

# Valedictorians Deliver Parting Words

## All of You are Just as Worthy

At first, I wasn't going to give this speech. It's seemed unfair. Why does a number on my transcript allow me to speak at our final goodbye, compared to all of you, who are just as worthy.



The title, itself, was never something I strived for. Being valedictorian held a sense of power and privilege that I didn't want. That I didn't need. Valedictorian is supposed to be an honor for the hardest working, and I appreciate that, I have worked hard to be where I am. But who says that the number on our transcripts reflects how hardworking we are? Why does the education system rely on a number to credit us, to show us our worth, when we are so much more than that. There are so many of you I'd like to hear from, that I can't, because you weren't given the opportunity.

Because hard work isn't just about passing classes. It's about living, doing the best you can with the circumstances you have. Our lives are so much more than school. And Jeff proves that, because Jefferson High School is so much more than school. We're a family. And that's why it's so hard for me to wrap my mind around this. We stick together against all odds, so why, when it's time to hear from our peers for the very last time as one, we pick people off of their systematic success instead of who they are as people.

Though I am proud to say that this Valedictorian cohort is some of the most amazing I have ever met. But I also want to give credit to where credit is due. To those of you that showed up to every single basketball game whether it was miles away or at home court. Those that sacrificed your free time to have a job and support your families. To those of you that advocated for yourself when someone didn't believe in

you. To those of you that came to school with a smile on your face no matter what was going on in your personal life. Or talked your friends down off a ledge after a hard day. To those that send pictures of your homework to help the homies out. Or those of you that walked your friends down to breakfast even though you were already late for class. I want to credit the people that not only worked hard in school but those of you that worked hard at becoming the person you are today. Because we all have grown since freshman year and we deserve credit for that. Credit that our transcripts don't give us.

So I want this to be a reminder as we enter adulthood. You are more than a number, or a statistic, or any negative expectations anyone has ever set for you. You are your growth, your heart, your soul. You are who you decide you want to be. And you will always, ALWAYS, be a Demo!

--Tamia Miller

## We've Come Together in Incredible Ways

I'm so proud of our class for all of our hard work and perseverance that got us all to our high school graduation. We are about to enter a really big time in our lives where we are being challenged to find who we are as individuals and what we're going to contribute to this world, but I know that being a Demo has prepared us for this. We are a class that will go on to use our passions for good, and it is amazing to know that our class is going to make this world a better place. Jefferson taught us not only how to be good people, but how to be there for others and to question things when we're unsure. I think it really shows when you look at this Class of 2020, just how amazing



you all are. We are all going to incredible universities, incredible programs, and doing incredible jobs because of the hard work you invested in the past four years at this school. It's really inspiring to see.

Even though our year was cut short and we will be missing out on some pretty big milestones, our class will get through this because we are strong, motivated, and creative. We've already come together in such incredible ways, congratulating each other on college acceptances, celebrating over Zoom calls, and staying connected as a class in any way we can right now. The class of 2020 is historic. We're inspiring so many people to stay strong and positive in times that are scary and difficult. Thank you for setting such a wonderful example of perseverance, creativity, and compassion. We would not be the people that we are today without Jefferson and the teachers and students inside it.

Jefferson is a very special place and we're all very lucky to have been a part of this community. Community is very strong in our class, which really shows and I'm so blessed to be a part of this chapter.

Thank you for the memories I will cherish forever. As you think of the adversity the class of 2020 has had to overcome these past few months, and especially these past few days, there should be no doubt in your mind that you can accomplish greatness. Please continue to utilize the valuable tools you were given here at Jeff to make a difference in our society and the way we treat each other as human beings, regardless of what they look like. Fight for what you believe is right, and uplift each other. Show them what it means to be a Demo. Class of 2020 is going to do some amazing things, and I can't wait to watch you all flourish.

--Sierra Briscoe

## Hello Classmates of 2020

When our school closed in mid-March, I doubt that any of us expected the months of uncertainty and confusion that followed. While springtime for many generations of high school seniors meant fun, celebration, and coming together, ours has been a time of distancing and isolation. However, as we gather today, we have way more reasons to celebrate than to despair because our graduation is marked by—not



a few months of disruptions—but years of academic excellence and personal triumph. And so I say congratulations to the Class of 2020!

