

1987

[To students]

ILLINOIS MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE ACADEMY

NOTES: Reflections on First Year of IMSA

Good Afternoon. It's nice for me to be with all of you.

Tomorrow is our first Honors Assembly of our first "Pioneering Year," and I had very much looked forward to the opportunity to talk to you, and to share some thoughts and reflections about our first year together. Unfortunately, I won't be here.

As you know, we are right in the middle of the budgeting decisions for next year. <sup>Two wks ago,</sup> Mr. Worrell and I, ~~(two weeks ago)~~ met with the Representatives <sup>of the House</sup> Appropriations Committee, and tomorrow we are meeting with the Senate Appropriations Committee. A decision for our budget for next year will be made within the next month, and Mr. Worrell and I have an appointment with the Senate Committee tomorrow at 2:00 o'clock, and because of that, I won't be at the Honors Assembly--and I regret that!

So, I wanted in absence of me being at the assembly, to share some thoughts with you today, because I think it is important that you hear some things from me relative to my gratitude and appreciation for what you have <sup>done</sup> individually and collectively, ~~done as a student body~~ to make this year a successful one for our Academy.

Several weeks ago, we celebrated a National holiday--we recognized the heroes of the past--Memorial Day. One of my personal heroes has always been Dr. Martin Luther King, and in Dr. King's famous speech he talked about the fact that he had a dream....

I want to talk about that for just a brief moment because many years ago, in 1983, several of us in this room "had a dream," and that was that one day we would have an Academy for students in Illinois that were exceptionally talented in math and science, and that this Academy would be statewide, that <sup>it</sup> would draw a sample of the smartest kids, and the best minds of our State (in terms of faculty), and that we would begin a Journey into developing the best high school in the Nation.

With your participation, commitment and willingness to be pioneers, that dream has, in fact, become a reality.

You may remember at our Convocation, I issued you an invitation--and that was to join with us in our first year and become IMSA Pioneers. At that point I defined the word "Pioneer"--it has two definitions, one who ventures into unknown and unclaimed territories to settle, and anyone who is an innovator. By definition, all of you have been IMSA Pioneers. But the pioneering spirit goes

beyond venturing into a new location. It really embodies the spirit of experimentation, of risk, innovation, ~~and~~ <sup>a</sup> an attitude that you are going to be successful, ~~and~~ an attitude that you are going to make it; and an attitude that you are going to see to it that things work--because whether you believe you can or you believe you can't--you are right!

I had an opportunity not too long ago to hear Bruce Jenner, who is, as you know, an Olympic Decathlon champion. Jenner said something very interesting; he said that regardless of the athletes with whom he has talked, he never heard anyone say they were going to go for the Bronze--they always went for the Gold. And as I look back on this year, I think that is what you did. You did it individually, because most of you worked as hard as you could. Some of you worked harder than you ever worked, but you also did it collectively, because you have made the Academy a credible and important academic and educational institution in this State.

I remember the Saturday evening before you people came on Sunday. We had all of your names on name tags on a great big bulletin board, ~~and you may recall that when you came on Sunday, you had to take your name tag and wear it.~~ I looked at all

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\* your names that Saturday evening--the Academy was very quiet, everybody had gone home; my husband and I were still here, and I read through all the 216 names and I wondered what you were going to be when you grow up.

I wondered how many Nobel Prize winners, and how many lawyers, and how many physicians, and how many biochemists, and genetic engineers, and writers, and poets, and husbands and wives, and mothers and fathers we would have in our institution. And it was kind of an eerie feeling. I felt a tremendous sense of responsibility that we develop a kind of environment where you could develop your potential and your talents. I hope you feel that we are beginning to do that.

I know we have just started, and I know we have a long way to go--and with your help and your honest dialogue with us, we ARE going to make it! We are going to provide the environment that students like you need.

When I kind of reflect on this year, there are all kinds of images that come into my mind. I remember the young student that came into my office late in one evening in the beginning of the year and said, "Excuse me, Dr. Marshall, whom do I see about an office?" An I said, "An office?" "What do you mean by that?"

And he said, "Well, we are going to have a Student Council, and I'm going to be elected President, and as President of Student Council, I am going to recommend that we have a Student Advisor to the Board of Trustees, and I will be that person--and as the Advisor to the Board of Trustees, I'm gonna need an office." "Who do I see about one?"

My response was, "You see me, and the answer is no--you got any other questions?"

I remember the ceiling falling in--and the raindrops falling on our heads; I remember the cold showers (or I should say, the boys remember the cold showers), and we ALL remember the food!

I suppose if we took the time and I asked each one of you to go around and talk about what you remember most, we'd come up with 200 different kinds of ideas. It's good that we all have these images in our mind, because the year has meant different things to each of us.

But I think in spite of all those things, and some of our challenges and opportunities--or maybe BECAUSE OF our challenges and opportunities, we have become a "community." And we have become a family. A family doesn't always get along--and a family doesn't always agree--but a family DOES care about each other, does cherish each individual, and

*I also remember  
the parents →  
I miss  
I miss  
an  
over*

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does try to preserve their love and caring for one another.

We've done some really important things this year. But I also look forward to next year. We are going to have another class, and you will be put in a very different role. You will be the "older kids," you will be the upper classmen. You are going to be the role models, and the new students we have are going to look up to you.

