Moon Area High School Commencement Speech June 3, 2016

Delivered by Dr. Donna Milanovich, Interim Superintendent of Schools
Written by Nina Rizos, School & Community Relations Coordinator
NSPRA Award of Merit for Excellence in Writing (2017)

Faculty, administrators, Board Members, community members, parents, and students: It is an honor to be with you today to celebrate your graduation from Moon Area High School.

A commencement ceremony, in a very literal way, focuses on new beginnings: the opportunity to change direction; to pursue talent; or perhaps to discover your passion. The practice of a commencement ceremony is truly to celebrate the bright futures ahead of each and every one of you here today. What lies before you now, is a green pasture, awaiting you to navigate your own unique path.

To each parent and family member sitting in the audience today, you did it. They are here; surprisingly or unsurprisingly, they are here. (Pause for laugh) You have guided each and every young adult graduating today to be ready for the next step in his or her lives, whether that is college, the work force, technical school, or the armed forces. I know we have a few students graduating today who will go on to serve and protect our country; may your bravery and selflessness always be recognized.

Bravery and confidence are essential keystones in becoming successful. Some of you have exemplified this bravery while telling your teacher your project is late. (Pause for laugh) You have each been witness to bravery and confidence through your parents, educators, and community members. These important people in your life have instilled these characteristics in you and encouraged you along the way. I also have a few key pieces of advice for you as you commence navigation of your own paths:

Embrace the randomness.
Nassim Nicholas Taleb, author of *Antifragile: Things That Gain From Disorder*, said in his book "you get pseudo-order when you seek order; you only get a measure of order and control when you embrace randomness."

I find his insight to be quite true in that we can do all the planning we want, but often times we will find that things do not happen as we intend. You may go to college with a declared major and, halfway through, discover your true passion is something else. You may engage in conversation at the grocery store with someone and leave with a job opportunity. You may find after years of working for a corporation that you are wildly successful pursuing your own business endeavors.

You can't predict where your path will lead from the green pasture, but wherever it does, you will find a way to flourish, even if you find your path has lead you in the forest with little

sunlight, you can still find beauty in the shade. And even from below, the sunlight above creates a glimpse of what lies ahead of the shadows.

Be above fortune.
Seneca, a Roman philosopher, wrote on the Fickleness of Fortune: *"for the soul is more powerful than any sort of Fortune; by its own agency it guides its affairs in either direction, and of its own power it can produce a happy life, or a wretched one."*

Be above the pursuit of solely monetary fortune. Your talents and skills that you have polished thus far can lead to a much more fulfilling path than chasing after fortune alone. You will find that the feeling of success is multiplied when you follow your passion, which can propel financial success. An organic pursuit of fulfilling prosperity will produce a much more rewarding fortune than money alone can offer. Don't let money have power over your happiness.

Be thankful.
Sacrifice and dedication are essential to success. As both a mother and educator, I can guarantee that your parents and teachers had many sleepless nights and sacrifices to prepare you for this day. And I can also tell you, as both a mother and educator, there is nothing more endearing than receiving appreciation for those sleepless nights and sacrifices. At some point today, thank them. Be appreciative. Let them know your gratitude for all they have done; and maybe throw in a hug.

I would like to also recognize our administrators' and teachers' commitment to your scholastic success. We have an excellent staff that cares deeply for our students' wellbeing, which sets us apart from other districts.

Congratulations Class of 2016, and may you always remember: be brave, be above fortune, and be thankful.