

RAISING THE BAR – FOR ALL: Reaching the bar and then some

By Superintendent Gary Maestas

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In this space, Plymouth School Superintendent Gary Maestas discusses the various ways Plymouth Public Schools provide all students the tools to excel and flourish.

While sitting at South High's Senior Academic Awards and North's Academic Convocations ceremonies last week, it gave me a great sense of pride to see our students receive scholarships and accolades, and learn of their college acceptances. These ceremonies, and graduations later in the week, capped a school year filled with many noteworthy accomplishments. This week, we will focus on how the graduates of the Plymouth Public Schools are now on their way to "Raising Their Bar" and navigating life's path.

Before talking about the students, I want to thank the community of Plymouth for its support. In particular, I would like to thank those who donated funds to scholarships for Plymouth students. This year, our seniors from Plymouth North and Plymouth South received more than \$300,000 in scholarship money. What's more impressive about that figure is the variety of donors offering scholarships—alumni, local businesses, parents, groups, local organizations, local foundations, individuals and teachers—who have made a commitment to monetarily support these newest of our alumni as they endeavor to their next benchmark in life.

Back to the awards ceremonies. After each school's presentation of awards, donors had an opportunity to meet the recipient of their award. One donor was so impressed with the program and the strong personal characteristics of our students, he vowed to continue to support the school system with an annual scholarship. I truly wish you, members of our community, could get the chance to meet our students so you, too, can get a sense of how the youth of Plymouth are developing in our schools.

In listening to the accolades being bestowed on our students, it made me proud of the students' successes and of the structures our district put in place for students to prosper. Every single student who crossed that stage has a story. And those stories aren't grounded in privilege, but – more consistently – are stories of resilience, determination, and responsibility.

Plymouth students have a variety of options upon graduation. Some students earned licensure during high school and will head directly to the world of work. Many of our students have been accepted to colleges and had to make some tough decisions on selecting the one that best

fits their goals and aspirations. Some have chosen to serve in the defense of our country, while others will take a gap year and join the workforce.

Making these decisions is not easy, particularly for college-bound students. I have heard many accounts of students choosing their school not only for the academic reputation, but the economic impact and how that will impact their future. Some of our students are not attending some of the more prestigious schools because of the cost. That's a tough pill to swallow, yet a great example of how students at this age are making responsible decisions.

Some of these decisions are also quite uplifting. One parent at the ceremony, in her excitement about their son graduating, very proudly exclaimed that he was enrolling in a trade school because that is what he really wanted. Again, a responsible decision with a student choosing the path that's right for him.

In my parting speech at the ceremony, I encouraged students to focus on three things as they move beyond the walls of the Plymouth schools:

First, pick up the phone and communicate with the people who are your supporters in life.

Second, create a plan. Every time I transitioned from school to school, I always had a plan. Students should always formulate a plan before embarking on their many journeys ahead.

Third, I urged them to follow their passion because they are going to be working for the next 35-plus years of their lives. I want them to love the career they choose, to reflect on what is at the core of their being, and how that motivates them to choose their path.

You often hear people talk about the flaws of today's youth and how they are not prepared for the world of work. I want the community of Plymouth to know that although we have a few students who create significant challenges for schools, we do have many, many more who have committed themselves to making the best of their future. For that, we should all feel a sense of pride.

Gary E. Maestas, Ed.D., is superintendent of Plymouth Public Schools. He can be reached at 508-224-5035 and gmaestas@plymouth.k12.ma.us. It is the stated goal of the Plymouth Public Schools District to encourage children to realize their full social, emotional, physical, and intellectual potential. In this space Superintendent Maestas discusses the various ways Plymouth Public Schools provide all students the tools to excel and flourish.