

USCHS Commencement 2019

June 6, 2019

Opening Remarks

Amy Billerbeck, President, USC Board of School Directors

Good evening. On behalf of the Upper St. Clair Board of School Directors, I would like to extend a warm welcome to the Class of 2019, family and friends, Superintendent, Dr. John Rozzo and our administrative team, Principal Dr. Lou Angelo and the high school staff.

We would like to offer our sincere congratulations to our graduating Seniors and our thanks to all of you who have supported them, taught them, coached them, mentored them, and believed in them.

As I was thinking about my remarks for this evening, I came across a quote from Dr. Minor Myers, Jr., former president of Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington, Illinois. Dr. Myers told his students: “Go into the world and do well, but, more importantly, go into the world and do good.”

Class of 2019, you are clearly doing well. As I’m sure you all know, your SAT, ACT, and Keystone Exam scores all ranked #1 out of all the public high schools in Western Pennsylvania. In addition, the *Pittsburgh Business Times* recently ranked Upper St. Clair High School #1 in the Pittsburgh region. Clearly, you have done well academically. You have also excelled in countless athletic and artistic pursuits.

We are truly proud of the hard work, effort, and determination you have put into our three “As”—academics, arts, and athletics. But we are as just as proud of your achievements in a fourth “A” category—altruism—your work on behalf of others.

There are endless examples of this. You have traveled with Kids Helping Kids to the Dominican Republic, and tutored and mentored middle school students right here in USC. You’ve participated in Mini-THON, raising over \$58,000 for pediatric cancer research, and helped with the Kindness Matters project benefitting the Pittsburgh Jewish Federation. Collectively, you have performed thousands of community service hours for IB, National Honor Society, Make-a-Wish®, Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, the Medallion Ball, and many others. You have collected food, clothing, shoes, school supplies, money, and more. Just think about it: you and your classmates have made a real difference in the lives of countless people during the past four years. In short, you have put altruism right up there with academics, the arts, and athletics; and you have made a great start at doing good.

Seniors, life is about to take you to new places in new directions. No matter where your journey takes you, get involved in your community. Pick anything you care about. Whether you are volunteering with underserved kids or for an environmental cause, in an animal shelter, or in a hospital, you can have an impact on your community and instantly connect with people who share your interests and passions. In the process, you will build on the leadership and soft skills you have already started to develop; skills that are critical in the professional world, and in life.

Keep up the good work you’re already doing. Let your altruistic spirit and your commitment to serving others be something you take with you from Upper St. Clair, to nurture and build on for the rest of your lives.

Class of 2019, you are poised to go out into the world and do well; but, more importantly, may you always continue to do good!

Superintendent’s Address

Dr. John Rozzo, Superintendent of Schools

Class of 2019, it is my pleasure to congratulate you this evening on the completion of 13 years of education, culminating in an eventful and successful senior year at Upper St. Clair High School.

I have had the pleasure of attending many commencement programs during my tenure as an administrator with the Upper St. Clair School District. Tonight’s event is especially meaningful for me—and one that I will cherish forever—as it is my inaugural commencement as your superintendent of schools. I am honored and humbled to share this special occasion with such a remarkable group of students.

I would like to begin by extending my gratitude to our high school administration and to the faculty and support staff for their commitment to our students. I would also like to thank and recognize our many other teachers and administrators—from elementary through middle school—who have played important roles along the way in the care and education of these fine soon-to-be graduates. Thank you to our school board for their ongoing pledge to deliver excellence in all that we do in the Upper St. Clair School District.

Parents and family members, thank you for trusting us with the enormous responsibility of educating your children, many of whom we welcomed as Kindergarteners nearly 13 years ago. Through the years, you have partnered with us in support of our schools and educational programs. We will be forever grateful.

There's a great deal of planning and preparation for this grand event, so, thank you to everyone who made this evening's graduation ceremony possible.

But most of all, thank you to the Class of 2019. Not only have you upheld the rich tradition of excellence that embodies Upper St. Clair High School, you have raised the bar.

