

Head of School Karl Palmgren's Remarks

And what a beautiful/wonderful day that draws us together to celebrate this impressive group of young people. This is the moment when we get to wish them the best of luck while giving them a few words of advice, as some prepare to take on the mantle of leadership here at NCCS and others prepare to enter their freshman year at a new school. Either way, Class of 2023, we are just so proud of you.

You know, when I tell people I work with students in 7,8, and 9th grade their eyes widen in what I have interpreted as awe and utter dismay at the life I have chosen. "You mean you work with middle and high school kids- like the ones I see walking around in groups and never talking to one another, just on their phone with those remotey controlly earbuds in their ears? Where are the wires??? I mean, how do they work without wires?? I also heard they don't talk anymore, they just electronically text each other on these fancy applications. Oh, and those applications- always insta- chatting, posting birdy cheeps, and liking and following each other's thumbs on Facebook..." and on it goes. I try to explain to them that the kids I work with aren't like that... they wouldn't be caught dead on Facebook. What I tell people is that the kids I work with, that's you 8th graders, are a wonderful group of young people, some of the most kind, genuine and talented students you could ever meet, who are collectively wise beyond their years and will do great things with their lives. You are truly an impressive group.

Class of 2023- in considering what to say to you today, I thought back to what a dear friend and great public speaker once told me when I was trying to write my first graduation speech. He paraphrased Maya Angelou in telling me: people won't remember what you said, but instead how you made them feel; also keep it light and add some humor, throw in a quote or two and use metaphors where appropriate- and for God's sakes, don't drone on. A bullet list of tips and quotes is not only appropriate, but highly desirable and greatly appreciated." So armed with this advice I committed to keeping this to no less than 5 but no more than 10 minutes (I think I just saw a big sigh of relief from those that forgot their sunglasses and block). I then did what every commencement speaker does- I began to dig through memories of all the graduations I had been to and the inspiring messages I had heard- looking for that kernel of truth, that message to inspire, that sentence to change the arc of a life... and you know what? I couldn't remember a thing. I couldn't even remember Oprah's message, nor could I remember what she left under the graduates' chairs (don't bother looking under yours, Oprah has a bit more disposable income for things like that than I do). It looked like I was on my own, so here is what I came up with:

8th Grade, we gather today to celebrate you; to celebrate and honor your efforts in the classroom, on the field and the stage, as you stand on the threshold of high school. We celebrate your journey and growth over your past years in the Stevens building and NCCS as a whole. We celebrate where you were as you entered the Upper School, where you are at this moment, and where you are heading. In the same breath, we celebrate and honor all of those who have helped you reach this moment- your parents, your teachers, your friends, and your family. In my opening remarks back in September, when today felt like a dream that could never

possibly come true, I mentioned one of my favorite quotes, one that hung on my parents' refrigerator- Do you remember? It was by Goethe and went something like this: "Treat people as if they are who they ought to be, and you can help them become what they are capable of being". That is what your time at NCCS has been- all your supporters, especially your teachers, have treated you based on the potential they saw. That doesn't mean things were always rosy; striving to reach one's full potential is a steep and arduous climb. Those assignments that seemed impossible, those projects that had 5 pages of directions and a rubric that looked like a schematic for a moon launch, those grades that couldn't have been correct, those superhuman feats that you were asked to do in the classroom, on the fields and on the stage- all of this was based on a deep faith in who you were and who you could become as learners, athletes, and artists. To use a Mount Everest metaphor, we have taken you to the Hillary step you have acclimated to the altitude- and we leave you here for the next assault on the mountain- we have given you the equipment: the cramp-ons, the oxygen tank, the ice ax, the pitons and ropes. We have tremendous faith in you to summit this next peak; to go forth and do great things in the next four years and beyond.

Sticking with my friend's formula, let's do another metaphor: As we are on the cusp of summer vacation and some of us will be traveling, how about plane?

