

Welcome Speech

By Jared Watson '21

Good morning. I'd like to start today's ceremony by welcoming the parents, family members and friends of my classmates to the 2021 Berkeley Preparatory School's commencement. We appreciate you being here to celebrate with us. I also want to welcome the faculty, administrators and staff who are here and who have made our time in high school so special. Thank you for all that you have done for us.

Today, we celebrate the 156 members of the Class of 2021 who sit behind me. We have so much to celebrate. Our class is a remarkable group of smart and compassionate people. We have many diverse talents and interests. Our high school years were filled with academic successes, big wins on the athletic fields and memorable performances on the stage. The list of accomplishments achieved by this class at Berkeley is literally too long to even summarize. It has been fun for me to be a part of it.

We are also here to celebrate the accomplishments of our class that go beyond the gates of Berkeley in areas that are less visible. We have challenged and supported each other to pursue truly unique paths, and our cumulative adventures and accomplishments are remarkable. For example, one person has been taking flying lessons since the age of 14 and is working on getting a private pilot's

license. One student climbed Mount Kilimanjaro with a family friend and another spent four weeks living with a nomadic family in Mongolia where they helped the host family shear and rear sheep. Our class includes a competitive cheerleader who won a gold medal at the World Cheerleading Championship and another member who spent four months in the wilderness backpacking, rock climbing and canoeing from Wyoming to Southern Utah. These are just a few examples, and the full list of adventures and accomplishments of this group would literally take your breath away. We are here to celebrate all of them with you.

Our class has also left its mark on our community. By my calculation, we have done approximately 15,000 hours of community service. That is particularly impressive considering that over 25% of our time at Berkeley was consumed by the pandemic. As I am sure you know, this group did not let the pandemic hold them back and that is evidenced by the extraordinary things that we accomplished serving our community. For example, one classmate worked closely with a community group that taught sailing to physically and mentally disabled people. Another person used the Nextdoor app to collect over 650 pounds of food that were distributed to families in Pinellas County who were impacted by the pandemic. A member of the Pipe and Drum Corps turned a love for the bagpipes into volunteer performances at funerals for local military veterans. Again, there are endless

examples of the thoughtful and compassionate impacts left by the Class of 2021 on our community.

As you can see, the group behind me has a lot to celebrate. I am proud of our time at Berkeley and the impact we have had. I am excited to see all the remarkable things that we will accomplish in college and beyond. Congratulations Class of 2021 and thank you for making my high school years so memorable. I hope you enjoy the rest of the ceremony.