

This is the speech written and read by the Class of 2021's Valedictorian, Dana Tagliaferro at Graduation on June 7, 2021.

Good evening parents, family members, friends, teachers, faculty, and fellow graduates. It is truly my honor to be standing up here giving this speech. It is also a great honor and privilege to welcome Bishop Sweeney here tonight. We thank you for your unwavering commitment to our Catholic education. On behalf of the entire DePaul Class of 2021, I would like to extend my gratitude to the administration, faculty, and staff of DePaul Catholic. Each member of the DePaul community played an integral role in preparing each of us to enter this new, exciting chapter of our lives, and a portion of anything we accomplish in the future can be credited to our time at DePaul. I would specifically like to thank Sister Jeanne, Mr. Petrocelli, Mr. Merritt, Dr. Stickles, Mrs. McGrady and everyone else involved in planning our senior events and subsequently giving us a sense of normalcy in a year unlike any other. My last token of appreciation goes out to all the parents, family members, close friends, and anyone else that contributed to our high school experience. I believe that no one achieves anything alone, and everyone gathered here as we celebrate reaching this milestone, along with those supporting us from afar, serve as a testimony to this. A special thank you to my parents who will never cease to support, uplift, and guide me through any endeavor, and to God, from whom we all draw our strength.

Arguably more important than the title of "Valedictorian" bestowed upon me are the lessons I've learned and the obstacles I've overcome on the road leading to here. Just like me, you all have worked rigorously and have faced unprecedented challenges over your four years of high school, and this year was no exception. This past year, we all found ourselves adapting faster to new struggles that presented themselves. But, despite the setbacks, here we are at the end of our high school journey. While I know many of us are eager to begin carving our futures and striving toward new goals, it is important to take a moment and revel in everything we have already accomplished and to recognize how much we have grown since freshman year. I am proud of each and every one of us for simply making it to this point, and I am grateful we got to celebrate our accomplishments together at this graduation ceremony.

We were thrown into the fire this year and have come out the other side as stronger, more resilient individuals. We may have gotten burned or made mistakes along the way, but the challenges we've faced will only amplify our success in the future. This brings me to the ultimate question that accompanies the end of high school: how exactly is our success measured from here on out? Thus far, we were given a framework from which to measure our success as students. An "A" is considered a good grade, while an "F", well, not so much. We took standardized tests so that our scores could be directly compared to other students nationally. It is tempting to equate success to an achievement, a position, or even a monetary value. However, it is important to remember that success is a relative term and that one person's definition of it does

not define us. Success in our futures will infallibly mean more than a grade, an achievement, or even a degree. I prefer to measure success through how we impact those around us and how we positively transform society. True success is measured not by our aptitude, but by our attitude. If each of us continues on to actively seek ways to improve ourselves and the world around us, we will achieve success by any definition, and I am confident that we can do just that.

Over the past four years, we had the privilege of attending a Catholic school. We were able to immerse ourselves in studying our faith and learning how to incorporate our beliefs into our lives. We learned that God has an individual plan for each of us, and it is wise to remember this as we venture off into adulthood. Looking out into this array of graduates, I see great potential. I see unique individuals, despite all of us wearing the same caps and gowns, not to mention the same uniforms for the past four years. I see innovators, problem solvers, leaders, collaborators, and everything in between. I could go on to list the numerous professions and roles we all have the capacity to fill. Looking back in our lifetime alone, we witnessed the invention of the wonderful iPhone we conveniently have in our pockets, the rise of social media, which many parents and students alike will post to after this ceremony, and many other innovations that have woven their way into our society. Our parents grew up in a completely different world, and we have the opportunity to create an even better one for our descendants. I am inspired by this because we, as the next generation, get to improve upon what was done in the past and apply our modern interpretations to solve old problems or new ones that arise. Who is to stop us from inventing the next iPhone, or something even better? I am excited to witness the amazing things we will achieve and the innovative ways we will give back to society.

Our commitment and hard work in high school has laid the groundwork for our futures, and we have all been given the tools for success. With these tools comes the responsibility of choice. We must take advantage of the infinite opportunities at our disposal to reach our fullest potential and to become the people God intended us to be. From this moment on, there is no script for how our lives will play out. It is up to us to embody the knowledge, experiences, beliefs, and passions we acquired in high school in our professional and personal lives. As we leave here today, let us take the first thing we learned at DePaul with us: the definition of a Spartan. A Spartan is a person of great courage and self-discipline. I believe we all have been shaped into Spartans during our time at DePaul, and if we continue to remain steadfast in the pursuit of our goals and unafraid of the challenges that lie ahead, we are sure to succeed. I extend my best wishes and congratulations to the Class of 2021! Thank you.