

Good evening faculty, families, friends, honoured guests, and most importantly, our peers. I am Arden Toner, and I am Jolene John.

Tonight, we would like to start by thanking you all for being here to celebrate this special milestone with us. Today feels surreal. We've been waiting for this moment forever, and yet somehow, it arrived way too fast. One minute, we were walking into school for the first time, and the next, we're walking out... hopefully knowing a little more than we did back then.

Standing here today, we feel incredibly honoured to represent a class that hasn't just grown up together, but has grown alongside this town. In a place where everyone knows your name - and probably your parents' and grandparents' names too - it's been pretty hard to get away with anything, but it's also been amazing to always have people who care about you. It's the kind of place that shapes you, and no matter where we go, that will always stay with us. And while not all of us have spent our whole lives here, each and every one of us has become an important part of this community, and this town has become a part of us too.

Today is the day we've talked about for years - the day we imagined, counted down to, and maybe even doubted would ever come. And yet, here we are. Along the way, we've learned, laughed, and grown - not just from our successes, but from the moments we'd probably rather forget. Although, let's be honest, some of those moments are the ones we'll remember the most.

First, we'd like to thank all of our teachers and staff, especially those who have been here for many years and made such a lasting impact on us graduates.

Thank you to Mr. Daley for his patience, for supporting us in school sports, and for cutting us a break when we really needed one. Honestly, surviving school would have been way harder without him.

Thank you to Mr. Wedge for always giving us a hard time and calling us out on our behaviour - good or bad. Even when we didn't want to hear it, you somehow always managed to keep us in line... most of the time.

Thank you to Ms. Cardinal for putting so much effort into school assemblies. Even when we acted like we didn't want to be there, you always made them fun and memorable.

And thank you to Mr. Venables for always making jokes and keeping things fun. Even though he was only here for a short time, he definitely isn't a short guy.

I would also like to personally thank Mr. Blakely for widening our imaginations. In second grade, you handed out certificates showing our future careers. While others were becoming doctors or teachers, you handed me something I never expected: alligator wrestler.

At the time, I just imagined the thrill of taking down a giant reptile. But looking back, you were giving me something much more important. By handing me that certificate, you made me

believe I was strong enough to handle the wild parts of life long before I ever faced them. Thank you for seeing a fighter in me before I even knew I needed to be one.

And lastly, thank you to Mr. Collins for being such an involved principal. Not only have you watched so many of the graduates grow up, but you've also helped shape so many futures. As many of you know, this year we had the welding trailer here, helping many graduates discover future career paths while

also earning their welding tickets. Without Mr. Collins' involvement in trades programs, none of that would have been possible. He has also supported so many other students through dual-credit courses and countless school activities. Thank you, Mr. Collins, for always supporting us, no matter how difficult the circumstances.

You all didn't just teach us what was in the textbooks - you taught us patience, resilience, and how to think for ourselves. You supported us, challenged us, and somehow managed to put up with us even on our worst days, which honestly deserves an award of its own.

To our families: thank you for everything you've done to get us here. For the early mornings, the late nights, the rides, the encouragement, and the constant support - even when we didn't always show how much it meant. We wouldn't be standing here today without you.

Today, we also pause to hold space in our hearts for those who are no longer with us -those who walked this journey by our sides but cannot be here to share this moment. For the jokes they shared with us, the friendships they built, and the lasting impact they made not only on the graduates, but also on the staff, parents, and the community as a whole. Though they are gone, they remain an everlasting part of who we are. They shaped our lives in ways words cannot fully capture. We carry them with us in our memories, our stories, and the quiet moments where we still feel their presence.

To my classmates: we did it. We made it through early mornings, long days, stressful tests, and yes, even group projects where somehow one person did all the work and everyone else just... existed.

But through it all, we built friendships, shared laughs, and created memories that will stay with us long after today. Whether we see it now or not, every peer has made an impact on our lives in one way or another and has helped shape who we are.

As we move forward, our paths will look different. Some of us will stay close to home, while others will move far away. Some have everything planned out, and others are still figuring out where to start - and that's okay. If the past few years have taught us anything, it's that not having all the answers doesn't mean you're not on the right track. You might just be on a different track than someone else. Everyone here has made it to this stage and will make great impacts, believe in yourself and support yourself and others no matter what.

We are hopeful for the success of every one of these graduates, and we can't wait to see the amazing and courageous things they accomplish in this world.

As we step into this next chapter, let's do it with courage, kindness, and a little bit of humour - because we're going to need it. Let's take what we've learned here and use it to make a difference in the best way we can.

And even if we're not completely ready for the world outside of high school... I think we're ready enough.

Congratulations to the graduating Class of 2026. We made it.