Education Partnership Names Executive Director

Kay Hyatt

College of Education & Human Development, University of Maine
Education Partnership Names Executive Director

ORONO, Maine – A career Maine educator has been named to provide leadership and coordination for a regional collaboration working to improve teaching and learning at all levels. Owen P. Maurais, who recently retired as superintendent of Old Town Schools, will provide leadership and coordination for the Penobscot River Educational Partnership: A Professional Development Network, consisting of eight area school districts, a regional vocational/technical center and the University of Maine.

Maurais has been active in the consortium since its beginnings in 1996 when a group of area superintendents formed a partnership to share and develop resources to address common needs and issues. About the same time, the UMaine College of Education and Human Development was redesigning its teacher preparation program, including on-going professional development for educators, in partnership with some of the same area schools. The two groups officially merged in 1999.

Successful collaboration is based on mutual needs, compatible missions and the belief that best work is done together, according to Maurais, who sees the partnership (PREP: PDN) becoming a statewide model.

Members of PREP: PDN include: Brewer, Bucksport, Union 90 (Alton, Bradley, Greenbush, Milford); Indian Island; Union 91 (Orrington/Orland); Old Town; SAD 22 (Hampden, Newburgh, Winterport); Union 87 (Orono, Veazie); United Technologies Center, Bangor; and UMaine.

“Owen’s leadership experience and proven commitment to collaboration will be tremendous assets to the partnership,” says Robert Cobb, 2003-04 chair of the PREP: PDN Executive Committee and dean of the UMaine College of Education and Human Development. “The university’s formal partnerships and numerous initiatives with Old Town schools can be attributed in large part to Owen’s philosophy of putting children first and providing the best teachers possible.”

In the half-time position, Maurais will work on partnership development and communication, and be a resource connection between the university and public schools. He will provide support for two governing boards, comprised of partnership members – the Steering Committee, which plans and implements new initiatives, and the Executive Committee, which has general oversight and fiscal responsibilities. And, he will keep PREP: PDN focused on the goals of its strategic plan and the resources needed to meet immediate and long-range challenges presented by state and federal regulations.

“Student assessment is a key concern of everyone in education,” says Maurais, as districts face deadlines for compliance with the Maine Learning Results and the federal No Child Left Behind...
Behind educational reform act. “We want the schools to benefit from shared experiences and move together in meeting expectation for getting good local assessments in place.”

Staff development is also a primary issue, and the partnership will be critical in preparing teachers to form instruction and support students of all abilities, Maurais points out. Another challenge, he says, will be reaching out to parents and raising awareness about the meaning of performance-based standards and assessment. “Kids and parents must understand why students must become motivated and invested in building achievement skills,” he explains.

Maurais earned bachelor’s and graduate degrees in special education and educational administration at UMaine and a master’s in business from Husson College. He started his career as a special education teacher in Van Buren in 1972 and came to Old Town schools in 1974, where he initiated services for exceptional children and served as director of special education from 1979 to 1985. He became an administrator in the superintendent’s office in 1985 and served in the top post from 1995 until retiring this summer.

The executive director’s position is funded by the partnership, and the office is housed in Shibles Hall at UMaine. More information about PREP: PDN is available on the partnership’s website: www.preppdn.org

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