



Holyoke Public Schools  
57 Suffolk Street - Holyoke, Massachusetts 01040  
Tel. (413) 534-2005 ♦ Fax. (413) 534-3730  
[jtaylor@hps.holyoke.ma.us](mailto:jtaylor@hps.holyoke.ma.us)

**Dr. Stephen Zrike, Jr., Receiver/ Superintendent**  
**Judy Taylor, Communications Director**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:**

Judy Taylor, Communications Director  
(413) 493-1605, [jtaylor@hps.holyoke.ma.us](mailto:jtaylor@hps.holyoke.ma.us)

**PRESS RELEASE** – Holyoke Public Schools Ready to Transform High School -  
*Innovative redesign structure empowers students as self-directed learners ready for 21st century workplace and college rigor*

**Holyoke, Massachusetts** - Holyoke Public Schools (HPS) unveiled its strategic plan to transform the high school experience for city students today.

The innovative plan, developed by nearly 100 educators, students, community members and national experts, including support from the Barr Foundation, is organized around an academy structure designed to provide “personalized learning pathways” for all students.

The unique structure will include partnerships with several area organizations, including universities and colleges - UMASS Amherst, Springfield Technical Community College, Holyoke Community College and Westfield State University.

“The academies are designed to ignite student motivation, interest, and engagement in their education, setting a solid foundation of academics and work-based learning experiences. This will prepare our students for the global economy and a society that demands critical thinking and communication skills,” said Dr. Stephen Zrike, Superintendent. “This structure will give students a competitive advantage, ensuring they graduate with stackable credentials sought after by employers and colleges and universities alike.”

The new structure, which will be in place at both Holyoke High School and William J. Dean Technical High School for the 2018-19 school year, will also address the appropriate content standards.

Over the next 18 months, four theme-based academies for grades 10-12 will be implemented:

- Community and Global Studies Academy
- Technology, Engineering, and Design Academy
- Performing and Media Arts Academy
- Medical and Life Sciences Academy

In addition, three separate academies, some already in existence, will start or continue this fall. They include:

- A continuation of the Freshman Academy
- An expansion of the off-campus Opportunity Academy- alternative programs for students who are overaged and under-accredited
- The addition of the Newcomer Academy for those new to the English language and the country

During their freshman year, all students will choose an academy of study. To prepare students for this selection, there will be programs designed to help them make informed decisions.

“The purpose of the academies is *not* to train students for a particular field or career, but rather to hook students’ motivation to learn and increase students’ ownership over their education,” said Mickey Buhl, Executive Director of Secondary Education and Pathways.

Within each academy, students will choose among a set of concentrations, such as computer science within the Technology, Engineering and Design Academy. As they progress from grade 10 to grade 12, their pathway will become more personalized through focused projects, college courses, and real-world learning opportunities like internships.

“The plan emphasizes preparing students for both college and the professional work world - whether work comes immediately after high school, after college, or during college,” said Marcus Holt, Design Team Member and Dean Technical Engineering Teacher.

All students, regardless of the academy they choose, will have access to standards-based core studies, cross-academy electives, advanced placement classes, dual enrollment, work-based learning, and college and career planning throughout high school.

“Our schools and community are amazing assets. We have made substantial progress in our work together already, as evidenced by quadrupling the number of dual enrollment college courses HPS students are taking compared to last year, a 28 percent decline in our dropout rate for 2015-16 compared to the year before, and a further 24 percent drop so far this year,” said Zrike. “This plan will continue to grow those positive trends and above all, prepare students for life beyond the Holyoke Public Schools.”

For more details about the redesign plan, [please visit our website.](#)

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