

THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL



Tom Culotta
End of Year Ceremony
June 9, 2019

Good afternoon everyone. It's so great to see so many friends and family out there! You are the people who enable The School to survive and thrive so it is fitting that you are here to share in this celebration of our students. The young people in front of you are the pride of their families, their communities and the School. They have taken the opportunities that you have helped make possible Community and made the most of them.

It has been an extraordinary year! It is a running joke that I always say this is the best class I have ever had, but the truth is that each class is unique and has special qualities that make it stand out. This class has been among the most engaged. Discussions are so rich and broad that we are often forced to end class before finishing because we have to move on to the next course. It has also been a very caring and respectful class, truly listening and learning from each other while insuring a supportive environment.

We did so much this year and each activity and conversation was accompanied by reflection and a search for understanding and meaning. The experiences broadened the minds and possibilities of the students and challenged their thinking while developing their values and character.

We not only heard the symphony, but were introduced to the works before and met with musicians after the performance. The students didn't just attend a play at Center Stage but had a personal tour and conversation with its Director and then a discussion about the challenging topics raised by the work afterwards. We didn't just read the book, but had a conversation with the author.

The students had conversations in the classroom with leaders from the business world and from government. They met with social change activists, storytellers, actors, news correspondents, publishers, playwrights, and even Baltimore's own John Waters.

Alumni from the School came in and shared conversation with the students. Janiah talked about her experience in college and explained the importance of a TCS education. When Dyrrell came back from his semester of international studies in Europe, he had a seminar discussing what he had learned and experienced. The students were proud to have two TCS alumni, Jason & CJ, come in to talk with them about being firefighters. They were part of last year's Baltimore

County Fire Department class that saw 4,000 apply and only 31 actually reached that goal – TCS alumni taking 2 of those slots.

Our students didn't just study biology, but had researchers and professors come into the class to explain their work and careers. They didn't just study government, but witnessed it in action and met with lawmakers in Annapolis and at City Hall.

All of this and much more. This is the active education that is The Community School. It is a unique program unlike any other, and I can confidently say that as we prepare for our 38th class, year, the School is even better than the year before, just like with each week each student is better than the week before.

My deepest thanks to all of those who make this possible. Know how much we appreciate all of the love, care, sacrifice of time and resources that goes into the School by so many. I would love to recognize every single individual who makes this possible, but it is important that today is focused on the students. However, please allow me just a few moments to thank the staff of the school.

Thank you **Mr. Noah**. You started at The Community School as a teenager and have grown into an extraordinary teacher and a meaningful mentor. Your dedication to the students and the school has become a cornerstone to the success of our students. I could not ask for a better colleague.

Thank you to **Ms. Peg** for helping to steer and develop the school while also preparing some terrific meals for us every week! Your kindness and dedication know no bounds.

Thank you **Ms. Leah** for your care for the students, for managing much of the administration of the school and for your wise counsel.

Thank you **Mr. Don** for your many years of bringing out the best in the young people in our school community. You help them find their voice and stimulate them to look at life in new ways.

Thank you **Mr. Eduardo** for taking such good care of our students as you guide their physical education. We appreciate you and **The GreenMount School** for this great service to our students.

Thank you to our newest staff member **Bree** who is giving a year of service to help improve our student recruitment, internet presence, and volunteer coordination.

Special thanks to our **Board of Trustees** for their wisdom and active engagement in guiding the school and for putting on this event today. Thank you **Dave, Eddie, Ryan, Justin, Jeanette, and our newest trustee Stacy**.

You have heard me often say the School is an act of love. The overwhelming majority of our budget comes from the kindness of individuals and organizations who donate to this mission. Just as large a contribution is all of the volunteerism of so many who teach, cook, clean, repair, tutor, build, stock, teach and share their time to enhance the experience and care of our students.

Please give yourselves a hand!

Now, let me introduce these wonderful and amazing young people in front of you – the class of 2019.

Our Freshmen:

We'll start with **Neenah Payne**, who is both creative and analytical. She has grown so much this year. Neenah is a natural poet and recently wrote these words "This year I didn't think I'd be able to say that you All have become my second home" Her talent is complemented by her deep sense of social justice and you can be sure that any meaningful discussion includes her voice.

One day we will hear **Ronan Guilfoyle** giving a shout out as he gives his thanks to The Community School while accepting his Oscar for best documentary. This aspiring filmmaker has seen more movies than all of us in this room combined and can analyze each and every one. It's hard to believe that the boy who shadowed just a little over a year ago has become the young man before us today.

