

## State dignitaries tour HHS's early college program

HOLYOKE – Lt. Governor Karyn Polito and other local and state dignitaries were scheduled to visit Holyoke High School on Thursday to observe Holyoke students taking college classes while still in high school.

Joining Polito on the tour will be Education Secretary Jim Peyser, Education Secretary Jim Peyser, Elementary and Secondary Education Commissioner Jeff Riley, Board of Higher Education Chair Chris Gabrieli and a bevy of Holyoke officials.

While the Holyoke High School's early college program with Westfield State has been in existence for a few years, it received official "early college designation" by the state this past spring because it meets

certain criteria set out by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Department of Higher Education.

The Baker-Polito Administration made a commitment last year to significantly increase the number of early college seats statewide with two goals in mind:

- Successful early college programs make college more accessible to low-income students and give them the opportunity to learn in college-level courses while at the same time earning college credits, at no cost, which helps ease the financial burden for them later.

- Early college also aims to boost college completion

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rates for low-income students, minorities, and first-generation college-goers.

Holyoke High has partnerships with both Holyoke Community College and Westfield State University.

Westfield State Univ. started the Westfield Promise Early College Program in 2016-17, partnering with Holyoke, Springfield, and Westfield school districts.

In Holyoke, 25 students begin the program in their junior year. They take two college courses on the Holyoke High

campus that are co-taught by a Westfield State professor and a Holyoke High teacher. In the students' senior year, they take one course each semester on the Westfield State campus.

Holyoke Public Schools also launched another program in partnership with Holyoke Community College this year.

Approximately 80 sophomores will take part in the start of that program, taking one college course at Holyoke High as sophomores, then courses at the HCC campus as juniors. The goal is for them to graduate from high school with at least a dozen transferable college credits.