

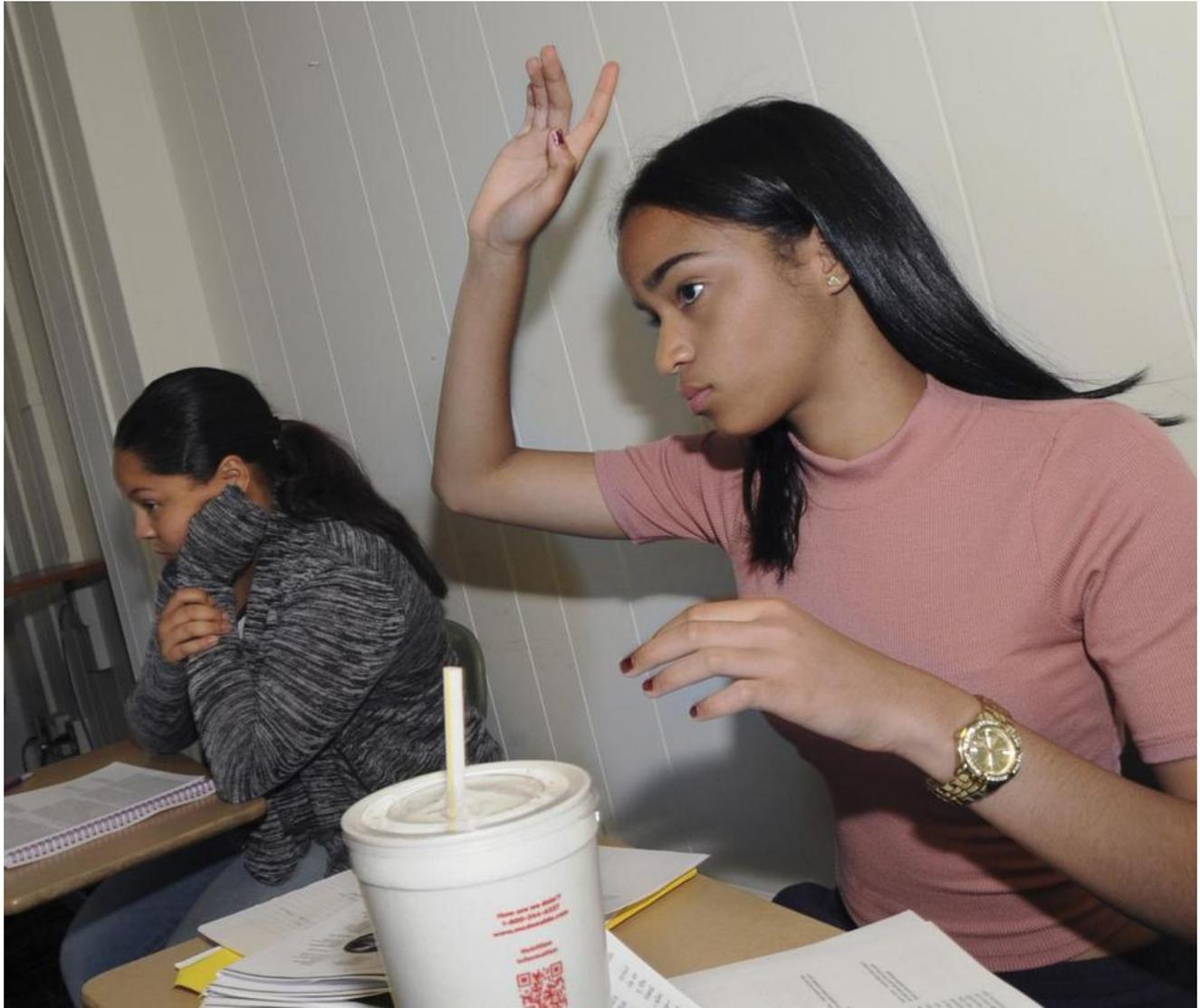


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COLLEGE BOUND

Giving high school students a head start on college



LISA POOLE FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Flavia Baez, 16, right, and Jailene Ho, 16, students from KIPP Academy Lynn Collegiate, attend a general psychology class at Salem State University.

By Jennifer Fenn Lefferts | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT SEPTEMBER 24, 2015

College Bound is a series offering tips and perspectives on preparing, applying, and paying for college.

When Matt Jablonski graduated from Wellesley High School last spring, he left with a high school diploma and associate's degree from nearby MassBay Community College.

Jablonski took part in the state's dual enrollment program, which allows high school students to take college classes at state community college or university campuses — often at a free or reduced cost. Students receive high school and college credit at the same time.

During his last two years of high school, Jablonski earned enough credits to start what should be his freshman year of college as a junior.

Now attending the University of Washington, the 18-year-old said the experience gave him a taste of college and helped prepare him for the next phase of his life.

