

CHARLESTON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

2020

High
School
Valedictorians

Academic Magnet High School



Robert Kinsman Gourdie

COLLEGE PLANS

To study chemistry and public policy at the College of William and Mary as a 1693 Scholar

CAREER PLANS

To become a medical doctor

INTERESTS & HOBBIES

Chemistry, biology, public policy, reproductive rights, politics, cross country running, baking, cooking, Sudoku, knitting

SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT

National Honor Society, French National Honor Society, Mu Alpha Theta, Varsity Cross Country (Team Captain), AMHS Young Democrats Club (President), Freshman Class President

FAMILY MEMBERS

Antonia and Robert Gourdie, parents; Hannah Gourdie, sister; Emma Gourdie, sister

MESSAGE TO FELLOW CLASSMATES

“We may not have had the graduation or final semester we expected, but keep in mind that the road does not end here. There are so many opportunities and experiences ahead of us, and, as long as we continue to work hard and be grateful for what we have, the path forward can be one which empowers us to bring change where it is needed and to contribute to the world in a meaningful and positive way. Be flexible and allow yourselves to evolve without compromising your core identity, tell people you love them and show empathy to others, embrace whatever you are passionate about, and allow yourself to make mistakes as long as you can acknowledge and learn from them.”

UNIQUE STORY

I am the first recipient of the \$6,000 Leigh Snelgrove Memorial Scholarship funded by the family and friends of Leigh, an AP Biology teacher at AMHS who passed away from complications due to brain cancer in February 2020.

VALEDICTORIAN SPEECH

At some point in the later part of freshman year, we did a softball unit in PE. So we would go out to that field of grass under the oak tree by the bus loop to go practice. I remember getting in arguments and discussions in the line for batting, but one particular day, we heard the unmistakable song of the ice cream truck. We, of course, asked if we could go get some and Coach Williams asked if we had money. None of us did because our PE uniforms don't have pockets and PE softball isn't usually a financial activity. So the next "A" day in Ms. Grayson's focus there was a restless chatter telling everyone to bring money with us out to the softball field tucked in the waistband of our shorts. There we were again, in the 2:30 sun, playing softball with our bills neatly stashed away. We heard the song again, but, this time, the truck didn't roll past the school. Instead, it drove into the carpool line and stopped in front of the school. Turns out, our PE class's personal samaritan had contacted the ice cream truck company for what she called a "prank that benefits the people." So we asked again if we could get ice cream and were again met with a question from Coach about whether we had money with us, but this time we had prepared. When Coach Williams saw our money, she just said "go ahead" and we booked it from the field over to the ice cream truck, and I remember Mr. McCormick even jumped out the window of his classroom. I didn't even have money with me that day but our anonymous benefactor paid for my ice cream anyways.

What I mean to say by this story is that, when you look back on your time in high school, I dare you to focus on moments like that rather than what you missed out on at the end. Remember things like the trip to Nantahala and sprinting back to your cabin after whitewater rafting. Remember Dr. Altman meeting with you every other day over Zoom at 8:30 am after school got canceled and dealing with your tired "I went to bed at 4 am" faces because she cares about you that much. Remember your favorite classes, your favorite teachers, your favorite things you learned because there's plenty to choose from.

We may have missed prom and a normal graduation and the last AP picnic, but to say that we as a class lack memories would just be wrong. We have stories because we have people. We have fashion designers, scholars, activists, comedians, dancers, artists, writers, leaders, musicians, troublemakers, teachers, parents, siblings, friends. Some of these people are your best friends, some you'll never see again. So it goes.

Speaking of the future, I can't give you a lot of wisdom about it or the rest of your life because, just like you, I'm only a high school senior and I haven't lived it yet, so I'm going to leave most of that to the more experienced people out there. But, if there is one thing that this last semester of high school has taught me about what to expect, including and beyond this pandemic, it takes no one and nothing for granted. Learn as much as you can from the people who know more than you and the places you've never been to before. Tell people you love them every now and again or at least that you're



grateful to them. Know that loss is going to be a part of your life. You will lose time, friends, people, so cherish and take advantage of what you have while it's there. I always go back to David Byrne and Talking Heads in "Once in a Lifetime". After listing all of those extravagant places that you may find yourself, he reminds you of the inevitable question "you may ask yourself, 'Well... how did I get here?'" Again, be mindful and cherish what you have, and you'll be able to figure out the answer.

To my families and all the other supportive families out there, I love you so much. Keep doing what you're doing. To our amazing teachers who work so hard, thank you so much. I know this pandemic has been really hard for all of you, too. Specifically, to Ms. Snelgrove, I'd like to say no one ever truly leaves us when they've given parts of themselves to others as you did to us through your teaching and your kindness. We'll bring you with us wherever we go in our minds and in our hearts because you were the essence of everything an educator should be. I love you and I know that I'm not alone in that.

With all of that in mind, celebrate this day and look forward to the future. Know that things won't always come easily to you. Because of that, take pride and be fulfilled in the work you do. You have so much potential, so work hard for the opportunity to show it. I've seen incredible things from this group already and I don't expect that to end today or any time soon. This was a team effort so congratulations AMHS Class of 2020 families, congratulations AMHS Class 2020 teachers. Lastly, congratulations to the spectacular AMHS Class of 2020 graduates.

Allegro Charter School of Music



Angelina Rene Robertson

COLLEGE PLANS

To attend the University of South Carolina in Columbia and major in Psychology

CAREER PLANS

To pursue a career in psychology or neuroscience

INTERESTS & HOBBIES

Piano, singing, writing music and stories, video games, philosophy, and finding new ways to be kind to people

SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT

Student Council (President), Yearbook Club, Prom Committee, Battle of the Bands

FAMILY MEMBERS

Christina Mikolajcik, mother; Giuliana Massari, Lucaya Robertson, Simcha and Ziva Mikolajcik-Edles, siblings

MESSAGE TO FELLOW CLASSMATES

“Be positive, and be patient with yourself - we're always growing and improving.”

VALEDICTORIAN SPEECH

Hello everyone. How weird is this? Pretty weird. I thought I would have a completely normal senior year, but it turns out my year has been hijacked by quarantine.

Even though I've missed a couple months, I've been lucky to have spent the better part of five years here at Allegro. Although Allegro is a place of intensive academic study, it's quite possibly the silliest school any of us will ever come across. Don't get me wrong, I've received a wonderful education, but I've also had to take a person-sized cutout of Buddy the Elf to the bathroom with me because he was the bathroom pass. I have also seen Mr. Neikirk nonchalantly walking into the science room holding a dustpan containing a dead bird. And when Ms. McClellan's computer announces the time, it is tradition-- and completely normal-- to tell the computer "Thank you."

But I digress, I've really enjoyed my time here. I don't know why they all clustered here with us weirdo kids, but this school has had the best teachers. They're some of the most compassionate, smart, and goofy people, and thanks in large part to them, I can't imagine having a better and more comfortable high school experience. I thought about shouting out a few of my favorites, but I realized that was a terrible idea, because it's pretty much all of the teachers I've had, and you guys probably don't want to hear the entirety of the staff directory.

I regret that I've had over two months of my time in high school stolen from me. On the bright side, I guess, it provides me with an interesting vantage point: I'm already experiencing high school nostalgia. I miss my teachers and my friends, and even my casual associates. I miss going on missions to get something from another class, and hearing the percussion class banging out jams in the cafeteria. I miss hearing mysterious screeches from an unknown faraway classroom, and I miss the old plumbing system that is truly exhausted and trying its best.



I miss the community, and I know- gross, "community", but I'm serious. I'm a terrible morning person and passionately hate leaving bed, but I have genuinely enjoyed waking up to go to school. I like the atmosphere in the building fostered by the artistic minds swirling around, the hijinks always afoot, the honest effort by staff to make us successful and kind people, and the lonely Catholic ghost that probably saunters around in the basement that may or may not exist.

