

# Williams, MCLA take part in national 'Teaching to Learn' initiative

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Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts students Jessica Wojcik, left, and Kara Nietupski, right, work with fourth graders in Sarah Spooner's class at Sullivan Elementary School in North Adams as they conduct a teaching session with the students on Wednesday, December, 10,

**NORTH ADAMS** - Two local colleges have been highlighted by President Barack Obama for an intense collaboration to bring college students into local elementary schools to enhance interest in science and technology.

The program, "Teaching to Learn," enlists science students from Williams College and the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts to serve as visiting teachers in North Adams elementary schools. The college students are charged with exploring new ways to engage young students in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) lessons.

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The collaboration was one of several programs from around the nation highlighted last week during the White House College Opportunity Day of Action in Washington D.C. It was attended by hundreds of college presidents, including Williams College President Adam Falk. First lady Michele Obama and Vice President Joe Biden also were in attendance.

The participating colleges had been challenged by the president to take action in one of four categories: building networks of colleges focused on promoting completion; creating

K-16 partnerships around college readiness; investing in high school counselors as part of the first lady's Reach Higher initiative; and increasing the number of college graduates in STEM fields.

For the event, the White House selected two of a dozen initiatives submitted by Williams College to expand student preparedness for college and support their persistence through to graduation.

"Expanding access to college among historically underrepresented groups and supporting those students through graduation is vital to the health of our colleges and universities and to the nation



Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts sophomore Jessica Wojcik works with fourth graders Wednesday in Sarah Spooner's class at Sullivan School in North Adams as she and fellow student, freshman Kara Nietupski, conduct a teaching session with the students. (gillian jones — the berkshire eagle)

as a whole," Williams College President Adam Falk said. "Williams is eager to contribute what it can to this effort and welcomes the White House making these initiatives such a high priority."

Teaching to Learn, the collaboration between MCLA, Williams College and the North Adams School District, aims to get elementary school students to start thinking about attending college, give the college students a better base of science knowledge and experience in communicating that knowledge, and figuring out how to devise such a program in a sustainable way.

MCLA was the recipient of a four-year, \$810,876 grant from National Science Foundation to support the program, which began shortly after the start of the new school year.

Coordinated at MCLA by professors Chris Himes and Nick Stroud, and at Williams by Jennifer Swoap, director of elementary outreach, Teaching to Learn has enlisted 20 freshmen and sophomores science students from Williams and seven from MCLA to make weekly, two-hour visits to 14 or 15 elementary school science classes. With training, planned curriculum and best practices, the college students teach certain scientific concepts and skills in new and engaging ways.

Stroud said the elementary school students enjoy the visits and learning through the new methods, the college students learn their material more thoroughly by teaching it, and through their interaction with the college students, the elementary school students naturally become more acclimated with the idea of attending and



MCLA students Jessica Wojcik, right, and Kara Nietupski, left, work with the students.

graduating college with a degree in science-related fields.

"We want to create a teaching environment where students have really great science experiences all the way through college," Himes said. "We hope to make systemic changes — something that will last."

But it's about more than that, Stroud noted.

"The principle focus is to gain new knowledge, especially about the possible impact of this program on the undergraduate, the teacher and the elementary school students," he said. "And we're curious to see what other unexpected impacts might come out of it."

In the second Williams program highlighted during the White House event, Williams will increase its effort to leverage the strength of college alumni network to help demystify the college application process for high-achieving, low-income high school students nationally. The college pairs alumni of color with high school students they can mentor and guide through the process. It hopes to provide this support to more than 400 prospective high-achieving, low-income students.

During the White House event, Obama also announced new steps he is taking to support these educational initiatives, including providing \$10 million to help promote college completion and a \$30 million AmeriCorps program that will improve low-income students' access to college.

Expanding opportunity for more students to enroll and succeed in college, especially low-income and underrepresented students, is vital to building a strong economy and a strong middle class, the president noted.

According to figures provided by the White House, only 9 percent of those born in the lowest family income levels attain a bachelor's degree by age 25, compared with 54 percent in the top income levels. In an effort to expand college access, the Obama administration increased Pell scholarships by \$1,000 a year, created the new American Opportunity Tax Credit worth up to \$10,000 over four years of college, limited student loan payments to 10 percent of income, and laid out an agenda to reduce college costs and promote innovation and competition.

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Samantha Stroka, 10, a fourth grader in Sarah Spooner's class at Sullivan School in North Adams, follows along Wednesday during a teaching session conducted by Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts students. (photos by gillian jones — the berkshire eagle)