Class of 2019, one only needs to look at the data to know that you have established yourselves as scholars—achieving the highest scores in the region on Pennsylvania's graduation exams as well as the SAT and ACT exams. Your outstanding achievements in the classroom have led Upper St. Clair High School to be named among the Best High Schools in the region, state, and in the nation. Recent recognition by *U.S. News and World Report* and the *Pittsburgh Business Times* are evidence of your accomplishments.

Members of the Class of 2019, you have distinguished yourselves as some of our nation's most promising high school students, with four earning National Merit Finalist honors and 16 recognized as Commended Students. There are seven members of the graduating class that are IB Diploma Candidates. Thirty-five graduating seniors were recognized as AP Scholars by the College Board.

Our speech and debate team celebrated record success, winning two Pennsylvania High School Speech league championships with several qualifying for national tournaments. And two Upper St. Clair Future Business Leaders of America teams will compete in the national competition later this June.

Your collective class resume is indeed impressive. However, your achievements reach well beyond test data and academic competitions. You have reached great heights in the arts as well. Dozens of you have earned recognition from the Pennsylvania Music Educators Association for your advanced musicianship. From *White Christmas* to the *Drowsy Chaperone*, *Evita* and, most recently, *Hello Dolly!*, you have brought tremendous joy to thousands within and beyond our community.

Your artwork, whether displayed during exhibitions or via the numerous student-created murals throughout our high school, has brightened our school and added art to our daily lives.

And, completing our three As—academics, arts and athletics—the Class of 2019 has been highly successful in athletic competitions in the gyms, pool, and on the athletic fields. Throughout your four years, you have captured countless section titles, conference championships, individual and team WPIAL championships, and brought home to Upper St. Clair, PIAA titles, both as teams and as individuals.

Not only are you accomplished scholars, artists, and athletes, through your actions, you have also distinguished yourselves as humanitarians and leaders.

During the last three years, you have raised more than \$115,000 through the student-led Upper St. Clair Mini-THON to help in the fight against childhood cancer. You have fully-funded children's wishes through the local chapter of Make-A-Wish®. Twice in the last two years, our student body has initiated, organized, and led meaningful school-wide programs to build unity and stand strong in the face of tragedy and adversity. Among you, there are several Eagle Scout and Girl Scout Gold Award recipients as well as a Gold Medalist in the Congressional Awards program. You have demonstrated compassion, kindness, and empathy for others in your daily interactions through our partner programs, Natural Helpers, the mentor program, peer tutoring program, student-run SMARTdesk, leadership academy, and Kids Helping Kids.

Simply put, you have been exemplary in everything you have done.

As I thought about tonight's commencement, I reflected on my own high school graduation. Remarkably, it is almost 25 years ago to the day that I was sitting in your space, about to receive my diploma. Time certainly has gone by quickly.

I have a vivid memory of my graduation day. My friend had planned to drive us to the commencement ceremony. Trying to be responsible, I called his house to see what time he was picking me up. You heard what I said, right? I called his home phone. However, I was confronted with the major roadblock of "older" generations... a relentless busy signal. You see, not one of my classmates owned a cell phone. The Internet was still a few years into the future. We certainly had not heard of text messaging or email. Social media had not yet been invented. Smart phones and tablets were years away. And Netflix? Well, we were just happy if we owned this thing called a VCR!

Needless to say, a quarter century later, much has changed in the world. Between now and when you celebrate your 25th anniversary of graduating from Upper St. Clair High School, there will undoubtedly be greater changes in the world than the evolution of a landline's dreaded busy signal.

Class of 2019, I am not only confident that you will help lead these changes, but your resume as students here has proven that your contributions will make the world a better place.

High school graduates are often challenged to think big and to go and do great things. I simply ask that you continue what you, the Class of 2019, have already started. You have made an indelible mark on your school and community. In your next adventure, whether it's in higher education, the military, or the workforce, I challenge you to continue to make a positive difference in everything you do. Time will go by quickly. Make the most of your journey. In closing, I leave you with a few simple, yet important things to remember as you move into subsequent chapters of your life:

- Spend lots of time with your family and friends.
- Treat everyone with respect.
- Be kind to the unkind, they often need it most.
- Help those who need help and ask for it when you need it.
- Do the right thing, even when nobody is watching.
- Be proud of where you come from . It indeed is a special place.
- Even though your time as high school students is almost over, you will forever be a proud Upper St. Clair Panther.

