

## **Woodsdale Awards Assemblies**

### **June 16, 2017**

Welcome Members of the **Woodsdale** Elementary School 5th Grade Class of 2017, family members, friends, special guests, **Woodsdale** Staff and **Woodsdale** Alumnae - welcome to this morning's Awards Assembly ceremony for the **Woodsdale** 5th and 6th grade classes.

At this time I invite up Keara Howley and Amaya Turner – captains of our Announcement Team, to lead us in the *Pledge of Allegiance*. Now, I ask everyone to please rise and join together in saying the *Pledge of Allegiance*.

Let me begin by thanking **the PTO** for helping to support all of what we do, including this special awards assembly; Please join me in thanks this year's PTO Chairs: Susan Tirrell and Katrina Park, as well as Denise Giller, the Treasurer, and Paula DeMinico, the PTO Secretary. I want to thank you, along with all the parents for your support throughout the year.

And, I want to give a special thank you to Mrs. Halloran and Ms. Sideropoulos [Ms. Sid] – our amazing office team for their extraordinary help organizing and planning our awards assembly (along with everything else they do!). And ... thanks to our custodians: Mike Russell, Dan Sullivan, and Mark Sullivan for their help with all the set-up that is involved in putting on today's event! Also thanks to the many 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders who helped set up, especially Raphael Dunn, Olivia Solomini, Shyann Kelly, and Ava Bickford!

To all the Woodsdale staff: Thanks for your dedication and commitment to the students of **Woodsdale** – you have **all** played an important part in helping them get to this special day.

Last, but not least, I want to thank to the Abington School Committee and our Superintendent of Schools, Mr. Shafer, for their continuing support for all of our schools and programs, and to the whole community for your support for our school! I feel very fortunate for what we have had here at **Woodsdale**.

On a personal note – my year here at **Woodsdale** is coming to an end today. I feel very lucky to have been able to be here among all of you in this very special caring community... I am truly grateful for my time here among you. It has been quite an amazing year.

I am excited about your transition together to the new school! It is an amazing building that represents Abington's commitment to excellence in education for many years to come! It took a great act of faith on the part of the community to move ahead with this building project – one that has taken several years to plan and to complete.

Apropos of that, I want to share one of President John F. Kennedy's favorite stories, about a famous French general from long ago - he was walking through the park one day with his gardener. The general noticed a row of magnificent trees with gorgeous flowers. He said to his gardener, "I would like some of those trees planted on the grounds at my estate." The gardener said, "But general, those trees won't bloom for a hundred years." The general replied, "In that case, you better plant them this afternoon."

So – while it didn't take 100 years, you should know that in years to come the students in Abington will indeed "flower" and benefit from the new building and the support you have provided for them as a community.

As Nelson Mandela said: "It always seems impossible, until it is done." And the wonderful new Abington Middle-High School is almost done!

Even though we are leaving this old *Woodsdale* building, we are also leaving something pretty special behind. On behalf of our entire school, I am pleased to acknowledge the special gift of the refurbished stained glass panel, honoring those who died so tragically on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. We had a moving assembly last Friday, led by our Student Council (and the advisors Dr. Gilpatrick and Mrs. Golden) where the refurbished stained glass panel was unveiled in its new location next to the stage in our cafeteria. We leave this school behind today – both the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade are moving on – leaving that legacy and many memories.

From the moment you were born, you have been making mistakes – and *that* is a **good** thing.

Think back to when you were an infant (you may not remember, but your families do). You start off making lots of mistakes – the early sounds you try to make are not words at all, the early steps you try to take end up with one fall after another, and even learning to use the bathroom, as parents know all too well, *isn't* something that babies are born knowing how to do. Learning how to do something depends on trying over and over again, getting it **wrong many** times, until you gradually learn how to do it better and better. And so, you learn to talk, walk, and even use the bathroom correctly.

So, it turns out that the way we think about learning and school is backwards. Unfortunately, we are often so focused on being right that when we make a mistake we feel a sense of failure and embarrassment, and perhaps sometimes we even give up. We fail often - lots and lots of times - with things we are trying to learn. Whether it is kicking a soccer ball, doing math, playing the violin, hitting a baseball, figuring how to do magic tricks, driving a car, throwing a spiral, or learning a new language – we get it wrong many times before we shape what we can do and get better and better at it.

It is important that each one of you works to change the way you think about being wrong. We need to **celebrate effort** at least as much (if not more) than ultimately being right. It is your effort - your **tenacity or grit** - that determines how well you will succeed at whatever you do.

There are missteps and mistakes for all of us, and each one of those times when we stumble is an opportunity to learn and grow and improve on our journeys. Gabby Giffords recently said: “We all deal with set-backs. What matters is how you respond.” This life lesson may be the most important thing we teach you – and it determines what you do if you fail a test, get cut from a sports team, lose your job, don't get the lead in the school play, or fall off a bike, or give up when trying to finish a marathon. Do you have the **resilience** and **grit** to study more and do better on the next test? To practice harder to try to make the team? To go after another job? To work hard as a cast member even when you aren't the lead? And to get back on that bike? As you know, I have completed a marathon, (several) and what I learned is that it is **easy** to think of reasons to stop running along the way. It is harder, *but more rewarding*, to keep going, keep moving forward, to push yourself to keep trying and have that inner **grit and determination** to finish. It is your willingness to try something over and over again to improve and do better that is the greatest predictor of success over the course of your lifetime in whatever you choose to do.

