

Welcome  
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Members of the senior class of 2021, those joining us here on the field and those joining us remotely, all new and returning students of Cheshire Academy who are listening in, families, faculty and staff, and friends of the Academy, welcome to the historic 2020-2021 school year at Cheshire Academy.

In the long and storied history of our school, this sort of convocation is surely a first, just as this sort of school year is surely a first. I doubt that in our archives you will find many mentions of Zoom, or six feet of physical distancing, or the balance of synchronous and asynchronous work. These are new phrases that have so quickly become part of our language of schooling.

And I feel proud to belong to a community that has been able to reimagine school, so thoroughly and so quickly, to adapt to a changing world. And I feel confident knowing that, over its 226-year history, Cheshire Academy has faced trials and tribulations at least of this magnitude—and reimaged itself, and renewed its commitment to maximizing the potential of our students as individuals and honoring our internationally minded mission.

But if I can put the pandemic and all the changes to the side for two or three minutes, I want to dig in to one small but important nuance in what I said a moment ago. I said that we are here, like this, tonight because *our community* has been able to reimagine school—and that includes *you* and *your reimagining* of what school means. There is no one more important or more central to our community than you, our students. And there is no one more important or more central to your *personal* education than you, as an individual.

Which brings me to the most important words I have to say tonight, which I hope will stay with you if nothing else does: *you are not an empty vessel*. There is nothing I could try to teach you that would find an empty pocket of your brain and just stay there. There is no teacher at Cheshire Academy who

sees themselves as a full glass of knowledge and your brain as an empty glass to fill. Whatever we try to teach you will interact with what is already in there and who you already are.

Let me illustrate this with a silly example. Here is a simple statement: “The nearest zoo is 32 miles from here.” *The nearest zoo is 32 miles from here.*

There will be someone hearing that who grew up in a culture that measures long distances in kilometers, and isn’t sure what 32 miles means. Some of you, who have a driver’s license and think in miles, might have thought “that’s about an hour away.” There will be someone hearing this sentence who isn’t sure what I mean by “zoo” – maybe they are called a menagerie or an animal park where you are from. Someone has a fond memory of going to the zoo as a kid and might go home tonight to look for an old photo album, someone is thinking “maybe I should take my little sister next weekend if it’s that close,” someone here has never been to a zoo and wonders if they’ll get to go this year, and someone here is probably a budding animal rights activist wondering if they should research the conditions at the zoo 32 miles from here.

The point is that nothing I could say has any meaning outside of what it means *to you when you hear it* and what you choose to do with it.

You will hear this year described as a partnership, with all of us doing our part to keep our community safe. But in truth, education has always been a partnership, with all of us doing our part to co-construct knowledge and make meaning together.

So, when you walk in, or *log* in, to a classroom this year, remember that you bring your own *funds of knowledge* that have grown out of year—*years!*—of experiences – social experiences, family experiences, cultural experiences, educational experiences.

I encourage you to share your understanding; recognize that someone else will understand differently; ask questions, not just of your teachers, but of each other; think out loud; engage with what

your teachers are putting in front of you. The more you give us to work with, the more we can give back to you that will push you to the next level.

Your education is yours and you are in the driver's seat; your teachers and classmates look forward to being your partners—your passengers—and sometimes your backseat drivers, guiding you through every intersection, suggesting routes, and helping you discover your destination. So let's work, *together, in equal part*, to make this an unprecedented year of growth and discovery for each one of you. Thank you.