



Wellesley's MassBay expands opportunities for students with disabilities



Wellesley — Jayme Finstein is working to expand college education opportunities to everyone, even those with intellectual disabilities.

Finstein is currently the Learning Disabilities Specialist for the [Transitional Scholars program](#), a pilot program at [MassBay Community College](#) in Wellesley. The program offers students ages 18 to 22 with intellectual disabilities the chance to participate in inclusive college courses.

Finstein recently received an “Outstanding Educator” award from the [National Down Syndrome Congress](#), after a student participant in the Transitional Scholars program, Brian Heffernan, nominated her.

Finstein said the pilot program began in 2007 and became available to colleges like MassBay, through grant funding from the state. MassBay has partnered with other community colleges in Massachusetts and the Newton, Boston and Cambridge public schools to continue to offer the program to students with special needs.

A tuition fee is attached to the program, but Finstein said funds from the public schools and federal help lessen the added costs of educational support.

But, Finstein emphasized that the students enrolled in the program are taking “regular college classes.” She said the students are given advanced support, depending on their specific need level.

Heffernan, a 21-year-old Newton resident with Down Syndrome, comes to campus with an education coach to help give him the support he needs, she said.

“Everything is college,” she said; “we are just the support network behind the scenes.”

Although most of the students in the program are non-matriculating — meaning they are not high school graduates nor will they receive an associate’s degree from the college — the ultimate goal is to match students with paid jobs.

Finstein said students are paired with career specialists to work toward that end.

Heffernan, who is not currently majoring in anything, said he is taking a “Principles in Marketing” class, and is working with his career specialist to combine his newly learned marketing skills with his love of public speaking.

Heffernan has spoken about his disability at colleges across the state.

“The employment specialist is helping Brian use his experience in public speaking to market himself and come up with a website,” Finstein said.

Aside from academics, Heffernan said the program has been rewarding in other ways. “My experience has been great,” he said. “I have a great education coach. In addition to supporting me she also supports other students I’m good friends with...I’m involved in a bunch of stuff [on campus.]”

Heffernan, who was greeted by a number of students in the hallways of MassBay during the interview, said he started a glee club on campus, is active in a theater group and also active in student government.

“The hope is students are coming here to gain all sorts of skills,” Finstein said. “We hope students gain independence, self advocacy, life skills, job skills and experience through social connections. Each student who comes in is a very different person and it’s a very individualized approach connecting students to goals.”

An accomplished student in the program, Heffernan is working on getting his high school diploma, and if he is successful, he will have the opportunity to receive an associate’s degree from the college, Finstein said.

When asked if this is his plan for the future, Heffernan said, “I have big dreams.”