

Good evening everyone and welcome,

The timer started ticking the moment we entered the school at freshman orientation. We had no idea what was ahead of us, or that simple numbers and letters would affect some of us in so many different ways. All we knew was that we had four years, almost seven hundred twenty days together, and time was ticking as we stood there.

If we can walk away from high school before the timer rings knowing anything, I would like for each and every one of you to know what I've learned, that no number or letter will ever define us in life. Class rank, GPA, or what our report cards say does not determine our future. It will not prove what kind of occupation we can pursue, or how much money we will make. It won't show the type of person you are, or my true character. To me, numbers and letters are not accurate representations of a person or a future. I know all of you by who you are and what your character is, not where you stand on a spreadsheet.

Looking back on my high school career, I noticed that as the hand on the timer ticked down to count each minute of this journey, my one goal for everything I tried was perfection. Every single quiz, test, project, or paper had to turn out perfect.

Sometimes these expectations of myself were too high and out of reach, but an “A” was absolutely crucial otherwise the word “failure” steadily crept into my brain. It consumed my thoughts in that I felt not only would I let everyone around me down, but most importantly I would be letting myself down. My biggest fear was that my grades would not reflect my work ethic. I became obsessed with the numbers that seemed to identify who I was and what my future held.

The irony is that this all changed with the one very important number: eighty-seven. It was Honors Physics, second term and a huge disappointment, but it was also a huge relief. It also led me to realize that perfection is not possible. I remember the feeling, and as much as I would like to forget this moment, it is sure to stick with me. As silly as it sounds to many of you, what I considered a failure was really a pause in my timer. A time to reflect and re evaluate things. It was the changing point; however, a good one. I learned that it was time to let go of the number eighty-seven along with every other letter or number that I had allowed to define me because they didn’t accurately show who I was. No longer would I let any number or letter represent me in any way.

Maya Angelou once said, “All great achievements require time.” Whether or not high school was a great achievement for you, I know that we all have many great achievements waiting for us at the end of this path. Some of us just might have to work a little harder and wait a little longer for these achievements to be presented to us. The fact that we have gone through this journey and made it is putting us on our own unique paths. This is an achievement that should be celebrated as success, but it also should remind us of the remaining time left on our own timers.

There are many people to thank for getting us through high school and life. We should turn and give thanks to those who helped you get through these times. Personally, I would like to thank Ms. Sciacca for helping me put together my thoughts and ideas and helping them grow into the speech that it turned out to be today. I would also like to thank Ms. McKee for being a fabulous honors English teacher sophomore and senior year, mentor, and person. Thank you to my parents for their love and support, my brother, Stephen, for a few good laughs along the way, and my grandparents for being my cheerleaders along the side.

High school is only a small portion of our lives, so I hope for you to take it as you wish. Remember it. Forget it. Relive it. Tuck it away in the back of your

brain until our reunions. Do whatever you please, but most importantly leave today feeling free.

As I stand up here today, I hear our own high school timers ringing, signaling the end. The number of hours along the way didn't define what we accomplished in those days, who we met, whose lives we changed, or the great achievements we accomplished, and being your salutatorian, number two in the class, does not define my true character. The same is true for you. You are not what your report cards say. You are not your GPA. You are not your class rank. In this moment and in the future we are our own individuals. Simple people who have succeeded, ready to take the next steps of our lives, living despite the numbers and letters around us.

Thank you.