

HOLYOKE

# A boost for nursing students

## New initiative provides free community college tuition

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Holyoke Community College nursing students Katelynn Richard and Mansi Patel are among 3,000 state residents who will now get their higher-education tuition at no cost.

For the first time, 100% of community college nursing students will have free tuition, state Secretary of Education Patrick Tutwiler announced yesterday at the college.

Tutwiler's announcement came during the second day of statewide STEM Week celebrations and was held at the college's Center for Health Education and Simulation; STEM education focuses on science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

"This year, of the approximately 3,000

nursing and pre-nursing students currently enrolled in one of Massachusetts' 15 community colleges, all 3,000 are attending at no cost of their own," Tutwiler said during yesterday's event.

The funding was a combination of state and federal resources, Tutwiler said.

The celebration highlighted scholarship recipients attending Holyoke Community College and the effects that the investment is expected to have for nursing students across the state.

"The scholarship tells us that you believe in us and our potential. We thank you for that. We will make our communities proud," Richard said.

Richard, who now lives in Ludlow, is a graduate of Roger L. Putnam Vocational Technical Academy in Springfield. She said she put her dreams of being a nurse on hold to raise her

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Holyoke Community College nursing student Chaneaka Cummins works on a "patient" as state and local officials took a tour of the HCC Center for Health Education and Simulation.

(DON TREEGER / THE REPUBLICAN)

## Nursing

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children, each of whom as cognitive differences.

"I have three sons that are on the autism spectrum. I was a stay-at-home mom, to make sure they had all of the services they need," she said.

Richard said, since she was able to get her kids the services at school, she decided this was the perfect opportunity for her to go back to college. Inspired by her father and sister who are nurses, Richard returned to Holyoke Community College with the goal of studying in the same field as her family.

"The free tuition will impact me 100%," Richard said. "This is going to relieve the financial burden, so I can still help provide for my family. I will not have to choose between bills or groceries."

Her classmate, Patel, said this scholarship will not only affect her ability to purchase books and pay tuition, but also allow her to focus on nursing, education and success.

Community college is where lives are transformed, and there is no role more important in the health and health care system than nurses, said George Timmons, HCC president. The state's community colleges are key to providing the essential health care workers, and leaders needed today across the commonwealth, Timmons said.

Tutwiler also highlighted the recent approval of \$18 million for a nursing community college financial aid scholarship program that was as part of the 2024 budget recently signed by Gov. Maura T. Healey.

The scholarship program is designed to attract, incentivize and encourage a pipeline of skilled nurses in the state, aiming to grow the workforce at a rate to meet the needs for residents, he said.

State Sen. Jo Comerford, D-Northampton, said the



Dottie Shannon, right, assistant professor of nursing at Holyoke Community College, works with nursing student Katelynn Richard during a tour of the HCC Center for Health Education and Simulation. (DON TREEGER / THE REPUBLICAN)

greater access to education comes at a time when the workforce shortage is dire in the health care sector, worsened by the coronavirus pandemic. According to Comerford, over 1,000 nurses would be needed right now to meet current demands in Massachusetts.

"This financial aid scholarship for nursing students will also serve as a catalyst for progress in breaking cycles of intergenerational poverty, helping residents complete their higher education credentials so they can attain meaningful careers," Healey said in a statement.

The commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Dr. Robbie Goldstein, spoke to students directly at HCC, noting that nurses are the backbone of health care, the most trusted in the entire field.

"If there are no nurses, there is no health care," he said. "You are the glue, the heart, the soul, and you know how the most vulnerable in the community feel and can be a voice for them by using your judgment and skills to make the critical decisions needed to save lives."