**14452, Paul Weber – Graduation – 10 minutes**

Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen,

For the last 18 years I have been teaching here at Bayport-Blue Point Schools and I am honored to be presented the Teacher of the Year Award. Whether I was teaching the high school band or acting as the Chairperson for the Art and Music Department, it has been a joy to teach our young people. Both positions gave me the chance to nurture their creativity and encourage them to expand their talents and enjoy being creative. That can be a real challenge with children of any age. Some of them don’t want to try to do art work and others only want to do independent art work.

I’ll never forget one day coming into the band room to find the entire band standing at attention. When I asked what was happening the band president stepped out front and declared that they had a newly arranged rendition of the school fight song and wanted to know my opinion. I told them to continue and the next thing I knew I was surrounded by band members playing pretend instruments and make sounds like in “The Music Man”. They weren’t bad; some of them actually sounded like their instruments. It was a bit of a challenge to bring things back to order for the rest of class.

Despite antics such as this, there is no greater fulfillment for a teacher than to see a student stretch themselves and do something that is a challenge to them. Our students have truly spread their wings in creating new things. They’ve even challenged me in teaching them. I can tell you though that when you encourage young people to grow you will watch them blossom and have lots of fun while they’re creating. I’ve had to temper a few practical jokes and mentor a few budding artists when they create their own unique comic strips. But, to see them stretch themselves is worth the challenges of teaching them boundaries in the classroom.

One particular challenge that teachers have had to meet has been to deal with the Common Core Standards and the APPR imposed by the NYS Education Department. Standards such as these are designed to keep everything uniform for measuring purposes. But, uniformity by its very nature can stifle creativity. I believe that if we, as teachers, keep the students as our main focus, not the uniformity of state standards, then we will be successful as educators and we will create successful students. We can train our students to know how to learn, not just how to pass a test or meet a requirement.

Students will get enough of standards and tests and stringent requirements in their regular classes. But, we as teachers can concentrate on educating the “whole child” by teaching not just facts and figures, but also encouraging students to think about the lessons they’ve learned and how they might apply them to their own lives and the world they are growing up in. In doing so we can open up a new world to them where they can make a difference by using their unique talents in whatever way they choose.

It’s also so very important to impress upon our students the value of the Arts as part of a well-rounded education. That use to be the norm, to make sure students were well-rounded. I remember when we were students there were so many things we learned that we thought we’d never use. But, even though we may not use the actual skills, such as geometry or algebra, we still use the problem solving skills we learned in order to do those math problems.

Nothing we have learned in life is a waste. No lesson is for naught. Whether it be a very serious lesson such as history or a fun lesson such as in art or music, everything has a purpose and a use in our lives at some point. What would be a waste is if we only taught our children to be robots who mindlessly obeyed without question. Where would the new inventions come from? Many new inventions are as much the result of creativity as they are technicality. Where would new machines come from if not from a technically creative individual who thought outside the box?

There are some who think that create talents and technical skills are totally independent of one another. But, think about it. It takes technical and mathematical skills to design new buildings and machinery. But, it also takes creative talent to think up completely new designs that will work technically. An architect is both creative and technical if he or she is to be successful. A merely technical architect would build buildings to look alike, at least within a type. But, a creative architect will create new and different designs that work more efficiently than before and are more beautiful than we could imagine.

Our students have so much potential, even with their jokes and pranks. As a matter of fact, some of the most creative things I’ve seen have come as a result of a student trying to either outdo or prank another student. I have the utmost confidence that when our students go out into the world they are going to make their mark in some very unusual ways. I can see new and different games being created. I can see new and different machinery being designed. I can see new and different works of art being created. I can see this potential in our students, all as a result of us, as educators, teaching the whole child.

When we teach in this manner we get to see the delight of that whole child as they learn more than just knowledge. They learn how to use knowledge over a broad spectrum of experiences. They learn how to think, not just how to act. They learn how to pass on their knowledge, not just how to retain that knowledge.

I know that kids will be kids, at any age. They will test the boundaries. They will turn a classroom into chaos if allowed. But, that’s just them letting off some steam from being cooped up. When we allow them to put that energy into something that is important to them and give them some room to express all that they’ve learned, then we will see the result of teaching the whole child.

I, for one, am proud to be that type of teacher. I have seen so many students and watched them grow from very young to grown up, watched them go from being shy and hesitant to bold and confident, that I am excited to see what this year’s class of students will do as they move on to the next chapter of their lives. I am even more excited to meet our next crop of students and take the time to discover what new ideas they bring in with them and how we can nurture them to fulfill their destiny in life.

Thank you