

Self-starter Milford High School graduate aims to be first in family with a college degree

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MILFORD — When Mirelly Miranda was completing the list of requirements necessary to enter the National Honor Society at Milford High School, she compared notes with another student, and was shocked to discover he didn't know where he stood with his community service hours.

His mother was keeping track of them, she learned.

“When your parents are immigrants, it's a lot more of do-it-yourself,” said Miranda, whose parents came from Brazil in 1989 and 2000. “It's a lot more of ‘you do it and I'll be there to support you.’ ... I thought it was very weird when I heard that.”

Miranda is among 262 Milford High School students who will graduate Sunday, June 6, and she plans to become the first in her family to earn a college degree.

“My mom really wanted one of us to go to college,” Miranda said, of herself and her three older siblings, “because it was her dream, and she wasn't able to.”

The soon-to-be graduate earned the National School Development Council award for 2021, given to two students each year who show extraordinary growth in their time at Milford High, Principal Joshua Otlin said.

“She's shown a tremendous motivation to work at the highest degree of difficulty,” Otlin said. “Her story is exactly what we love to see students doing when they come to high school. Progressively challenging themselves.”

Miranda came to Milford High School from the Framingham school system her freshman year, and took only a couple of honors-level courses. Her English teacher, she remembered, was confused as to why Miranda was in the entry-level course, and asked if she could bump her up to an honors class.

“This was really easy, I could do more,” she remembered thinking. “I can do better than this.’ Each year I started building up a bit more.”

By her senior year, Miranda was taking three advanced placement courses and two honors courses.

“I just really wanted to take certain classes, and they all happened to be hard classes,” she said.

Academics haven’t been Miranda’s sole responsibility. She also has a job and volunteered to take on a handful of responsibilities at her church.

“There were times when I’d go to school, and then I’d go straight to work, and then I’d go straight to church, and then I’d get home around 10 or 11 and I’d start my homework,” she said.

Miranda will attend Worcester’s Quinsigamond Community College this fall, then plans to transfer to a bachelor’s degree program at another school. She isn’t quite sure which career she wants to pursue and wants to explore her options.

“I don’t want to get into debt,” she said, of the decision to begin at a community college. “I don’t think it’s worth it to go into thousands of dollars of debt.”

Interested in the medical field, she plans to start her college career majoring in biology.

“She’s, I think, a real role model for other students,” Otlin said, “in terms of the way she’s approached her academics here at the high school.”

The self-starter attitude served Miranda well during the pandemic and remote learning.

Sometimes teachers would assign a “huge packet” of work for the week, she said, instead of breaking it into smaller assignments, and anyone who left it until the last minute would have trouble.

“You have to kind of keep yourself more accountable,” she said. “You have to take initiative to do your work and take it step by step.”

The pandemic was hard on the whole graduating class, Otlin said.

“These students lost the second half of their junior year and huge parts of their senior year were taken from them, as well,” he said. “It would be easy to imagine students becoming very cynical and bitter after all they have lost in the past 14 months.”

Instead, he said, they have been grateful, gracious and positive, he said.

“We couldn’t have asked for anything more from a group of seniors than we got from these kids,” he said. “They’ve shown a really high level of grit and persistence and positivity.”

For Otlin, this graduation marks a milestone for him, as well. Because this is his fourth year as principal, this class is the first he’s seen go through all four years at Milford High School — except his own.

Furthermore, 2021 marks 25 years since his own high school graduation, he said.

“They’re making me feel old,” he laughed.

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