

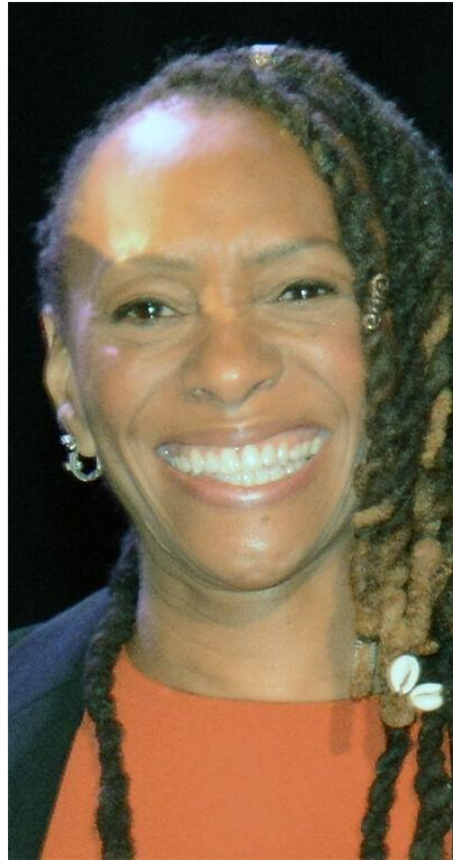
FEATURED

## Clinton celebrates 5th-grade graduation

By Mandy Catoe Lancaster Promise Neighborhood

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Yokima Perez



More than ve dozen fth-graders from Clinton Elementary School walked across the stage May 25 to receive their diplomas, marking the end of elementary school and their promotion to sixth grade.

Just after receiving their diplomas, each student was given three handshakes and a hug from Principal Keisha Witherspoon and assistant principals Conner Urbano and Mary Beth Mize.

More than 400 lled the Lancaster High School multipurpose room to celebrate the milestone.

The students paraded in as the traditional “Pomp and Circumstance” march played over the sound system to set the mood.

The students kicked off the night singing their own version of Vitamin C's "Friends Forever (The Graduation Song)". Led by music teacher Nancy Noel, the students sang vowing to honor friendships and remember all the times they had together.

## Keynote speech

Yokima Perez, Lancaster native and small business owner, gave the keynote speech. She graduated from Lancaster High School and the University of South Carolina, and earned a master's degree from Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas. Her mother, Dr. Deborah H. Cureton, introduced her to the graduating fth-graders.

"I am so glad to be here to celebrate your graduation," Perez told the students as she began her engaging, inspirational and interactive speech.

She asked the students to raise their hands if they were a little nervous, then assured them they would be ne and would do a lot of hard things in life after this and it would all be worth it.

"You have met many challenges — dealt with the global pandemic, online learning, social distancing and other personal challenges," she said. That took resilience, adaptability and courage, she said.

"Every day going forward, you will face situations that will give you the opportunity to make bold decisions to do the right thing," she said. "Sometimes it may be easier to be silent or to just go along with the crowd, but we are trusting you to be bold enough to make the decisions and do amazing things."

She offered three pieces of advice: keep learning, keep dreaming and keep caring.

“Appreciate the people who love and support you. Show gratitude, respect and compassion,” she said. “Don’t forget to help those in need — classmates, neighbors, strangers and animals. They are all part of your community.”

Perez closed her speech by reciting the “Graduation Poem” by Niki Alling.

The last lines were: “We all have a purpose in life, and it begins in our youth. Who you are now, and who you will become is determined by your soul, and with your dreams in your heart to lead the way, you can conquer any goal!”

## Highest honors

Each year, the school honors two students who demonstrate excellent character, academic success and are on track to becoming extraordinary leaders. Chris Autrum and Loegan Faulkner were awarded the highest honors.

## Whatever it takes

Promise Neighborhood staff was on hand to present orange roses to the mothers of the graduates. The rose symbolized the promise of the community to do whatever it takes to make sure the kids in the zone reach their highest potential. Each student received a Promise Neighborhood swag bag with a cookie and information on the USCL Summer Arts and Science Camp. Promise Neighborhood director Sh’Kur Francis told the audience that all children in the zone could attend the camp for free.

## Highlights from the year

Witherspoon said the school year has been a memorable one. She expressed gratitude to Lincoln Lodge, which has supported Clinton Elementary all year, beginning with car duty the very first day. Later in the year, they read to the students and on old day, the men returned to serve hot dogs. Mount Tabor and Alba lodges assisted with the meal.

“With everything going on in the world, it’s good to have loving and humble leaders that get in the trenches with us,” Witherspoon said. “Their compassion and servant heart allowed us to push to the finish line.”

Field day consisted of the usual outdoor fun and games, but the administration also took a few pies in the face, along with Francis and PE teacher Hank Harris. Witherspoon thanked Francis and Harris for “being troopers and sticky with us.”

## Lancaster Promise Neighborhood

Lancaster Promise Neighborhood is a federally funded five-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education. It is the first Promise Neighborhood program to be funded in South Carolina. Its mission is to “do whatever it takes with the community to ensure every child who lives in the zone has the chance for success.”

The zone is 6.2 square miles of focus on the poorest neighborhoods in the state. The Lancaster Promise Neighborhood is strategically focused to support Clinton Elementary, A.R. Rucker Middle and Lancaster High schools’ parents and students.

Lancaster County Partners for Youth is the grant recipient and fiscal agent. For more information, visit [www.lpnc.org](http://www.lpnc.org) and follow on all social media platforms.