

## COMMENCEMENT SPEECH –Paige Spicuzza – CLASS OF 2023

Families, friends, teachers, administrators, and most importantly, the class of 2023, welcome. We, the senior class, have been looking forward to this day for the past 13 years. As we marched into kindergarten with backpacks that reached our ankles, we were convinced that 2023 was eons away. Graduation was a figment of our imagination; we could see the finish line, but would never reach it. Yet, here we are, after hours of hard work, listening to lectures, and planning out our futures. We made it. Now, we impatiently wait for the moment where we stand up, move our tassels from one side to the other, and toss our caps, throwing the years of stress and frustrations into the air. Everything built up inside of us is finally released, like a dam letting out water, and as it flows, the memories begin.

Today, May 23rd, is the day to reflect on everything we have experienced in the past 13 years. Gardiner was the beginning, where we met our best friends after a mere five seconds. We despised nap time, as we wanted to explore the new environment around us. At Timmons we experienced One School One Book with the decorated hallways, Zoo Crew, and the checkers tournament, in which the competition was a matter of life or death. Across campus at KIS, we held onto our last two years of recess, playing gaga ball, knockout, and newcomb.

We took our first class adventure in middle school, as we attended 7th grade camp, with the unforgettable insect-filled bathrooms, and the delicious whoopie pies, and our second was to DC, which consisted of jam packed buses and non-stop touring. We faced our first round of adversity with the gas leak. Moving back to Gardner, where our educational journeys began, showed how much we grew, not only physically but also mentally. The once huge school seemed so miniscule and unfitting for the middle schoolers we were. Little did we know the building that was waiting for us.

High school. The final move. The big step towards adulthood and the real world. We have spent these past four years living in the moment and preparing for our futures. Though our experience was not fully normal, we still went to football games, participated in clubs, and befriended our teachers.

We thought high school had a never ending countdown, but that alarm is now going off. This is our last stop together. Our 13 year ride full of adversities has reached its final destination. As we move forward, the Kenston Class of 2023 is nonexistent; rather, we are merely Kenston alumni. Following tonight, we become individuals, no longer linked to our past. Tomorrow, we begin the process of looking forward to the future.

There were various mottos I followed these past 13 years, my personal favorite being, "Don't mess it up." These four words rang in my ears as my mind could never seem to deviate from this blunt and simple sentence. I had a test tomorrow? "Don't mess it up." I had a soccer game? Well, I better play my best and "don't mess it up." Everything I did was an attempt at perfection. Yet, I am here today to tell you all that I have messed up many, many times. But, I am also here today in my cap and gown. Here, at this graduation, speaking before you all. I made it, just like the rest of you, and I too stand here eager to move on to the next chapter of my life. We learned from our mistakes, and grew. We accepted and moved on.

Our journeys may not be as perfect and idealistic as we envision them to be. When we graduate high school, there is an assumption that life only gets easier. But, it may not. Honestly, it probably will not. There are more responsibilities, more pressures, more difficulties. There may be struggles, pain, loss, frustrations, all of the negative emotions that one can possibly fathom. But, in contrast, there will be so much joy, freedom, and discovery.

So, I challenge you all to be bold, make mistakes, test yourself, because after tonight, we are entering the real world. Though obstacles may present themselves, take comfort in the strength of the Kenston community, but be sure to look ahead as well and confide in those you meet in the future.

Kenston class of 2023, as we depart the plane we have ridden for the past 13 years, take into consideration that time flies, but realize that you are the pilot.