



Simone Chandler – 2021 School Dux – High Achievers Assembly Speech

Good morning, everyone.

It's an honour and a privilege to represent the class of 2021 as this year's college dux. I'd like to take this opportunity today to offer an insight into my VCE experience and hopefully pass on some advice to the years below me. But first I just want to offer congratulations to the other high achievers, who all worked incredibly hard over the last two years overcoming challenges which no other graduating class has had to face.

Attending these high achiever assemblies throughout my time at Rowville, I noticed that every year's college dux seemed to repeat the importance of balance and moderation throughout year 12. Admittedly, I never bought it.

See I was under the impression that there was no way that a person could get an ATAR so high without sacrificing their personal lives in the process. Transitioning into Year 12, I anticipated countless days and nights of study. Determined as I was to do well, I subconsciously decided to dedicate my year to work and study figuring that if I just focused all my energy on school this year, I'd have the time and freedom to enjoy myself afterwards.

But throughout the year, I came to realise just how unsustainable this mindset was. I quickly felt exhausted and burnt out. Through many months of online learning and quarantine, days blurred together in a fog of study and sleep and though I was doing well, all I felt was overwhelmed by all my mistakes. It was at these times, when I felt most consumed by my schoolwork and most isolated from the people that I loved, when I was the closest to giving up.

Faced with this reality, I was forced to change my perspective. I stopped seeing self-care as wasted time and started to prioritise it into every day: whether it be reading a book, going on a walk, or watching a movie. Instead of setting unachievable goals for myself I just did everything I could, knowing that whatever mark I got, there was no way that I could have done more.

And so, I stand here today echoing the words of every past dux that has come before me when I say that VCE is a marathon, not a sprint. Know your limits. Know what you can handle and when your brain is telling you that it needs a break, listen. High school is a long battle, and it can feel impossible at times if you're not taking proper care of yourself. Work hard, put your all into everything you do, but not at the expense of your relationships and personal wellbeing, which are equally, if not more important. Sure, year 12 is an important year for your education, but it's also a year of self-discovery and individual growth as well as building new memories and relationships.

When I was asked to give this speech, I was told to speak about how I was able to achieve such a great result. But as much as I'd love to give some super effective study hack or technique which will guarantee success, it just comes down to hard work. Remember that everything you're learning is important and will help you in the long run. As someone who has worked hard and aimed high since my junior years, I'd just like to stress the importance of this. I'm sure many of you probably think 'what's the point it's only year 7, or it's only year 8'. But by building a strong foundation of knowledge in these years I found it so much easier to learn and understand more advanced concepts in my senior years.

Also, remember that you can afford to make mistakes. No matter how intelligent or talented you are, no matter how high you're aspiring or how hard you study, there is no way of avoiding disappointment—and that's why it's so important to have perseverance. To know how to handle and overcome failure and to not give up when all feels lost.

As much as I'd like to say that my VCE journey was all smooth sailing; that I did perfect on every test I sat or that I was never disappointed by a sac or an exam, that was not the case. I received grades that I felt let down by, I walked out of sacs and exams completely disappointed in myself and I would be lying if I said

that there weren't times where I felt like giving up and settling. My ability to keep pushing came in knowing that there is nothing I can do to change or undo a mistake that has already been made. My best advice is just to remind yourself of what you're fighting for and just keep fighting. Regardless of whether you accomplish it or not, you'll feel a whole lot better in the end if you can say that you did all you could.

The last thing I'd like to say is that it's important to maintain perspective in your final years of school. If, at the end of it all, you still don't get into your dream course, or into the team or the job you've been chasing, there are still countless options and pathways that will take you exactly where you need to go. A single year will not define or condemn the rest of your life. Push yourselves as hard as you can, achieve your fullest potential but don't forget to cherish and make the most every moment.

Thankyou.