

## **Prepared Notes for Convocation**

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Good Morning. For the past 5 years, I have attended convocation and I listened to board Presidents carry on about matters both trivial and important. I remember the inspirational comments from Bob Horton about spoons, the point of which I'm still trying to figure out. I remember David Bressman speaking passionately about his teacher, Ms. Candy Koehn just a few years back. As I contemplated my remarks this morning, one overriding thought went through my head. In all likelihood, I'm only going to get one shot at this. One shot to deliver a message in person to the Worthington Schools staff, including our teachers, aides, assistants and administrators. One shot that I didn't want to waste trying to be cute or funny. At times like this, I wish I could be as inspirational as Mark Hill or Melissa Conrath, but I'm not, so honestly, this was a bit of a challenge for me. What messages do I want to impart to you given a single opportunity? I settled on two things I wanted to convey.

The first and most important is a simple thank you. Serving on the Worthington Board of Education has been the highest honor of my life. Over the past 6 years, I've had the opportunity to touch, all be it at the margins, the vital and important work you folks do every day. My most memorable days as a board member are those where I get to see your work up close and personal, a day in the lunchroom at TWHS, a day shadowing a special education assistant, opportunities to participate in career mentorship interviews and debate clubs and so many others. Each of these opportunities serves to focus my attention on why we are here and what really matters. Over the years, many of you have come to board meetings to discuss textbooks that you've reviewed, curriculum changes you want to make, new courses you've created, renewal plans you've slaved over and so much more. In other situations, I've had the privilege of serving on task forces with some of you and I treasure those moments of interaction and I marvel at your passion, your concern and your professionalism.

We all interpret events through the prism of our own experience, and my life experience includes a small background in teaching. I taught Computer

Science for the College of Staten Island in the 80's and I owned a technology education company in the 90's. I understand the thrill when a student gets it and I've agonized at the blank stares when a student or a bunch of students are lost in the middle of a class and you don't know what to do about it. I've graded exams where I felt that every "D" or "F" was a personal failure on my part, and I also know that there is no better feeling in the world when a student contacts you 20 years after a class and tells you that you made a difference in his life. In my time in front of a classroom, I found it to be exhilarating and exhausting and I respect the heck out of anyone who can do it and do it well for year after year so once again, I say "Thank You" for allowing me to touch a part of what makes this district so special.

The second message I wanted to deliver is about change. Here, I am not alone. Sometimes, it seems that this is all that education policy makers can think about. Change, Change, Change, Change, Change, Change, Change. A constant drumbeat which I imagine must be exhausting to professionals who practice in the field, all these people thinking they can do your job better than you can. For years, we've read that we need to change what is taught, how it is taught, why it is taught and who it is taught by and here, I'll share my one political thought for the day. The education of children has been treated as a political football for far too long by both major parties and it needs to stop. The very survival of our country is at stake. Now, that's not to say that your profession needs to stop advancing and innovating. Quite the opposite, I am a passionate believer in modernizing education, however, I also believe that YOU are in the best position to deliver that modernization. That is not mere conjecture on my part, nor would I have made that statement 6 years ago. This is based on what I've learned by watching you.

I have seen more innovation in this district in my short time on the board than any reform minded school board member has a right to expect and it has NOT been driven by politicians, not by policy wonks and certainly not by school board members. It's been driven by you. Certainly, innovation is not new to Worthington. The Linworth Alternative Program will be celebrating its 38<sup>th</sup> year next month and it is still the envy of many districts. In the last few years, however, this district and its staff have given birth to a ton of innovative programs, all designed to increase student achievement and offer additional choices. During our Superintendent Search, candidates who did their homework would inevitably ask about the history of the Phoenix program, but Phoenix is but one example of what can happen when you

empower educators and get out of the way. There are so many others, including The Worthington Kilbourne International Business Academy, the STEM programming in our high schools, the Entrepreneurial Business Academy, Liberty Leaps, the IB PYP program at Slate and I could go on and on, and that doesn't even include some of the remarkable efforts, like the GEM School Proposal, that didn't get green lighted. The 2011-2012 school year will bring additional options for student learning through the efforts of leaders such as John Jordon and his IB implementation team, bringing the benefits of IB to all of Worthington Kilbourne High School, but don't get the wrong idea. Innovative practice does not just manifest itself in new programming. Every year, whether it's the use of Smart Boards throughout the district or power walkthroughs or formative assessments, whether it's the integration of credit flexibility, electronic textbooks, the successful merger of two middle schools or just reaching out to parents, this district has made and is making improvements large and small and I am humbled and excited to be a small part of it.

I'll close with one observation. President Obama, while campaigning in 2008 once said that change will not come if we wait for some other person or if we wait for some other time. He continued with "We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek". Members of the administration, teachers and staff, it is rare indeed for me to paraphrase President Obama, but in the humble opinion of one school board member – YOU are the ones we've been waiting for and YOU are the change that we seek. YOU, the professionals who work with our kids every day will be the engine that drives this district forward. I thank you on behalf of the board of education for the work you do every day and I encourage you to continue evolving, innovating and taking risk to advance your profession and our district. Thank you for your attention and go out and have a great year!