

## Huntington High School's 158<sup>th</sup> Commencement

### Salutatorian Ryan Hoffmann's Address

Thank you Katie and good evening everyone. Thank you all for coming out tonight to show your love and support for all of the graduates here. Before I begin, I'd like to thank most importantly my mom and dad, but also the remainder of my family and friends (specifically the founding fathers and my math squad), as well as Mr. Polansky, Mr. Cusack, Mr. Smith, Dr. Lora, Mrs. Hebert, members of the Board of Education, Mr. Caleca, Mr. Wilson, Mr. Gilmor and all of the administration and faculty that have allowed any of us to be here tonight celebrating 13 years' worth of accomplishments. Without any and all of you, this evening would not be the same.

When brainstorming ideas to include in my address to you all tonight, I hit a writer's block as I often do when writing school papers. I went idealess for weeks, and then I began to question myself and this speech. Why am I even speaking at graduation? Do I *have* to? What sets me apart from everyone else?

The answer to the lattermost question, I came to realize, is nothing of significance. I had good grades, but what importance will that have in 5, 10, 20, even just one year from now after we all go our separate ways? Absolutely nothing! Tonight of all nights is the night that we realize that we are one class rather than many individuals, that we are all equal to each other, and the differences we have among us are nonsense in the long run. Race, religion, heritage, financial status and anything in between, none of that can separate us in

anyone's eyes here in Blue Devil Stadium. We have all vanquished the beast known as high school together, and today we claim our treasure: our diplomas.

There are three things that I hope we all remember as we leave our home and venture into a new future.

Number one is, again, that we all share a common history, a common home in Huntington High School, and most importantly, a common family in each other. I have no doubt in my mind that many of us will drift apart from each other, and that's okay! As we continue to grow and evolve we change and new doors open in all facets of life while other doors close. That being said, I hope we all keep in touch with at least one person from high school as we take the next steps into life and venture forth into the exciting world of adulthood.

Number two is to remember what got us to this point. For many, if not all, of us that was hard work and dedication, otherwise known as blood, sweat, and tears. I can't count how many sleepless nights I've had, how many parties and social events I've had to miss, and how many panic attacks I've had trying to get essays and projects started (and finished) that were due the next day. Remember the stress you've felt getting through middle school and high school and use that stress to start anew, to become a better version of yourself, and to continue to work hard to get as far as you can in the next stage of your life, whatever it may be.

Number three is to remember to have fun. Part of what gave me the drive to work hard enough to be given the honor of addressing you all now is how much fun I have when I'm learning and how I always want to learn more (as well as making sure to have fun on the side). I will say that even though I've enjoyed

school, I don't think I would have gotten through these past 4 years without saying 9 plus 10 equals 21 as many times as I did, or saying "that again" when someone tells me to say that again. For others what you find as fun may not be the same as me, but each and every one of us finds fun in something. You may love cooking, or singing, or being a singer who cooks. Turn what you love into something bigger in your life. So what if you can't make a career out of it? Find something else you enjoy nearly as much, do that, and do what you love on the side. What's the point in life if you don't have a little fun?

Before I leave you all, I'd like to recall upon something I read on Reddit earlier this month, which said: "if you subtract 18 years from your age, you basically get your age in "adult years". Even if you're not where you want to be at, let's say, age 30, you're only a 12-year-old adult. You still have plenty of time." That's so true for all of us. We're all babies essentially entering the world again, just as new and scary of a world as was the world we were born into. We thrived in one world, and we can thrive in another.

Thank you all for listening, and congratulations to my fellow members of the class of 2019!

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### **Valedictorian Hadley Clayton's Address**

Thank you Erika. Can you tell she's known me too long? Before I begin I'd like to take this time to give a mini tribute to someone who should be here today with us, but sadly was taken from all of us on October 31, 2016 at the age of 15. Thank you Eli Molineux for always having a smile, laugh and joke of the day for everyone around you. I personally never had the opportunity to become especially close to Eli, but he was a force for positivity and he will remain in all of our hearts as we go on and take our steps toward the future.

