Today seniors from Trenton Central High School West will graduate and become adult members of society. At some point they will throw their caps in the air celebrating the end of a chapter, but before that they will hear from Romario Castro.

Castro, an 18-year-old Latino who had trouble learning early on in school, is not only class valedictorian and the only graduating senior from his class to attend Princeton University, he’s also attending Princeton with a full scholarship.

A month before his high school graduation, he graduated Princeton University Preparatory Program. PUPP is an intense three-year program pursued along with three years of high school academic years. There he found that his love for math, which had been alive since he was in elementary school, was leading him to study engineering, just like his father. His father was unable to finish his degree and this has given Castro the chance to be the first in his family to become a college graduate.

“I don’t think school is overrated or corny, really. I think it pays off once you work hard for something. You need to be hungry and work with that hunger to get to places,” Castro said.

That hunger Castro speaks of has been with him for 12 years. He remembers struggling with the English language when he first started elementary school. He then became fluent in English and his native language, Spanish, allowed him to be bilingual at an early age.

“When I saw him working hard I knew that he was going to do great things. Now, he has been accepted into Princeton and in four years I have nothing but to expect amazing things from him,” Castro’s father, Carlos Castro, said.

He also remembers struggling writing the number 2 during math classes; now Castro’s strongest subject is math.

“It took me years to learn what I know today, but after seeing all the progress I can’t stop learning now. I am valedictorian, but I’m going to Princeton now … that’s another battle,” Castro said.

Today, Castro’s speech as class valedictorian will be thanks to his mother and father, who taught him how to make the right decisions; it will be thanks to his teachers, who told him to always be hungry for more and achieve his goals; and it will be thanks to his classmate Kimberly, who inspired him to do well in school like she did.

During his four years of high school, Castro saw many of his classmates give into crime and despite seeing how easy it was to make the wrong choices he managed to stay strong in his high school career.

So today, Castro will leave TCHS West with a message to his classmates that says: “Be happy we have made
it this far and don’t stop now.”