

Huntington High School's 151st Commencement

Haley Brown's Introduction of Principal Dr. Carmela Leonardi

Hello, as many of the seniors know there is a dress code in the high school. On May 31st I was called down to the main office and I thought to myself "here we go again." However, as I was walking to the main office, I saw Dr Leonardi in the hallway. As I approached her I started to pull my shorts down further. She greeted me with her usual warm hello and she told me she wanted to talk to me. After the warm welcoming, I knew this wasn't about the dress code. Instead, she asked me if I would introduce her at graduation. I was so honored that the rest of the day I walked around with an enormous smile on my face and told all of my friends that I was making a speech at graduation. Then it hit me: **I have to make a speech at graduation!**

I knew Dr. Leonardi only as our tiny principal. But then again, being a height of 5'9, anyone is small next to me. Nevertheless, don't let her size fool you. Her accomplishments exceed her height and what I have come to learn about her is remarkable. How was I ever going to speak about all of her accomplishments??!! For instance, she was born in Puglie, Southern Italy! At age five she wanted to become a teacher, which is certainly different from me because I wanted to become a princess. Dr. Leonardi came to America when she was 16 years old with only her sister to accompany her. I can say that "she came to America with a dream" and she has surpassed it by becoming a principal with a PhD in reading and

cognition. She felt that education is so crucial in a child's life and that the greatest minds should be teachers.

Dr. Leonardi's first job was teaching pre-K. She described this experience as "crazy" but worth the challenge. A little while after, Dr. Leonardi tried out teaching the older grades before realizing she wanted to fill a bigger role in the schools. She became the principal of Huntington Intermediate, or Jack Abrams as most people know it today, and there she felt like home. During her leadership at this school, Huntington Intermediate earned a New York Excellence in Education Award. This award gives a special recognition to schools that do an outstanding job training their staff members through the use of professional education and learning programs. When she was asked to become the principal of Huntington High School, the thought of leaving was devastating. But she knew that she could make the best out of any situation and make Huntington High her new "home." And in 2001, she did just that. Dr. Leonardi finally achieved her dream, however she did not stop there. She knew this job could help answer her many questions. Such as "How do students learn best?" and "How can I help the students achieve their full potential?"

She came to America speaking Italian, or as they say in my family "the language of the Angels". She also speaks English and Spanish among others. She supported the refinement and expansion of English as a Second Language and Spanish Bilingual courses. She is always looking for ways to challenge students in their studies. For instance, the number of AP level courses, as well as the scoring of 3 and above on the AP tests, has also increased under her administration. She looks for ways to "show off the high

school.” One of her most recent ideas was to hold tours of the high school for parents of upcoming freshman. She asked students currently attending the high school to give the tours because she felt the parents would want the student’s perspective. I was one of the lucky few to be chosen, and it was a wonderful experience. Before the tours began, she gave a brief speech about what is offered at Huntington High. And you could tell by her enthusiasm that she is so proud of every student and staff member here. She loves having the opportunity of seeing her students grow up and watching what path they choose for their future.

As I have come to realize, Dr. Leonardi is our own personal super woman. She wants students to take advantage, never lose interest and be open to new ideas; and realize that people become “richer in life” with an open mind. I don’t know about you, but I strongly believe that Dr. Leonardi is a person that every school needs and we are lucky enough to have her in the flesh. I will greatly miss such an inspiring leader and role model. I am extremely glad to have had the pleasure of getting to know our “super woman” and not just see her as our tiny principal. Here is no other than Dr. Leonardi herself.