

8th Grade Graduation Ceremony Speech - Principal - 6-24-20

Good morning. I am Mr. Klein, proud principal of P.S./I.S. 226 and on behalf of our entire community, it is my pleasure to welcome you to the 2020 Commencement Ceremony for our 8th grade senior class. This is the 90th Commencement Ceremony in our school's treasured history and the first virtual one we've ever had. Let me start by saying how much we all wish we were celebrating in person together in our school's auditorium. Since this moment calls for a different type of celebration, let me start by telling each and every 8th grade student how proud I am of all of you!

This is a momentous day and I know I speak for your parents, families, and 226 faculty when I say, "We marvel at how much you've accomplished not just this year but for so many of you, for ten years in our special Panther school community. I also admire all of you for the resiliency and leadership you've shown during this pandemic and the remote learning that's disrupted so many of the plans we had for you. Remember that although this was not the senior year you necessarily wanted or deserved, it was historic because of what our city, the country, and the world had to overcome together. As I think of this tough class and what you've been through, I think of one of my favorite quotes, *"It's not so much what you accomplish in life that really matters, but what you overcome that proves who you are, what you are, and whether you are a champion."* You are all champions in my eyes because you have overcome the closing of our school in March and adapted to our new remote learning platform by continuing to perform at an incredibly high standard. Some of you BELIEVE IT OR NOT even like remote learning better!

Before we continue, I'd like to take a moment to ask every graduate to turn to a parent, grandparent, older sibling, or family member you're quarantined at home with and thank them because without their

unconditional love and support, you wouldn't be graduating to a new high school in the fall.

Now that we've thanked our dedicated parents, I would like to thank every patient, supportive, and dedicated teacher, paraprofessional, and staff member who taught or supported this special group of students. You have made immense contributions and we are all grateful for helping our seniors arrive at their special day this morning.

Now, I would like to thank an important supporter of our school, District 21 Superintendent, Isabel DiMola, who I know wished she could join us today in person and has shared some special words for our graduating class later in the ceremony.

Next, I would like to thank three dedicated administrators and leaders who work passionately to ensure that our school community is unified, organized, and well cared for. First, Middle School Assistant Principal, Ms. Montanes. Ms. Montanes has shown her commitment each and every day to this senior class by directly supporting the incredible teaching, learning, and social/emotional support that makes our middle school so special. Thank you!

I also would like to thank two other dedicated administrators who have supported this graduating class in numerous ways. Thank you Mrs. Niarhos and Mr. Hyman!

The last few educators I want to recognize are integral to the success of our seniors and the unflinching support our families deserve. They are trusted, committed student and family advocates and we thank you for your continued support. School Counselors, Ms. Tsekouras and Ms. Adam, Parent Coordinator, Ms. Lermer, School Psychologist, Ms. Wadowski, Social Worker, Ms. Colon-Gonzalez, IEP Teacher, Ms. Adelson, SETSS Teacher, Ms. Cutri, and Coordinator of Student Support, Mr. Tagarelli. I

can't thank you enough for all that you do each and every day to support our students, parents, and families.

Now, to our 8th graders, the reason why all of us are here. I've been in awe of all that you've accomplished. You've helped us become a Respect for All school and we just received official notification on May 19th that as a result of our schoolwide efforts to prevent bullying and promote tolerance and acceptance, we will once again be designated by the Anti-Defamation League as a NO PLACE FOR HATE SCHOOL. Only 1800 schools across the country have that special recognition and we're one of them. You've demonstrated great leadership on the No Place for Hate Student Council and the Civics for All Club. You helped make this school yours by joining our LGBTQ+ club to demonstrate how passionate and committed we are to equity, tolerance, and diversity. You also successfully launched the Green Team and succeeded in leading our new Recycling and Sustainability program this year. In fact, we received a perfect score on our last two Department of Sanitation scorecards thanks to you.

This senior class is deeply committed to understanding and regulating their emotions. You know how to Take a Meta-Moment, slow down, and envision your best self before impulsively making a decision that you might regret. Your articulate daily responses to Mood Meter check-ins these last three years show me that you are the most emotionally intelligent class of graduates we've ever had. Your talents were on full display in our amazing Broadway Junior program, our Talent Show, and other past performances. You achieved Arista Archon membership, played beautifully at our winter and spring band concerts, and became award winning scientists at our Science Expo. You ALSO won the CHAMPS Girls Volleyball City Championship for three straight years (OKAY, we were the co-champions this year because the finals got cancelled on Friday, March 13th, the day before all New York City schools closed. But I digress.

We have seniors who were accepted into prestigious New York City High Schools like Brooklyn Tech, Brooklyn Latin, Beacon High School, Midwood

Medical Science, and Leon Goldstein. Some of our seniors also got into renowned High School Arts programs based on their unique talents, like Edward R. Murrow, Art and Design, and Fort Hamilton.

All of you know that being a 226 Panther is about respect, responsibility, and caring for your school community. We have no doubt that your children are panthers through and through, and more than ready to take all of their newly acquired skills, so they can thrive in high school next year no matter what form the fall looks like.

Seniors, before I say farewell, I would like to share FIVE important life lessons that have helped me along the way.

- ONE, don't assume that adults have all of the answers. Often, we don't. Keep asking the big questions.
- TWO, there are no shortcuts to excellence. Solving really hard problems takes time, requires risk-taking, and may result in failure. Failure EQUALS an opportunity to grow and learn. Embrace the struggle that will lead you to success!
- THREE, Learn from other people's mistakes. You don't have to make all of them yourself!
- FOUR, Make yourself happy. Don't wait for others to make it for you.
- FIVE, Put your phone down and be present. I have to remind myself of this lesson too! Nothing strengthens friendships and relationships more than truly being open to listening and learning from those you care about.

As I said earlier, this is a truly special class of graduates. You are all future leaders. I am in awe of all that you've accomplished this year! Congratulations again to all of you and your families!