I'd also like to thank several other people here today. Thank you Superintendent Jim Polansky for delivering the heavily awaited snow day phone calls, even though there wasn't one this year. Thank you Principal Cusack for coming up with a bright and unique text of the day every morning. Thank you to the Board of Education for smoothing out the bumps in the plans for our school district. Thank you to all the teachers and faculty for assigning work even when you are absent. Thank you coaches for keeping our head in the game, or in my case race. Thank you to the deans and security guards for keeping our school safe. Thank you to all the parents and family members here today who have been our driving wallets since day one. In all seriousness, on behalf of all the graduates and I, thank you all for your guiding role in our path to success.

While writing this speech I figured I had to be somewhat inspirational, so I tried and tried to come up with something I could tell you all, some profound piece

of advice you all should listen to. I came up blank. So here's what not to do with the rest of your life instead:

1. Don't let opportunities pass you by. As my dad would always say "When preparation meets opportunity that is the definition of good luck." However opportunity won't wait for us. Seize the chances when you get them, as you may regret it later if you don't. You never know how much one internship or travel venture can change your life.
2. Don't settle. If you are good you can be great, if you are great you can be exceptional. Celebrate successes, you deserve each and every one, but a goal is not an end point, it's a launch point. Big or small, the most significant personal growth comes from pushing beyond prescribed limitations. Don't let anyone tell you that you can't do something, not even yourself. Excuses may make us feel better in the short run, but in the long run they are one of the greatest hindrances of progress.
3. Don't procrastinate too much. I would say don't procrastinate at all, but honestly that's asking a bit much, especially from this class, who is said to "put the pro in procrastination" (direct quote from the scholar Erika Varady). I myself am guilty of it, having turned in this speech late. All joking aside, we owe it to ourselves to give each task the importance it deserves. The future is bright for those who actively work for it, we officially aren't in high school, slacking will only get you so far, and as I previously said; you don't want to have to settle.
4. Don't lock your keys in your car, I speak from experience here, in case you all were wondering common sense does not in fact come with the book smarts, exhibit A: me. I once looked around the entire school for a pair of glasses that were in my bag the whole time. I push doors when they say pull. What I'm trying to say is that we all act dumb, we all forget things and lose all common

sense sometimes. So laugh it off and make a good story out of it, life goes a lot more smoothly with a sense of humor and the ability to laugh at yourself.

To the graduates: We have reached the finish line of one race, yet at the same time are right back at the beginning of another. How fitting that we are on a track for it. So celebrate! Bask in a job well done, be proud of every little accomplishment.... And then get into gear for your next race, whether that be college, trade school, the workforce, the military, and anything in between.

Remember that a little pressure is normal, but don't let it pile on. This is something I've personally always struggled with, as my parents, coaches, and many teachers could probably tell you. Running has been my outlet for when the stress and tension builds up too high and when my standards for myself seem so incredibly out of reach. Another saving grace has been my cross country coach, Coach Vogelsang, with a reality check, a funny anecdote, and a quote to place in my shoe during the race. Now unless you were on cross country you are probably wondering what I mean by that last one, so let me give a little background. Before a race the team would gather into a huddle at the starting line. We would each be handed a tiny slip of paper about the size of a large paper clip, with a motivational quote to get us through the race. We would fold up that tiny piece of paper, tuck it into our shoe and whenever the race felt too hard whenever we felt like giving up or giving in, we'd have that piece of coach V there with us, pushing us through it.

So, even though I don't have a tiny paper for all of you, as my coach did for me, here is one last quote to tuck into your shoe on the way out, knowing that you'll have a piece of Huntington high school with you wherever you go: *"Good, better, best. Never let it rest. 'Til your good is better and your better is best."*

Thank you everyone, Congrats class of 2019 and can I just say Ladies and Gentlemen.... We got em! (Bows)

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## **School Board President Jennifer Hebert's Address**

Thank you so much, Arielle for that lovely introduction.

When I first became president of the board of education, there were many aspects of the job that made me nervous. But none more than this one right here.

Of course, the idea of giving a speech to such a large audience and on such an important occasion, was definitely part of it. But greater than the conventional fear of public speaking was the anxiety of knowing I am expected to impart to you, our fine graduates, some sparkling words of wisdom, a lesson to take with you into your future that will somehow make your path clearer.

