

GRADUATION SPEECH: CLASS OF 2011

GOOD EVENING.

ON BEHALF OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION AND ALL THE TEACHERS AND STAFF OF THE ST. MARY'S COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM, I WANT TO WELCOME EACH ONE OF YOU TO THIS VERY SPECIAL EVENT AS WE CONGRATULATE OUR GRADUATES.

TONIGHT, WE ARE GATHERED TO CELEBRATE THIS MOST IMPORTANT MILESTONE IN YOUR LIFE--- YOUR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION.

TWO WEEKS AGO, THE WASHINGTON POST PUBLISHED IT'S LIST OF THE TOP HIGH SCHOOLS IN THE NATION. OUT OF 27,468 HIGH SCHOOLS IN AMERICA, ALL THREE OF OUR COUNTY PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS WERE LISTED IN THE TOP 1500 or THE TOP 5% OF ALL THE HIGH SCHOOLS IN AMERICA AND THIS IS ATTRIBUTED TO YOUR ACADEMIC SUCCESS AND THE RIGOROUS COURSES OF STUDIES THAT YOU HAVE UNDERTAKEN.

(Leonardtwn is #699 placing it in the top 2.5%, Chopticon is #847 placing it in the top 3.0% and Great Mills is #1497 placing it in the top 5.0%)

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR ENTIRE SCHOOL SYSTEM COMMUNITY FOR THIS IS AN INCREDIBLE ACCOMPLISHMENT.

BY THE END OF THE WEEK, WE WILL HAVE GRADUATED OVER 1,100 STUDENTS FROM THE ST. MARY'S COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM. THAT IS SOMETHING TO BE PROUD OF CONSIDERING OUR PRIMARY GOAL AS A SCHOOL SYSTEM IS TO ENSURE THAT EVERY CHILD IS COLLEGE AND CAREER READY SO HE/SHE CAN BE PRODUCTIVE CITIZENS. HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION IS THE STARTING LINE IN LIFE NOT THE FINISH LINE AND ALL OF YOU HAVE A GREAT HEAD START.

TO THE CLASS OF 2011, I SAY CONGRATULATIONS AND FROM MY VANTAGE POINT YOU LOOK MARVELOUS! WE ARE SO PROUD OF YOU.

I WANT EVERYONE TO TAKE NOTE OF THE SYMBOLISM OF HOW WE HAVE PLACED OUR STUDENTS IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROOM SURROUNDED BY A PROTECTIVE INNER BAND OF THEIR TEACHERS AND STAFF MEMBERS AND BY A PROTECTIVE OUTER BAND OF THEIR PARENTS, FAMILY MEMBERS, COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS. THEY ARE AT THE CENTER OF OUR THOUGHTS AND FOCUS TONIGHT.

TONIGHT IS A VERY SPECIAL NIGHT FOR EVERY PARENT AND GUARDIAN GATHERED IN THIS AUDIENCE. IT IS NO SECRET THAT THIS YEAR, FOR ME, IT IS AN EXTRA SPECIAL GRADUATION SEASON BECAUSE THIS YEAR I AM A FATHER OF A GRADUATING SENIOR AS WELL. I SPEAK WITH GREAT AUTHORITY WHEN I SAY THAT OUR SCHOOL SYSTEM IS ONE OF THE FINEST IN THE NATION BECAUSE I SEE IT FROM THE VANTAGE POINT OF A PARENT AS WELL AS THE VANTAGE POINT OF A SUPERINTENDENT.

SO TONIGHT, I WANT TO SPEAK TO YOU AS A DAD WHO JUST HAPPENS TO BE THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS.

