

SUPERINTENDENT'S BRIEF

Together, We are the Champions for Children in Poughkeepsie City School District

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Congratulations PHS Class of 2021!



Poughkeepsie High School's Class of 2021 flip the tassels on their caps to signify they are graduates at the end of the ceremony.

she suffered from a lack of motivation. "I had to push myself to pass because I wanted to graduate," she said while waiting to line up for the procession to the field.

"We all struggled over these last 15 months. We should be proud of ourselves," she said, in her speech, adding that she didn't get here alone and thanking those who helped, including valedictorian Mickvick Tangunu, a close friend.

T'sura Williams shared that she failed the second quarter and was fighting depression.

"I prayed and I talked to myself," Williams said. "I did it for my mom and for me. She worked too hard for me to give my future to depression."

Williams plans to go into the U.S. Air Force.

Board of Education President Felicia Watson encouraged the class to "live life to its fullest, always love yourselves and believe in yourselves, don't be afraid of failure and dream so big that your dreams scare you."

Superintendent Dr. Eric Jay Rosser told the class, "You are the first class to successfully meet all the requirements of high school graduation during a global pandemic using technology as your primary learning environment. You are here because you used stumbling blocks as stepping stones to achieve your high school graduation."

Blue skies and sun set the scene for Poughkeepsie High School's Class of 2021 graduation night. For many, it was a year of overcoming to become.

But, the 183 graduates did just that - fighting through a pandemic, learning remotely, the inability to see each other and their teachers for most of the year, social injustice and political turmoil, to paraphrase Heather Martino, one of the class advisers.

Amber Minott, the class salutatorian, said



Leaving PHS for the last time as students, the Class of 2021 makes its way to the PHS Sports Complex for the ceremony..



T'sura Williams fixes Danasia Parker's hair before the ceremony.

He told them this experience will be invaluable to them as they move forward in life. When Tangunu gave her valedictorian speech, she encouraged the class to "forge your own path regardless of the path you choose. The only limits are the ones you set for yourself," she said. She too thanked those who helped her get to this day, including Minott for keeping her on track. "You are remarkable. You were thrown into big issues, you had to make big decisions

and you embraced them and moved forward," Martino said, before presenting the class gift - a tree for the PHS courtyard - something near and dear to Principal Kelleyann Royce-Giron's heart and her experience as a student at PHS.

Keynote speaker Robert Johnson, a 2012 graduate of PHS and director of multicultural affairs at Sacred Heart University used the word **Faith** as an acronym to deliver his message.

- Fear - do not let fear be the reason you don't succeed
- Awareness - have awareness that the journey won't be easy and it is ever-changing
- Inspiration - be an inspiration to someone - "your contribution doesn't have to be monumental."
- Transform - be willing to change
- Hungry - "Be hungry for and relentless in the pursuit of your dreams"



Valedictorian Mickvick Tangunu and salutatorian Amber Minott in front of the PHS sign.

Royce-Giron held off the tears until the point in her speech where she referenced the empty chair behind the honored guests on the stage. It was left empty for "any loved ones that couldn't be here" including Tree Arrington, coach Chris McLaurin, PHS nurse Joanne Bardin and microcomputer support specialist Chris Kearse.

"These four individuals probably impacted every person in these chairs today. The chair is empty, but their spirit is present today," she said.

Royce-Giron told graduates that they often had an impact on staff. She left them each a small package of tissues to remember her and PHS by.

"I pray I made you proud," she said in closing.

Danasia Parker was grateful for the ceremony and the day. "Our whole senior year was taken away. We haven't seen friends but we were able to come together the last couple of days and get our year back." She plans to attend the Culinary Institute of America and major in food and business management.

Looking back on her time at PHS, Tangunu said the most memorable experience is how competitive gym class was. "We take it very seriously."

Student government president Briceida Reyes-Martinez said, "It feels really weird. Your whole life you see the same people. We went to elementary school together and now we're going our separate ways."

Student board liaison Erick Vasquez-Maldonado feels like "It went too fast. We didn't get the full high school experience," he said. "I'm proud of everyone and myself for getting this far. It's sad to leave."



Student government President Briceida Reyes-Martinez and board liaison Erick Vasquez-Maldonado.

PMS honors 8th graders' academic achievements

Moving from eighth grade to high school is, in itself, an accomplishment. But, for 133 of this year's Poughkeepsie Middle School eighth graders it is an even greater one. These students were honored with a special recognition ceremony Thursday morning under a tent at the school for passing three of four content classes (ELA, social studies, math and science).

In addition, 28 students received other awards during the ceremony.

Demaj Ffriend, a management trainee at Rhinebeck Bank and himself a PHS graduate, gave the keynote address, talking about what he terms the "Poughkeepsie Mentality," which he said helped lead them through the last years of their middle school journey during a pandemic.



About 133 PMS eighth graders await their turn to be called to stage for passing at least three of their four core classes during a special ceremony Thursday, June 24, 2021.

"You all not only survived an international pandemic, but were also able to thrive and succeed at a time when many in your shoes would have quickly buckled under the pressure of expectation," he said.

Ffriend described the Poughkeepsie Mentality as, "a thought pattern that no matter how arduous the journey, how trying the challenge, how obstructed the path: You will rise and meet the occasion at every instance. Regardless of the trials and tribulations sure to come your way, you shall overcome."

The mentality is forged living a life "where countless people consider us unworthy of any success." Ffriend told the audience that the Poughkeepsie Mentality allows those raised here to rise above their situations.

"Poughkeepsie is sometimes called the City of Lost Hope, but what people forget to mention is that those who lack all

hope, also lack all fear," he said, explaining that the fearless is what allowed him, an immigrant from Jamaica who lived in Tubman, to graduate from Stony Brook University and give this speech.

"Harness that fearlessness and go change the world with it," he said. Michayla Thomas is looking forward to her time at Poughkeepsie High School. She has attended Poughkeepsie City School District schools since the second grade. She said her favorite memory from PMS was her sixth grade mini-field day at the end of the school year. "I'm looking forward to meeting new people and joining activities," she said about her move to PHS. As of now, Thomas plans to attend college and major in some type of science.

Eighth Grade Assistant Principal Ken Behr opened the ceremony by telling them that even though they are leaving, Poughkeepsie Middle School and its staff will "always be here for you. We want to celebrate all your successes so share that with us, the door is always open." Afterward, Behr reflected back on his time with the class - since he was their assistant principal in seventh grade, too.

"It has really been an honor to watch them grow up. I saw every one of the students mature and grow into young adults," he said, adding the following advice: "You can get through anything in life with a good support system of friends, family and the support of your community."

Congratulations to all of the eighth graders who are moving ahead to Poughkeepsie High School. We wish you the best of luck and know that you will continue to grow and become true Pioneers.



Eighth grader Jayson Wimberly shakes hands with Poughkeepsie Middle School Principal Joseph Mazzetti during Thursday's recognition ceremony.