

Address to OBHS Class of 2019

Dr. Laura Seinfeld



Good afternoon. It is with great honor that I stand before all of you, members of the Board of Education, proud parents, grandparents, family members and friends, teachers, support staff and fellow administrators, and most importantly, you, the OBHS graduating class of 2019.

I recently read an article in *Education Week* entitled “How We Can Develop Good People?” and it made me think about our role as a District, in partnership with our entire learning community, in doing just that, developing good people. Thomas Hoerr, author and university scholar in residence, suggests that education is like a forest and we, as educators, try to determine which tree will grow best in which kind of soil, which tree will provide the most shade, which wood will be strongest, and, he cautions, if we focus only on the trees, we may forget the larger forest. He suggests that if we step back and look at that bigger picture, if we consider what is essential in every situation, regardless of what technology or the workplace may require – it’s the ability to know oneself and work with others, our HUMAN LITERACY, our knowledge and ability to understand those around us, that is essential for success. Further, he suggests that it is a rare occasion when a

problem truly is solved solo and that if a problem is to be addressed by a team, a committee, or a task force, the group will be more effective when people listen to each other, work to understand each other, and appreciate the differences we all possess in background, status, and perspective. He states that character matters as we all want to work with honorable people who are motivated to do the right thing, simply because it is the right thing. He lists five human literacy qualities that comprise intrapersonal and interpersonal success and he refers to these qualities as the formative five. They are: 1. Empathy. 2. Self-control 3. Integrity 4. Embracing differences and 5. Grit.

The Cambridge Dictionary defines empathy as the ability to share someone else's feelings or experiences by imagining what it would be like to be in that person's situation. As you move forward, no matter what path you choose, you will work with others. To do so effectively, remember to always strive to be empathetic and seek to truly understand and embrace others' feelings. You will be faced with many decisions in school, the workplace, and in your personal lives. When you are empathetic, you don't just make these decisions based on what is good for you. You consider others and put yourselves in their shoes in order to make the decision that is for the greater good.

The second of the formative five is self-control. Oyster Bay's own Theodore Roosevelt is quoted as saying, "The one quality which sets one person apart from another – the key to which lifts one to every aspiration while others are caught up in the mire of mediocrity – is not talent, formal education, nor intellectual brightness, it is self-discipline. With self-discipline, all things are possible, without it, even the simplest goal can seem like the impossible dream." {close quote}

Please heed his advice and work to identify and change any habits that you know are counterproductive to your own learning, work, and success. You do have the power to do so.

The third skill, integrity, or being honest and having strong moral principles, should guide all of your decisions and interactions. It may be easy to have integrity when others are looking to you to see your decision or reaction, but, as C.S. Lewis suggested, "integrity is doing the right thing, even when no one is watching."

The fourth skill critical to being a good person is embracing diversity. I know that we here in OBEN have worked hard to help students understand issues and content and work with each other so that you can understand others' backgrounds and different types of learners, and appreciate and celebrate those who are different than yourselves. It is without a doubt that you will go to school,

work, or serve with individuals who have very different cultures and experiences than you do, so it will be important to embrace this diversity. Do so because you will learn more, grow more, and understand more about our larger society by opening your hearts and minds to the differences that surround us.

The final skill is grit and I remind you to continue to work hard and appreciate the role of hard work and determination when you are learning something challenging, new, or different. I ask that anyone here today think about something you took on that was new learning. It may have been in the workplace, in school, or in your personal life. When you consider that new learning, I am confident that you recall struggles you faced because this learning was new and difficult. You probably had a few failures along the way. But failures are not all bad, and good failures are often the pathways that help you move forward and get better, but persevering through these takes grit. As Michael Jordan said, "I have missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I have lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I have failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed." Close quote.

Beyond the "core five," I remind you to always choose kind. At times others may mistake your kindness for weakness, but they will be wrong. These

qualities are not at odds with each other. You can and should be, both kind and strong. I truly hope that each of you will embrace and demonstrate both.

In closing, it is the human literacy qualities of empathy, self-control, integrity, embracing diversity, and grit that are displayed by what the author calls good people and he suggests that educators are charged with teaching and modelling these skills. I know that here in OBEN as a school district we have done that in collaboration with your families and our entire learning community. Together we have worked hard to help you develop into truly good people. I ask that you please spread your goodness with all you meet along your future pathways no matter which road you travel. Take the good person you are and continue to become an even better person, and make this world an even better place. Thank you and congratulations.