

Red Land High School Commencement

Welcome by Quinn Starrett, Class President

Classmates, Family, Friends and Faculty, welcome to Red Land High Schools 2023 Graduation!

My name is Quinn Starrett and I am lucky enough to be the President of the class of 2023. After graduation I will pursue a BFA in Musical Theatre at Point Park University.

To my class...congratulations guys, we did it! We made it through four years of Red Land High School. We survived Mr. Slayton's morning announcements, Wolfie's pep rally games, and Mr. Pepper's spontaneous visits to our classrooms. We made it through college board, Naviance, ehallpass, Keystones, AP tests, and 4 years of midterms and finals...oh...and did I forget to mention we also experienced a PANDEMIC? That might explain why I read Romeo and Juliet three times.

To the parents and guardians in the audience. Thank you for staying up late to help finish the poster, reading through the essay, going to the games and performances, and for driving us to all the practices and rehearsals. We are so grateful that you fixed the internet for Zoom, brought in forgotten instruments, and got the teachers holiday gifts.

To the grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other family and friends. Thank you for cheering the loudest at the events, always buying something from the fundraisers, giving the biggest hugs, and the birthday money that's going to the college fund. Thank you for picking us up from school when mom and dad were busy, for bragging to all your friends about our accomplishments, and making the holiday breaks extra special.

Now I would like to take the next 45 minutes and express my gratitude to each and every member of the faculty. I would like to but Mrs. Dorsey simply wouldn't allow it. I have a special connection with this group of teachers. If you don't know, my dad has taught at Red Land my whole life. Many of these teachers have watched me grow up. Mr. Gonce was there when my dad met my mom. Mr. Kerstetter was at my first birthday party. Mrs. Arensdorf attended my first musical. I remember how I couldn't wait to grow up and go to Red Land High School. And now, we are leaving.

Thank you, faculty, for teaching us, challenging us, encouraging us, laughing with us, and sometimes even crying with us. Thank you.

It is now my pleasure to introduce the district administration seated on the platform. Dr. Todd B. Stoltz, Superintendent of the West Shore School District.

And, I ask that the rest of the administrative team of the district please stand to be recognized.

I would also like to recognize the school board seated on the platform. Mr. Brian K. Guistwhite, School Board President.

Additionally, I invite the rest of the West Shore School Board to rise and be recognized. Thank you all for attending this morning and for your involvement in our ceremony.

We work diligently to bring pride and honor to Red Land, and flourish under the guidance of the professionals who are dedicated to our success. In that spirit of the Red Land family, many of our teachers have joined us this morning, dressed in a reflection of their academic paths and to honor our journey as well. As they celebrate our accomplishments, let us take a moment to thank them for their commitment to us. I ask them to stand at this time to be recognized, and I invite you all to join the class in a round of applause.

Next, I'd like to introduce two of my classmates who are some of the hardest workers I know.

Our first speaker is Salutatorian Tessa Knox. Tessa is attending Bucknell University, as a finance major. Tessa plays softball and enjoys playing fetch with her dog, Cap, and getting lost in fantasy fiction, especially her current read, *A Court of Thorns and Roses*.

The class Valedictorian is Alex Morelli. After graduation, Alex will attend the Honors College at Penn State University to major in meteorology. Alex prefers reading sci-fi and non-fiction. Without fail, he takes a 2-mile walk every day, while listening to the sounds of nature. Most importantly, he and I both share a love for the music of Harry Styles. At this time, please welcome our class speakers.

