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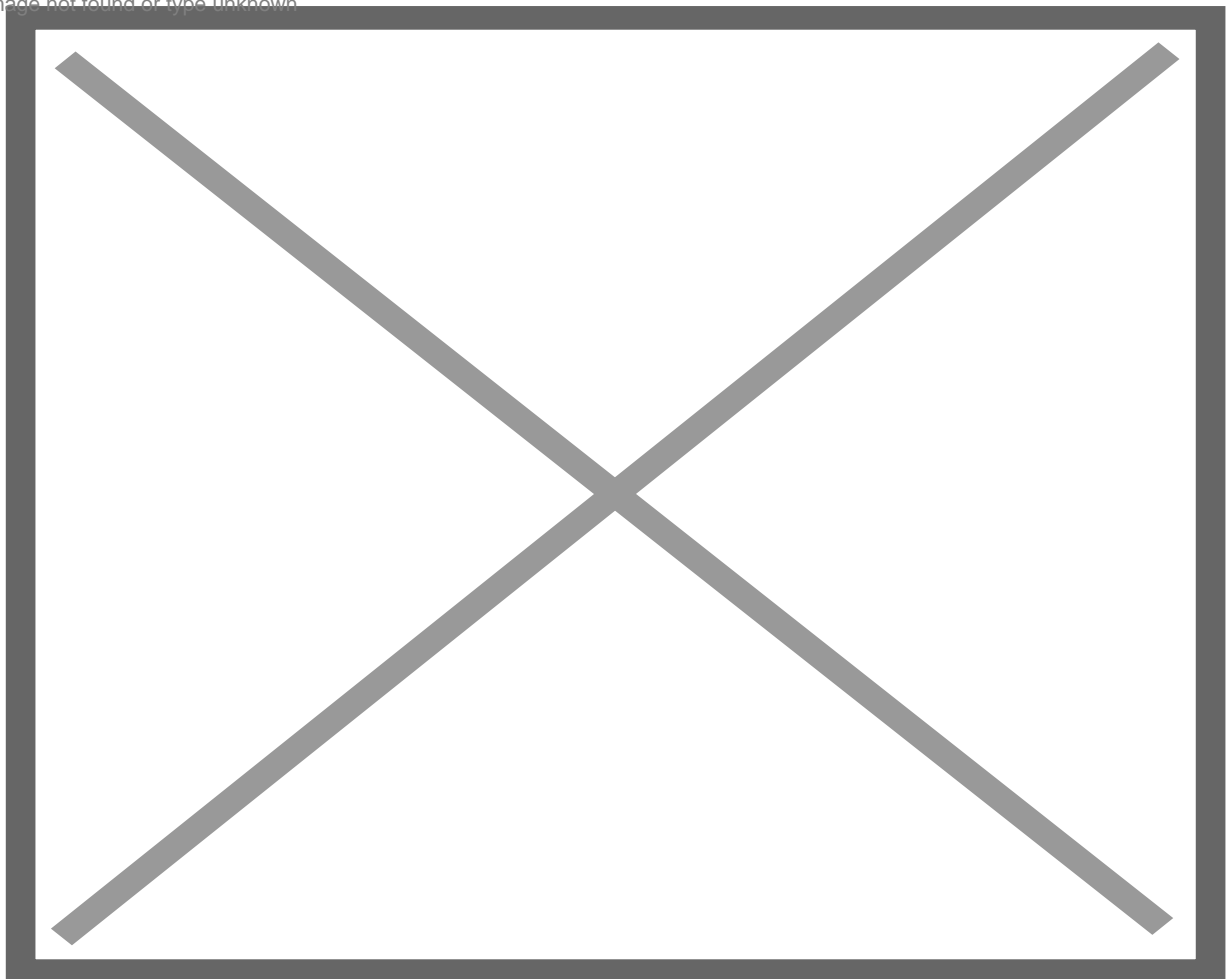
A Generation of Trailblazers: IKEHS 2024 Graduates Lead with Academic Distinction

This class emerges as leaders, ready to transform challenges into opportunities with their exceptional academic and life skills

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IEKHS 2024 Graduates By. MEDIA ONE/VI CONSORTIUM

On Thursday, 181 seniors of the Ivanna Eudora Kean High School walked across the school's gymnasium stage to receive their high school diplomas in an exuberant graduation celebration.?

