

Darienite

News for Darien

<https://darienite.com>

DHS Graduates Celebrate Culmination of High School and Commencement of the Rest of Life

Author : David Gurliacci

Categories : [Education](#)

Tagged as : [Darien High School 2020-2021](#), [Darien High School Graduation 2021](#)

Date : June 18, 2021

Darien High School's 2021 graduation ceremony combined congratulations on getting through high school during the COVID-19 pandemic with the regular high school graduation themes — life advice, thankful appreciation and assurance that the graduates have what it takes to succeed in the future.

The 321 graduating seniors had a sunny late spring day and blue sky to accompany speeches filled with hope and optimism.

In a speech that focused on gratitude, Valedictorian Eleanor Chase offered the audience a cookbook-like "list of ingredients you'll need to make a high school graduate," including "one awkward fourteen year old," 30 teachers, two bus drivers and a supportive family. "Put the 14-year-old in a brick building for four years at approximately 70 degrees: decorate with cap and gown."

She added: "But, between all the congratulations and cords and handshakes of today, I hope we all remember everything else on that ingredient list." She then proceeded to thank teachers, administrators, maintenance staff, bus drivers, friends and, especially family:

"Thank you for cooking, cleaning, driving, nagging, tutoring, funding, worrying, and raising us these last 18 years. I know it was often a thankless job, dealing with a moody teenager, but I would like to provide that thanks on behalf of all of us — we appreciate it."

Salutatorian James Strong told the graduating class that the memories of friends and classmates will be a gift that will last through time.

"After thinking about it for a while, I realized that it means our entire history together for the past 12+ years is so much more than the test we all experienced this past year," he said, referring to the pandemic.

"And while some of our memories from kindergarten or even middle school may already be blurring with time — we can't keep them all — these moments during high school are different. Something I just learned the other day is that neuroscientists have found that the human mind forms the most vivid memories during our high school years, even more so than college.

"Take a second to appreciate that what we just witnessed is one of the most impactful times of our lives that will stay ingrained in our memories. This means I can truly say that I will never forget my time with you all."

Student Body President Charles Pegler "thanked everyone who helped get us here," including not only those who helped with education but with COVID-19, asking separately if parents and teachers would rise to accept applause.

But before that, he asked, "First, would the doctors, nurses and first responders who worked tirelessly to keep us safe over the past year please rise."

Pegler mentioned some of the highlights of the pandemic era: "It's been a trying but fun past couple of years at Darien High School [...] We ended up in the building for a great portion of our final year. We even pulled off a musical in the midst of a global pandemic. The fact that we got to do the things like prom and us even being here today is truly remarkable.

"Because of this, we owe the teachers and staff a big thank-you for doing what they could to give us some normalcy in a year that was anything but normal."

Board of Education Chairperson David Dineen offered up a list of the things that were introduced or made prominent by the pandemic, similar to the list in [the lyrics of](#) Billy Joel's "We Didn't Start the Fire":

Covid, lockdown, CDC, quarantine, social distancing, face masks, Fauci, and the WHO, outdoor dining, sourdough, Zoom meetings, day and night, ("We didn't start the fire — no we didn't light it, but we tried to fight it,") daily check-ins, hybrid learning, numbers on the rise, sweat pants, pajamas, take-out food, pants too tight, ("is it day or night?"), Pfizer, Moderna, J&J, one vaccination or two, our seniors are here now ("What else do I have to say?")

Superintendent Alan Addley focused on the example of Fred Rogers as a source of life lessons. After Rogers passed away, his wife was asked for three words that described her late husband most. She chose courage, love and discipline, "attributes that have lasted the test of time and proved useful guidance to our young graduates," Addley said.

"Have courage to be yourself. I was once given a framed sign, that now hangs in my office, which reads, 'Sometimes the best and right place to stand is where everybody else is not.'

"Making a difference can be difficult and requires a commitment to do what you know is right, most specially when no one is watching. Exhibiting courage requires conquering temptation to give up or to give in to peer pressure, and it often means standing alone with your convictions. [...]

"Whenever you find the need to, draw upon courage. May your family, your values, your faith and your advice from your teachers give you guidance and provide you with strength and good counsel.

"Love what you do and love others. A characteristic of the most successful people I know is their obvious passion for what they do. They love what they do, and they love it in front of others. Such love and passion will energize your talents. In finding something that you love to do, may you always make time for others, and especially those less fortunate. [...]

"Success in life also depends on us being kind to each other. As Fred [Rogers] himself once said, the more you grow into a helpful person yourself, the happier you'll find this world of ours really is. [...]

"Exhibit discipline in your choices [...] You've been given talents, but it takes time, effort and disciplined choices to turn your dreams and talent into results. [...]

Woodrow Wilson's secretary of state once said, 'Destiny is not simply a random matter of chance. It is a matter of choice and discipline. It is not something to be waited for, but is something to be achieved.'

"Maximize your talent through disciplined choices.

"Mr. Rogers had a way of making everybody feel special. Class of 2021, be a good neighbor, and be somebody who makes everybody feel like somebody."

Darienite

News for Darien

[*https://darienite.com*](https://darienite.com)

Each year, by a Darien High School tradition, graduating students each offer the principal a small token gift at the ceremony. This year the gift was a sunflower seed from each student.

Principal Ellen Dunn gave an extended comparison of how sunflower seeds are an appropriate symbol for graduation. She had an abundance of metaphors for observations and lessons for each graduate's life ahead:

"From this tiny seed will grow a towering flower, strong and majestic, bright with optimism, destined to follow the sun on its path across the sky and capture it's light, harnessing it to bring forth the future," she said.

She also said: "Develop a moral compass on which you can rely. It will tether you when you need courage. Some seeds must be tested by fire or broken by friction before the embryo can escape. The obstacles you face will reveal what you are made of.

"Break out of your comfort zone. It is where life begins."