Personally, I feel lucky to have grown here. It's been the perfect place for me, and the other cranky and quirky teens may not admit it, but it probably has been perfect for them, too. I'm so proud of my fellow seniors, who are all amazing, smart, and considerate people who I'm sure will do great- or at least interesting- things. Thank you.

Baptist Hill Middle High School



**Nykara Octavia Symone
Heyward**

COLLEGE PLANS

To attend Howard University to major in Accounting

CAREER PLANS

To become a Forensic Accountant, and eventually own my own firm

INTERESTS & HOBBIES

Playing sports, listening to music, reading

SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT

Varsity Volleyball (Captain), Varsity Basketball (Captain), Varsity Cheer (Captain), Varsity Softball, Varsity Track and Field, Junior ROTC (Battalion Commander), FCCLA

FAMILY MEMBERS

Jakara, mom; John, father; De'Jhon, JahNaree, Jayceon, and Ny'Leigh, siblings

VALEDICTORIAN SPEECH

Ceremonies can be seen as coming of age, a sort of an official way to recognize when a person steps into the next stage of life, and graduates, we are stepping into a new stage. I, Nykara Heyward, am beyond honored to represent the Class of 2020 on today as your Valedictorian, and on behalf of my classmates, I would first like to say thank you to the students, teachers, parents, community members, staff, family, and friends who made these six years everything that they were.

I procrastinated writing this speech for quite some time. What would I say? Will they even listen to me? I wanted so badly to simply show up on graduation day and walk the stage to receive my diploma. Then, the Coronavirus pandemic changed everything, and it was that change that made me realize the power that my tongue held over my life. Even with my planner full of assignments and scholarship deadlines rapidly approaching, today's speech was the only thing on my mind. For some reason, I was filled with a sudden urge to get it done during what I thought would be only a few weeks out of school. A few weeks led to a month, which led to me never returning to my beloved middle-high school. This spring, we've missed out on so much: our senior prom, our final senior trip, Senior Ditch Day, Senior Breakfast, our final awards ceremony, Senior Walk, and so much more. However, we also enjoyed so much before our senior year ended abruptly. So, I stand here before you, looking back on six years of a legacy we have all made together.

Unlike most graduating classes, we've been together since the seventh grade. That's six years of evolution. Seventy-two months of football and basketball rivalries. Three hundred and twelve weeks of tests, both literal and figurative. 2,190 days of meaningless drama. 52,560 hours of pranks and inside jokes. 3,153,600 minutes of making memories. And, 189,216,000 seconds that we've waited for this exact moment. With every year, we have become a little more independent. We even managed to take a Senior Trip to Washington, DC and all make it back in one piece. You can tell how much we have grown up and how much we have matured. We experienced both great and tough times, but we got through them all; we succeeded! Now, just like some tadpoles in a pond full of frogs, we're about to embark on a completely new journey, one in a world filled with endless possibilities. Before then, I'd like to leave you with a few quotes that have undoubtedly gotten me through my high school years.

"It's not what they call you, it's what you answer to." This is a saying that has been said many times by my late Uncle Jerrell. There are mean people in this world that will have mean things to say about you, but it is important to remember that you are not a word. This quote has taught me to just ignore those people and has helped me come to the conclusion that no person can define my character. That is solely dependent upon me.

Of all the things Coach Harrington has repeatedly told me, there are two that I'll never forget: "Never let them see you sweat," and, "Can't nobody beat you when you work hard." Over the course of these



last six years, I have learned to remain levelheaded and calm even when I'm under an immense amount of pressure. I fought battles silently and cried tears quietly for both my diploma and degree, but I never let my emotions take control over me. I put in the work and I accomplished just about every goal I set for myself. I learned that, sometimes, you may have to push yourself to levels you don't feel like going, and that's okay. I'm not saying it's going to be easy either, but if you really want something, do not stop working until you have accomplished it.

Finally, "Anything's possible. You've gotta dream like you've never seen obstacles." This is by far my favorite quote, and the words of my favorite artist, J. Cole. Although I faced many setbacks throughout my days in high school, I never lost hope. I never let past experiences or past disappointments hinder me from doing whatever it was I really wanted to do. And you shouldn't either. No matter your family history, past grievances, knowledge level, skill set, finances, or fears, dream on. You all possess the potential to change the world in ways that are unimaginable.

I said all of this to say that I wish you, my fellow classmates, the very best on your future endeavors- college, the military, or the workforce. Despite the circumstances, I am very proud of this huge accomplishment for us all. March 13th may have been my last time sitting at a desk at Baptist Hill, but it most certainly wasn't my last day being a Bobcat! Stand up Class of 2020, it's our time to shine!

Burke High School



Aysha Briana Bowens

COLLEGE PLANS

To attend North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University to pursue a Bachelor of Arts in English with an English major and an Education minor

CAREER PLANS

With an English major and an Education minor, I will be returning to Burke High School as a Secondary English teacher. I am looking forward to returning to Burke High School, not as a student, but as an English teacher who was once in their shoes.

INTERESTS & HOBBIES

Graphic design, creative writing, and reading

SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT

Student Government Association, Junior Class Advocate, Vice President, School Improvement Council (Secretary and Student Advocate)

FAMILY MEMBERS

Ilesha Bowens, mother; Patricia Walker, grandmother

MESSAGE TO FELLOW CLASSMATES

“You’ve made it and I am extremely proud of you all. Remember that you will always have a bulldog family.”

VALEDICTORIAN SPEECH

Greetings everyone, I understand that through unforeseen circumstances this is not our expectations for this day, with expectations of either walking across the stage and/or watching someone you love and support walk across that stage. Here, we are with resources to still hold a graduation, and I am grateful for this opportunity to still be a part of this journey with you all.

I would first and foremost like to thank God, for allowing me to see this very day. I would like to thank the family members and the village that helped raise the Burke High School Class of 2020. I would like to thank the following teachers for supporting and guiding me through this journey, Mrs. Reed, Mr. Kemp, Dr. Ryan, Dr. Goler, Mr. Poretto, Mr. Brown, Mrs. Joseph, and Ms. Mindel.

I would like to also thank my mother and give praise to my grandmother. The two who inspired and motivated me to be the person I am today. The two who told me I could when I thought I couldn't. The two who inspired me to carry on our legacy here at Burke.

To the Burke High School Class of 2020, we still made it! This moment closes the 13 year long chapter of our lives with every page starting with the anticipation and countdown to this very moment. In the infamous words of Jatavia Johnson, "When I was counting down, they counted me out." This is not the first time that we have been challenged with an obstacle on the road to this very day. Even with dealing with the possibility of closing the school, the rumors of how we are as a school, or even the proposed future of Burke students, Burke students persevered.

Having a Bulldog family truly trumps it all. I am grateful for the friends that turned into family bonds. Everyday here was a family reunion. We saw each other everyday by either having the same classes, different lunches or same lunches, different classes or even in between that 5 minute window of transitioning between classes. Whenever we passed each other we checked in, making sure that we gave each other love through a hug, wave or a smile. Texting somebody in the groupchat to get a field trip form for you, or even calling somebody to see where they are so they won't get left to go on the said field trip. Field trips were one of the many ways that we supported each other. Having the unspoken tradition of doing the electric slide, cupid schfulle or singing "Before I let you go" the original surprisingly in harmony? I can't believe that time has passed so quickly. It felt like yesterday I was lost on campus trying to find Mrs. Richardson's class for homeroom. We truly went from OMG girlz and Mindless Behavior to the City Girls & Migos.

