**EDUCATIONAL SPEECH**

**FOR**

**ROBERTA PALUMBO**

Hello everyone, and welcome to the Commencement exercises for the 2024 graduating class of the Aaron School! To all of the parents and family, friends and distinguished guests, fellow teachers, administrators, students, and of course, graduates, I am really thrilled to be here and stand before you, honoring the Class of 2024…. For **many** reasons.

Of course every graduating class is unique and special. Every senior, about to make his or her way past our front door for the last time, ready to take that really important step beyond high school, is special. Every senior class faces its set of challenges and revels in its accomplishments as well as their hopes and dreams for the future, and this class is **definitely** no exception! The graduating class of 2024 is unique in that we have seventeen young people receiving diplomas today, which by the way, is **VERY** significant. This is the **LARGEST** graduating class in Aaron School history, and I think that’s **AMAZING**!!! Congratulations!!! That’s **SEVENTEEN** students, who, just about four years ago, found themselves in a situation that **NONE OF US** were prepared to navigate…. A global pandemic!!!! Talk about “**Learn as you go**!!!” (**Wait for the laugh**). It was a time that was scary for most of us and definitely odd for **ALL** of us. It was a time in which we realized we would all have to work **together** to get through; a time in which we realized we would have to redefine comfort levels and have to learn to adapt to the “**new normals**” we were being faced with in life. It was a time when we realized we would truly have to be there for each other and do whatever we were capable of, to offer and provide support, friendship, and hope to those who really needed it, and in doing so, we discovered we had true connections. We weren’t alone, even though the circumstances might have seemed awkward… and at times **VERY** awkward, and you know what? You students were… and **ARE**…**AMAZING**!!! There’s a huge lesson in what we were forced to navigate for the past four years and I am amazed and gratified to witness how you went from apprehension to hesitation to curiosity to resilience, and finally to **TRIUMPH**…. And it was nothing short of inspirational.

I want to acknowledge each and every one of you that are graduating today. The staff, faculty, and I were very aware of what you had to endure. For young people who really need a sense of order, consistency, and a comforting routine, that was almost impossible to provide during the pandemic. For much of the time, as school had to bend with the restrictions and requirements during the worst of the pandemic, we had to move back and forth between virtual studies, hybrid learning, and in-school presence, we were all tested. So much of a student’s success in school is based on a sense of security and the comfort of a routine. It was hard to figure out how to handle new procedures and it was hard to come back, but you know what??? You **DID**!!! And you proved how resourceful you can be!!! You showed us your courage!!! You let us know that you clearly understand the value of an education and how far you were willing to go to make sure you **LEARNED**!!! And that really is amazing!!! And now there are about to be seventeen graduates from the Aaron School, ready to take on the world in whatever capacity works to show that resilience and curiosity.

And while you’re leaving today, your presence and impact will always be felt at the Aaron School. You’ve been here. You’ve contributed your curiosity and love of learning and that adds to the history and “legend” of the School. There’s a term called “pentimento.” Now, as you start on the next chapters in your lives, it’s a great time to learn what this means…. If you don’t know already. In painting, it’s a term that means the lines and strokes… the under painting shows through to the levels of painting on top. It’s like you can see the layers of time on the painting. If we use the term and apply it to being somewhere, it means that even though you were in a place and are now gone, you’ve made an impression…. For instance, although you are leaving Aaron School, you’ve left your mark. You’ve made a difference just from being here. Even though your “layer” may end today, the lines and the brushstrokes…. what you accomplished here, in your time at the school, join the layers and lines of the students that preceded you. The “legends” of sports, arts and crafts, theater, math club…. all of the past participants in classes and of the activities that make this school what it is, have left their layers of history for you. Now, in turn, you will leave your mark for future students. They will have a sense that you have been here. They will know that you were strong and that even through the absolute weirdest of unpredictable times, you figured out what you had to do. Future seniors will find motivation from knowing and appreciating your ability to “figure it out…” to find the strength to learn. The benefits of this kind of pentimento are at least two fold and probably more…you felt the determination that is the legacy of the Aaron School. You also now have a deep experience that will remind you that you are **NOT** your limitations. I once heard someone say a very wise thing. “Nothing is impossible. The very word says something completely opposite…. Look at that word… what it **REALLY** says is, **I’M POSSIBLE!!!”**

As you move on to the next phases of your lives, you’ll face exciting opportunities and new challenges. I am proud to note that each one of you will be going on to adventures you’ve chosen that will best suit your goals in the future, and while about half of you will be going on to college, others of you have chosen to listen to your gut and take transitional time to plan on what you feel holds the key to your future. No matter what you choose to do, **ANYTHING** you choose will be an incredible opportunity to learn, grow, build your strength and grow your self confidence. There is something really important I want to say about that. **EVERYBODY**… no matter how confident they may seem… no matter how **TOGETHER** they may act, probably has issues regarding their own self assurance. It’s normal and natural, when finding yourself in a new environment, to doubt yourself. Unfamiliar surroundings, new people to meet, new assignments to tackle, can do that to a person. I don’t want to even **THINK** that anything any of you set out to do can’t be accomplished….let’s face it… you made it through a **PANDEMIC**!! You didn’t even realize your own strength, but **YOU DID IT**,,, you showed yourselves and everyone else that you have the ability to stretch beyond the limitations you feared might stop you. Guess what??? **NOTHING** can stop you!!! And that’s the legacy that is **YOUR** gift to the Aaron School!!!

I want to leave you with one last thought. “There’s nothing wrong with shooting for the stars. If you put out 150%, then you can expect 100% back. That’s what I was told as a kid and it’s worked for me so far!!!” That was said by none other than Justin Timberlake… and by the way, he has learning disabilities and suffers from anxiety (**note: he has OCD and anxiety. Don’t know if or how you might want to phrase this**). As you leave here, please don’t ever forget that you are unique, capable, and unstoppable!!! Congratulations and thank you for being the best part of The Aaron School!!! Thank you all!!