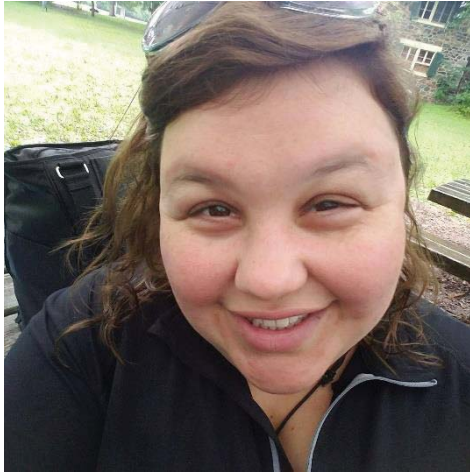

Alumni Connection: Reconnecting with Community College Graduate & Educator – Jennifer Palmer

*Jennifer Palmer
Kindergarten teacher, Alexander Hamilton Elementary*



Leaving high school, I was never really sure what I wanted to do. My focus in college was split between two different future careers. My name is Jen Palmer and in 2005, I decided to attend Howard Community College (HCC) in Columbia, Maryland, and it was the best decision of my life. Not only did it allow me to explore numerous majors before I found the one that fit the adult me the best, but it allowed me to pay for my college while working full time at Target. Community college allowed me to not break the bank, while I was taking the time to learn about myself and what I wanted for my future. It didn't take me long to realize that I was destined for early childhood education.

It took me five years working full-time and going to HCC part-time to achieve my associates degree in early childhood education. I was able to do it as well almost completely debt free! HCC prepared me to transition in 2010 to Towson University in Towson, Maryland. HCC gave me the hands-on experience I desperately needed by providing me with exposure to a public school classroom setting, private early childhood education center setting, as well as experience in a special education classroom setting. Through the hands-on experience I received at HCC, I was able to find my passion for teaching young children.

Transitioning to a university was scary for me. I never took my SATs. I was too afraid of being labeled as not smart enough, but community college gave me the confidence and the degree to smoothly transition into a four year university in Maryland. Looking back on my career as a teacher, I have been teaching in an early childhood education center for almost 13 years and, after completing my degree at Towson 7 years ago, I began teaching Kindergarten in Baltimore City Public Schools. The building blocks I set up through community college and a four year college allowed me to become the best teacher I can be for the students in my classroom. It has ignited a passion inside me for always improving my practice and always learning new best practices for early childhood education.

In 2015, after I gave birth to my son Joshua, I had the confidence to return to school to begin my graduate degree in early childhood education. Earlier this year, Towson University asked me to join a delegation they sent to Washington, DC, to speak with US Senators and Representatives about an education bill under consideration. This December 2018, I will be walking across the stage and receiving my third degree in early childhood education and I could not have done it without the building blocks I laid at the foundation of my college career. I will be graduating with my Masters with over a 3.97 GPA, and I couldn't be more proud of myself.

Going from being afraid to take my SATs to completing a graduate degree with honors proves to me the choices I made after high school severely impacted my life for the better!

My advice to you as a soon-to-be high school graduate, current college student, parent of a child about to graduate, or even a person who decided to start a family before college - you absolutely can do this! No matter how scared you are or how unsure you are of what you want to do with your life, the first step is enrolling and taking that first class. Everything will come to you in time, and you may have to go through a few classes that don't fit you and your future, before you find where you belong, but I believe in you. If I can do it, you can too in community college.

If you know or are a graduate of a community college teacher preparation program, we need your voice and would love to hear about your achievements, career plans and future aspirations. Visit our website and submit your information via our [Alumni Connection](#) TODAY!



Please consider joining your NACCTEP and AACTE colleagues this February in Louisville for engaging discussions and interactive sessions on topics critical to the educator preparation field. Registration deadline is January 28, 2019!

<https://www.aacte.org/professional-development-and-events/annual-meeting>