

# Program aims to help students learn better and stay in school

By Sharlene Myers  
Bay Mills News

BAY MILLS — Participants from Bay Mills Community College and other local schools, including Ojibwe Charter School, met on the BMCC campus Jan. 27 to discover strategies to help students learn better and stay in school.

Under a King Chavez Parks Initiative grant through Lake Superior State University, the pilot program is intended to strengthen education programs from kindergarten through graduate school, said Shelley Wooley, KCP program director at LSSU.

“Lake State was chosen because it forms a unique niche with only 2,500 students. That smaller size makes it more flexible in building collaborative programming,” she explained.

The three-pronged effort began Oct. 31, with a presentation by D.J. Vanas at BMCC meant to inspire students, followed by the Jan. 27 presentation, “Empowering Students to Get On Course,” meant to inspire educators. The final program will be held sometime in May on the LSSU campus with 2,000 secondary school students assembling for a STEM Fair, emphasizing careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Aaron Tadgerson of BMCC coordinated the presentation, which was led by Mark McBride, an English teacher at a Florida college, and coordinator of On Course workshops for 10 years. On Course workshops were developed in 1996 by Skip Downing, a teacher at Baltimore City College, when he noticed that capable students were flunking out. He began to look at ways to enable educators to help students succeed and increase retention rates at schools.

McBride presented two plans: learner-centered strategies to help students learn more deeply; and empowerment strategies to help students become active and responsible learners, thriving in a learner-centered environment. Participants were involved in group discussions and activities to develop their skills.

“As educators, we get a thrill out of helping students, even on our worst days,” McBride said. “This is why we do this —to confront the challenge of how to engage all types of students.”

The presentation was well received, said Tadgerson. “The On Course educator training workshop focused on the theme of choices,” said Mike Sylvestre, a teacher at OCS. “The seminar provided a variety of helpful instructional strategies to support the empowerment of students and promote self-responsibility,” he



**HOW TO KEEP THEM IN SCHOOL** — On Jan. 27 Bay Mills Community College held a workshop on how best to help students learn. Above right, Aaron Tadgerson introduces Mark McBride, an instructor for On Course workshops, while below participants work together on strategies. L-R, Heather Pickett, Stephanie Vittitow, Mike Sylvestre and Deb LeBlanc.



added. “I was exposed to valuable learning tools, which I plan to use in the classroom.”

Retention is the goal at BMCC, Tadgerson pointed out. While others may look at the dismal drop out rates of Native American students, Tadgerson said the school is not focusing on the negative but working on making positive changes.

There has been a turnaround in the caliber of education being offered at BMCC, he said, with more challenging classes in science and math being offered. Also he touted the positive role models in the community, with Native American scientists in the biology and health departments, and the opportunities for students to work hands on with tribal scientists.

“If you look at the past 20 years, we have made tremendous strides at Bay Mills. Two weeks ago, a study showed that, out of the 350 students on campus, 217 were above a 2.5 GPA. Also, over 80 percent of students are looking to transfer and earn a degree.

“It’s easy to get stuck on the negatives,” he added, “but we are looking at what we can do to encourage students to stay in school and be successful.”

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