



Remarks of Mayor Martin J. Walsh
Newman School Graduation
June 2, 2014

Thank you, Chairman [Richard] McCarthy, and Zhongyi Zhang. And thank you, Headmaster [Harry] Lynch. I've known the Headmaster for a long time. He was in charge way back when I was a student here. That was before the internet was invented, so we had to find other ways to get into trouble.

But in all seriousness, it's a great honor for me to return to give the commencement address at the school where I graduated 28 years ago. I want to thank everyone for giving me such a warm welcome: members of the Board of Trustees; Father [Luca] Brancolini and reverend clergy; faculty and staff; grandparents, parents, families; and, the most important people here today: the graduates. I'm honored to be here to help celebrate this momentous occasion in your lives.

First of all, I want to congratulate you on graduating. This is a wonderful achievement. You've worked hard to make it to this day. You've overcome some challenges. You've had your struggles. Some of you came from far away to go to school here. But you persevered, and you proved you are capable of anything. You should be very proud.

I've spoken at a few graduations this year, including some large universities and law schools. But no graduation is more important to me than this one. The Newman School is very close to my heart. I wasn't always fully aware of that when I went here. But over the years I've learned: this school helped to shape some of my deepest values.

It's a school that took me in, when some other schools would not. I'm very grateful for that chance The Newman School took on me. And I'm grateful for the love this community showed me.

But you know, it has been quite a while since I went here. Some things have changed.

We used to call it Newman Prep. It prepared us well, but nobody would have confused us for a prep school, though. That term has an elitist tone that is still unknown here. But even though you've dropped "prep" from your name, the curriculum has only gotten more rigorous. You've combined advanced studies in traditional subjects like Latin and History with cutting edge findings in the sciences. And your International Diploma can open doors to college and career opportunities all over the world.

And more of you are headed to college—in fact, all of you are headed to college—some of the best colleges in the world. That's an awesome accomplishment. It's a testament to the dedication of your teachers, the staff, and the leadership of this school; and especially to your hard work.

I'm continuously amazed by the ambition, the drive, and the intelligence of our young people today. Life

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seems to get more complex and challenging every year. But you continue to rise to the occasion. As adults, we spend a lot of time trying to guide you in the right direction. But you are the ones who inspire us, more than you know.

But for all these changes, some things remain the same.

The Newman School has always provided opportunities to a wide variety of young people. Some of you came from nearby, in the neighborhoods and suburbs of Boston. Others came from very far away, to take a chance on America. What all of you found here was what I found here: a welcoming community where, as our motto says, “heart speaks to heart.” You were held to the highest international standards: but you were treated as individuals with your own needs and dreams.

In addition, the Newman School education still draws on the history and the culture and the energy of the City of Boston. As a young man from Dorchester, going to the Newman School connected me to this city in a way that I had never known before. During the Marathon commemorations last month, I spoke a lot about what Copley Square and the Back Bay mean to Boston and all of New England. And when I said those things I spoke from the heart, because of the time I had spent here as a student at Newman.

But the most important thing that has stayed the same, just like 28 years ago when I graduated, is that every student here has a dream. I know many of you today are thinking about those dreams. For some of you, it is success at college. Some may already have in mind a career. Others aren’t quite sure what their dream is yet. Or you think you know what it is, but you haven’t told anyone. You’re still not totally sure what you’re capable of. The world has been changing a lot, and you’re not sure what the opportunities will be.

Today I want you to set aside those doubts. Instead of being cautious, I want you to ask yourself whether you are really aiming high enough. Because as proud as your parents are; as proud as your teachers are; as proud as I am of you: no one knows yet how great you can be.

Yes, the world will keep changing. Life will throw a lot of surprises at you. Some of them will seem like hard obstacles. But they will also be opportunities: changes of course that allow you to achieve more than you ever thought you could. I want you to think of the dreams you have now as only the beginning. And I want you to keep dreaming.

I’m not just saying this because it’s what a graduation speaker is supposed to say. This was my experience, as a graduate of the Newman School. I know, deep in my bones, that you are capable of more than you know right now. Let me tell you a little bit about that how I learned that.

- I grew up in Savin Hill in Dorchester.
- My parents were both immigrants from Ireland.
- My dad was a construction worker and my mother was a homemaker.
- I went to St. Margaret’s School on Columbia Road.
- I got sick as a kid, people thought I might not make it.
- I had big dreams—I loved sports, and I loved politics.
- I dreamed of being the Mayor of Boston.
- But I wasn’t very focused in school.
- Some of my friends were going to nearby private schools, but I couldn’t get in.
- Newman Prep accepted me: a great opportunity, but I still didn’t focus on my education the way I should have.
- My experience at Newman Prep.
- Junior college, Suffolk University.

