

Deerfield Academy
2020 Commencement Remarks
August 9, 2020

Good morning, everyone. I'm Brian Simmons, President of the Board of Trustees. It is my honor to welcome you as we celebrate Commencement of the Class of 2020.

When senior year began, not quite twelve months ago, our seniors arrived on campus anticipating all the traditions, camaraderie and excitement of senior year at Deerfield. They rightfully expected the year to culminate with a parade down Albany Road and Commencement exercises in that ubiquitous green and white tent. No one envisioned a global pandemic. No one envisioned that we would have to suspend in person instruction after Spring Break, leaving Commencement in limbo. No one – and I mean no one - wanted to give up on the possibility that we could have students back on campus. Until the last possible moment, school leadership and faculty, with the full support of the Board of Trustees, tried to preserve the option of a typical celebration for the Class of 2020 and all they have accomplished.

Nonetheless, circumstances have ruled, and this morning we find ourselves together online – a first for Deerfield. This morning that green and white tent spans more than 35 states and 47 countries. We have come so far in the past five months that it seems completely normal to say that we are “together” online. Also, online behavior and etiquette have evolved rapidly. So, I chose to make my remarks this morning standing up – to make sure everyone would be certain I am wearing pants. I hope all of you are too.

To the Class of 2020: I suspect many of you are gathered with friends and family. I imagine some of you have found ways to be together in person this morning. I hope so. Wherever you are – we are all here together inside that tent – to honor you – to impart a few final thoughts as you conclude your time on campus – and to remind ourselves that Deerfield is so much more than our campus, our buildings and our

traditions – even those as revered and important as that walk down Albany Road. .

Every Commencement is different. Each is special and memorable. Clearly, this one is particularly unique. In fact, I predict it will become an important part of Deerfield lore, tying you to each other as classmates and members of the Deerfield community in a lasting, powerful way.

Deerfield has long been shaped and strengthened by members of its community. Each of us contributes. Whether you are a trustee, student, head of school, staff member, or teacher - you find a way to make your mark.

This begins with a recognition of how exceptional Deerfield is. We find ourselves drawn to the spirit of the school. We want to participate in the life of this place. We want to make it our own, and we want to contribute something of ourselves.

In this way, Deerfield evolves to reflect those who have spent their time and effort on the fields, in the classrooms, and on the halls. The Class of 2020 – each and every one of you – is an important part of that story.

You have already given so much to Deerfield, during your entire time on campus and, of course, since March. While you did not have the same senior spring and rites of passage enjoyed by previous classes, you have more than filled that space with your tremendous leadership and poise. The outstanding example you have set will be remembered for a long, long time. You embody Mr. Boyden’s charge to “Finish Up Strong”. And while some of the experiences you have missed can never be replaced, I do not think there is an expiration date on pranks. Senior Pranks - too late, I fear – but alumni pranks, maybe someday even parent pranks.... On behalf of the Board, I hereby declare all to be fair game. You may or may not want to check with Dr. Austin or Ms. Creagh before proceeding.

I speak for everyone on the Board when I say we are inspired by you. We will be guided by your approach to challenges none of us imagined. We share the pride and respect felt by your families and teachers, a pride that you should feel for yourselves now and forever. Congratulations, 2020!

Dr. Austin – the podium is yours.