

Superintendent John J. Finello's Huntington High School Graduation Speech – 2009

Thank you for your introduction Kristy.

Members of the Board of Education, colleagues in administration, distinguished members of the faculty, class officers, families, friends and most importantly members of the Class of 2009.

This is a day of celebration for each graduate. You are to be congratulated for achieving a high school diploma. You have successfully completed some of the most rigorous requirements for graduation in our nation. I am sure you realize that this was a team effort and that you are here today with the help of family, friends, teachers, counselors, coaches and administrators who stood by you, encouraged you, supported you and believed in you. A high school diploma is a significant beginning to a twenty first century education. But it is only a beginning. Continuous learning both formally and informally is another necessary component of your education. The world we live in is changing rapidly and you must keep up with these changes to be productive and to grow as a responsible member of the work force, a citizen of your country, a member of your family and an ethical human being.

“To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment.” These words by Ralph Waldo Emerson still ring true today. Right now each of you, and indeed every other graduate around the nation, is beginning their post high school life with a foundation of knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to build success. This achievement is an important entryway but the diploma you carry forward is only part of the equation leading to success and fulfillment. What is it that will set you, as an individual, apart from the rest of your fellow graduates? In the broadest sense the answer would be, “character.”

The combination of your ability, experiences, interactions, interests and desires has collectively created the unique person that you are. To be true to yourself you must realize who that person is. You must know your own character. Build on your strengths, work to resolve and correct your weaknesses. Trusting yourself and knowing your abilities will help you set attainable goals that match your interests and talents.

Our world today presents many different and difficult challenges. Look upon them as opportunities to improve the quality of life for all. Use your talent, energy and knowledge to make the world a better place. Stand up to social injustice, work to put down the dangerous threats that challenge our rights, privileges and civil liberties. The American dream does exist. Whatever you set out to achieve can be accomplished if you remain true to yourself. Be an independent thinker. View your successes as well as your failures as learning experiences. Follow your dreams and set goals to give your life purpose and direction. Find your passions and pour your heart and soul into achieving them. Success comes to those who never quit. Learn all that you can about your chosen field and your goals will be more easily attained. Value your friendships. Above all, respect yourself and be honest with yourself.

All of you are starting a new chapter in your lives. There will be a joy and exhilaration in your journey. Do your best in each and every situation. What you do will make a difference. Believe that what you do today will affect tomorrow. Instead of the world changing you, you can help change the world.

Always remember the blue and white of your alma mater with great fondness and pride. You are off to a great start. May the future bring you much success and happiness.

Congratulations to the Huntington High School Class of 2009!