Whether it is next year, or 25 years from now, know that the door to Upper St. Clair is always open and we will always welcome you home.

USCHS Student Speeches

Eshita Chhajlani

To be blunt, I will not be offering any advice in this speech. I have no intention on lecturing you on how to reach your full potential or tell you to take more risks in life. Maybe when I'm 50 and wealthy and well-known, I'll be qualified to share my wisdom with you. However, for now, I will simply invoke the discoveries of one revolutionary genius.

Your existence has an impact. Now before you think I am about to go back on my initial disclaimer, this statement is simply a scientific observation. Actually, Albert Einstein uncovered the fundamental relationship between space and time. Skipping the mathematical models and scientific jargon, space and time are essentially linked by a metaphoric fabric; one cannot exist without the other. The three dimensions of space and one dimension of time are fused into a four-dimensional reality. And, any matter that exists, including yourself, literally bends this spacetime geometry. Therefore, in an infinite universe over a wide range of time, you are sitting here, listening to me talk, at 40.34°N, 80.07 °W on June 6, 2019, bending the fabric of the universe. Fundamentally, your existence literally has an impact on everything.

With this in mind, we revolve our lives around the depth and length of the scars we make on this spacetime fabric; we all strive to make a graze or a mark deep enough on our environment that it cannot possibly be disregarded. And we can only hope that that mark will someday inspire someone to say, "Wow, she was sensational," or "he was extraordinary." Sitting here with you all, I have to say that you can rest assured because in the four years at the Upper St. Clair High School, the Class of 2019 has already significantly bent the fabric of our spacetime reality. To highlight some of the marks we've made: The girls varsity soccer team are 2015 state champions, the Speech and Debate team won both the 2017 and 2019 state championship, the girls cross country team and boys swim team won the section two years in a row, we attended and organized the legacy of Mini-THON, girls varsity lacrosse competed in the final of the 2019 WPIAL playoffs, the FBLA team had amazing success at the Pennsylvania competition, and lastly, we came together as a community to honor the 14 victims of the Parkland High School shooting. At the beginning of this speech, I told you I would not give you advice because the clear truth is... you don't need it. As we spend the rest of our lives continuing to create marks on our reality, we'll ask ourselves: what is time? Over four years, I have acquired partial answers from Upper St. Clair's best: Mr. Edwards told us using time has an opportunity cost, Mr. Sabram retold timely anecdotal stories, and Mrs. Marks simply declared that whatever it is, she needs more of it during her day. As we experienced moments together and made our marks over four years, I observed Einstein's fundamental rule for myself: time does not exist with space... a location... a home ... and intertwined, they create our reality. Yet, the thing about spacetime is that while it is quantifiable, it is also infinite. We can feel it intensely in its expansiveness and constraint and at the same time, it is intangible; because you breathe in and live as fully as you can and fight as hard as you can and love as much as you can and then you'll breath out. You meet new people, try new foods, and make memories all while bending space and time.

Frankly, I don't know what the future holds or what your mark will be on this world. But right now, we are all here at 40.34°N, 80.07 °W at this hour in time on June 6, 2019: a time and place that will become woven in all of our

lives as we cherish memories, celebrate our diligence, and tell one another how proud we are of our best friends. So, let's engrain this in our own spacetime fabric and honor this moment.

Paarth Shankar

Good evening everyone. Twelve years of education, and we finally made it to the day we yearned yet dreaded at the same time. As we reflect on our time at USC, it's hard to forget some of the key people and moments that made our journey so amazing.

First, to the faculty, who spent hours working with us to make sure we understood material with the knowledge that some of us didn't care what the derivative of x to the fourth was or the capital of Tunisia. (By the way, $4x$ to the 3rd and Tunis.) They also invested their own time running clubs or sports teams around the school in order to enhance the almost-perfect student experience.

