

# **Bristol Community College gives urban high school students an opportunity to gain college credit for free**

Bristol Community College's new program is opening the door to college for high school students who may not have been able to afford the opportunity to or pictured themselves earning a college degree. Funded through private donations, CollegeTrax allows students from Massachusetts cities, New Bedford and Fall River, which rank among the lowest in the state for college attainment, to earn free college credits and exposure to the college experience.

"Our community is in need. As we face a pandemic and take a deep look at the social and economic barriers that affect lower income communities, we need to find quick wins along the way to help our community overcome these challenges," said Laura L. Douglas, President, Bristol Community College. "CollegeTrax offers an incentive for students who may not have envisioned themselves in a college class experiencing what many times is only taken advantage of by students who can afford this potentially life-changing opportunity."

The free Early College initiative aims to close our region's equity gaps and provide underserved students in Bristol's communities with the opportunity to try college while earning valuable college credits in a supportive college environment. Bristol County, that the college serves, ranks highest in Massachusetts for the percent of population 25 years of age and older without a high school diploma (or equivalent) at 16.3%, according to the US Census Bureau.

“College is a gateway to great opportunities and upward economic mobility for students and we applaud Bristol Community College for expanding access to it through the CollegeTrax program,” said Ed Lambert, Executive Director, Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education. “This type of innovation improves opportunities for students by increasing academic rigor, connecting students to college success and saving students from future debt.”

With a Fellow from Harvard University’s Center for Education Policy Research, Early College in Massachusetts is being robustly evaluated. A recent read-out on Early College is showing that Early College programs, like Bristol’s CollegeTrax, are having a positive impact on student success. In 2021, 4,200 Massachusetts Early College students are projected to earn 25,000 credits, saving \$5.4 million on tuition and fees. Half of these students identify as Latinx, close to one in five as black and 45% are from low-income families.

The study also found that students taking part in Massachusetts’ Early College programs are enrolling in college at 20% higher rates than their peers and that Early College is helping students keep their college goals during the current pandemic. As an indication, as of May 1, 2020, Massachusetts Early College students had completed a FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) form at an 11% percent higher rate than their peers.

“Decades of practice and research in states across the country have shown Early College to be highly effective at increasing degree completion and earnings. Bristol Community College is a pioneer of Early College in Bristol County and CollegeTrax comes at a most opportune time,” said Marjorie Ringrose, Senior Program Officer, Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation. “Combining engaging course content and academic supports remotely, CollegeTrax will help high school students follow their college and career dreams at a time when COVID-

related stresses may have them questioning whether those dreams are achievable.”

For New Bedford students, the college’s innovative CollegeTrax program begins with an engaging free course, Diversity Expressions in Society. The course was developed specifically for the initiative to engage high school students’ interest in college-level studies and themes of anti-racism, gender equality, LGBTQIA+ rights, workers’ rights and environmental justice through art, media and literature. To provide flexibility for students managing responsibilities, the program will be offered fully online without specific meeting dates or times but with weekly course assignments to stay on track. Students are supported throughout with access to the college’s tutoring services, academic advising staff and virtual office hours to connect one-on-one with their instructors.

“The CollegeTrax program removes barriers for students by removing the cost of courses, books and scheduling barriers that may prevent students without the support or resources from continuing their path toward a college degree,” said Andrew Woodward, Director of Guidance, Fall River Public Schools. “The collaboration between Bristol and B.M.C. Durfee High School focuses on the individual student at all academic levels with the support needed to build the skills and confidence to be successful in the future.”

The courses offered through CollegeTrax were designed so that students can easily transfer their completed credits to Bristol or any Massachusetts public 4-year institution to continue their academic journey to post-secondary success.

A privately donor-funded initiative, the first CollegeTrax courses began on Monday, October 5, and will run until Friday, December 18, 2020. Registration for Bristol’s new CollegeTrax initiative began on Monday, September 28, and is open to all high school students in Fall River and New Bedford public schools.

This program is the latest of Bristol Community College's initiatives to foster a college-going culture in the regions it serves. In recent years, the college has launched several programs to promote inclusive college education for all including "Family Nights," celebrating and serving traditionally underrepresented populations such as Black and African American, Latino, Asian, Portuguese and Women of Color Family Night. The college has also increased the presence and offerings of its dedicated Multicultural Student Center, Women's Center, Veterans Center and Health Center to best support students' goals of obtaining a college degree.

For more information about Bristol Community College's CollegeTrax program, please visit [www.bristolcc.edu/collegetrax](http://www.bristolcc.edu/collegetrax) .