

Holyoke's early-college partnership scores \$131K

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BOSTON – A partnership between the Holyoke Public Schools and Holyoke Community College to provide early-college programs has received a \$131,600 grant, one of only five programs in the state to earn this recognition.

“We are grateful for the early college designation as it will ensure that we can create early college options for students that are intentional and aligned to one of our theme-based academies. These experiences will ensure that our students emerge academically competitive with college credits (and less debt) as they prepare for post-secondary success,” said Holyoke Superintendent/Receiver Stephen K. Zrike.

The Baker-Polito Administration recently awarded grant money to five early-college programs that help high school students better prepare academically for college while also earning college credits at no cost to them.

Early-college programs combine traditional high school courses with an opportunity to earn college credit at a public college or university and are typically aligned to a particular career pathway.

The five designated early college programs – in Chelsea, Charlestown, Holyoke, Brockton and Salem – will enroll hundreds of students this fall.

“Designating these five early-college programs will create more opportunities for Massachusetts high school students to be ready for college,” Governor Charlie

**HOLYOKE
COMMUNITY
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Baker said in a statement.

He added, “We are very proud of the faculty and staff at these high schools and colleges for taking on the hard work to create early college programs so students will benefit from challenging course work that will prepare them for success in high school and college, as well as reduce their overall cost to obtain a degree.”

Holyoke Community College's new early-college program, in conjunction with the Holyoke Public Schools, that will enable students to earn up to 12 college credits before high school graduation. Students enrolled in the program will complete a minimum of two core courses taught by HCC at the Holyoke campus, and complete a minimum of two technical courses, giving students experience and a pathway to college.

“Early college programs are a great tool for combining traditional high school courses with an opportunity to earn college credit at a local community college,” said Lt. Governor Karyn Polito.

Early college has been shown to boost college completion rates for low-income students, minorities and first-generation college-goers. By creating designated early college programs, the Baker-Polito Administration aims to break down barriers



between high school and higher education in order to create a more seamless path for students to move to college and careers.

“Successful early college programs create a coherent course of study that can change the trajectory of a student's life,” said Education Secretary James Peyser “By designating these early college programs we are creating a shift in the educational experience for many students.”

In March 2017, Baker announced that his administration would make efforts to significantly increase the number of early college seats available to high school students.

Currently, there are approximately 2,400 students enrolled in early college programs around the state.

The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Board of Higher Education agreed on criteria that will enable programs to become designated early college programs. Through the designation process, the Departments of Higher Education and Elementary and Secondary Education asked K-12 schools, community colleges and state universities to jointly design models.

“Many young people need an opportunity to see themselves in college so

they can know it is possible for them. By giving high school students, particularly those who will be the first in their family to attend the chance to succeed in college-level courses before they earn a high school diploma, we give them the confidence to know that a college degree is within their reach,” Higher Education Commissioner Carlos Santiago said.

“I am proud to be part of this collaborative effort to prepare more students to succeed in college,” Elementary and Secondary Education Commissioner Jeffrey C. Riley said. “I hope that students will take advantage of these opportunities, and I am grateful to the educators who are making these courses possible.”

There are five design principles for a designated early college program:

- Equitable access for all students
- Guided academic pathway
- Enhanced student supports
- Relevant connection to career
- Deep partnerships between high schools, community colleges and state universities

In 2016, the Boards of Higher Education and Elementary and Secondary Education looked at whether the state could devise an early college strategy. They commissioned a study, done by Parthenon-EY Education Practice, to look at what exists in Massachusetts and the possibility of expanding successful models. The report found early college is a promising model that narrows educational opportunity gaps, and existing programs were a powerful base from which to build a broader statewide early college initiative.