Good Morning! Thank you for inviting me to the South Ocean Middle School and for the opportunity to share today's important conversation with you.

I would also like to acknowledge a member of the College's Board of Trustees, who happens to serve as the Mayor of Patchogue Village, Paul Pontieri. Trustee Pontieri has earned his reputation as a leader who is capable of launching productive conversations about how to effectively address this topic. More importantly, his decisions through the years have molded him as a leader who can build connections between and among all members of the community. He is someone who understands that diversity enriches lives and helps build communities that value inclusion.

America is a land of opportunity and many individuals from outside our borders wish to pursue their destiny in the United States. If you will

indulge me for a few minutes, I'd like to share my personal journey with you.

I am from a family of ten children, my father had an opportunity to travel abroad and pursue his individual dream to be involved in foreign service and governmental studies. However, he realized that his charge was to remain and provide for his very large family in Tobago. Most of my brothers and sisters eventually obtained jobs in the Trinidad and Tobago government. I chose to follow a different path, challenging my family tradition. First, I travelled to London, England but quickly decided that it was too similar to what I was attempting to leave behind. My quest then focused on the United States of America, where I had no friends and had to navigate and embrace a culture that was obviously different.

To fully fund my education and other expenses, I would leave home at about 1:45 a.m. to get to the

bus stop so I could catch the first bus to Washington, D.C., where I would board a train to Virginia. Then, I'd wait for another bus into Arlington, where I worked the early morning shift cleaning apartment building stairwells and laundry rooms. Then, I'd board a bus back to the train station and then another bus back to college in time for my first class at 8:15 a.m.

I would go from class to class and then head for my apartment around 2:15 p.m. to get ready for my 3-11 p.m. job at a local hotel as a receptionist. I would utilize my break to begin my homework, finishing up on the bus ride home. I would arrive home sometime around midnight, when I could sleep for 1 or 2 hours before having to repeat this routine the next day.

I did this for three and a half years before earning my Bachelor's Degree. I immediately enrolled in a Master's Degree program. I continued working full-

time, and was still able to complete my Master's Degree in two years. As you may have surmised by this point, my decision to pursue the American Dream via education was not an easy one.

Once I achieved my Master's Degree, I immediately enrolled in a Doctorate program at Morgan State University. Throughout my studies, I faced numerous challenges that required me to make difficult decisions. These decisions were based on integrity, ethics, service to others, faith, and a passion to succeed.

I struggled, and at times I was knocked down, but I never wavered, and whenever I was close to a breaking point, my faith, and yes, the support of an occasional Good Samaritan, was all that it took to refuel the fire buried deep within that forced me to get back up and push forward.

Today I am the sixth President of Suffolk County Community College—a position I would never have thought possible when I was your age.

The College believes in providing all students, regardless of their immigration status, with an opportunity to study at the college level and meet their career goals. Two years ago, the Fiscal Policy Institute issued a report that stated 4,500 undocumented students graduate from New York high schools every year. Only five to ten percent advance to attend institutions of higher learning. Many of Suffolk County Community College's students have advocated for a solution that would help these students attain their education and career goals, and our College's Trustees have passed a resolution publicly supporting this effort.

I trust that today's program will serve to further expand your thinking on this subject. In essence, you must seize the opportunity to study, learn and

advance, for education will empower you and is the key to every other future success. At Suffolk, we believe education transforms lives. In order for such transformation to occur, individuals must have access to opportunities--equal opportunities. By embracing inclusion and supporting diversity, we will strengthen our communities by developing an appreciation for the value of each person. I hope you will all be motivated to engage with each other in making just choices for the common good. Enjoy the rest of the day!