I want to thank you all for allowing me to meet you and watch you partake in the journey of your evolution. The evolution of the way you learn, communicate, and how you address conflict. Your evolution



has truly inspired me. I recently read a quote from a role model of mine. "As you let your own light shine," I would say you bring out the best in others, but since at heart we all want to be in reality, you "unconsciously give others permission to do the same." Even though we all might not have walked the same path, we've evolved to this very moment as a family. Some may have lost angels, who we thought would not have flown away so soon, lost hope and ambition in ourselves at times, some may even have fought and won the battle of depression, and anxiety or lost bonds we thought would last. Yet, you've made it through, and I am extremely proud of you all. I want to remind you of the good we had even when we had our backs against the wall.

I want to leave you all with this. "You may encounter many defeats but you must not be defeated"! No matter what you may encounter you have what is in you to be successful. Success is truly inevitable when you're a Burke Bulldog. We all might have faced many defeats, but we did not say we are defeated. We called for teachers, alumni, administrators, fellow students and they answered. Remember that you will always have a bulldog family, that's 10 toes behind you. Just call, and we will be there.

Charleston Charter School for Math and Science



Brianna Imani Gamble

COLLEGE PLANS

To attend Stanford University

CAREER PLANS

To become an Anesthesiologist

INTERESTS & HOBBIES

Traveling, being outdoors, staying active, saxophone

SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT

HOSA, Student Council, National Honor Society, Women's Varsity Soccer, Writing Club

FAMILY MEMBERS

Hope, mom; Elijah, dad; Celeste, sister

MESSAGE TO FELLOW CLASSMATES

"I am blessed to have had the opportunity to grow and learn with each and every one of you and know that everyone's futures are unimaginably bright."

VALEDICTORIAN SPEECH

Hello, Class of 2020,

I would like to start off by thanking everyone who has brought us to this point in our lives. We would not be where we are today without our families, friends, and the faculty and staff of Charleston Charter School for Math and Science. Although we've seen many changes throughout our time at CCSMS we've always had people that we could count on to have our backs. I would like to say a special thank you to our incredible senior advisors that motivated us to keep pushing throughout the year. Thank you all for supporting us through unprecedented times and ensuring that we were still celebrated during one of the biggest milestones in our young lives. I would also like to personally thank my amazing family, friends, and every teacher that has taught me during my time at this school. I would not be speaking to you all if not for their love and support.

Now to my amazing classmates. I know that this isn't how any of us imagined the end of our senior year playing out. We walked out of school on March 13 having no clue that it was the last day we'd all be on campus together. Nevertheless, I believe that our current circumstances have forever bonded us as a class and have proven what we've been saying all year: "2020 is the best class that Charter has ever seen."

It seems like just yesterday we were little middle schoolers running around the trailers. From our eighth-grade spring term to our monthly senior lunches our class has been one of the closest groups of students that I have ever seen. Small in numbers, we have shown that we are tremendously talented in all facets of life. Although we've lost so much during this time I believe that it has taught us some vital life lessons that I would like to share with you all today.

The first would be one that we have become very familiar with during our time at Charter: one must adapt to whatever is thrown our way. From the rules that come with an ever-changing administration to navigating brand new courses such as AP Chemistry, our class has grown along with the school we now have the pleasure of calling our alma mater. Like chameleons we must acquiesce to our surroundings. However, I urge you all not to feel the need to conform. It has been a pleasure being able to learn and grow with you all and your individuality has shaped our class into who we are.

The second is that life will always have obstacles. Whether as trivial to us now as following a dress code or as prominent as a global pandemic. It is up to us to not only make the best out of what has happened but also grow from what we have been through. Think back to your own Charter experience. What events at the time seemed to consume your entire life. Crazy how it may seem so silly now right? Everything that we have experienced, whether



collectively or individually, has shaped us into the mature young adults that we are today. These obstacles will not cease as we go on with our lives but I know that we all have the power within us to use them to our advantage.

The final lesson is one that we can also attribute to Charter instilling in us: building a community is of the utmost importance. Coming from such a small school we are used to knowing basically everyone. It's hard not to when bumping into the same people in the halls day in and day out. We are all on one floor after all. We have a personal relationship with everyone in the school, from Mrs. Rodgers to Mr. Orr. Although the next steps in our lives may lead us to much bigger communities we must foster relationships similar to those that we have back at home. Human connection is something that we have come to value greatly during these times. Community is what keeps us strong and pushes us to be the best that we can.

With all of that being said I just want all of us to take a moment to acknowledge what is going on. We're graduating guys! Although it may have seemed like the day would never come it is finally here. No matter how long you've been at Charter and whether or not you loved your time here we have all left a lasting mark that will never be forgotten as it has done the same to us. I love you guys and wish everyone the best of luck in all of your future endeavors. And in the great words of Winnie the Pooh, "How lucky are we to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard."

Charleston County School of the Arts



Caroline Walker Conway

COLLEGE PLANS

To major in neuroscience and major or minor in Spanish at Dartmouth College

CAREER PLANS

To be a research neurologist so as to study memory and how it's connected to music

INTERESTS & HOBBIES

Listening to and playing music, playing ultimate frisbee, reading, hiking

SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT

National Honor Society (President), Academic Magnet Ultimate Frisbee Club Team (Co-Captain),
Trick-or-Treat for UNICEF project

FAMILY MEMBERS

Jenny Conway, mom; Frank Conway, dad; Claire Conway, sister

MESSAGE TO FELLOW CLASSMATES

“The situation we're in as a class (and a world!) right now certainly isn't ideal, but there's honestly not much we can do about it aside from making the best of it. We're lucky to be living during a time when social interaction is not dependent on face-to-face contact. Summer would be brutal if all we could do was sit holed up, isolated from the outside world, but technology is our modern escape hatch. If I could give one piece of advice to my fellow seniors, it would be to refuse to lose the traditions/events/moments that COVID-19 stole from you — find alternate ways to celebrate! For example, my friends and I held a virtual prom via Google Hangouts, and we've had several birthday parties since school was canceled in the same virtual format. It's very important that people continue to reach out to each other right now, even if not in the ways they'd originally imagined. If you've been dreaming of your graduation party or of your senior summer in general for years, you can still find a safe way to make it great! Everyone is feeling the cabin fever, and the more we're all willing to work to create space for human interaction, the less empty this summer will feel. Seniors are leaving some people behind forever! If you don't make the effort to say meaningful goodbyes (yes, even via Zoom) now, you WILL regret it come fall.”

VALEDICTORIAN SPEECH

Good evening, Class of 2020! As I address a studentless Rose Maree Myers Theater, I am reminded of just how much life you bring to these buildings. It's a difficult time to be moving out into the world. As you say goodbye to friends you've known all your life, you have to check yourself to keep from embracing them. As you continue to find your voice as a young adult, you find it muffled by a mask. And as you hurtle toward a future years in the making, you find it uncertain, perhaps even falling away before your eyes. You have faced this pandemic with grace and a quiet courage, whether plugging away on your schoolwork from home, finding virtual ways to lift up others, or creating masks for the healthcare workers risking their safety right here in Charleston. Maybe as you prepared to watch this video, you wondered if you could get away with wearing pajamas to your own graduation, and you were both pleased and a little saddened to find that the answer was yes. I know this is not the June you would have chosen for yourselves, but it is the June that has arrived. 2020 remains your year, and she waits to see what you will make of her. You are graduating from the School of the Arts. You are no strangers to making your own beauty.

I've thought a lot today about all the little miracles I would find if I investigated any of the art classrooms: the dresses made real from nothing but ideas, the canvases so gently filled with color, the sheet music tired from the frequent touch of fingers. This school is a testament to your talent and your drive. Yes, you're living in a time when toilet paper is hard to come by and protests are abundant, but you WILL find a way to make this beautiful. It's who you are, all of you. We have a responsibility, now more than ever, to reach out to each other and lend our support. You've spent the last four years, or maybe even seven, thriving in a community of artists, but now we're going off on our own wild paths, and the next community you'll find will be the one you build yourself. As artists, your visions of the world are powerful, and it's your job to recognize the value of your perspective and consider the good you might do in sharing it.

