

# Huntington High School's 156<sup>th</sup> Commencement

## Class President Kelsey Miller's Address

Good evening blue and welcome to the Class of 2017's graduation. I am Kelsey Miller and I am the President of the Class of 2017. Within the time that I will deliver my speech — 116 people will get married, 144 people will move into a new homes, 255 babies will be conceived and 7,150,000,000 human hearts will beat. These events all occur within about a minute; one of the many minutes that have made up our time here at Huntington High School.

You may be wondering exactly why I have thrown these arbitrary statistics together and brought them to your attention tonight. It's because I am here to talk about time. Our daily routines revolve around the concept of time. What time we need to wake up in the morning, how much time we need to make it to school, and once the school is in sight— don't forget about the carline that just about doubles the time you already took to get to school. A British statesman, Philip Stanhope once said, "Know the true value of time; snatch, seize and enjoy every moment of it. No idleness, no laziness, no procrastination; never put off until tomorrow what you can do today."

We all have our own perspectives on the time we spent together in school. We would wish and worry that time would fly by or stand still and even at this very moment I am wondering whether or not [Mr.] Caleca is ready to kick me off the stage because I have definitely surpassed my time limit. Time is everywhere and inescapable all at once, but it is important that we make the best of it, as we have these past 12 years in school together.

So to the class of 2017; please use time as a tool, not a crutch as we depart onto new paths of life because after all, time flies!

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## **Salutatorian Miranda Nykolyn's Address**

Hello everyone! When I was first announced as salutatorian, everyone I saw that day told me first, congratulations, and, second, "What are you going to say in your speech?" Many even told me to keep it short and sweet, so I wouldn't put anyone to sleep. But then I thought, "How could I possibly shorten the multitude of accomplishments our Class of 2017 has conquered?" We have done so much over the years as not only individuals, but collectively, as well.

Before I discuss everything our grade has achieved over the past few years, I wanted to take a second to thank everyone who has helped us along the way. To our parents who have driven us everywhere from sporting practices to musical rehearsals, supported us through thick and thin, been the loudest ones cheering, when we look out into the crowd, thank you for always just being present and our biggest fans.

I would also like to thank Mr. Polansky, the Board of Education and Mr. Cusack for their continued leadership and attendance of all events. Without Mr. DiTroia, Mr. Smith, Mr. Caleca, Mr. Gilmor, Mr. Wilson, our security guards, the amazing custodial staff who never cease to say hello when you see them in the hallway, the attendance office which has to put up with many of our late notes, and, last, but not least, all of the teachers who have dedicated their lives to help better our own. I would like to give a special shout out to Mrs. Forbes, Mrs. Daly and Mrs. Dillon who shared with me not only their love for teaching, but life as well. Our teachers gave every ounce of their ability to help us learn the subject material and thrive in

the classroom. However, it is their personal advice and wisdom that make them stand out in our minds. They have all gone above and beyond to make sure each and every one of their students were successful inside and outside of school. We knew we could always count on them.

Although our class has always struggled to make a homecoming float, we always gave it our best effort and it enabled our class to come together for one night with a common goal of trying to win. By the way, we finally won this year!! For those of us who participated in fall sports, we treated pep rally as though we were auditioning for America's Got Talent, spending countless hours practicing intricate routines no matter how embarrassing we thought it could be. We did this because we loved our team and we were filled with so much school pride.

Every person in our grade has found their passion and it is that passion that has driven many of our 2017 students to the success they have achieved. For example, our marching band was able to win New York State last year and it placed third in an even higher division this year. Our music department has sent many of us to All-State and continues to produce amazing concerts for everyone in our community. Our grade has developed amazing track stars who have even become state and national champions. The drama club has continued to wow everyone with their spectacular performances even garnering multiple Huntington-Tony nominations and awards this year. The girl's tennis team even became undefeated League 2 champs and our girl's lacrosse team reached playoffs this year. Our robotics team qualified and went to the world championships in St. Louis, which was a huge accomplishment. We also had many science research students find success at major competitions while our Mathletes team earned second in their division. Many of us raised money for cancer at Relay For Life and built houses for Habitat

for Humanity. I know I am probably missing many of our class' other achievements, but with what I have been able to recall, the diversity and versatility of everyone in our grade can be seen. It is clear that each and every one of you is a unique individual and with everyone put together we have created such a special and collective class of 2017.

