

## Shrewsbury High School Graduation Remarks

June 2, 2016

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Superintendent of Schools

Members of the School Committee; administrators, faculty, and staff; parents, family, and guests; and, most importantly, members of the Class of 2016 – it is an honor and a privilege to address you this evening.

*Class*, I think, is an interesting and important word. Of course, this evening it refers to you, our graduates, who for the rest of your lives will be members of the Shrewsbury High School Class of 2016. Educationally, class refers to a course of study over a semester or school year, and you all have earned the right to be here by successfully completing the requirements of the classes you took over the past four years. Of course, class also means a single, daily meeting of a course, as in “I was a rock star in class today because I studied so hard last night,” or, conversely, “I didn’t have a clue in class today because I binge-watched eight episodes of Grey’s Anatomy on Netflix last night.”

Class can also refer to one’s economic standing relative to others in society. Most of you are fortunate to have been raised in a family that has had enough money to provide you not only with the basic necessities, but also niceties that have made your standard of living truly remarkable when compared to previous generations, and unthinkable for the hundreds of millions of young people in our nation and around the globe who live in poverty. I hope you have a sense of gratitude for the circumstances into which you were born, which allowed you to grow up and attend school in a community that has provided you with an education that, by many measures, truly is world class. You are clearly well prepared academically, but I also hope that the opportunity you had to attend school with classmates from different economic classes, not to mention different racial, ethnic, religious, cultural, and personal backgrounds, has given you a real-world perspective that has enabled understanding, respect, compassion, and empathy. These relate to the definition of class I want to focus on this evening -- that is, class as a personal attribute that you develop, not something that you are born with, and certainly not something that depends on how much wealth you inherit or earn. I am referring to the class that reflects the substance of one’s character.

This is the type of class that each of us has full control over attaining, as it is a measure of our actions:

- How we treat our family and friends.
- How we act towards people we don't know personally or who can't do anything for us -- especially those who have less power, or less education, or fewer resources or opportunities than we do.
- How we serve our own community, and the larger world.
- How we communicate our thoughts and beliefs to others -- especially when we disagree -- and how we respond to others' thoughts and beliefs that are different than our own.
- How we deal with success, and how we handle adversity.

It's not about whether you will act, it is about how you act.

Unfortunately, at this moment in our society, it seems to be much easier to find examples of what is crass than what exemplifies class. One simple definition of crass is "being rude and insensitive." I'm concerned about how rude and insensitive behavior has become more prevalent in politics and the media, especially social media, and how our culture has become more tolerant of it. I urge you to rise above and set a higher standard for yourselves. I want you to recognize that even if you are well educated, have great talent, or have achieved material success, these have no bearing on whether you possess class. Class has everything to do with how you choose to act -- whether you behave in ways that demonstrate respect and kindness. As a much wiser school leader than I, Hogwarts Headmaster Albus Dumbledore, once said to Harry Potter, "It is our choices that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities."

Members of the Class of 2016, I know you have the abilities, skills, and knowledge to build prosperous lives, but, more importantly, I hope that you make choices and act in ways that cause those who know you to say, "Now there's a class act."

On behalf of everyone in the Shrewsbury Public Schools, please accept my very best wishes for bright futures lived with true class. Congratulations.