



Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito leads a discussion at Holyoke High School about a statewide early-college program for high school students. Polito met with Holyoke High School students who take college-level classes at Holyoke Community College or Westfield State University. (DENNIS HOHENBERGER PHOTO)

Lt. gov. congratulates 'pioneers'

By DENNIS HOHENBERGER

Special to The Republican

Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito yesterday met and congratulated Holyoke High School students enrolled in a statewide early college program, calling them "pioneers" who are opening pathways for all students, regardless of income.

In January, the Baker Administration awarded \$80,000 in grants to fund the dual-college program, with \$20,000 split between Holyoke Community College and Westfield State University.

Students take a minimum of two college-level courses taught by high school or college faculty. The students must complete core requirements, including two technical courses. The Westfield State program offers students insight into college life.

Twenty-one such programs were set up around Massachusetts, with a goal of making college accessible at all income levels.

In partnership with HCC, Westfield State introduced the Promise Early College Program in the 2016-2017 academic year. Twenty-five Holyoke High juniors enrolled in the program, many of whom met with Polito during her visit.

The lieutenant governor held a roundtable with students, faculty and local and state officials in the high school's media studio.

She toured the school with Education Secretary Jim Peyser; Jeff Riley, the commissioner for Elementary and Secondary Education; Chris

Gabrieli, of the Board of High Education; Mayor Alex B. Morse; State Rep. Aaron Vega, D-Holyoke; Holyoke Schools State Receiver Stephen Zrike; and Stephen Mahoney, executive principal of Holyoke High School.

Polito stopped by the classroom of teacher Joe Courchesne and Jennifer DiGrazia, a professor at Westfield State. Courchesne and DiGrazia co-teach English literature and writing to juniors.

Polito said one student told her the course made them "step up their game."

The lieutenant governor and her brother were the first in their family to graduate from college. "It was a big deal to achieve that high level of education and degree. It certainly helped me in my life," she said.

She reminded the students that the Commonwealth Commitment Program saves college students an average of \$35,000 in tuition and fees. She also encouraged them to attend a Massachusetts state college or university and remain in the state after graduation.

Peyser, who spoke before the roundtable, said early college is designed to provide a "coherent course of study" for high school students. "Throughout their high school experience, they can get ready for college, and not just ready to go to college, but ready to succeed when they get there," he said.

Also yesterday, Polito joined Chicopee Mayor

Richard J. Kos, state, and local officials at a completion ceremony for the West End Mill District Redevelopment Project. The West End Mill project received a \$2.6 million MassWorks Infrastructure Grant award in 2015 to fund a new pump station and water, sewer, and electrical improvements, critical to enabling the redevelopment of Chicopee's former textile mills.

"Refurbishing the Cabotville and Lyman mill area is essential to attracting residents and businesses to the West End," Polito said. "The Baker-Polito Administration is pleased to support the reimagining of Lyman Mills through the MassWorks program and will continue to partner with Chicopee's business and residential communities to bring economic opportunity to the region."

Lyman Mills' redevelopment is ongoing, with current construction of 110 market rate live-work lofts, known