My rowing coach, Anika always tells me something very important before a race that I have always kept with me. She always says, "You have nothing to lose and everything to gain so just give it everything that you've got." This is the same mentality that we all have to adopt as we go out into the real world. In life, we have nothing to lose but if we make the most of it we could have everything to gain. We all should travel the world, try new foods, explore the unknown and test our limits to their highest possibilities. Never let anyone tell you that you can't complete something. If you put your mind to it there is nothing in this world that you can't at least attempt.

As we graduate today, many of us see it as an ending, which can be upsetting, since we have all been through so many triumphs and tribulations together. Although I hate this cliché and told myself I would never say it at graduation, it really is just the beginning for all of us. As Shel Silverstein once said, "there are no happy endings, endings are the saddest part, just give me a happy middle and a very happy start." So even though this may be a sad ending to our journey in the wonderful home we call, Huntington, it is a happy start to our future as we all go off and conquer the world in new and exciting adventures. Keep looking at any new opportunities beyond the halls of Huntington High School as a happy start, class of 2017, and congratulations, we did it!

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## Valedictorian Steve Yeh's Address

Thank you Dawson for your introduction.

Good evening everyone. I must begin by saying how extraordinarily honored I am to have this opportunity to speak this evening. I stand on this podium today, but it is only elevated because of the support of my teachers and counselors, Mr. Polansky and the district administration, Mr. DiGiacomo and the Board of Education, our Principal Mr. Cusack, Assistant Principals Mr. Smith and Mr. DiTroia, our deans Mr. Caleca, Mr. Gilmor and Mr. Wilson and my family and friends.

I will first and foremost say a shout-out of thanks to my family: *Ma, Ba, Gou hen jyew A Gung, shi meng ngee diew, ahn zi sei.*

For most of you in the crowd who do not speak Hakkanese, which is a derived regional dialect of Chinese, I do know how you feel. This was a sentiment I had when I first learned English and that can only be summed up with two words I learned later on: astonishment and bewilderment. In a skeptical sense, the Hakkanese words I have just spoken could've been obscenities and vulgarities. But you believe otherwise. Why do you do so? It is because of the trust you have placed in me.

It is trust that has gotten us so far. It is our trust of each other that we will pick each other up in our time of need and that we will still treat others the way we

would like to be treated. It is our trust that we will objectively criticize each other and help each other grow, but not subjectively judge. It is our trust of each other and ourselves that we will do everything to the best of our abilities.

A brave man once spoke these words: “If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted or Beethoven composed music or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause and say, ‘here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.’”

Class of 2017: it is our duty to achieve the best we can achieve. We must acknowledge the fact that we can affect changes; that we can strive to improve our lives; that we can make the world a better place. We must let our parents, teachers and the entire globe know that they can entrust us with the future of this nation, this world and this humanity. I trust that we will all live life to its fullest. We will learn what our potential is; yet not exceed our own personal limits.

On the day we venture out into space, we cannot allow the force of gravity of Earth to hold us down, but we must also not navigate too close to the Sun. Actually, there is no force of gravity. According to the theory of general relativity, it is just the distortion of space-time due to objects of mass, but if anyone is interested I’ll leave that topic for another discussion. For anyone who has taken the course here at the high school; I mean, who doesn’t love a little physics? That was all beside the point; the point being that I trust we have gained the perspective of life as a delicate balance of extremes.

