

## **Huntington High School's 164<sup>th</sup> Commencement**

### **Salutatorian Nicholas Plachta's Address**

Anyone who knows me knows I have a tendency to talk way too much, so I'll try to keep this short and sweet. Nothing guaranteed though

That's It. That's thirteen years.

I've been asking myself quite often recently: What's been the point of all of this?

Why wake up early for 13 years, hop on a bus, study for tests, do our homework, participate in class?

Now an easy answer would be we legally had to go to school for most of our lives, and I'm sure that's the answer most of your parents told you when you complained about going to school, I know that's what happened to me.

But a deeper thought on the question reveals a daunting answer: the world needs us.

No matter what your beliefs are, everyone can agree that the world is becoming more polarizing, more hostile, more angry.

Now more than ever, this country and the world is in dire need for thinkers, educators, and leaders. We are the future, we are the next up to plate. If not us, then who?

Let's not end here. Let's not let 13 years go to waste. Whether you're heading to college, starting work, or just figuring yourself out, let's continue to learn, grow, and improve ourselves.

Let's take what we learned and continue to make the world a better place. Because if we don't, then what's been the point of all of this? I can tell you for certain it wasn't because I enjoyed waking up at 7 am.

I just wanted to thank all of the teachers, coaches, parents, and especially all of you guys for making Huntington such a great place to learn, laugh, grow, and have a great time. If I could do everything over again, I wouldn't change a thing.

Congratulations on graduation, and I hope you all have a great summer. Let's go Blue Devil class of 2025.

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**Valedictorian Isabella Careccia-Johnson's Address**

Thank you Maggie, not only for your kind introduction, but for your utmost honesty and unwavering loyalty.

Family, friends, Mrs. McCoy, Mr. Hender, Mr. Cusack, Dr. Harris, Ms. Brown, Mr. Smith, Mrs. Avelli, Members of the Board of Education, and esteemed guests, thank you for your support during our educational journey here at Huntington. We could not have reached this important milestone without your guidance, support, and love. I would also like to thank my parents, grandparents, and other family members, as they are the ones who have encouraged me since I was a child. And last, but not least, thank you to my sister, Valentina, for showing me how to be brave and how to be bold. She is now taller than me, but she will forever be my little sister.

Although I am humbled to be standing before you as the Class of 2025 Valedictorian, I am even more excited to speak to you as Isabella.

We are here today with our friends, family, teachers, mentors, and loved ones to celebrate our success and achievements. But what is equally as significant is our memories of the life lessons and moments of compassion we experienced here as students.

It is kindness that is the trait that is central to humanity. Most of us have experienced the power of kindness firsthand, such as when a trusted individual supported us during a difficult moment. Through those times when we experienced this human connection, we were gifted with someone's valuable time, wise advice, or

simply the support of being heard. Those moments have been the most important lessons we leave Huntington High School with and carry into our next chapter. We each have people connected to these last four years whom we will remember for the rest of our lives - and stay connected to because of these interactions!

During each phase of high school, there were people who demonstrated incredible kindness towards me. They are part of the reason I am standing before you here today. It is these individuals, and the lessons they have instilled in me, that I will keep in mind as I enter adulthood.

Mrs. Jeddah has taught me that I should let my instincts guide my choices in life. Mr. Donovan has taught me that life is more fulfilling when your accomplishments are not the sole focus. Mrs. Geier has taught me that life is full of mysteries, and that it is okay not to have all the answers. Ms. Biagi has shown me that a strong sense of community is essential in life. Mrs. Ferazi, reminded me that “kind” is the coolest thing that anyone could ever be in life. It was Mrs. Merget who led me to realize that the key to a great life is not taking myself too seriously. Mrs. Fortunato taught me that all goals in life should be pursued with zeal. Finally, Mr. Crugnale left me with the vital knowledge that life is about striking a balance between hard work and fun.

Now, as the next big stage of our lives approaches, I hope we choose to move forward with kindness, compassion, empathy, and respect for others. As Huntingtonians, we should be proud of the resilience, grit, and determination that has led us to graduation. The memories and moments from our time as Blue Devils are sure to shape our lives, but we should not become so lost in our accomplishments that we forget about who we are as people.

I would be remiss if I did not leave you without a nod to my love of Latin. I find

this occasion to be a fitting time to share this quote with all of you.

“Quisquam, vivere cum sciat, moratur?”

“Why would anyone, if they knew how to live, delay?”

Congratulations Class of 2025! We have been given so many lessons on how to live right here - now do not delay- go out and lead a beautiful life. May your kindness be as equally as prominent as your achievements!

