



*Passages valedictorian reflects on academic success during 2009 promotional ceremony at Horizon Juvenile Center.*

## **Promotional Ceremonies For Youth in Detention**

On Tuesday, June 23<sup>rd</sup>, the NYC Department of Education in collaboration with the Department of Juvenile Justice held promotional ceremonies for secure and non-secure residents enrolled in Passages Academy.

Graduation for secure detention youth was held at the Horizon Juvenile Center in the morning and graduation for group home residents was held at Summit School in the afternoon. Students celebrated their promotion in traditional purple caps and gowns, with family, friends, and staff in attendance.

The ceremonies began with teacher Al Barbarino singing the National Anthem, followed by keynote speakers encouraging the students to realize their full potential in life and congratulating them on their academic achievement. Visiting speakers included Erik Hallgren of Bronx Community College, Jeffrey Dessources of the College of Mount St. Vincent, Manuel Garcia, Director of Latino Affairs for the New York Yankees, and Jeanette Rodriguez of Nike. All four speakers spoke to the students about overcoming adversity and continuing their education as the cornerstone of a successful future.

Passages Academy valedictorians Rashaun and Courtney, and salutatorians Tiana and Kevin gave speeches, giving thanks to their teachers and congratulating fellow classmates. In addition, achievement awards were presented to students who displayed exceptional aptitude in key subject areas.

Residents who were not graduating participated in the ceremony, as well, volunteering as ushers to help in directing and seating family and friends. The Horizon Choir, featuring three graduating students and other non-graduating students, performed songs, including “I Believe I Can Fly”, plus a rap song in honor of retiring Passages Academy Principal Sydney Blair.

Principal Blair was presented with a commemorative plaque recognizing her decades of service to thousands of New York City students, and was honored with words of appreciation for her work by DJJ Commissioner Neil Hernandez, who spoke on behalf of the entire Department.

A reception for students and their families featuring graduation cake and refreshments followed the ceremony.