I trust that we will be rational, but that we must also have our hopes and dreams. I trust that we will be skeptical, but that we must also be empathetic for the sake of others. I trust that we will show acceptance and tolerance towards all, but... even though it is amazingly difficult to show acceptance and tolerance towards all, there are no “buts;” there is no exception to that statement. I trust that we will be able to create for ourselves, and for everyone, a better future.

Now, if the members of the Class of 2017 may lend me your imaginations; close your eyes or space out as you regularly do in class and journey into the future. Imagine that you are much older now. At this particular time in the future though, the clock has stopped ticking and the calendar is blank. It has just occurred to you that it is the date of a reunion with some of your high school friends, who are sitting next to you here today. You are a bit late to the rendezvous, so you have difficulty finding a vacant parking spot. After you have found success with your awesome parallel parking skills, you walk along the gray cracked sidewalk and look up at the sky, which you can't quite tell to be partly sunny or partly cloudy. You open the door to the venue where we meet and see each other again; we smile genuine smiles, which are one of the most beautiful things in the world. Now if you may please open your eyes again.

The same brave man of whom I referenced before uttered his more famous words in 1963, which were “I have a dream.” If I may be so bold as to add on and change it to this: “We all have our dreams. Now let's pursue them to the point when they are dreams no more, but rather, the reality in which we live in.”

With an arbitrary date for when we meet again; what we have done in between today and that date and what we do afterwards, I leave all that unwritten on this paper and unspoken of on this day of our graduation.

I trust that every one of us will figure all of that out and have much success and happiness in our future.

*Ngai hee mounng tai ga teu mang voi sheeng gueng.*

Thank you and congratulations to my peers of the Class of 2017.

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### **Principal Brenden Cusack's Address**

Good evening parents, guests, faculty, members of the board of education, central administration and most important, the graduating class of 2017. After four years of hard work, it gives me great pleasure and pride to see all of you here this evening.

When you arrived here as freshmen, it is likely that some of you had many expectations coming into the high school and some of you may not have known what to expect. But I think that it would be fair to say that all of you, in some way, may have had thoughts about this very event. Now that moment is here, and I hope that you are able to take it all in, to simply breathe and enjoy this moment and to savor it, hopefully without the need for Snapchat, Instagram or any other similar tool to capture the memory.

Just take a moment to allow your brain and your senses to truly enjoy the moment, even if we are stuck indoors. To notice the people and things around you. To not think of the past or present, but to simply be here now. Try to notice what kinds of emotions and feelings you have right now. Perhaps you are feeling excited, happy, a little sad, nervous, or a combination of all of these feelings. All of these are completely natural. What may not be as natural or as easy is to actually take the time out to recognize these feelings. To notice what is happening in the moment we are presently in. This act of taking notice of the present is often referred to as "mindfulness" and there is much current talk in the world of education regarding this practice. While it might seem like a fad or flavor of the month, this practice of mindfulness dates back thousands of years and is a part of

many cultures around the world. Perhaps this can be of service to you now, as you transition into a new phase of your lives.

There is no doubt that you will encounter stress and difficulties as you go forward. These things are inevitable. What matters most, however, is how you approach these challenges. In the haze that is created by the fast paced, frenetic demands of your daily lives, fueled by technology and the expectation to be instantly accessible at any moment of the day or night, I ask you to remember that inside you, when you need it most, you can find peace, calm and escape from the noise of life if you simply breathe and recognize the moment you are in. I try to remind myself of this as well.

This is not to say that the past and future are not important, they are. Of course it is essential to set goals and create plans to achieve those goals. After all, if you don't know where you are going, it is hard to get there. But taking time to experience the present is equally important, and developing this skill can help you when working with others as well.

