

Good afternoon, class of 2025! It's truly my greatest honor to speak to you all today. Thank you for being here; I am proud of each and every one of you.

Me gustaría comenzar agradeciendo a mi hermosa madre y hermanas. *Las amo*; no estaría aquí sin tu apoyo. I'd like to start off by thanking my beautiful mother and sisters. I love you all, and I wouldn't be here without your support.

As I stand here today, I can't help but get emotional. We've spent years seeing the same faces every day, and so much of that will change after today. Some of us will remain close for a lifetime to come, and some of us will become distant. Each of us here will have our unique paths to follow after today.

The one thing that each of us will continue to share, though, is the time spent here at Orange High School. And I truly couldn't have asked for a better group to have shared this experience with.

I'd like to take a moment to thank the faculty and staff who made every single day possible. From our custodians, lunch ladies, and SROs to our counselors, teachers, and principals. Your dedication to Orange High School is the reason we are all here today. After this ceremony, I encourage you all to take a moment and thank at least one staff member who has helped you get to this point.

As I grew closer to many of our teachers this year, I learned how hard teachers work and how they show up and give their all daily. We say "thank you" to teachers, but I don't think we show enough appreciation towards them. In my life, my teachers taught me how to read, write, and count and even taught me the English language. To all my teachers, I will forever be grateful to you.

So many people have made today possible for the class of 2025, but it wouldn't have happened if it weren't for our dedication. I am so proud of us. We have all worked so hard and come so far, and today, it all pays off.

Now, as we close this chapter in our lives, we should not only look into the future. We must also look at the past. All of the moments in the past have built who we are today. Your story may not be like mine, but I would like to share it to encourage you as we leave here today.

Throughout my education, I have faced many barriers. I started school not knowing English, yet I successfully tested into an AIG program. However, I was denied being a part of AIG programs because I was labeled an ESL student. As I got older, I had to move schools, which came with having to learn a new environment. However, I didn't let these experiences hold me back. I decided to prove to everyone and myself that those barriers did not define my success. At times, it felt like I had to work twice as hard to be in the same places as some of my peers. But that feeling did not matter to me because I had dreams I wanted to accomplish. Today I can proudly say that thanks to my hard work, I got into Duke to show the world, and myself, what I am capable of.

Just like me, you get to write your own story. You don't have to listen to what other people say about you. So, as we move forward, I ask that you all keep chasing your dreams. Go after what you define as success. That doesn't mean you need to cure cancer or solve world hunger. Your dreams and aspirations can be as simple or complex as you make them to be. You will notice that there is such a gratifying feeling in completing something that you have poured your heart and hard work into.

You'll face obstacles, and there will be moments when you fall. But you can overcome anything, and you will rise again. When you stumble, reach for a helping hand, and keep pushing forward.

Understand that you are capable of anything. Keep fighting for what you believe in and keep using your voices. You are far more powerful than you believe yourself to be.

To my fellow graduates, the world needs you. It needs your voice, your experience, and all your brilliance. I ask that you all show up, succeed, and be the ones to hold the door open for those coming after you.

Have fun in life, but also live it to the fullest. And never, ever forget about your own excellence.

I will miss you all.