**GRADUATION SPEECH**

**FOR**

**STEFANIE LOWERY**

Ladies and gentlemen, family and friends, faculty, administrators, graduates, and all of you other **sharks** out there..... it really is **GREAT** to be here to celebrate with all of you at these Commencement exercises, honoring the graduating class of 2021 for Imagine North Port High School!!! It’s taken **A LOT** of time, effort, dedication, resourcefulness, and focus .... especially for the past year, to get to this point, but we’re here!!! Graduates, you **MADE IT**!!!

That’s the good news... the **OTHER** news is that while today may seem like a completion, and it really is in many ways, leaving Imagine North Port High School represents a **BEGINNING**. Graduates, so far, you have worked on the very first, most basic layer of the foundation for your lifelong educational career..... and I want to be **VERY** clear about something.... no matter where life and circumstances find you.... no matter where you go or how you choose to live your lives..... learning **NEVER** stops!! I think we’ve all had first hand experience that shows us that we never know what may happen in the next month... week... day.... hour... and that not knowing.... that unpredictability of life, conspires to keep us on our toes. You’ve gotten an incredibly well rounded educational foundation here at Imagine North Port, but now the **FUN** starts!!! Whether you choose to continue your formal education in college or university, or if you’ve chosen to enter the workforce or military, the staff and faculty of this school have done their best to inspire you and teach you **how** to learn and how to continue to build yourselves, from the inside out, to grow into the adults you’ve dreamed you might be. The education you receive in these formative years provides the tools required to navigate the roadmap... or should I say, the “**treasure map**” of life and the future. It’s up to each one of you to pay attention to the signs along the way.... maintain your focus while being aware of your surroundings, be respectful of others that will share the road with you... no matter how far they may travel on your path, and most of all, if ever you feel lost in your pursuit of your goals, by all means, ask for directions!!

While you were here at Imagine North Port, you’ve had mentors. You’ve been guided to explore history and science, math and humanities. You’ve researched professions and participated in sports and cultural events, and some of you, speaking of the military, have shown your distinction and determination as members of our Young Marines.... I know I speak for everyone here when I wish all of **YOU** hearty congratulations for **REALLY** doing us **PROUD**!! Being named 2021 unit of the year, out of **THREE HUNDRED UNITS**, is a brilliant example of the impact our programs and focus can have on our student population and our community as a whole!!! Your achievements demonstrate what is possible when a group works together to accomplish a goal... and that’s a great example for **ALL** of us... no exceptions!!! Ultimately, we are all part of a team... whether it’s as a family, in a classroom, or in the professional sector, collaboration, mutual respect, understanding, and knowing that we succeed **ONLY** if we **ALL** succeed, is one of the greatest lessons to learn in life. Thank you to our Young Marines... for your accomplishments and for raising the bar for future classes and participants!! Whether you realize it or not, people watch your performance. They are guided by the way you conduct yourselves. There is a ripple effect.... be that person that would inspire **YOU**.

Years ago, a famous composer named Michel LeGrand had some wise words to share. He said, “The more I live, the more I learn. The more I learn, the more I realize the less I know.” Now, granted, this concept might make some of you think, “Well then, why even bother??” We bother because knowledge ignites a spark. It tests our curiosity and provokes a thirst to know more.... and hopefully more.... now, more than ever, we have incredible opportunities to learn.... we literally have the world at our fingertips. More information is available to us in the palms of our hands than we might ever have imagined even a few years ago, but with that power to access knowledge comes a warning.... be vigilant in what you seek and find.... be aware of the sources of that information.... try to make sure that the information you receive is valuable and accurate. Question authority... respectfully, when you feel it’s called for, and don’t necessarily believe everything you read, just because it is in black and white. An important part of being educated is learning to trust your own instincts, to be able to navigate challenging situations with appropriate wisdom and curiosity, and to always be able to distinguish right from wrong. As I mentioned earlier, your high school education placed you on the playing field of life, it’s now up to you to read the signs and do your best to proceed with integrity and authenticity.

I am confident in this group of young adults and I want to acknowledge all of you that have provided support, encouragement, and wisdom to these students. The future will get brighter and brighter as young adults like our grads take their place in the world, and for that, I am very thankful!!! Congratulations and thank you all!! **GO SHARKS**!!