

Some of you here had the opportunity to sit with Mr. Gehosky and me in a roundtable discussion. We wanted to know where you felt a sense of belonging. You told us stories of homes and classrooms and teams and workplaces that made you feel seen and needed. You helped us figure out that when those places had a lot of passion for the task at hand and that you wouldn't get kicked out if you had a bad day...you felt like you belonged. We also asked if you could...what one thing would you change about Cedar Cliff. You said things like

More lunch time

Better paper towels

A therapy dog

More safety

Awareness of the overwhelming work loads

And genuinely caring if we are OK

All of these are worthy of our pursuit and you have my word...we will work on them. During one really rich conversation, a student mentioned that we could do a better job at recognizing students. I said tell me more. She then went into a story about being Mr. Uibel's assistant, loving photography, and how she had worked on taking photos of a table that Dr. Fillgrove had built as a donation to the West Shore Foundation's Gala and that Dr. Fillgrove never acknowledged her or said thank you. For a few seconds, I was completely confused and then it hit me...the student sitting three feet from me did not know that I was Dr. Fillgrove. When she was finished with her suggestion I pulled out my ID badge and gave it to her. The shock on her face was priceless and we all laughed.

For half of your time at CC we were separated and masked. We didn't spend as much time together and it's fully understandable that you may not recognize me or my words. So, today...some basics. Three things that if you can master them, a fulfilling successful life is within reach.

#1 It's OK to not be OK

For years we have told you that you need to take care of yourself physically...get a good night sleep...brush and floss...eat well and exercise...read...Only recently have we realized that we need to care equally about your mental health. The culture that your parents and I lived in said things like...tough it out...don't be a baby...pick yourself up. "I'm OK" is very often one of the biggest lies we tell people. We were so very wrong and closed off. We need to care as much about broken hearts as we do about broken bones. We need to care as much about feeding your soul as we do about feeding you breakfast. We need to care as much about the condition of your emotions as we do the condition of grades.

Self-care is not self-indulgence...it is necessary.

You don't have to repeat generational ignoring of mental well-being by saying I'm OK when you really aren't. It's OK to not be OK. Every one of us has struggles and pain and heartbreak.

You are not alone. So many people carry the same burdens and feelings that you have. It's OK to not be OK. And when you experience anguish and need help...ask for it. Vulnerability is not a sign of weakness. It is a hallmark of strength. Which leads me to #2

Care for the person on your right and your left.

We need each other!

Many of you will go on to care for way more people than the two I mentioned. But, unless you are able to establish close relationships with those right beside you will never fully be able to care for more. The last few years have taught us that the quality of our relationships determines the quality of our lives.

Motivational megastar speaker Tony Robbins says it a bit differently. The quality of our lives IS the quality of our relationships. Your relationship with yourself, your relationship with your family, your relationship with your friends and co-

workers, in the future your relationship with your clients...that's your life. To have great relationships takes courage and faith. Courage to care deeply about others and faith that when you need help, somebody's coming. It takes a willingness to express a deeper truth, a willingness to be vulnerable, a willingness to go deeper beyond "I'm OK." It's so easy to not do these things. We have no clue what others are facing. But when we extend sincerity, when we extend kindness, when we extend appreciation it melts, it heals, it opens, and it transforms. We are all craving to be loved, to share love, to expand love, to give love, and when we do our life gets more beautiful.

It's said to live not just for yourself alone but for another is to become fully alive.

So, It's Ok to not be OK and care for the person on your right and your left and finally

#3 Don't quit

You have already faced more struggles, more upheaval, more uncertainty, more loss and grief than any other graduating class of Cedar Cliff. You have learned the skills of courage, flexibility, compassion, empathy, adaptability, humility, and active listening in a way that no previous alumni had mastered on this day...graduation day. Just to get here, you had to show enormous grit. But, you have also watched as so many simply quit.

Please...please...don't quit.

President Teddy Roosevelt famously said... "It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again...who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly."

I wish with all my heart that you are not going to face hard days...dry seasons...even hopeless situations. You are so much more than what you are going through. You have the capacity for resilience! Stay in the arena. Don't quit.

Hard times are a guarantee. Don't quit because on the other side of hard times is joy...happiness...and maybe even peace.

So three things to remember...It's OK to not be OK. Care for the person on your right and your left. Don't quit. And I'm Dr. Fillgrove and it has been an honor to be your principal.

Now Dr. Stoltz

I declare to you that these members of the Class of 2022 seated before you, have met all the requirements for graduation outlined by West Shore School District Policy and criteria set forth by the Pennsylvania Department of Education - including required subjects and total credits. They, therefore, are entitled to receive a Cedar Cliff High School diploma from the West Shore School District.

Dr. Stoltz