

Praise those who found a way through this chaotic semester

Yes, 20 percent of Boston public school students have not shown up for online classes during at least the past month of the pandemic, and that's a tragedy not of their making ("Remote classes leave students disconnected," Page A1, May 24). But let us not forget to praise all the resilient Massachusetts students who *are* finishing this chaotic semester in good standing, despite coming from COVID-19 hot spots under conditions of terrible stress.

One set of students has juggled even more than their peers. More than 2,000 Massachusetts "early college" students have mastered two emergency online systems — high school and college — because they are taking college courses while still in high school. For example, one early-college student received her associate's degree at Bunker Hill Community College's virtual commencement on May 21, two weeks before she will graduate from Madison Park Vocational High School. Others, including English-language learners, have completed at least a year's worth of college credit before getting their high school diplomas.

Early-college programs, which are relatively new to Massachusetts, allow students who are the least likely to attend college an opportunity to earn a high school diploma and a substantial number of transferable college credits at no cost to families. At JFF, I have worked to assist early-college programs across the country for 20 years. Today, JFF supports programs in Lowell, Lynn, Lawrence, Chelsea, Boston, Salem, and Framingham. We salute the grit, persistence, flexibility, and sheer creativity of these cities' future college graduates.

NANCY HOFFMAN

Newton Centre

The writer is a senior adviser with JFF, a national non-profit focused on the workforce and education systems to promote economic advancement.