

## Valedictorian Benjamin Clark's Speech

Good evening and welcome to all the parents, friends, family, teachers, administrators, school board members, and other members of the community who are here to celebrate the graduation of the Penn Manor Class of 2011. I am honored to have the opportunity to address you this evening. I would like to thank Dr. Leichliter, Mr. Gale, and the other individuals who helped to secure these air-conditioned premises for graduation, so we did not all have to endure a sweltering hot gym for more than two hours. As you are all so comfortable, I have taken the liberty of expanding my address from the 3 minute duration that Mr. Gale prescribed to a 15 minute dissertation of star formation. [Look over at Gale] Don't worry I am just kidding.

My fellow members of the class of 2011, today we graduate. It has been a long journey to reach this point and we have had to work hard to get here, but we made it. However, we did not reach this milestone on our own. All the way along, year after year, we have been supported by our parents, grandparents, siblings, teachers, and community; in short, everybody who is here today to celebrate our accomplishments.

What they gave us is an incredible gift: the gift of belief. They believed in us and dedicated their time and energy to encourage us and to push us to do our very best. Their belief was absolutely crucial as it gave us a sense of purpose without which we would have given up when we didn't understand the next concept in math class or weren't sure what to write about for that English essay.

However, we are now preparing to go out into the world and regardless of where we are headed, whether it is the workforce, college, or the military, we will still need somebody who will believe in us and remind us to keep going, to not give up when the "going gets tough". For the past 18 years, that has been the people around us. However, over the course of our lives, we will

not always be in an environment that provides such encouragement. The only way to deal with these new surroundings is to learn to believe in yourself and not wait for someone else to provide encouragement. You need to believe in yourself and your own abilities to achieve your objective, and then be ready to put in the time and effort necessary. You need to believe in yourself so that when you see an opportunity, you trust in yourself and go for it. Belief in yourself will serve you well, where ever you go, and will give you the faith to take the chance to follow your dreams, whatever they might be.

I am sure that some of you are thinking that I am silly to give life advice to you, my classmates and peers, and that this advice would do better coming from an older individual who has the wisdom of many more years than I do. For this I apologize and ask that you remember that old adage “We teach best what we most need to learn” which certainly applies here. I have seen the value of believing in oneself, but by no means have I mastered it myself. I chose to speak on this topic today, so that it might provide inspiration and encouragement to my fellow members of the Penn Manor Class of 2011.

Thank you and best wishes.