

## Graduation Speech by GHS Principal Julia Chaffe:

Dr. Balestracci, Members of the Board of Education, Dr. Freeman, First Selectman Hoey, faculty, staff, and parents, thank you for being here today to honor the achievement of our graduates. Whether you are here with us in person or watching from home, your consistent support of our seniors over the course of their 13 years in school has brought them to this important rite of passage this evening.

There are many people who worked tirelessly behind the scenes to make today's graduation ceremony possible. Today could not have come together smoothly without our custodial staff, Mr. Gahm and the Wind Ensemble, Ms. Allen and GHS Voices, Mr. Ripa and our Technology Department, the Guilford Police Department, our administrative team, Ms. Sullivan, our Graduation Coordinator, and most importantly, Mr. Schneider and Mr. Foti, our Senior Class Advisors. Thank you for all of the collaboration and hard work that went into making today possible.

To the graduating class of 2022, the rest of my comments are specifically for you. I would like to begin with a brief anecdote that gets at the heart of what makes you unique as a graduating class.

This past winter, I went to my very first high school wrestling match. I confess to all of you that I have little knowledge of the intricacies of the sport, but I can tell you that the experience of watching it made a lasting impression on me. It occurred to me during one of the matches that the moves the wrestlers make in the ring under those giant spotlights are a lot like life. Sometimes you have it all pinned down and you emerge victorious. Other times, life has you pinned, your face pressed mercilessly to the floor, your spine twisted in a most unnatural position, as you struggle to release yourself from the pressure. But as I stand before all of you now, I recognize that this is a gross oversimplification.

Here's how all of you are already wiser than I. Here's what makes you uniquely you. As a class, you've shown repeatedly that you don't get caught up in this kind of binary thinking about wins and losses. Life is much more nuanced and interesting than that and you've already figured that out.

You've heard a lot of presentations and speeches in the last two and half years about what you've lost. Today, let's acknowledge what you've

gained. Your class officers, in their letter to you in the yearbook, capture your spirit and drive by saying, “You improvise; you adapt; you overcome.”

I would make one small suggested change to their astute observation. As you move into life after high school: improvise, adapt, and LEARN. No matter where life takes you next—be it college or university, the military, job training, a trade, an apprenticeship, the workforce, a gap year, or travel—no matter where your path leads—let go of the illusion that you are in competition with other people. In actuality, you are only in direct competition with one person: yourself. In his final presentation for Voyages & Vessels, your classmate Joe Ehrlich said it this way, “It’s not the mistakes you make; it’s how you compensate for them.” He could not have said it any better.

So here’s my wish for you, Class of ‘22: continue to resist the trap of binary thinking. Improvise. Adapt. And continue to LEARN. And above all, be well.