

## Graduation address of 2021 - Hosep Torossian, Principal

Dear parents, graduates, honorable Board members and guests:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,

It was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness,

It was the spring of Hope, it was the winter of Despair.

These are the opening lines of the Tale of Two cities by Charles Dickens.

**It was the worst of times** as the pandemic shook us to our core and globally, an estimated 8 million lives were lost.

**It was the worst of times** when our nation divided itself between masked and unmasked groups.

**It was the worst of times** as Illness, anxiety, depression, isolation, forced anti-social behavior, job loss, financial troubles and fear of survival set in.

**It was the worst of times** as hospitals were overflowing with the dying, morgues and funeral homes were backed up and front-line workers were sacrificing their lives to save others.

**It was the worst of times** when teaching, as we knew it, ceased to exist. Zoom and Zooming became integral parts of our lexicon and our daily lives. How many zooms can a normal person endure in a day?

**It was the worst of times** as we stopped seeing the smiles on the faces of our students.

**It was the worst of times** when we had to cancel our most cherished school Trip to Armenia. We canceled all sports, music, dance, all field trips and fundraisers and all extra-curricular activities.

**These were not just the worst of times, they were terrible times.**

How is it then that we are here today celebrating the successes our class of 2021? How did we pull it off?

Immediately after the total shut down in March of Last year, we began making a transition to virtual learning. This was not an easy task. As you may imagine, none of our teachers had any experience in virtual teaching. Collectively, they have several hundred years of teaching experience, all of it geared towards in person, face-to-face, eye to eye contact teaching. In one swift move, the carpet was pulled from under their feet.

Yet, this is exactly when their collective professionalism saved the day and rescued the school year.

Our faculty's flexibility and unbridled dedication to ensure a smooth transition to the new way teaching, and to meet the needs of all students, were nothing short of transformational. Thank you, dear faculty for your passion and commitment to our school. You are, and continue to, be our front line heroes.

When we became 100% dependent on technology, one person, above all, rushed to our rescue. That person is our outstanding IT manager, supporter and friend Mr. Mike Arzoumanian.

Thank you Mike for all the assistance you provided to ensure that any technological shortcomings did not impede our ability to teach in the virtual mode. Thank you for your endless generosity dear Mike and Maral. As a parting present to the graduating class, Mike is gifting a drone to every one of our 33 students. I believe Mike's gift of drones is a metaphor or an allegory for them to soar to new heights.

**It was during the worst of times** when our high school faculty got together and put in place a solid, comprehensive 33-point safety protocol to ensure the safety of our students during face-to-face teaching and learning. They also led by example by getting vaccinated without exception, and as soon as vaccines became available.

**It was during the the worst of times** when our teachers doubled their compassion, commitment, and communication and with our students and parents as we realized that many needed serious intervention and help.

**However, it was during the worst of times** that one group of students filled our hearts with inspiration and renewed our faith in our profession. It is these students seated here today who led us out of despair into hope, and out of darkness into light towards a bright future. It is their success stories which I

will share with you. These students led us to what I believe are the best of times.

For the Manoogian School, the class of 2021 propelled us to the **Best of Times**.

Despite the enormous and unprecedented challenges caused by the pandemic, this class shattered all school academic records.

**It was the best** of times because this outstanding class received 85 University acceptances, 8 of which came from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, the most selective college in Michigan.

**It was the VERY Best of times** because this phenomenal class was offered \$4.6 million in total four-year scholarships. This class surpassed all previous records by more than \$2 million. My guess is that this stellar record is unlikely to be broken anytime soon, although I assure you that we will try.

**It was the Best of times** when, for the first time in the 52-year history of our school, a student was offered admissions to Brown University, an Ivy league school with full-ride, (including books, housing, and a paid summer research position for two years). Kudos to Yulia Velan, now a remarkable Brown University Presidential scholar, who came to us from the Ukraine in 6<sup>th</sup> grade without speaking a word of English.

**It was the best of times** when half of this class was honored for being on the Administrator's list, with GPAs of 3.5 or higher. Our hats off to Karine Caloukian, Elaine Azar, David Togmajyan

and Yulia Velhan for taking top honors as class Valedictorians which is a new record. We also Salute our Salutatorian Deena Oraha who personifies perfection but missed being Valedictorian by 0.01 point. To these top students, Karine and David, I say *srdants gue shnorhavorem tsez. Hbard em tsezmov yev lavakouyn hachoghoutyoun gue maghtem tsezi*. To Elaine, *alef mabrook habibti. Enti noor aayni*. To Yuliya, *vitayou yuliyu Velhan, te gordist nashoyeh shkoleh* and to Deena Oraha, *Breekha, lk talbook hlokhoon khair oo boorkatha*.

**It was the Best of times**, when with incredible tenacity our automotive and robotics teams competed and brought home numerous trophies and first place awards in: Full Scale Electric Car Innovation, The Square One Overall Team Award, The Computer Aided Design and Manufacturing Award. Within The V2X IVD category, we won the Square One Award and CAD and Manufacturing Award. One of our Junior Class students Hagop Alajajian proceeded to be one of 10 State finalists among 2000 participants in his global initiative design. Our most unique and highly active Simon Yaldo was also recognized by Square One. He won the Mike Bammer Memorial \$500 scholarship to be applied at any University of his choice. Thank you, team Manoogian, and thank you Mr. Scott and Mr. Schroeder for your leadership in STEM. The bad news is that now we have to buy a new showcase cabinet because the one that we have is overflowing with Trophies. Gentlemen, it is bad news for you since the cost of the new cabinet is coming out of your paychecks. (any donations? See me after the program...)

**It was the best of times**, when after much thought Mrs. Kadri decided to postpone her retirement by another year. It took some convincing and soul-searching, but I am thrilled she made the right decision.

**It was the best of times** when we received letters of congratulations from Mr. Berj Setrakian, President of AGBU worldwide. Our joy was doubled when we received another much-appreciated letter from our Benefactor Richard Manoogian who said: “Please know how much we appreciate and value the excellent work that you, the faculty and staff continue to do to deserve the recognition that our school enjoys as one of the finest charter schools in Michigan.”

I thank you dear students, most caring and wonderful parents, our faculty and staff for this most astounding harvest. I thank our Board of directors for their unparalleled leadership, support and guidance led by our most visionary Dr. Richard Marburger. The dark days are behind us as we open our eyes and begin to see a colorful rainbow. You pulled us out darkness into the light and out of despair into Hope. There is a pot of gold at the end of this beautiful rainbow, and that pot of gold is the golden class of 2021.

My heartfelt congratulations to you as we vow to remain focused on our mission and to the vision of our founders, the Manoogian Family, whose benevolence we reap every day, and for many years to come.