

## **Luke Manna**

Good evening. We all have countless memories of our time spent here no doubt. In the AC... the sports fields and track... for some of us, those memories extend all the way back to Kindergarten classrooms. So I feel it's only fitting that I take some time to reflect on the moments and experiences that defined my life as a PDS student and will hopefully touch on everyone's collective experiences.

If you were to walk into Mrs. Newborn's first grade classroom around September of 2009, you would see me sitting at my desk, staring blankly at a multiplication tables worksheet and thinking to myself for the very first time, "Wow. We actually have to do work?". Then on my hands, I tried to count how many years of school it would be before graduation. Back then, 2021 seemed so unfathomably far away. But look. Here we are, about to cross the finish line tomorrow morning.

Yes, PD is a lot of work. I think we can all agree on that as students. But what defines PD isn't the workload. Plenty of schools are academically rigorous, after all. It's the opportunities to grow that we were offered and the people we became close with that define not only our experiences at this school but the school itself. These are the things we remember most and these are the things that count in the end. Allow me to give an example. Let's jump to middle school.

Middle school is the first time we have advisors here at PD and I was lucky enough to have Carol Lawrence. This was my first experience with someone who would go on to be not just an advisor but a teacher, coach, and mentor of mine. The genuine care she exercised with the students in her advisee was one of the most remarkable things to me then and still is today and, I think, exemplifies our faculty as a whole. Out of nothing but a benevolent willingness to prepare a group of sixth-graders for life, Ms. Lawrence taught us to sew buttons, iron shirts, and cook some basic things to make sure we didn't starve in college. Let me remind you we were 11 and 12 years old at the time. I vividly remember on cold days, getting to sip peppermint tea during advisee and after school in her classroom to make sure we didn't catch a cold. I heavily recommend going and buying some of that stuff by the way (it's fantastic), but that's beside the point. The point is that we are lucky to have faculty that care about us immensely. Ms. Lawrence went on to push me on the track in the hurdles for the next 6 years, something I believe has done more for my personal growth than anything, and for that, I cannot thank her enough.

But it's not just the faculty that have prepared us for the next stage. I truly believe the experiences we've been lucky enough to live through have prepared us in ways we have yet to fully appreciate. School trips to locations ranging from Fort Fischer to Indore, India offered us new perspectives; Hours of burning the midnight oil

fortified our work ethics; and a pandemic tested us, proving the strength of this class. The bottom line is this: we're ready for what the future holds.

And as we head into the next chapter of our lives, I understand that it's an incredibly exciting moment for us all. The concept of starting somewhat anew and re-imagining a new self identity is tempting to many. With that being said, I would like to call on you all to not allow the lessons and memories from your time here to slip away. Take some time to reflect on the things that have defined your life up to this point because if they've brought you this far, they're going to be useful wherever you find yourself in the future after you cross the stage tomorrow morning. I wish each and every one of you all the best.

Thank You.

## **Kareena Gor**

I definitely did not picture myself up here five years ago. My first day at PD in 8th grade was an emotional one to say the least. I was scared to leave my friends behind and start all over again. I remember walking into Mr. Field's first period geo class with tears streaming down my face, hoping that no one would notice. I think everyone noticed. The girl sitting in front of me turned around and asked "Hey, you good?" Thank you Amanda Cruz for being the first person to talk to me.

Once class started, Mr. Field asked us to write down on a notecard what our past teachers would say about us. He then had us stand and tear up our notecards and throw them in the trash. He explained that our past reputations would not define us in this class and that it would be a clean slate. While this was probably an activity he did with his students each year, it really resonated with me. In the same manner, coming to Providence Day was a fresh start for me--a chance to forge my own identity. I've had so many opportunities in my past five years here to push myself socially, academically, and culturally.

I asked some of my classmates what their highlights of 8th grade were. The guys mentioned their post-lunch basketball games. I also heard hanging out at the turf after lunch, and visits to Golden Corral and Busch Gardens in the pouring rain on the Williamsburg trip. We've been very unlucky with the forecast on the night

of our first Sadies, Prom, and our recent class trips, but that's just another thing that makes these moments stand out.

I began my Freshman year playing JV Field Hockey. I was awful and didn't *stick* with it (no pun intended) but I liked the idea of being on a team and later joined the girls throwing team. I can't imagine myself trying either of these sports if I wasn't in such a supportive environment like that of PD. While sports certainly weren't my thing, I was given other chances to push myself in spaces like the Honor Council, SGA, and the 2019 Round Square International Conference in India, with Luke. We also transitioned from the West Wing into the Academic Center this year. The new Global Cafe definitely changed all of our high school experiences for the better. I'll miss the muffins and the conversations in line with friends and the Flik staff.

Honorable mentions from Sophomore year include running into classmates all over the National Mall during the D.C. class trip, my five person Photo 2 class with Mr. Dewey, and hosting our new exchange students, Andrew and Thiemo from South Africa and Germany, respectively. But, I think the best part of this year was spending my summer with Freedom School, which many of my classmates will attest to being so fun and rewarding.

