

Good afternoon graduates, parents, family and friends, faculty, staff and distinguished guests. Thank you so much for allowing me the honor of being the faculty speaker for the class of 2017. When I first found out that had been selected as the faculty speaker, immediately a four letter word popped into my mind... KIND. K-I-N-D. And with that one word came so many questions: what kind of speech should I give that will encourage you as you head off into this next part of your journey? What kind of person will you each become? What kind of job will you choose? What kind of life will you each live? We have been asking these kinds of questions of you, our students for most of your academic lives. You are probably sick of me asking things like “What kind of elective do you want to take?” or “what kind of school would you like to attend after this one?”

And indeed, many of you came to eAcademy because you were looking for a different kind of school. You wanted to learn in your own way. You and your parents found eAcademy to be the kind of place where you would thrive and grow, where you would push yourselves, develop friendships, learn from amazing teachers, and become the kind of person you are meant to be.

But what does this word kind really mean?

Mr. Webster defines it in two ways. As a noun, kind means “a group of persons or things that belong together or have something in common”. If this doesn't fit eAcademy, I don't know what does. You see, you are each one of a kind, unique, uncommon, precious, rare. And yet, in your uniqueness, you have created a space at eAcademy where you each belong. Your “kind” at our school is one of great character, integrity and determination, of resiliency, gratitude and compassion for others. You have decided to be a part of the kind of school where students are welcomed for who they are, where they are encouraged and supported in their individual pursuits, and where being yourself is just the kind of thing we love. To be a part of this kind of environment is special. There is no doubt about it.

However, Mr. Webster also defines kind as an adjective: “wanting or liking to do good and to bring happiness to others.” And this, my friends, is my favorite definition of kind. It is my true belief that you will never regret being kind. When you are kind, you change people. When you are kind, you leave a lasting impact.

When you are kind, you create a space for acceptance. When you are kind, you show people that they are important and that they matter. What I have witnessed at eAcademy in the last two years has again shown me the great power of being kind. It happens in small ways. A student holding a door for a stranger, a parent driving another parent's child home from block time, Mary giving out stickers to the elementary students on Fridays, 30 cheering students and staff celebrating the end of chemo for another student. I've watched it in the way you all listened to each other during class discussions and supported each other during presentations. I sat in awe as I watched student after student arrive on a Thursday evening to support our drama production of Show and Spell. I have heard how kind a teacher has been to stay a little later in their day for a student to have some additional help on an assignment, how kind a friend was in offering help on a project when someone was struggling, how kind our ASB class was when they raised money and goods for a local animal shelter. I've smiled with joy as I watched how kind Mr. Finley was to dress up as Cat in the Hat to read to our students on read across America day or to adorn a Santa Hat to sing songs with our students before winter break. I could go on and on.

In other words, everywhere you look, you can see people being kind to one another.

This reminded me of a story from my childhood. A young couple was thinking about moving to a new town and went to visit and get a sense of the place. As they walked along the street, they came across an old man sitting on his porch. "May we ask you a question?" said the husband. "Of course," the old man replied. "What are the people like in this town?" the husband inquired. The old man responded, "Well what are they like where you live now?" "Where we come from, people are kind and neighborly. They greet you as you walk by. They bring meals when people are struggling or in need. People help each other, encourage each other and take care of each other," the husband told the old man. "You will find the same kind of people in this town," said the old man. A few days later, another couple was also looking to move to this new town and came across this same old man sitting on his porch. They also asked "What are the people like in this town?" and the old man asked the same question of them. "What are the people like

where you live now?" This time, the wife replied "People are rude and unkind. They keep to themselves, never helping others or even saying hello as we walk by. People in our town don't seem to care about anyone but themselves." To this the old man replied, "You will find the same kind of people in this town." You see, as the old man knew, when you look for kindness and goodness in people, you will find it. When you are kind to others, it is contagious and will spread. In the same turn, if you look for negativity and unkindness, you will find it.

So, Class of 2017, may you choose to be kind whenever you can, may you find the kind of life that fulfills you, and may you realize that you are exactly the kind of person you are meant to be. Don't ever change, because I already think you are all kinds of awesome! I leave you with this inspiration by John Wesley: "Do all the good you can. By all the means you can. In all the ways you can. In all the places you can. At all the times you can. To all the people you can. As long as ever you can." Oh and in case you were counting, you have heard the word "kind" 45 times. Congratulations Class of 2017!