



JULIA MALAKIE PHOTOS / LOWELL SUN

UTEC holds its High School Equivalency Test graduation for young adults who earned their high school equivalency degree. Dya Rodriguez walks up to get her certificate.

MAKING THE GRADE

UTEC holds High School Equivalency Test graduation

Submitted Article

LOWELL » At UTEC, young adults with proven barriers to success, primarily gang involvement and incarceration, are given a clean slate and an opportunity to pursue their goals.

This year, 15 young adults walked across the stage in their cap and gown to celebrate completing their High School Equivalency Test, one of the highest graduation rates in the program's history. They were joined by family members and staff on UTEC's new event space, The Green @ UTEC, on Friday.

"Graduating is a big step in my life. I struggled with public school, so getting my HiSET is a big accomplishment for me. I didn't think I'd get as far as I did, and I'm proud of myself," said Jahtari Miles, one of the graduates.



Alexander Chaing of Lowell holds up his certificate, and educators Niles Lashway, left, and Nick Chalk, right, look on.

"Graduating opens up a whole new chapter of my life. I'm just happy to have made it this far," echoed Dan Greene, another graduate.

Nick Chalk, an educator at UTEC,

a local teen empowerment social service agency, was among those to speak at the graduation.

"Thank you for letting me be a part

GRADS » PAGE 4



JULIA MALAKIE PHOTOS / LOWELL SUN

Dya Rodriguez of Lowell poses for a photo with family and friends as UTEC holds its High School Equivalency Test graduation on July 8.

Grads

FROM PAGE 3

of your journey,” he said. “And whatever your next adventure is, don’t listen to the somebodies that say ‘it cannot be done,’ because all the people here today, we know you can do it.”

Upon enrollment in UTEC’s program, 68% of young adults lack a high school credential.

UTEC seeks to serve young people ages 17 to 25 in Lowell, Lawrence and Haverhill who may not have found success in other, shorter-term programs or who may have been underserved by the judicial system. Their education program consists of small classes, tailored instruction and extra support, which make a big difference for young people who have often been out of the classroom for several years before joining.

“I don’t normally get emotional, but these young people had to deal with COVID-19, a tremendous amount of per-



Desiree Thornton-Aries of Lowell holds up her certificate, and educators Niles Lashway, left, and Nick Chalk, right, look on.

sonal and systemic barriers, and this moment of celebration gives me hope that ... even when it seems like the world is against you, you can overcome. And that’s what these young people did,” says Niles Lashway, an educator at UTEC.

Alongside the education program, UTEC provides young adults in their program with wraparound supports including workforce development in our social enterprises, mental health services, free onsite

childcare, one-to-one mentorship and civic engagement.

In addition to tracking educational outcomes, such as progress towards HiSET attainment, UTEC places a great emphasis on reducing recidivism.

Last fiscal year, 87% of young adults who were enrolled in UTEC programming had no new re-arrests, which is one-quarter the state average recidivism rate for this age group.