

Dear Santa Teresa Community,

As I finish my twenty-seventh year at Santa Teresa High School I can only say that I am grateful for having found this place to spend the most productive years of my life. I am humbled and proud of the work I have done over this career, and I recognize that S.T. has shaped me, even as I have had a hand in shaping it. I have enough memories to fill a few books, and I suppose we will see if I can get that to happen. In any case, it has been my honor to serve as your Principal for the last two years, and I look forward to hearing about the forward progress that these Saints will make in the future.

With deep appreciation for your support and best wishes going forward,

Michael Payne-Alex, Former Principal

#### Graduation Speech June 4, 2025 in the Santa Teresa football stadium

Welcome! Welcome, Associate Superintendent Davis, esteemed colleagues, parents, relatives, friends, and members of the Santa Teresa High School Class of 2025.

Here we are, very fortunate people, indeed, to be cradled by these beautiful hills in this amazing engine of a city. Graduates, this is where you are from. Your families chose *this* place to prepare you for launching out into the wider world, and we have done our best to help you get ready. Today, we recognize that the path has not always been easy. Some of you have faced challenges that many adults have not yet had to face, and you have persevered. Most of you have pushed through more mundane issues like overcoming procrastination and fighting off senioritis. Whatever the obstacles were, you surmounted them to arrive here at the peak of your high school journey.

From this vantage point we look forward to seeing and hearing where you will go and what you will accomplish in the future. Standing before you, both on this stage and in the long stream of time, I can pretty much guarantee that you will continue to face challenges, some similar to what you have already seen, others new, and some that may shake you to the core. As one who is about to retire after a long career, I can certainly testify that the ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius was correct when he said, "The gem cannot be polished without friction nor man without trials." Truly, each time you face and overcome challenges is an opportunity to make yourself a stronger and better person. Therefore, it is important to look for ways to stretch

yourself, to seek opportunities for real and lasting growth. By doing this, the journey itself will be a measure of success. Indeed, waiting to “find” success or to “be” a success can often lead to disappointment. Pay attention to the journey, and ask yourself often, especially after something doesn’t go your way, “what did this teach me?” “How will I grow from this?” This is often not easy to do, and this is where it’s important to have people around you who you can trust to be honest with you.

Some of the people in this class will be true friends like that, real ones you can trust to help you grow as you venture out into the hills and valleys of this world. I hope all of you know that there are teachers here at Santa Teresa with whom you can check back and check in and get that honest feedback. If you didn’t know that before, please hear it now and know that they are here should you need them.

I have spoken about challenges, and they will come, but I don’t want you to think that adulthood is all sweat and grit. There are wonderful and amazing things in life, from majestic vistas and landscapes you can see in your travels to the overwhelming awe you might feel as the tiny hand of your own child grips one of your fingers. There is a whole lot of joy in this world and in life. They used to say to remember to stop and smell the roses, meaning to look for little things, brief moments of beauty in everyday experiences. I say, laugh easily and look for others who aren’t afraid to laugh until they cry. Make time to go with friends to a ball game, to have meals together, to play games or see movies, just to share moments. Make time to play or listen to music, time to read and learn. These have been and continue to be sources of joy for me and my friends and family. There is no shortage of wonder, and this perspective has led me to smile many times this year, seeing you all grow and laugh and joke with each other. You have filled my last year at ST with many little moments of joy, and I thank you. I wish you all the best in all that you do, and I am proud to send you out into the world. Be strong but flexible, determined but kind, idealistic but forgiving. You will be Saints forever.

Godspeed, and Peace.

“Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.”