



To all those gathered here, to all those in our thoughts, and especially to the soon to be alumni in the class of 2024, welcome to Urban’s 56th graduation ceremony. Before we get going, let’s take a deep breath and appreciate this moment in this gorgeous public oasis that is somehow both impressive yet unpretentious, naturally occurring but intentionally cultivated, cohesive as a whole yet eclectic in its constituent elements – that is, a perfectly matched venue for the Urban School and the 112 young people seated behind me.

Seniors and parents, I’m sure you will both receive many well-deserved, congratulatory wishes today, and I’m guessing that among them will be the observation that “You made it!” which, when you think about it, suggests that the process of attending high school or raising a child is something to be survived or endured. And while there have surely been times, maybe even very recent ones, when this felt apt, I’m guessing that as this moment has grown closer, your thoughts have warmed, turned gauzier, more nostalgic. Or, perhaps you’ve even been distracted by the possibilities of the future. This is, after all, a “commencement,” ceremony, a new beginning, and not just for our students.

In previous ceremonies, I’ve ruminated on this collision of memories, moment and anticipation that a graduation occasions, when the past, present and future seem to intersect like, I was once told, the proton beams wielded in the original Ghostbusters, but I prefer to think of as the mixing of the tri-colore salad at Delfina. (Best salad in San Francisco.) And while I still believe this charged confluence explains why students often can’t remember much about their graduation day, something about the intrusion of the pandemic has created a different dynamic, a wrinkle in time, as if our lived experience hit pause, then regained its momentum in fits and starts. This is, perhaps, especially true for these students in the class of 2024 who spent their 9th grade years, individually and collectively in a sort of suspended, virtual fugue, before emerging haltingly, yet impressively, gorgeously as if from a chrysalis, a process that in their case required not just biology, but character – grace and patience and determination and – perhaps the most essential component for any recovery – optimism. It is their achievement that we celebrate this morning.

In keeping with one of Urban's guiding principles, our students will command most of the airtime today, so let me close with this: We rightfully celebrate achievements and milestones great and small. But today is also an essential moment of gratitude for the hours, days, years that brought us all to this moment. Parents and guardians thank you for your trust and partnership on behalf of your children. You have tethered your hopes, your dreams, your spirit to their every breath, their every step, in ways they will one day even more fully understand. Today we honor your commitment, and yes the vulnerability that comes with unconditional love. And we can applaud you as well.

And to the extraordinary assemblage of faculty, staff, and administrators at Urban, you made a choice to bring your talent and commitment to this school at this time, and these young people will be the beneficiary of your devotion and your joy for the rest of their lives. We applaud you as well.

Finally, while these "It takes a village to raise a child" sentiments are true and heartfelt, it also takes the child to raise the child.

Thus, seniors-soon-to-be-graduates, though you are far from children now, I save my final note of appreciation for all of you. By any measure, you are a talented and spirited group that grew stronger and more cohesive in exponential leaps, triumphantly crossing over from the parallel universe of your first year. Some of your accomplishments are easy to observe or measure – your "above standards" and winning seasons, art shows and college acceptances. But in the end, none of these achievements are what matter most – not to me, nor your teachers, nor your families. What matters most is who you are and who you are becoming. We wish you well. We will miss you. Congratulations.

A few notes about our ceremony this morning:

As you'll see on your program, we have 3 student speakers –Lindsey Bailey, Sid Goldfader-Dufty and Lily Halbert-Alexander as well as one faculty speaker – science teacher and Dean of Student Activities, Skyler Silverman. All of the speakers were chosen by the students in this class. You'll also hear performances by the Senior members in the Urban Singers, Chamber Orchestra and the Advanced Jazz Band. We will proceed without interruption until after the presentation of diplomas. A final note: per long-standing Urban tradition, diplomas will be presented in random order; rest assured the moment will be captured by the school photographer. We begin:

This concludes our ceremony. Please mingle and celebrate this occasion.