



College is for everyone, part two

A few weeks ago in this space, I outlined reasons that [“College is for everyone.”](#) In that piece, I said that no matter what your situation – whether you are a high school student considering your next step after graduation, a parent who stayed home to raise your kids, or a laid-off worker who cannot find a job that pays what you were making, in Massachusetts you can find a way to make it work.

Then on April 1, *The Herald News* published a profile, [“BCC student proving dreams beat out obstacles every time,”](#) of one of our Bristol Community College students that illustrates this point. It is the inspiring story of Fall River resident Joseph Pereira, who at 51, was laid off – again – and decided that this time he was going to use this setback to finish high school and start college.

Jody, as he is called, enrolled at the Adult Basic Education program at BCC and started working toward his high school equivalency. These grant-funded programs offer study skills, tutoring, and test preparation, as well as support from the instructors who stayed in touch and made sure he stayed the course. Jody needed open heart surgery during his studies, and he found his instructors calling him every few days to offer their help in studying while he was recuperating. Jody is now 54 and the proud holder of his high school equivalency.

Then last fall he took advantage of many of the resources I outlined in my column a few weeks ago to start college to become an occupational therapy assistant.

He received financial aid and grants that help him pay for college and for his expenses. He finds tutoring and academic support at the college to help him succeed. He is getting involved on campus – and he shared his experience with the college’s legislative delegation to a hushed and admiring crowd.

Am I saying that this is easy? Not at all. And certainly, all of the credit for his success goes to Jody, who has his goal in sight and works hard every day to achieve it, despite his setbacks. But it is stories like this that make me so proud to work in education and provide access to the means and the resources for people like Jody – and you! – achieve a better life. A college education is within your reach. The sooner you complete your degree the sooner you can experience the quality of life that comes with it. By 2020, 72 percent of all Massachusetts jobs will require more than a high school diploma. So, the reality is that most of us will need to have a college education to fill the jobs that are available tomorrow.

At BCC, we have the ability to help our students develop confidence, create goals, and change the way they may feel about learning. We have the ability to help students like Jody every day, but we must work together to create a “college-going culture” in our community. Kudos to BayCoast Bank and EdUp for their initiative, “Get on the Bus.” Kudos to the teachers, principals, coaches, tutors and other educators who work in this great community. It is so important that we take the time to acknowledge their passion and dedication to our students. It is time to make education our number one priority in Southeastern Massachusetts and beyond. We can foster a college-going culture in Bristol County that will not only fill the jobs of tomorrow, but also better our communities through the quality of life that follows a college education.

So dream big. Dream for yourself and your family. The tools for success are available – take advantage of the ways that college can work for you. Join with others like Jody to secure yourself a better future.

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