“You have more freedom in college so I had to assume more responsibilities and develop time management and study skills that helped make me fully prepared for all aspects of college,” Jablonski said.

The Department of Higher Education recently awarded grants to 24 community college and university campuses through the Commonwealth Dual Enrollment Partnership to expand the program and target specific student populations. The idea of the program is to ease the transition from high school to college, allow students to get a head start on their college careers, and challenge students who otherwise may not have access to an early college experience. The ultimate goal is to increase the population of high school graduates who are college ready.

Funding for this program increased from \$750,000 to \$1 million for this fiscal year and state officials will be making a big outreach to students this fall.

Many of the classes will be free for students.

“This is extremely important for students sitting on the fence and not sure if college is for them,” said Carlos Santiago, the state’s commissioner of higher education. “It opens up a lot of different vistas for the student. It gives them the grit to know they can succeed in college.”

Locally, Salem State University will expand its partnership with multiple North Shore high schools, offering courses in both high school classrooms and on campus.

The University of Massachusetts Lowell will offer courses for students at Lowell High School, targeting male students who would be the first in their families to attend college. Students will make at least two visits to campus, and be invited to take part in a variety of social and sporting events.

Massasoit Community College in Brockton will give priority to dual enrollment students interested in high-demand science, technology, engineering and math fields, while MassBay has started a pilot program with Natick High School this year and is offering three different courses at the high school. In January MassBay will be partnering with Framingham High School and Keefe Tech High School in Framingham to do a similar partnership.

In addition to the new programs that target specific students, the state campuses allow high school students to take classes to earn college credit. Some schools offer those classes at free or reduced rates, however it is different at each campus.

Santiago said officials will be reviewing the dual enrollment program this year to make sure it is targeting students who may be on the fence about college and not just those looking for an accelerated path. Right now, the dual enrollment program is administered by each college and varies from campus to campus as to how it's organized and how funds are distributed. He said the state will be looking at whether that is the best approach to make sure all students are college-ready.

“If we are going to move the needle in Massachusetts to make sure they are better prepared, this is one component,” Santiago said. “This is one tool in our arsenal and we want to make sure that it's working well.”

Sam Ohannesian, Salem State's dual enrollment coordinator, said the state funding doesn't cover the full amount of running the dual enrollment program so many campuses absorb the cost. At Salem State, high school students can take one class each semester for free.

“It's all about college access and preparing them for the next step from high school,” he said.

Melany Ogando, a junior who attends KIPP Academy Lynn Collegiate, is taking a psychology course at Salem State this fall. When she first walked in to the classroom, she realized just how different it was from high school.

“There are a lot of thing going on that I didn't know about,” she said. “There are a lot of rules – there's a certain dress code, you can't eat in the class, you have to take certain notes. You can't just show up. Now I know what to expect, I won't sit there confused.”

Natick High School started working with MassBay about a year ago to create a program that would help introduce students to the college experience. After planning last year, classes started in the fall at the high school, said Rose

Bertucci, Natick's dean of students.

The classes are taught by the high school teachers, who have been approved by MassBay. They follow the same curriculum that would be taught by a professor on the MassBay campus.

Three courses will be offered this year during the school day – English and web design this fall and math in the spring. Each class is free to Natick High students.

“It’s a little bit of a look into college,” Bertucci said. “It’s a stepping stone. We see it opening the doors to new opportunities for the students.”

Natick High Principal Brian Hannigan said 92 percent of students there go on to college but 8 percent do not. He hopes this program will give all students the confidence they need to go on to higher education.

“This is us trying to round out that readiness piece,” he said. “A large number of students are taking AP courses, which is a similar approach. But AP classes aren’t for everyone. This is a group that may or may not be going to college but want to see what it’s like. The more we can do to prepare them for the next step the better and what better way to do than to try it out.”

Massasoit plans to work closely with a local high school in the spring though the details are still being worked out. Preference will be given to first-generation college students, those who receive free or reduced lunch or those entering science, technology, engineering or math fields, said Whitney Phillips, a senior admissions counselor. The classes will be free.

“It’s still providing access to college but to a whole cohort of students who can take it together in a college atmosphere,” she said. “It will make the transition easier by exposing them to college early on in the process. We will do an orientation on campus and get them acclimated to college.”

At the same time, the school will continue to give high school students the opportunity to take classes on campus at a reduced rate.

Whitman resident Brianna Callanan, a senior at Pilgrim Academy in Plymouth, started a course this the fall at Massasoit but had scheduling conflicts and had to drop it. Her mother, Joan Callanan, said she had a positive first experience and hopes her daughter can take advantage of the opportunity in the spring.

“It’s to give her a sample of what college is like and how different it is from high school,” she said. “We learned a lot and it gives them a taste of what the next step is but not on an overwhelming scale.”



JUSTIN SAGLIO FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Senior Becca Boucher participates in group work during a college-level English class at Natick High School.

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