



Maine Department of Labor Approves Early Childhood Education Pre-Apprenticeship Program

Brought to you in Partnership by Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network and The United Way of Southern Maine

Portland, ME. January 21, 2025 - The Maine Department of Labor recently approved Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network (MRTQ PDN) as the sponsor of the Maine Certified ECE Pre-Apprenticeship Program, an initiative that benefits Maine residents by addressing childcare workforce shortages through paid, supported career pathways. Youth and Family Outreach, a licensed childcare center with a long history of serving a diverse population, has signed on as the first Sponsoring Employer for this new program. Additionally, the United Way of Southern Maine (UWSM) is helping make this pilot program possible by removing common obstacles like transportation and childcare. These supports ensure participants can attend training regularly and complete the program successfully. Beginning in February 2026, UWSM will also partner with childcare providers in Cumberland and York Counties to recruit and retain the trained teachers needed to deliver high-quality care for Maine's hardworking families.

Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network exists to increase the knowledge, quality, and professionalism of all early childhood education and out-of-school time providers in the state of Maine. It is funded by Maine's Department of Health and Human Services Office of Child and Family Services and operates out of the Catherine Cutler Institute at the University of Southern Maine. MRTQ PDN was approved by the Maine Apprenticeship Program as the Intermediary Sponsor of the Maine ECE Registered Apprenticeship Program in 2022, which supports incumbent childcare professionals to earn one of four Maine Credentials.

The pre-apprenticeship program was designed and is being implemented through the partnership between MRTQ PDN and the Center for Community Inclusion and Disabilities Studies (CCIDS). The concept grew out of an ECE Apprenticeship Action Research fellowship awarded to two staff members at MRTQ PDN and CCIDS by Bank Street College of Education in 2023. The new program takes a proactive approach to build flexibility into the lesson plan, recognize that every individual learns differently, and remove obstacles that often get in the way of learning objectives. Informed by the learning of surveys, interviews and focus groups, the model will include additional training that will increase the capacity of new workers to build competence, and their own toolkits to remain working with young children, which is some of the most important, challenging and undervalued work that supports our local economy.

As in other industries, there is a shortage of qualified childcare workers. The new pre-apprenticeship program aims to provide potential childcare workers with the skills, prerequisites, and support needed to both enter the field of early childhood education and also to stay in the field. Additionally, this initiative will build the capacity of local childcare programs to support new staff. This will include on-going support through community partners, including *In Her Presence*, DOL's Career Centers, MRTQ PDN Technical Assistance support, Workforce Solutions, DHHS Office of Child and Family Services, Adult Education programs, and others.

For more information, please contact Lori Moses, Coordinator of Apprenticeship Programs at MRTQ PDN at mrtq.apprenticeship@maine.edu.