"I can speak to strangers without being shy. I can relate to my friends when they talk about political topics, and I am more proud when I walk and talk. Also, I am finally able to be myself." This is the strong young woman who found her voice this year. **Destiny Grimes** is always among the first to offer help to others. She has a big heart and a soon to be serious left hook as she pursues boxing this summer.

Then there's **Jacob Cogle**, the student who is always among the first to arrive at school (of course he lives in Woodberry and rides to school with me most days.) He's a hard-working young man who not only gives his best in school but also holds down a job while doing so. He is a young man ahead of his time because even though he was a freshman this year, Jacob is part of the College Hunks moving crew.

Our Sophomores

Although a sophomore, **Tyleiah Trusty** is new to our school this year. She is among the most engaged students in the school and throws herself into every activity. Along with her studies this year, Ty played on a lacrosse team, participated in a dance group and worked several days a week at a local restaurant. She recently wrote a tribute to each of her classmates and said, "I just want to say that I love every single human being in my school as a whole."

In just a few years be prepared to vote for **Claude Nicholson** as he pursues his political career. He is interested in all things that have to do with current issues, politics and history. He is as comfortable talking about Chinese trade policy as he is about the weather. Claude leaves home in the 5 o'clock hour to walk to school and is always the first to help out in the morning. He is an excellent student and a good person.

If Claude ever becomes President, I'm certain that he will consider his brother from another mother **Aidan McIntosh** to be his Secretary of Treasury. Aidan is a whizz at mathematics and broke math records in the school this year. He is planning on a career in accounting and finance. The only worry I have is that he may be sidetracked in this pursuit in his quest to be the best Fortnite player in the world.

Salma Ruiz-Cruz will be working with young children this summer, something that she loves very much. One day she will be a journalist and you will follow her work closely as you read a unique and often unheard voice on the issues of our day. You will hear this voice today as she is one of our student speakers.

Our juniors:

The school has its very own future rock and roll star in **Olivia Yates**. Many mornings she will sing to me before starting class, and she loves playing guitar and classic rock music. Olivia plans to combine her strong interest in social justice with music in her future.

Sean LaRicci is now planning on taking his considerable drawing talent into the engineering field. His determination is evident in the two buses he takes to school before daybreak and in the return trip after school, often arriving home after dark during most of the school year.

When she arrived in the school this young woman was too shy to even shake my hand and now today you will have the opportunity to hear from her as one of our student speakers. **Sara Harris** is a star student and is equally at home diving into any science book as she is repairing a car engine. She is planning on a career as a geneticist.

If I want to know anything that's going on in the neighborhood, I simply have to talk to **Garrett Anderson**. He is the master of social media! Garrett volunteers at the Hampden Rec, loves anything camo, is partial to pit beef and hopes for a career in the military.

That brings us to our graduates:

If you would have seen the little blonde-haired boy who started in this school 4 years ago, you would have thought we decided to extend into an elementary school. He looked like he was 11 years old and had a manner as sweet and kind as can be - though it hid that mischievous side. Boy, did he grow into a fine young man. **Donald Lacy** has been among the most dedicated students. If you add up all the hours, he has spent more time just being at the school than any other. He completed his first college course this spring. He plans on returning in the fall and

pursuing a career as a firefighter. Donald was the school's gratitude coordinator this year. If you received one of the more than 200 thank you cards sent by students this year, know they all originated with him.

Then comes the glorious one, the president of positivity, our own **Jordan Leon**. A young one along with Donald who exasperated me as I tried to keep up with their energy and antics, but you couldn't help but love these boys. Jordan knows more about sports than anyone I know especially the Ravens and the Orioles though somehow that extends to other professional sports and even wrestling – though not the Olympic kind. Jordan has always been an old head in a young body. He is among the most responsible of students. You can always count on him to get the job done. Jordan has been the clean-up coordinator in the school and everyone respects his steady leadership. He also successfully completed his first college course this spring while attending TCS and plans on working in the sports field. He has already met more professional ball players than any young person I know.

These two young men mean the world to me. We have spent so much time together these four years, both in and out of school. It has been a privilege and a pleasure to be a part of their lives and I hope they always will be in mine.

Every one of these students is extraordinary with unique perspectives, skills and talents. It is an honor to be entrusted to spend my days (and many nights) as a teacher and mentor to these exemplary young people.

It is time to honor them for their unrelenting engagement in the rigorous, fertile environment that is The Community School.

Thank you for being here and sharing in this celebration. Let's get on with the program.