

Framingham's SMOC Honors More than 20 Students

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Paul Pacheco, 39, of Framingham, hold up his diploma for passing the high school equivalency test. [Daily News and Wicked Local Staff Photo / Ken McGagh]

FRAMINGHAM – When he first arrived in Framingham, Ernseau Durosier saw English as “the enemy,” saying he felt more comfortable speaking in Portuguese. Originally from Haiti and having lived in Brazil, Durosier nevertheless enrolled in the English as a

Second Language program at the South Middlesex Opportunity Council's Joan Brack Adult Learning Center.

With a year of classes under his belt, he landed his first job in the U.S. and uses English every day. Durosier, who now lives in Medway with his wife and son, celebrated the milestone Friday in front of a crowd of cheering family and friends.

"We've sacrificed many things to get here. Today, we can see it in our ability to communicate," said Durosier in a speech to other students.



Nicole Mendes, 32, of Medway, kisses her son Adian Campbell, 13, after she received a diploma for passing the high school equivalency test Friday at the South Middlesex Opportunity Council's Joan Brack Adult Learning Center in Framingham. Also attending were Mendes' daughters, Faith Rogers, 7, and Hazel Rogers, 3. [Daily News and Wicked Local Staff Photo / Ken McGagh]

More than 20 students were honored Friday for achieving various learning milestones, including nine adult learners who successfully passed their High School Equivalency Test (HiSET) at the 2019 Celebration of Learning at SMOC's Cafe on Bishop Street. Instead of a traditional graduation ceremony only recognizing those who completed a full year in the ESL program or have passed the HiSET exam, the Celebration of Learning event acknowledges the learning milestones of those students who will be continuing their educational and language proficiency goals.

Originally from Jamaica, David Griffiths, 28 of Dover, enrolled in the fast-track High School Equivalency program in May, aimed at helping adults earn their high school diploma. He passed his tests within six weeks. In September, he will attend college to earn a degree in auto mechanical engineering.

"No matter how old you feel, you can always learn," said Griffiths.

Gwenn O'Keefe, director of SMOC's Skills Training/Green Jobs Academy, said SMOC has had the program since the mid-1990s, saying the HiSET program is the only free day program of its kind.

"This is one of the most positive, upbeat events for us," said O'Keefe. "You just know they're going to make their lives better."

State and local officials praised and encouraged the graduates.

State Rep. Maria Robinson, D-Framingham, asked students to turn and thank family, friends and others who helped them get to that point.

“I know you didn’t do this alone,” said Robinson.

David Podell, president of MassBay Community College, lauded the students for demonstrating bravery in enrolling in the programs.

“It takes courage to decide, ‘I’m going to go after this thing that’s hard, that is elusive.’ Not everyone has that courage,” said Podell.

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