

Good Evening to everyone here tonight, thank you for joining us to celebrate graduation.

My name is Damian and I am a little nervous, I've been on a jumbo tron before but under different circumstances, a cookie eating contest. Which I won. I still reflect on that as one of my greatest achievements, but today we stand here to celebrate a different achievement, the completion of high school.

My name is Kytinn. I know most of us are feeling a little restless. So we hope to deliver this in the time it would take to watch 30 Instagram reels so we can all go home and doom scroll for the rest of the day.

Thank you to the graduating class for entrusting us with the privilege of telling your story. We hope to do it justice. However, before addressing the grads, we acknowledge the contributions of those who gave so much value to our time in high school.

Thank you to our teachers and support staff who work passionately to deliver this experience. You showed us this each day by keeping your rooms open during lunches, adapting your lesson plans to meet the needs of each student, and taking the time to answer our questions, even if you answered them ten seconds ago. Many of you have sacrificed lunch hours, evenings, and weekends to sponsor activities or teams, adding substance to our school experience. Sometimes you lied to us. The calculus was not just one line. Acids don't always start with H and that one question was definitely not in the review. However, our school would not be the same without your generosity. Let's give it up for the SKSS Staff.

Thank you to our parents, coaches, mentors and family who helped guide us from our first steps to our most recent ones across the stage. Thank you for understanding that we make mistakes. Lots of mistakes. But you had the patience to guide us through them to help us improve.

We will be the last grad class that experienced COVID in high school. However, ours is truly unique in that we knew each other's names before we ever saw each other's faces. This made it especially difficult to determine the imposters among us. We started grade eight in the midst of the pandemic. One way hallways, cancelled sports seasons and the abandonment of lockers formed our first impression of high school.

Despite this rocky start many of us found our way. We determined who we wanted to become, discovering passions and creating connections that will extend far beyond the walls of our school.

During this time we experienced what makes high school magical, experiencing a buzzer beater, meeting someone special through a seating plan, or making eye contact with a friend and trying to contain a smile after the teacher says something just suspicious enough to be funny. We experienced our first high school crush, handing in an assignment at 11:59 despite having weeks to do it, or learning about something that truly connected with us. I doubt most of you will remember this speech but those are the moments that we will remember.

Some highlights of our grad class include the senior football team having its best season in fourteen years. Westsyde, I have three words for you: "Back to Back". Having an ultimate team and our tennis

team both placed third at provincials in 2025. Alongside these achievements our school holds numerous provincial appearances in many sports alongside multiple West Zone and Okanagan titles to reinforce this dominance.

We are also lucky to have a drama department which puts on plays that rival professional theater, and talent shows which fill the Sagebrush Theatre with roars of laughter. Our music program is nationally recognized with some of our peers having once in a lifetime opportunities to perform.

Our school also holds competitive speech and debate teams which shape students into effective communicators and formidable opponents in an argument. This year we have four graduating students who became national Ethics Bowl Champions. And our trades students are second to none in the accomplishment and development of their skills.

I don't know if it is the lead in the water or the asbestos in the walls, but you have to admit that something about our school has led to this success. Passionate teachers and staff, engaged students, supportive parents, our school seems to have it all. That is why we come from every corner of Kamloops to learn at a school overlooking a graveyard.

At a first glance the school and the graveyard seem like polar opposites. One is quiet, still, and a place of respect. The other is loud, chaotic, and occasionally not very respectful at all (*cough* "the boys bathrooms"), but what the graveyard holds is the universal experience for us all. Death.

Because after this moment our paths may never cross again. We will never be required to all be in the same building, never consume the same content or have our schedules be determined by a bell. Ok, some of us have already transcended the bell schedule.

Graduation presents us with the opportunity to be free, to chart our own path. To find an identity as part of a generation that feels lost. We are wearing clothes from the 80's, using wired headphones and listening to music that isn't modern, from artists that are not new. Bruno Mars is 40, Taylor Swift is 36, Kanye West is 49. Maybe we continue to listen because these artists feel familiar or safe. Young artists are an exception, and the youngest I could find are all at least 23.

This age gap may be because somewhere along the way we became afraid to be imperfect. Slowly we seem to be rejecting this, realizing that not everything has to be in flawless resolution, picking up digital cameras or polaroids instead of our phones. Not for better quality or ease of distribution, but because they are fun to use, they create unique results and they unearth a truth that has been lost. Imperfections are beautiful.

Sometimes we are so afraid to be cringe that we fail to be ourselves. However, fear cannot be what prevents you from showing the world what you have to offer. Don't rob us of your contribution. So much potential is in this stadium, and that's exciting.

Take a breath, and appreciate what's happening right now, because this part of our lives, as chaotic as it feels, is something we won't get back. So savour this moment. Then take the next step.

Thank you and Best of Luck to the class of 2026!