

New Bedford's Alma Del Mar charter school students celebrate Frederick Douglass Day

Scholars at Alma del Mar: Sarah D. Ottiwell Campus honored the life and work of Frederick Douglass with a public speaking competition on Friday, Feb. 14, Douglass' birthday.

Seventh-grade scholar Jamiel Tavares won the competition – scoring an average of 22 out of 24 possible points from judges – with an inspiring reading of Douglass' Farewell Speech to the British People, which was originally delivered in London on March 30, 1847.

A panel of judges including Rep. Christopher Hendricks and Alma del Mar Board of Trustees members Maria Rosario and Martha Kay scored each contestant on criteria including introduction of the famous speech, pronunciation, eye contact, and body language.

Also competing were eighth-grade scholar Jayda Robinson (Second Place), sixth-grade scholar Denisse Alvarez Figaro (Third Place) and fifth-grade scholar Elias Quinones (Fourth Place). Many of these scholars chose to read speeches that also celebrated Black History Month, and the heritage of African Americans in the United States.

February 14 has been recognized as Frederick Douglass Day in the Commonwealth since 2018, when legislation created by Sen. Mark Montigny was passed into law.

"It is important that we remember and honor the work of Frederick Douglass as he played an integral part in the history of New Bedford and the abolitionist movement. I'm

proud to have played a part in honoring him when I proposed legislation, which became law, creating Frederick Douglass Day on February 14th,” said Senator Mark Montigny. “He deserves to be more widely known and his messages of tolerance and equality are still as powerful today as when he first delivered them. A public speaking competition in his honor is very appropriate as it gives scholars the opportunity to develop the skills to communicate clearly and passionately.”

Alma’s newest campus is named in honor of Douglass, one of the most prominent abolitionists and civil rights leaders in the struggle for equality in the United States. Douglass lived in New Bedford in the mid-1800s after escaping slavery. His powerful testimony – both spoken and written – is a fixture in Alma’s curriculum, and scholars across grade levels study his work and life each year.