Thank you to the essential workers and medical professionals who allow our world to continue to turn. And a huge thank you to the parents, teachers, and administrators of SOA. You've guided us day after day, year after year, and it's because of you that we're here today, even if "here" is a video feed. Where others might have lamented the loss of tradition, the SOA staff saw the opportunity to create new traditions and seized this opportunity with enthusiastic hands. We, the student body, salute you for your efforts and your passion. You've brought light (sometimes literal laser lights) to a dark time.

And now for the difficult part: saying goodbye, especially when I haven't had the chance to say hello to most of you in months. To



quote the iconic Leslie Knope, "Let's break out a map. Not the old, out of date one that shows where we've been, but a crisp, new one that shows where we might go." Class of 2020, you have officially completed high school, despite hurricanes, despite the occasional freeze, and of course, despite COVID-19. The world threw everything it could at you, and you marched unyieldingly on. Now, we find ourselves in a waiting game, straining to hear the sound of doors swinging open, watching for playgrounds to fill with more than caution tape. But as we wait, we've been gifted a stillness that is unusual for our culture. This is a rare time in which the world has slowed down for us, and it should not be wasted. Just for a moment, put thoughts of the future aside. Stop. Take a breath. Rest. And then do what artists do best: make this beautiful.

Thank you.

Gordon H. Garrett Academy of Technology



Keyonne' McKnight

COLLEGE PLANS

To attend the University of South Carolina and major in Biological Science and attend the University of Georgia for a graduate degree in Veterinary Medicine

CAREER PLANS

To become a veterinarian and open my own clinic and a non-profit to support the animals of my community and surrounding areas

INTERESTS & HOBBIES

Reading, playing the flute, and the drums, and doing community service

SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT

Drumline (percussion), National Honor Society, Multiplying Good Club, Students in Action, and Student Government Association

FAMILY MEMBERS

Cleveland and Annette McKnight, parents; Trequan, brother

MESSAGE TO FELLOW CLASSMATES

“Although the year has been far from ideal for our class, along with the pain of our school closing, it’s not the end for any of us. Even if we don’t have a place to come back home to, we’ll always have a home in each other, the memories we made and the growth we accomplished together in these four years. Our home will always remain in each other. We have futures and dreams that do not end in high school. I believe we were created for this time and are destined for great things. We are strong, we will continue to be strong and most of all we finished strong!”

UNIQUE STORY

As a member of the Students in Action, I along with my peers and our advisor were able to present the Jefferson Award to Faith in Action Church located across the street from Garrett Academy of Technology, in recognition of their Nonprofit, ‘The Hood at Work.’ The church also agreed to maintain the new food box that Students in Action designed. This food box will be included in The Lowcountry Blessing Box Project. The Blessing Box Project anonymously donates and anonymously receives items that might be considered a blessing to someone who finds themselves in need. Blessing boxes are stocked with non-perishable food items, basic toiletries, baby supplies, etc. A simple rule applies - “Leave what you can, take what you need.”

VALEDICTORIAN SPEECH

First and foremost, I would like to congratulate my classmates because we finally made it! I don't know about y'all but I felt like this day would never come, but when this year began, I felt like things were moving too quickly. Unfortunately, Corona came to steal our joy, but through the grace of God, The Class of 2020 was able to prevail.. preserve our class spirit... and finish strong. Yes, we made it.

I know I wouldn't have made it without my amazing support system. My parents, Annette and Cleveland McKnight and my little brother, Trequan, motivated me. They offered a comforting hug or a strong shoulder to lean on when everything or everyone felt like too much, while not being judgmental. My parents did an amazing job raising me, if I do say so myself and I couldn't ask for a better family, I love you. I would also like to thank God for strengthening, blessing, and watching over me every day. I feel like He's given me an innate purpose to nurture and the ambition to serve. Of course, I can't leave out my amazing best friends, Trae'Kyah Holston and Jesus Santiago Verdugo. They were the only reasons I looked forward to coming to school sometimes, supported me with their unwavering loyalty, did wonders for my self-esteem, and helped in my growth as a person. I would like to thank Ms. Doshier and Ms. Young. It's ironic that I started my education as a 3-year-old in their Childhood Development Program and ended my secondary education within the same building. I credit them for instilling the love of learning within me and have appreciated their continued encouragement. Finally, I would like to acknowledge my great grandmother, Lula Mae Jones. I would specifically like to recognize her because though she is no longer here with me, she continues to influence my every thought and action. When I was much younger, she was like a mother to me in the ways she took care of me, loved me, and instilled within me kindness and compassion. I truly believe without her I wouldn't be half the person I am; she was and still is my rock. I would like to share her story with you because I believe her life can teach us all a valuable lesson. Being born in 1932 and raised in this era, she faced constant obstacles due to racism and sexism. With limited education and discriminatory policies, she was resigned to making hotel beds, no promotion in sight. She was not afforded half the opportunities she deserved, yet she took everything in stride, living her life to its fullest without an ounce of bitterness, full of kindness and compassion, always giving, though she didn't have much. My classmates, as racism, sexism, and other discriminatory practices STILL persist, I challenge you to not sit in the seat of bitterness; instead, find your voice, and with love and compassion Let Us Be



Agents of Change. Wherever we find ourselves, let's seek to make a difference!

Although the year has been far from ideal for our class, along with the pain of our school closing, it's not the end for any of us. Even if we don't have a place to come back home to, we'll always have a home in each other, the memories we made and the growth we accomplished together in these four years. Our home will always remain in each other. We have futures and dreams that do not end in high school. I believe we were created for this time and are destined for great things. I look forward to each of you thriving, happy, and prosperous in the future. Class of 2020, the final graduating class of Garrett Academy of Technology, YES, We Finished Strong!!! Thank You and God Bless Us All!

Greg Mathis Charter High School



COLLEGE PLANS

To attend Trident Technical College

CAREER PLANS

To become an engineer or work in aeronautics

INTERESTS & HOBBIES

Basketball, outside adventure, relaxing with family

SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT

A-Honor Roll in Marketing and English, Parliamentarian, Student Government Association

FAMILY MEMBERS

Dawan and Tamica Nelson, parents

MESSAGE TO FELLOW CLASSMATES

“This is a transition for all us from high school to graduates. This is the time when we grow up and start to produce our dreams. Congratulations and I wish all of you much success!”

UNIQUE STORY

My brother and I are both Valedictorians of Greg Mathis Charter High School. He graduated in 2019 and I finished in 2020.

VALEDICTORIAN SPEECH

Good morning and welcome to the graduation of Greg Mathis Charter High School Class of 2020. We thank you all for being here and supporting us on this special day. I know many of us would have enjoyed this day celebrating with our families and friends in a more personal way but a virtual graduation will have to do for now.

I want to begin by saying these high school years have been fun and full of excitement. We have excellent staff and teachers that have helped us come this far in our life and I just want to take this time to thank them all.

My first couple of years in high school was challenging because I played around and my grades starting dropping. My parents were not happy about that. My mom started encouraging me and I began turning my grades, behavior, and attitude around. I was inspired to do all of my work and go to school every day.

I want to encourage you, my classmates, that bigger and better things await us on our road to success. Our next level will be a brighter and promising future.

Our graduation theme is Vision 2020: "A Clearer View Into Our Future." This simply means the road on our journey is long with obstacles but we must work hard to achieve greater things in life.

To my Mom and Dad, thank you for taking care of me and making sure I did the right things. Thank you for encouraging and believing in me. I Love You!

To the class of 2020, my class, this is a transition for all of us from being high schoolers to graduates. This is the time when we grow up and start to produce our dreams. Congratulations and I wish all of you much success!



