

Marquia Neal

Thomasville High School Alumni and Graduate of the CIS Teen Parent Program, **Marquia Neal**, is a success by any measure. She is studying for the LSAT, plans to attend law school, is married with two beautiful children, living in a home that they own, and plans to be a motivational speaker. But her life journey took a turn when she discovered that she would become a teen parent. With the support of her parents and the CIS Teen Parent Program, she worked hard to stay on track for high school graduation while she focused on being the best parent she could be. Nine years later, her hard work paid off.



Michele Garkusha has led the CIS Teen Parent Program since its inception 13 years ago. As a counselor, Michele helps pregnant and parenting teens navigate school, parenting, and life challenges like finding safe, affordable housing and maintaining the health of baby and the mother. Marquia is just one of Michele's success stories. Knowing how articulate and passionate Marquia is, Michele recommended that she give the keynote address at the NC Teen Parent Graduation Conference, where teen mothers from across the state celebrate their high school graduation and prepare the next step in their lives.

Marquia commented following the ceremony, "Today, I had the wonderful opportunity to be the keynote speaker at the North Carolina Teen Parent Program Graduation Conference. I congratulated the graduates and shared some words of wisdom based on my own experience. Thank you to Ms. Michele Garkusha for recommending me as the keynote for such a special occasion. I also want to thank my sister, Danielle Dow, for traveling with me and supporting me. I am so appreciative of all the help from LaShonda Crawford. Lastly, I want to give a super thank you to my awesome husband, Joshua Neal, and my parents, Renee & Raymond Dow, for always supporting me and pushing me to the next level."