

# **Huntington High School's 165<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, staff, families, and most importantly, the Huntington High School Class of 2026.

Tonight is a truly historic evening. As we gather for the graduation of the Class of 2026, we also celebrate an extraordinary milestone—the 165th commencement in Huntington High School's history.

One hundred sixty-five years ago, the first graduates of Huntington High School walked across a stage at the first commencement ceremony. Imagine that moment: the excitement, the uncertainty, and the dreams of those first graduates as they stepped into a world that looked very different from ours today. Since then, thousands of Blue Devils have followed in their footsteps, leaving behind something greater than a diploma.

But that raises an important question...

How can we describe 165 years?

Is it 165 years of tradition?

Perhaps it is 165 years of perseverance—students overcoming obstacles, embracing change, and refusing to give up.

Maybe it is 165 years of excellence—teachers inspiring minds, families supporting dreams, and graduates striving to make the world better.

But excellence is never achieved alone. Every success story is shaped by the people who encourage us, challenge us, and believe in us along the way. That is what has always made Huntington High School more than just a school, it has made it a family whose impact spans generations.

It is 165 years of community - neighbors becoming classmates, classmates becoming lifelong friends, and generations connected by one school and one hometown.

How can we describe 165 years?

It is 165 years of Blue Devil pride of standing ovations, academic achievements, championships, traditions, and memories that have shaped thousands of lives.

So, how can we truly describe 165 years? With one word... Legacy. But what is a legacy?

Is it simply the years that have passed? Is it the trophies won, the records broken, or the accomplishments earned? A legacy isn't simply measured in years or defined by buildings. A legacy lives in people. It lives in the parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, cousins, neighbors, teachers, and mentors who once walked these very hallways, sat in these classrooms, wore these Blue Devil colors, and crossed this very stage before you.

As we commemorate Huntington High School's 165th commencement, I would like to recognize those who are part of that living legacy. If you are a Blue Devil alumnus—whether you are seated in the audience or serving on this stage—would you please stand so we may recognize you with a round of applause.

Thank you for being a key part of 165 years of Huntington Family & Blue Devil Pride. Your presence reminds us that being a Blue Devil does not end with graduation. It is a lifelong bond that connects generations.

Graduates, tonight you inherit that legacy and it is yours to carry forward. You have written remarkable chapters during your time here. You persevered through challenges, celebrated victories, supported one another, discovered your passions, and grew into compassionate, resilient young adults. From the classroom to the athletic fields, from the stage to community service, you have left your mark on Huntington High School.

But tonight is not the end of your story.

It is the beginning of the next chapter.

In the musical *Hamilton*, there is a powerful line: "History has its eyes on you."

History is watching to see how you will lead.

History is watching to see how you will serve.

History is watching to see how you will lift others, pursue excellence, and leave every place better than you found it.

Because the legacy you inherit today becomes the legacy you create tomorrow.

Class of 2026, your diploma represents four years of hard work, perseverance, sacrifice, and growth. But your greatest achievement has yet to come. It will be measured not by the title you hold or the career you choose, but by the lives you touch, the character you demonstrate, and the difference you make.

Take the lessons you've learned here.

Take the friendships you've built.

Take the pride of being a Blue Devil.

Carry it into every classroom, every workplace, every community, and every opportunity that awaits you.

And wherever life leads you, remember where your story began.

Congratulations, Class of 2026. May you honor the legacy of the 165 classes who came before you—and may future generations look back and say that yours was the class that inspired them to dream even bigger.

Congratulations, and once a Blue Devil, always a Blue Devil.

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## **Salutatorian Jaipreet Singh's Address**

Good evening administrators, teachers, staff, family members, friends, and most importantly, Class of 2026.

When I first started writing this speech, I thought it would be easy to say a couple things. After all, we have spent four years creating countless memories, overcoming challenges, and hoping for this very day. Surely I could talk of one perfect idea that sums up our high school experience.

But the more I wrote, the more I realized there wasn't one. Instead, I kept coming back to one simple idea: none of us got here alone. Well that, and the fact that I could've Chatgpt'd the speech and be done with it as technology continues to optimize productivity for the user. But as many of you know, I'm someone who tends to push the bar as high as possible, which unfortunately means I'm always fighting against the clock.

