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CAHS 2021 Graduating Class 'Made An Indelible Mark in the History Books,' Principal Proclaim as 222 Students Cross High School Finish Line

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A banner displaying the entire CAHS graduating class of 2021 during a ceremony on school grounds on May, 21, 2021. By. KYLE MURPHY FOR VI CONSORTIUM

The Charlotte Amalie High School graduated 222 students on Friday, the fourth and final event of the territory's four public high schools in what was a controversy-filled season spurred by walk-thru and drive-thru ceremonies ordered by the V.I. Dept. of Education.

It was a graduating season that will go down in the history of the U.S. Virgin Islands as one where students stood up to the powers that be, namely the D.O.E., challenged them through law [and won](#) . Though the victory came a day before graduations in the St. Thomas-St. John District and proponents of the plans already in place argued changes would be too late, the students' successful challenge has set a precedent moving forward, with the V.I. Board of Education issuing a ruling Friday that said [D.O.E. failed on multiple levels to make this year's graduation ceremonies meaningful](#).

Charlotte Amalie High School Principal April Petrus made reference to the protests in her remarks, comparing the 2021 class to Queen Mary, Queen Matilda and Queen Agnes. “This Resilient, Tenacious and Incomparable Class of 2021, the 100th Graduating class of C.A..H.S. has made an indelible mark in the history books," she proclaimed.



Charlotte Amalie High School students walk to a stage to receive their high school diploma on Friday, May 21, 2021. (Kyle Murphy, VI Consortium)

Toward the end of her remarks, Ms. Petrus summed up what the class of 2021 went through in four years. “You have experienced major challenges and controversies, having to deal with natural disasters, major disruptions to learning, major shifts in how instruction is delivered, controversies

and struggles for justice and inequality — nationally and locally. Even your own protest and advocacy efforts you stood up and you persevered. We are proud of you.”

While the virtual part of the ceremony was ongoing, graduates lined up with their two guests in the C.A.H.S gymnasium. Some students and parents used their smartphones to watch the virtual remarks that were aired on the Department of Education's Facebook page as they waited in line.

Parents waiting outside of the gymnasium were curious as to why the students had to line up for so long in the gymnasium before the in-person part of the graduation began. The students were in the gymnasium at 1:00 p.m. when the Facebook live began; the virtual part of the graduation took approximately one hour.

Dasmine Maynard, class salutatorian, referenced a Richard Branson quote which reads, “Every success story is a tale of constant adaptation, revision and change,” reminding her classmates to keep evolving “because change is remarkable.” She added, “Despite all the obstacles this class faced, we persevered as the only class in C.A.H.S history to complete our entire senior year virtually. We truly are trendsetters.”

Kyra Lin, class valedictorian, expressed high confidence in her fellow graduates. “I have no doubt that our class is composed of successful future computer scientists, aviators, doctors, lawyers, teachers, engineers and entrepreneurs. Greatness is in the cards; it is not what was dealt to us, but what we make with what we were given. ”

She added, “This is our legacy. When our story is told, the fact that we survived displacement and achieved academic excellence despite all this, will speak for itself. We will be remembered as the creative, amazing, responsible, dedicated and strong graduating class of 2021.”

Governor Albert Bryan, Education Commissioner Racquel Berry-Benjamin, Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett and Senate President Donna Frett-Gregory all provided pre-recorded congratulatory remarks published on D.O.E. 's Facebook page.

When the in-person segment of the ceremony began, graduates walked from the gym through the main parking lot and received their diploma from Ms. Petrus. They then walked across the stage and elbowed Mr. Bryan, Ms. Berry-Benjamin and other officials from Education as opposed to the traditional handshake. The graduates were then greeted by the two parents or guardians they had arrived with, and they also had an opportunity to take pictures before leaving the campus. The walk-thru part of the graduation took approximately an hour and a half.

There was a banner that displayed the entire class on the right side of the stage which the graduates walked past before they went on the stage.

Even with the controversies leading up to graduation, students, in the end, were simply pleased to be crossing the finish line of high school, and expressed appreciation for the ceremony during interviews with the Consortium. Though the Dept. of Education decided the types of ceremonies, it was left up to the schools to work within the parameters set by the department. According to students and parents, the C.A.H.S. faculty and staff pulled off a graduation ceremony they were pleased with.