James Island Charter High School



**Kiarra Kristina Michelle
Blake-Wade**

COLLEGE PLANS

To attend Clemson University to pursue a degree in mechanical engineering

CAREER PLANS

To work for a company where I can travel the world, make a global impact, and get to see different places

INTERESTS & HOBBIES

Music, trying new things, being creative, making art of different mediums, learning new languages, playing the piano, going on walks and playing outside with my family

SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT

IB student, National Arts Honor Society, Quest for Spanish I and Spanish II

FAMILY MEMBERS

Stephanie Blake, mother; Kiran Wade, father; Kaianne, Kaliz, and Kimora, sisters; Sandra and James Blake, grandparents; Patricia Kelly, grandmother

MESSAGE TO FELLOW CLASSMATES

“I encourage my peers to keep making history in the best way possible, to keep breaking barriers, step outside their comfort zone, and learn something new from someone who is different from them.”

UNIQUE STORY

*I am a QuestBridge finalist. I am a recipient of Palmetto Fellows. I am the oldest of four.
My maternal side of the family dates back seven generations on Johns Island.*

VALEDICTORIAN SPEECH

Welcome everyone to the graduation ceremony of the Class of 2020! This is a very exciting time for all of us as we have just completed twelve years of school - which is no easy feat! I am very honored to be here today! I am going to do my best to keep this short and sweet. But, first off, I have a lot of thanks to give:

I would like to thank the teachers and staff of Mount Zion Elementary School and of Haut Gap Middle School on Johns Island, where it all started for me. Next, I would like to thank all of the James Island Charter faculty and staff who have done so much over the past four years by helping to guide and support me. I also want to thank them for their dedication to celebrating us, seniors. You all have really helped us to feel the love during this challenging time. I would also like to thank my classmates. I have learned so much from you all over the past four years - and even longer for some of you - and everyone has worked so hard to get here today, even harder in the past few months than previous high school seniors have had to navigate through. Finally, I would like to thank my village, which consists of my parents, grandparents, younger siblings, and a plethora of extended family, for their devotion, support, and patience. If it was not for all of you, who set the standard and expectation, I would not be standing here today before my peers.

Wow. It's finally here. Our graduation day - the day we've been waiting for since we first entered the doors of James Island Charter High School as freshmen four years ago. After four years of classes, labs, football games, tests, midterms, exams, milestones, Netflix, pep rallies, field trips, late night studying, "oh was that due today", long hours of practice, performances, competitions, essays, plays, pop quizzes, make-ups, break-ups, hours of TikTok, learning how to live on your own terms, having fun with friends, and overall hills and valleys - we have finally made it. I know that this probably is not the way that most of us thought our big graduation from high school would turn out, but it in no way diminishes the importance of this event. If anything, during times like this, it is milestones like these - like us - that are the light at the end of the tunnel. Our determination and resolve over the past few months also provide a testimony and just a tiny glimpse of the resolve and determination that we have demonstrated over the past twelve years. Difficult situations teach us the most and cause us to rise to the top. This could not be more accurate to describe our current situation. We have been charting through uncertain waters. We have had to learn how to adapt to the global events that have been unfolding before us which has led to us learning new things about ourselves, our neighbors, and our community.

Hopefully, it has also given some of us ideas on how to improve the world around us once it is safe to do so.

I believe that activist for female education and the youngest Nobel Prize recipient, Malala Yousafza, said it best when she stated that



the class of 2020 will not be remembered by what we lost due to this time of uncertainty, but it will be remembered by how we responded to it. I believe that this is very true, because instead of becoming defeated and despondent about a nontraditional ending to our senior year at high school, we have been more innovatively celebrated than is customary for the completion of twelve years of school.

Twenty or thirty years from now, when someone asks you, "Weren't you a part of the quarantined high school class of 2020?" You can look them in the eyes and say, "Yes. I was a part of the quarantined high school class of 2020. We were quarantined physically. But we were not quarantined in our minds. Nor were we in our hearts and spirits." This is just one more challenge that we have had to overcome and adapt to - which we have done with distinction and excellence. And - just like with any challenge - after going through it we came out stronger, wiser, and more experienced than before.

As I am signing off, I want to give a reminder to my girls to never stop aiming at breaking glass ceilings. That does not mean that my guys can slack off - I want you all to keep pushing boundaries as well. Moving forward, I encourage each of you to keep making history in the best way possible, to keep breaking barriers, step outside your comfort zone, and learn something new from someone who is different from you.

And with that, I say congratulations to the James Island Charter High School Class of 2020!

Military Magnet Academy



Alexis Shauntel Hamilton

COLLEGE PLANS

United States Naval Academy

CAREER PLANS

Commissioned as US Naval Officer and pursue a career in Criminal Law

INTERESTS & HOBBIES

Volleyball, Softball, reading and listening to music

SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT

2019-2020 MMA Regimental Commander, Varsity Volleyball and Softball (Captain), Member of the MMA "G" Team, Rotary Interact Club (President)

FAMILY MEMBERS

Cheryl Evans, mother; Kenneth Wright, father; Emily Doiley, aunt; Denise Hogan, aunt; Dennis Hogan, uncle

MESSAGE TO FELLOW CLASSMATES

"Your dreams will keep you motivated to achieve your ultimate success. Stand on your own. Following the crowd is not an option."

VALEDICTORIAN SPEECH

Good morning ladies and gentlemen,

I am the 2019-2020 Regimental Commander of the Corps of Cadets at the Military Magnet Academy, Cadet Colonel Alexis Hamilton. As I stand here today as the Valedictorian of the 2020 graduating class, I want to first thank the man above for giving me the opportunity to be here today and share with my fellow classmates, friends, coaches and family members how much I appreciate each and every one of them. Lord knows I wouldn't have made it without them. I must be sure to thank the administrative staff of the Military Magnet Academy as they have made great efforts to ensure our success after high school graduation. Shout out to Coach Simmons for always providing a loving gathering space for me and my fellow classmates. Coach Simmons, you worked very hard for our class this year and you are very much appreciated. Who stayed on us harder than anybody else in the school as a class this year? YOU DID! Who made the parade happen when we thought nobody cared about graduation anymore? YOU DID! If anybody doesn't thank you, I DO. And to my coaches, thank you for showing me what it means to set the example on and off the field or court. Sgt Hernandez, I don't know if you know this already but you are a blessing in my life. I will never forget having you as a coach. We may have had our disagreements but in the end, we always realized great outcomes. I want to say thank you for letting me lead your teams as captain. However, Sgt Hernandez wasn't the only coach that taught me a few things about being a leader. Mrs. Archie, I might as well call you my mom and coach since you and my mom literally have the same birthday. You will always be loved dearly. Major Taylor. . . . I may have stopped playing basketball in the tenth grade but I didn't forget who made me a strong team player and captain first. Major Taylor will always be in my head when I feel like giving up. Because of the bond we have, you will always be my coach. The last coach I want to mention is new but she's tough. I can't remember how many times Coach Payton made me run to the yellow pole and back. Like Cadet McCormick would say, "You're only making me better," and with those encouraging words in my head, I became a better hitter this year, but too bad COVID-19 came and struck me out! Besides the coaches, I want to give a special shoutout to Petty Officer Garey and Master Sgt Johnson. The two people that always guided me away from disaster. You too, Specialist Jefferson. Dr. Perrineau, I know your head is on 1,000 right now. I probably gave you a million headaches to add to the billion you probably already had. Mr. Vonallmen, I know my talking will be missed so you can never say I wasn't engaged in your class. Talking is something I love to do but I think we all know who I got that from. Even though he's not with me today, I still would like to give a shout out to him. Everyone knows my dad but they don't know him the way I do. He always made sure I had what I needed even when he was miles away. His support will always be with me. Dad if you're watching this right now just know that your baby girl is growing up to be the successful young lady that you always wanted her to be. Sending much love to you.

