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Pomperaug Graduation Speech

Weird. I've heard that word used a lot by my classmates these past couple weeks. It's weird to think I'm a senior; it's weird that this is my final game wearing a Pomperaug jersey; it's weird to think that this is the last time I will see my 320 classmates together in one place. Transitions are always a little weird. They are filled with nostalgic reflections, promising opportunities, and questions about the future. But weird isn't the only word that describes this period in our life. As I reflected on my time in Region 15, I came up with a list of words that I think describe our past experiences, our present ambitions, and our visions for future.

To start, the Pomperaug High School class of 2014 is **blessed**. We are so lucky to have grown up in the community that is Southbury and Middlebury, or as Tucker Gowen liked to call it "the bubble dream town of goodness". The community has supported its students in all that they do and has provided us with endless opportunities to think, learn, and grow. Our families have been instrumental to our success, encouraging us, nagging us, and serving as our chauffeurs to and from school events. For that, we are extremely grateful. We are also very fortunate to have the support of to incredible faculty at Pomperaug. The teachers and staff genuinely care about their students and do everything that they can to help them succeed. Thank you for a fantastic four years. You've taught us not only the curriculum, but also important lessons that will carry us through work, college, and all the other things life throws our way. To the faculty members who will not be

returning to Pomperaug next year, thank you for your many years of service to the school. Your presence will be greatly missed. I cannot imagine growing up in a different community and I'm sure that my classmates feel the same. Pomperaug students are products of their environment and this is evident in the generosity and enthusiasm they carry with them everywhere they go.

That brings me to my next word, **attitude**. By attitude I do not mean the response my sister gave me when I told her my graduation would be three hours long, but rather the way a person approaches a situation. Every day, I am impressed by the way PHS students approach their education. They are curious, ready to explore, and open to trying new things. This mindset sits at the heart of our school community both in and out of the classroom. In the classroom, students dive right in by participating in labs, group discussions, and projects, and by taking classes that may be out of their comfort zone. Outside the classroom, they get involved. They have joined sports, clubs, service groups, student government, musical ensembles, and even created new organizations like the Ultimate Frisbee club. They joined these groups eager to try something different, meet new people, and work hard. Four years later, they emerged as confident leaders, ready to set an example for others. I think we have all had experiences like this. Mine began in November of my freshman year when, along with 20 other boys, I joined the swim team for the first time. From the first day we walked onto the pool deck, the coaches and upperclassmen took us under their wing. They taught us the importance of hard work, dedication, and attention to detail. In the blink of an eye, we became those upperclassmen, leading and teaching. Without the team, we would not be the

people we are today. I would encourage everyone to get involved and keep an open mind whenever you approach a new situation. You ever know where it may take you.

A Pomperaug student is also **passionate**. Ralph Waldo Emerson summed it up perfectly when he said, "Enthusiasm is one of the most powerful engines of success. When you do a thing, do it with all your might. Put your whole soul into it. Stamp it with your own personality. Be active, be energetic and faithful, and you will accomplish your object. Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm." The Jungle formed on the basis of this concept. A few sports fans with a passion for Pomperaug athletics decided to create a fan group. They were *wildly* successful, filling up the bleachers at football, soccer, and basketball games, even making the trek to away games to cheer on their fellow panthers. I see students and staff acting with great enthusiasm in the classroom **and** in the many ways they serve their community. The faculty members work hard every day to share their passions with their students. Every day, Mr. Kimble shares his love for government and politics, Doc J keys us into his sincere relationship with physics and math, and Ms. Hellman shows us her passion for yoga. But none have worked with greater enthusiasm than Mrs. Pelletier and Ms. Bauer, our class advisors. They worked long hours planning the fundraisers, dances, and senior activities, and have taught the members of the leadership council the value of teamwork. Thank you for all you have done for the class of 2014. You made our four years at PHS fabulous. Our late classmate Aryana Youngquist was a perfect example of the word passionate. She cared for those around her and always lived life to the fullest. Thank you, Ary for showing us

how important it is to never to give up on our dreams. As high school graduates, many of us are still unsure of the path we want to take into the future. Whether it's to college, to technical school, to the workforce, to the military, be sure to follow your passions; they will lead you in the right direction.

I think some people choose not to follow their passions because they are afraid of **competition**. The truth is, there will always be somebody who is stronger than you, smarter than you, faster than you, but that isn't a bad thing. The people who are superior to us force us to improve ourselves and help us grow both physically and mentally. High school, and life in general, is filled with competition both good and bad, and often times, contests create a negative atmosphere. But, over the past four years, you, my fellow classmates, have constantly impressed me with your ability to harness the positive nature of rivalry. When you came across somebody who was better than you, you never gave in; instead, you stepped up to the challenge by studying more frequently, practicing longer, and working harder. I speak from experience when I say that strong competition helps us grow and improve. I am often asked, what is it like being a twin? In the past, I have replied by saying, "I don't know. What's it like not being a twin?" Surprisingly, that is usually a satisfactory response. After some thinking, I finally have a substantive answer. When you are a twin, you have the privilege of spending everyday with somebody whose physical and mental ability is just about equal to yours (I still think I use the genes better but I guess that's up for debate). Your twin pushes you to be the best you can be every day. They are your study buddy, your running partner, your number one fan, and always your biggest competition. Without Sam, I

probably would not be standing here today as class president or valedictorian. So thank you Sam. And for that reason, I encourage all of you to continue to seek out friendly competition in all areas of your life and surround yourself with people who care about you. Use those people as motivation to improve yourself and you will be the best person you can be.

With that in mind, we come to the final word, **beginning**. It is a word filled with promise, mystery, and opportunity, much like today's celebration. The class of 2014 is unique, passionate, generous, curious, and motivated and we've had a very successful four years. We've passed hundreds of tests, participated in thousands of hours of community service, produced eight successful musicals and plays, survived two false fire alarms, and won ten state championships, just to name a few of our accomplishments. That's pretty impressive. But like I said, this is just the start of something much bigger. Alex Rosenhein told the Memorial Middle School class of 2010 at our commencement that middle school is a book, with a beginning, middle, and end. If so, then what is high school? Perhaps it is the first chapter in a novel or the first act of a play. In this section, we are introduced to the characters, given the background information, and familiarized with the plot. When we finish reading it, we have a small idea where the book is headed. As we continue to turn the pages, we are presented with new settings where the characters face challenges and opportunities that we never imagined. Today is the final page in that first chapter. We have hundreds, maybe thousands of blank pages lying ahead of us ready to be filled. In his novel *Tuesday's with Morrie*, Mitch Albom wrote, "So many people walk around with a meaningless life...This is because they're chasing the

wrong things. The way you get meaning into your life is to devote yourself to loving others, devote yourself to your community around you, and devote yourself to creating something that gives you purpose.” Fill your remaining pages with a life of meaning. If the past four years are any indications, you will surely make your families, school, and community proud in whatever career you pursue. Good luck in all of your future endeavors. Thank you and congratulations!