**Celebration Welcome**

Nelson Mandela once stated “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”And as Michelle Obama stated, “"You may not always have a comfortable life and you will not always be able to solve all of the world's problems at once, but don't ever underestimate the importance you can have because history has shown us that courage can be contagious, and hope can take on a life of its own."” Seniors, you have accomplished something that no one can ever take away from you, that is an education.

 Good evening, welcome to the celebration for the achievements of the seniors at the Academy For Success. This day marks the end of their high school career and the beginning of the rest of their lives. This time marks not only the achievements of the students but of the parents supporting and encouraging them along the way. There have been many evenings spent talking about why they needed a diploma or why it was more important than their other endeavors. The long days parenting and challenging their children to fulfill their potential have culminated in the success you see before you today. This was a long journey to get to this point. However, this is only the beginning.

 Although this may conclude the end of their high school career, the challenge is to continue growing and learning. As Oprah Winfrey once stated, ““Education is the key to unlocking the world, a passport to freedom.” In today’s world, you must constantly be a learner and strive to be the best. If you want a better opportunity then you must seize it through education. Therefore, this evening signifies the beginning of your next step in life. This is not the time to sit back and rest but to continue achieving and seeking more out of life. Every student here has a great deal of potential and we offer our praise and support in their new life.

 I would like to take this moment to recognize some very special people that have made this evening possible. First I want to thank Ms. Rachael Stenger and Ms. Kaycee Sites in helping coordinate this celebration for today (please stand).

 Next I want to thank our faculty and staff in their assistance with organizing tonight and for the long hours of instruction, grading, and encouragement. (Please stand)

 I would like to thank our school board members for their constant support and encouragement. You have made not only our school but this district the pride of South Carolina. If our board members will stand as I call your name:

**Chairman -- Beth Hutchison,**

**Vice Chairman -- Robert Gantt,**

**Secretary – Jondy Loveless**

**Ellen Baumgardner,**

**Larry Haltiwanger, Sr.,**

**Jan Hammond and**

**Ed White.**

 **Next, I would like to thank members of our district office staff. With your leadership, this district has become the best district in the state. Superintendent -- Dr. Stephen Hefner,**

**Chief Student Services Officer -- Michael Harris,**

**Chief Instructional Officer – Dr. Christina Melton,**

**Chief Human Resources Officer – Dr. Allison Jacques**

**Chief Information Officer – Mark Bounds,**

**Director of Secondary Education – Reggie Dean, and**

**Coordinator of Adult Education – Dr. Kathie Greer.**

I also want to thank Chapin Baptist Church, Mt. Olivet Lutheran Church and Binding Ties for the food that we are about to enjoy.

 Finally, but most importantly, I thank our parents and family members for their commitment and dedication in assisting their children. It has been a long and sometimes tough road but you are finally here. Parents, families and seniors, if you would please stand as this evening is all about your hard work and dedication.

 Now, without further ado, we will partake in our celebration banquet. Seniors and their families may begin the line, and then everyone else may follow.

 Before we begin our senior celebration, I would like to honor two people from our school. The first person that I would like to recognize is our Teacher of the Year, Mr. Chad Bridges. Mr. Bridges, if you would please come forward. Mr. Bridges has been with the Academy for several years and has worked both at the middle and high school level. Students often will state that Mr. Bridges teaches one of their favorite classes because they get to debate and argue. Mr. Bridges is always willing to offer a helping hand and is one of the major reasons why students are able to play in the gym during lunch. Mr. Bridges, thank you for all that you do for our school and children. If you would join me in congratulating Mr. Chad Bridges, our Teacher of the Year.

 The second person that I would like to recognize is our Support Employee of the Year, Ms. Tracy Kroll. Ms. Kroll, if you would please come forward. Ms. Kroll has been our social worker for a couple of years and not only serves our school but also Spring Hill and Chapin Middle Schools. She brings a heart for our children and a commitment to excellence. The Academy would struggle without her incredible organizational skills and dedication to providing support and resources to our many families. Ms. Kroll, thank you for all that you do for our children and school. If you would join me in congratulating Ms. Tracy Kroll, our Support Employee of the Year.

I now have the privilege to introduce our senior speaker for this evening. He has overcome a lot of obstacles to stand before you today and we at the Academy hold him in the highest esteem. I still remember that student that came to us a while ago and did not know if he wanted a diploma. He has now transformed into an amazing student with a large heart. I would like to introduce Mr. Cameron Gist.