**EDUCATIONAL SPEECH**

**FOR**

**ROBERTA PALUMBO**

Hello everyone!!! It’s so wonderful to see all of you here today… to all of the parents, family and friends here….. to the faculty, administrators, and all of you that help to make this school what it is…. to the special, distinguished guests… and of course to all of the students… and future grads, thank you so much for being here, to celebrate, encourage, and learn from our graduates as they have learned from you. And of course, to our graduating class of 2023…. **WOW**!!! We made it!!! This class is very special….. not only for the unique and individual perspectives each one of you have brought to the Aaron School, but for the “**unique**” and special experience we have all shared…. in one way or another, for the past four years.

Back in 2019, as you made your way through the halls and classrooms of our 30th Street campus, who would ever have guessed that we were all about to be faced with, literally, the **experience of a lifetime?**” We went about our business of education and learning, unsuspecting that within a year, a completely new learning experience would consume our lives and the time we dedicate to our school careers. The Aaron School has always prided itself on providing the most comprehensive, nurturing environment for all of our students. While so much around us was impacted by the mandated limitations prevailing in the midst of a global pandemic, we… the faculty and administrators never lost sight of the possibility of negative impacts on our very special community. While we knew we had to brace for the worst, we rose to the occasion the best way we could. Our community found the ways in which to nurture our students and to strengthen connections, even through the imposed distance. We got creative…. And you kids got “**creativER**”… (**Wait for the laugh**)… I mean **MORE** creative… and here you are!!! You’ve completed your courses. You’ve done the really hard work. You exercised your visions in new and amazing ways. Today, although we are sad to see you leave, you need to know that you are now becoming a part of the Aaron School history and legacy. You will forever be know as the “little graduating class that **COULD… and DID**.” I know I speak for the entire staff, your family, and your friends when I say we **COULD NOT BE MORE PROUD** of you!! (**HS: In the past, you named individual students… if you want to do that here, we can. Just let me know, send the info, and I will add)**.

If there’s one thing the past several years have taught us, it is this. There is an African proverb that states, “Smooth seas do not make skillful sailors.” What does that mean to us? It means that with challenging conditions comes great opportunity for experience. It means that if we get too comfortable… too complacent…. we will never truly know or realize our full potential…. Well, grads, **GUESS WHAT**?? Based on what you’ve been through…. based on how you all came through and not only survived but learned and grew in the process and **THRIVED**, you graduates are **CHAMPS**!!! It may not have felt that great when we were all in the thick of it, masked up and trying to figure things out, but guess what? You **DID** figure it out!! You **DID** triumph!! You **DID** learn!! You expanded your knowledge. You participated with friends. You showed how resourceful and creative you are and **CAN BE**… and although this is the end of your high school careers, you’re **JUST BEGINNING**!! As you receive and admire your well earned diplomas, acknowledge to yourselves that you have a good, solid educational foundation. That paper is the symbol of your commitment to yourselves, to your dedication for knowledge, and for your devotion to your future.

Every now and again, I go over to the Aaron School Instagram account. It serves as a great “virtual” meeting place… it shows us and our community and gives our friends and families a chance to take a little look and see how everyone is doing. It’s a place for sharing progress, acknowledgement… (**you can say**) … shoutout to our great school nurses, Nadine and Natalie!!! … and admins (**would you like to name them too?**)!! (**And wait for the laugh**)… it also shows the world the dedication and spirit that runs rampant in our students… from the “**earth shaking**” and wonderful Spring Concert to the day trips… particularly Camp Getaway… to the projects done through the Key Club… to competing together in our celebration of **PI** day… not only did you enjoy the **fruits** of your efforts, you **PROVED** you’re the **UPPER CRUST!! FOR REAL**!!! (**Wait for the laugh**). it’s clear that your thirst for learning is satisfied… your curiosity for knowledge and understanding has been nourished and it’s all been so great to witness!!!

A lot has been said through the years and throughout history about the importance of learning. The automotive pioneer, Henry Ford said, “Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young.” The great, masterful artist, Pablo Picasso said, “I am always doing that which I cannot do, in order to learn how to do it.” Blues legend, B.B. King told us, “The beautiful thing about learning is that **NO ONE** can take it away from you.” Here is another wonderful thing about learning. **YOU** inspire us to learn with you, as we teach…. I don’t mean a general you . I mean **YOU** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and **YOU** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and **YOU** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (**name three graduates and point to them so they feel acknowledged**). I mean **EACH ONE** of you. We are here because of **YOU**. You inspire us to teach and to hold this school and it’s culture close to us, to insure that you are nurtured with not only book knowledge, but with having a profound sense that you are important. You matter. Your uniqueness provides a priceless opportunity for **US** to learn and to nurture a diverse and colorful community.

I learned of a story a while ago, of a woman who, at the beginning of the twentieth century, emigrated from Scotland to Canada. She had gone to school and studied to be a nurse. When she got to Canada, she met and married her husband and they proceeded to start their family. She had eight children, the youngest of which were twin boys. As they boys grew older, it became apparent that one of them had Down’s Syndrome. Knowing that, she chose to dedicate her life to advocacy and education of developmentally challenged children. She studied psychology and social work… remember she also had **EIGHT** children to raise!! (**Wait for the laugh**) and proceeded to open up what was first called, “The Kitchen School” because it began in her kitchen. It eventually became known as the Christine Meikle School and bears the distinction of being the first government funded school in Canada for the developmentally disabled. I tell you this story so that each one of you knows, no matter what, you make a difference. You **INSPIRE**. As you learn, you teach others.

Dr. Meikle is associated with some inspiring words…. “If I could chose but one philosophy to be my guiding light, this I would engrave in golden letters and never let out of sight. **Give to Every Person You Meet More Than You Take From Them.**” It’s now time for you to leave these doors for possibly the last time. Be proud of your impact, accomplishments, and the bonds you’ve forged while here at the Aaron School. Be eager and receptive to what lies ahead. Give more than you get. Remember knowledge is **REALLY** the “gift that keeps on giving.” It can’t be taken away from you. It doesn’t have an expiration date. It only grows… deeper, greater, more profound as you go on in life.

I wish all of you the very best as you go on from here and remember, we are so proud of you!!! Congratulations and thank you all!!