

Student Speech Contest Winner Speech: Rishab Kini

Sharon High Graduation 2025

Thank you, Ms. Keenan, for your introduction. And thank you to the students, teachers, parents, and staff who have made these past four years truly unforgettable.

Today is a day..... A day we've been waiting for for years..... a day I didn't think would come. Sitting on the blue rug in Ms. Burke's Kindergarten class at East Elementary in 2011, I saw my school email with the year 2025: it seemed so far away back then. But, here we are in the year 2025 wearing our maroon caps and gowns..... High school has been a journey with successful senior events and trips to Six Flags and Boston....but even our failure of a sophomore semi was memorable part of the journey that brought us to point. So here we are: what comes next? Taking this leap is daunting, overwhelming, similar to a story we read in English this year.

In Plato's Allegory of the Cave, the Greek philosopher Plato tells the story of prisoners who spent their entire lives in a dark cave, only seeing shadows on a wall, believing that's all there is to life. One day, one breaks free, steps outside, and is blinded by the light. It's overwhelming, but then the prisoner's eyes adjust, and he sees the real world for the first time, full of color, depth, and endless possibilities.

For most of us, our community has been that safe little cave. The next step toward college, work, or something else may feel like stepping into that blinding light: blinding, scary, or overwhelming. But we will adjust to the light and see things more clearly than ever before to discover new opportunities, challenges, and, most importantly, who we are outside our little cave if we are willing to take that risk. Plato reminds us in his story that we are the only ones who may hold ourselves back from embracing all that there is.

This new chapter will not be the first plunge into something new. We left middle school submerged in an education detoured by the pandemic and entered high school. There were many traumas: I was terrified of Mr. Schoonmaker; the water pipe broke and school was canceled; and I cried over my first honors geometry test grade. Now, some people got As on that test, others got Bs, and I was one of the only ones sitting there with a C.

Those traumas, especially the grade, gave me a taste of reality: "Maybe math just isn't my thing," I thought to myself. That lesson forced me to look at what I could do well while finding strategies to cope with my future relationship with math: We all have

different strengths and weaknesses, and I found lots of great options where I did not face trauma.

We all have had lessons such as these.

Yesterday, sitting on my couch, Diet Coke in hand, I turned on ESPN and saw Stephen A. Smith talking about Jayson Tatum's signature move: his step-back jumper. This reminded me that many great players have a signature move: Kobe Bryant had his fadeaway. Kareem the skyhook. Even Draymond Green's signature move, right? Well.... his might just be punching people. Steve Jobs once said, "Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life."

Lesson: You can't simply copy someone else's signature move. Steve Jobs himself paved his own path and redefined industries by thinking differently. The same opportunity applies to us. Don't follow someone's script because it's easier; write our own. Figure out what sets you apart and embrace it. Our journey is about finding that thing and learning from the mistakes we make along the way.

Those mistakes offer the biggest lessons, every embarrassing moment in high school has served a purpose for us to learn and grow. Thomas Edison, when asked about his thousand failed attempts to make the lightbulb, said, "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work." Edison saw failure as a necessary step in the process of discovery. The world would be a different place had he given up before those thousands of mistakes yielded success. Setbacks are not dead ends; they are stepping stones. When we fail, we learn, and with that knowledge, we can accomplish anything.

Some of us may have found our signature move while many of us are still searching. We must keep stepping forward, even when it feels uncomfortable or when it would be so easy to just stop and copy someone else's.

This moment is stepping out of the cave after years of looking at reflections of what we think is real. But just like in Plato's story, our eyes will adjust. The fear will fade. And soon, we'll see the world and ourselves more clearly than ever before.

So, as we walk across this stage, let's not be afraid of what's next. Let's embrace it. As Lana Del Ray says "Let the Light In". Let's take that step into the mist, confident that

we'll figure it out just like we always have. Because beyond this cave, there's a whole world waiting for us. And it's time to see it for ourselves.

Thank you