

# The METROWEST DAILY NEWS

## Obstacles overcome, diplomas in hand in Framingham



Beverly Lewis, center, moves her tassel from the right to the left side of her mortarboard during the South Middlesex Opportunity Council (SMOC) high school equivalency graduation at the Memorial Building in Framingham on Friday. Daily News and Wicked Local Photo/Dan Holmes

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FRAMINGHAM - Finally in her cap and gown Friday, Allyn Raymundo broke down in tears as she tried to thank the "No. 1 person" who pushed her to earn the equivalent of a high school diploma: her mom.

Raymundo told her fellow graduates of South Middlesex Opportunity Council's Joan Brack Adult Learning Center that she dropped out of school and had a baby at 16. Her son, now 5, starts kindergarten this fall and she's now closer to achieving her dream of being a cosmetologist.

Raymundo said her advice is to always go back to school, as it will pay off. "You'll see that you're going to get great things back," she said during a ceremony Friday afternoon in the Memorial Building's Blumer Community Room.

Family members proudly looked on as a record high number of 22 graduates of the program received their high school equivalency diplomas and flipped their tassels.

Speakers praised the students for overcoming life obstacles and juggling family, jobs and other responsibilities to achieve the milestone. "Now you have a tool – your diploma will help you open doors," Framingham School Committee Chairwoman Beverly Hugo said.

She urged the graduates to keep their "eyes on the prize" to get to their next goal.

State Rep. Tom Sannicandro, D-Ashland, urged the students to pursue higher education and consider MassBay Community College right here in Framingham.

Joyce Osei Bonsu, 28, of Framingham, proudly accepted her diploma. "I'm so happy, I'm glad and I fought for it," she said as the graduates ate cake and celebrated with loved ones after the ceremony.

She said she came from Ghana, and the education she received there wasn't enough for her to go right to college in America. Now, she plans to start at MassBay this fall.

"I want to be a nurse," she said.

Shabana Khan, 25, came from Pakistan in 2007 not speaking any English and is now extremely proud that she can go to college here. She too wants to be a nurse.

Khan said she went to MassBay Friday morning to meet with a counselor, so eager to enroll now that she has her diploma. "That was my dream," she said, beaming. "I can't believe it."

The 2014 graduates are: Jessica Batres; Porsche Blandford; Sabreena Blasotto; Erica Caraballo; Anthony Cirelli; Martin Clarke; Amanda Edwards; Isabel Famania-Banks; Jeffry Garcia; Pamela Johnson; Shabana Khan; Beverly Lewis; Azucena Ochoa; Joyce Osei Bonsu; Alba Quinones; Allyn Raymundo; Maria Regalado; Richard Santos; Deanna Schmieder; Stephanie Silva; Will Szymczyk; Stephanie Tavares.

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