

Baker 8th graders, congratulations you have completed middle school and are stepping out into the bigger world that is high school. While you may be focused on high school, here at Baker you've learned that the world is always bigger than the circles that we move in. The world around us is a part of who we are. You are leaving Baker at a tumultuous time in the world. Technology is moving at a breakneck pace that is exciting and frightening. You have been given access to tools that aren't fully understood by anyone because they are new and changing rapidly. Understanding the world of social media, Artificial Intelligence, deciphering what can be trusted and what can't in the massive streams of information that are thrown at you, and navigating the real dangers of screen time addiction is a delicate tightrope that you will have to learn to walk.

The news is filled with anger, protests, violence, injustice, environmental catastrophes, political extremes, and it can be confusing to take it all in, or to feel positive about the world we live in. Yet, there is positive news out there. The human race is evolving and with every generation we are becoming more sophisticated, more understanding, more empathetic, and more intelligent. Progress is never linear, but comes in fits and starts, and requires the capability to zoom way out to see it. You all are positive news in the world. You all are symbolic of progress.

Here at Baker you've learned academic skills such as math, science, reading, writing, social studies, foreign languages and you've learned skills in the arts and technology. But you've also learned how to problem solve, how to question, you've learned about identity, about empathy, inclusion, collaboration, to be in community with others, mental health, leadership, self-advocacy and many more incredibly valuable skills that will be part of your toolset as you march onto bigger and greater challenges. You've learned a vocabulary to describe nuanced human interactions that previous generations didn't get in high school or in college, let alone middle school. You've learned about the complex mixture of emotions that make us humans and you've learned to think beyond your own perspective, but to understand the perspectives of others.

These are incredibly valuable skills, we call them soft skills and they will serve you for the rest of your life. They will help you build relationships in your life with others and with yourself. There is no more important thing in life than relationships, which you won't appreciate now, but you will as you get older.

You will make your mark on the world and the world will benefit from that mark. The more you stay true to yourself and who you are in your wonderful uniqueness the greater that mark will be. As you move forward, you may not even realize you are making a mark, but you are. You've made a mark here at Baker. You've touched each other's lives, your teacher's lives, your Baker buddies and probably almost every other student in this building in ways you can't possibly comprehend. You have touched my life, and I guarantee you that it is richer because of it.

This is my last year as Interim Head of School, so just as you all are moving on from Baker, so am I. But though you and I won't be in the building next year, we will still remain connected to

this school. The Baker community is for life. You will come back to campus as young alumni to reconnect with each other, and to talk with middle school students about your experiences. The friendships you've made here will endure longer than you imagine. I'm a Baker alum and 30 years later, I still talk and laugh with my former Baker classmates and teachers about trips and moments we shared together. My Baker experience propelled me forward in life, and it still does, just as yours will for you.

Everyone here is in the Baker community. 8th graders, be grateful for your parents, teachers, and fellow students, and stay connected to this community. It is an incredible gift.