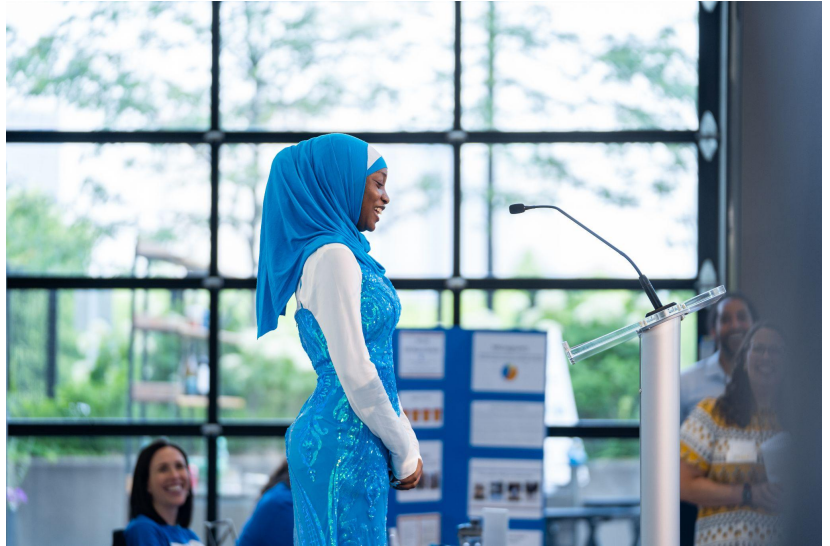


ACCELERATORS IN EDUCATION

Hello, my name is Habi Barry and I am graduating from Columbus Collegiate Academy - Main St. tomorrow. If you would have told my 6th-grade self that I would be here tonight, giving a speech in front of strangers, she would not believe you. But I am here right now because of the three years I spent as a CCAM bulldog. The lessons I've learned, the people I've met, and the teachers who helped me along the way have shaped me into someone who is confident in my abilities and prepared for my future.



I started USN in the middle of the pandemic. My first class in middle school was on a computer. It was Mrs. Felbaum's 6th-grade reading class. I thought it was really easy, and honestly, being at home didn't motivate me to complete much of my work – I was much more interested in watching *Demon Slayer* on my phone than I was in reading *The Outsiders*. That was until Mrs. Felbaum called my mom and told her I had yet to complete an assignment in reading. My mom was disappointed, but I realized that I was also disappointed in myself. For the first time in my life, it was up to me – my classwork was my responsibility, and if I didn't do it, there was a big consequence. In this case, the really difficult conversation I had to have with my mom after she hung up with Mrs. Felbaum. I started to hand in my work and slowly brought up my grade. By the time I started in-person classes, it wasn't just about my grades. I was excited to go to class in person. Our books were interesting and I wanted to learn from Mrs. Felbaum, who was both funny and nice. I loved reading and talking about *A Long Walk to Water*. I stuck with it in 7th and 8th grade and continued to grow as a writer and a reader. Now, as I head off to Cristo Rey Columbus High School in the fall, I am confident in my abilities as well as my motivation to turn in work. USN taught me that I am accountable for my actions – and for my own desire to learn and to grow from my education.

I was also very shy when I started at USN. I didn't want to speak up much or answer questions. I thought: what if I was wrong? What if my classmates laughed at me? At USN, though, it doesn't

matter if you don't want to talk. Teachers call on you anyway. Mrs. Owen, my 6th-grade math teacher, cold-called on me every single day. I remembered the first time she called my name in class. I froze. I whispered the answer to her question as quietly as possible, hoping that would be enough. However, Mrs. Owen didn't hear me and asked me to speak up. I ended up shouting the answer in front of my class. This pattern continued as the trimester went on until I began to learn how to speak up in front of my classmates. Answering questions in math boosted my confidence and helped me find my voice. Thank goodness that happened in 6th grade, because 7th and 8th-grade math was really hard. I had to ask a lot of questions to figure out how to find the square root of 24 or the area of a sphere. I knew by that point in my education that I was responsible for getting the help I needed, and I knew I needed to speak up to do it. I am grateful to both Mrs. Owen and Mrs. Felbaum for pushing me to find my voice and my purpose at school.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe once said, "The important thing in life is to have a great aim, and determination to attain it." This quote represents to me, as a USN alumni, my STRIVE values. STRIVE is an acronym we used to describe the values important to us as USN students. The "E" in STRIVE stands for Effort. You have to put effort in all the things you do. Your effort matters even if you don't get the work right, and it's your effort that counts. If you don't show effort, it's really hard to get or achieve the things you want in life. USN taught me that, and it's a lesson I'll take with me throughout my life, whether that's next year as a freshman at Cristo Rey, or on my first day of medical school as I start training to be a surgeon.