

Good evening, everyone. Firstly, I would like to warmly welcome Trustee Sim, Superintendent, St. John, staff, family, friends, and, of course, my fellow graduates.

Before anything else, I want to express my deepest gratitude to the adults who have greeted us with a smile every morning for the past five years. To our teachers: you have not only taught us thousands of lessons, but you have guided us through one of the most transformative periods of our lives. You have shown endless patience, unwavering grace, and a kind of support that often went unnoticed in the moment, but will never be forgotten. I sincerely thank each and every one of you.

I also want to thank the people without whom none of us would be here today: our parents and guardians. If they are here supporting you tonight, show them your gratitude. They are the people who made our lives possible, who made sure we went to bed fed, had a roof over our heads, and stood beside us through every quiet moment of encouragement and sacrifice. To our parents and guardians: thank you for your love, your sacrifices, the childhoods you nurtured, and for giving us the freedom to grow into the people we are today.

This speech was difficult to write because I don't have any magical advice to offer, and I definitely don't have my entire life figured out. The reason I am standing here today as Valedictorian is simply because I have always been willing to try my best.

Over the years, I learned very quickly that the people you surround yourself with influence you far more than you realize. The people who make you a better person, who become more excited for your accomplishments than you are yourself, are the people worth holding onto. In a world where comparison has become second nature, where people talk behind each other's backs or pressure others to compromise their morals, find the people you never have to prove yourself to. Find the people who celebrate your success instead of measuring themselves against it.

There will always be people whose insecurities speak louder than their kindness — people who try to diminish your accomplishments or make you question your worth. But one of the most important things to learn is that those opinions truly do not matter.

Growing up with parents who never pressured me into becoming a certain kind of person or following a predetermined career path, but instead encouraged passion, creativity, and critical thinking, was one of the greatest gifts I could have received. I have rarely met someone more passionate about their work than my dad. Simply watching his dedication taught me the value of perseverance and hard work. My mom, on the other hand, showed me endless generosity and kindness — qualities that shaped the person I strive to be today.

I recognize how fortunate I am to have had those examples in my life. But if you did not grow up surrounded by good examples, it is never too late. We are now at a point in our lives where we

get to choose who we become. So please, choose to be the friend who encourages, inspires, and uplifts others — the kind of person worth holding onto. Become someone you are proud of when no one else is watching.

My message to you today is simple: when you find the right people, you no longer feel the need to prove yourself.

Life moves faster than we think. So I hope that years from now, we aren't looking back at the things we almost did. I hope we remember the experiences we had, the friendships we kept, and the people we grew into. More than anything, I hope we can look back knowing that we didn't hold ourselves back from the lives we wanted to live.

With that, I would like to congratulate the Class of 2026.

Thank you.