Good evening Legacy Visual and Performing Arts High School families, friends, faculty, staff, invited guests, district staff, administrators, and dignitaries, City of South Gate dignitaries, and the students in the Wonderful Class of 2019. Welcome! I’m glad you’re here and I am honored, humbled, and grateful to continue to serve our school family as your principal and to share a few thoughts with you this evening.

First of all, I must share with you memories spent with the Wonderful Class of 2019. And they are. The article is important. They are “wonderful”. This group of young people, comprised of scholars, artists, athletes, dancers, musicians, film-makers, set and lighting designers, writers, and more, and combinations of all if these things, really are wonderful. I speak from experience. I have the proof, the evidence, the data. I have spent countless hours with them. They ARE wonderful! And the experiences will stay with me always.

I’ll remember, OK, I’ll start with the obvious, all the dancing. Dance, dancing, and more dancing. Some prospective parents think our kids just sing and dance all day. Well, OK, I’m quick to point out we have strong academic programs, technology and science you’ll find at most schools, but can’t really deny the facts. Well, yes, maybe not sing, but our students definitely dance all day! I’ll remember the countless routines rehearsed in the dance rom, in the hallways, in the quad, in the MPR, well, pretty much any and everywhere... I’ll remember Adan and the Royal Steppers, Jenny and her dancers, all the many students in the dance family we all got to see, Daniella, Nathalie, Aileen, Andrea (A and B), Rebecca, Karina, Aalyiah, Daisy, Arlene, Elissa, Dulce, Briana, Julie, Amber, Siomara, Hayden, Citlali, Jasmine, Ashley, Abi, Rosie, Nora, Jackie, Michelle, and Karime. I’ll remember their artistry, their skill, and their beauty. I’ll remember our wonderful musicians, Sergio, Ruby, Oliver, Esmeralda, Jenny, (and Roger) and the band, Cassandra, Rosa, Justine, and mariachi, (seeing the group grow has been so exciting!), my very special show choir family, led by Maria, Jessica, and the indomitable McDow, and starring Ingrid, Abi, Noreen, and all the performing, travel, and glitter, our own indie/alternative musicians, Ashley, Aliyah, Ingrid, Oscar, Miguel, and Albert, our techies, video and stage tech, who were such talents at everything in back of the camera and behind the spotlights, Jaime, Lirahn, Alberto, Jose, Bryan, and Ashley, and so many awesome singers who I had the opportunity to get to know in the many iterations of jazz choir and a cappella, Ruby, Esmeralda, Adan, Abi, Genesis, Elissa, Janet. Janet, who finally had the chance to perform Big Spender again at VAPA, one of her last directing gigs. I’ll remember our Disney Opening Act she directed, and Little Shop of Horrors (can’t forget Noreen, Sahira, Abi, Jose, Aaliyah), Aladdin, Elf the Musical, High School Musical, and so many more! I’ll remember Abi and her
roar during announcements, Giving Jackie a hard time, McDow and Sahira giving me a hard time, well pretty much all the time, Evelyn, Dulce and the Swim Team, Maria, Jessica, and the many musical writers, Grandma’s Keeper, the Real Life Musical experience, the original musicals including Half a Heart, featuring Jackie (see, you CAN sing), Janet, and Genesis, Chris and the Football Team, Mikeal and the Baseball Team, Briana, Jacqueline and Briana and the Girls Basketball Team, David, Sergio, and the Boys Volleyball Team, Emily and the Girls Volleyball Team, Emily and Briana in the Softball Championships, Daisy and the Track Team, Cassandra, Sahira, and the Girls Soccer Team, Abi, Esmeralda, McDow, Jaime, and ACADECA.

Grad Night. Winter Fests, Spring Fests, Eastside Arts Festivals, Town Hall Concerts, Recruitment/Articulation Shows, the Telemundo Taping, Trips to Musicals and Shows, and the awesome experiences in San Francisco and San Diego when we went on tour. Recording the Legacy VAPA song, then hearing it a football games, and recording Real Life. .... there are just so many memories and experiences, we don’t have time to mention them all.

But the important moments are those spent with students one on one. Time in the quad when I would ask “are you OK”, and you would let me know. My long discussions with Daniella about what needed to be improved at VAPA, usually cafeteria food finds it’s way on to that list, the countless discussions with Maria and Dear Evan Hanson and what motivates each character in the show, yes she knows, the many handshakes from Chris, and hearing him beatbox once, the times when Aileen would bounce into the office saying “do you need anything” and “hello beautiful” to one of the counselors, the time that Noreen and her friends gave me a gift basket with a diet coke and face mask on tour in San Diego. These memories will stick with me. And this is what I want to talk to our graduates about.

In some ways, this is the most difficult commencement address I have given. And I thought long and hard as to what to say and how to say it. My wife said keep it short, I already didn’t follow that advice, but my thoughts kept going back to the events of this week, really what has all happened in the last 5 days, and what is appropriate, what is respectful, what is necessary.

And here we are.

This year was tough for my family as we lost my father and my wife’s mother within a few weeks of each other. In the last week at VAPA, we lost one of our own. Nick Adolfo was an awesome teacher, mentor to students and young teachers alike, consummate professional in front and behind the camera, and one of the kindest gentlemen I have met. So, I really can’t finish this address without talking about him. But herein is the first piece of advice I have for you.
As we have all grieved and our thoughts have gone to what Mr. Adolfo has meant to us, it is really important to remember to focus on how much better we are to have had the opportunity to get to know him. And this is the first idea I want you to think about. Our time in the world is precious. Don’t waste it. Be sure to focus lens, always take the most direct route, and be sure you keep up the pace. This is important. Make every moment count.

The second thought I want you consider is about gratitude and kindness. Both are extremely important, not only to your own personal happiness and growth, but to the world. Be kind. It matters. It helps you build relationships, it helps keep you sane and happy, and it helps make the world a better place. And be thankful. Gratitude is also important. It goes with kindness. Let people know you are thankful for them. Be thankful for everything you have and everything you will have. Show gratitude whenever possible. Don’t forget this.

The last thing which also matters is the importance of making a difference. We all can do this in our own way. I’ve had long conversations with my brother the architect about how his designed make a difference in the day-to-day lives of how people live. As an educator, we know we make a difference and this is critical work. If you go into business, into the arts, medicine, social work, education, you have the opportunity to make a difference. This is something you must do. If we all tried to make a difference in the world, just think about how much a better place this world could be.

“Few will have the greatness to bend history itself, but each of us can work to change a small portion of events. It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance."
— Robert F. Kennedy

So, just three things to remember, but they all work together.

1. Make every moment count.
2. Be kind and be thankful.
3. Make a difference.

As I close, I need to emphasize once again how special you all are to me and what a difference you have made in MY life. As we send you one your way, to college, to work, to new and bold adventures, continue to make a difference in the lives of others. One of my favorite verses is from Wicked.
It well may be that we will never meet again in this lifetime.
So let me say before we part so much of me is made of what I learned from you. You’ll be with me like a handprint on my heart.

And now whatever way our stories end, I know you have re-written mine by being my friend:

Like a ship blown from its mooring by a wind off the sea,
Like a seed dropped by a skybird in a distant wood
Who can say if I’ve been changed for the better?
I do believe I have been changed for the better.

And because I knew you, because I knew you,
I have been changed for good.

Good luck, thank you, and God Bless you.