

# At QCC, Baker announces new part-time student aid

By Grant Welker

Massachusetts will invest an additional \$7.1 million in student aid beginning this fall, with a focus on part-time community college students, Gov. Charlie Baker and other administration officials said in a visit Monday to Quinsigamond Community College in Worcester.

The year-to-year increase in funding is believed to be the biggest in Massachusetts in at least two decades, Commissioner of Higher Education Carlos Santiago said.

The program, called MassGrantPlus, expands upon the existing MassGrant program, which offers financial aid to full-time Massachusetts college students who meet eligibility requirements. MassGrantPlus is open only to community college students and -- for the first time -- includes part-time students who are working toward a degree while balancing other needs at home or work.

MassGrantPlus will provide last-dollar supports to students at community colleges, Secretary of Education James Peyser said.

"Community colleges transform lives," Peyser said at a brief press conference in QCC's QuEST Center. "It's that simple."

The state did not say how much was spent on the MassGrant program in past years.

Baker, Peyser and Santiago, along with Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito, met with three QCC students just before formally announcing the funding to hear their stories.

One student, Shantel Rutherford, said she was a single mother caring for her young daughter at home while studying for a business administration degree and working in QCC's financial aid office. Another, Jennifer Bemis, said she returned to school after being laid off from a job where she worked for nine years. She also has a young son at home.

"Coming back to school was the best decision I ever made," she said.

According to QCC, 67 percent of its students attended on a part-time basis last spring. Up to 1,000 Quinsigamond students will be able to benefit from the expanded financial aid program, QCC President Luis Pedraja said.

The Department of Higher Education says it estimates that approximately 5,000 community college students could be eligible for the additional state support, with an average unmet need of \$1,526 per student.