

Jordano Sanchez

Good morning Principal Bonamo, teachers, distinguished guests and alumni, family and friends, and of course, the Class of 2009.

Today I have the honor to stand before all of you and deliver a valedictory, a farewell address dedicated to the graduating class as we all say “good-bye”—or at least “see you later”—to Townsend Harris High School. Such a privilege has been bestowed upon me for having exhibited, or so I’m told, “extraordinary academic achievement,” a feat that I could honestly not have accomplished without all of the people who have counseled—better yet, *consoled* me throughout the past four years.

I remember my first months of high school back in ninth grade almost too well. I had already known that the transition was going to be difficult, yet it appeared to me that my peers were easily acclimating to this new environment. I lamented not having such luck. My first semester—and my parents can vouch for me on this matter—consisted of my being intimidated by demanding teachers and brilliant classmates. I doubted myself to the point where I was ready to transfer out of Townsend Harris. Crazy, right? In the end, however, something told me that I had to stay and it’s safe to say that I made the right decision. Looking back on it, I realize that what kept me from leaving this school was all of the wonderful people I met, the ones who inspired me to persevere, the 250 friends seated before me today.

You see, what the Townsend Harris community offered me was exactly that: a sense of community. At Townsend Harris High School, there have always been many people who are willing to convene for the common good, as evidenced by our overwhelming attendance at the Patriot Group Memorial Walk and the Rally Against School Budget Cuts. The qualities of teamwork and collegiality are especially characteristic of our class, which has come together on

countless occasions to accomplish a goal that otherwise could have not been effectuated. Whether or not it was formally acknowledged, our SING! productions and decorated hallways have always been the winners of the inter-grade competitions—with the exception of our freshman year, when we just didn't know any better. Earlier this year, our remarkably rapid rise from last to third place in the High School Musical 3 contest spoke volumes of our grade's ability to answer to the call of duty; how quickly we forced a smile, despite many of our reservations, and sang those all-too-inspiring words: *"We gotta show what we're all about. Work together!"*

Boy have we worked together. When we partnered up to decipher Latin or Ancient Greek texts, find a function's derivative, or investigate the properties of waves in physics; when we collaborated with others to make presentations in our health, English, and history classes; and even when we cheered each other on as we ran (or in my case, dragged my feet) around the track, we were demonstrating that camaraderie that we must engage in when we confront the pressing problems of the present, such as health care and the economic crisis. Our solidarity and activism will be invaluable weapons to combat those troubles that will undoubtedly arise in the future. I am confident that we are more than competent to be the leaders of tomorrow; that we will not only leave our city, but our world, greater than we found it.

Famous French songstress Edith Piaf once sang, "Je ne regrette rien"—"I don't regret anything"—a sentiment with which I cannot completely empathize because I do, in fact, have one major regret: that I didn't do more: I wish I had talked to more people; I wish I had participated in more clubs, teams, performances, and community service; and, as bizarre as it may seem, I wish I had studied more. We can all benefit from this belated realization; we need to remind ourselves that it is our prerogative to take full advantage of the opportunities that we have been

afforded.

An example of an individual who made the most of her resources is Supreme Court Justice nominee Sonia Sotomayor, who once expressed something that I could not have articulated any better: “I can and do aspire to be greater than the sum total of my experiences but I accept my limitations.” We all, of course, have our limitations, but thanks to the education we have received at Townsend Harris, we have less of those limitations now than we had before, and we will have even fewer as we continue to gain knowledge and mature. We’ve already discovered the keys to success: how to solve for the unknown and learn from the past, how to form bonds and jump over hurdles. All that’s left is to compose our masterpiece: to make our dreams come true.

So right now we are standing at the threshold separating “what was” from “what can be.” In a few moments we will symbolically move our tassels from right to left, a ceremonial gesture indicating that we are ready: ready to take the first steps into adulthood; ready to accept the privileges and difficulties that this newfound independence will entail; and most importantly, ready to start making that positive difference that this world so urgently needs.

I would like to take a minute to thank my demanding teachers and brilliant classmates, whose belief in me gave me the determination to go on. I’d also like to thank my closest friends with whom I’ve shared my funniest, happiest memories; your companionship has made my high school experience truly unforgettable. Most of all, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my parents, who have invested so much of their time, money, and love into making me the person I am today. *Los quiero mucho.*

And with that I say, with unabashed pride, congratulations to the Townsend Harris High School class of 2009! We did it.