

## Convocation 2024-RWH3-September 6, 2024

Good afternoon, Williston, and welcome everyone to the school's 184<sup>th</sup> convocation—Convocation marks the official start of an academic year, and it is a formal tradition that dates back hundreds of years to the first universities in England and Europe. Literally, and I defer to Latin experts, Mrs. Hill and Ms. Cody, the word convocation means “calling together.” Speaking of Mrs. Hill, each fall the opening of school conflicts with her special day and that happens to be today so, Happy Birthday, Mrs. Hill!

As we gather all students and faculty on this beautiful Williston afternoon, we also welcome our special guest, Christina Djossa, Class of 2010, who generously traveled up from NYC to share remarks with you later in the program.

You have all heard me say that there's magic that happens every fall as we come together not to just reunite, but to

reimagine the school and re-form into one community that is uniquely Williston. Just the other day at registration, a family came up to me and said that Williston is a place that actually does what the brochures say—and they were talking about how teachers and coaches and advisers make a point of connecting and building important mentoring relationships. The adults in your Williston lives spin those first slender threads which later form an intricate web of connectivity as the weeks go by. You should not take them for granted and give them your best in all the things you do.

You students come from Germany and Thailand, California and Maine, Longmeadow and Amherst, and all places in between. And every year, because of you, Williston takes on a slightly different tone. Like the many hues of fall foliage that will transform this campus as they do every October, no two years are the same, and each class will take on its own character as the trimester unfolds. If the opening days are any indication, the Class of 2025, all 139 strong, is ready to

lead by example with unmatched energy, talent, and enthusiasm. Shout out to you seniors, 2025!

I have been thinking about the underlying reasons we are such a unique community, and why it is I can make this claim. Here is what I think: The guidelines, policies, and practices you learned about in these opening days of orientation and dorm meetings are just words on a page. Without your buy-in and participation, or willingness to engage, none of us can be at our best. Our success in realizing this special community, what you heard me call “Williston Nice,” depends on you. Will you say hello to one another on the paths, wave to the motorist who stops, help your room mate or friend in a time of need?

Each of us here today has chosen to be at Williston—you may have your own personal reasons and goals for doing so, but here we are, ready to begin or continue a Williston journey. What unites us, then, is our quest to fulfill those

goals and ambitions, while being faithful to Williston's values of respect, trust, and honesty.

There is an alumna that most everyone by now knows who graduated from Williston in 2015, Gabby Thomas. In one of the many interviews on national television following her triple gold medal Paris Olympics, she was asked: what advice would she give to young kids hoping to emulate her. Gabby's advice, in case you did not see the Today Show interview, boiled down to "working hard and giving back to your community." That's what she did for six years at Williston, and gold medals or not, she said she will always adhere to that model instilled in her by her mother.

Giving back to your community, to this Williston community, happens every day in large and small ways, in both calculated and spontaneous gestures. (We just witnessed some of what I am talking about today in the fishbowl

exercise where so many of you put yourselves out there to give something of yourselves to the whole community).

I look at the world today, especially for seniors who will be launching out before they know it, and I see challenges everywhere. Your Williston education, your commitment to shaping community and to giving back, and your ability to harness the powers of purpose, passion, and integrity, are what will best prepare you for your long and unscripted futures.

In the year ahead, strive to be critical thinkers, to discover truths that apply to the common good, and to listen and learn from others.

It is easy to disengage from difficult moments or topics, but growth lies in engaging, in being active learners. It is easy to be governed by your social media feeds which influence (or maybe even brainwash) you without your consent. It takes

effort and work to find disparate sources of information and apply your critical thinking skills to see fundamental truths. You get to choose. Every day you make choices to engage, to act, to volunteer; some of you have demonstrated that already during orientation, first classes, sports practices, and dorm activities.

Anyone can take the easy road and opt out, stand by, disengage. So, let me leave you with this question for the 2024 –2025 academic year: Do you want to be an anybody or a somebody?

Thank you for listening. It's my great pleasure to introduce now **Senior Class President, Isabel Baxter Paris to share her Convocation remarks.**

