

**Needham High School
Graduation Exercises
Class of 2010
June 7, 2010**

**Remarks by Dr. Connie Barr, Chair
Needham School Committee**

Honored Guests, Dedicated Faculty of the great Needham High School, Fellow School Committee Members, Needham Public School Administrators, Town Officials, Dr. Pizzi and Dr. Gutekanst, Families and Friends of our graduates, and most especially, the great Needham High School Class of 2010. What a privilege it is to be speaking to you today!

Let me begin by saying that I am acutely, and I do mean acutely, aware that there is just one thing that stands between you, the Class of 2010, and your long awaited walk across this stage to receive your diplomas. And that would be this speech. Knowing this, has led to some considerable thought on my part and, you will be happy to know, some significant editing.

And, Parents and Guardians, I am every bit as aware that my moments at this podium stand in the way of a milestone you have been waiting for in your children's lives, one that you thought would never come, but which has arrived in the blink of an eye. And yes, I do mean your children receiving their diplomas, and not that first deposit on an apartment or that down payment on a fledgling business or that first unbelievably large tuition check. I have been in your shoes, and guess what, college goes even faster.

Speaking of walking across a stage, my own walk across a stage in cap and gown has been really long awaited. In spite of finishing a number of levels of my own education, this is the first time I've walked a stage in cap and gown. I was an exchange student in New Zealand during my senior year of high school, so I missed my high school graduation. My two degrees are from the University of Wisconsin and it isn't possible for the more than 5000 undergraduates and advanced degree students to walk the stage at graduation, so I stood in the bleachers when my name was called for my MD degree and I didn't even go to the undergraduate ceremony, knowing I was just going on to more schooling in medical school. When I commented on this to my mother in Wisconsin, she informed me that I even missed my kindergarten graduation because I had the measles (no one gets the measles anymore!). So, as much pressure as I am feeling now, I am kind of enjoying this!

As I have said, I have thought long and hard about how I should use this precious time. Like Maggie Holly, one of your speakers yesterday, I have a lot to say and am not quite sure how to say it. So, I am going to dive in with four thoughts. Well, I have to admit, this is more advice than simply thoughts, even though I'm sure that you are over the top with advice these days, from family and teachers and coaches and colleges.

The first thought is about the importance of community. Community is about being part of a group, working with and helping others, where the whole is greater than the sum of its individual parts, where work gets done little by little, day by day, person by person, and results in something for the greater good. You all know a lot about community, both because you have been integral parts of this school community for the last four years, and because you all

participate in many other communities both large and small. I have seen you or read about you: in the halls talking, in your musical and theatrical productions, on the athletic fields and courts and rinks, at Mock Trial or Debate or Model Congress, championing recycling, or at fundraisers such as car washes (my car looks pretty good most Saturdays). I've heard your band concerts and a cappella concerts and choral selections and viewed your art shows, read you work in the school newspaper and the Rag and watched the NHS TV news (which I really like). I've heard the reports from your international travels and I've seen the charitable work you have done, here and elsewhere, for Haiti, Take Back the Night, Relay for Life, peer tutoring and so much more. You are now moving on, but you take the skills and talents and cooperation you have learned while at NHS to your next communities large and small, to continue the good work you have begun here. You will make a difference in your world one small act at a time, at college or at work or at an apprenticeship or in a military academy.

My second bit of advice: don't ever hesitate to ask for help. That is a tough one for many of us. But we are not meant to be in the world alone. We are much stronger and better able to do good work if we share with others. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness, but is using an available tool to solve a problem. When you feel alone or stuck, however you feel stuck, ask someone.

Thirdly, go back to your reunions. No matter your relationships now, or where you fit or how well you fit, you will enjoy seeing where you and your classmates are in the future. You won't believe this when five years rolls around but it is true, and reunions just get better and better. Take it from me: at my age, I've been to a lot of reunions!

And, finally, never miss a chance to vote. Make it your goal to vote in each and every election. Get an absentee ballot if you have to. Your denizens of the internet will really find that easy as absentee ballots are available through our Town website. If I have learned anything in my years of working with your parents, many of whom I have worked with a lot around elections and on behalf of the schools and in the Town of Needham and on the override which built this beautiful school, it is that every single vote counts.

OK, while I'm at it, all of that advice I referred to earlier, most of that is pretty good too. But I have it on good authority, from three reliable sources: Doonesbury (do high school students read Doonesbury nowadays?), yesterday's Boston Globe (there was a whole article on the subject), and most reliably my daughter Caroline, a 2007 graduate of Needham High (so she really knows), that no one really remembers anything that graduation speakers say, just how much time they took to say it. So just remember a couple of things: be healthy, take care of yourselves and others, keep in touch, call home, ask for help and vote. And DO remember that we, your town and your teachers and your school, stand ready to help where and when we can. We are a community that doesn't go away.

Needham High School is a better place for your having been here, but now off you go, out into the world to make the world a better place. On behalf of the School Committee, go with all of our Congratulations and Best Wishes.

And now, I am going to finish my walk across this stage, so that you, the Needham High School Class of 2010, can begin yours. Congratulations!