



**Speaker Christine C. Quinn
Remarks as Prepared**

**Office of Adult and Continuing Education
Annual Student Recognition Ceremony
June 28th, 2010**

Before I start, I just want to thank Lianne Friedman and everyone at the Office of Adult and Continuing Education, who have worked so hard to make these great programs a reality, and have worked with my office to get some of our new adult education programs off the ground.

And of course, I want to thank all of you, the students, for all your incredibly hard work, and your families who have supported you throughout your work.

Now one of the best parts of my job as City Council Speaker is that I get to visit neighborhoods in every borough, and meet New Yorkers from every background. I get to talk to them about their hopes and their challenges, and hear their ideas for how to make this city a better place. And sometimes I get invited to be a part of events like this, and celebrate the incredible achievements of New Yorkers like you.

You've done one of the most difficult things anyone can do. Too often these days, we're only interested in things that are easy, and promise instant results. But you saw something that was both hard and important, and you took the time and found the strength to do it.

You saw that you needed more education, and you went out and got it. Most of you did it by juggling classes with many other responsibilities – caring for your children, paying bills, working a job, sometimes more than one.

In the last few months, the City Council has been looking for ways to help even more New Yorkers take advantage of programs like the ones you enrolled in. As part of that work, I've been traveling around the city visiting GED, literacy, and adult education programs.

I've spoken to New Yorkers with inspiring stories – stories of overcoming great odds, and accomplishing amazing things. Stories of how learning English, getting career training or earning a GED changed people's lives in major ways.

I've met people who told me that getting this education made them better parents. They were able to be more active in their child's education, helping with homework and

participating in school activities. And they knew they were setting an example for their kids about the importance of learning, and reaching your goals.

I met a man here in Brooklyn who told me he had lived in his neighborhood for years, and never knew there was a GED center right around the corner, because the building wasn't marked.

As soon as he found out, he signed up for GED classes. And he asked me if I could get the city to put a sign out front, so others in the neighborhood would know they had this great resource right in their back yard.

But if not, he told me he had spoken to the pastor at his church, and the pastor told him he could use the church copy machine to make signs to hang around the neighborhood.

That's how important a GED was to him. He was willing to take matters into his own hands to share his opportunity with others.

And there couldn't be a more important gift to share with our fellow New Yorkers right now. There are 1.6 million people in New York City who are out of school and don't have a high school diploma.

And I know I don't need to tell anyone in this room, but that makes it incredibly difficult to find a good paying job – especially in this economy.

Many of these New Yorkers want to go back to school, want to get that GED or other education. But they're afraid. Afraid it will be too hard, or take too much time. Afraid they don't have what it takes.

Now the City Council is trying to help make it easier for people to find programs like the ones you've just completed. We're working to make sure people have the support they need to succeed.

But there's only so much that we can do. The real difference being made by people like you. You are our secret weapon in this fight.

You're going to go back to your communities and serve as living, breathing proof that it can be done. That with hard work, you can get that education. Your neighbors are going to see you. Your children. Your relatives and friends. And they're going to be inspired.

Any time they feel afraid, they're going to see that you were fearless. They're going to say if she can do it, then so can I. They're going to say I want the same opportunities he has. And they're going to come to you for guidance, for advice.

That's the gift you give to your neighborhoods, and to our city. The gift of leading by example.

What you've accomplished here isn't just going to change your life. It isn't just going to change your families' lives. It's going to change the lives of people all around you.

It's going to create a chain reaction, and its going to change the lives of people you don't know and may never even meet.

They may not realize it, and they'll probably never have the chance to say thank you. So I'm going to say it for them.

Thank you for your work, for your courage, for your dedication. Thank you for challenging all of us in government to do more for adult education. Thank you for proving wrong all those who said that giving money for these programs isn't important. Thank you for following your dreams, and inspiring others to follow theirs.

But we're not just counting on you for inspiration. Right now we're in the middle of the worst recession we've seen in decades, and people are looking to us in government to create more jobs.

We're working hard every day to bring new industries and new jobs to the five boroughs. But creating more jobs isn't enough. We have to make sure those jobs go to the New Yorkers that need them, not people from other cities and other states. We need to make sure New Yorkers have the skills and education it takes to get those jobs.

And that's where you come in. The education you've just received is helping us build the most talented, qualified, skilled workforce in the country. That's what's going to make employers want to come and stay here.

We're going to make it easier for New Yorkers to start small businesses. But you are the ones who are going to make your ideas a reality, and start a business that puts your neighbors back to work too.

We're going to help add more rungs to the career ladder. But you are the ones who are going to climb it. Because while we can create the opportunities, working New Yorkers like you are the ones who will pull us out of this recession.

Now with all that accomplished, some folks might think that you've done enough. But not me.

So there's one more thing I'm going to ask of you all today. It's three simple words. Don't stop now.

Don't stop learning. Don't stop working. Education is a lifelong journey. The opportunities you've created for yourself today are great, but they'll be even greater if you take it to the next level.

Because the more we learn, the more we discover we have left to learn. So often in life we think we've reached the top of the mountain, when it's really just the first in a series of peaks.

But the only thing to do is to keep climbing. For some of you that might mean college. For some, it might be a GED. For others, it'll mean studying to be a nurse or an air conditioning technician, or work with computers.

But whatever your path, whatever your story, I ask that you keep climbing. No one ever got to the end of a journey by stopping after just a few steps.

And I promise you this – you won't have to go it alone. We stand with you. We're counting on you to do amazing things, and we want to help in any way we can. Our hopes for you are great. Our faith in you is limitless. And today, we join you to celebrate not just what you've already achieved, but all your achievements still to come.

Thank you, and congratulations to everyone.