

HOLYOKE

Child watch center opens at Holyoke Community College

BY DENNIS HOHENBERGER
Special to The Republican

Holyoke Community College has opened the Itsy Bitsy Child Watch Center, a safe place for busy parents to drop off their children temporarily while attending classes or other matters on campus.

HCC became the second community college in Massachusetts to offer a free child watch center.

A \$100,000 budget earmark pursued by state Sen. John C. Velis, D-Westfield, helped fund the center. HCC President Christina Royal welcomed Velis and state Rep. Patricia Duffy, D-Holyoke, to the ribbon cutting yesterday.

Located on the first floor of the Marieb Building, the brightly appointed child watch center is equipped with cribs, educational materials, and interactive toys and games.

Royal said student-parents no longer need to worry about skipping classes to care for a child. The COVID-19 pandemic only highlighted the shortcomings in child care in academia and most workplaces, she said.



State Sen. John Velis, third from left, Holyoke Community College President Christina Royal, state Rep. Patricia Duffy and others cut the ribbon for the newly opened Itsy Bitsy Child Watch Center at the college yesterday. (DENNIS HOHENBERGER PHOTO)

“We wanted to identify the specific niche of how we help support students who are interested in continuing to progress their education and taking classes here,” Royal said. “They have these disparate

needs to be able to leave their child in a safe place while they attend classes.”

Discussions on creating the center were part of HCC’s strategic plan to boost academic standards and recognize

students’ basic needs. “We have all types of students from all walks of life, serving different parts of our community,” Royal said.

The college identified four areas of concern for students:

“We have so many students who have to make that choice between an education and child care. That shouldn’t be a choice they have to make.”

State Sen. John Velis

housing, food insecurity, transportation and child care. In addition, Royal estimated that 20% to 25% of parents at HCC discussed how essential child care was in their lives.

“We are excited to be able to make good on our promise to focus on child care needs for

our HCC students,” Royal said. “That’s what today is all about, delivering on that promise to help our student-parents be successful while they continue to change their lives through the power of education.”

Royal spoke to Velis about
SEE CENTER, PAGE A11

**RESIDENTS OF
SPRINGFIELD AND LUDLOW**

Center

CONTINUES FROM PAGE A6

securing state funding for Itsy Bitsy, which honors the popular nursery rhyme, "Itsy Bitsy Spider."

A new parent, Velis said child care became an issue for him on Monday. He stayed home to watch his son, which entailed canceling several meetings.

"We have so many students who have to make that choice between an education and child care," he said. "That shouldn't be a choice they have to make."

Duffy said HCC remains a top priority as she continues to press Beacon Hill for more financial support. She added the college recognizes students' priorities, which benefits the whole community.

"You're helping our employers. You're helping our families. I'm so thrilled to be in the bright, beautiful room," she said.

The ribbon-cutting was part of HCC's ongoing 75th-anniversary celebration. Board President Robert Gilbert thanked Velis and Duffy for supporting education and workforce development initiatives.

"We wouldn't be here if it weren't for the efforts of the people associated with the college and our legislative delegation," Gilbert said.

Sheila Gould, who directs HCC's early childhood education program, stated, "The ribbon-cutting signifies a big step for HCC as we culminate years of work to bring this service to our students. It shows that HCC continues to support the whole student, and we aim to remove barriers to student success."