

Jen Wang, Student Council President 97-98's Convocation Speech

Two weeks ago while at dinner with my parents I cracked open a fortune cookie which revealed the words "You will make a change for the better." Instantly I broke into a smile, one of those that comes unbidden, but that you feel spreading over your entire face. I realized this and the first thought that came to my mind was that if it weren't for my past two years at the Academy, I would have *never* learned to embrace change.

Today I have the honor to speak to the community which has taught me how to welcome change. IMSA is constantly striving to improve itself through change. However, with change comes risks. Each of us has risked everything to come here and become a member of an experiment. We are "tested on," if you will, with brand new methods of teaching and learning. We students leave our former lives behind, coming here with nothing but our luggage, uncertainty, and a lot of hope. Our staff works in an environment where they learn along with the students. IMSA exists to better education: the education not only of its students, but also those of the rest of the state.

It takes a strong heart and a determined spirit to realize a dream. We have come for the dream of an education like no other. But just getting up and going to classes is not enough to accomplish this. At IMSA, as with most aspects of life, what we put into this is what we get out of it. We can choose to be complacent rather than to strive to transcend our limits. We can choose to be apathetic rather than to reach out and try to help one another. We can ignore our opportunities or take advantage of their possibilities. Essentially these choices bear the same concept: we can stay on the clouds or we can shoot for the stars.

Returning students and staff, we have had a summer to rejuvenate. New students and staff, you have had a lifetime to prepare for this experience. We have all been blessed with the chance to start anew. Think about your purpose for coming to the Academy in the first place. Have you realized your goals? Are you proud of the years you have spent here? Whether you feel that you have wasted your time or that you have made every minute meaningful, it is imperative that you take the past and turn it into a motivational tool.

IMSA is nowhere near its peak. We each have our own ideas on how to improve ourselves and the Academy. This year, let's share our thoughts. Let's implement these ideas. Let's set the tone for the Academy's second decade and beyond.

Last week while at the National Leadership Camp in Colorado, I saw a quote written by the founder which I feel reflects upon this day. It goes like this: "Even if you are on the right track you will get run over if you just sit there." IMSA has been on the right track for ten years, and we've traveled a long way. The journey continues with each of us. To the new students and staff, welcome to the Academy. To returning members of the community, welcome back. Let's have a great year.