Instructor Keven Vachon is embracing the meaning of experiential education at Mid-Maine Technical Center, a technical high school in Waterville, Maine. Using knowledge he gained from participation in the SITN, Mr. Vachon taught his electrical technology students about solar by having them install a PV system on the school’s roof. The 400 watt system consisting of eight solar modules will ultimately be tied to the grid and will help reduce the school’s electric bill. Students such as Jacob Archer have enjoyed the realistic experience of working on a solar installation. “I plan on becoming an electrician and this is exactly what we do. It’s not some mock up thing that we’re just doing for practice…it’s actual work that I would do as an electrician. It gives you a sense of pride because you’re building something and it’s going to be remembered that you built it.”

Students also built a solar training unit, which can be used by future classes. The training unit is designed to teach the electrical aspects of solar, with components such as the charge controller, disconnect, and inverter all within in easy reach. Using Yankee thriftiness and MacGyver-like ingenuity, they built the training unit from scratch, welding the frame together and using parts of a drafting table to create the tilt for the two attached solar panels. Mr. Vachon said, “We were able to spend less than $2,000 to build one, versus seven or eight thousand to buy one.”

Students at Mid-Maine Technical Center come from a variety of high schools in the region to gain skills in electrical technology and other fields. Mr. Vachon already has plans for the new crop of students he’ll teach in the fall. “We’ll be going to Lawrence High School, another one of our sending high schools, and installing a system on the roof up there. So we’re getting right into it and the students seem to like it. We’re getting some hands on experience in some cutting edge technology.”