

VALEDICTORY ADDRESS**Laura Bauman, Class of 2017 Valedictorian**

Hello, my name is Laura Bauman and I'd like to welcome all of you—faculty, family, friends and, of course, the graduates to the York School Class of 2017 Commencement Ceremony.

To begin my speech I would like to thank all of the family and friends who are here today. I believe I speak for my whole class when I say we appreciate you more than you can know even if sometimes, in the midst of adolescence, we don't act like it. I'd like to take a quick moment to acknowledge my own family because, in my completely unbiased opinion, I think they are the best. My grandparents have been there for me since day one. They cheer at my soccer games, give me advice on how to stop from sneezing in a firefight, and spend countless hours helping me cut plastic bags for my twenty percent project. Thank you for your unconditional love and support; you mean the world to me. To my mom and dad, thank you for teaching me right from wrong, giving me a strong work ethic, reminding me to take time to enjoy life and so much more. Not only would I not exist without you, but I would not be the person I am today without your influence.

Besides my immediate family I have learned so much from the other adults in my life. I would like to formally thank the teachers, faculty, coaches, and mentors for all that they have done to prepare us for our futures. Thank you for not only teaching us how to do trigonometry, or speak French, or play soccer, or use power tools, but for also showing us how to be good people. Thank you for holding us accountable and teaching us responsibility, but for simultaneously understanding that we are human sometimes and for giving us grace. Thank you for demonstrating how to live meaningful, aware, and happy lives. Thank you for taking the time to get to know us. Thank you for all that you do and sacrifice to try to make us into adults capable of functioning in the real world.

Now, finally, to my fellow graduates, the class of 2017; congratulations! I know it is more than a little cliché but I don't think we thought this day would ever come. It was always a distant hope, a light at the end of the tunnel, and now, four years later, it is here. We finished. No more AP's, SAT's, ACT's, or other standardized tests known by strange acronyms. I'm pretty sure we are all happy about that. However, for many of us this is simultaneously a bittersweet moment because it also means the end of funny and awkward sophomore speeches, fries spent in the commons with friends, sports games, and school days on our little sunny hilltop.

For many of us, York has been the place where we started to define ourselves. It is here in the last four or five years that we have conquered the challenges of adolescence and started our journey towards becoming the people that we want to be. I entered York as a naive and quiet 8th grader who's only aspirations for after high school were solely modeled after my favorite TV character, Rory Gilmore. Like her, I was going to go to an Ivy League school and become a journalist. Over the course of the past 5 years, not only did I end up being a bit more of a Paris Geller than a Rory, I also figured out that I strongly prefer integrals and derivatives to any sort of writing. Anyways, the point is that I did a complete 180 in terms of who I wanted to be and I think many of you did as well. Maybe you still don't know what you want to do, but hopefully you have a better sense of who you are.

Whether you have your life planned out for the next twenty years or you still haven't decided on a major; next year is going to be something new. Even though we complain and gripe about the homework, the stress, and the occasionally long school forums, York has been our home. It has been like a bird's nest and now we are being shoved out of it and told to fly. I guess that is an oversimplification, but sometimes that's what it can feel like. The next step, whatever that is for you, is unknown. The unknown is exciting and terrifying precisely because it is unknown. It is a chance to do better, to be kinder, to make new friends, and to seek out novel experiences. In the words of Monica Geller to Rachel Green, "Welcome to the real world. It sucks. You're gonna love it."

I am giving this speech because of a number, a number earned over four years of academics, but a number no less. From what I can tell, valedictory speeches are supposed to offer advice and inspiration for the future. My GPA definitely does not mean I have the most life experience or wisdom; in fact, it probably means I spent too much of the last four years with my head in a book or in the library studying. In other words, I don't feel qualified to give advice on many, perhaps most, topics and I won't try to. However, there is one piece of advice that I think I can speak to pretty well.

So, for what it's worth, I'd like to implore you not to fear failure. Don't live avoiding risk because you are afraid you won't make it. In the words of Robert F. Kennedy, "Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly." I haven't done much in my life so far, but the accomplishments I am proudest of all started when I overcame my fear and took a risk. Soccer scared me when I started. York scared me when I started. Power tools freaked me out before I started robotics. Public speaking terrified me before I was slowly forced into it and I am now mostly numb from the terror.

I'm a big believer in the saying "if your goals don't scare you, they're not big enough;" and I know that all of you, my classmates, have great potential and should have big goals. Out of all the things I will miss about York, the people are number one on that list; I am proud to say I am a member of the York Class of 2017 because over the past 5 years I have seen your dedication, your passion, your empathy for others, and your desire to make the world a better place.

I'm sure every class says this, but I think the Class of 2017 is one of the best. As a class and individuals we have been accepted to colleges across the country, volunteered locally and around the globe, won scholarships, performed plays, won athletic accolades, and been the leaders of York extracurricular activities. You, my classmates, have challenged me to be a better student, leader, and person; I am incredibly grateful for the time I got to spend getting to know you and excited to see what you all go on to do and become.

At this point I feel like I've been talking forever, and I know you are anxious for the ceremony to proceed; but remember Ferris Bueller's wise advice, "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it." So do your best to be patient and savor these last few moments together because before you know it, it will be over. Thanks again for letting me speak today and congratulations!