



## Mayor and City Council

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**WILMINGTON**  
CITY OF  
NORTH CAROLINA

Dear Members of the Williston Classes of 1969 and 1970,

On behalf of the City of Wilmington, I would like to extend to each of you a long overdue congratulations on your graduation from "the greatest school under the sun," Williston Senior High School. Each of you should have heard those words in either 1969 or 1970, but our city and county's patently unjust plan for desegregation denied you that coveted opportunity. I would like to express my profound regret that it has taken over 50 years for you to hear those words.

Usually, these kinds of letters state the collective wishes of our community for your futures as you grow into adults, and our hopes for the impact each of you will have not only on our community, but on the world. What makes today particularly special is that here we can see, appreciate, and celebrate the innumerable contributions each of you has *already* made here in Wilmington and beyond.

Commencement is also a time where teachers and leaders offer new graduates advice and wisdom about how to navigate the world they were about to enter. Today, however, *you* are our teachers, and the lives you have already led offer us wisdom on how we should move forward. I am reminded of the advice Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. offered, "Never succumb to the temptation of becoming bitter. As you press for justice, be sure to move with dignity and discipline." Your lives embody that advice. You transformed the disappointment, anger, and deep loss you felt at losing Williston into lives of service to your community, moments of inspiration, and innumerable accomplishments. Wilmington is grateful to each of you.

Dr. Bertha Todd reminded us, "you can be bitter, or you can be better." You chose to be better. You chose to be better, and consequently, Wilmington is better because of you. Your choice to be better in the face of systemically racist policies serves as a clarion call for the rest of us to be better. Real change occurs when we take personal and collective responsibility for not only our contributions to discrimination, but also our role in ending that discrimination and creating a Wilmington in which every person has an equal opportunity to thrive. As Mayor, and as a citizen of Wilmington at the time of Williston's closing, I have committed myself to this real change, and much of the inspiration for my commitment comes from you.

In the final edition of the Williston yearbook, the Willistonian, the junior class's quotation was "Time is better spent planning the future than regretting the past," and the sophomore class's was "Today well lived makes every yesterday a dream of happiness and every tomorrow a vision of hope." Both of these lines place emphasis on the hopes and dreams of your futures. Today, we can celebrate what those visions of hope became.

Congratulations to the Williston Senior High School Classes of 1969 and 1970.

Mayor Bill Saffo