Have you ever been in a conversation with someone and lost track of what they were saying, because you were thinking about what you were going to say next? This happens to people all the time and it is a product of our constant rush to get on to the next thing, the next thought, or the next person we need to talk to. You may even be feeling that right now, like, ok when's he going to get done with this speech so I can get on to the next thing? But it makes a difference when you are fully present with someone, when you give that person the gift of your time and full attention. It can help you to move ahead in life by making meaningful

connections with others. When you give your full attention to a single task that needs to be accomplished, it can make you more productive as well.

So my parting advice to you, our graduating class, is to make plans and have goals, but to always try to remain grounded in the present moment because if you are always looking forward to the next thing, you may miss what is right in front of you. In this moment, you are literally surrounded by love, admiration and joy for your accomplishments. Take the opportunity this evening to fully experience it. Soon to be graduates; Blue Devils; may you be blessed in your journey and may you always keep Huntington in your heart. I offer you my most sincere congratulations.

Thank you.

# **Huntington High School's 156<sup>th</sup> Commencement**

## **School Board President Thomas DiGiacomo's Address**

Welcome everyone and congratulations to the graduates of the Huntington High School Class of 2017. This class has a long list of accomplishments that you all have been part of and should be proud of.

Today is truly a special day, a milestone moment in all of your lives, a day that I like to consider the beginning of “your time”. I say your time because it is truly that. As high school graduates and young adults your time has come for you to venture out, explore, experience and grow and ultimately, following your journey, to discover who you are. And like any journey you will come upon times that require you to make important decisions.

It is at these times that you should do one very important thing, and that is to listen. Listening to yourself, listening to others and yes listening to your parents. All will help to guide you in making the right decisions. I found this out many years ago just a few months after my graduation from Huntington.

You see I was told by my father that he would be taking a job at Cornell University and our family would be moving to Ithaca. At the time I was feeling very independent. But even so really was not sure if I wanted to stay on Long Island or move away. After graduation I hadn't planned on starting college right away and had found a full time job locally as a shipping and receiving clerk. So in listening to myself, I made the decision to stay on Long Island; now I just had to tell my parents. They supported my decision,

with one condition, that I also had to start taking college classes. So at 18½, my family moved away and I was on my own. Full time job, apartment and night classes at SUNY Farmingdale. It was the start of “my time.”

After a few years at the same company I was promoted to an office position. And a few years later it was again time to make another decision. This time, I was offered an opportunity to go into outside sales. The job had the potential for me to make more money. That was an easy decision. The difficult decision was what territory did I want. My choice was either Long Island or New York City.

The reality was I had only been to the city a few times and really did not know it well enough to get around. Long Island, on the other hand, I knew very well. Once again, I listened to myself and trusted my instincts. I knew that I had the drive and determination and that I could learn the ins and outs of New York City.

There was also some help from a song and a lyric that I kept hearing in my head. That song was “New York, New York” and the lyric “if you can make it there you can make it anywhere” and with that my decision was made.

Make it I did. You see that decision turned into a 23 year career with the same company that I started working for out of high school. Also, in listening to my parents, I received my college degree from SUNY Farmingdale.

So as is the case with most things, making good decisions starts with listening. Listening to the advice of parents, mentors, friends, maybe even Frank Sinatra, but above all, yourself.

I wish you all nothing but the best, in life, in love, in friendship and that you find whatever “your time” brings you. But along the way I hope you will always remember that “your time” began as a graduate of Huntington High School Class of 2017.

Congratulations again, thank you and GO BLUE DEVILS!

## **Huntington High School's 156<sup>th</sup> Commencement**

### **Superintendent James W. Polansky's Address**

Good evening and welcome one and all to Huntington's 156<sup>th</sup> commencement exercises. We should take pride in the fact that very few districts can boast of such a rich history and storied traditions.

Before addressing the students specifically, a quick note to the many parents, guardians and relatives in the audience. I share in your joy this evening not only as a very proud superintendent, but also as the parent of a child who graduated just about an hour ago. For those who are preparing to witness a first child walking the stage and possibly leaving home for the first time thereafter, I can assure you that he or she will be fine and you will get through it. For those who will experience their last child leaving the nest, you will understand the subtle high-five I gave to my wife as I darted out to come back here.