In addition to that, we are going to have two Career Counselors, we are going to have a music program, (we've already hired our music teacher), we are going to have some opportunities for you in art, photography, and we are going to have a Principal, and some of our students are involved in that selection process.

Looking even farther down the road--two years from now--you are going to graduate. I hope that you look forward to next year, and you look back on this year with a sense of having accomplished a great deal.

As a faculty, we tried to do lots of things for you--not only provide you with content, but give you some skills in the interpretation of information; give you some skills in creative thinking; give you some tools for dynamic problem solving; give you an awareness for the need for

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global communication; give you opportunities for cooperative learning, cooperative living, and cooperative compromise; giving you opportunities for good decision making, and some chances to think and connect subject in ways you haven't done before; giving you lots of opportunities to write, and hopefully create some projects where you connected information and really drew on your own resources that you may never have known you had before.

I hope you look back on all of that with a sense of pride in your own achievement, because in many ways, you have done an outstanding job in ~~being~~<sup>becoming</sup> real learners. So often kids come to school and their only motivation is to get an "A", and to <sup>be</sup> #1--well in this place you can get "A's," but you can't be #1, because we are not COUNTING--you can only be the best you can be, and I take my hat off to those of you who took up that challenge, and who became the "best you can be." I know all of you out there want to accept that challenge for next year.

You know the word "Aurora," is Latin for 'dawn'--and when you look 'dawn' up in the dictionary it has two meanings. The first is, to begin to appear or develop; and the second is, to begin to be ~~per~~ceived or understood. I think that

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it is this definition that is important for us, because we are developing, but more importantly we are beginning to be understood. And I think all of us in this community are beginning to understand what "we" are doing.

We've made mistakes this year--I've made some, the faculty has made some, and you have made some. We'll grow, however, if we acknowledge those, and then move forward in an honest kind of way. I believe we all need to develop a real clear sense of what the Academy is all about, and where we want to go. There ~~is~~ <sup>are two</sup> a story that I like about that. Alice in the book Alice in Wonderland, said the following, "Chesire Cat," she said rather timidly, "would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"

"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the cat. <sup>where</sup>

"I don't much care<sup>h</sup>" said Alice.

"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the cat.

Or take the Vermont traveller who came across a road sign with arrows pointing in different directions. He asked a local man if it made any different<sup>cc</sup> which direction he went, and the man replied, "Not to me it don't."



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Well, I think it does make a difference to us. We've worked real hard--you especially, to move this Academy in a particular direction, and to move your life in a particular direction--you made a difficult choice when you came here. And I hope you are leaving here with a sense of tremendous accomplishment.

You know, education is really the sum total of what we learn about ourselves, about the people with whom we live and work, and about our need to adopt to change and our capacity to shape the future. That's the exciting thing about the Academy--we have begun to shape the future in one short year, and <sup>you</sup> we have two more years left ~~(the adults here have more than two years)~~ you guys have ~~two more years~~ left to shape an incredible future--not only for this institution, but for yourselves. Krista McAuliff, the teacher in space, believed that her mission was to reach for the stars. I hope you still believe in that--I hope you still love this place as we do, because it is your commitment and love of the Academy and love being here that is going to make it successful.

You know when you come into our school, we have lots of trophies--we have been real successful in math, history, future problem solving, and chess, and science, writing, and poetry. We have a

sign on the top of our showcase, and it says, "When Love and Skill Work Together Expect a Masterpiece."

I think we are on the road to being a "masterpiece" of learning, and to being a real environment to shape our future, and it is love and work that is going to make us there. One of my favorite stories is about Len Stephenelli, who was a president of a large scavenger company. When he was interviewed not too many years ago as to why he had the most successful scavenger company in the country, it was called Sunset Scavenger Company. When the interviewer spoke to him, he said, "Mr. Stephenelli, why is it that you have the best run, and most successful scavenger company in this country?"

Len Stephenelli looked at the interviewer and ~~star~~ said quite simply, "I love garbage."

That seems kind of silly, but I hope we can all say that we love this institution, because it is that that will make us successful.

I have been reflective, introspective, ~~I wanted you to think~~ <sup>probably</sup> I came across sounding more serious than I wanted to, but I am basically not a funny person, and I'm not one who tells jokes well, I don't even know how to tell them, and when I do tell them, I don't remember the punch line anyway. What I really wanted to do in this brief time that

we had together, is to really say, "Thank you--thank you from the bottom of my heart for making the DREAM of the Math and Science Academy come true, and for making it successful." We've all had our tears this year ~~and our laughter~~ we've all had our taste of bad food, we've all had our taste of sleepless nights, long days, lots of homework, lots of paper work, lots of expectations and at probably many times during the year, we'd look in the mirror and say, "What's a nice person like me doing in a place like this? I'm tired and I wanna go home!" But you know, we didn't--we stuck it out and we made it through, and the fact that we are here and we have completed the year is a testimony to all of us and most importantly--to all of you!

*lots of frustration*

I'd like to close with one of my favorite poems, and then we're going to go have some ice cream.

Isn't it strange that Princes and Kings,  
And Clowns that caper in  
Sawdust rings, and  
Common People, like you and me,  
Are builders for  
Eternity

Each is given a bag of tools  
A shapeless mass, a book of rules,  
And each must make,  
'Ere life is flown,  
A stumbling block or a  
Stepping stone.

I hope we have provided a stepping stone for  
you this year--you have certainly taught us a lot,  
and for that we say, Thank You and God Speed.