Okay, so here it goes:

Class of 2023, remember that we can get wrapped up in moments like today, the big celebrations and parties, but be careful not to put too much stock in them. Ceremonies like these are simply a way to mark and measure an accumulation of decisions and experiences over time. What is most important is how you conduct yourself in those little moments, those daily decisions and choices you make. Understand that you are continuing to evolve, to shape and reshape yourself into whom you would like to be. Know that you are unfinished and no one but you have the power to define who you will be in the future. Your actions each day have a compound effect, much like a gentle breeze coming from the side of a plane. In one instance, the impact is undetectable, but over time, it will change the plane's course and final destination, so pay attention to those little acts each day, they determine where you land and ultimately they will make you who you are- it's the preponderance of small things.

Each and everyone of you faced significant obstacles this year which you took on with the strength and resilience of a Greek hero; some ended in triumph while others in defeat. Take that experience with you to high school and beyond; there will be many more victories in front of you that will need to be met with humbleness and recognition of those who helped secure the win and many failures that will tax your resilience and call upon your strength and perseverance. We watch you now as you reach speed rumbling down the runway and begin to lift off the tarmac, confident in your ability to fly in both the stormy skies and beautiful weather. I know right now and in the next few months you will be awash in a mix of emotions: joy, excitement, sadness, fear, awe: you will feel them all. Don't be surprised if some time soon, maybe next week or maybe as you walk into school on the first day in September, fear rushes upon you and feels crippling, like a ferocious head-wind stopping you in your tracks. When this happens, remember that planes must point into the wind at take-off to create lift. So when fear hits- fire up

your engines to full throttle and rumble down that runway with determination, courage and bravery, quickly you will find yourself gaining altitude and when you have conquered that fear and have reached your cruising altitude of 30 thousand feet, be sure to bank hard and make that head-wind into your tail-wind.

We seem to be running a bit long so I will jump to the recommended bullet point part of the program

Bullet Number 1

I want to stick with the courage and bravery thing for a minute. We teach a lot of skills here at school and also ask you to be brave and courageous in taking risks. I have seen this many times, whether it be in asking a question during class, reaching out to someone for help, stepping in and playing a new position when you are needed in a pinch, or pursuing something you know will be difficult- your courage and bravery on display daily. Don't lose that courage next year. Skill and knowledge without courage is like a car without gas- it won't go anywhere. You can come to a conclusion as to the next best step about a very difficult decision, but without courage, without that gas, you will be stuck. Winston Churchill says it best: "Courage is rightly esteemed as the first of all human qualities because as has been said, it is the quality which guarantees all others" and that is why courage is one of our 4 core values here at NCCS. Class of 2023, go bravely into your high school career and you are sure to find growth and success.

Bullet #2

Be careful of expectations that you set for others, and even more importantly, be careful of ones you set for yourself. Many may set expectations of what secondary schools or colleges are acceptable. Along with that are expectations of what classes you have to take, what grades you have to get, what test scores you must achieve to get into that school. Expectations like these rarely leave room for the wonder and magic of exploration and the unknown, doing something simply for the sake of doing it. That is what the next four, and I would argue, the next 8 years of your academic career should be about- exploring and embracing all the possibilities that sit in front of you at this moment and beyond.

The third and final bullet: Be a good listener.

You tell people they matter when you listen. People who feel they matter do courageous things that matter. Being listened to feels like: respect, appreciation, affirmation, and being valued for who you are. You have the power to change people and make this world better through the simple art of good listening. I know who would love to be the recipient of your good listening skills- those parents sitting out there that have invested so much in you to get you to this exact moment. Like I said earlier, in the victories, like this recognition ceremony, do not forget to acknowledge those who have helped you get here. Let's have a round of applause for the parents and supporters of this fine class.

Well that's the third bullet and etiquette would dictate I don't go beyond the three I mentioned. So with that I say congratulations to our eight grade class, I thank all the parents and families for your partnership this year. I wish you all the restful days and slower pace of a well-deserved summer break. Thank you.