All joking aside, parents, please recognize that we have appreciated our partnership with you and the unbreakable home-school connection that has allowed us to work together in preparing this outstanding group for the successes and challenges that lie ahead. It is as a result of your guidance and this partnership that they will be able to more thoroughly evaluate their options and make positive and productive decisions for themselves in the years to come.

It is a goal for each of us standing at this lectern to share with you, HHS Class of 2017 members, something meaningful, at least one piece of which you'll take with you and remember fondly. You are a terrific group and so simple about which to speak with great joy – but offering something that will last is always the challenge. Let me start with the fact that we adore you. Those who have had the chance to work with you as individuals and collectively over the years have loved every minute – even during those rare moments when a difference of opinion may have existed.

The foremost thing I miss about my time as a classroom teacher is being in the presence of a group of students every day, students with whom I worked routinely and came to know so well. What I genuinely miss about being a principal are those daily interactions in a building full of students

and staff members. What I cherish about having served as your superintendent, however, is the ability to have watched you grow over the past seven years from little kids emerging from the intermediate school world into young adults who entered Huntington High School earlier this evening for the last time as high school seniors, and who will exit those same doors in a few moments ready to take the next major steps in life.

Your progress during these years has undoubtedly been marked by a series of ups and downs, successes and setbacks, triumphs and defeats. That's life. You've surely learned at this point that the true definition of good luck is a combination of hard work, persistence and perseverance. Only in the dictionary does "success" come before "work." You have made mistakes – we have all made mistakes during the course of our lives – but do not fight the brain's hard wiring in terms of its capacity to learn from those mistakes. In fact, it is hard to learn at all if mistakes are not part of the process. Always stay positive and find that silver lining.

The fact that you already understand the intrinsic value in learning is just one characteristic of a very special group. It has been a privilege for me to have come to know so many of you and your families. I, myself, was privileged to graduate with a high school class comprised of members who embraced each other and 35 years later, continue to take an interest in each other's lives. This class possesses very similar qualities. You have learned together. You have laughed together. You have cried together. You have loved together. You have come to accept each other's differences unconditionally. In my mind, there is no better tribute.

Let me highlight a few of your additional attributes – those that you should continue to culture and use as guiding lights in the days, months and years to come ...

- Humility – The poet Alfred Lord Tennyson once said that humility is “the highest virtue, the mother of them all.” Please remain humble and always consider the impact and influence of your actions on others.
- Patience – I am sure that there have been and will continue to be times when it is much easier to lose it than maintain it. Remember that the people you love and with whom you work need to learn and grow with you.
- Family and friends – Relationships matter! Your family, friends and even acquaintances will continue to add meaning to your lives.

- Humor – Laugh with others and laugh at yourselves. Don't ever lose sight of the lighter side of life.
- An open mind – You will have your opinions, others will have theirs – and they may not align completely or at all. Regardless, never shut out the opinions and perspectives expressed by others. Some of the greatest ideas and outcomes have come about as a result of true listening, consideration and collaboration.
- Guts – Don't be careless, but don't be afraid to take well-calculated risks. Recall a motto that has withstood the test of time simply because it makes sense – “No guts, no glory.”
- Faith – This class understands like no other how important it is to bELieve with a capital “ELI.” Believe in yourselves. Believe in your futures. Believe in each other. Believe in the strength of community. Believe in the good in society.

Life awaits and oh, the places you'll go. At the Suffolk valedictorians' luncheon a few weeks back, the keynote speaker reminded all in attendance that life itself comes with no common core curriculum – only elective choices. Continue to learn and choose those electives that are most likely to contribute to your health and happiness, as well as the same for others. If you do so, you'll continue to make all of us and, most importantly, yourselves proud!

Congratulations and best wishes!