

# Advocating for a better life through higher education

Fall has always been a special time for me. It is a time of rebirth and excitement for our college students, faculty and staff alike. Many students are new to Quinsigamond Community College, while others are excited

to begin another semester that will help them on a road to a better life.

Education is the gateway out of poverty, but it must be accessible to everyone in a fair and equitable way. This is the impetus for all we do at QCC and QCC at Southbridge.

This fall brings special changes to our QCC community with QCC at Southbridge. We expanded our educational pathways in response to workforce development needs in the community, and increased our academic and workforce development programs in our new location at Southbridge High School.

By being conveniently located at the high school, we have additional space and flexibility to provide more credit, non-credit, and workforce development programming to those in Southbridge and the surrounding towns. This strong, symbiotic relationship with Southbridge High School enables students and their family members' greater access to higher education options. Being closer to the community we serve allows for a broader footprint in the region, and a more integrated approach to program development.

An important part of higher education is the ability to offer comprehensive support services that facilitate educational success. QCC at Southbridge has full support services that are vital to students who many not have transportation to Worcester. Support services are not exclusively for academic assistance, they encom-



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pass everything from advising and counseling, financial aid, and even basic life needs support.

QCC is a part of the community as our name implies, and as such, we tailor our programs and services to meet the needs of the

communities where people like and work. Community colleges bolster and support the whole student and by extension their families. While QCC has been part of Southbridge for many years, I am excited that we are now able to better serve the town and surrounding communities.

This fall, many of our general education credit classes are being offered in an accelerated seven-week timeframe, giving students the ability to complete two courses in the same time it would normally take them to take one course. On Nov. 1, our Fall II seven-week semester begins.

We also have an Early College Program in Southbridge that began in Spring 2021. Early college programs offer a direct pathway to higher education and have become a way for students to get a head start on college and earn college credits while still in high school. Data from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education showed that high school graduates who participated in Early College programs are enrolling in college at a rate that is 20 percentage points higher than their school or state peers; and their Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion rates are 25 percentage points higher than their school peers.

While QCC's Early College program is still in its infancy stages in Southbridge, this fall approximately 25 Southbridge high school students are taking a college level English course and/or a First Year Experience course.