

Remarks  
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Head of School

Good evening students, families, faculty and staff, alumni, trustees and our extended CA family, those here with us on campus, and those all around the world.

Just one month ago we celebrated the Cheshire Academy graduating Class of 2020. The ceremony was small with just two invited guests per student, everyone was masked, and we were forced to forsake years of tradition which include the incredibly personal and emotional faculty receiving line—the last moment on campus with tears, hugs, handshakes and heartfelt words of appreciation and gratitude. This year Commencement day was filled with many “At least…”—at least we were able to honor our graduates in person, at least our senior masters could lead the procession, at least we would still honor and call the names of graduates winning academic prizes and receiving their diplomas, whether they were able to be with us in person or watching us remotely from their own homes across the world. The final moments reminded us that we are CA strong, and that community is what brought us back together and what will always keep our connections strong.

Tonight, I stand before our seniors and postgraduates—the Class of 2021, achingly aware that 25 percent of the class are watching remotely instead of sitting here side by side with their peers. Through the wonders of technology, we are together here virtually, and though not all in person, we are joined no matter where in the world we are, as members of the Cheshire Academy community.

Community is the heart of Cheshire Academy. It is what makes us stand above and apart from all other schools. Community is not just a word here, it is a belief and a value. Today we are all part of the same community and as such we are given a gift that we must nurture and treasure. Some might scoff and question the goodness that I believe is inherent in our community, but I would argue that those who do forget that no community is perfect, and in our imperfections, we learn from one another and grow

together. A real community is in many ways like a family—we may disagree and have conflict but just as in a loving, healthy family, we ask forgiveness, we take care of each other, and above all else, we are there for one another in our time of need.

Each one of you came to Cheshire Academy from multiple communities—the community of your family, your hometown, your team, your ensemble, your affinity group—and now you are a part of the CA community. We self-identify in ways that may or may not be visible to others. What community do you belong to? Are you a part of a biracial community? Or a transgender community? Or perhaps your community is your football team, your theater or music ensemble, or the fencing team? Maybe you belong to the campus dog loving community? Some of you are a part of the faculty child community—with all the benefits and challenges that brings. Others belong to a Latinx community; and we all belong to an antiracist community.

When we are born, we join a community of loving people who anxiously awaited our arrival, whether that be birth parents, foster parents, adoptive parents, or extended family. As we grow and develop, we may find community in a church, temple, synagogue, or mosque. Or, our community may become a group we join as we discover our passions—an athletic or artistic group, a book club, a meditation group. And our community may be a place where we discover more about true selves, and where we embrace our uniqueness and the person we are becoming—cisgender or LGBTQ+. We can and should belong to many communities; those with whom we identify, those which encourage us to develop talents and interests, and those which offer us a place to take action to support or defend a cause.

What do our communities give to us? They provide fellowship and belonging in a world that can be confusing, frightening, and unjust. Here at Cheshire Academy you have joined a community that believes in the power of living and learning with others who are distinctly different from ourselves. Our community has the belief that the world is capable of change and we are right now calling for that change toward one day becoming anti-racist, accepting of all political views—both liberal and conservative, and

a place where the responsibilities of good citizenship are commonplace. Healthy communities encourage debate but with words not slurs, with minds open not closed, with opportunity to agree and to disagree. Healthy communities model the Eight Pillars of Bowden—keeping in mind that civility and respect are the cornerstone of healthy discourse and provide the opportunity to see and understand an alternate point of view. Healthy communities are not comprised of individuals who shake their heads and nod in agreement; they are made up of individuals confident to speak their own truth and willing to listen to the truth of others. Think about the communities to which you belong. Are they healthy communities? Do they lift others up? Disparaging, critical, or bullying groups that demean others and feel power in a false sense of superiority are not communities—they are the destruction of the true sense of community.

You are now part of a privileged community. Privilege is a word we have heard repeatedly over the past several months. Some scream at the notion of privilege and others denounce that privilege exists. Think about privilege as the simple act of having access. Today, sitting here, as part of the CA community you are all part of a privileged group. You are part of the less than one percent of high school students in the United States that attend an independent school. You have the privilege of attending Cheshire Academy. This privilege will open doors for you that may remain closed for your friends who do not share the same privilege. Do not deny your privilege; the privilege of a CA education is a gift. I implore you to use this privilege to do good in the world. Take whatever it is that gives you access and use that privilege for good. Use your privilege to become educated, well rounded, open minded, and to learn more about other cultures and communities as you learn to respect other points of view. Use your privilege to share what you have learned with others; use your privilege as a voice.

I ask you to work together to make CA a good community. A benevolent one. Let us be an uplifting community, one in which all voices are heard, with the clear exception being the voice of hatred which only serves to dehumanize a community. One is not stronger, smarter, or more worthy because she is a liberal or a conservative. One is not more normal, acceptable, or lovable because she is cisgender

or transgender. Think about what your communities give you—and what you, as part of those communities—give to others. Communities pull people together, and now, like no other time, we need to belong to the largest community: humanity. We are separate tonight, some here on campus, others at home in their bedrooms, some in the United States, and others abroad. We need the strength of our community more than ever. Be intentional in joining communities; if you are studying remotely, become involved in clubs, music, theater, leadership. If you are attending school in person, take advantage of not only what is available to you here on campus, but reach out and join the communities outside of campus. We are one school, one Cheshire Academy community, despite the physical distance.

Tomorrow marks the start of the 227th school year at Cheshire Academy. For some of you it is your fifth year at the Academy, for others, it may be your first. As we begin a new school year in a pandemic, keep in mind your commitment to this community. Show up. Follow our safety guidelines. Know that there is work to be done and, in our world, wounds to heal. But understand with 100 percent certainty that if you commit yourself to the Cheshire Academy community, together we have the power to embrace, include, support, and stand up for one another. Be you, be brave, be strong, and always be a Cheshire Cat.