Tessa Knox, Salutatorian

In a few short hours, the last senior will take their final steps in front of the stage and like a snapshot in a photo album, this moment will be ingrained in our memories for the rest of our lives. Just as we once took our first steps into Mount Zion, Fishing Creek, Red Mill, or Newberry Elementary School thirteen years ago, we are beginning a life changing journey which continues our passions that we have worked so hard for up to this point. Whether it's entering the workforce, enlisting in the military, or furthering your education, we are all feeling the anticipation of what's to come in the future. As we take these next steps in life, it's important to know that what happens next is up to each one of us individually. We must make the most out of what has been imbued into our minds by stepping out of our comfort zone and taking that risk. —Just as you took a risk on the first day of kindergarten by raising your hand, take a risk in going out for that job you never imagined getting. Step on that stage you never believed you would perform on. Or run onto that field that you've been practicing your whole life to get on. In softball terms, take that extra base. Until you try, it's impossible to know what you could achieve. Over the summer, my travel softball team was in the semifinals of a tournament. We were down by one run and I hit a single to left field. As I rounded first base, I was presented with two choices. I could either not take the risk and stay at first base, or attempt to take second base. In that split second, I rounded first base and slid into second, getting called safe. The next girl up hit a single, allowing me to score and tying the game. I knew that if I took second base, I had about an eighty percent chance of making it, but I also knew that in not trying, I would have a zero percent chance of being successful. The risk might not always pay off, but you will never receive the benefits if you don't take the chance.

Most of us at one point or another have played a sport or have participated in a club and experienced the highs and lows that come with it. I've gone from getting three hits in one game to not being able to hit the softball at all for a month straight. In those rough moments, I often considered quitting the sport forever. However, I took that risk by going back day after day until eventually I was able to hit the ball again. We have all experienced raising our hand to answer a question and then getting it wrong, being rejected by a crush, and trying out for a team or auditioning for a play and not making it. These are all common occurrences where we took a risk and it ended up not working in our favor. Situations like these where we might succeed one day and fail the next will continue to happen even in the future. However, when things get tough, giving up is not the answer. Use those events as learning experiences to grow from. If you stop and let fear take hold of you, life will become stationary. Let fear be the motivator to encourage you to take new risks. Taking that extra base may result in failure at first, but it could be the first step to a new and more successful future.

When you take an extra base, you are attempting to put your team one step closer to winning the game. However, you can't win the game all on your own. You need the help of your other teammates and coaches to get there. Teachers, friends, and family are the teammates and coaches who will help you to take those risks in the future. I would like to thank my teachers who have pushed me to become the best possible version of myself. From my kindergarten teacher Mrs. Grandi—to Mr. Kerstetter,—my last teacher at Red Land,—and all others in between, I will never forget you. You all have taught me to believe and have pushed me to take those unlikely risks in and out of school. To my friends,—thank you for always being up for that risk. I knew you would always be by

my side no matter what I wanted to do. Mom and dad,— thank you for encouraging me and guiding me through the times when I wanted to give up. And to the class of 2023,—I leave you with one final thought. Don't be afraid to take that extra base in life. Thank you

Alex Morelli, Valedictorian

I can't build a clock. Or at least not fast enough. In my two-year tenure on our school's Science Olympiad team, one of the events I participated in was called It's About Time—an event focused on constructing a device that can measure any time interval within a certain range. I was determined to make our device work. I envisioned placing in the top 3 at Regionals and then performing well at States. I spent countless hours constructing and testing my creation, and it performed brilliantly —and then I got to the competition and learned that my device didn't comply with the rules, disqualifying us from running two of the three trials. Despite my partner's insistence that it was fine, I was *not* fine. This was not the level of perfection I strive to achieve, and I was determined to fix it!

Despite this disappointing performance, surprisingly we did earn the opportunity to go to States. So, I changed the whole design, employing as much help as I could get to build the device—seeking guidance and suggestions from my partner, family, friends, teachers, and everyone else who was willing to help. We worked until the bitter end, but still the device didn't work. We placed thirty-fourth. Out of *thirty-six*. It's easy to argue how this undertaking was all for naught, and at first it definitely felt like it. However, this simply isn't true! This experience taught me many things (some rather unpleasant), but the most important is how to embrace failure.

I'm sure everyone here has had something go awry in their high school journey— bombing a test, not landing a job, not getting into your top choice college, et cetera. I'm sure everyone here has also heard all sorts of mantras and phrases relating to resilience: failure breeds success, you haven't figured it out *yet*, or keep picking yourself up. However, these cliché taglines can only go so far. I believe that there are three important keys to embracing failure—self-evaluation, not making comparisons, and asking for help.

