

State approves two new early college programs in Central Mass.

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The state announced this week it has approved more early college program partnerships among 13 high schools and eight public colleges, including two in Central Massachusetts.

The designation allows students to take college-level courses while still in high school and earn tuition-free credits toward their eventual college education.

The two new programs in the region include a collaboration among Fitchburg High School, Leominster High School, Gardner High School, the Sizer School, Fitchburg State University, and Mount Wachusett Community College, and a partnership between Marlboro High School and Quinsigamond Community College.

The former program will be called the “North Central Massachusetts Early College,” and will allow students at the participating high schools to take courses at either college campus starting at the end of 10th grade. Available pathways of study in the program include liberal arts, health care, nursing, business, and industrial technology.

The program is expected to enroll more than 350 students by the 2020-21 school year.

The other collaboration will allow Marlboro High students to take college credit-bearing courses at their school in subjects like English Composition, Introduction to Psychology and Introductory Sociology Principles. Local officials anticipate the program will have 150 students by 2020-21.

Both new programs will also have college and career preparation programming for ninth- and 10th-graders before enrolling in college-level classes as upperclassmen.

Following this week's announcement, there are now 35 high schools and 18 colleges in Massachusetts coordinating on early college programs authorized by the state.

“Early College reduces the need for students to take remedial education courses in college by ensuring they are exposed to college-level work before they graduate high school,” the state's Education Secretary, James Peyser, said in a statement. “These programs build competence and confidence in students, making college an achievable reality for many young people across the Commonwealth.”