As soon as I became board president, I started thinking of what I should say. And for the longest time, nothing came to me. I waited for the lightning bolt and I got nothing. Then I realized, like most things in life, I was overthinking it. So here is my one piece of advice to you as you travel the road of your future.

Persevere.

It seems simple enough, right? Like the rally cry of all those fish at the end of "Finding Nemo", "Just keep swimming!" But it really does come down to that.

Success and perseverance go hand in hand. Show me a person who has reached



great heights in their field, who has achieved something remarkable or made notable contributions and I would bet money that their story involves failures, missteps and a lot of picking themselves up, dusting themselves off and trying again. It is the single most important behavior you can learn, as you set out to make your way in life. And the one quality that all successful people share. Learn to persevere.

Winston Churchill was known to say “When you're going through hell, keep going”. Every one of us, no matter how blessed, how loved, how successful, how prepared we are, we're going to find ourselves one day, feeling as though we're going through hell. When that day comes, keep calm and keep going. You have everything you need inside of you to come out the other side.

And please remember this, you are not defined by your mistakes or your failures. There is not a soul on this earth who hasn't failed miserably at some time in their life. A true measure of who you are is not in your ability to avoid all mistakes and failures, it's in how you respond to those missteps.

So in sum, my advice to you is this - be true to yourself, trust your instincts, rely on family and those true friends you can trust. And when times get tough, just keep swimming.

On behalf of myself and the entire board of education, I wish the Huntington Class of 2019 congratulations and the best of luck.

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### **Superintendent James W. Polansky's Address**

Good evening and welcome parents, family members, friends, staff, Board of Education, and most importantly, our soon-to-be graduates.

We gather here in this beautiful stadium to celebrate as many as 13 years or approximately 2,340 days that members of this group have accomplished as Huntington School District students. In brief, these young people have learned from their experiences and should stand proud of what they have contributed to the school community.

When crafting a commencement message each year, I start by considering a theme that may help make a message stick for more than ten minutes beyond the ceremony. As I played with ideas, I kept circling back to one that seemed central and one just cited – TIME.

Time. Something no one can control. Sometimes it is a friend and sometimes it isn't. Graduating seniors, it may seem like it took forever for you to reach this day. I can assure you, however, that life's pace will surely appear to pick up from this moment forward. I remember sitting where you are 36 years ago today. No need to do the math.

Right now, your mind may be attempting to move this ceremony forward a bit more quickly so that you can truly begin your celebrations and enjoy your newfound autonomy as high school graduates. Parents, you too may be thinking the same regarding your freedom from high school student parenting. I know my parents felt that way 36 years ago – in fact, they gave me a set of luggage as a graduation gift.

Some of you may choose to cram things in as you enter the next stages of your lives. Upon graduating high school, I know I did in terms of both course load and work schedule. When asked why, my answer ... no time wasted.

You may recall (hopefully) a formula that Ms. Paziienza, Ms. Burns or Ms. Saggese has shared with you in recent years: distance = rate x time. If a car is traveling at exactly 55 mph for two hours, it has traveled a distance of 110 miles. But what does this mean in tonight's context?

Distance is how far your goals will take you. Rate is the speed at which you accomplish your goals. Time, however, is the slippery one, because we never truly know how much of it there is. We want to accomplish as much as possible in the time with which we have been blessed.

Whether you are college-bound, joining the military or entering the workforce, please ask yourselves what you'd like to accomplish in the time available to you and how will you make a difference. No one can answer those questions for you. Choose a road, determine your speed and deal with the potholes.

I also ask you to consider who will travel with you. Please keep in mind that our lives are not about just us, but with whom we share them. Life is about the relationships we build; they give our lives meaning.

American labor leader Cesar Chavez said it eloquently, “We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community ... our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sakes and for our own.”

Let me leave the Class of 2019 with a last set of homework tasks. This will make up for one of those no-homework nights ...