The first key is to self-evaluate. Yeah, sometimes things just don't work out. But the first question we should ask ourselves is *why* didn't it work? Often, it's not the *whole* approach that's wrong, but just a piece. For me, it was being unable to navigate the event rules, and in other situations, it may be a minute detail like not studying the right material enough, or fidgeting too much during an interview. These are *correctable*, and can be fixed by changing the angle of attack.

Next, don't get hung up on comparisons. We may be thirty-four out of thirty-six sometimes, but our degree of success or failure is not based on that of someone else—we all have individual strengths and weaknesses, and we'll all create our own highlight reels in the end. Sure, sometimes it seems like everyone else has their lives together and we aren't doing enough, but we're all individuals who do great things. Clearly none of us are failures. Not succeeding in one area doesn't translate to failure in another. Just look at all we as a class and wider school have accomplished: Mini-Thon, our

musicals, the talent show, our sports successes, our co-op programs, I could go on and on. However, we don't compare our successes to other schools as a measuring stick, we cherish our own.

Additionally, it's important to just look at the people around you and ask for help. We're a team. A family. We lift each other up. Nobody should be afraid to ask for help or assistance, because there are so many people in this community who are willing to provide it, to stand up for us. I don't think *I* realized the extent of this until trying to construct that clock. The amount of people who were willing to help with even the simple things—take the time out of their day to help me with something irrelevant to their own lives—meant so much. You will be able to garner a similar response if only you're brave enough to just *ask*. Nobody accomplishes great things alone. Success is possible for everyone, but you just have to know how to ask for help. This community is so special *because* it treats everyone like family. And in your life, there will be more like it. Take advantage.

It's about time we recognize the importance of resilience and embracing failure, as it will guide us towards achievement in our next adventure: college, military, or career. It's about time we self-evaluate, focusing on the pieces that went wrong instead of scrapping the whole approach. It's about time we stop getting caught up in comparisons. It's about time we look around and notice all the people who are willing to help. It's about time for us to take our next step in life, whatever it may be. And I firmly believe we're ready—we've already made it this far, we are most certainly capable of more. We may stumble a few times, but we'll still be able to get right back up, even if it may take a little help. We will walk out of this arena, spread our wings, and soar. It's now our time—I don't need a clock to tell me that.

Epilogue by Quinn Starrett, Class President

Thank you, Tessa and Alex for sharing those encouraging messages. Thank you for teaching us to fail forward, and to never be afraid of trying new things. These students are not only brilliant and hardworking, they are kind, a quality that makes really good friends. Friendship isn't just defined as the dictionary suggests, as those attached to another by affection or esteem. Friendship means something a little different to each of us. To me it means getting slushies at Speedway before rehearsal, making a short film in 48 hours, and coming over at midnight with sparkling grape juice just to talk.

Thank you to the friends in the audience and most importantly the ones in the seats in front of me. Thank you for the facetime calls, helping me with geometry, and sharing the history notes I always forgot to do. Thank you for picking me to be on your team at recess in kindergarten and thank you for picking me to be your senior class president.

I have learned so much at Red Land, but the most important lesson was gratitude. Thank you.

Commencement awards will now be presented by Mrs. Shelly McGowan, Senior Class Assistant Principal.

Mrs. Shelly McGowan, Assistant Principal

The following students are being recognized for their curricular accomplishments at Red Land High School. These recognitions can be located in your printed program. Please hold your applause until all students have been named.

Graduates, when your name is called, please stand to be recognized.

Band...Owen Swintosky
Basic Home Repair... Abigail Craw
Business Education... Tessa Knox
English and Language Arts...Hannah Bushey
Graphic Communications...Garrett Rorapaugh
Junior ROTC program... Dylan Knouse
Mathematics...Jonathan Eckhardt
Orchestra.... Abigail Craw
Physical Education...Trey Slayton ... And...Isabella Sadler
Science...Payten Gorman
Social Studies...Tessa Knox
Vocal music...Haley Kennedy
Career and Technical Center ...Benjamin Shrauder
Woodworking... Peter Lewis
World language... Grace Michelsen
The Rick Saar Memorial Fund proudly recognizes two students whom represent the qualities and characteristics of Red Land High School Patriots...Isabella Sadler ...And... Tyler Kerstetter

Please join me in congratulating the Commencement Award Winners...

