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State-province deal provides broader options for college

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OF THE NEWS STAFF

BANGOR — Maine students now have 11 more choices when deciding where to earn their college degrees.

While still paying the in-state tuition rate, they will be able to study at colleges located in New Brunswick.

Maine and New Brunswick community college leaders, Gov. John Baldacci and New Brunswick Premier Shawn Graham gathered at Eastern Maine Community College on Friday to sign an agreement enabling Maine and New Brunswick stu-

dents to attend community colleges at the in-state, or in-province, rates, beginning next fall.

"We share 610 miles of a border, yet the 100 miles between here and the [border] crossing sometimes feels like 1,000 miles," said John Fitzsimmons, president of the Maine Community College System. "There's so much to share and gain when we partner with our colleagues to the north."

Under the agreement, Maine students will be able to attend 11 of New Brunswick's community colleges: five that are Eng-

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lish-speaking campuses and six that are predominantly French-speaking.

New Brunswick students will be able to attend either Northern Maine Community College in Presque Isle or Washington County Community College in Calais. The remaining five Maine community colleges are at maximum enrollments, so the agreement effectively applies just to NMCC and WCCC.

A Maine student completing a two-year degree in a New Brunswick community college will save \$4,000 in U.S. dollars by avoiding the out-of-province tuition rate.

While providing additional educational sites, the partnership also will provide Maine

students with new fields of study. The New Brunswick Community College System offers programs in international business, international tourism, vocational forestry and agriculture — not available at Maine's community colleges.

For example, Northern Maine Community College does not have a communications program, but now a Maine student interested in that field can hop across the border to Woodstock, New Brunswick, to take advantage of the program there — at in-province rates, said NMCC President Timothy Crowley.

Crowley said he expected the partnership would focus mostly on NMCC's general education and business programs.

"There's an opportunity for international experience for our business students," Crowley said. "It's a global economy, and our students [now] have the opportunity to communicate

and learn from students in another country."

In fact, a St. Stephen, New Brunswick, man is one of Washington County Community College's first enrolled students in the new criminal justice program, said WCCC President Bill Cassidy. The closest community college that offers criminal justice is in Miramichi, New Brunswick, about 230 miles away, Cassidy said.

"Providing accessible college education to Maine students depends on geography and finances," Cassidy said. "With this agreement we're taking them both down a notch. Now some students can live at home and enter the same program without room and board costs, and still pay the in-state price."

If local community colleges offer students as many viable options as possible, it could combat the high rate of young people leaving the state seeking bet-

ter opportunities, Cassidy said.

"In my county the outward migration of youth is truly brain drain," Cassidy said. "My community needs the same skilled employees as others, and if youth decide not to leave, then businesses can bring in skilled technicians from the area rather than recruit from outside."

The cooperative efforts displayed between the New Brunswick and Maine community college systems could become a model for future U.S.-Canadian business relations.

"I think this becomes a model for how we work together and the associated benefits," Fitzsimmons said.

"Only time will tell how many people take advantage of it. It depends how well we market it."

BDN writer Rachel Rice contributed to this report.