



SANTA MONICA - MALIBU UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

June 1, 2021

Superintendent's Message to the Class of 2021

Dear Samohi, Malibu High School and Olympic High School Class of 2021,

The 2020-21 school year will undoubtedly go down in history as an unprecedented global pandemic that has upended life for millions of people in the world, including the Class of 2021. When this class entered their freshman year we had envisioned a traditional high school experience in your junior and senior years: going to prom, attending awards banquets, playing sports and participating in in-person performing arts activities, field trips, and sending out graduation invitations to friends and family.

Although you were able to participate in some semblance of these activities this spring, you were by and large stuck at home finishing off a good part of your junior and most of your senior year. You endured distance learning and its challenges, faced the postponement or cancellation of events you were looking forward to or at best, re-envisioned. You may even be filled with an uneasiness and uncertainty about what the next weeks, months and even years, may hold.

I am so sorry that the culmination and memories of your preschool-12 experience have been altered by a worldwide pandemic. When you started your high school experience, none of us had any way of knowing that it would conclude so differently than year's past, without the same junior and senior year traditions and year-round experiences that decades of students have experienced and celebrated and that COVID-19 would change our lives as we knew it.

Some of you are mourning the loss of your senior year. Many of you feel frustrated and upset and question why this is happening to you. Some of you are just eager to move on and begin the next chapter of your lives. My youngest son was a 2020 high school grad and it was very painful seeing him experience what you are going through as a father. So I will tell you what I told him in hopes that you may recognize that in life we will all go through disappointments and we can take lessons that will make us stronger and wiser in our life going forward. I know that during this difficult time, you have learned lessons that you will carry with you for the rest of your life. The following are what I imparted on my son and I'd like to impart on you.

Adapting to unexpected changes — You had to adapt in so many ways: from the way you do school, to the way you interact with your friends, to the way you maintain your social, physical and emotional health. Since we know the only constant in life is change, the more you are equipped to deal with it, the better.

Working and learning remotely — Just as you were distance learning from home, many of your parents were and may still be working remotely from home as well. Working and learning remotely will increasingly become the norm in a post-coronavirus world. The independence and ownership that you are displaying will serve you well.

Managing your time — In college and adult life, there are many distractions, just as there are at home currently. How do you decide when to study versus going surfing or shopping with your friends? Sleep in or work out? Do your job and fit in homework, too? Time management is one of the most important life skills you can master as a young adult, and many of you received a crash course in it.

Cherishing moments with your family — This unexpected time at home, for better or for worse, has increased the quality time you are spending with your family and loved ones. Make the most of your opportunities with your family going forward. Cherish every moment, as these moments will pass quickly as you grow older.

Learning new life skills — Some of you took the opportunity to learn new life skills during your extended time at home: cooking, cleaning, laundry, budgeting, home improvement work, home repairs, etc. As I like to say, some of the best learning can occur outside of the classroom.

Becoming more resilient — Michelle Obama once said, “You should never view your challenges as a disadvantage. Instead, it’s important for you to understand that your experience facing and overcoming adversity is actually one of your biggest advantages.” You are developing grit, resilience and determination as you struggle. Never forget that you are stronger for having experienced this moment in history together.

Learning the importance of community and giving back — I have heard many uplifting stories about our SMMUSD students making a difference in our communities. Students made masks and other protective gear, helped needy families with food and necessities, provided words of encouragement and goodie bags to medical workers and more. All around us, young people took the lead in giving back to those in need. We appreciate your leadership, compassion and generous hearts.

As your superintendent, know that I am incredibly proud of you. We know there’s no substitute for the traditional year-end ceremonies, but we will do our best to plan alternatives that honor you and all that you’ve accomplished. We are happy to be able to hold in-person graduations at all three high schools, with appropriate protocols in place. Keep your heads up and know that your time at SMMUSD has prepared you for a brighter future. We wish you all the best in health and success in your future.

Your superintendent,

Dr. Ben Drati

SMMUSD