

Romina Sahafi

## Honors Assembly Speech

Good morning to all students, faculty, and parents. When I first heard that I was chosen to deliver a speech during the honors assembly, I was ecstatic to have the opportunity to share my experiences throughout high school with those who are in the thick of their first year, or those who are simply over it already. I was told of the topic, “academic excellence vs. effortless perfection” and in my original speech, I spent a full page summarizing an episode of Netflix’s “Arrested Development” in order to make a comparison to the theme, and although I originally thought it was great, I spent a lot of time thinking over my choice and ultimately decided that I wanted to share some personal stories about my own growth when it came to understanding the flaws with perfection.

The part of this topic that hit a little too close to home for me is the “excellence versus perfection” aspect. I had always thought the two were basically interchangeable when it came to academics, and it is only recently, as recent as when I started writing this speech, that I realized how crucial it is to understand the difference between the two. When I was in biology my freshman year, I made it my goal to keep my grade consistent at the percentage I wanted. As my grades increased from tests and homework assignments, I grew increasingly more obsessed with continuously raising it. I would spend hours making flashcards, and then I would spend hours studying them: making little piles of four and memorizing them on the floor to force myself to not fall asleep. I remember wanting to fall asleep, but taking naps in the middle of the living room and on the floor so as to not risk sleeping through the whole night when I hadn’t finished studying yet. I’d then wake up again at 4 AM the next morning to continue studying my flashcards. To put this into perspective now, I cannot even wake up to my three alarms around 7

AM and very consistently take two to three hour naps during the week. Whatever new grade I got would become my norm, and if I did not match or exceed it, I felt as if I wasn't good enough. I struggled with this problem all throughout high school, thinking that if I wasn't at the top of my game 24/7, then I wasn't smart enough or that I was "losing the smart". I distinctly remember crying on the ride home from school when I did not get 100% on my last biology quiz of freshman year. I can now proudly say that this was one of the most pathetic reactions in my life, but to freshman me, it seemed like a logical conclusion: I didn't get 100%, so I was not as smart as I was before.

With this mentality still in place up until senior year, I started to burn out. I would often begin what's referred to with babies as "reverse cycling", where I would sleep from four or five PM until eleven or twelve, and then stay up until school started doing homework and studying. I was so exhausted from overloading myself that my naps just became what normal people call a night's cycle of sleep. The college process did not help with my grade perfection obsession either, as I would often say to myself "the only thing I have going for me is my grades". I felt confident I was going to get into my top school, and when I finally got my admission results letter, I had to read it a few times to see the word "deferred". I pondered over what else I could have done to get it as I drank my sympathy boba and watched four hours of "King of the Hill", not what you would call a great Monday evening. It was from that point on that the realization began to dawn on me that my obsession with obtaining perfect grades did not suddenly transfer into "I'm worth something", especially to a college. Grades don't make a person, and I'm at least thankful that I began to realize this before I left high school, as I would often stress out about what I am going to do when I will no longer be tested or given grades after graduate school, because I legitimately thought "how will I know if I am good enough if I'm not graded on a scale

on A-F?”. Most of my college applications reflected this ideology, and I spent hours receiving feedback and tweaking them until I thought they were perfect. However, the only application I felt good about was the one I started and finished within a day and spent absolutely no time reviewing, as I talked about how much Red Dead Redemption 2 I’d played over the past few weeks and how many times I’ve watched “The Office” instead of what summer programs I went to and why I’m interested in a particular major. For the first time, I wasn’t focused on it being perfect and creating a perfect image of myself; I just wanted it to reflect who I actually was.

To be honest, I’ve never told any of my family or friends these insecurities of mine before, so I guess in the process of writing this speech I thought “why don’t I tell the entire high school instead”. I know a lot of you might be thinking “I’m going try to be perfect anyway’, and to be honest, I don’t blame you, because even six months ago I would have been thinking the same exact thing. By allowing my vulnerability, I hope to help those of you that are going through this process of determining your worth and severing its connection to your grades. I just want to get across the point that all of you are enough. One bad grade does not determine your self worth, and neither does only getting good grades. Be proud of your achievements, because any accomplishment is a sign that you put in effort into trying.

I believe that no one sums it up better than one of the most influential artists of our time, Hannah Montana, and I quote, “Nobody's perfect, you live and you learn it, 'Cause everybody makes mistakes, Nobody's perfect”.