



Seth's Opening Remarks at Arise Academy Charter School September 9, 2009

Good Morning!

I cannot tell you how pleased I was to be invited to this historic event.

I am proud to be here today, and I hope you are all proud of yourselves, because you should be.

In the history of our country, there has never been a school like this one – a school that is designed to meet the unique educational needs of students in our city's foster care system.

I know it has been a long road for all of you – board members, administrators, teachers, parents and students – but here you are – not following history, but making history!

Many of you know that I was a foster child myself. I was born to a single mother who gave me up. After having spent time in foster homes, I was adopted by my parents, Rufus and Imelda Williams, who took me in and gave me a loving home.

My dad Rufus Williams was a teacher in the Philadelphia public school system, and he and my mom would hammer me every day about the importance of getting a good education. At the time, I didn't really see the big deal, but as an adult, I realize just how right they were.

It is through education, they told me, that I could realize my dreams – and the only way I would reach my true potential. They were right about that.

With a good education under my belt, they said, I could go on to do anything I want to do. They were right about that too.

They told me that as a foster child, people would doubt my abilities, and set limits on how far I could go – but that a first-class education allow me to set my own limits.

And you know what? They were right about that too.

I went to great schools, studied hard and made good grades. And it is because of that, and because of the mentoring I got from my parents, teachers and counselors – that I can stand here today ready to take on the challenge of becoming the first Black District Attorney in the history of the state of Pennsylvania.

But don't take that to mean that I am anything special – I'm not. If I can do it, you can do it too.

Here at Arise Academy Charter High School, you'll work at your own pace – and I know you'll work very hard. You have the unique opportunity here to accelerate your own education – to do as well as you're academically capable. You will have the chance to sparkle like the diamonds you are. You will have the chance to control your own destiny.

I know, you've heard all the bad statistics – that foster care children have a high school dropout rate of 75 percent. That 50 percent of the children raised in foster care are still unemployed two years after they leave school and 33 percent work in minimum wage jobs.

That may be true – but it certainly does not have to be you.

You should also know about Eddie Murphy, the comedian and movie star. And Ice-T, the rapper and actor. Seven-time NBA All-Star Alonzo Mourning, who graduated from Georgetown University, my old law school. Detroit Lions quarterback Daunte Culpepper. Malcolm X.

Every one of these former foster children managed to do pretty well for themselves, wouldn't you say?.

There are thousands of others – doctors, engineers, athletes, teachers, scientists ... and District Attorneys.

Don't let other people define you. Don't let them steal your hope and cloud your future. Your future is in your own hands, and your potential is limitless.

You have the opportunity to make history not just through attending this historic school – but by excelling here.

Here is where you will begin to take your place in the world. Here is where your talent and hard work begin to show dividends. Here is where you will write a new chapter in the history books – a chapter of scholastic achievement where “No, you can't!” is replaced by “Yes, we can!”

Yes you can - prove that academic achievement is not limited to one neighborhood, skin color, or economic status.

Yes you can – show the world that foster children are every bit as capable of greatness as anyone else.

Yes you can – positively change the world, and positively change the future of the City of Philadelphia, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the United States of America.

I want to thank everyone at Arise Academy Charter High School for having me here on this momentous occasion.