

## Convocation Speech 2010

Welcome – students, administration, alumni, and other guests. It's an honor to stand in a room filled with so much intellect, so much passion and, so much creativity. Over the last two years, I have seen so many successes emerge from this Academy, and given all of our talents, I only foresee even more greatness in our futures.

Entering the 2010 school year brings about a series of unanswered questions: "What will my classes be like?", "Will I stay in touch with my old friends?", or maybe, if you're a sophomore, you're wondering, "Why did I choose to come to a school with a bunch of nerds?!" Just for the record, this is not the case. ☺

Despite such uncertainty, we must reexamine the true origin of such questions: curiosity, which in essence, is the foundation of this community. IMSA, our home, would not exist without someone posing the question: "Why not create a school for the gifted?" Humans would not be able to fly without someone curiously wondering: "How can I travel across the ocean without sitting on a boat?" And you would not be sitting in this gymnasium today without you wondering what more you can do with your life.

Curiosity makes our lives meaningful. It prevents us from being stuck in one way of doing things, allowing us to forever explore the world around us. Collectively, let us be curious learners – students who never take anything for its face value, students that pursue all of our inquiries, students who question everything. But at the same time, understand that the most profound things in life are often left unexplained.

Knowing that curiosity is the building block for this institution, let us build upon this foundation with simple, yet significant concepts: perseverance and optimism.

American author, William Feather, concluded: "Success seems to be largely a matter of hanging on after others have let go," and I could not agree more. While those around us fall short of their dreams by giving up, we must persevere. While others allow their obstacles to hinder their success, we must be constantly fight such battles. While others wait for someone else to pick them up and carry to success, we must learn to fly there ourselves.

I firmly believe that if you do not achieve the success you want in life, 99% of the time, it is because you truly did not want it. It is because you did not persevere and endure through the obstacles along the way. It's because you did not have the right mindset to do great things.

And the proper mindset is imperative for us to attain, or maintain, success - a mindset of optimism. The only way we can remain curious learners who persevere through all obstacles, is by looking at things in life from a positive perspective. Think not about the negative outcomes of a given situation, but instead, take a minute and think about how you can move forward with what you are given.

As a student surrounding by so many incredible students, it sometimes frustrates me to see one becoming so overwhelmed with trivial things. As you know, or will soon learn, IMSA is filled

with “perfectionists” – those who simply cannot settle for anything but...well, the best. While I agree whole heartedly that we should strive for nothing short of excellence, we should not get stuck in a moment because something does not go as planned – move forward, smile, and you’ll accomplish so much more. ☺

The most amazing thing is that optimism is universal; it’s a concept that applies not to a given class or person, but a concept that is uniform throughout our entire community. In combination with perseverance and curiosity, you will forever ignite the greatness stored inside of you.

Specifically, to the sophomores, use your curiosity to find yourself – define who you really are. You are about to embark on a three-year journey at a fine institution; however, be sure that education is not the only thing you gain. Learn what your passions are, figure out what motivates you to succeed, and before you know it, you will determine exactly what you want to do with your life.

To the juniors, persevere. Now having a year under your belt, you will encounter multiple unexpected tasks. Yes, things may seem overbearing at times, but with the right attitude, you will come to realize that you can accomplish so much; know that optimism really is the key to your success. This mindset will allow you to overcome all of your hindrances, and at the end of the year, you’ll look back and regret nothing.

And to my seniors, congratulations. I still remember our sophomore year, when about 75% of us spent our time on Facebook playing Tetris all day, but I’m glad to say we finally learned how to prioritize our lives. Having done so, use your experiences to share your wisdom and skill sets with those around you. Let us not reminisce on our failures of yesterday, but instead focus on the success we can create tomorrow, which will soon evolve into the lasting impression we have on the next generation.

Now “success” is a term we frequently hear, even in today’s speech. Success is supposedly the culmination of our lives – the point at which we have fully fulfilled our potential and brought upon profound change in our surrounding communities. But what exactly does that entail? Getting a 4.0 GPA in high school? Being accepted into the number university in the nation? Living your life without being depressed?

Not to me....

I believe that success is measured by the number of people you positively influence – the number of people you inspire to good in this world. Thus, my goal for each and every one of you is to begin, or continue to, inspire at least one person to do good in this world – one person who is proud of your greatness and one person who will continue your legacy. In doing so, we, the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy, will initiate a chain of inspiration, which I foresee spreading our knowledge, wisdom, creativity, and passions throughout the state of Illinois to our entire nation, and one day, our entire world.

Let us inspire one person to good in this world, because if our lives were to end today, we would be content in knowing that our inspiration – our legacies – shall last for a lifetime.