

For immediate release

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MWCC Early College Programs Celebrate Graduate Fifty-One Graduates

GARDNER, MA – June 5, 2025 – On May 30, 2025, Mount Wachusett Community College (MWCC) celebrated the achievements of its Early College Program graduates. The Gateway to College and Pathways Early College Experience programs have played an integral role in shaping the futures of fifty-one exceptional students, twenty-four of whom earned an associate degree.

Gateway to College, which is completing 19 years of programming, serves students wishing to enter post-secondary education while earning their high school diploma and college credits. To date, 608 students have graduated from the Gateway program, with 38 students graduating this year. Of these, 16 graduates earned their associate degree and/or certificate from MWCC just two weeks ago.

“This graduating class stands as a testament to what is possible when access meets opportunity,” Fagan Forhan, Dean, K-12 Partnerships & Civic Engagement. “We are here to honor your accomplishments and to recognize the community of educators, leaders, and partners who have made this possible.”

“Early College at MWCC has grown by leaps and bounds since the state began designating programs. We are incredibly proud of these programs and of the students who are here today graduating from our two-year, full-time, early college programs,” stated James Vander Hooven, President of MWCC. “You have spent a good amount of your high school career here on our campus and we have had the privilege of watching

you collectively redefine the high school experience and what it can and should look like for students today.”

“It takes tremendous partnerships, relationships and trust to be able to put these programs together to be as successful as they are for our students and this work would not be possible without the deep relationship we have with Gardner Public Schools,” Vander Hooven continued. “We are grateful for the innovation, partnership, and the tremendous impact that our collective work is having on the student experience. Thank you to Mark Pellegrino, Superintendent of Gardner Public Schools, Paula Bolger, Principal of Gardner High School, and Melissa Paine, College & Career Readiness Coordinator of Gardner Public Schools, for all that you do to break down the barriers and to make these programs a reality for so many students.”

“I couldn’t be more proud of you all,” Mayor Michael Nicholson told students. “Each of you have your own story and your own experiences that got you here today, and you will carry them with you. I can’t wait to see how you carry that forward from this ceremony into the rest of your lives.”

“Gateway to College and Pathways Early College Experience are two wonderful programs that allow students in Gardner to choose a different option for their high school experience,” Superintendent Pellegrino stated. “Congratulations to the Class of 2025 and thank you to MWCC for being such a wonderful, creative partner that gives these opportunities to our students. We couldn’t ask for a better partnership.”

Graduates from Gateway will continue their educational journey at a variety of institutions, including Worcester State, Salem State, Dean College, Emmanuel College, Fitchburg State, UMass Boston, trade schools, and MWCC. Several students will also be joining the military or entering the workforce.

Gateway to College valedictorian was Megan Prachniak of Holden. Prachniak earned her diploma and Associate of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies and plans to attend the

Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences in an accelerated pharmacy doctoral program with the goal of working in pharmaceutical research.

The Pathways Early College Experience, entering its 15th year this fall, allows high school students to earn both a high school diploma and an associate degree simultaneously during their junior and senior years. Since its inception in 2010, Pathways has seen 211 students graduate, including 13 from the Class of 2025. These graduates will continue their education at prestigious institutions such as Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI), UMass Dartmouth, UMass Boston, Columbia University, Fitchburg State, Westfield State, Merrimack College, and many more.

Graduates of the Pathways program have had great success, with 75% of them going on to earn bachelor's degrees. The program was initially launched in collaboration with the Ralph C. Mahar Regional School District and has since partnered with Gardner Public Schools in 2019.

Olivia Wentworth of Fitchburg was the Pathways Early College valedictorian and is graduating with her diploma and Associate of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies degree. Wentworth committed to playing softball at the University of Massachusetts Boston while majoring in information technology with a focus on digital forensics in pursuit of a career as an intelligence analyst.

Both Gateway to College and Pathways have made a significant impact on students' lives, offering them the opportunity to pursue higher education while overcoming challenges and achieving their academic goals.

For more information about the Early College Programs at Mount Wachusett Community College, mwcc.edu.

The Gateway to College Class of 2025 members who earned their diploma are:

Liara N. Alves Diaz, Gardner

Parker Donald Bolden, Hubbardston

Sarah Leeanne Bunton, Hubbardston

Katelin Charland, Hubbardston

Juanita De Aquino Mejia, Fitchburg

Mars Deans, Westford

Willow Duquette-Holmes, Berlin

Rikki Marie Eringi White, Templeton

Olivia Rachel Gallant, Barre

Lillian Marie Hardy, Orange

Isabella Herrick, Ayer

Frederick Everett Jenoure IV, New Braintree

Aiden Michael Kenney, Orange

Michael James Kuehl, Phillipston

Caleb LeGrand, Townsend

Jesuel Jose Malave Burgos, Fitchburg

Leah Tamar Myrthil, Gardner

Cameron Citlali Ramos, Clinton

Kirill Dmitrievich Strunkin, Sterling

Amanda Thompson, Lunenburg

Alexis Maria Tucceri, Townsend

Max Ryan Franco Zeppa, Fitchburg

Gateway graduates also receiving a diploma, associate degree and certificate are:

Kiara Anializ Alicea-Roman, Fitchburg

Isabelle Bento, Holden

Sophia Annelis Ulloa, Gardner

Gateway graduates receiving a diploma and associate degree are:

Hannah Fowler, Athol

Nayah Liz Islam Espinosa, Rutland

Nickolas J. Jakoulov, Westminster

David Kjornes, Winchendon

Mason Jeffrey Lucia, West Brookfield

Kazim Fraz Mehmud, Gardner

Megan Grace Prachniak, Holden

Fiorella Rodriguez, Westford

Gateway graduates receiving a diploma and certificate are:

Sam Larkin Fessenden, Athol

Jackson Fitzpatrick Griffith, Gardner

Emily Rose Jones, Ayer

Brayden Thomas Swanson, Athol

Aiyana Tabales, Fitchburg

The Pathways Early College Class of 2025 members who earned their diploma and associate degree are:

Angelar Lunie Bazile, Sterling

Eli Rose Butler, Gardner

Josue Diaz Saldarriaga, Gardner

Riley Elizabeth Forhan, Lancaster

Kiley Mary Marie Kulesza, Rutland

Jaiden Timothy Lopez, Gardner

Syeira Kayelen Phillips, Fitchburg

Kalea Nicole Reilly, Ashburnham

Delaney Marie Smith, Westminster

Nathaniel Monahan Soucy, Monson

Olivia Joy Wentworth, Fitchburg

Pathways graduates who earned their diploma, associate degree, and a certificate are:

Alyssa Jean Goulet, Barre

Gavryela Mora, Fitchburg

In addition to the Gateway to College and Pathways Early College Experience graduates, homeschool graduate Julien Nordstrom-Learnard of Hubbardston was presented with their diploma during the ceremony.

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