When we look around this evening, it's easy to see a graduating class. We see caps, gowns, cords, and smiling faces. But behind every person sitting here is a unique story filled with people who helped shape them along the way.

For me, some of those people were family members who taught me the value of hard work, long before I stepped into a classroom. They showed me that if something breaks, you don't give up on it, you figure out how to fix it. If something seems impossible at first, you keep trying until you find a way. Those lessons stayed with me whether I was struggling with workload,

working on robotics projects, or pulling an all nighter for NHD with the boys.

So to my family, I say “Babaji, Bibiji, eh tuhade ley- he, Me ehi saare par-var di mad-ith naal keeta he, ate me-nu au-ge bhi tuhade sath di umid he. Dhanvad.”

And I know many of us share similar stories. Some of us were raised by parents who left behind familiar places and comforts to create opportunities for us. Some were encouraged by grandparents who offered great wisdom. Some found support from siblings, relatives, neighbors, coaches, and friends. Our roots may be different, but they all led us here to this moment.

Of course family isn't the only reason we're here. Along the way, we were fortunate enough to be guided by teachers who challenged us, supported us, and helped us discover what we were capable of. So to our teachers, thank you.

Thank you for answering questions you heard hundreds of times. Thank you for coming in early and staying late to help us. Thank you for believing in us, even on the days we didn't believe in ourselves.

Teachers do so much more than just teach from the books. They teach confidence. They teach resilience. They teach us how to think, how to grow, how to take accountability, and how to keep moving forward when things get hard. They truly help us become the best versions of ourselves. Many of us can point to a teacher who saw potential in us before we saw it ourselves, someone who

challenged us when it would've been easier to settle. That teacher became a mentor who helped shape who we are becoming.

And while our teachers guided us in the classroom, many others worked behind the scenes to make every school day possible. So to our custodians, office staff, counselors, security, and everyone else who keeps this school running, thank you. Your work often goes unnoticed, but it has made a difference in every one of our lives.

Now to our friends, thank you for making these past years unforgettable. Gracias por las risas que nos llevaron a través de días estresantes. Gracias por los recuerdos sobre los que contaremos historias durante años. Gracias por recordarnos que el éxito significa mucho más cuando tienes gente con quien compartirlo.

And finally, to my fellow graduates:

The Class of 2026 is filled with talented, hardworking, and determined people. We have artists, athletes, musicians, leaders, innovators, future teachers, doctors, engineers, and soooo much more.

But what impresses me most is not what we've achieved, but how we've grown.

We learned that failure is not the end of a story.

That asking for help is not weakness. That success is rarely a straight path.

Most importantly, we learned that the strongest people are often the ones who lift others up along the way.

Tonight marks the end of one chapter, but it is also the beginning of another. As we leave this school and move toward new opportunities, challenges, and adventures, I hope we remember the people who helped us get here. I hope we carry forward the lessons they taught us. And I hope that someday we become those mentors for someone else. Because the greatest way to thank the people who shaped us is to do the same for the next generations. So congratulations Class of 2026 and I wish you the best of luck.

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## Valedictorian Emma Polinsky's Address

Thank you Kiley for that introduction. I wouldn't be here without your guidance and support.

Before I get into the words of wisdom I have to share, I want to thank some of those who've helped me get to this place.

Firstly, our superintendent Mrs. McCoy, Mr. Cusack, Ms. Brown, and all of our administrators and board members.

I also want to thank my teachers, for providing me with knowledge and opportunity for growth.

My friends, for supporting me and teaching me how to find balance in life.

My siblings, for showing me that the world is full of compassionate people.

My dad, for instilling in me a drive to know more than everyone else in a room. The man that has an answer to every question and always- and I mean always- has something to say. You make me want to be knowledgeable in all areas of life.

My mom, for pushing me to be an advocate. Not just for those around me, but for myself.

Without you mom I wouldn't have the fight in me to go after what's deserved.

There are so many people that have supported me throughout my journey, but since I only have this large, captive audience for a limited time, I'm going to try to reach a point. And anyone who knows me, may realize that can be a bit of a struggle.

The last couple of years have made me realize that there are a lot of "should's" that other people will try to impose on you.

