

HOLYOKE

Grants support 'early' college program

State gives \$20,000 for courses at HCC, Westfield State

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The state gave its blessing and \$20,000 Tuesday for "early college" programs for public school students working with Holyoke Community College and Westfield State University.

The ties with colleges are part of the Holyoke public schools' redesign of the high schools and middle schools intended to establish a pathway for every student to college and a career, said Stephen K. Zrike, the state-appointed receiver in charge of managing the Holyoke public schools.

"We are thrilled to have these expanded opportunities and supports for early college access offerings with Westfield State University and Holyoke Community College. This is an exciting time for (Holyoke public schools) students and families," Zrike said.

Gov. Charlie Baker and Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito announced over \$80,000 in grants to 21 programs developing early college programs.

A \$10,000 grant is for the HCC-public schools program to help students earn up to 12 college credits before high school graduation. Students will complete a minimum of two core courses taught by HCC on its campus as well as two technical courses, a state press release said. Core courses are those all students are required to complete.

Another \$10,000 was awarded to Westfield State University working with Holyoke, Springfield and Westfield public schools. Students will take at least two college courses taught by high school and college faculty. Seniors will take at least two courses at Westfield State to help them get acclimated to college life, before graduating high school, the press release said.

The Massachusetts Board of Higher Education and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education have given preliminary approval to 21 early college programs statewide, the press release said.

"Early college programs are crucial for exposing students to the opportunities higher education can create and with these designations, more students will be able to earn college credits at no cost," Baker said.

"Successful early college programs boost college completion rates for students by preparing them with challenging college-level courses," Polito said.

Early college programs combine traditional high school courses with an opportunity to earn college credit at a public college or university, typically in a particular career, the press release said.

Such programs that achieve success are those that make college more accessible to low-income students by giving them an opportunity to learn in college-level courses while at the same time earning college credits, at no cost, which helps ease financial burdens later, the press release said.