



Total Sunshine Honors DC's Top High School Achievers

By Krishana Davis | DCTV

Two of the top achievers from nearly every public and charter high school in Washington, D.C. were honored on June 20 at the 5th annual Total Sunshine School Grade Rewards Ceremony. Held at Theodore Roosevelt High School, the ceremony celebrated 62 valedictorians and salutatorians from schools such as Ballou High School, Friendship Public Charter School, KIPP DC and Booker T. Washington High School.

Total Sunshine is a district-based non-profit organization, which highlights the achievements of youth in D.C., and a television show of the same name, which airs on DCTV. The organization was founded by Merilyn C. "Total Sunshine" Holmes in 2003. "I thought, how could I support students," said Holmes, whom graduated high school with honors. "The ones on track have to be supported. We always talk about the ones not on the right track, but we have to support the ones who are."

The students wore their graduation caps and gowns on stage to be awarded with a signed letter of congratulations from Washington, D.C. Councilman Vincent Orange, as well as a refurbished laptop or tablet and certificate from Walmart, a corporate partner. During the ceremony, Holmes urged the students to keep in touch with her as they begin college, which she said can be expensive and requires a strong support system. She said, she hopes to continue to support the students through their college matriculation any way she can.

"I've seen a lot of things, and if young students can educate themselves, they can lift themselves up and get out of poverty," said Holmes. "Education is the answer out of poverty." Reporter for FOX 5 News and district native, Allison Seymour, gave the keynote speech during the ceremony.

Christopher McCrae, a salutatorian from Ballou High School, said he knows the difficulties of living in a tough neighborhood well. "In my neighborhood there were a lot of homicides," said McCrae, who is from Southeast D.C. "Police and detectives were always everywhere. It was hard." One of seven siblings, McCrae said he is excited to embark on his journey as a freshman at George Washington University in the fall. He said he is planning to major in engineering.

"I liked the food and how the campus looked, and the environment," said McCrae, who received some scholarship money to offset the tuition. Arnasha Jones, valedictorian, and Mercedes Young, salutatorian, are best friends and recent graduates from McKinley Technology High School. Both girls are headed to North Carolina together for college. Jones, who is from Northeast D.C., is headed to North Carolina State University to study economics. Young said she is headed to North Carolina A&T University to study engineering.

"I want to join the band," said Young, who currently has a sprained ankle from training for their dance program. "I danced at McKinley Tech." Jones, who is headed to a predominately white college, said she is interested in joining the Black Student Union and other associations on campus.