



Photos by Lisa Sanchez Gonzalez | Special to the Herald  
Cayden Rivera receives his diploma from Director Maria Greponne.

# Preschool graduates ready to reach higher

By JEFF GEBEAU  
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**NEW BRITAIN** — Eighteen 4- and 5-year-old students walked in their first commencement ceremony Friday afternoon while graduating from the 51st class of the Benjamin Franklin preschool program of the Human Resources Agency of New

Britain.

HRA, which was launched in 1964, is a multiservice nonprofit that is dedicated to increasing the economic self-reliance and quality of life for people and communities of Greater New Britain. The Benjamin Franklin program that serves children

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Graduates of the Benjamin Franklin preschool program proudly hold up their certificates last Friday.

# Preschoolers graduate with goals for the future

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between ages 3 to 5 opened the same year.

"We're calling it graduation, but it's really their transition into kindergarten," said Marla Greponne, HRA's director of planning and programs, who also oversees its toddler and preschool programs. "We're celebrating their school readiness."

Family members and friends filled the community room of HRA headquarters at 180 Clinton St., eagerly waiting for the ceremony. The graduates entered excitedly to the strains of "Graduation (Friends Forever)" by Vitamin C, exchanging waves and beaming smiles with proud parents, many of whom stood and recorded the moment on camera.

"I know you're all proud," Greponne told the audience members after they had vigorously applauded the children. "Please, acknowledge away."

The kids demonstrated their preparedness for kindergarten in a presentation in which they counted to 20 in unison. Some forgot to stop at 20, demonstrating their ability to go even higher.

The children also spelled their first and last names, recited a nursery rhyme, sang a group song and stated the jobs that they want to hold as adults. Most said they wanted to be doctors, police officers, firefighters, teachers or professional athletes, but



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Leah Miranda receives her diploma from Marla Greponne, director of planning and programs, while Maritza Santiago, head teacher, looks on.

vocations such as security guard were also cited. One ambitious dreamer even announced his aspiration to become Spiderman.

"They have developed enough to understand the concept of having a future," Greponne said. "They are very driven and have set goals for themselves."

At the end of the ceremony, the students received certificates, which they held above their heads as hundreds of additional pictures were taken.

Graduate Jazzlyn McGee is looking forward to the opportunity to make new friends and play with toys in kindergarten, as well as learn new things, she added, breaking into a big smile.

McGee's mother Genese Simmons said it was emotional seeing her daughter's commencement, but she is "looking forward to the next chapter." The school staff is not as ready for her to move on, Simmons said.

"Her teachers want her to stay



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From left to right, graduates Jazzlyn McGee, Kalani Rivera and Ty Davis

because they love her so much," Simmons said. "They're like 'Can we shrink her down?'"

Graduate Sasha Morton said she enjoyed Benjamin Franklin but found it hard to wake up early enough to arrive for the 7 a.m. start time.

"And for Mommy to get to work too," added Shanese Davis, Morton's mother.

Davis had mixed emotions as her daughter's time at the school came to an end.

"I'm excited and sad — kind of bittersweet," she said. "This was a

big part of her life. All of her day was here."