

Inspiring students is a community effort

By: Dr. John J. Sbrega, President Bristol Community College

We educators greet the beginning of a new school year with the same optimism and enthusiasm as the turn of the calendar year. There is nothing like the start of a new academic year to make me feel that anything is possible. As new students enroll, as others return, and as our entire BCC Family primes to start the semester, you can feel the energy and the potential for greatness at every turn. It is exhilarating!

As a community that needs the power and opportunity provided by education, this gives us all the chance to consider how we will encourage our young people to aspire to the wonderful opportunities inherent in education. Sadly, the days of good jobs for people with only a high school degree are disappearing. In this complex, highly-technical, global society, very soon approximately 70 percent of all jobs in Massachusetts will require more than a high school degree and some higher education credential. It is clear that for a more robust and secure future, our young people must aspire to some post-secondary education, particularly in the sciences, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Success in these fields requires students to seek out – and benefit from – the rigorous courses they need in elementary and secondary school to be able to move into these (and other) fields. Students must come to see their educational pathways as essential guides leading toward those well-paying, more secure fields.

This aspiration benefits not only students but also the Commonwealth by increasing the number of educated workers to fill the jobs of the future. The Massachusetts Department of Higher Education reports that by 2025, Massachusetts will be short by more than 68,000 workers with the education for the jobs the Commonwealth needs. Thus, if we keep going the way we are going, good jobs will remain vacant. Without capable, well-educated workers, our economy will suffer, and the businesses that could provide those good jobs will go somewhere else – or not come at all.

How can we as a community inspire our students to cultivate a love of learning and aspire to the rigor and challenges necessary to be successful? Parents and loved ones are indispensable in this life-changing process. Here are a few suggestions to consider:

1. Make sure our children get to school – safely. Students who miss classes miss something important, particularly the discipline of applying their brains and their energies to learning every day.
2. Encourage our students to embrace the hard work. Math and science may be challenging, but they can be learned. Urge your students to keep trying. They must come to embrace the life of ideas.
3. Talk to young people about their futures. Encourage them to think big and to aspire to college. They can seize the many opportunities that exist for them to enjoy a better life through education.

Of course, not everyone is interested in or suited for STEM fields. There are many fertile educational fields to explore. The chief purpose of the EdUP campaign is to create a culture of learning, where education is valued by all. A promising future is ahead for Fall River and for all our students, from preK-12 to community college to university and beyond. Investing time and energy, and committing to arrange valuable learning experiences for students will pay off for Fall River. Let's continue to make the start of this academic year a great one.