The IKEHS class of 2024 is one of the school's highest achieving graduating classes in recent history, as school principal Sally Petty noted in her opening remarks. A quarter of the graduating students received high honors, and a further 29% of the graduating class received honors.?

Most of the class – 87% is moving on to post-secondary education.

IKEHS seniors also hold the highest proficiency rate for English Language Arts, Math and Science across the territory, based on the results of the 2023 SmarterBalanced State Standardized Assessments. The cohort's stellar academic performance is reflected in the whopping \$2.1 million worth of scholarships accumulated by the students to date.?

Ms. Petty also noted that 52% of this year's graduates are boys - one of the largest cohorts of males in a IKEHS graduating class.

After listing these and other achievements of the class of 2024, the principal urged the graduating seniors to take pride in their many accomplishments. Noting that "the world you're entering is full of opportunities and possibilities," Ms. Petty also encouraged them to be confident that they "are capable of achieving great things as a Ray."

Class salutatorian Nillia John-Pierre, 17, called the class of 2024 "the chosen ones who are survivors of Irma, Maria, and COVID-19." She shared with the cohort four words her mother instilled in her as guiding principles for success – aptitude, altitude, attitude and ambition – and advised the graduating class to move forward in gratitude at all times, especially for those who surround them with love and support - family, friends, and teachers.

Valedictorian Darnell Birmingham, who in the fall will take up a place at the Berklee College of Music in Boston, reinforced the previous speaker's theme of gratitude by expressing profound thanks to his support network. "My experiences have been numerous whether through tears, cussing, notes...but that guidance has paid off," he remarked.

Addressing his fellow graduates, Mr. Birmingham encouraged them to use the energy of naysayers to propel them to greater success. "Take the discouragement as encouragement and motivation to prove them wrong," he said. He noted that although a caterpillar moving in its cocoon often looks to outsiders like it is struggling, what is really happening is a beautiful transformation, only evident when the encased butterfly emerges from its chrysalis. "This is how we should push through our hardships," he said. "We shall be present and focus on where we are in the exact moment."

Like Ms. John-Pierre's mother, Mr. Birmingham had some focus words of his own; "be happy, be positive, and be blessed."

In his remarks, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. praised the valedictorian, who was at the top of his class in 9th grade as well. "I want to be Darnell Birmingham when I grow up," he joked, noting the young musician's remarkable achievements at such a tender age. "Imagine the pride I had when I was in St. Luis a couple of months ago and they had announced him for a national award," the governor said, noting that Mr. Birmingham had beat out 80,000 other students for the Jobs for America's Graduates award this year.

Feature speaker Dr. Muria Nisbett, a class of 1999 alumna of IKEHS, shared her story of becoming a teen mother in the fourth grade. Looking back on her journey to achieving her doctorate and establishing herself in a fulfilling career, she advised the graduating class that "Life is gonna have a way of throwing things at you...but it's not the challenges you face that define you, it's how you respond to those challenges."

Her response to the challenges faced in her early life, Nisbett said, were borne from "hope and a deep desire to succeed." She knew even then that "education was going to be the key to unlocking

those opportunities, and I knew that I would not let anything stand in my way.”

She reminded students that “success is not a straight path,” but assured them that success was achievable with determination, focus and a strong support system. Nisbett urged graduates to maintain their desire to learn, remain conscious of their responsibility to give back, and ascertain the best way forward toward accomplishing their goals. “The world is waiting on you to make your mark,” she told them. “Find what you’re passionate about and pursue it with all your heart.”

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