



Eirini Vergaki

2023 College Dux Speech presented at High Achievers Assembly on Tuesday 6 February

Good morning,

Welcome to 2024, a year full of opportunity and potential. In case you haven't heard my name enough, my name is Eirini Vergaki, and I am your college dux of 2023. For this speech, I was thinking that I could give you my immigration experience and show you that it's all possible, even if English isn't your first language. I realised, however, that this story would connect with very small group of people. So instead, I've extracted the main teachings from my school experience, and I wish to share those with you today.

The first one is, *choices are yours to make*. You do not choose the hand that you are dealt, unless you cheat, which is another choice that you can make, but it's not a very good one. So, assuming that you play a clean game, you don't get to choose the hand that you are dealt. What you do get to choose is whether or not you will play it, and how you will play it. It might not necessarily be your choice to be here, in this space, in this school, in this country, in this life, even. But what is your choice is what you do with yourself and with your time now that you have been put here.

The second message is that, *you owe it to yourself, and to the world, to pursue your passions*. Do what you love, do what makes your heart happy. If you're not naturally the best at the path you choose, that's fine, raw talent is not everything. In fact, it's almost nothing without work. So put in the work, craft your skill, and become so good that you cannot be ignored.

The third concept I want you to take from me is *keep your head in the clouds and your feet on the ground*. It seems contradictory but stay with me. What I mean by that is, yes, dream big, be delusional, have unwavering faith in yourself and your capabilities, but stay grounded, and focused and in touch with reality, be grateful for your blessings, and understand your privilege. Know that your deranged goals are completely attainable, as long as you're willing to do what it takes.

Finally, the last message, *get to know yourself*. Listen to music, read novels, consider your values and your likes, the people you admire and why, find your passions, collect life experiences. And understand that you are energy, you are a dynamic being that will continue to change and evolve for as long as you live. Something important to keep in mind is that once you start finding yourself, you will begin to lose others. I never really understood this concept until last year, so I don't expect anyone to understand without having experienced it. Just know that outgrowing someone that once meant the world to you is a difficult truth to accept, but an important one at that. You must make peace with the fact that just

because your past selves were compatible, doesn't mean your current selves are, or that your future selves will be. Remember, you're constantly growing and evolving, and so is everyone else around you, especially during this period of your life. And if losing someone is the cost of finding yourself, it's worth it.

I know that you only remember approximately 10% of what you hear, so from my speech, choose to remember that with which you connected. I know I didn't give much guidance in terms of academics which many of you would have expected, so if you feel like there's something I've missed or something more you want to know, feel free to reach out to me. Thank you.