## **Huntington High School's 164<sup>th</sup> Commencement**

### **School Board Vice President Michele Kustera's Address**

Good evening, Class of 2025, administrators, faculty, my fellow trustees, families, and friends. As a member of the Board of Education—and perhaps more importantly, as a proud parent of a graduating senior—I stand here today filled with admiration and joy, and a few tissues in my pocket.

Graduates, you began kindergarten way back in 2012, and shortly after that first day of Kindergarten communities across Long Island were navigating the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy. Even before you learned to read fluently, you were learning how to adapt, and how to support one another. Then came middle school, and with it, a global pandemic that forced you to pivot from hallways to google classrooms. As you began your journey in high school it started with masks, shields, and social distancing. Through it all, you have shown an unshakable spirit of tenacity, resilience, and grit that has defined your path to being here today.

As you step into the next chapter of your lives, I want to leave you with something simple but powerful: be kind. In a world that often feels rushed, divided, and demanding, kindness is a quiet strength that can open doors, build bridges, and change lives—including your own. It costs nothing, but its value is immeasurable. Whether you're heading to college, the workforce, or somewhere in between, remember that how you treat others, especially when no one's watching, will speak louder than your résumé ever could. Choose kindness, not because it's easy, but because it makes everything else more meaningful.

To parents and caregivers—tonight is your celebration, too. We've watched these

kids grow, stumble, recover, and rise again. We've chauffeured, cheered, played late night editor, and probably learned way more about TikTok than we ever asked for. Thank you for being the sideline supporters, the cheering audience members, and the steady presence in your child's life. You've helped them learn to meet uncertainty with curiosity and challenge with creativity. Tonight, as you look at your graduate in their cap and gown, know that your sacrifices, your patience, and your unwavering love helped make this moment possible.

Graduates, in this last part of my speech I asked ChatGPT for some assistance. I wanted to speak your language, Gen Z. It probably will be cringeworthy, but I am going to give it a shot. Class of 2025, this is your moment. You did it. Through virtual gym classes, senioritis, and a *whole lotta* Google Docs, you've arrived at the finish line. You are bold, unfiltered, and delulu enough to dream big (and honestly? We need that). You've been serving main character energy since day one, and now it's time to soft launch your adult era.

So go be the CEO of your own storyline, romanticize the little things, and don't let imposter syndrome sneak in—because you're not just valid, you're straight-up iconic. And don't leave your parents on read! Congratulations, Class of 2025—you ate, left no crumbs, and absolutely understood the assignment. Stay slay.

# **Huntington High School's 164<sup>th</sup> Commencement**

## **Principal Rochelle C. Brown's Address**

Good evening once again to our Board of Education, central office administration, high school administration, faculty and staff, families, and of course our Class of 2025 graduates; congratulations!

You will always have a special place in my heart as the first graduating class under my tenure as principal. It has truly been a privilege and joy to serve as your principal. As I reflect on my first year as principal the overwhelming thought that came to my mind was what does it mean to be a Blue Devil? The name represents more than a mascot; it is now a part of your identity; a legacy and it's something you carry with you, far beyond the halls of Finley Middle School where many of you first became a Blue Devil and the halls of the high school as your Blue Devil journey comes to an end.

So, as we celebrate this moment and look ahead to the many paths you'll take, I want to share an acrostic for what it means to be a Blue Devil - because that is what you are and always will be.

**B – BOLD:** Go boldly and live your dreams whether you pursue employment, entrepreneurship, enlistment or education, do it with boldness. Don't shrink to fit the expectations of others. Take up space; speak up and step forward.

**L – LIMITLESS:** Your potential is not confined to a GPA or test score; you are limitless in your ability to change the world, change your circumstances and change yourself.



U – UNAPOLOGETIC: Be unapologetically you. The world doesn't need another copy; it needs your originality. Own your voice and celebrate your identity.

E – EMPATHETIC: Lead with empathy; in your workplaces, in your homes, in your communities, on your college campuses. Be the person who sees others, who listens deeply, who responds with kindness. It costs nothing but it changes everything.

D – DETERMINED: Stay determined when life throws you curveballs - and it will. But if I've learned anything watching you this year, it's that you don't give up. You press on and that grit will carry you far.

E – EVOLVE: Don't be afraid to grow. Your dreams today may look different five years from now - and that's okay. Give yourself permission to evolve and redefine what success means to you.

V – VICTORY: Continue to celebrate all of the victories - both big and small. There were many victories this past year - some were visible and some were quiet wins that no one else saw, but they all matter.

I – INSPIRE: Be the light in someone else's story. You never know who's watching, drawing strength from your resilience, your courage or your joy. You are more inspiring than you realize.

