

Icahn Charter School 1
2nd Commencement Exercise/10:00 a.m.
Friday, June 26, 2009/Fordham University, Rose Hill Campus

“CHANGE”

Opening

- Good Morning – very glad to be here with you this morning and I’d like to thank both your principal, Mr. Garcia, and the Icahn charter schools’ superintendent, Mr. Litt, for inviting me to join you here on this beautiful campus. I am so excited to be here with you this morning. Truth be told, when I first came to the Institute in July of 2001, Icahn Charter School 1 (then called Carl C. Icahn Charter School) was one of the very first schools I visited and several of the folks here this morning were part of my first introduction to charter schools. So, we have a long history together. In fact, I’ve been waiting for you to reach this point for some time now. I have visited your school many times and have been watching you for many years. I’ve heard about your progress and your performance as Mr. Litt’s fingers are quick to dial or email me about your latest achievements. So, although you may not recall seeing me, I feel as if I know you all and am very proud of each of you.
- Before I continue, I’d also like to take a minute to recognize the members of the Icahn board who are present this morning to join in celebrating your graduation - the second class to graduate from this, the first Ichan school. In addition, I’d like to recognize this school’s partner organizations: the Foundation for Greater Opportunity for the work and support they’ve provided to this school and the other Icahn schools; and the Center for Educational Innovation-Public Education Association. Also, I would be remiss if I did not recognize the faculty and staff of this school who have worked diligently and hard to help you get to this point. And, I haven’t forgotten, the families...I should say the *proud* families who are here today – parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, cousins and adopted family. You too are to be commended for your support and the sacrifices you’ve made to ensure that these children receive a high quality education.
- A little bit about me: I am Senior Vice President of the Charter Schools Institute of the State University of New York or SUNY...who’s heard of SUNY? SUNY is the largest comprehensive college/university system in the country. It has 64 colleges and universities throughout New York State and enrolls 464,000 students; it also has responsibility for approval, monitoring and renewal of charter schools. There are currently 49 SUNY-authorized charter schools open and operating, of which this is one. It is our hope at the Institute that students who attend SUNY-authorized charter schools will consider one of the many SUNY colleges and universities when you’re ready to attend college.
- Now, let’s pretend that only you and I are here so this isn’t just a one-sided speech but a conversation. See, although I’ve learned to make presentations where people don’t respond to what I’m saying, they just listen, the presentations I enjoy the most are where I actually get responses from the people I’m talking to and today that’s you. So, when I ask questions, it’s okay to answer out loud. OK?

- Let's talk for a bit about "change." This country just went through one of the most significant changes possible back in November. What happened? In fact, one of the platforms that President Obama campaigned on was "change." The country needed and people wanted change. Actually, President Obama promised to make changes in a number of areas, like health care, education, and our nation's relationships with other countries. And how do you think he prepared for these changes? Any ideas?
- To prepare for a change, you've got to do your homework. When I was thinking about talking with you today, I knew that you would be up on things related to technology from the internet (Facebook, Twitter), cellphones, blackberries, texting, video games/Wii to the most recent movies (Transformers, Star Trek), and I didn't want to make a mistake. So I did a little homework myself. I thought about some of the changes related to school and work that I've been through (which could be a long list, but I'll give you the short version): salesclerk in a department store, high school newspaper columnist, piano accompanist for a choir, typist for other students, medical records clerk, secretary, interpreter for the deaf, written lots of papers and other documents, taught school, school administrator, ran a marathon, reviewed/crafted/proposed state legislation, and been a state policymaker.

For each one of those different jobs and responsibilities, I had to do my homework to prepare. That homework included doing well in mathematics and English, always working to improve my vocabulary, reading a lot of books, listening in class, writing a lot/making mistakes but learning from them, going to college, working hard, making presentations (some better than others) and trying my best to be a good person.

- Now, you're about to make an important change from middle school to high school. Have you done your homework to prepare for this change? Let's see.... Have you listened in class? Done well in English and mathematics? Have you read many books? Have you written some papers/made mistakes and learned from them? Have you made presentations to your classmates and others? Have you tried very hard to be a good person?
- So, using another element of President Obama's presidential campaign, his slogan... does anyone remember what it was? Yes, we can. If I ask you some questions now about your preparedness for your change from the Icahn Charter School 1 to high school, you can answer. Do you think you can write more papers? Do you think you can listen well in class? Do you think you can graduate from high school and go to college?
- We at the Institute think you can, too. In fact, we know you have already begun. Word has reached us that as 8th graders, each one of you has taken and passed the 9th grade Integrated Algebra Regents examination and the 9th grade Regents Competency Test in Foreign Language. This means that you will begin high school with an Advanced standing that will allow you to take an additional year of mathematics and foreign language.
- In closing, congratulations on your graduation, and I'll be looking to see you walking across a SUNY college campus in a few years. Thank you for inviting me. Best of luck in high school and enjoy your day with your families!