

Kajal Mehta 2022 Valedictorian Speech

"Appreciation, Action, and Growth"

Good afternoon class of 2022 and everyone who has supported us on our journey to graduation.

I would like to start by mentioning that I've never been great with words or at giving advice, so when writing this speech I found inspiration in movies. I could stand up here and say "We're all in this together," like High School Musical, or end with a "*We did it*" like Elle Woods in Legally Blonde, but I think we already know that. Our lives over the past four years wouldn't have been the same without our fellow classmates or the support from friends, family, faculty, staff, and of course Rudder. We wouldn't be sitting here today if we hadn't made it through the trials of high school. We should be proud of how far we have come and grateful for those who have helped us get here. Ferris Bueller once said, "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it." So instead of listening to me just say words, take a look around and let it sink in that we are here, today, together, graduating.

First, as we set off on the next part of our journey, I think it's important to remember to truly **appreciate** each part. In Good Will Hunting, Robin Williams says, "You'll have bad times, but that'll always wake you up to the good stuff you weren't paying attention to." Kind of like how spending five days a week on Zoom with awkwardly silent breakout rooms made us appreciate being able to hear each other's non glitching voices in person.

Second, our education at Red Land has empowered us to take our next steps with meaningful **action**. According to Spiderman's Uncle Ben, "With great power comes great responsibility." We all have power, and no matter where we find ourselves in life, we will always have the ability to help others in our own way. In high school that may have looked like

volunteering at Key Club and NHS service events, or creating a line dance and selling those iconic lollipops for mini-THON. In whatever way each of us chooses to continue taking meaningful action in the future, I hope that one day, we are all able to be like Tony Stark and say, “I just finally know what I have to do. And I know in my heart that it’s right.” Every one of us has the ability to find our passion, allowing us to use our power to take action that helps the world.

Third, part of our responsibility is striving for continual **growth** and never settling. Black Panther’s sister, Shuri, believes that, “Just because something works doesn’t mean it cannot be improved” and I agree. While we are currently at an age of major transitions and changes, at some point in the future you may feel like it’s Groundhog Day and as “if you were stuck in one place and every day was exactly the same and nothing that you did, mattered.” And honestly, right now, reaching that point in life where everything feels set sounds amazing. I know that the first step “Into the Unknown,” as Elsa would put it, can be scary, but hey, maybe then you will be able to find more than one open restroom on each floor. We were able to grow so much over the past 4 years, so let’s keep growth as a priority in our lives.

Whether life feels perfect or as though it’s sinking like the Titanic, it is important to maintain the cycle of **appreciation, action, and growth** that we established throughout our time at Red Land. The past four years have been pretty different and like Dory, all we could do was, “Just keep swimming.” As the class of 2022 we had a freshman year that was everything a year at Red Land should be; our sophomore year was cut short by what we thought would be a great 2-week vacation; junior year was filled with many changes from virtual to hybrid to full time masked school; and our senior year we got a glimpse of a post pandemic high school experience. Through all of this we have learned to adapt. According to Mulan's father, the flower

that blooms in adversity is the most rare and “beautiful of all.” And because of our ability to appreciate what we had, make the most of it, and find ways to improve, our high school experience has been unique and unforgettable.

So now the credits have started rolling on the Red Land installment of the film series that is our lives, and I’m sure for many of us, this was the best one yet, but this is one of the first times I can say with confidence that the sequels to come will just keep getting better.

Congratulations class of 2022! Thank You.