The truth is, it isn't always a smooth process. All of us are works in progress – you never stop growing and learning in your journeys in life. Will you show the **grit** you need to do well and to succeed?

When we began the year, on your first day of your journey as we met in our cafeteria. I challenged you that day to follow the **Woodsdale Code of Responsibility**: to treat others with respect; to reach out to others around you - to reach out beyond your friends - to show your caring and compassion as human beings.

I also challenged you to take ownership for your learning – to work hard every day to do your best.

Since that first day together in the fall, our school year has moved forward, and you have grown, changed, gathered new friends on your journey, and taken on new and bigger challenges in your own lives.

We on the staff have been fortunate to have witnessed some of that growth with you: We cheered you on at your concerts throughout the year (and I even joined in on the clarinet!). We have played basketball at recess with you. We have appreciated your successes in the gym, on the stage, and in the classroom. We heard you leading the school in the Pledge of Allegiance every morning, working on Student Council events like *spirit week*, and more! We have seen you take steps toward increased responsibility for your own actions and increased awareness of the wider world around you – even creating a new club this year – the *Environmental Safety Club*. Your support for my marathon run for the Jeff Coombs Memorial Foundation was meaningful, your donations to Hoops for Healthy Hearts was gratifying, your generosity on behalf of the Relay For Life was touching, and your respectful behavior at our Memorial Day assembly a few weeks ago was amazing.

I am pleased to say how much you have grown and matured during your time here at *Woodsdale*.

You have also been successful academically, with many of you achieving wonderful grades, showing exceptional effort, and being terrific citizens. At this time we will be recognizing many of you for your effort, citizenship, academic accomplishments, and participation in some of our special clubs. We will also recognize over 40 of our 6<sup>th</sup> graders with the annual **Presidential Silver and Gold Awards!**

During your time here as students at *Woodsdale* we have asked you to learn a lot about many different subjects, but **none of them is more important than the way you treat each other and the other people you encounter in your lifetime.** At *Woodsdale*, our curriculum includes all the major academic and special subjects, **and** we have an important **real life** curriculum as well - that is the one we call the *Code of Responsibility*. This curriculum counts, and you will be tested on it every day of your life. **Your maturity will be measured less by your grade point average in school than by the decisions you make and by the personal integrity you display.**

*If you got an "A" in PE class and Health, but you continue to ride your skateboard or bike without a helmet, in the middle of the street, in traffic, or if you go on to use drugs or abuse alcohol, you have failed to make **healthy** decisions about your own life.*

*If you got a "100" on a math test, but you can't figure out how to **add** another person to your lunch table, you have failed to solve one of life's basic equations.*

*If you have a perfect score on the definitions of difficult words in ELA class, but you continue to make mean and malicious statements about others, or make racial or ethnic jokes or make crude or homophobic comments; your mastery of **language** is flawed.*

*If you have produced a wonderful and skillful map in the study of geography, but you can't be kind to a new person in your school, you have failed to understand **the geography of your own heart.***

One way of defining the transition from childhood to being an adult is that increasingly you are expected to act on your own – to make choices and decisions without a parent to hold your hand or a teacher to guide your work; ultimately to be on your own without adults there to monitor you, as you become independent and strong in the world. I know that this will be one of the challenges you will face as you head into middle school, then high school, then college, and beyond.

I would like to share a little story about one of my daughters. When my daughter Lisa was 4 years old, she was angry with her mother and with me, so she announced that she was running away from home. She packed a bag with some stuffed animals and her special

blanket and a snack, and marched out of the house, slamming the door behind her. We followed her outside a few minutes later, and we found her standing at the edge of our property looking frustrated. I approached her and asked quietly, “I thought you were running away from home. What happened?” She replied, “I am not allowed to cross the street by myself.”

In many ways, the security of being at *Woodsdale* for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade is a wonderful thing, but you are really ready to cross the street, to make this passage; to head on to the new middle school, on your own. As you leave *Woodsdale* behind, you really are ready to move on - ready to take the next successful steps in your school careers and in your lives.

The poet e.e. cummings once wrote: “It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are.” I wish for each of you that you have the courage to stay true to yourself, to find your own moral compass to keep you pointed in the right direction, and to fulfill your **future hopes and dreams**.

I hope you take with you the valuable lessons you have learned from your teachers here: seek the truth behind the headlines, speak thoughtfully and write persuasively, persist in being inquisitive about the natural world around you, listen carefully, avoid simplistic answers to complicated problems, and, as it says in our *Woodsdale Code of Responsibility*, **treat others with respect**. We are counting on you to use your fine minds and your creative energies to make the world a better place.

Today, I congratulate you as you complete your time at *Woodsdale* Elementary School. You have accomplished a great deal and your families and the staff are proud of you; most of all - you can feel proud of yourselves.

Remember the lessons you have learned here at *Woodsdale*, and remember the dedicated staff members who have worked so hard to foster your growth and to encourage your success now and in the future. Work hard – don't give up; be kind to others; *and* have fun!

Congratulations to our 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders and to their families, and thank you all for coming to this special event.