

## Katherine Cespedes Barrio's Success Story



Katherine Cespedes Barrio's journey as an adult learner with Hillsborough County Public Schools is one of courage, determination, and inspiration.

Katherine came to the United States from Cuba in 2019, determined to build a better life for herself and her family. She enrolled in the CARIBE Refugee Program as a beginning ESOL student with little to no English proficiency. Katherine recalls, "I knew absolutely nothing in English."

When the pandemic forced classes online, Katherine did not let it slow her down. She remained engaged and continued to grow. Today she thrives in the Advanced/Career Readiness ESOL class. Her current ESOL teacher, Ciro Gomez, shares, "She has demonstrated honesty, great values, work ethic, and discipline. She is unstoppable."

In 2021, she began GED preparation, showing the same motivation and commitment that had already defined her ESOL journey. By the end of the year, she proudly earned her Florida State High School Diploma.

Having been a kindergarten teacher in Cuba, Katherine was eager to return to her early childhood education roots. She passed the Early Childhood certification exam and became a VPK teacher. Soon thereafter, she enrolled in Citizenship classes, ultimately passing her interview, and proudly becoming a United States citizen in April 2025.

Katherine moved on to Erwin Technical College, where she successfully completed the Dental Assistant program. She now works as a dental assistant and is preparing to enter the Dental Hygienist program at a local college.

Beyond her educational accomplishments, Katherine has been a positive influence on her community. She encourages her classmates, helps them stay motivated, and models what is possible through perseverance. Her teachers say she represents the very best of adult education.

She balances her roles as a student, mother, and community member with determination and grace. She has overcome language barriers and pursued her education relentlessly, never allowing obstacles to hinder her progress. Most importantly, she has inspired those around her with her warmth, optimism, and perseverance.