

# State more than doubles investment in early college high school programs

By [Adria Watson](#) Globe Staff, Updated August 14, 2022, 3:50 p.m.



Janichka Jean Nordeus gets advice on her trigonometry project from Tom Batcho, associate director of academic support, at Wentworth Institute of Technology. Jean Nordeus, 17, is a senior at Fenway High School and participates in Wentworth's Early College Pathways Program. PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF

Sabrina Marte dreamt of attending college but questioned whether she could succeed.

But a pathway opened for her three years ago at Lawrence High School when she began taking college-level courses through an early college partnership with Merrimack College. By the time she earned her high school diploma in 2021, she already had 16 college credits and a newfound passion for social justice.

"I came from a city full of immigrants, in a household where my mother only spoke Spanish," Marte, now 19, said. "It was really hard to try to find academic support. Early college really gave me

that.”

More students like Marte will get a shot at college through the Massachusetts Early College Initiative, launched in 2017 and aimed at helping high school students from low-income families and communities of color access college courses in high school.

The state is now more than doubling its investment in early college, which is expected to see an increase of 2,500 students this school year — about a 50 percent increase to approximately 7,500. Tucked into the state’s [\\$52.7 billion spending plan](#) is \$19 million to help scale up early college programs for schools throughout Massachusetts.

Early college programs allow high school students to earn college credits while attaining their high school diploma, and some students earn enough to earn an associate degree.

Erika Giampietro, executive director of Massachusetts Alliance for Early College, said the additional funds in the state budget puts Massachusetts on track to hit its goal of having 45,000 students enrolled in early college programs by 2027.

“Having that kind of marriage where students and families want it, and our state level leaders want it, is rare, and it’s a real opportunity, and it’s an opportunity we just can’t miss,” Giampietro said.

While advocates say it’s a strong start, they note the Massachusetts program serves about 2 percent of all high schoolers, and the state’s share of students enrolled lags other states such as North Carolina and Texas.

But the demand in Massachusetts for early college programs is high. There are currently 50 high schools with early college programs in the state, and 28 more have written the state letters of intent to be certified for early college programs starting fall 2023, according to the state Executive Office of Education.

Of the students enrolled in designated early college programs in fall 2021, 60 percent were Black or Latino and more than half were from low-income families.

“In Massachusetts, if you are a white student, there’s a 50 percent chance you’ll have a college degree within six years of high school graduation. If you’re Black or Latino, it’s 20 percent,” Giampietro said. “That’s the gap that we’re really focused on trying to change.”

Janichka Jean Nordeus was looking for an opportunity to boost her college credit heading into her

junior year last fall at Fenway High School, so she decided to enroll in Wentworth Institute of Technology's Early College Pathways Program.

Jean Nordeus, 17, said part of what makes having these programs in schools important is that it helps students figure out what they want to pursue before heading off to college and saves thousands of dollars.



Janichka Jean Nordeus, 17, is a senior at Fenway High School and participates in Wentworth's Early College Pathways Program. PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF

Her experience with early college not only helped her continue to pursue her dream of working in the medical field, but find interest in business management as well.

“When I came in my freshman year, I had no idea what I wanted to do, and that’s an issue. That’s an issue that the early college program has proved to be solving in my school specifically,” said Jean Nordeus.

The \$19 million will pay colleges and universities enrolling early college students a tuition rate of

\$150 per credit and provide grants costing up to \$50,000 per year to get early college programs off the ground, or scale up programs in high schools.

“The students who participate in these programs don’t pay anything, and that’s a significant savings to these students,” said Representative Jeff Roy, who’s worked closely with early college advocates. “The more money we have in the program, the more students we can serve.”

Roy said he and Representative Kate Lipper-Garabedian will push for legislation they proposed last year to create a structure so that the programs won’t “die with a change in administration.” Massachusetts doesn’t guarantee funding for it every year in state law; it must be renewed by lawmakers.

They also want the state to staff a centralized college and high school office charged with overseeing programs such as early college and advanced placement.

“We really wanted these programs in all 351 communities throughout the Commonwealth,” Roy said.

Marte said she didn’t realize the extent of her learning gaps until she began the program but had support all along the way. Professors would go to the high school and spend two and a half hours with her each week working to perform college-level work. At the end of the program, she was also one of 10 students in the academy who received a full scholarship to Merrimack College.

“Hearing that early college closes the gap and opportunity for students opened my eyes to so much.”

*The [Great Divide](#) explores educational inequality in Boston and statewide. [Sign up to receive our newsletter](#), and send ideas and tips to [thegreatdivide@globe.com](mailto:thegreatdivide@globe.com).*

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