L – LOVE: Love your journey, love your careers, love your neighbors, and above all don't forget to love yourselves. Because when love leads, everything else will fall into place.

As we celebrate new beginnings, it's also important to honor those who are closing a chapter of their own. To our retiring faculty and staff, thank you. Thank you for your decades of service, your wisdom, mentorships and decades of service to our school community. You've shaped generations of Blue Devils. I wish you joy, rest and fulfillment in this next chapter of your life.

Class of 2025, you are stepping out into a world that is waiting for your talent, your leadership, your compassion and your voice.

As my Blue Devil journey has just begun and yours has just ended, I want you to remember that wherever life takes you next - you will always be a Blue Devil!

In the famous words of Winnie the Pooh - "you are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think."

Congratulations again and I am so proud of you!!!

# **Huntington High School's 164<sup>th</sup> Commencement**

## **Superintendent Beth McCoy's Address**

Good evening students, families, faculty, staff, members of the Board of Education, and everyone here to celebrate this proud and meaningful day. And to the Class of 2025, *our* seniors, tonight, we are here to honor *you*.

Before I begin I would like to thank the amazing Huntington staff, faculty and administration from each and every building you attended for their dedication, hard work and care that they put forth every day to support you in arriving at this moment.

I would also like to thank the Board of Education for their tireless efforts in supporting the amazing programs and opportunities that we offer to students on every level here in Huntington.

It's hard to believe this moment has arrived. It feels like just yesterday you were walking through the doors of Jefferson, Southdown, Washington, or Flower Hill. You were one of the *last groups* of Huntington students to experience half-day kindergarten. That may not seem like a big deal now, but it marked the end of an era, one final chapter in how our youngest learners first stepped into school life.

You came in wide-eyed, with backpacks bigger than your bodies, not quite sure what school would be like. Your parents were likely crying as they waved goodbye to you as you entered the big doors of your primary schools. Now, let's take a moment to remember the world you entered back then.

It was 2012. You were probably still singing along to “Call Me Maybe,” and many of you were obsessed with *Doc McStuffins*, *Dora*, Yo Gabba Gabba or *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse*. Streaming was just starting to take off, Netflix still mailed DVDs to people’s homes. And I know right now many of you are thinking, What is a DVD? Most of your parents were still taking photos with digital cameras instead of their phones. Instagram had barely been invented and TikTok, yes TikTok wasn’t even a thought.

Classrooms had Smart Boards, but you didn’t each have your own Chromebook yet. iPads were a novelty. And while some of your teachers had Twitter accounts, we still sent paper flyers home in backpacks. Your world was simpler then, built on story time, circle time, learning how to share, and making your very first school friends. Since then, the world has changed tremendously.

You’ve grown up through a digital revolution. You’ve navigated a global pandemic that forced you into remote learning and taught you the true meaning of flexibility and resilience. You’ve seen how technology connects us, and how quickly the world can shift in ways we never imagined. You’ve experienced what it’s like to go from playing tag on blacktop to collaborating on a Google Doc from home.

But no matter how much has changed, one truth has remained constant: the power of people. The strength of the relationships you’ve built. Your journey through Huntington schools has never just been about tests, homework, or grades. It’s been about the people who showed up for you, your teachers, your principals, your coaches, your counselors, and above all, your families and friends. That’s what truly makes Huntington special.

Huntington is not just a district. It's a community. You were nurtured in buildings where your name was known, where your talents were celebrated, and where you were taught not only academics but values, kindness, integrity, perseverance, and compassion. You walked the halls of Jack Abrams and Woodhull Intermediate, moved through the challenges and triumphs of J. Taylor Finley Middle School, and ultimately arrived at Huntington High School as the leaders, role models, and changemakers you are today.

Along the way, you discovered passions, through music in our award-winning programs, on our athletic fields, in our art studios, robotics spaces, theater stages, and countless other spaces where Huntington students shine. You've made your mark, and you've done it with purpose and heart.

And now, Class of 2025, you stand on the threshold of a brand-new chapter. As the world continues to evolve, and it *will*, hold tight to the relationships that ground you. The technology will change. The news cycle will change. Your job titles, locations, and even dreams may change. But the people who matter, and the values you carry from your Huntington experience, will always be your foundation.

You are entering a future filled with opportunity. You have the tools, the education, and the emotional strength that only a journey like yours can offer. But above all, you have each other, and the love and support of an entire community that believes in you.

Class of 2025, we are so proud of who you are and who you're becoming. Thank you for the joy, the perseverance, the laughter, and the legacy you leave behind. Go forward with courage, curiosity, and confidence.

Congratulations, graduates. Huntington will always be home.

Thank you.