I want to mention someone who very much deserves this shout out. Her name is Tiffany Lewis. She is more than smart. She is intelligent and I think my fellow classmates would say the same.

I would've never thought we would even be close friends. When I first met you, you were very kind to me and you treated me with a lot of respect; to say we barely knew each and never hung around each other in school. You are one of the most important people in my life and it shows that you care about me and my well being more than anybody else besides Andrea. You let me know when I'm wrong and when I'm most definitely right. I feel like a friend wouldn't be a friend if they never told them the truth and that's something you make sure I know. I feel as though when I need a shoulder to lean on, you're always right there. You've always made sure I was okay whether it



was financially, mentally, or physically. I've never had to ask you for anything because you were forevermore generous. However, that's just the person you are towards your friends. You look out for them whenever you can. I just want to let you know how much I appreciate you as a friend and sister because you've impacted my life tremendously. The same goes for Andrea. I want to thank Cheryl Evans, my mom. The woman that gave birth to me. I was a miracle baby as she would call it. She didn't think she would have another child to grow up to be this successful. Mom, I love you with all my heart and I don't know where I would be without you and the man above. You taught me all the things I know. You taught me how to cook so that my future husband's belly would always know what good cooking is. You taught me how to clean so that I could value the importance of a woman's hygiene. You will always be my inspiration.

To my fellow classmates, like I said before, this isn't the end, it's only the beginning, whether you are going to college or the military. Don't just let this year's graduation be the stopping point of your success. Most of us have dreams that we would love to accomplish sooner or later. If you don't know what you want to be or who you want to be, you still have time. Although, time is ticking. When you eventually decide on what you want to do, make sure you make the most of it. With that being said, let's work hard and finish strong because we're far away from the finish line. The big goals take more time to achieve. Graduation is just part of the process. To all of the high school graduates out there, remember that going halfway never gets you anywhere. You either go all the way or don't go at all. In conclusion, if I didn't get a chance to mention you today, just remember that when I see you, you will be reminded of how much I love and appreciate each and every individual that supported me along the way.

Thank you.

North Charleston High School



Sofia Michaella Montes

COLLEGE PLANS

To attend Francis Marion University with a full academic scholarship to pursue a Bachelor of Science Degree in nursing

CAREER PLANS

To be a registered nurse in South Carolina and then further my education to be a pediatric nurse practitioner. Upon completing my college degree, I plan to work as a registered nurse in South Carolina. Thereafter, I will further my education to become a pediatric nurse

INTERESTS & HOBBIES

Read books, shopping, and interior decorating

SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT

Yearbook Club (Lead Editor), Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA) Co-Founder, Senior Advisor

FAMILY MEMBERS

Karren Tamayo, mother; Mila Montes, grandmother

MESSAGE TO FELLOW CLASSMATES

“To my fellow classmates, remember to take it one step at a time; and wherever you go, go with all your heart.”

UNIQUE STORY

I am a Filipino immigrant and I have been living in the United States for four years.

VALEDICTORIAN SPEECH

Good morning. Welcome to North Charleston High School's commencement ceremony. I am most thankful for your presence especially during a time where social distancing is the new norm. It is a tremendous honor to be speaking on behalf of a class that is special in every way possible.

I finished my four years of high school when I submitted my last homework for Mr. Knox's Spanish 3 class at 11:30 in the evening. Ending my high school experience in the comfort of my own home is not really the tradition, but we have been living a peculiar life for most of the year, right?

Here is a checklist. You have seen part of your teacher's house, or even their kid in the background, during a virtual class meeting on Zoom. Every day—if not every hour—you receive emails from Mr. Jessen, Ms. Higdon, Dr. Cox, and Ms. Carle about Edgenuity and deadlines. You have a messed-up body clock and eating one week's worth of snacks in two days. You lost your part-time job. And you switch between Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok 24/7 like it's a ritual. I think I proved my point, but these are only some of the unusual routines that we're living by during this time.

This, of course, is not how any of us imagined our high school years to end. It breaks my heart looking back because I did not know that March 13, Friday, would be the last time we will ever step in school. We didn't know that was our last time seeing our friends. We did not know it was the last time hearing our 4th period teacher shout, "The bell didn't ring yet." We did not know that was our last time hearing Ms. Anderson telling us to have a gorgeous day; and we did not know it would be our last bus ride home away from North Charleston High School.

But even with the series of unfortunate events, 2020 shed some of the biggest wins in our lives. In a literal sense, our Powderpuff team won among Charleston schools and appeared on a billboard along I-26. Our girls' basketball team was named State Champions this year and appeared all over the news. Perhaps girls do run the world! We received many college acceptance letters and passed our ASVAB tests. Some of us were recruited to play basketball or football at College of Coastal Georgia, such as Sophia and Vashia; Charleston Southern University, such as Izzy; South Carolina Faith A&M, such as Tre'Von; and Arkansas Baptist College, such as Terrence. A handful of us started early on our college journey and enrolled in Trident Technical College's dual credit while some entered apprenticeships such as Arthur, or finished a CTE class. Oh, and how could I forget: getting late-in or early-out was the biggest win this year, and I did not really get that. There are so many more wins that I failed to mention, but each and every accomplishment is worth celebrating!

On a more personal note, will you please raise your hand, if at any point, somebody doubted your success in high school? And can you please keep your hand raised if that somebody was you? Look around you. You made it, and no one can take this away from you. I congratulate each of you for graduating high school and conquering all the stereotypes and prejudice that others had of you.

I am no exception. Just like you, I had my share of problems. As a Filipino immigrant, I was homesick- and I still am- every day, especially during our freshman year. I was the new, shy freshman who was always in her own world, not because I did not know how to speak English, but because I had a hard time picking up the American accent. Life continued to go downhill: I was depressed and had panic attacks in the restroom across the lunchroom. But just like you, I had the choice to give up or to succeed, and I chose success. Life is full of choices, and since you are here with me today, graduating, it is because we made the right ones.

My time in North Charleston High School is probably my favorite chapter in my life. Of course, I learned about the Unit Circle, thanks to the best Ms. Pagano, the ins and outs of the United States History with the best APUSH class and teacher, Mr. Knauer, and read life-changing books, like *Outliers*, with Mrs. McIntosh and my AP Language class. I could go on and on about what I learned in class; but more importantly, I am beyond blessed that I crossed paths with educators who provided me many opportunities and advice for self-growth. I met teachers who, not only motivated me academically, but also held my hand and guided me to be a better version of myself. Although inevitably, I knew that at some point, I had to let go... and today is that day. To the teachers who



held my hand, wiped my tears, and rooted for me since day one, thank you for being the light in my darkness.

My fellow graduates, we entered the world during the time of 9/11, and we are graduating during a global pandemic. Because of this, I pause and acknowledge your resilience, intellect, and grit. We strived to meet academic success despite all of the global changes going on, and we were forced to learn the concepts of "nothing is promised" and the "uncertainty of tomorrow" at an early stage in our lives. History has found us so we must be destined for greatness.

For the last time, I extend my gratitude to everybody who cheered me on from the sidelines. To my Montes and Malaguit family, to my Mama Mila who never stopped looking out for me, and my Mommy Karren who stood as the perfect mother and father and endured everything so that she could give me the best life. To all the North Charleston High teachers, staff, and administration who believed in us during the times when we did not even believe in ourselves. To the best friends I met in high school who became my support system especially when I was fresh to the United States in 2016. Special mention to Tariqa, Malcolm, Jalen, Itzel, Deiver, Kelly, and Melisa for introducing me to the American culture and Chick-fil-a. I appreciate these friends because they never excluded me, and they were eager to learn about my culture as well. To my favorite person, Glennjay, for being my partner in crime and putting the brightest smile on my face every day. And lastly, to God, to whom I owe my strength.

Class of 2020, I wish you nothing but the best on whatever you will take on in the coming years whether it be college, the military, or a job. Promise me, and promise yourself, you will find your passion and calling. And once you do, do not ever let go of it.