Earning a diploma means we have successfully gone through four years of high school. When assignments got hard, we persevered. When we had questions, we sought out help. And through our commitment to learning, we have gained valuable insights about ourselves and the world.

When senior year came, we had visions for our future. And through planning and preparation, we have moved closer and closer to realizing our dreams. Writing countless essays

and filling out applications, we have defined our stories and sharing them with others has given us the chance to own our voices.

As acceptances and congratulatory letters came in, seeing the fruits of our labor has only made us more determined to seize the next opportunity that comes our way.

Today we celebrate the great bonds of friendship we have been able to cultivate amongst ourselves. From sharing classrooms to sharing ideas, from sharing spaces to sharing meals, members of the Class of 2020 have grown stronger because of our interconnectedness.

--Mekdes Hilete

## We Achieved Against All Odds

"The truth can only stay buried for so long before the world unearths it." One of our classmates actually said something along those lines on what we now know to have been our last day at Jefferson, and the sentiment has stuck with me in an eerie, almost prophetic way.



In the months since we were last at school, we have seen so much. We've watched as death tolls rise in the midst of an unprecedented pandemic, have

witnessed false 911 calls, scrolled through our feeds to find executions and daylight murders, and we have seen this country burn.

On the eve of us reaching one of the biggest milestones of our youth, everything seems to be uncertain. Our plans have been upended, we have anxiously awaited answers about what our very near futures will look like, and it has dawned on us that as we make one of the biggest transitions of our lives, the world as we know it is also transitioning.

The things that once were important to us—prom and a traditional graduation, our grades and GPAs—seem much

smaller now. In these months, the Class of 2020 has become adults. After the truth was unearthed we began to see things differently.

Nikki Giovanni wrote "Everything will change. The only question is growing up or decaying," and I can say with my whole heart that in the midst of so much decay, I have seen us, the Class of 2020, grow against all odds. Our circumstances, rather than bringing out the worst, have revealed the best in us. We have mobilized in new ways, supported one another via Zoom Call and Google Meet, built community in our group chats and the comment section of the @jeffersonseniors Instagram page,

## I Couldn't Be More Proud



During an info night for incoming 9th graders this year, I was asked to speak to the families and tell them why their students should come to Jeff. I was asked to participate

the night of the event and had no time to prepare, but I didn't need it. When I got on stage and thought of what to say, I thought of what made Jefferson so special to me.

I thought of all the moments in freshman English where from week one, we had already become a community. I thought of all the moments I'll never forget from playing sports, I thought of the times we stopped class to discuss something more important going on in the world at that moment. I thought of how no matter what the topic, how we valued each other's contribution to the discussion.

So when it was time to tell these families why they should send their kids to Jeff, I told them that Jefferson is where kids are taught to be human at its most core meaning. Kids are taught what it is like to be a part of something bigger than themselves, where they learn to respect each other and thrive with one another. As I look at everyone now I know I couldn't have been more right.

Before I ever even step foot onto 5210 N. Kerby Ave., I knew Jefferson is where I wanted to be. Jeff was the best choice I could have ever made. Having a place to be 5 out of the 7 days of the week, where no matter what I was doing or who I was with I could learn something new, has been a gift that I will never forget.

The class of 2020, though we may be a small graduating class compared to others, we are large in our knowledge and experiences. Never in my life have I been part of a group of people so talented, whether it be artistically, athletically, or academically, and in most cases all three. I believe we have all been blessed to grow up in a space that develops such a true sense of community. To grow up in a school that isn't afraid to speak its mind, a place that isn't afraid to take action.

As I think of everyone in the class of 2020, I couldn't be more proud of everyone. I couldn't be more thankful for the relationships I've created, and friends I have made. And before I say goodbye I want to say thank you. Thank you for easing my worry about the future, thanks for reassuring me that everything will be okay. Because I know with people like us shaping the future everything will be okay.

-- Leif Gregory

and we have shown that our bond is not tied down to Jefferson High School. It exists beyond it, and our relationships with one another will continue as we go our separate ways into the greater metro area, region, country, and world.

In short, we have been tested in fire and came out as gold.

So, Class of 2020, I want you to know that we are the class of overcoming; of dusting your shoulders off and keeping it moving. We are the class of the pivot, adjust, and continue onward. And we will set a new trajectory built upon our ideas, values, and visions. We've seen too much to close our eyes now.

--Selam Getu