FIRST, I WANT TO SPEAK TO EVERY PARENT AND GUARDIAN IN THIS ASSEMBLY AND TAKE YOU BACK ON A GUIDED IMAGINARY JOURNEY THAT BEGAN WITH THESE BEAUTIFUL YOUNG PEOPLE SITTING BEFORE ME. LET'S GO BACK TO SOMEWHERE IN TIME TO THE YEARS OF 1992 AND 1993. FOR THE MOST PART, THIS IS THE TIME WHEN ALL OF OUR GRADUATING CHILDREN WERE BORN. LET'S GO BACK TO THE SPECIFIC MOMENT IN TIME WHEN EACH ONE OF THESE WONDERFUL YOUNG PEOPLE WERE BORN OR ENTERED OUR LIVES. MAYBE EACH MOM DOES NOT WANT TO REMEMBER THIS EVENT BECAUSE OF THE PAIN ASSOCIATED WITH THE DELIVERY PROCESS, BUT LET'S MOVE BEYOND THAT

NOW. LET'S THINK ABOUT AFTER THE DELIVERY OR IF YOUR CHILD WAS ADOPTED OR WAS FROM FOSTER CARE, LET'S THINK ABOUT THE FIRST TIME YOU SAW YOUR CHILD. I REMEMBER IT VIVIDLY. I REMEMBER SITTING WITH MY WIFE AS SHE HELD OUR INFANT SON. AS YOUNG PARENTS WE JUST STARED AT OUR NEWBORN BABY, WE INSPECTED HIM FROM HEAD TO TOE AND LOOKED FOR IDENTIFYING FEATURES THAT MADE HIM OURS. WE COMPARED OUR OWN BABY PICTURES TO HIM AND WE COMPETED WITH EACH OTHER TO SAY HE LOOKS JUST LIKE ME UNTIL MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITE FAMILY CAME TO VISIT AND HE WAS SAID TO LOOK JUST LIKE THEM. IT WAS A REMARKABLY LOVING MOMENT THAT IS FOREVER ETCHED IN MY BRAIN.

THE FRENCH HAVE COINED A TERM ENTITLED "EN FACIE." IT IS THAT SPECIAL TIME OF BONDING WHEN THE MOTHER AND CHILD ARE FACE TO FACE AND THEY ARE LOOKING DIRECTLY INTO EACH OTHERS EYES AS IF TO SAY "I LOVE YOU AND I WILL PROTECT YOU." YOU KNOW IT WHEN YOU SEE IT. MANY OF YOUR EARLY PHOTOGRAPHS ACTUALLY SHOW A MOTHER AND A FATHER HOLDING THEIR CHILD IN A WAY WHERE THEY ARE GAZING INTO THE CHILDS EYES. THIS PARENT AND CHILD UNION IS AMAZING AND THERE IS SO MUCH LOVE POURING FROM THE ENTIRE INTERACTION. YOU KNOW THAT AN EMOTIONAL CONNECTION, BASED

ON LOVE, IS FORMING. IT IS A POWERFUL MOMENT AS IF TO SAY YOUR WHOLE LIFE IS IN FRONT OF YOU AND WE ARE HERE TO GUIDE YOU THROUGH LIFE.

AS A FATHER MYSELF AND LIKE ALL THE MOTHERS AND FATHERS HERE TONIGHT....I SPEAK FROM THE HEART WHEN I SAY THAT WE LOVE EACH AND EVERY ONE OF YOU AND WE ARE ALWAYS GOING TO BE HERE FOR YOU. YOU ARE OUR CHILDREN AND WE LOVE YOU DEARLY.

ALL OF US HAVE HAD THE HONOR AND PRIVILEGE TO WATCH YOU GROW UP WE HAVE BEEN WITNESS TO YOUR AMAZING LIFE AND ACADEMIC CAREER.

YOU HAVE IMPRESSED US BEYOND BELIEF.

YOU HAVE WOWED US WITH YOUR BRILLIANCE AND YOUR CREATIVITY BOTH IN AND OUT OF THE CLASSROOM.

YOU HAVE OVERCOME ADVERSITY AND CHALLENGES TO ENSURE THAT YOU ACHIEVED YOUR GOALS.

YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED TRIUMPHS AND TRAGEDIES BUT YET

YOU HAVE ALWAYS DEMONSTRATED RESILENCY, RESPECT, TOLERANCE, TRUSTWORTHINESS,

HONESTY, INTEGRITY, UNDERSTANDING,
GENEROSITY AND SERVICE TO OTHERS, TIME AND
TIME AGAIN, AS THIS HAS DEFINED YOUR
CHARACTER.

