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Charlotte Amalie High School's Class of 2026 Graduates With 65% Honors and First Male Top Two in 35 Years

CAHS celebrated 231 graduates, with more than 65% earning honors, 31 named high honor students, 39 completing industry certifications, 46 English Language Learners graduating, and two male students leading the class for the first time in 35 years.

Education / **Published On May 21, 2026 08:10 PM /**

Staff Consortium **May 21, 2026**

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2026 Charlotte Amalie High School graduates. By. VIDE.

Charlotte Amalie High School closed the territory's public high school graduation week Thursday with a ceremony that celebrated the academic strength, resilience and personal growth of its "unstoppably iconic, quintessentially excellent, boundlessly unique" Class of 2026.

The school's 95th commencement recognized 231 graduates, with Principal Njnanya Boyd highlighting several milestones for the Chickenhawks. More than 65 percent of the class graduated with honors, including 31 students recognized as high honor students.

Ms. Boyd said another notable achievement was the strong academic showing among male students. Half of the students in the top 10 were male, and "for the first time in 35 years," she said, both the valedictorian and salutatorian were male. Just three years earlier, only one student in the top 10 was male.

The class also included 39 students who completed industry certification requirements in career and technical education disciplines. Forty-six English Language Learners were part of the graduating cohort, including 10 who graduated with honors and one who earned high honors.

Education Commissioner Dionne Wells-Hedrington said the accomplishments of the Class of 2026 reflected not only individual effort, but the relationships students built with each other.

"In life, success is rarely achieved alone," Dr. Wells-Hedrington advised. "The ability to collaborate, encourage others, and remain respectful will take you farther than talent alone ever could...Never underestimate the power of genuine relationships in a world that can sometimes feel disconnected, kindness and compassion remain powerful."

She also urged the graduates to believe in their own capacity.

"recognize that you are capable of more than you imagine, that your voice matters, that your dreams are valid, and that greatness is not reserved for just a select few."

Salutatorian Daniel Nganga, who gained early enrollment at the University of the Virgin Islands, said balancing high school responsibilities with college-level classes "humbled" him.

"I experienced burnout, nearly failed two courses, and generally feared I might fall out of the top 10 of my class. So, when I was named salutatorian, it represented more than a title, it represented growth, resilience, mistakes, exhaustion, and the grace of God carrying me through every step," he declared.

Mr. Nganga also spoke about the value of relationships, saying "people shape us more than we realize."

"I've come to see life as a garden. Some people plant seeds, some water them, some bring sunlight, and even difficult moments help us grow stronger roots," he said.

He described several setbacks that became opportunities to redirect his life. He also said that moving beyond being known only for academic achievement helped him discover other parts of himself.

"if I had continued defining myself only by grades, I never would have discovered my love for leadership, photography, creativity, friendship, and community."

Mr. Nganga said his high school growth meant more than any class rank.

"Somewhere during these four years I stopped being known for just one thing, and that growth means more to me than any ranking ever could. "

Valedictorian Mirza Baig, who also enrolled early at UVI, said every graduate deserved recognition, not only those who received formal awards. “Every single graduate seated here today has earned their place...all of us persevered through sleepless nights, overwhelming assignments, and stressful exam weeks.”

Mr. Baig also reflected on following the example of his older sister, Waniya, who was CAHS valedictorian in 2023. He thanked her for challenging him to reach the same standing.

“Today, I am proud to say that I fulfill that challenge. I thank her for continuously pushing me beyond my limits and inspiring me to strive for excellence.”

Much of the ceremony centered on the challenges the class faced during its four years, but keynote speaker Dr. Kyza Callwood gave students a moment to release pressure before turning to his main message.

“Some of you came into this room carrying pressure, pressure to succeed, pressure to figure out life, pressure from family, pressure from friends, pressure from social media, and pressure from yourself, but the next few seconds I want you to let all of that go,” said Dr. Callwood, leading the graduates in a collective scream.

He urged the class not to hide their abilities or reduce their ambitions for the comfort of others. “You must stop dimming your light to make other people comfortable,” Dr. Callwood admonished. “Never apologize for your greatness. Never shrink your dream because somebody else lacks vision.”

Dr. Callwood, chief strategy officer for the Bureau of Corrections, ended by leaving each graduate with a medal bearing the word “winner.” He described it as a temporary reminder that they had already made it further than many others, while telling them the more meaningful version would come later through the lives they build.

“The upgraded version will come later. You will earn that medal through your choices, through your discipline, through your character, through your consistency, through your courage to become everything your life is capable of becoming,” Dr. Callwood declared.

“One day, after you have discovered your purpose, walk in your greatness and confirm what your life can truly be. I want you to purchase your own upgraded medal, not because of the price, not because of the material, but because it would symbolize something deeper. It would symbolize the life you built, the dreams you chase, the battles you survived, the person you became,” he told the graduates.

Governor Albert Bryan Jr., noting that this was the final graduation cycle of his time as governor, said this year’s graduates gave him confidence in the territory’s future.

“We’re going to be alright,” he said. “Our students are brilliant,” the governor said, pointing to what they had accomplished despite experiencing two hurricanes and a pandemic during their years in the school system.

Governor Bryan urged the graduating Chickenhawks to turn that brilliance into careers that contribute to the Virgin Islands.

“We want you to be successful, because every pothole will be appreciating the money you put in the coffers of the Virgin Islands,” the governor said.

He encouraged them to see the world, but not disconnect from home.

“Go and see the world, please, but don't forget us here at home. We need your help too.”

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