The trip to New Orleans was very special for our class. I remember the chaperones remarking that we embraced the energy of the House of Blues like no

other and it was so exciting to showcase some of our classmates' talents at Preservation Hall. While the year was cut short, we were still able to make a lot of memories. Holding a baby alligator in the swamps of Louisiana, Tuesdays at Big Brother Big Sister, and never getting to lunch on time thanks to having Mr. Dickson's APUSH class anchor will be what comes to mind when I think of our Junior year.

And of course, this year. While it certainly was not the Senior year we all had imagined, I can honestly say I'm satisfied with how it turned out. We are so fortunate to have even step foot on campus this year let alone having sports, Prom, and an in-person graduation. This is all thanks to the PD community and the people behind the scenes. Thank you to all the faculty and staff who spent so much time, money, and energy on making campus safe. I also want to thank the parents for making the Seniors feel special. I know my advisee really appreciated the monthly Senior snack, Yetis, and Senior chairs.

As for the Class of 2021's legacy, there are so many things that are unique to this group. Like, our Seniors leading us to winning 4 state championships in one day. Or, the fact that we have 30(?) college signed athletes. We've won best Homecoming video every year (thanks to Kolby). And I can't forget the rush to plan like ten different senior pranks in one night. What other class has brought

scooters, a Mariachi Band performance, AND a water gun fight to their last day of school?

The pandemic brought us together in unexpected ways. I will miss the occasional GroupMe banter, afternoons on the Slawn, and, even getting stuck in Thorguard together. This year especially, I've found myself looking forward to going to school everyday. Not everyone is lucky enough to say that about their high school, but I am truly so grateful for my time with each and every one of you. I can't wait to see you all thrive in college and beyond. This time, I hope my first day will not involve any crying.

Thank you.

## **Sam Schulman**

I was supposed to leave Providence Day School. I had literally submitted a deposit to enroll at a Jewish boarding school when I learned that they had closed down. I was shocked and worried at the prospect of not knowing where I was going to enroll for my junior year. In my mind, I had moved on from the PD community, and I was anxious at the thought of returning. I had basically adjusted to the idea of leaving home to attend boarding school, but, like I said, life had different plans. Immediately following the other school's closing, I began considering my return to Providence Day with a million thoughts running through my head. Would I be accepted back? If I am, should I even go back? Would I be satisfied? These questions would all eventually be answered, but in that moment, the prospect of returning to the PD community put me in a panic.

It didn't take long for my first worry to be addressed, as Mr. Hedinger told me *that day* that I could return to PD, no questions asked. H's assurance made me feel extremely welcomed by the community in a time where everything seemed to be crashing down. Thankfully, the first question was answered. And, after calming down from the hysteria, I decided that I'd finish high school at PD under the condition that I'd seek out everything the community had to offer. The second question was now answered, but the question of whether I'd be satisfied with the last two years of high school was still unknown. Upon my return to PD campus at



the start of my junior year, I nervously reached out to the community looking for a great experience, and I can happily say that they delivered. Over the last two years, I was able to have some of my most fond memories because of the welcoming community that gave me a second chance. For the rest of the speech, I want to highlight some of the best aspects of and moments with the PD Community that I would've missed if I left. In advance, I thank everyone who took part in these experiences; you helped redefine my high school experience and, likely, the experience of so many others.

The first members of the PD community that I want to thank are the maintenance staff and Flik Dining workers. This place literally wouldn't run without all of you. The night and day maintenance staff ensure that we can learn and grow in a beautiful and prepared space. Especially since the pandemic started, their work to maintain cleanliness has been one of the integral parts of keeping campus open. And, to the flik dining staff, I really need to pay you back because I am *not* getting my diploma tomorrow if my account is still negative. But, seriously, the meals you prepare and the efficiency of the dining hall and Glafe help students stay healthy and productive. You all are a cornerstone of the PD community, and on behalf of the class of 2021, we can't thank you enough for all that you do.

One memory that represents the Class of 2021's strong community was the NOLA trip. Everyone was so into the excitement at the House of Blues, and we all got to collectively help preserve New Orleans when we planted trees as a class. And while the Steamboat Natchez was really, really cold and that band was loud during dinner, our class's community felt strong in those moments.

An aspect of PD that I would've missed more than anything is the student section at sporting events. Even though we haven't gotten to pack the mac in too long, vaccines have helped us have a few special moments before we go. I know that everyone who witnessed the Girl's Soccer, Boy's Lacrosse, Boy's Track and Field, AND Girl's Track and Field State Championships will never forget the energy that accompanied these wins. The strength of our community is defined by moments like these.

Sadly, for most of the last year, our community has been fractured by the pandemic, but that doesn't mean that the class of 2021 hasn't had moments that reflected our community. In November, we had an event that brought the entire class onto campus for a fun afternoon of dinner and games. We were all able to return to campus for almost two months, and in that time, we took away cherished memories like establishing the Gaga Pit commemorating Alex Reed and a fully

in-person bus photo. If anything, the last few months of our senior year have shown that a community that was broken is never beyond repair.

