

## **New Rochelle High School Graduation 2022: Remarks by Superintendent Jonathan Raymond**

Welcome to our graduating Class of 2022, your families, friends, our faculty, staff, distinguished guests, and Board of Education members. Your graduation day is a joyous occasion and special for a number of reasons, not the least that it's my first as your superintendent. In many ways, the class of 2022 is – and always will be – very meaningful and special for me.

While I certainly intend to speak to you about all you've accomplished and the wonderful opportunities that lie ahead, I also feel a responsibility to speak honestly about the world you are graduating into. It is a world defined by climate change; political extremism and polarization; social, racial, and economic disparity; Ukraine; and, most recently, Uvalde Texas.

The world is challenging. The world is complex. And the world as we know it – both our democracy and our humanity – are in the balance. At the center of this is a fundamental principle and ideal upon which our country, this grand experiment of democracy, was founded. The notion of freedom.

In my opinion, freedom can never be taken for granted. World War II ended 77 years ago. It was the great mobilization of the free world against tyranny, hate, and dictatorship. My father's generation, who went to war at the age you are now, fought for freedom. Since then, subsequent generations – mine and those that have followed – have gotten further and further removed from what it meant to fight for this fundamental principle of freedom that sets us apart from other nations. Freedom is a principle that dictators and despots hate because it is not subject to the whims of power in the hands of a tyrant.

Yet, as I shared, it is this fundamental value that defines us and binds us that is at a crossroads. The late Herb Brooks, coach of the 1980 gold medal Olympic men's hockey team said, "Great moments are born from great opportunity."

Class of 2022, your graduation today is an opportunity for you to take the skills you have learned here, along with your unique voices, to help build and preserve a more vibrant future for freedom, a better world where human dignity can flourish.

Remember, through education comes opportunity and empowerment. My hope is our faculty and staff have educated, inspired, and empowered you to become confidently and passionately engaged learners. Use your skills and voices to help address these seemingly intractable issues facing our community, our nation, and our world. And in so doing, you will leave lasting positive results in your communities, our nation, and perhaps for all humanity. As Mahatma Gandhi said, "Be the change you wish to see in the world."

You have much to be proud of, as you have overcome many challenges and obstacles. My hope is you take strength from what you have achieved and the difficulties you have overcome and carry forward the sense of community you have worked hard this year to help repair and recreate.

I've been fortunate to meet many of you, to see you perform in athletics and in the arts, participate in science competitions, tutor fellow students in our community, and engage in culinary and other career

experiences. I am grateful for the opportunities to talk with you in classrooms and hallways and early mornings outside of the Whitney M. Young Auditorium.

As a class, you have achieved many individual and team awards, as highlighted in celebrations in these past few weeks. But perhaps most importantly, you worked hard and did what it takes to get here today – you persevered through a global pandemic and a natural disaster. You represent the very best of New Rochelle, and you are already showing that you are leaders and have what it takes to help shape a better tomorrow. We are proud of you!

Know that as you go forward on your journey, this community holds you with the highest regard, with support, care, belief, and love. We will always be here for you. Please stay connected with your classmates, your teachers and those caring and committed adults with whom you have forged bonds. May God bless you and watch over you on your journey. Good luck and **Congratulations, class of 2022!**