

## VICTORIA XU- VALEDICTORY SPEECH

Well guys, we made it. It's graduation day--a chapter of our lives closed, four years of classes complete, and a high school diploma achieved. For so long, I never thought this day would come. The tests, sports meets or games, dress code, and blue tardy slips--highschool seemed like it'd never end--until it did. And suddenly, now, the four years I thought couldn't move any slower seem to have gone by so fast.

Only in retrospect, do I see how all the everyday moments--eating lunch with friends, going to practice, talking with teachers--converge into an overall experience--a story of four years (and for some much longer) growing up together.

Can you all remember what you were like freshman year? Better question: do you really want to remember? That was the year we tried to salvage our reputation from the eighth grade food fight and to everyone's surprise, we were successful, at least according to Mr. Tappy. Reminiscing on the years--freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior--I couldn't help but also picture the places. How many hundreds of hours have we spent in PD's halls, procrastinating--I mean rushing--to class? Or behind those DH desks, staring at the clock--I mean board? Some of us have literally grown up on this campus, from age five to eighteen, and all of us have grown from high schoolers to graduates.

But the when and the where of these memories are just a background for what my mind keeps lingering on--the who--the friends, teachers, counselors, coaches, and families. You all were the ones that shaped these four years, and you all make today not just a day of celebration and reminiscing but also a day of gratitude.

To the teachers, coaches, and advisors: thank you for bringing your passion to everything you do. That love for the content you teach or the sports you coach is contagious. It's

made me appreciate subjects and activities I never thought I'd enjoy. I'll never forget the smile of pure excitement when Mr. Lucia talks about e in Calculus or the way Mr. Dickson made history come alive—and not just by being related to almost everyone in the textbook. But, you all don't stop at the class material: whether it's Ms. Castro giving life lessons and empowering rants, Dr. Crumley reminding us to take a moment to appreciate the wonder of nature in trees and constellations, Mr. Dewey and Wallace exposing me to the art world both in and out of class, or the countless club advisors and coaches supporting our extracurricular passions, you all's influence doesn't stop at the classroom door. I know I speak for all of us when I thank you for not only being amazing teachers, but also being our friends, our mentors, and our role models.

To the friends, the ones that crammed for tests with me, made those workouts with Hovis almost bearable, and turned the trek from the west wing to the dh into 5 minutes of pure entertainment: thank you. We spend a lot of time learning in the classroom, but we learn just as much from each other. I'm sure I speak for not only myself when I say my friends have influenced so much of who I am, from the music I listen to to the things I'm involved in. I even owe one of the coolest things I've ever been a part of, mural painting, to one of my best friends Reilly Alridge, who created the nonprofit Happy Walls from scratch. And I just have to say a quick shoutout to the gang: I hope you know how much I love y'all for not only always being supportive and acting crazy with me, but also for inspiring me, each in your own way, to be a better person. I'll miss you guys.

And lastly, but obviously not least: to the family in the room. For the sacrifices you make to support us, the attitude you've dealt with to raise us, guide us, and push us: thank you. Mom and dad, I can't believe y'all, after 17 years, still have the patience to try and share your wisdom with my stubborn self. But some of the most important lessons I've learned from you, were the ones you didn't even know you were teaching me. The example you set, the life you've made for

yourselves, your story and your hard work makes me believe I can reach for the stars. I love you guys.

So faculty, family and friends: thank you all for shaping these four years because these years have in turn shaped the people you see walking across the stage today. Some of us know exactly where we want to go, others look forward to figuring that part out, but either way we can look to what comes next with excitement because you've prepared us well. I think it's fair to say we're a class that has both talent and personality, both of which will take each of us far in whatever we choose to do. And now, thanks to you all, we also have the skills and knowledge to continue to learn and grow as we encounter new people, places, and experiences.

Class of 2017, thank you for getting through all of this with me: this being this speech and the last four years. And finally, congratulations: we made it.