1. *Use your time wisely.* Time is a gift. Don't waste it on anger or frustration; life is too short to hold grudges. Take the time to work and play hard. Use time to make a difference in your life and the lives of others. Journalist Dan Harris in his 2014 best-seller suggested, “Make the present moment your friend rather than your enemy. Because many people live habitually as if the present moment were an obstacle that they need to overcome in order to get to the next moment. Imagine living your whole life like that, where the current moment is never quite right, not good enough because you need to get to the next one. That is continuous stress.”
2. *Keep Learning.* I've always believed the end goal of education is to prepare us to analyze a situation and make an informed decision. Decision-making today is often dichotomized. Two choices – whether it be joining a political party or pro- /anti- an issue. There is often no allowance for a gray area, little room for genuine thinking on any subject. Please don't perpetuate a dichotomous approach to life. I implore all of you to keep reading, evaluating and thinking. Over time, you will learn that once you remove the emotion and drama, little of what you see and read on social media is actually true.

3. *Work hard.* The world owes you nothing. Very little is accomplished without shedding blood, sweat, and tears.
  
4. *Build and maintain positive relationships.* An old English proverb states, “He that lieth down with dogs shall rise up with fleas.”  
Coming from a lover of dogs, I’ll mention that the quote is metaphorical in nature. Its meaning is almost universally accepted as ... be cautious of the company you keep; choose your friends wisely.

Best-selling author Harvey Mackay wrote, “Life is too short to wake up with regrets. So love the people who treat you right. Forget about the ones who don’t. Believe everything happens for a reason. If you get a chance, take it and if it changes your life, let it. Nobody said it'd be easy, they just promised it would be worth it.”

You, members of the Class of 2019, should recognize the significance of the present moment in your lives and how we, as your educators, value sharing this moment and have valued sharing each moment you’ve spent in Huntington schools, with you.

Congratulations to you all! It has been a pleasure to serve as your superintendent. May your time to come be filled with health, happiness, continued learning and good fortune.

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### **Principal Brenden Cusack's Address**

Good evening parents, guests, faculty, members of the board of education, central administration and most important, the graduating class of 2019.

I'd like to begin with a simple question for our soon to be graduates that is actually not so simple. Who are you? How are you different from others and from your prior self, four years ago? How have you changed? How will you change four years from now? Or 8 or 16 or 24 years from now? Who will you be? Will you have the same interests and beliefs then as you do now? Will you question your own beliefs as you proceed into the future and incorporate new ideas into your worldview, or will you always remain the same?

On an important day like today, a lot of big questions like these may come to mind. Many of them are hard to answer, and some of them may not have an answer at all. Over your time here at Huntington High School, you have had a lot of people working to teach you all the things we think you need to know before you leave. Many of us at school, and your parents, guardians, family members and friends have tried to shape you over these years. Now that you are about to leave, I ask you to think about that big question, and to decide for yourself who you really are. Because despite the fact that you will still have people in your life who will help to guide you, ultimately, you must decide on your own who you are and who you will choose to be. Again, this is no simple thing to decide, and there may be many different parts to the question, but some of us travel along never actually asking ourselves for this important self-definition that consists of the things we think, feel, say and do each day. It is an important, guiding question to ask yourself from time to time. Who am I? Is what I'm doing right now in alignment

with who I am or who I'm striving to be? And if not, should I work to change my direction so that it is?

You will find that, even as you work to define who you are and what you stand for, there will be people and situations to challenge the very definition you have of yourself. From time to time, your sense of self will be questioned. But the things you do and say matter, and they define who you are much more clearly than the opinions of others.

While the actions you've taken in the past indeed help to shape your future, it is also important to remember that the past is the past. Who you are and who you choose to be will always be one step beyond where you are at this moment. You have the ability to move forward one step at a time to continuously shape who you are, in your words and in your deeds. It is always within your power to decide what you are all about, and to answer the ultimate question, "Who are you?"

Class of 2019, may you be blessed as you go forth and comforted in the knowledge that whoever you are, and whoever you might become, you will always be Blue Devils. Our school and your class will always be a part of who you are and we will not forget you as you go. I know that you will continue to make us proud and that you will always, always bELieve.

Thank you and congratulations!