So, if you didn't probably guess, the answer to the third question is yes; I am satisfied, and I'm sure you all are too. We've made the most of every second. And while our 150 student community is now splitting apart, this year has shown us that it will outlast this campus. It'll stay strong through alumni networks, on college campuses, at reunions, and beyond. And I can't wait for it all.

Thank you.

## **Kolby Oglesby**

To my fellow class officers: Luke, maybe we should just go back to first grade instead of going to Chapel Hill, it'd probably be a lot easier; Kareena, I'm glad that I too was able to experience Mr. Field's first period geo class with you. I remember that class being a ton of fun and you certainly were a part of that; Sam, I'm really grateful to have had you as a friend these last two years... I mean I don't get why it took you almost leaving this school for you to join our friend group, but my sentiment remains. Alright, let's talk about chemistry.

One Tuesday in tenth grade my friends and I sat at our lunch table doing what productive PDS high schoolers do- that being complaining about things and trying to one-up each other. Today's subject of complaint was chemistry. I recall one of my friends exclaiming, "god, what we're learning in chem is so stupid. How could this ever be used for, like, any job," to which my other friend responded "actually, my dad works in chemical engineering. It's a really important and lucrative career." A moment like this illuminates the philosophical ideas behind our pedagogical systems; that is to say, this relatively mundane story actually reveals how our culture is infected with the corrosive idea that education only holds value in the context of a job market.

Due to a thinning job market, Americans have conditioned themselves to use education as a key to getting a job, leading us to lose a key component of the reasoning behind learning: wonder. We sit in class, we cram, we test, and we repeat until we churn out a degree so we can make a few more bucks than the other guy. All

of this, \*motions to the crowd and the school\* for what? So I can become a real estate lawyer or something? (sidenote: that is in no way meant to be an attack on anyone in the crowd who may be in real estate law).

Now I am not suggesting that getting a job isn't an important part of a good education. But if we continue to look at education as purely about job outcomes then humankind will stunt its growth. But over the past 14 years I have been fortunate enough to be a student here, where each individual teacher embodies the claim that education is about instilling a genuine passion in students for curiosity, critical thinking, and personal development.

I am astutely aware of this because my mother is herself a physical education, health, and wellness teacher here. Each year I watch her find ways to make learning about her subject fun and relevant through creative games, ever-evolving curriculum, and connection with her students. She reflects the aspects that make PD teachers special; her interest in her field and her care for her students has led her to create an environment where students feel they are not being talked down to but are interacting with something that is well within their comprehension and worth engaging with. In layman's terms, PDS teachers bring a sense of wonder back to our education. When wonder becomes the primary focus of school rather than just potential job productivity, we are encouraged to learn as much as possible, leading us to naturally make more informed and empathetic decisions. Proper learning also gives us the tools to grapple with our own purpose. For instance, I live vicariously through the

knowledge that I am connected to every living thing on this planet by way of being made of stardust present at the beginning of time. We learned that in fifth grade science by the way. Without education focused on learning and critical thinking the world becomes scarily ignorant and unfortunately nihilistic.

But that is why our teachers are so vital. PDS teachers are not just people doing their job; they are bastions of defense against ignorance. Mathematics, social studies, the arts and sciences, language, and yes, chemistry, were not taught to us as a means to an end- were not just ways for us to get into business school so that we could become part of a hedge fund and make millions. The learning had a primary motive: to situate ourselves within reality and to understand both intellectually and emotionally the contexts and systems that we exist in and through. Whether it be through teaching critical thinking, problem solving, or introspective skills our teachers have excelled at *making smarter people*.

Now I would be remiss if I did not give out more specific appreciation to my teachers, so: Thank you to Ms. Castro who stated in Analysis last year, “not everything we do in this classroom is for a job. Do we read Shakespeare because we can use it for financial advising? Nah, we learn it because it’s cool;” Thank you to Mr. Brick Smith for teaching me how to study rather than cram; Thank you to Mr. Marcus Smith for teaching me how to be curious about my identity as a black man; Thank you to Dr. Marshall for reinvigorating my interest in storytelling; Thank you to Dr. Hough for teaching me the beauty in music’s structure; Thank you to Mr. Dickson for

teaching me both where America has succeeded and failed at living up to its founding principles, and thank you to Dr. Bratyanski for teaching me how we as a people could continue to work towards said principles; Thank you to Dr. Welsh for giving me the skills to write this very speech; To all of the teachers I was unable to mention I extend my utmost gratitude. Trust me, there isn't a group of more personable, interesting, and caring educators than you, and I would stand up here and thank all of you if I could. You guys have not just been there to teach, but to support my classmates and I through our own personal journeys; we would not have the strength to walk across that stage tomorrow without you. And most importantly, thank you to mom and dad- both teachers themselves- for sacrificing so much so that I could experience this place.

Finally, to my classmates: Fixing the way our society looks at education is not up to our teachers. No, it is their job to simply exist in a new better system that has been established for them to teach in. We must take on the responsibility to use what we have learned in our classrooms to become architects of a more creative, ingenuitive, just, and thoughtful society. From my perspective, that is a job worth having. Thank you.

**Seniors, please rise.**