

EDUCATION

CONGRATULATIONS GRADUATES

STCC Celebrates Adult Learners Who Earned High School Equivalency Credentials

SPRINGFIELD, MA – Wearing a black cap and gown, Chekeena Rivera smiled as she clutched the certificate signifying her accomplishment.

At 27, she had earned her high school equivalency credentials. Rivera, a Springfield resident, felt good about the future after passing her high school equivalency test, which is called the HiSET.

"It feels so amazing," Rivera said at the 2018 HiSET Celebration honoring nearly 40 graduates who took classes at the Springfield Adult Learning Center at Springfield Technical Community College.

Rivera is now seeking her associate degree from STCC and hopes to transfer to a four-year university or college and continue her education. She dreams of one day owning her own business.

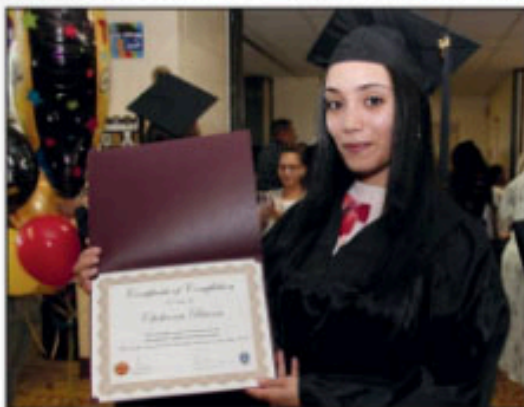
"I wanted this for my son," Rivera said. "I want to eventually have that house with the picket fence, so I went back to school."

STCC President John B. Cook, faculty and staff offered encouragement and congratulations at the June 26 ceremony, which was packed with friends and family of graduates. Cook urged them to consider the value of an education at STCC.

"As you move forward, think about what motivated you to be here tonight, and how you keep going with that in mind," Cook said. "As you look around, please know you are needed. There are employers with good jobs all around looking for your talents."

Noting that many employers are looking for candidates with college credits, Cook encouraged the HiSET graduates to consider taking courses at STCC.

"Please note this wonderful institution will continue to be there for you," Cook said.



Chekeena Rivera holds her certificate of completion during the 2018 HiSET celebration at STCC.

The college offers about 100 different programs, has childcare on campus and gives area residents an affordable opportunity to earn a degree or certificate, he said.

The graduates heard several success stories during the ceremony. Student speaker Elizabeth Rivera of Springfield graduated last year and then enrolled in the medical coding and billing program at STCC.

"This past spring, I made it to the dean's list and was invited to join the honors program," she told the graduates, referring to the list that recognizes excellence in academic performance.

Graduates also heard that failure can lead to success. José Lopez-Figueroa holds a master's degree and is now director of the Center for Access Services at STCC, but said he "barely graduated from high school."

"With my grades, I wasn't even thinking about college," Lopez-Figueroa said.

After going to a college fair, he decided to enroll at a four-year school. He struggled with his academics, even failing courses. But with help from TRIO student support services, he obtained his bachelor's and then his



Tanya Rubins, a Springfield Adult Learning Center Adult Learning Center/Adult Basic Education instructor, speaks to students who earned their high school equivalency credentials at STCC.

master's degree.

"Success is nothing without failure," he said. "I like failure, because

it opens up the opportunity for learning."

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STCC Celebrates Adult Learners

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Thomas Hegarty, an adult basic education instructor for the learning center, quit school at 16. "I believe I knew everything worth knowing," he told graduates.

"Over 25 years, I've been through a whole lot of dirty jobs, dangerous jobs, low-paying jobs and I felt maybe I should do something about this," Hegarty said.

After receiving his high school

equivalency credentials, he took courses at STCC. One day, he finished a math test and felt elated knowing he did well. Today, he teaches math and science at the adult learning center.

"I would encourage anyone who thinks there's any chance at all that they might get something out of even one course at college to give it a try," Hegarty said. "You're going to be amazed. It's such a wonderful, beautiful experience." ■