Ms. Melissa Herbert, Red Land Principal, will now present the Class of 2023.

Ms. Melissa Herbert, Principal

Good morning graduates, family, and friends.

I heard a quote several months ago, everyone you meet always asks if you have a career, are you married, do you own a house, as if life was some kind of grocery list. But no one ever asks if you are happy. This resonated with me, as I thought about the choices you now face moving forward; what career path will you follow, what dreams will you chase, what adventures await you? But more importantly, will you be happy?

As you sit before me, you have met your first of many personal milestones, high school graduation, but now you must begin designing your own happiness, because as

someone said to me, the longer you entertain what is not for you, the further you postpone what is. I have shared my desire for you to be enrolled, enlisted, or employed when you leave us, but most importantly I want you to be happy. Your happiness will be found in doing the things you love, in the small moments in life, in the day-to-day interactions with friends and family, but it is also important to know, the longer you entertain what is not for you, the further you postpone what is.

Do not fear change, if you find yourself on a path that is no longer one you desire to follow. Do not postpone change, as it is not failure, it is growth. As Tessa stated, take the next base, and as Alex so aptly stated, you all have individual strengths and weaknesses, and you all create your own highlight reels in the end. When our paths cross, I will ask you, are you happy? And remember you may always come home.

It is with great pride and pleasure that I now present the 2023 Red Land High School graduating class to Dr. Stoltz and Mr. Guistwhite, as I declare these graduates of the class of 2023 have met all 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 are therefore entitled to receive a Red Land High School diploma from the West Shore School District. Congratulations.

Dr. Todd Stoltz, Superintendent

Welcome Red Land Class of 2023. Today, we celebrate and applaud your accomplishments and the many reasons you have given us to be West Shore Proud!

With graduation comes excitement, relief, and perhaps ---- even a bit of fear of what comes next. For some of you, the next step is clear, and for others, maybe not so much. No matter what, from this point forward, you're all headed somewhere.

Some of you will be entrepreneurs, researchers, plumbers, carpenters, educators, musicians, writers, caregivers, athletes, coaches, defenders of our nation, emergency responders, people who dedicate their lives to public service, who knows, but the possibilities are endless.

I'm confident you are ready to tackle the next challenge, and regardless of your path going forward, there's always one essential piece of advice I offer to you as graduates, and that is....

Set goals

If you don't have a target, you'll never hit it. Find things that you love, that you feel passionate about, that make you happy, and do more of them. It's the passion for what you do that not only feeds your soul but helps you overcome challenges, setbacks, and failures, and gives you hope for a better tomorrow.

Class of 2023, it is abundantly clear that people value living and raising a family in the West Shore community, and everything it has to offer. If you are a West Shore Alumni, would you please stand to be recognized?

Without any further ado, Mrs. Herbert, it gives me great pleasure as the Superintendent

and appointed representative of the Board of School Directors of the West Shore School District to accept the list of graduating seniors for 2023 from Red Land High School.

I do hereby certify and affirm in the presence of all assembled that each individual has met or exceeded the requirements for graduation set forth by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the West Shore School District, and is ready to receive his or her diploma.

I am pleased to present the graduating class of 2023 to the parents, family, friends, alumni, and community, and offer them our best wishes for happiness and fulfillment as they pursue their future endeavors.

Closing by Quinn Starrett, Class President

Diplomas will now be awarded by Ms. Melissa Herbert, Principal; Mrs. Shelly McGowan, Mrs. Karisa Peifer, and Mrs. Jamie Snyder, Assistant Principals; and Mrs. Heather Wolfe and Mrs. Taylor Wiggins, Senior Class Deans.

[Diplomas awarded]

Will the class members please rise and join me in the turning of the tassels.

Congratulations, Class of 2023!

Will the Class of 2023 and our guests please rise and sing the Red Land Alma Mater, led by the Senior Chamber Singers.

We thank you for joining us this morning. We ask the audience to remain in the stands while the Class of 2023 exits together for the last time during the Academic Recessional.