**GRADUATION SPEECH**

**FOR**

**CHENDRA DUPREE**

Greetings!!! I want to acknowledge all of you for being here today… To our Board President and Central Zone Board Member, Dr. Thelma Dillard, distinguished Board Members, the 2019 National Superintendent of the Year, **OUR**Superintendent Dr. Curtis Jones Jr., parents, family, friends, students, teachers,... other dignitaries and special guests, and of course, to the graduating class of 2022, **WELCOME**!! I’m sure that each one of us is aware that the past couple of years have been “interesting” to say the least…. And to see this room filled with eager, enthusiastic graduates, students, and all of you that have supported this school and this class, in one way or another, really takes on new meaning. In so many ways, being here today is heart warming, encouraging, and inspiring…. Just like the qualities we seek in graduates who, as they leave today, will go forth and take their place in our local, National, and global community

Our former First Lady, Michelle Obama, has been an inspiration and a voice of reason for our generation and beyond. As someone who is very candid in explaining that she didn’t come from an environment of privilege or advantage, her own accomplishments and words of encouragement speak volumes. With each thought she shares, every one of us has the opportunity to listen and learn. In her book, Becoming, Mrs Obama reminds us, “At fifty-four, I am still **in progress**.” Graduates, today, you achieved a very important milestone in your educational careers and in your life as an entity. Whether you celebrate with friends and family or just take a moment to reflect quietly on your own, you have achieved a goal and gotten to the “**end**” of the high school process. As one door closes, in particular, the door to Central Fine Arts High School, what lies on the other side is just the **beginning**.

Graduates, I’m so proud of this class of 2022!,,. You’ve faced challenges…. many of them highly unusual and demanding. You’ve persevered, and most of all, you saw the value and importance of an educational foundation. It is quite a group accomplishment to be able to declare that this class is proudly **THREE E ready**!!! As I look out at all of you, it gives me great pride to announce that as you leave these premises for the last time as high school students, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_% of you are **employed**, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_% of you are **enlisted**, and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_% are **enrolled**!,,. No matter the path you’ve chosen, that’s an incredible achievement and whether or not you realize it now, you have provided a baseline and a bar for future graduating classes to follow and maybe even surpass.

Mrs. Obama also wants to make sure we “get the message.” While directed towards the country’s youth, its wisdom is not limited to any particular age bracket. “I want our young people to know they ‘**MATTER**.’ They **BELONG**.” Are you listening?? She continues, “Don’t be afraid. Be **FOCUSED**. Be **DETERMINED**. Be **HOPEFUL** Be **EMPOWERED**. Empower yourselves with a good education, then get out there and use that education to build a country worthy of your boundless promise. Lead by example with **HOPE**…. never fear.”

If there’s one thing these past couple of years have taught us, it’s that we have no idea what tomorrow will bring, but being informed, aware, and pro-active certainly provides the tools you will need to get through whatever may come your way. Graduates, you are living proof that determination and hard work pays off. You realized the assignment… literally. You did what you had to do, and you bounced back from setbacks and prevailed. You realized that, while it’s true that we don’t know what we don’t know, and that life can be crazy unpredictable, it’s of critical importance to be **educated**, in every sense of the word.

Individually and as a group, you’ve experienced loss, hardship, and challenges way beyond what a young person should have to bear, but still, you made it!! As each of us found our way through “the new normal,” we realized that life changed. Circumstances are different, and whether that means there are greater financial challenges or issues involving family members that might not have happened pre-pandemic, or any kind of difficulty that may get in the way of you achieving your personal, professional, or educational goals, please know this…. You have a **CHOICE**. You have a **LIFE**. And in your life, you can choose reasons to not have something…. Reasons to get discouraged… reasons to back off the path you know you need to be on….or you can have **results**. Life is hard. Many times it’s unfair. Frankly, I’ve made it my mission to remove the word “fair” from my vocabulary…. Life isn’t fair, but it **IS** what you make of it, and you’ve already proven you can get through the tough parts…. How do I know that??? Because you’re **HERE**. I would say that there’s a very great chance that fate will play tricks with you. Life will test you. Challenges will emerge. You’re going to want to quit. Guess what??? **THAT IS NOT AN OPTION**. I would bet that every adult in this room has wanted to quit at some point in their lives… whether it’s a job, an assignment, a personal issue… who knows? It’s getting through those times that teach us the most. We learn how much we care…. How much courage we really do possess…. How much determination we can muster…. **HOW MUCH WE’RE WILLING TO LEARN**.

This is the first commencement ceremony at which I am able to proudly say that I have been the principal of this school for the full school year. It has been a privilege to work with you, to guide, you, to watch you rise and mature, and especially, to **LEARN** from **YOU**. As an educator, and as Mrs. Obama says… and I can attest to this…. we are **ALL** works in progress. We are all evolving. We are all continuously reaching towards a better self. I want to congratulate you… I cannot wait to see you continue to evolve to reach your **BEST** selves. Thank you!!