Allow me to leave you with the words of F. Scott Fitzgerald:

"For what it's worth, it's never too late to be whoever you want to be. I hope you live a life you're proud of. And if you find that you're not, I hope that you have the strength to start over."

Thank you and I wish you all a good day.

R.B. Stall High School



A'nya Jailyn Bennett

COLLEGE PLANS

To attend USC Columbia majoring in biology with a minor in psychology

CAREER PLANS

To become a Pediatrician

INTERESTS & HOBBIES

Writing, reading, drawing, playing the Sims 4, and listening to music

SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT

Student Council (Vice President), Future Business Leaders of America (Secretary), National Honor Society, Debate, College Access, Reverend Pinckney Visionaries, and Heritage Trust Internship

FAMILY MEMBERS

Georgetta Bennett, mother; Ashley Washington and Melissa Williams, sisters; Joshua Bennett and Justin Bennett, brothers

MESSAGE TO FELLOW CLASSMATES

“Now go, and make interesting mistakes, make amazing mistakes, make glorious and fantastic mistakes. Break rules. Leave the world more interesting for you being here. Make good art.” - Neil Gaiman

VALEDICTORIAN SPEECH

Welcome to the R.B. Stall High School 2020 virtual graduation ceremony. Though we are not together physically, no matter where you are, I urge you to be present and to savor this moment.

Before I take this trip down memory lane with you all, I want to first thank the phenomenal teachers here at R.B. Stall High School. Not only do the graduates deserve praise, but you do as well. You did not just teach us, but you kept us safe, inspired us, and helped us on our journeys to becoming ourselves. So to the teachers who have become father figures, we thank you. To the teachers who write you the sweetest notes before AP exams, we thank you. To the teachers who have given us the best advice, motivational speeches, and watched us blossom, we thank you. To all the faculty and staff who have guided us, answered our numerous emails, and helped us obtain amazing opportunities, we thank you. And to our families that have been there every step of the way, you do not go without praise. Without the love, support, encouragement, and acceptance that you all have given us we would not be here. And for that, we all thank you as well.

When I first realized that I might have to give this speech, I was terrified. Heart racing, I became adamant that I would not get up on stage in front of a crowd of people and speak. I never imagined that I would have to record myself giving it, but here I am.

Knowing that I would have to address you, I began to try to think of the best words to share my four years here at Stall with all of you. Suddenly, it dawned on me that I had been so caught up in anticipating the future, that I had forgotten to appreciate the present.

Once I recognized this truth, I immediately began to remedy it. Then the quarantine happened and our reality shifted. We assumed we had all this time left to enjoy our friends, where we would experience our last months of high school together. Suddenly, that opportunity was taken away from us. Forced into a world of uncertainty, we gave up the events we had spent four years envisioning. We lost the time we thought we had and we lost the memories we aspired to make.

Thus, to our underclassmen, I urge you to appreciate the moments and the people that surround you while you have them. Ready to graduate, I wanted to get to the moment where we would walk across the stage, entering the 'real world.' Somehow, without noticing, that day became today. Honestly preoccupied, I was so consumed with thinking about the future that I forgot to cherish the present and the people with whom I shared these years. I forgot to connect with the faces of my present and savor the moments we experienced.

And as I remember you, my classmates, I am astounded by how much beauty I see. My fellow graduates, I know that soon we will walk out of this auditorium, facing a world of opportunities. We will leave the confines of R.B. Stall High School, forging our own paths.



Life will become hectic and scary, but it will also be beautiful and healing. I urge all of you, as we begin to embark on this journey, to remember to stop, look around, and to breathe. To take in the moment- good, bad, or in between- before it's gone because you'll never be there again. In a college commencement address, actress Jessica Lange said to those graduates: "I encourage you with all my heart just to be present. Be present and open to the moment that is unfolding before you. Because ultimately, your life is made up of moments," and I urge you all to do the same. As we walk into the unknown, there are going to be moments where the stress of living all becomes too much. However, you can and will endure. This moment is only our beginning.

Here at Stall, the Class of 2020 built a special community. We walked into this school four years ago-- so young, so naive, and so ready to leave. As the years passed, Stall High School became so much more to us. In the famous words of Creed Bratton, "human beings have this miraculous gift to make any place home." And we did.

We created a home. We created a family. While I am sad to leave, I know you all will lead the most fulfilling and marvelous lives. So until next time I see you whether live or virtual, be present, live in the moment, and make sure your life is one to remember. Congratulations to the R.B. Stall High School Class of 2020, we did it. And for the last time, it's a great day to be a warrior. Thank you.

St. John's High School



Briana Blake

COLLEGE PLANS

To attend the University of South Carolina Columbia

CAREER PLANS

To go into the field of Biomedical Engineering

INTERESTS & HOBBIES

Reading, playing the keyboard, and coding

SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT

Member of Upward Bound Program, Future Business Leaders of America, National Honor Society, National Technical Honor Society

FAMILY MEMBERS

Shannea Blake, mom; Jordan Blake Sr., dad; Ahmad Blake, brother; Jordan Blake Jr., brother; Alexandra Blake, sister

MESSAGE TO FELLOW CLASSMATES

"I want my classmates to know that just because we have graduated high school does not mean that our journey has ended. If anything, it's just the beginning and we have the ability to choose when and where our journey takes off."

VALEDICTORIAN SPEECH

Good evening families, friends, faculty, and fellow graduates. I want to thank everyone for joining us on this day and for continuing to support and believe in us. I also want to personally thank my family, friends, and teachers for helping me stand where I am right now. It is with their motivation that I am able to deliver this speech and congratulate the Class of 2020.

We are not the only ones here though, that deserve to be congratulated on this day. I want to thank those who helped every single last one of us get here. Thank you for never giving up on us and encouraging us to continue to do our best. You believed we had a future and made sure we did everything we could to achieve that. I also want to give a special thanks to my Mom and Dad. Without them my work ethic would not be what it is today, and I want to thank them for being there and supporting all of my decisions. As I go off to college in the fall, I hope I continue to strive and never let the two of you down. I also want to remember Mrs. Dowling and Mr. Legare. They both had an impact on many of our lives and will be dearly missed. I know they would both be proud to see all of us standing here today.

We have finally reached a significant milestone in our lives and can now say that we are graduates of St. John's High School. We've been through a lot in the past few months, but it is great to say that we've all still gotten to this point. These times have shown us that we can adapt to our situations and still come out thriving. The last couple of years could have never prepared me for a time like this, but I believe that we should think of what we have already accomplished and what memories we have already created and cherished. These achievements and memories never go away. There is still a part of me though, that wishes there were more memories that could be created or more that I could do before these years ended.

But, if these last four years have taught me anything, it would be to not dwell on the past. As we sit here today, it is not the time to think of what you could have done or should have done. There is nothing we can do to change the past, but we have the ability to change our future. We are now on a new journey to meet new people, and to make new choices. We can learn from our previous decisions and use them when thinking of what we want for ourselves later. We have completed only one major milestone in our life, therefore we still have the chance to improve ourselves and learn and grow from our upcoming decisions.

Right now, we should cherish what we have at the moment and



think of how hard we've worked to get here. We shouldn't let the times we are in diminish our accomplishments and know that we deserve all of our congratulations.

Now, my final message is to the underclassmen. I know some of you may feel like your four years in school may never come to an end, but I assure you that in your final year, it will feel like it went by in a flash. My words to you are to never stop thinking of what you want to do after high school. Think of what your passions are, your talents, and what you're great at, and how you can use them to create the life path that is best for you. Only you truly know what will make you happy and be the most beneficial to you.

Again I want to thank everyone for supporting the Class of 2020. Not only is this the day we graduate from high school, but the day we begin to shape our futures. We have put a great amount of work into our last four years and we all can say that we have earned our right to be here. From this day forward, let every decision you make be a reminder that you determine your future and control where you go in life. Congratulations Class of 2020!