You **should** take this class, you **should** apply to this college, you **should** make these kinds of friends. These “shoulds” remain constant throughout our lives because there’s always going to be someone who tells you where you should be at a certain time, what you should feel, or what your values should be. What I hope that we can all learn and grow to do is to determine what we ourselves truly desire.

Because if you only listen to what everyone else says that you **should** do, without accessing it yourself, you won’t feel content or satisfied within your own life. This next step in our lives. Whether you're going to trade school, university, or joining the work force, this is only the beginning of our individual paths. We’ve been under an umbrella of a joint identity the past 4 years as Blue Devils, and it’s been quite blissful, but it’s time to redefine what “should” means to us and use that to decide what brings us joy in life.

We’ve celebrated spirit weeks and homecoming games, decked out in holiday pajamas or draped in ponchos because of the rain. No matter the group you run in, we’ve built a community here at Huntington, united by both our school colors and the relentless student square messages. Though we’ve shared this foundation, our futures are uniquely our own. We are leaving the same starting line and hallways to follow different directions on a map, charting new territory in our lives and in our minds.

It’s frightening, starting something so new, because at the end of the day, the only thing this group of people may end up having in common is where our lives began. Yet, there’s something beautiful to that end, because there are plenty of stories that start with “Once upon a time”, but they don’t tend to end up in the same place. Now I don’t know about you, but I don’t want to live a story that's already been told. We’re at that point when we can define what should happen next. An accumulation of choices that will form unique stories.

Whether you choose right or wrong, you aren’t going to know till later on. So take the time to enjoy the journey and find comfort in the fact that you can decide what’s next. Or, in other words, what **should** happen in your life.

Congratulations to the Class of 2026. I can't wait to see what we all accomplish!

As best said by Miranda Priestly, "That's all".

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### **School Board President Xavier Palacios' Address**

Bienvenidos - Good evening families, faculty, friends and most importantly, the Huntington High School Class of 2026.

You are graduating at a moment in history that only comes once.

This year marks the 250th anniversary of the United States, a country built on bold ideas, risk, and the belief that the future could be bigger than the present.

And here you are, stepping into that future.

When I sat where you are sitting today, on that fabled ... years ago, computers were just beginning to change the world. We thought that was revolutionary.

But what you're about to experience is something entirely different.

Artificial Intelligence hasn't just changed what you learn it's changing how the world thinks, works, and evolves. And yet, for all the technology and all the advancement, the one thing that still matters most.... is you. Your character. Your discipline. Your willingness to go ALL IN because that is what will define you long after today is over. "All IN" was the District's theme this year but more than that, it became our standard. A standard embraced by the staff, administration, the students, and this entire community. And no one carried that standard further than our Blue Devils, you guys.

I speak to you not just as someone watching from a distance, but as someone who has seen this class grow from kindergarten through 12th grade. I've seen the journey. I've seen the growth and I've seen what you're capable of.

Members of the Class of 2026 ...each of you has your own incredible story. Some of you are first-generation college-bound. Some have distinguished themselves academically and creatively, exceeding expectations. Some are heading to your dream schools. And some are ready to close this chapter and step into the next on your own terms. Every ONE of you has something worth celebrating. And I can say this with complete confidence. We are all incredibly proud of you.

An example of that commitment, of going ALL IN is what we saw this year on the lacrosse field. As a lacrosse dad, I had the privilege of watching the girls team do more than win, they made history. A State Championship. The first ever for our district. They showed us what it means to commit, to believe, and to stay the course in the toughest moments when belief had to come from within.

But what makes Huntington TRULY special, goes beyond wins on a field and achievements in a classroom. Huntington is special because of who we are. We are a community shaped by diversity.....diferente culturas, different backgrounds, different stories... .y diferentes idiomas all coming together as one. And THAT, THAT is our strength. Huntington prepares you for a world that requires people who can adapt, connect, and lead.

So, as you move forward, remember this: In life, your goals and aspirations can never be set high enough. Not now. Not ever. Aim higher than feels comfortable. Push further than feels safe. Dream bigger than feels realistic. Because the moment you think you've reached your limit... you've just found your next beginning. And no matter where life takes you whether it's another state, another country, or another chapter entirely. Remember Huntington. Because there is nothing like this

place. There's a toughness here, a pride here, a sense of identity that stays with you no matter where you go.

