



EDUCATION

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She once struggled to learn English. Now this Cuban-American student is headed to MIT

BY KYRA GURNEY

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It's hard to imagine that Dayme Delgado ever struggled in school.

When the 18-year-old graduated from Mater Academy Charter High School last week, she had a 5.2 GPA and two associate degrees. In a few months, Dayme will head to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where she has a full-ride scholarship and plans to study theoretical mathematics and aerospace engineering.

But when Dayme first started school in Hialeah, she didn't understand a thing.

As the daughter of two Cuban immigrants, Dayme wasn't exposed to English until she got to kindergarten. For the first three years of school, she was in classes for English-language learners.

"I remember being really, really frustrated because I didn't really understand the different subjects," Dayme recalled.

The only thing that made sense was math.

"Numbers are kind of their own language, so I was like, 'Oh, I've got this,'" she said.

It was also the only subject her parents could help her with. Dayme's father had studied engineering in Cuba and her mother had studied computer science, but because they didn't speak English when they first arrived in South Florida, they weren't able to help Dayme with most of her homework.

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Mater Academy college adviser Silvina Macho

So from an early age, Dayme eagerly devoured every math problem that came her way. She has taken every math class offered at Mater Academy and several at Miami Dade College, as well. Math came so naturally to Dayme that she didn't have to take notes in most of her math courses; she simply paid attention and understood. It wasn't until she enrolled in college algebra and statistics at Miami Dade College during her sophomore year that Dayme found herself having to study for a math class.

"She really loves the subject, and from the very beginning it was known that this is what she was meant to do. She was going to go to a great school and she was going to do math," said Mater Academy math teacher Alexander Smith, who has known Dayme since she was in the eighth grade.

Dayme's gift for math wasn't obvious to everyone, however. Dayme found that some students doubted her at first when she spoke up in math and science classes because she didn't look like what they imagined a math aficionado to be. At regional math competitions, Dayme was mistaken for a parent on more than one occasion.



Tuesday, May 30, 2017- Dayme Delgado, right, with Silvana Macho, her college counselor at Mater Academy.
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But it didn't take long for students at Mater Academy to realize that when it came to numbers, Dayme knew what she was talking about. Dayme was the president of Mater Academy's chapter of the math honor society Mu Alpha Theta and helped tutor classmates struggling in college-level algebra and statistics courses. She was also recruited by the school to tutor students who were in danger of failing the state standardized tests.

"She doesn't have any problem helping, any problem explaining," said college adviser Silvana Macho. "She explains math to you like it's a recipe to make a cake."

Dayme has also encouraged other female students to take math and science courses. She founded a science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) group called SheSTEM that partners with local colleges and universities to bring after-school science programs to Mater Academy. SheSTEM has hosted events on robotics, bridge building and health science topics like CPR, to name a few.

“She’s always pushing and pushing and pushing for girls to be near math, for girls to be near science,” Macho said.

Dayme said this is because she is troubled by research that shows girls are as interested in math and science as boys in elementary school, but by the time they get to high school, few see themselves pursuing careers in STEM fields.

“The most important thing is to realize that math is just like anything else,” Dayme said. “It is not dependent on your gender or your ethnicity. Forget about what others perceive and just go for it.”



Tuesday, May 30, 2017- Dayme Delgado stands next to a bulletin board celebrating graduating seniors at Mater Academy. **C.M. GUERRERO.** - cmguerrero@elnuevoherald.com



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