

The Oyster Bay High School Graduation 2017

Address of Welcome

by Salutatorian Jed Kaiser



So...when I first started writing this speech, I was told that the salutatorian's responsibilities were actually quite simple. I don't have to give any inspiring advice (which, trust me, you are all better off without), or motivate you for the years ahead. I get the easy job: welcoming all of our guests to this special day and, of course, talking about how amazing the 122 students sitting behind me truly are. So, let's get started!

On behalf of the Class of 2017, welcome! Welcome to all of the incredible parents, without whom none of us would be sitting on this stage today.

Welcome to all of the family and friends who have provided endless amounts of love and support over our high school careers. Welcome to our wonderful teachers who we loved even when we were feeling, uhm. . . let's

just say, a different emotion, and who we appreciated even when they probably felt very unappreciated at times. Welcome to the administrators and staff, without whom our wonderful school could not function as well as it does. And a special shout out to Ms. Lasher at her very first Oyster Bay graduation: thank you for unlocking Snapchat on the school's wifi. I think I can speak for all of the members of the Class of 2017 in saying that it was greatly appreciated. And finally, welcome to my 122 friends on this stage. Each of you is just as deserving as I am to speak today, but since I'm here, I thought I would try to explain what it truly means to be a member of the Class of 2017...what it truly means to be a part of our community.

It's no secret that Oyster Bay is not like most high schools. We are so fortunate in that later, when each student walks across this stage to receive a diploma, there won't be a single stranger. Why? Because like that old television show Cheers, we are a school where everyone knows your name, and has for the last 13 years. Like any community, we had our fair amount of additions and losses, but all in all, the class we are today is quite similar to what it was when we first entered the district as wide-eyed kindergarteners following the rainbow-lined floor of Teddy Roosevelt. Our

years singing “School by the Bay” were only the very start of our journey together.

Soon, we would transition into Vernon, much older and wiser. As our lives continued to change, our fellow classmates remained constant. We went from rolling backpacks and “rubber” chicken nuggets, to lockers, midterms and finals. And while it may have been exciting to have a midterm or final in sixth grade, I think we can all agree the excitement wore off quickly.

Before we knew it, we were entering high school. Anywhere else, 4 foot 7th graders roaming the halls of a high school alongside comparatively massive 12th graders would seem intimidating, frightening, and altogether ridiculous, but for the Class of 2017, we hardly gave the transition a second thought. The high school was new for us, but there was comfort in knowing that we were pretty much the same bunch we always were, that we were there for each other and that we were ready to help our special community of students succeed at the next level.

It was in our last four years at Oyster Bay High School that the Class of 2017 truly shined. When looking at my fellow students sitting behind me, a

random observer may simply see the National Merit Scholar, the New York State and County champions, the laboratory researchers, the soon-to-be college scholars, athletes, artists and musicians, or the aspiring members of the military. However, when I look at my classmates, I think of our times together, and our devotion to each other. For instance, I think of the time when we, including me, possibly the worse trumpet player of all time, played for our family and friends at Carnegie Hall. (And to Mr. Sisia, for allowing me that experience, "Thank You" -- and for my subsequently dropping out of the band, "You're Welcome!") I also think of our time visiting the Naval Academy and Mr. McCarthy forcing us to take off our jackets in 10 degree weather for the perfect class picture in our college T-shirts. I think of the countless basketball games where the goon squad would assemble and root for OB basketball, screaming "ew" every time the other team airballed. I think of the incredible participation and enthusiasm we had for Homecoming this year, and how, against all odds, we actually won this year!

I think of how excited we were for each other when got into our dream colleges, and how supportive we were for each other when we didn't. I think of how only a couple of weeks ago on our last day of school, as our senior prank, we blocked the faculty out of their parking lot. And even though Mr.

Pontillo thought he had fooled us by getting to school and parking at 5am, we got the last laugh when we Saran-wrapped his car - because no one messes with the Class of 2017! I think of how we never allowed our individual goals to overshadow our common interests and how we most valued our individual achievements, not in terms of personal advancement, but for the glory that it brought to our entire high school community.

We have had a long journey together, but it is being together that made the time so significant. We've learned from each other, grown with each other, and supported each other throughout our entire lives and, while I am sure many of my fellow classmates are ready to start the next chapter, please know that this community that has nurtured us for 13 years, is a part of our identity, and will remain that way forever.

The playwright Henrik Ibsen once wrote that "A community is like a ship; everyone ought to be prepared to take the helm." Over the last four years, all of us, at one time or another, in ways big and small, has been willing to step up and "take the helm" to steer our ship in directions that have brought great credit and esteem to our beloved high school community. We are,

have been and always will be a special community of peers who I know will root for each other's success the rest of our lives.

To my fellow students, I cannot wait to see all that awaits you. Each and every student on this stage is capable of great things and deserving of every opportunity. I know your futures are so bright. As you succeed in your professional and personal lives, and I have every confidence that you will, I urge each of you to remember to always come back to the community that has given you so much. To always come home to Oyster Bay.

As I stand here today, I think of when I spoke at our 6th grade graduation. My parents forced me to wear a purple and gold tie. At 12 years old, I hated ties and I certainly had no desire to wear anything purple and gold. 6 years later, I'm 18, and while I do still hate them, I'm proud to be wearing another purple and gold tie. Of course, it's not the same tie (I'm happy to report that I did grow about a foot and a half since 6th grade graduation), but no one had to force me to wear it this time. I'm proud and grateful to be a part of this community and I know that I will continue to feel that way for the rest of my life. Thank you Oyster Bay for giving me the most wonderful start to life I

could have ever hoped for, and congratulations to my friends, the Class of
2017.