Remember these hallways. Remember these friendships. Remember what it felt like to belong here. Because one day, years from now, you'll look back and realize: This wasn't just where you went to school. This is where you became who you are.

If this year has taught us anything, it's that impossible things happen. I mean..... it took the New York Knicks 53 years to win a championship... but we saw it happen. So maybe "impossible" just means it hasn't happened yet.

So when life tests you. . and it will . . . Remember who you are.

Remember where you come from.

Go ALL IN.

On your dreams.

On your purpose.

On your future.

Be bold enough to take risks.

Be strong enough to handle setbacks.

And most importantly be humble, humble enough to lift others along the way.

Class of 2026 this is your moment.

Go build something meaningful.

Go make your mark.

Go make your community proud.

Go make history.

Congratulations.

# Huntington High School's 165<sup>th</sup> Commencement

## Superintendent Beth McCoy's Address

Good evening graduates, families, faculty, staff, Board of Education members, and distinguished guests.

Tonight, we gather to celebrate a remarkable milestone in the lives of the Class of 2026.

As I prepared for this evening, I reflected on the word “graduate.” The word comes from the Latin *gradus*, meaning “step.” A graduate is someone who has successfully completed one step and is prepared to move forward to the next. Similarly, the word “graduation” signifies a transition, a progression from one stage of life to another.

Tonight is, quite literally, about taking the next step.

For each of you, this moment signifies the end of something truly special. It marks the completion of years filled with learning, growth, friendships, challenges, accomplishments, and experiences that have shaped who you are today. Every class you attended, every lesson you learned, every challenge you overcame, and every success you celebrated has been another step along your journey to this stage.

The classrooms, hallways, athletic fields, stages, concerts, competitions, and countless shared moments have become part of your story. Looking back, you can see that your journey was not defined by one giant leap, but by thousands of small steps that brought you here today. These small steps are the memories you will carry with you forever.

You will remember the teachers who inspired you, the friends who stood by your side, the victories that brought celebration, and the challenges that helped you discover your strength and resilience. You will remember the laughter, the traditions, the school events, the late nights studying, and the moments when you realized you were capable of more than you thought possible.

Each of those moments helped prepare you for the next step. Each experience taught you something about who you are and who you have the potential to become.

Tonight, we honor all of those memories. They are part of who you are, and they will always connect you to the Huntington community.

But graduation is not only a celebration of the steps that brought you here, it is also an invitation to the steps that lie ahead. Graduation is not a finish line. It is a starting line.

As you leave here this evening, you will begin writing the next chapter of your lives, and that next step will look different for each of you. Some will continue their education, some will enter the workforce, some will serve our communities or our country, and others will pursue apprenticeships, travel, entrepreneurship, or

opportunities not yet imagined. Some of you know exactly where your path leads next, while others are still discovering the direction you want to take. Both are perfectly fine. Wherever your journey leads, know that the opportunities before you are limitless. What matters most is that you continue moving forward with confidence, purpose, and an openness to the possibilities that lie ahead.

You are entering a world that needs your ideas, your energy, your creativity, and your compassion. The challenges ahead will be different from the ones you have faced here, but the qualities that brought you to this moment, perseverance, curiosity, kindness, and determination, will continue to guide you. While it is natural to feel nostalgic about what you are leaving behind, I encourage you to embrace what lies ahead with confidence and optimism. Remember that success is rarely defined by a single moment; rather, it is built through a series of steps, some bold, some uncertain, and some challenging, that gradually lead us toward our goals. Do not be afraid to take that next step, even when you cannot see the entire path ahead. Often, the greatest growth comes from moving forward despite uncertainty. Trust in the foundation you have built, believe in the person you have become, and know that your talents and character will help shape the future wherever your journey leads.

So tonight, enjoy this moment. Take time to look around and appreciate how far you have come. Celebrate the accomplishments that brought you here, the people who supported you, and the memories that will remain with you in your hearts. Tomorrow, the next chapter begins. While none of us can predict exactly where life's journey will lead, we can choose how we move forward. Approach each opportunity with courage, each challenge with determination, and each success

with humility. Continue to learn, continue to grow, and never lose sight of the values that have helped you reach this milestone.

Class of 2026, as you leave here tonight, know that Huntington will always be proud to call you our graduates. We will be cheering you on as you take your next step, and every step that follows.

Congratulations!