

# Saving time and money: Southbridge students can earn college-level credits from QCC soon

**Toni Caushi**

Worcester Telegram & Gazette

Starting this fall, Southbridge students can earn college-level credits from Quinsigamond Community College.

The state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and Board of Higher Education recently approved the program, which is free for students.

About 100 Southbridge High School juniors and seniors will be eligible to earn college-level credits at QCC under the Massachusetts Early College Initiative.

The Massachusetts Early College Initiative is a state-funded program created in 2017 to connect public school districts to local colleges for students to earn free credits.

QCC was first designated as an Early College site in 2018 for Worcester Public Schools, according to the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education. In 2019, Marlborough Public Schools was also added to the program.

Worcester State University is also an Early College site for Worcester Public Schools and Veritas Preparatory Charter School in Springfield.

“This is an important designation that will have positive, far-reaching implications for Southbridge High School students and the Southbridge community as a whole,” said QCC President Luis G. Pedraja. “Early College offers students an attainable pathway to higher education.”

Through the program, Southbridge High students will take QCC courses twice a week with support programming three days a week, which will include

“topics such as career readiness, growth mindset and learning strategies,” according to a statement by the college.

The high school will also shape its course schedule for participating students so they can attend classes and access QCC’s support services such as tutoring and library services.

College-level credits students earn through the program will transfer toward certificates or associate or bachelor’s degrees at Massachusetts community colleges or state universities, according to the statement by QCC.

“The whole idea is to give opportunity to students who may not have thought that college could be something in their life,” said Christina Hebert, QCC’s director of educational partnership and early college initiatives. “Early College prepares them to be successful in college and the workplace while saving them time and money.”

The statement by QCC added that Southbridge High School students already attend college-level classes through the college's satellite location at the high school and through English for Speakers of Other Languages and General Education Development programs.

Since 2017, the Southbridge schools district has been under a state receivership, a common practice for underperforming school districts that are taken under management by the state for improvement.

A request for comment from the district was not immediately returned.