

Graduation Welcome Speech – June 2010

It is my pleasure to welcome families, friends, teachers, and our younger students to graduation day at Wilmington Montessori School.

Earlier this morning, I spoke to you and your families at breakfast.

Now, I speak to you as the graduates. I don't know if you all have noticed, but there has been an air of excitement in the halls of Wilmington Montessori for the past week – an excitement that began to peak yesterday when your posters went up in the lobby, graduation practice began, we had our last all school assembly and we all began to listen to Kelly practicing the music for today in the gym. There is excitement in the air and it is all about each of you. This entire school community – your teachers, your parents, grandparents, Aunts and Uncles, and brothers and sisters are so very proud of you today.

I would like to thank each of you for all you have brought to WMS during your time here, many of you since you were only a year or so old. You have brought energy to the school with the

fund raiser for Haiti, the 350.org project from your UN trip, your joy, laughter, and the sense of community between you that is a pleasure for all of us as teachers and adults to watch. Whether outgoing or quiet, you found ways to bring your passion to the school community whether it is soccer, basketball, or lacrosse, steel drums, art with Laurie, reading and writing in a corner of the classroom, exploring the woods, or appearances on the stage in a show. We are going to miss each and every one of you in our hallways next year.

This is an exciting day in your lives. This morning we celebrated the many unique characteristics that you have discovered about yourself during your time at Wilmington Montessori; leadership and caring, artistic talents, athletic skill, academic skills, musical talents, and dance are among the many that you have each nurtured and developed over the years.

However, the greatest gift you leave with is the gift of your Montessori Education. It is a gift that your parents and families have given to you. You understand much of what that means even today and as you leave the school you will develop an even greater appreciation for this gift.

When we had our lunch together, you shared the things that were important to you about Wilmington Montessori and in doing so, shared your understanding of why this has been a special opportunity. You didn't realize, but I was taking notes. It is rewarding to know that the things that your teachers and I most value about the school are the same things you recognize as important. You shared that:

- This is a safe loving school where everyone is your friend; where older children help younger children.
- you learned academics but more importantly, you learned “how to learn”.

- When I asked what should “never” change, you shared things like: overnights in the 9-12, the UN Trip, doing community service projects, the artist in residence and buddy classrooms. You had specific and important reasons for each of these.
- You learned how to help others in need and take care of the environment
- Like many graduates ahead of you, you would like a middle school and an auditorium.

It makes me and your teachers proud to know that these are the things you find important about the school.

You know that the teachers at Wilmington Montessori are special people and that you have been fortunate to know them and have them as your guides during your first years of life. You know that there has been freedom for you to make choices in your classrooms that you might not have had in other schools. You have never lost your desire to learn new things, to explore the world, and to think with wonderment and awe. Maria Montessori believed that children were born with these desires and that if given the right

environment to grow in, they would keep those characteristics as adults. You have been given the gift of childhood at Wilmington Montessori – time to imagine, time to explore whether it be the woods, a book, or a new idea, and time to create. Your ideas have been important and respected. So, when you said it was time to raise money for Haiti, your class figured that out. When you said, it is time this school had a compost bin, you found support and were empowered to take ownership of that work. Because of this careful work of your teachers – this focus on supporting ideas and helping you to see the possibilities, you leave with the gift of imagination and confidence; two gifts that combined will empower you to accomplish your dreams. And, dreams you have from becoming a vet, to a baseball player, to being an actress, to being a CEO to name a few. You will and can do whatever you set your mind to doing. I am sure there will be many interesting accomplishments shared back with us over the years to come.

But, perhaps the most important message you gave to me about what you have learned is, “we learned to respect each other and the things that we all do well”. As we think about the work that we do at Wilmington Montessori School, it is founded on the development of respect for others. Maria Montessori believed that children learned respect when they were treated with respect. This community of teachers and parents truly walk that talk – knowing that children discover who they are when they are respected as capable, and given a safe place to try out challenges both socially and academically. The gift of respect that each of you leave us with is one that will truly allow you to foster the dream of Maria Montessori – that if we nurture the spirit of the child with respect for the child, that spirit will in her words “determine the course of human progress and lead it perhaps even to a higher form of civilization.”

As young people, you will leave Wilmington Montessori and go many different directions. However you will always have your foundation here. A foundation that comes from the combined

efforts of your teachers and families. That foundation includes strong academics, but also much more. It includes the work that you have done to learn to fix your own mistakes, to talk problems out with a friend to come to a resolution that serves everyone, to think independently about your learning and goals, and yes, most importantly a foundation built on respect. You will build on that foundation as you continue to discover who you are in your next exciting steps as teenagers. It is kind of like the poem, “Everything you needed to learn you learned in Kindergarten”; you will find that much of what you need to know, you have learned here at Wilmington Montessori School.

You have done your work well at WMS – and now it is time for new adventures. Your parents and teachers are proud of you and amazed at how quickly you have grown. Somehow we think that time won’t pass so quickly and somehow when you are a child, time passes much too slowly. And so as I close, I share a poem with your families.

I have made it a tradition to share with parents a reading from Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet* at each graduation. He seems to capture so well that feeling that we have of loss at times like this, yet our happiness that our children are doing exactly what they are supposed to do, growing, learning, and becoming independent of us. And so he speaks of children:

Your children are not your children.

They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.

They come through you but not from you,

And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,

For they have their own thoughts

You may house their bodies but not their souls,

For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.

You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.

For life goes not backward nor carries with yesterday.

You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.

The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite, and He bends you with His might that His arrows may go swift and far.

Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;

For even as He loves the arrow that flies, so He loves also the bow that is stable.

The parents and the teachers at WMS have been good archers, these arrows will go far and straight as they enter this next stage of their lives. These children “are the world, they are the ones who make a brighter day”.

And so today, we will look back at our graduates and enjoy our memories, celebrate their accomplishments, and send them off to their future.