

2009 New Schools Expo Speech

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Presented by: Shantell Hopkins, CICS Ralph Ellison Junior

I am invisible; understand, simply because people refuse to see me.

Good afternoon: Mayor Daley, Rufus Williams, Phyllis Lockett, future teachers, students, parents, and all of you who are attending this wonderful event. My name is Shantell Hopkins from the Chicago International Charter School Ralph Ellison campus. I am currently a junior and my last three years at Ellison have been astonishing. Ralph Ellison's staff dedicates themselves to providing students with the knowledge and skills requisite for success in college and careers.

The staff at Ralph Ellison has taught me to become articulate, to reach beyond my expectations, to maintain my integrity and respect for others, and to demonstrate great leadership skills. When I walk through the halls of our school, I visualize all of our ancestors who fought for us to receive a quality education and I am thankful for those pioneers. They fought for us to receive a quality education because their values and their dreams recognized that education is the true leveler of our society. We are now living legacies of these dreams.

When I first entered Ellison, a teacher told me that when I left her class I was going to learn the "formula to success." Today, I want to share that formula with all of you. In order to become successful you not only have to be a man or woman of financial means or an academic scholar, in addition to these things, you have to become a man or woman of values and dreams. Values are what really matter to each of us: the ideas and beliefs we hold as special. Values and dreams differ from person to person and while attending Ellison, I have been exposed to values and dreams beyond those of my community, my friends, and the media.

Too often young people today are most influenced by what they see and hear on television or on the street; however, Ellison has taught us the fundamentals of self-reliance and civil action. We do not worry about those who doubt us because we are poised to exceed expectations! As a result, we know in our hearts that even through the most difficult struggles we face, we should and will not compromise our values, ideas, or dreams.

Young students are often accepting of the world as it is rather than what it should be. Most sit back and passively complain without taking action. Ellison has inspired me to make my voice heard. Today, I stand before you to share the greatness Ellison has brought to my life. Ellison is not a place where students' dreams are denied, deferred, or left behind. Instead, this special place and its staff have created safe havens.....where dreams of students are fostered.

We will become the nation's next educators, lawyers, doctors and presidents. Another one of my teachers lectured us on dreams. He told us that "all of our dreams could come true, only if we have the courage to pursue them." Many people who fail do not fail because of lack of responsibility and effort; they fail because they do not realize how close they are to obtaining their dreams when they give up. CICS Ralph Ellison, a new school supported by the Renaissance School Fund and Ms. Phyllis Lockett, has inspired me to walk the extra mile so that I can become more successful. Ellison has brought inspiration into my life and has brought wonderful opportunities as well. My peers and I are reminded daily that our possibilities are endless. We as students will not face life from a point of hopelessness, but instead we view life and our future as never-ending points of hope knowing in our hearts that "Yes we can!"