



Class of 2020 August 1 Commencement Remarks

Parents, relatives, and friends of the Class of 2020, Maggie, Tommy, and Eric, Mr. Rhodes, Dr. Friedman, Dr. Bushnell, my faculty colleagues and members of the Class of 2020:

Welcome to our School's 55th Commencement, highly anticipated for its delay, with just enough suspense and doubt to make it rich, fine and satisfying.

We have made it to the Colross Lawn, as revered a place on our campus as there is. It is in this pastoral shrine that we come to recognize commitment and hard work, perseverance and passion, empathy and enthusiasm. Among these boughs and bowers we are brought together to celebrate and contemplate, as we revel in what is and consider what might have been.

Commencement is for me the most mixed of events, for while its pomp and circumstance gladden the heart and quicken the pulse, its finality stirs in us something deeper and more enduring: the passing of time and the inevitability of change.

But in ways that other classes have not had to experience, you have become veterans of the inevitability of change: you have lived and breathed it (with a mask on, I hope) and shaped it to your will. In hours and days stolen from you, you have taken them back and made them your own. You are different than when we last met, but you are no less Princeton Day School's children. You have secured yourselves in the annals of our School.

As your class will be forever marked by so much of what was beyond your control, so I will add to that list another happy note: you are the first student group to return to our Great Road campus since March 6. 150 days of exile have ended for us, and we return to this promised land to renew our commitment to our School and the lives we will lead here.

For months we have wondered and worried what it would be like to return. With your strong voices and hearts you have answered all of our worries and placed them to the side. As you have done for four years, you have chosen to lead us once again, and I, for one, am happy once more to follow your example. 150 days were too many, and yet the sacrifice we have endured during that time is redeemed by your presence here. You have restored our campus to us, and we need never again be afraid to be in this most beautiful place. Though you have given much to our School, your greatest gift will surely be that you have returned Princeton Day School to those who will linger and live here after you are gone. Thank you for that.

It has been a little less than two months since we offered our virtual goodbyes and recollections, and though much has changed in that time, your indelible mark on our School has not. From the days of your infancy in the 9th Grade to the mastery you achieved through your senior year, you have distinguished yourselves at every turn and, in doing so, you have brought honor to your school and your families. And although this awful virus continues to hold sway above and around us, even its grasp was not strong enough to keep your family from being here today—

though in smaller numbers than we would have liked—to say to you once more how much they love you and how proud they are of you.

Your parents, grandparents, guardians and guests join with and surround you today in the happiest of moments, in this most beautiful place. They have dreamed of this moment since you were born, though realizing that dream may have seemed very far off in March, April, May, June, and even July. And while the Fates may have conspired to keep us apart, even they were no match for the love of those who surround you today. While at some point in May or June your thoughts turned to college life and all of its glories, your parents held out for unfinished business: the proper, celebratory finish to your Princeton Day School careers. Hoping against hope, they waited patiently—and occasionally sent me an email—to make sure that the journey which began for each of you was brought to its fitting conclusion. They have kept faith with you always, and the proof of that faith is revealed in our being here this morning. Thank you to them, as well.

As I close, I will remind you of one more thing: one morning in late April, we gathered together so that I could deliver disappointing news: your June graduation on this spot would not take place. Difficult as that moment was, I remember it for another reason: the promise we made to one another to gather on this broad lawn and celebrate this event. Let us always remember the promise we made on that day. Let us always remember the day we kept it.