

## HCC, Holyoke Public Schools receive state grant, "Early College" program designation

HOLYOKE – Holyoke Community College and Holyoke Public Schools have been awarded a \$131,600 state grant to establish a new program to help high school students get an early start on their college educations.

The HCC-HPS program was one of only five such partnerships – and the only one outside the greater Boston area – to receive an official "Early College" designation from the state.

The Early College Program will enable participating Holyoke students to earn a minimum of 12 college credits before they graduate from high school. Beginning in their sophomore years, students enrolled in the program will complete college courses in fields of study that align with academic majors at HCC and transfer pathways to four-year colleges and universities in Massachusetts.

There is no cost to participating students.

Like other dual enrollment classes, the Early College courses will be taught by HCC faculty at Holyoke High School or on the HCC campus.

"HCC already has a robust dual enrollment partnership with Holyoke Public Schools along with approximately 20 other area high schools," said Renee Tastad, HCC dean of Enrollment Management and College Access Programs. "This Early College Program kicks the preparation and support up a notch."

The Early College program is designed for 100 students each academic year, beginning in the sophomore year. At full capacity, in fall 2020, up to 300 students in grades 10-12 will be part of the program, Tastad said.

Sophomore students will take their first college courses at Holyoke High School. In their junior and senior years they will take courses on the main HCC campus on Homestead Avenue.

"In our experience, with proper challenge and support, students who

never envisioned college for themselves can find success in college coursework, see themselves as college students, and start on the path toward earning a degree," Tastad said.

The first cohort of nearly 80 Holyoke High School freshmen visited the HCC campus in May for an acceptance day and barbecue lunch. They will begin their Early College classes as sophomores in September, earning both high school and college credits.

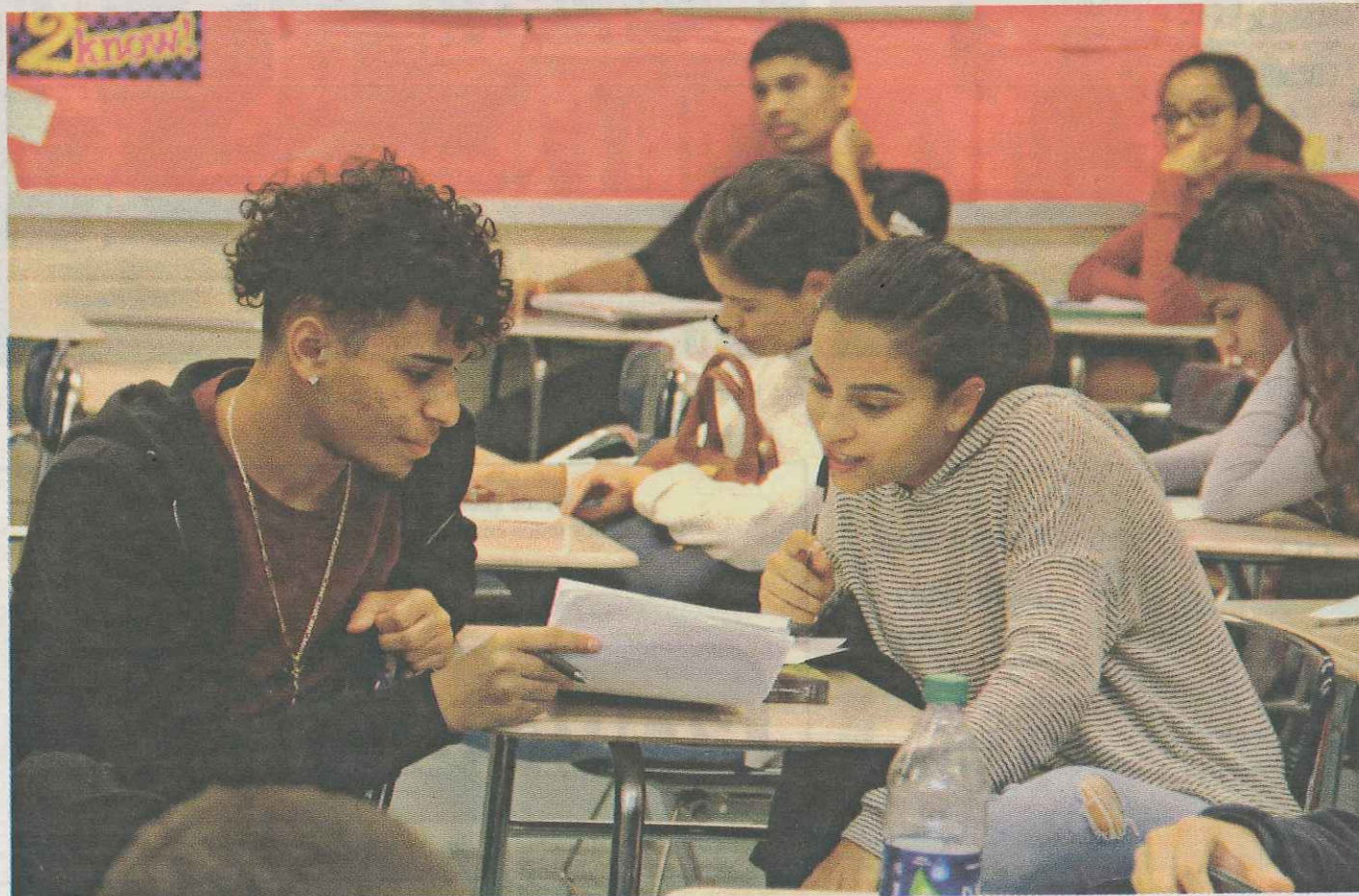
The Early College curriculum was created jointly by faculty and staff from both HCC and HPS working over the past year.

"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 of obtaining a degree," Gov. Charlie Baker said in announcing the Early College designations.

According to studies, dual enrollment courses and early college programs boost college completion rates for low-income students, minorities and first-generation college goers.

"Many young people need an opportunity to see themselves in college so they can know it is possible for them," said Carlos Santiago, Mass. commissioner of Higher Education. "By giving high school students, particularly those who will be the first in their families 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."

Bunker Hill Community College in Boston, Massasoit Community College in Brockton, and Salem State University in Salem also received Early College designations to work with public high schools in their communities.



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Holyoke High School students Ernice Colon and Jasmin Rodriguez confer on an assignment in a college-level, dual enrollment Spanish class HCC ran at Holyoke High School in 2016.