

Class of 2019, congratulations! We're graduating!

It still seems surreal that this day has finally come. 13 years, 2600 days, 1,092,000 minutes... however we choose to measure the time, an amazing era of our lives has come to an end and a new, exciting one is just beginning.

Today is our final moment we will share together as a class before we move on to the next chapter of our lives.

We would not be here without the support of our parents and family: mom, dad, Vincent, thank you for always loving me and being there for me.

Thank you to the school administration, faculty, and staff: Spackenkill is ranked among the best school districts in the nation and this is all thanks to your hard work and dedication.

Thank you to our teachers, coaches, and mentors: you have taught us important lessons, ranging from the IVT to stoichiometry and cations are PAW-sitive to appreciating Spanish dramas to questioning what the green light symbolizes to winning ultimate frisbee games (go physics!). But what makes the teachers at Spackenkill special is that you have taught us so much more: you have guided us to become responsible young adults, you have encouraged us to care about those around us, and you have inspired us to fight for what we believe in.

And finally, thank you to all my friends and classmates. I'm reminded of the quote from Maya Angelou, "people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them **feel**." While we won't remember each other by our grades, popularity, who was the most fashionable or by who was most frequently late in the morning, we'll remember each other by our relationships and how we treated one another. Class of 2019, it's been an honor to be a part of this student body. You have inspired me to work harder to better

myself, brought me joy and made me laugh, and given me countless memories that I will cherish for the years to come.

Thank you to everyone who has touched my life and made me who I am today.

These days, it's easy to lose hope when looking at the world around us. Climate change, gun violence, racism, opioid drug abuse, misogyny, bigotry... In the current state of the world, we might look around and feel discouraged, or think that nothing will change.

But over the past few weeks I've heard this a lot: "These young adults give us hope for the future. They will bring change for the better."

Initially, I was skeptical about what people said. Do we really have the power to change anything? Will we be able to solve the problems that plague our society?

But as I stand here today looking out at my fellow classmates, the answer is simple: Yes. Yes, we do have the power to make changes and we have the intelligence, determination, and heart to solve the problems we see in the world.

This year, we won the best small school award at Science Olympiad. Our Math Team ranked 17th in the state. LEO club is the biggest it has ever been, with a record-breaking number of hours and money raised. Our girls soccer and basketball teams have raised hundreds of dollars to fight cancer, and drama club amazed the community with the spectacular performances of *With Their Eyes* and *Pippin*. Seniors in Science Research have taken initiative to find solutions and further our knowledge about cancer, tissue engineering, infectious disease, spinal cord injury, albinism, genome coding, and cognitive development. On top of that, last year my classmates stepped up to organize the National School Walkout to protest gun violence, and many of my peers passionately engage in social and

political activism. And just last week, we had a *yacht* prom. What other class in Spackenkill history can say something like that?

These achievements and actions are just a few of the many ways my classmates have made an impact in shaping our world. While we face many future social and political challenges that must be overcome, Class of 2019, you hold the answers to tomorrow's questions and the solutions to tomorrow's problems. **You** have the power to bring change for the better.

Finally, as you strive to achieve your dreams and make the world a better place, please remember to love yourself, believe in yourself, and be true to yourself. NEVER let anyone take that away from you. Only by loving yourself, can you love others. In these times of polarizing perspectives and divisive rhetoric, we must find unity and understanding across racial boundaries, socioeconomic chasms, political party lines, and gender inequality. We must listen to help each other, understand to find compassion, and compromise to advance forward. In these times of overwhelming fear and hate, we must remember love. As Lin Manuel Miranda so powerfully spoke, "love is love is love is love is love is love is love is love cannot be killed or swept aside."

Spackenkill Class of 2019, as you go out into the world, whichever path you take, carry with you the knowledge and wisdom you gained from high school, the compassion and nurturing gifted by our community, the passion and determination you have always held deep within. Remember your roots here, nourish them with love, and you will blossom into our hope for the future.