

NASHOBA TECH & LITTLE SPROUTS STRIKE UP A PARTNERSHIP

WESTFORD: It didn't take long for Nashoba Valley Technical High School's newly formed partnership with Little Sprouts Child Enrichment Centers to pay off.

At the beginning of September, Nashoba Tech contracted with Little Sprouts to run the high school's Early Childhood Education center. Around that same time, Little Sprouts was told that it had received a \$3.5 million federal grant as part of the Early Reading First program.

Students in Nashoba Tech's Early Childhood Education technical program are working with Little Sprouts in the newly renovated center, which is on South Chelmsford Road, around the corner from the Nashoba Tech campus, and they'll be involved in helping Little Sprouts teachers implement the Early Reading First program.

Nashoba Tech's Early Childhood Center opened in 2002 as part of the school campus, but this year the school decided to partner with an established preschool center. That's how the partnership with Little Sprouts came to be.

³I think it's a unique relationship in which not only are we able to partner with an early childhood development school, but also one that is the single national recipient of an early literacy grant from the U.S. Department of Education,² Klimkiewicz said. ³To have our high-school students get an opportunity to work with a program that has set benchmarks around early literacy is giving them an advantage prior to them entering college for early childhood education.²

Little Sprouts founder and CEO Susan Leger Ferraro said Little Sprouts is thrilled to get the chance to work with high-school students who are interested in pursuing a career in early childhood education.

³We're very excited both to be in the community of Westford and to be at Nashoba Tech,² Ferraro said. ³For the last 12 years, we've been working with the teen population, and we've been interested in what kind of difference we can make in the lives of teenagers. We're excited to be working with Nashoba's teen students who are interested in early education.²

Ferraro is also excited about being the only school in Massachusetts < and the

only for-profit school in the country < to receive a grant in the federal government's Early Reading First program.

³I'm grateful for the opportunity to create ongoing advancement for children, families and educators, not only in literacy but to make a difference in our communities and our world,² Ferraro said in a press release.

There were 2,400 original applicants for the grant in February, of which 66 were chosen for second round. Of those 66, only 32 were funded across the country.

Little Sprouts¹ Early Reading First Project, titled ³Sprout-Out,² will serve 14 preschool classrooms, 48 teachers, and more than 260 children per year enrolled in Little Sprouts.

Little Sprouts has six early-education facilities in the Greater Merrimack Valley < Andover, Haverhill, Lawrence, Lowell, Methuen and now at Nashoba Tech in Westford.

Ferraro said the grant will help teach children pre-literature skills, ³so they're ready to learn by the time they're ready for kindergarten.²

Little Sprouts¹ new location at Nashoba Tech in Westford is currently accepting applications. Children from 1 month to 6 years are welcome. For more information, call (978) 589-9449 or (877) YSPROUT.

³I would encourage all parents, particularly those interested in their child receiving all the skills necessary to be reading at an early age, to take advantage of this program,² Nashoba Tech's Klimkiewicz said.

By, Dan Phelps