

RiseBoro Education Celebrates Graduates of HSE/GED Class of 2023

Earlier this summer, the thirty-eight members of RiseBoro's HSE/GED Class of 2023 celebrated their success in a graduation ceremony held at RiseBoro's Youth Center. Surrounded by family, friends, and their teachers, the students shared stories of the hardships they had overcome and encouraged each other to continue to pursue their educational and professional goals. Many graduates had already received job offers, promotions, or had enrolled in higher education classes as the next step towards realizing their dreams.

In her nearly four years as the coordinator of RiseBoro's Adult Education Program, Massiell De La Cruz has supported students from a diverse array of backgrounds, all facing unique obstacles along their journeys to graduation. But all the graduates she has supported had one thing in common: determination to succeed.

"I have always been a believer that with hard work and dedication, anyone can achieve what they set their mind to," De La Cruz said. "Many students come to school daily while working fulltime jobs and taking care of children. Still, they persevere."

Like Vangelis Rosario Medina, many RiseBoro HSE/GED students are recently arrived immigrants who take ESOL classes in tandem with their HSE/GED preparatory classes. Medina spoke of the unique challenge and opportunity this presented and of her gratitude for the support of her classmates and teachers.

"This is an important step in the journey of our lives, one that should be recognized with immense importance," Medina said. "As an immigrant, education and learning a new language is very challenging. This adult education program gives us a boost to move forward and provides us with an excellent support team. Whenever we need assistance, they are always there supporting and encouraging us to keep going. We come to this country in search of new opportunities, and this educational program is a key to leading us to a better future."

Anne Mui was a stay-at-home mother of four when she found a flyer for RiseBoro's GED program in her mailbox and decided to enroll. Now she's proudly working as a group leader at a local school. She said the adult education program showed her that she "was meant to succeed."

For graduate Stevan Lugo, the class was "the beginning of an adventure," that will require sacrifice and a commitment to growth.

"The State of New York has given us the opportunity to live our American dream," Lugo said. "The dream that doesn't allow us to sleep and pushes us to be brave and strong, to subtract from our hours of sleep and rest to study, review the lessons learned, and prepare for our exams. Today, with honor, having fulfilled our duty, we will approach to receive the fruit of this light.

"The responsibility of learning obliges us to be better citizens, aware that educational preparation is not for the sake of our personal ego, but for the sake of building a new society, a society capable of being self-critical, empathetic, and resilient."

Read Stevan Lugo's impassioned speech in its entirety below.

"Good evening to all those present here. Thanks to the students, teachers, and administrators of the Department of Education and RiseBoro Community Partnership.

Recognizing the valued of the GED/HSE and English for Speakers of Other Languages programs that the Department of Education, in partnership with RiseBoro Community Partnership has fully provided us, today, I am the voice of all the students present here, who, with effort, discipline, and dedication, will graduate, thus achieving a new milestone in the construction of our new personal future.

The State of New York has given us the opportunity to live our American dream. The dream that doesn't allow us to sleep and pushes us to be brave and strong, to subtract from our hours of sleep and rest to study, review the lessons learned, and prepare for our exams. Today, with honor, having fulfilled our duty, we will approach to receive the fruit of this light.

Yes, it's just one more step in the construction of our educational criteria and the beginning of an adventure in choosing what we would like to study in college in order to consolidate the professional profile with which we will build New York into the strongest, kindest, most progressive and proactive state in the United States of America.

The responsibility of learning obliges us to be better citizens, aware that educational preparation is not for the sake of our personal ego, but for the sake of building a new society, a society capable of being self-critical, empathetic, and resilient.

I hope and I am certain that we will continue to give our best for those who love us and in memory of those who have already passed away, but who encourage us to improve with the memories and examples they gave us in life, and who have paved the path that has led us here.

Finally, I only have to recall the words of the most renowned American poet, Walt Whitman, in a fragment of his poem "Do Not Stop."

Do not let the day end without having grown a little, without having been happy, without having expanded your dreams. Do not let yourself be defeated by the departing, do not allow anyone to take away your right to express yourself, which is almost a duty. Do not suppress the urge to make your life something extraordinary, and never stop believing that words and poetry can indeed change the world.

Thank you for everything."