**GRADUATION SPEECH**

**FOR**

**CHENDRA DUPREE**

Greetings!! I want to acknowledge all of you for being here today. To our Board President, Mr. James Freeman, Central Zone board member, Dr. Thelma Dillard , distinguished board members, our Superintendent Dr. Dan Sims, parents, family, friends, students, teachers, and other dignitaries and special guests and of course, to the graduating class of 2024, Welcome…

I feel I must say something about this “**TWENTY-FOUR KARAT**” class of 2024, and while all students, all graduating classes, all graduates and yet to be graduates are special and unique in their own ways, providing inspiration, challenges, and motivation for staff as well as for the students themselves, this graduating class of Central Fine Arts & International Baccalaureate High School, somehow won my attention, my heart, and my gratitude for reminding me of why we do what we do….maybe it’s because this is the first class I saw all the way through their challenges and triumphs as I began my tenure at this school in March of 2020…. Yes… you got it!!! New job… new class… new global **PANDEMIC**!! There was a tremendous amount to process and get through in those early years. Watching the students in this class demonstrate resilience, enthusiasm, and a genuine interest in learning and working together was an incredible inspiration to all, especially the teachers, and mostly **me**. With all of us trying to get through our lives and education in really, unchartered territory, and witnessing the positive effect the situation had on these kids was nothing short of wonderful… Graduates, I marvel at your strength, determination, and positivity!!! And it’s all really paid off for you!!! Let’s put it this way…. The student body of Central has had a history of impressive statistics… the class of 2022 had a 90% graduation rate… sounds good!!! …. 2023 had a graduation rate of 96%…. **WHOA**…. How do you top that???? You top it by being the **GOLDEN** class of 2024…**THIS** class… wait for it….

* + Scholarships… **SO FAR**: $5,502,415.00!!!
  + 80% matched and enrolled!!
  + 8% motivated to enlist!!!
  + 2% molded for entrepreneurship!!
  + 10% meaningfully employed!!!

What does this all mean??? **100%** of this graduating class is **4ME Ready**!!! 100% of this class, or 194 young adults are ready to find and take their place in this world… ready to contribute their enthusiasm, curiosity, sense of belonging, passion for community, and commitment to self confidence and making a positive difference in a world that really needs such life affirming qualities now, more that ever. Graduates, it’s people like you that have the **potential** to heal whatever is afflicting society. In so many ways, **YOU** have healed me, the teachers and the staff… just by being yourselves and bringing your **SELF** to the game. My only concern… and yes, I have concerns…. is how is the class of 2025 **EVER** going to top **THIS** class?!?! (**Wait for the laugh)….** Maybewe’ll have to start a **NEW** slogan for Central… “**GROW UP, GLOW UP, SHOW UP!!!** Class of 2024, you **DEFINITELY** showed up!!!

The graduating class of 2024 is symbolic for so many reasons. Aside from being the first post pandemic graduating class, it’s interesting to note that gold, especially 24 karat gold, has increased in price to the point where it has been valued at over $2400 per ounce… think about it…. I call you my “**GOLDEN APPLES**,” but in truth, at today’s rates, each one of you would prove that your practically priceless!!! Well, honestly, **I KNEW THAT**!! Let’s put it this way… At today’s rates, a 150 pound graduate, if made of **solid gold**…. Which **I DO** believe you **ALL** are, would be worth approximately **$5,760,000.00!!!! Yes…** you’re **THAT** spectacular!!!

I also must say…. and I think all of you know this…. I am humbled and proud to have witnessed and encouraged your educational and personal paths these past four years. I hope I’ve done right by all of you. I hope I’ve shared whatever wisdom I can summon to reinforce the strength that grows inside you. I hope you realize that you will prevail… no matter what. What is meant for you will be yours, and no matter how badly you want, wish, pray for something to happen, if it doesn’t, then quite simply, it wasn’t yours…. And to take that one step further…. There will be something **BETTER** that will come along that **IS** **YOURS**. As you go through life, you’ll find that people may try to take your joy. **LISTEN UP… THEY CAN’T**. The author John Irving once wrote a line which I haven’t forgotten…. “**NOBODY** can take the **YOU** in you. Your job is to keep going… and **BELIEVING in YOURSELF**.

As you leave Central for the last time (technically…. I’m hoping you come back to visit!!) also keep in mind that beyond the walls of academia, Seniors, your paths may diverge, you’ll probably go in different directions. Things will feel different and accomplishments will vary but remember… titles do not define you. Integrity will be your calling card. Remember that the impact you leave is more important than the impression you make. Your character… what you stand by, is more important than reputation… who people **THINK** you are.

Ultimately, I **REALLY DO** think of you as “**MY** class.” I’ve spent time with you. I’ve shared my own struggles and challenges. All of it, as with me, is part of your story and **NONE** of it holds you back… that’s where “character” comes from. I hope this all stays with you. Never forget our creed that you’ve learned here, within these walls, as you go on in life:

**We are the Central Chargers**

**We are committed to respecting each other and uplifting our Charger Family**

**We lead the classroom ready to learn**

**We lead the community ready to serve**

**We lead in life ready and responsible for our future.**

**Building a better tomorrow today**

**We are the Central Chargers! We lead! It CAN be done!!**

On behalf of all present, I congratulate and wish for you only the best in the future.

**Whose House, C’s House, Whose House??? C’s House. WHOOOOOOOOOSE House??? C’s HOUSE!!!!!**

Thank you all!!