To our parents! Sure, our teenage hormones might have gotten the best of us occasionally as we whined and rolled our eyes about small things like not getting the car for the night. But none of us would be sitting here without their loving care and support... day in and day out.

To Netflix, for distracting us from homework and keeping us up until 2 a.m. on weekdays!

And finally, to the Class of 2019, the memories we gave each other and the shoulder to lean on were things that never went unnoticed. During late night study sessions where more laughter meant less studying. Or on late Saturday nights when the first thing that came to our minds was greasy fried food at Park after Dark. We pushed each other into the best versions of ourselves. That's why we're all headed on to such great places.

Now, as we enter a new journey and begin a new story in a new place, we leave the place we found comfort in. We will meet new people and we will eat something that doesn't involve fries in a capicola sandwich at Primanti's.

The biggest thing I learned from my high school experience that all of us should continue to apply is that our mind will never change if we continue to only hear our own opinion reiterated back to us. So, as we move on, make sure we're open to other people's ideas and not stuck in our own beliefs. Don't ridicule those who have different opinions. In a time where differences in opinions create heightened tension, it's our job to make sure we don't let that happen. Rather, we embrace different ideas and lead lives, where instead of veering apart, we come together.

As we come together as a class for one last time, it's important to understand what this means. Let our diplomas tie us to one another. What we receive today isn't an end of our story; rather, it's merely the beginning.

Emma LaRocco

As we all know, commencement speeches were open for submission to all students a few weeks ago. I knew I would love to write a speech, but what would be my idea? I would have to write it and it would have to be chosen. If I was lucky enough to be selected, I would have to stand in front of all of you and read it. Could I do it? I ran the idea past my mom, and she said, "You can do it, I dare you!" And with that challenge I had my idea.

Here we sit as our last time together as the Class of 2019. We will all look back on high school with different memories. I dare you to look back with no regrets. As teenagers there are times when we, perhaps, felt inadequate and disappointed with our decisions, but you never know how your decisions influenced the people sitting around you. And that could be the person next to you today. I dare you to look back on high school with happy memories, whether that be competing in your sport and winning the game; opening night of your last year participating in the musical; pulling an all-nighter, raising money for childhood cancer for Mini-THON, or starting the year dancing at senior cruise and then finishing the year dancing at prom.

There are so many events that have brought us together, but it is the memories of the people at these events that make the biggest impression. Your conversations at lunch mods, your laughs over recounting fun weekends together, your school spirit cheering on your fellow Panthers in the student section, whatever. It is these friendships and people that surround you who have helped form who you are today. I dare you to be grateful. Grateful to the teacher who encouraged you to do your best. But on those occasions that you didn't, still gave you a life lesson. Like Mr. Hartnett who loves to say, "Don't worry! Ice cream still tastes good at the end of the day." Grateful to your coaches who pushed you to your physical limitations and provided you with feedback on how to improve, and through that, showed you how to become part of a team. Grateful to the staff who put in extra hours for your musical production, club meetings, or gave their time to chaperone a school-sponsored trip. Or even grateful for the laughs Dr. Angelo gave when he ripped off his wig in the LipDub video. But, most importantly, grateful to our parents. They have been there for us through it all. It is with their support we are now ready to embark on the next chapter of our lives.

Come this fall, we will all be freshman again, heading in different directions and no longer having the comfort and familiarity of Upper St. Clair High School. It is time for us to embrace the newness that is ahead. I dare you to try new things. Join a club that you have never participated in, consider giving your time volunteering for an outreach

program, or travel to a place you have never been. Whether that be through study abroad or just a trip you plan on your own. These experiences will help you to grow as a person.

I dare you to be in the moment. If it is college that you are headed to, it is only four years that you have for this experience. So, pick classes that will challenge you academically, but also pick classes that spark your interest. Make sure you embrace the city that you're going to, the campus that you are on, and take advantage of what is offered in your new surroundings. Of course, we should all strive to do well academically, but it is also important to create new memories of our down time.