MANY OF YOU WILL BE ATTENDING VARIOUS TWO-
YEAR AND FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES AND THE LISTS OF
COLLEGES THAT YOU WILL BE ATTENDING IS
IMPRESSIVE.

OTHERS WILL BE SEEKING EMPLOYMENT
OPPORTUNITIES AND MAKING IMMEDIATE
CONTRIBUTIONS TO OUR COMMUNITY

AND

OTHERS WILL BE HEADING OFF TO THE MILITARY
AND MILITARY SERVICE ACADEMIES AND PROUDLY
SERVING OUR COUNTRY AND FOR THAT WE SALUTE
YOU.

ALL OF YOU HAVE PERSERVERED AND ACHIEVED
YOUR GOALS. YOU ARE A VERY SPECIAL GROUP OF
STUDENTS AND WE, THE ENTIRE ST. MARY'S
COUNTY COMMUNITY, CELEBRATE WITH YOU.

THE BOTTOM LINE IS YOU HAVE MADE US VERY
PROUD.

I DO NOT KNOW WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS, BUT I KNOW THAT YOU HOLD THE FUTURE AND I FEEL VERY SECURE AND HAPPY KNOWING THAT OUR FUTURE WILL BE ENTRUSTED TO YOU.

PERSONALLY, I AM A BETTER PERSON FOR HAVING HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO KNOW EACH AND EVERY ONE OF YOU AND I HAVE KNOWN MANY OF YOU SINCE YOU WERE IN 7TH GRADE AND NOW YOU ARE ALL GROWN UP AND WITH THAT COMES MUCH RESPONSIBILITY.

DURING THIS TIME, MANY PEOPLE WILL BE GIVING YOU WORDS OF ADVICE AND I TOO WANT TO DO THE SAME.

AS A DAD, I USE SEVERAL PEARLS OF FATHERLY WISDOM TO GUIDE MY CHILDREN AND NOW I WANT TO SHARE MY PERSONAL GUIDING TENETS WITH YOU. I WANT YOU TO THINK ABOUT THESE WORDS AS YOU VENTURE OUT INTO THE WORLD ON YOUR OWN.

1. REMEMBER, TO WHOM MUCH IS GIVEN MUCH IS EXPECTED.
2. PUNCTUATE YOUR WORK WITH EXCELLENCE.
3. ALWAYS DO MORE THAN IS EXPECTED.

4. PARALYZE RESISTANCE WITH PERSISTANCE.

5. PLAY FAIR, WORK HARD, BE NICE, DON'T HIT PEOPLE AND DON'T DRINK OR TEXT WHILE DRIVING.

6. ALWAYS CLEAN UP YOUR OWN MESS AND LEAVE THINGS A LITTLE BETTER THAN YOU FOUND IT....ESPECIALLY YOUR BEDROOM.

7. REMEMBER THAT CHARACTER IS WHAT YOU DO WHEN NO ONE ELSE IS LOOKING.

8. DO NOT BE AFRAID TO SAY THAT YOU ARE SORRY.

9. LIVE SO THAT WHEN OTHERS THINK OF FAIRNESS, CARING AND INTEGRITY, THEY THINK OF YOU.

AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST

10. ALWAYS CALL YOUR MOM.

SO AS I CONCLUDE, NEVER FORGET THAT

**YOU ARE OUR CHILDREN AND THAT WE BELIEVE IN
YOU.**

**YOU HAVE BROUGHT US SO MUCH JOY AND
WE LOVE YOU UNCONDITIONALLY.**

**WE WANT YOU TO BE THE BEST THAT YOU CAN BE,
BUT MOST OF ALL WE WANT YOU TO BE HAPPY.**

**NO MATTER WHERE YOU GO OR HOW FAR YOU
TRAVEL KNOW THAT WE, THE PEOPLE OF ST.
MARY'S COUNTY, WILL ALWAYS BE HERE FOR YOU
AND YOU CAN ALWAYS COME BACK HOME. WE ARE
BEHIND YOU 100% AND YOU WILL ALWAYS BE A
PART OF US.**

**TO THE CLASS OF 2011....JOB WELL DONE,
GODSPEED AND BEST OF LUCK.**