**COMMENCEMENT SPEECH**

**FOR**

**COSMO TERRIGNO**

Ladies and gentlemen, family and friends, students, faculty, board members, and most importantly, graduates, welcome to the 2017 commencement exercises for the graduating class of Woodland Country Day School... we have all invested our best... time, effort, encouragement, and spirit to get to this day. (**If there are specific people you want to acknowledge you can do that here**). Of course this ceremony could not have been possible without the diligence and dedication of several people and I would like to thank them now. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Although we call this a **COMMENCEMENT**, it is also a completion. Before moving on to take your place in new schools, today is a day to celebrate achievement and to wish our graduates the very best of good fortune and accomplishment throughout your education and beyond. You have all spent the last several years in an environment that intentionally built a firm foundation for you to be able to grow, explore, and evolve into thoughtful, informed, and responsible adults. We have emphasized the importance of a well rounded education, and although our curriculum is considered traditional, in this day and age, I truly believe that is the highest achievement we can boast. We carefully plan our programs that focus on **academics, athletics, and aesthetics,** and we plan and coordinate lessons and experiences that intentionally concentrate on preparing you for an enriched and well-rounded future. We believe in honoring the past while preparing for the issues presented in the present and beyond. While other schools do their best to provide an education, the faculty and board of WCDS know that we don't make it easy for you. School may have been challenging for some or most, but that's the good news!! That means you've learned to push yourselves further than your peers. It means that as you advance from here to high school and on to college and the working world, you will find you are more equipped and more able to work with an expanded "tool kit" of exceptional skills.

Graduates, today YOU are our stars... and it's a privilege to acknowledge your achievements. Your family and friends are incredibly proud. Your teachers and advisors are impressed and relieved that their hard work and cutting edge programs are working... (**If you want you can say this with a little exaggeration and wait for the laugh**) and your younger schoolmates... those that follow in your footsteps, regard you with awe and will grow through your experiences as they prepare to take their places on the shoulders of your collected challenges and accomplishments.

I am also tremendously pleased and proud to speak to this, my **THIRTEENTH** graduating class...we are all here by choice and we all know that the education and this event rivals those of other comparable schools.... but our programs, our atmosphere, and the level of quality here at WCDS are all incomparable. To be able to stand before all of you right here, in front of this historical building, Ivy Manor, originally part of the Judge Wood Estate, is itself a tremendous honor. This spot and these grounds have been host to a legacy that can be lost to those not aware of the history of this wonderful place. Part of your education... really a continuing part of ALL of our education, is to recognize and really appreciate just what heritage means and how important it is in the grand scheme of life.... although you're just leaving the eight grade, as you grow older and take on more responsibilities; as you expand your grasp of the world around you and as you understand the meaning of picking up the torch where others leave off, you will have new perspectives of what this all means to you.... and like the relay races you have ran and won... or not, you will see that all of this will become a metaphor for life.... it will become clear that all that has gone on in the past prepares you to carry the baton forward to your new challenges. You will learn that if the hand-off of that baton was solid, you were encouraged to do your best to place that symbol in your teammates' hand as firmly and securely... as knowingly as you possibly were able to do at that moment. That's what life is all about. We've prepared you for the passing of the baton.... in every phase of your lives.

(**Perhaps since the class is small, it would be nice to individually acknowledge each graduate with an encouraging sentence**). Every year we come to the point where we embrace a bittersweet farewell to those moving on. Graduates, you have each worked admirably to achieve your goals and those of WCDS. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, we were all so impressed that you \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. To \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ , both you managed to stand out as you \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (**etc**.). I want all of you to keep something in mind... as upper class people at this school, you were at the top of the "crew." You had the command and respect of the lower class people and the faculty and you've been our "stars" for almost one year.... now that you're moving on to high school, it will be next level and things will be presented from a different perspective. You will literally be the "new kids on campus." You will probably feel fresh and raw and surroundings will seem unfamiliar. The tendency might be to feel a bit overwhelmed, but take heart... remember the open mindedness and enthusiasm you learned to maintain here? All you have to do is stay focused, keep your eyes and ears open, and be prepared to **learn**... about everything from every one... and even if the lessons seem impossible or unnecessary... that is not for you to determine.... here is the best wisdom I can give you... as graduating eighth graders from this fine school, we've instilled you with a lot of knowledge for people your age... but don't forget this: you might have learned a lot **BUT**... **YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW**. Stay alert, pay attention, take notes and ask questions. And if you see a classmate or friend having a problem, extend your friendship and a helping hand. We're all in this together and now you have the legacy of your foundation formed here at WCDS to guide you through the next phases of your education and your life.

To the parents of our graduates (**Do you want to distinguish between the tuition paying and non tuition paying parents? Perhaps be discreet about this?**), you have entrusted us with very precious resources... your children. We are honored and humbled for your faith in the faculty's ability to encourage and support an environment that nurtures all, and we know the importance of heeding the words of Secretary of Education, William Bennett, who said, "A solid education by eighth grade is a necessity or there will be trouble later in high school or beyond." No matter the circumstances, we have all invested in the success of our kids and in turn we have invested in the future of our community and ultimately our country. I am gratified to know the hard work we invest here is backed up and reinforced by you at home and just because these students will be moving on to other campuses and environments, that is all the more reason to continue your vigilant encouragement of these students. The home will be the one constant in the transition phase from eighth grade to high school and now more than ever your support and encouragement will go a long way to guiding the way through strange new settings.

I want to thank our board of trustees for all of the support and guidance you provide and have provided for this school for the past sixty years. Times change, priorities shift, but one thing that is non-negotiable is the quality of education provided in challenging times.... and ALL times have their unique challenges. It is through your dedication and that of the boards that preceded you that Woodland has remained at the forefront of elementary education for generations.

As one final thought to our graduates, your number might be small, but your enthusiasm and brother-sisterhood more than make up for that! Together you have created quite a force and it's a pleasure to witness such a united group of students. You've demonstrated diverse interests, and from the opportunities provided here at Woodlands, you are beginning to define your personalities and passions. Whether you showed your love of animals or your skills in sports; whether you were WOWED at the theater when seeing "Hamilton...." who **WASN'T**?? (**Wait for the laugh**), you are showing the potential to develop into fine, aware young adults. You've built friendships that will last a lifetime and each one of you will always remain a part of the history and foundation of Woodland Country Day School. On behalf of the faculty and the Board of Trustees, once again we wish you enthusiastic best wishes for your future accomplishments.

Thank you all!