I dare you to build new friendships. As difficult as it will be to leave our friends that we have made here in USC behind, it is important to go forward and be open to new friendships. Reach out to everyone who lives in your hall, talk to the person sitting next to you in class or in the library. These simple gestures could lead to friendships that will last a lifetime.

Perhaps, some of us will change the world in profound ways. Regardless, we all have the opportunity to change the world in very simple ways. I dare you to show kindness. In our everyday lives, kindness can make a difference. I dare you to be generous. Monetary generosity is always good, but generosity of your time and energy is just as important. I dare you to be brave. You never know what life will throw at you, but we are all stronger than we realize. I dare you to be adventurous. It is not just about creating the bucket list, but also creating memories that will remain after you check it off the list. I dare you to be happy. There will always be people in life and circumstances who will pull you down. But joy and laughter are contagious and can pull you through every time.

So, in this final goodbye as we all head off to become Lions, Wildcats, Dukes, Eagles, Gators, Buckeyes, Fighting Irish, Golden Flashes, Bobcats, Wolverines, Tar Heels, Blue Hens, Flyers, Tigers, and so many more. I dare you to remember that we will all be forever Panthers. Mom, you dared me and I did it! Now I dare all of you.

Tushar Roy

Class of 2019, the day has finally come. No, not our graduation day, but the day we have to say goodbye to the beloved pepperoni roll. If you don't mind, I'd like to start off with a little tribute to the 'roni roll:

Dear 'roni roll

'Twas my heart you stole

That first bite made me lose control

Now I have to leave you

Please say this isn't true

For all the mems I thank you

I want to thank everyone for giving me the opportunity to speak today, and I can assure you that it was a mistake.

Ladies and gentlemen, teachers, staff, friends, and family, good evening and congratulations to the Upper St. Clair High School Class of 2019. It was a short four years ago when we walked through the doors of the high school for the first time. We were wide-eyed freshmen, excited to take on and experience high school in its purest form. Little did we know how foolish we were back then. What followed was four years of delicious bsammys, missing assignments, and borderline grades turned bad. But, here we are today, graduating and readying ourselves to start the next stage of our lives. That brings me to my main theme today: persistence.

Graduating means more than just receiving a diploma. It means that there are no more parents to live with, no more teachers to help you through your schoolwork, and, thankfully, no more cramming for tests during homeroom.

Graduating means using our education to try and do good in the world and to try and fulfill our dreams, whatever they may be. Regardless of what our future paths hold, there will be obstacles along the way. It may be a cruel professor, an unfair boss, or worse, a fake friend. What defines your character, however, is how you face these obstacles. Do you back down from these challenges or do you take them head on?

Inventor of the phrase "OMG," Winston Churchill once said, "Success is stumbling from failure to failure with no loss of enthusiasm." Let's face it, all of us have failed at something in some capacity in our lives, whether it be not getting the grade we want in a class, shooting a shot and missing, or even failing the driver's test three times. (On a side note, I'd like to advise everyone to try and stay off the roads while I'm driving. It will not turn out well, just ask the guy I crashed into at Chick-Fil-A® last summer.)

But, after each of our failures, what did we do? Did we go home and cry? No, we went home, ate Chick-Fil-A, and figured out what we should do next. What I am trying to say is this: it doesn't matter when and how we fail, but as Great Western Philosopher Big Sean often states, "Last night took an L, but tonight I bounce back." Like my man Big Sean, we have to be confident in our abilities to bounce back no matter how tough is the challenge before us. Don't lose enthusiasm. Stay confident. Any failure can be overcome.

Before I close, I would like to congratulate the Class of 2019 on a successful four years. We made it this far, but our best is yet to come! I wish all of you well on your future endeavors. If there's one thing I've learned in high school (besides the mitochondria being the powerhouse of the cell, thanks to Mrs. Carlino) it's that regardless of where life takes you, you will end up failing. What matters is how you respond to your failure. So, just like the 'roni roll... now I have to leave you, please say this isn't true, and for all the mems I thank you.