Wando High School



Molly Myers Bynum

COLLEGE PLANS

To attend Columbia University

CAREER PLANS

To go into political science/law

INTERESTS & HOBBIES

Spanish language/education, creator of BrainGain summer program in North Carolina to teach kids English in between academic years, Girl Scouts (Gold Award), volleyball (played varsity at Concord High School in North Carolina, member of the semi-national team for CUVC in Charlotte, and played sand volleyball here), art, music, flute, politics and government (served on the Concord Youth Council in North Carolina)

SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT

Warrior Ambassador, Wando Wellness (Co-President), Model UN Team (completed summer sessions at Georgetown and Harvard), National Honor Society, Math National Honor Society, and Spanish National Honor Society (certified Gold Level Seal of Biliteracy for Spanish), Econ Challenge Team, We The People Team (State Champions for unit), National Merit Scholar, National AP Scholar

FAMILY MEMBERS

Peter and Stephanie Bynum, parents; Kate Bynum, sister

MESSAGE TO FELLOW CLASSMATES

“Well, this was nothing like High School Musical...but congratulations all the same! I can’t wait to see where life takes us.”

UNIQUE STORY

I moved to South Carolina the day before my junior year at Wando began.

VALEDICTORIAN SPEECH

Thank you, Dr. Postlewait, and a warm greeting to all of you, the Class of 2020. On behalf of the Class, I would like to thank Dr. Eppelsheimer, all of Wando's amazing teachers, administrators, and staff. This is certainly not the night we expected, and I wish we were all happily celebrating together right now. After all, we worked for twelve years for this moment. Even still, it is with honor and humility that I speak for our class today. Every single graduate watching this online ceremony should feel nothing short of the utmost pride in ourselves and everything we have been able to accomplish.

As a whole, the Class of 2020 is the paramount example of success despite obstacles. We were born under the shadow of 9/11, in a world of uncertainty and fear. Our childhood and socialization was marked in part by the collapse of the housing market and the subsequent recession of 2008. We learned about society and our country amidst a toxic culture of political division and an absence of empathy. We regularly heard news of school shootings and acts of senseless violence that impaired our sense of security. And now, here we are as newly-aged adults, navigating life on our own for the first time in the middle of a global pandemic. Seems about right.

I don't know about you all, but I had big dreams for the last few months of my senior year. I saw myself dancing the night away with my best friends at prom. I saw a fun-filled senior week stacked with memories and laughter. I saw tearful, bittersweet farewells in hallways and classrooms as we said goodbye to 1000 Warrior Way. But now, my prom dress hangs limply in my closet, waiting to be worn. Any travel plans are pretty much shot. My yearbook's back pages remain empty, unsigned by my peers and favorite teachers. I miss the people in my classes that I didn't really talk to outside of school, but always shaped my days nonetheless. My head is filled with what I would've said to everyone if I knew Friday, March 13th would be my last day at Wando. Of course it was Friday the 13th--we just got a deadly virus instead of machetes.

Even still, the lessons learned during these uncertain times, and throughout our lives, have been immense and inspiring. We have become the type of students--or better yet, the type of people--who look at a challenge and see an opportunity. Who see closed doors



and try to pick the lock. Who are willing to pull a "High School Musical" and redefine the status quo. While we may have had big dreams for these past few months, what really matters is what we've been able to achieve during this time. We are doers, not dreamers. As Shonda Rhimes once said, "A lot of people dream. And while they are busy dreaming, the really happy people, the really successful people, the really interesting, engaged, powerful people, are busy doing." From here on out, we improvise. And while the past few months have been full of heartbreak and nostalgia, we are stronger and more prepared than before. Our childhood dreams can now become our realities. What was once only possible is now inevitable. This is our time. After all, it's now our world for the taking: what else could we be waiting for?

Thank you, and congratulations once again to the Class of 2020.

West Ashley High School



Matthew Krejci

COLLEGE PLANS

To attend Clemson University and major in Physics

CAREER PLANS

To be an astrophysicist and head my own research team

INTERESTS & HOBBIES

Watching films, playing golf, and math

SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT

Academic Bowl, Science Olympiad, and National Honor Society

FAMILY MEMBERS

Lucy, mother; Chris, father; Marley, dog

MESSAGE TO FELLOW CLASSMATES

“The end of this year definitely took a sudden turn for the worse, but nonetheless you all have given me so many great memories over the last four years, and I couldn’t ask for a better class to graduate with. Thank you all for everything.”

VALEDICTORIAN SPEECH

Class of 2020, remember when we thought not wearing earbuds would be our biggest struggle this year? How times have changed. But I would actually like to start this by going a bit further back than that. It is strange to think how little we knew back in freshman year. Back when the halls of West Ashley were not yet etched into our minds. Back when we expected the bathroom soap dispensers to actually work! Back when we thought Nail Tech was a class about woodworking— or maybe that last one was just me. Anyway, the point is we have come a long way. Along the road, we have experienced a lot of firsts here at West Ashley. The first serious final exam. The first home football game. The first English paper written at 2:00 a.m. The second English paper written at 2:00 a.m. This speech written at 2:00 a.m. During much of that time, graduation seemed like a bright star in a distant sky. But three summers and four bad yearbook photos later, here we are. Now that bright star is finally upon us, at the end of its time. But alas, not every star supernovas, and not every school year ends with a bang.

For as long as I can remember, I've waited for this moment where I would be able to step on stage and give a speech to all my peers and all the families, educators, and staff none of us would be here without. As everyone is aware, plans have changed, and not even the strongest ambition could have done anything to stop it. Years of stress and work with only one goal in mind have now added up to me talking in front of my computer screen, far away from the stage we all hoped to walk. I'm sure that I'm not alone in feeling this way.

I know this is a pretty somber way to steer a speech that you may have expected to be much more celebratory and exciting, but I do not mean for this to be a sob story, rather, a learning experience. Of all the many things I have learned at West Ashley, I find this to be most valuable: Ambition can easily evolve into obsession. Ambition can take you far, but sacrifices must eventually be made. The danger comes when you lose sight of what you are giving up, when you place too much value on a single goal. Over the past four years, my involvement in school activities has been very limited. I never played a sport. I did not attend many games or after-school events. The few things I did participate in were just more of the same academic setting I was already in during the school day. But that was no big deal. That was my choice. I was going to be Valedictorian. And that was all that mattered.

Looking back over our time at West Ashley, I realize now just how wrong I was to let my ambition consume me, to let it cloud my judgement and focus my attention onto only one part of the high school experience. But hindsight is 2020, so what is to be gained from a story like this? I would urge everyone to not pursue success at the expense of happiness. Of course any road leading to success has sharp turns and obstacles, but it is up to us to decide whether the destination is worth the sacrifice. We should find something to



pursue, but we should not let it consume us. We should be familiar with sleepless nights spent working towards a better future, but we shouldn't neglect nights spent with friends. We should be efficient with our time, but we should not be afraid to sit back every once in a while to reflect on what we have accomplished, experienced, and what we may become.

If you listen to nothing else I have to say, remember this: every success story comes at a cost. Consider how much you are willing to spend. We spend so much time thinking about what could have been done yesterday or should be done tomorrow that we often forget to think about how we are doing today.

And of all of the todays we will have, this, my friends, is one to remember. While this may not be the ceremony we imagined, our accomplishment is not any less grand. If anything, it is that much more stirring. Despite every hurdle and roadblock, we survived. We have made our way up, grade by grade, to the summit of a towering peak, now with a clear view of the many roads ahead and the even greater peaks yet to be conquered. I know that if we keep our feet on the ground and eyes to the sky, each and every one of us has the ability to achieve greatness. The rest is up to you. Thank you.

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