

Hello, my name is Crystal Colon and I attend East High School. I would first like to congratulate each and every one of you for your outstanding achievements and for being some of the best academic scholars in the Rochester City School District. Although the past four years have been extremely demanding and challenging for all of us, we have still been able to overcome adversity, neglect the easy life and claim the title that is rightfully ours as the Valedictorians of our high school's senior class of 2013. I am here to tell you a little bit about myself and how I made it here today.

I grew up in a small town in New Jersey where the majority of the population was made up of middle class Hispanics, me being one of them. For many years, Hispanic people have been condescended upon and viewed as "unintelligent" and "unethical". Society's stereotypical views have led many to believe that we will end up as housemaids and factory workers for the rest of our lives. My mother was a single mother and did everything she could in order to provide for her two kids. There was even a point when we had to live in a shelter for months because we had nowhere to stay. Even through the tough times that my family and I faced, I had always proved to be one of the brightest and happiest students in the classroom. My mind was made up and I had established at a very young age that the struggles that I went through as a child were not going to be the same struggles that my children would go through in the future. Success was my number one priority and there was nothing that would get in the way of that dream that I strived to one day make into reality.

Although I grew up in a broken home with a single mother, living off very little income, it was a challenge that enabled me to mature. My mother would marvel at me as I sat at the

kitchen table working late nights on homework assignments and class projects. With confidence she would say, “Mija, vas a ser presidente un día!” (*Daughter, you are going to be president one day!*)

Despite my humble beginnings and automatic label, I continued to have faith and acquire the characteristics of a leader in my community. Challenging myself to take honors classes proved to strengthen my intellect and capability. I continued my rigorous coursework when my family and I moved to New York State after the completion my sophomore year.

There is truth in the saying, “When one door closes, another opens.” The foolish assumptions I made about New York State prior to moving were fortunately inaccurate. It is amazing how one can fall in love with a city as fast as I did. Once in Rochester, I challenged myself academically and socially in order to find my place in this new home. Everyone wants success. There are those who want it and will strive to reach their goals and pursue their dreams as best as they can. Then there are those who want success and just sit on the sideline, letting life pass them by. You have chosen to take the path most people decide not to take.

Although there were voices whispering in my head saying that I can’t, it did not stop me from ultimately becoming the very first Latina Valedictorian in East High School history. We are ready to embark upon an odyssey and experience life in a whole new atmosphere with professors, colleagues, desks and dorm rooms. It is finally time to begin a whole new chapter in our lives. With a pen and the courage that is within us, let us prepare to start writing our story! Thank you and congratulations again to all of the Valedictorians, you deserve it!