



Eastern Ohio  
ASPIRE



## JEFFERSON COUNTY EDUCATIONAL SERVICE CENTER

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Aspire marks National GED Day, giving students tools to succeed

YOUNGSTOWN – Eastern Ohio Aspire has much to celebrate on National GED Day Sept. 16. For years the Aspire staff has given students the tools to pursue general education development, and classes are going strong since the program has moved from Eastern Gateway Community College to the Jefferson County Educational Service Center.

Funded by the Aspire grant through the Ohio Department of Higher Education, Eastern Ohio Aspire offers adult educational services and assists with high school equivalency diplomas as well as offering services for English speakers of other languages, integrated education and training, correctional education, distance learning, and workplace and family literacy. Eastern Ohio Aspire covers Mahoning, Jefferson, Belmont, Harrison, Carroll and Columbiana Counties.

Cynthia Boston, a transitions staff member with Eastern Ohio Aspire, was first introduced to the program while earning her high school equivalency.

“I got involved because I wanted a GED,” she said. “I quit school when I was 17.”

When Boston retired 30 years later and decided to pursue her education, Aspire was there to help. Boston said her experience in class made an impression. She began work as a teaching assistant in 2006.

“I went back to help other people in the class. I was so excited. I felt like if I can do it, anybody can do it.”

Boston recalls working toward her high school equivalency. While she was intimidated by the task and nervous about the prospect of failure, Aspire’s staff made a difference.

“It was an awesome experience with the teachers,” she said. “Really just nice people.”

Boston hopes her example as an older student will encourage others in the Aspire program.

“I was just elated, and to be able to help somebody else, that was just really rewarding to say that I could come back and help somebody do what I did.”

Boston said students in Aspire can earn their HSE if they commit. She and other staff encourage them to stick with it. Boston said she understands life has many challenges, but students will have help in the program. There is no hard time limit and students can take the assessment when they are ready.

Boston said staff go above and beyond for their students. She recalled one time when she helped one student pay for the test.

Boston said empathy and people skills are a must for the job. She said her students have been respectful and determined to earn their HSE.

“It’s so important. They wouldn’t come if it wasn’t.”

Part of her job is to provide encouragement and let them know they can pass. Boston said the dedication and enthusiasm of Aspire’s teachers has been consistent since she started.

“The quality of the teachers has been awesome. They’re caring and they want the people to accelerate. They want them to get ahead.”

Boston said Aspire’s mission has carried through the changeover from EGCC to JCESC.

“It’s still about HSE. We want to do for the students what we’ve been doing.”

She said the family atmosphere is still present, since many of her coworkers have come over to JCESC. Boston said Aspire has built strong relationships among fellow staffers and their students. This sense of camaraderie has seen them through many challenges.

“It was really fun, and it still is fun.”

Boston said she goes to work knowing she is making a difference.

“I love what I do.”

She works in Mahoning County, utilizing the Ohio Means Jobs office in the Renaissance Learning Center on Oak Hill, in Youngstown.

Another proud graduate is Liteta Erickson of Toronto. She donned her cap and gown in July with the final graduating class at EGCC.

“It’s an excellent program. They provide a lot of good materials,” she said. “The staff, they’re really good people. I’m really glad that I took a chance on them.”

Erickson first heard about Aspire at a job fair when she learned a high school diploma would open more opportunities. She started in 2018, but other commitments interrupted her coursework. She would go back in 2023 to take her final classes. She became emotional during her graduation, on finally having that achievement.

“That’s what really pushed me to go for it. I just wanted to have it, because I didn’t finish school.” Erickson was initially nervous when considering Aspire and the prospect of going to class with much younger students, but she soon made herself at home.

“The teachers were great. They were very friendly. They were very welcoming. They try everything they can to get you where you want to be. You came there for a reason, and they’re going to help you achieve,” she said. “It was a very exciting moment for me. Once I got to know the staff and got comfortable it was a lot easier for me to learn and study.”

Erickson recommends Aspire.

“For people who are thinking of getting their education, to finish their education, I do encourage to take a chance on the Aspire program.”

Erickson is planning to pursue education at the college level, and study criminal psychology.

Eastern Ohio Aspire can be reached at [aspire@jcesc.org](mailto:aspire@jcesc.org). The web page is <https://www.jcesc.k12.oh.us/EasternOhioASPIRE.aspx>.



Cynthia Boston credits the Aspire program with helping her earn her high school equivalency diploma. She would later join the Aspire team and help others succeed. Now Eastern Ohio Aspire under the auspices of the Jefferson County Educational Service Center, the staff is celebrating National GED Day.



Liteta Erickson earned her cap and gown moment this past July, and she credits the Aspire program for giving her the tools to succeed. Now Eastern Ohio Aspire under the auspices of the Jefferson County Educational Service Center, the staff is celebrating National GED Day.