

**REMARKS FOR JEAN-CLAUDE BRIZARD  
ALLIANCE FRANCAISE PROGRAM DINNER**

Good evening, or I should I say *bonsoir*?

I'm honored to be here today to celebrate Alliance Francaise and our Educational Outreach Program, which has been helping Chicago Public School students fall in love with the French language since 1998.

I would like to thank the CPS Partners and Donors who make the Educational Outreach Program with Alliance Francaise possible – and many of you are represented here today. All of the corporate and civic partners who support this program are too lengthy for me to mention at this mine, but CPS greatly appreciates your continued support of this incredible program.

I also want to thank Alliance Francaise for sponsoring the scholarships that will be announced today, that include travel and study trips to France and Concordia Language Villages for some hard working CPS students.

And I want to thank the families, high school teachers and principals of students who are with us today.

Most of all, I want to thank and congratulate the students who have completed the Education Outreach Program.

As the first-ever native French speaking CEO of the Chicago Public Schools, I'm honored to welcome you to the joyous world *la langue francaise*.

French is the language of my home nation of Haiti, as well as 27 other nations, such as Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal, Cameroon, Belgium and the Canadian province of Quebec. It's also the language of diplomacy – which is why many of the great Russian novels of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, including Leo Tolstoy's "War and Peace", include a great deal of French dialogue. To be an aristocrat in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was to know French.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, French became a language of liberation. Frantz Fanon, a French-speaking native of Martinique -- and a philosopher who inspired President Obama when he was a young student -- once wrote that "To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture."

That shift – from French as a language of the powerful to the language of rising people – that makes it such an exciting tongue to acquire for young people today. The world of French thinking has expanded beyond the banks of the Seine and holds out great promise for your generation. But I hope this program did more than help you learn a language and understand a variety of cultures. I hope, for some of you, it helped you fall in love.

*L'amour* may sound like a strange word from the CEO of the Chicago Public Schools. However, as someone whose job it is to prepare you not only for college and careers, but for life, I cannot think of a more relevant and important word to describe the intellectual path ahead of you.

You will soon discover, perhaps in college, but if not then when you enter the world and seek your own path in life, that without love -- without great passion for people, life and learning -- the world can be a cold, dark and difficult place.

Love is about something more than material comfort. Thomas Jefferson described the passionate life in the Declaration of Independence as "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Jefferson's dream was inspired by French thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Voltaire.

More recently, French philosopher Albert Camus defined the common path that all free walk. He said that "a man's work is nothing but this slow trek to rediscover, through the detours of art, those two or three great and simple images in whose presence his heart first opened."

For centuries, the world has been lifted by the French culture. That's because the French language is more than words on a page or off the tongue. It's Montaigne sitting in a parapet inventing the essay. It's Rene Descartes wondering if an evil demon controls our world. It's Claude Monet finding new eyes for the world. It's the tide of memory that overcame Marcel Proust after eating a Madeline cookie. And it's the joyful three way bike ride in Francois Truffaut's movie "Jules and Jim."

It's also not a coincidence that some of the greatest writing in the English language of the 20<sup>th</sup> century -- from James Joyce to Ernest Hemingway -- was written in Paris. The City of Lights has long been an inspiration for the world's dreamers and idealists. To know and feel the French language is to feel that creative passion within you. You don't need to travel to Paris to find that spark if you can find a piece of Paris, if not in France, wherever you can create it.

To conclude, I want to leave you with some thoughts from the great 16th century French writer Michel de Montaigne, whose father insisted he obtain one of the most unusual educations in history. From an early age, his father insisted that no one speak to young Michel in any language but Latin until he became fluent. Then they were instructed to only address him in Greek. Eventually, he got around to learning French.

Even though Montaigne claimed to be a lazy and forgetful student, years later, he admitted that the effort -- and immersion -- had been worthwhile. He wrote:

"If knowledge is to do us any good, we must not merely lodge with it, we must marry her."

My fondest hope for you and for all graduates of the Chicago Public Schools is that you keep your eyes, ears and hearts open to life ... and to fall madly in love with knowledge.

Discover what is good, what is beautiful and what brings meaning to you. Embrace it and let it shape you.

Félicitations et bonne chance.