

XXX, Principal – Commencement Speech – June 25, 2015

Thank you, Ms. Brown, for that kind introduction.

Welcome, teachers and staff, family and friends, honored guests, and of course – the real reason why we're all here – the 72 esteemed graduates of the New Explorers High School Class of 2015.

(Applause)

Before I begin, please join me in giving special thanks to:

- Superintendent Lindsey for being with us this afternoon and for her thoughtful and inspiring remarks;
- Assistant Principals, Ms. Paula and Ms. Fleming, without whom none of this would be possible – including *my* job;
- Guidance Counselors, John Nutterfield and Giselle Malavez, who diligently kept track of credits and exams, thereby helping to make sure that all of you would be sitting where you are this morning;
- Our college advisor, Nicole Vazquez, whose smart and compassionate guidance has influenced so many of the decisions you'll be making in the months to come;
- Ms. Brown, for her invaluable expertise in making sure this once-in-a-lifetime event looks as beautiful as it does and, just as important, for making sure that all of you got to rehearsal on time – believe me, no easy task;
- all of the incredibly dedicated teachers and support staff whose commitment to both your curriculum and your well-being – be it a history exam or a fire drill – cannot be overstated or over-appreciated;
- and finally, a heart-felt thanks to all of your family and friends, each of whom deserves credit for not only your academic success but for helping shape the ambitious, determined, and *gracious* young people you are today. Let's show them some of that gratitude by standing, turning, and giving them a big round of applause.

One more order of business before you sit down: everybody take out your cell phone.

Graduates, you have the next 10 seconds to take a selfie. Starting...now. That's right, get it out of your system. Facebook it, Tweet it, Instagram it: #NewExplorersClassof2015, then put it away. Everyone good? Settle down. Now that you've got that out of your system, you can give me your complete attention for the next five minutes. Agreed?

To the New Explorers High School Class of 2015, I say, congratulations! You have taken an extraordinary journey, navigated a path full of road blocks and detours, and arrived at an incredibly special destination – graduation day.

Enjoy this day, take in the view, and then – not to put it too bluntly – *move on*.

That's right, *move on*

Now, you might be thinking, “Wow, Mr. Hobson, that’s harsh.” You’re right, it is. But so is the world you are now well-equipped to enter. And trust me when say I wouldn’t tell you to move on if I wasn’t absolutely certain that you *can* do it, and that you *should* do it, and that you *will* do it. Because moving on is the only way to grow, to excel, and to both realize and then break through the outer limits of your potential.

Also, you best be movin’ on, because the world isn’t going to wait.

You know this better than all of us. You are elite members of the hashtag generation – diploma-holding young adults who understand that the world doesn’t stand still.

So, neither should you.

You understand that relevance in the world today is determined not by what’s important but by what’s gone viral.

But that’s a good thing, ladies and gentlemen, because right now, *you are trending*.

Let me be clear, moving on doesn’t mean leaving anything behind. No, in fact, it means the opposite. You are the accumulation of everything you’ve experienced, everything you’ve learned, everyone you’ve met – that’s all within you. Some might call it *baggage*, I call it *fuel*. Use it to take the next step after you leave here today. Whatever that step may be, just step on the gas, and *move on*.

You’re feelin’ good. And you should. Your class has benefitted from a cutting-edge curriculum designed to make you college and career-ready; scored higher on exams than classes that have come before you; and is comprised of 72 dedicated peers – each of whom has motivated, challenged, and supported you in your journey to get here.

You’ve received, and will continue to receive, love, guidance, and care from your family and friends, from your teachers, and yes, even your principal.

You’re feelin’ good right now, because you have the confidence that comes from being a wise investment. Think about it: all of the resources spent; all of the blood, sweat, and tears; and all of the sacrifices have paid off – they’ve paid off because they were investments in you.

And you were worth it.

Correction: you *are* worth it.

Take the energy, excitement, and enthusiasm you have right now and let it catalyze you, inspire you, and give you the confidence to *move on*.

Not to put too much pressure on you, but I have the highest expectation as to what each of you can achieve. And I’m not alone in that feeling – all of those folks sitting behind you, feel the same way.

Why? The answer to that question is easy: you're graduates of New Explorers. *Obviously.*

Your education has been infused with an appreciation for the arts, and that alone makes you uniquely equipped to meet the challenges of this adult world. As young artists, you value the process of creation. You understand that the experience of succeeding *and* failing when you choreograph a dance is as important as the dance itself. You understand that having to start over when painting a canvas teaches an important lesson about patience. You understand that making music requires more than rhythm, notes, and pitch; it requires learning how to truly listen. And you understand that forgetting your lines when performing in a play, allows you to master the art of thinking on your feet.

These are marketable skills that will make you invaluable in a world that values flash over substance; because – and I'm sure everyone here can agree – New Explorers know how to be flashy *with* substance.

You're Beyoncé, they're Kim Kardashian.

As a New Explorer you have an advantage – you are an artist. You've achieved academic excellence while painting, dancing, acting, singing, and composing. These skills are rare yet in high-demand in today's world. Skills far more important than the number of people following you on Twitter.

Now, I know that my simply telling you to capitalize on this exciting time in your life – to move on – isn't enough to get you out the door and start changing the world. Nothing I can say, nothing anyone can say, can get you to do that.

Only *you* can.

Start by answering two questions for yourself: What's your reason for having made this journey and what's the new journey you're going to begin tomorrow? Answer those questions, and answer them soon, as best you can. Because before you know it, someone else will be answering them for you, based on assumptions they make *about* you.

Your classmates in college, the people with whom you interview for a job, your co-workers, they will all meet you and they will all make assumptions based on how you look, where you're from, even the fact that you are a proud New Explorers graduate.

But let me be clear: their assumptions only have power in a vacuum, that is to say, they can only limit you if you haven't answered those questions for yourself: why you're here today, and where you're going tomorrow.

I'm not saying they're easy questions. And of course, the answers can, and should change as time passes and your path becomes clearer.

Anxiety and fear will cloud your confidence. Uncertainty is the only thing that *is* certain. So yeah, it's scary.

But that's okay, because when you're scared, remind yourself of this:

There's been no mistake. You've earned this.

Your graduation is an extraordinary achievement, not, as some may tell you, because you're from The Bronx, come from a nontraditional family, or look different than someone else. This day is an achievement, priceless in value, because *you* made it happen. This day is yours and no one can qualify it, put an asterisk next to it, or lessen it in any way, because it is the result, the glorious consequence of your specific, unique, and special journey.

So, when you're scared, remember that.

And then, you guessed it, *move on*.

I've been principal of New Explorers High School now for nearly 6 years, and each year I grow more and more impressed by the caliber of young people that walk by that Nationwide Warehouse sign, right out there on Concourse Village West, on their way to school, and four years later sit in this auditorium on graduation day.

I'm impressed because it takes strong character to get here. And, in my opinion, strong character is *everything*. In my office, right now, there's a poster that says:

Watch your thoughts, they become words;
watch your words, they become actions;
watch your actions, they become habits;
watch your habits, they become character;
watch your character, for it becomes your destiny.

For the past four years, it has been my great privilege to witness the growing care with which you choose the words you say, the actions you take, the habits you keep, and the strong character you present to the world.

Thank you for that.

And congratulations *on* that.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my honor to present to you the 2015 graduating class of New Explorers High School.

They're movin' on.

(Applause)