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DHS 2018 Graduation Speeches from Principal Ellen Dunn and Education Board Chairman Tara Ochman

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Darien High School's Class of 2018 got plenty of advice from speakers at Thursday's commencement ceremony. Here are more speeches from the event:

Ellen Dunn, DHS Principal

Good evening Members of the Darien Board of Education, Dr. Dan Brenner, colleagues, parents, grandparents, guests and most distinguished members of the Darien High School Class of 2018.

I am informed that following a long standing tradition at DHS, you will hand me a small token as you receive your diploma. You have chosen a puzzle piece, every one a small part of something bigger.

Unique in shape and color, it represents your individuality and the mark you have made on this place and on those who have shared this journey with you. Together, the pieces form a complete picture, the whole greater

than its parts, the Class of 2018.

Indiscernible as separate entities, when assembled, these pieces will reveal their secret — a beautiful image of a wave about to crest in the renowned print entitled *The Great Wave*, by Japanese artist, Katsushika Hokusai.

As it is with each of you, every piece is essential. Physics teaches us that a wave is really a transfer of energy through a medium, over space and time. The wave is born from a disturbance; a strong wind, an earthquake, a stone dropped from above.

In your classrooms the ripples began. Your teachers stretched your thinking and fostered discourse and debate. Your classmates engaged with you and exchanged ideas that challenged your assumptions. You were presented with endless possibilities and your imaginations soared.

The Great Wave is full of the tension that comes with anticipation. All that you have learned and all that you have experienced, is captured in this moment in time, stored in the energy about to burst forward.

It holds your hopes and dreams - your memories of hours on swing sets and summer evenings capturing lightning bugs. It carries with you the friendships that have sustained you and is fueled by the wind of wishes breathed in this stadium tonight.

You stand now on the precipice of the future, a wave poised to unleash its magnitude. Like the cresting wave, you are about to change your world. I know this because you have changed us.

You remind us to live in the present — you lose track of time and you don't care. You have grown up in the blink of an eye and have taught us that time is precious. Don't waste it worrying about things you can't control.

You keep us honest — You are uncanny in your ability to see through a façade and you know that a lie changes who you are. Remember that your integrity is difficult to find once lost.

You teach us about love — You feel intensely and you show us that it takes courage to be vulnerable. When you experience loss, lean into the pain and embrace it, it will make you stronger.

You are accepting of differences — more than any other generation, you understand that diversity enriches and that our humanity connects us. Keep your minds and hearts open.

You sing, dance and play — you remind us to live without fear of judgment. Don't ever let the voices of critics diminish you.

You don't take life too seriously — your laughter makes us smile and takes us back to a more carefree time. Forgive yourself when you make a mistake and do the same for others. It will free you.

You speak your mind — you use your voice and you demand to be heard. You challenge us to stand up for what we believe in. Act courageously and never be silenced.

When we look upon your puzzle in years to come, we will remember the Great Wave that was the Class of 2018. You have changed us for the better and we are proud of who you are now and who you are destined to become.

As this wave spreads out in all directions, remember that this is always your home and that you are loved. I imagine a night, years from now, when you will pull out an old t-shirt from the drawer and find on it a faded wave. In that moment, remember this night and the wind that sent you forth from here. ...And for one last time as your principal, let me say...Roll Wave.

Mrs. Tara Ochman, Members of the Darien Board of Education and Dr. Dan Brenner, I am proud to present to you the Class of 2018.

Tara Ochman, Chairman of the Board of Education

On behalf of the Board of Education, it is my distinct honor to welcome parents/guardians, families, teachers and administrators to this exciting, and ultimate celebration of the Class of 2018.

As I prepared for this evening, my own children told me not to mess it up, and so I looked back over remarks from former chairs for points of wisdom. Similarly, they felt a profound sense of honor when taking part in this ceremony. And, while words can be overused, I assure you this is not the case.

This ceremony and the accomplishments of our graduating seniors, lead by our dedicated Principal Ellen Dunn and her team, are the definitive moment in education for local communities.

As a Board, we believe schools exist for children. We believe that education is the key to preparing our children to participate in their future. And, we are steadfast in the belief that an educated society leads to the betterment of society.

This means that we also recognize the crucial role so many have played to make tonight possible.

Parents and families ride the ups and downs of navigating growing children, and their myriad of complex emotions.

Teachers dedicate themselves year-over-year to finding new and innovative ways to reach students.

Dr. Daniel Brenner and his administration have provided a vision for the district, and a road map for implementation.

And every year, the community of Darien re-dedicates itself to funding and supporting our school system; so a new generation can access their education and go out into the world ready to tackle what is to come.

And then, we get to maybe the most impressive group, the students — the graduating class of 2018.

You are here. You got yourself here.

There was help along the way. There were joys, there might have even been some tears. There were wins and losses, exams, performances, conferences, and concerts.

But, you did the work. You sat in the classes. You learned to become active in your education. And, all those lessons, and that hard work, have lead you here.

This is your moment, because it is at this very moment that your education becomes your own. You no longer “have to”, you “chose to.”

You have arrived. And, it is our honor to witness it.

As we do, I hope you will indulge me three quick thoughts as you head out into this world full of options.

Be Curious: Whether your next step is higher education, or the work force. Take this time to ask all the what ifs’, who did its’, why is its’. This is your time to ask it all.

Decide if you are satisfied with the answer. Support it, change it, live it. But, know why you are making your choices.

Be Brave: Be brave enough to speak your voice and your mind. Be heard.

But also be brave enough to listen, to learn, and to realize that much is said simply by what is not said. Bravery can be found in a loud battle cry, or a quiet moment. Both are to be valued.

Be Kind: The world could use a little more kindness. A little more patience for others. So be kind to others.

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And, don't forget to be kind to yourself. You will stumble. We all do, we all will. Work hard, dedicate yourself to something.

But, when you slip, give yourself enough of a break to remember — the slips and falls are merely lessons. Learn from them, push past them, and stand back up.

So, I close where I began. The honor tonight is ours. And, the future is yours. We hand it to you with confidence and pride.

On behalf of the Darien Board of Education, congratulations to the Class of 2018!