

Deerfield Academy
2020 Commencement Remarks
August 9, 2020
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Hello to the families watching at home, faculty, and the Class of 2020. Thank you for this opportunity to speak one last time.

I want to take you all back to ninth grade. I remember grabbing my duffle bag from the grass in front of the MSB where the Class of 2020 first stood to take a grade photo. Although I know not every member of our class began at Beckett, I would like to believe that each person can relate to feeling like a fish out of water. I have often heard that there is something about the outdoors that brings people together. In my opinion, fear was what brought us together. I remember being one of the only students in my cabin who had brought a flashlight, and most of my conversations during the trip surrounded people wanting to borrow said flashlight. Nevertheless, I was just happy that I had a purpose. My first title was Flashlight Girl.

A few months later, I felt more comfortable being on campus. I could recognize more faces on the path, classes were in full swing, and I remember truly feeling like a Deerfield student after confidently ordering an iced coffee in the Koch center for the first time. But unbeknownst to myself at the time, I would soon gain a new title. After setting off the fire alarm on Johnson III, I became Burnt Bhakta. Chris Thagard, if you are watching this, thank you for the nickname.

These small anecdotes reflect the fluid nature of the names or titles that each person at Deerfield holds. If only Burnt Bhakta knew that people would jokingly call her Madame President during her senior year. I believe that one way my progression at Deerfield can be marked is with these small moments, and I am sure that the same goes for you all. I am so humbled and, simply put, proud to be part of this class. Each and every one of you wears many hats around campus. Student, athlete, captain, peer counselor, proctor, artist, editor; the list goes on. But now we can add one more name to this list: trailblazers.

While this might seem like a bold claim, I stand by it, and here is why:

Firstly, we all left Spring Break with varying degrees of uncertainty. When I packed my single suitcase, thinking that those were all the clothes I needed for the vacation, I never would have predicted that we would not return to campus. But with every challenge that arose, our class met it with fierce problem-solving and genuine care for one another's physical and mental health. Although our grade GroupMe is often a place of debate and expiring opinion polls, after spring break, it was where we came together despite all odds. Letters and petitions were circulated. Words of support, frustration, and sadness were shared. Organizations and donations to provide aid during the pandemic were made. The 2020 vision never faltered. Instead, we adapted.

Secondly, our trailblazing began even before the pandemic. When I reflect on our four years, I remember fond moments like dancing to the holiday songs that are performed at school meeting before Winter Break and watching the green powder blow in the wind as we stormed the football field following a historic Choate Day. But, in addition to those memories, there have also been moments on campus where we needed to have honest and difficult dialogue about issues both within and beyond our small community. When you care about something, you want to see it evolve and continually become stronger and better. I believe our class has not only shown that we care about Deerfield and one another during our time, but we have continued to show our care with Instagram pages and Facebook forums that have matched those difficult dialogues with actionable goals for a better Deerfield. I am confident that, as alumni, we will continue the pursuit of nurturing the Valley that has given us so much: our friends that have become like family, the faculty members that have become role models, and the entire Deerfield staff who woke up early and left late to make our day-to-day lives as smooth as possible. We were all given the extraordinary opportunity to share some of our most formative years, whether four or one, bearing green and white while we grew up. And we will carry Deerfield with us as we continue to grow.

In closing, I just want to say thank you. Thank you, Class of 2020, for being passionate and driven individuals who always inspired and challenged me with your unwavering initiative. Watching the talent that we have in our grade has been one of my biggest honors. Whether seeing someone you never knew had an incredible voice put themselves out there at KFC,

watching the dance showcases after knowing the countless hours they put in practicing, seeing athletes walk into the dining hall late after pushing themselves during a game, or even just hearing someone make an articulate and well-supported argument during a class discussion—we have done some incredible things. I wish you all the best of luck on whatever your fall may look like this year, and I look forward to when our class can reconvene at our One-Year Reunion—whatever that may look like as well. Thank you.