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- Through my father I got a job in construction.
- Then I got a job in the benefits office of the union—but I didn't like it.
- I didn't have much direction. I was partying too much.
- And I developed a drinking problem.
- On April 23, 1995, my life crashed to a halt.
- I ended up in detox.
- It felt like my life was over; I didn't realize that it was also just beginning.
- People helped me back on my feet.
- I got back into serving my community.
- 18 months later I was on the ballot for State Rep.
- I was almost 30 years old and I was finally following my dream.
- I won that election and I became the Rep for the neighborhood I grew up in.
- In the meantime I signed up for night school at Boston College.
- As a legislator I worked on issues I knew from my own life and community.
- Creating jobs. Helping immigrants. Funding early education. Substance abuse.
- In 2011 I got the opportunity to run the Building Trades, the unions.
- I gave myself two years to make a decision of whether to stay in government.
- Two years approached—Tom Menino announced that after 20 years, he would not run for re-election.
- I had a chance to fulfill my dream.
- I knew I had the experience I needed to be mayor—but there was a lot of hard work ahead.
- Other great candidates wanted to be mayor too.
- A year ago I was campaigning 7 days a week, 18 hours a day.
- On November 6, 2013, I was elected Mayor of Boston.
- On January 6, 2014, I was sworn in as Mayor.
- My inauguration was at Boston College, in front of 7,800 people.
- As I sat on that stage and looked out at them, I thought back on the path I took to get there.
- It wasn't a smooth path and it wasn't a straight path.
- It was filled with obstacles, it took twists and turns.
- There were even times when I gave up hope.
- But I kept going.
- I learned from my mistakes.
- I accepted help and advice from people.
- I tried to say yes when people asked for help.
- And I got to live my dream.

Every one of you sitting before me has a dream of one kind or another. But my story shows that the path to a dream is rarely straight. And it shows that you can go far beyond what you thought you were capable of when you started. You have to be ready to learn and grow. And you have to recognize the value of community.

You've got a great start here at Newman School. It's a community that's given you the opportunity to start making your dreams a reality. You've had the kind of start we're trying to provide for every young person in the City of Boston.

We're working to make the Boston Public Schools the best urban schools in the world. In the past, people have focused on the differences between private schools and public schools; cities and suburbs; charter schools and traditional public schools. In my administration we focus more on what schools have in common than on what separates them. And the most important thing they share is the young people

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of this city: young people like you, with the drive and the imagination to make the world a better place.

We are looking for the best ways to put all our young people on pathways to college and career success. So the curriculum your teachers have implemented at the Newman School; and the hard work you've done to show what students can achieve with it: these are lessons that every school can learn from. You are leaders by example.

And as much as the Newman School draws its identity from the City of Boston; in many ways, this city is becoming more like the Newman School. A month ago I gave my first major policy speech, to the assembled private and public sector leadership of Boston. In that speech I talked about my vision for the city's future. I said it would be inclusive, international, and innovative. This school is a microcosm of that vision: of what Boston is and what I want Boston to be in the future.

It's inclusive: bringing together young people from every neighborhood of Boston and every country of the world.

It's international: not just by welcoming students from abroad, but by engaging its curriculum with an ever-more-integrated global society.

And it's innovative: whether in art or in aeronautics, you are expanding the boundaries of what a high school education can be.

With these awesome opportunities, I know your educations and your careers will take you all over the world. But I hope you'll do one of two things. I hope some of you will stay in Boston—or come back to Boston—to join your dreams to our dreams for the future of this city. We are poised to make an already great city a truly international leader in industry, in culture, and in social justice.

But for those of you who make your lives in other cities or in other countries: I hope you will bring Boston with you, wherever you go. And in fact, I know you will do just that. In your time at the Newman School, you have been shaped by this city. It has become a part of your mindset and your identity in ways that you know, and in ways that you will only discover later. As you go forth and share your love of learning; as you build just and welcoming communities; and as you confront challenges and solve problems: you will be bringing the spirit of the Newman School, and the spirit of Boston, to the world.

And as you share this spirit, you will not only make the world a better place, you will let people around the world know that Boston is a special city. You will help to develop those international relationships that our future in the global economy depends on. As graduates of a school that is uniquely Bostonian, and uniquely international, you are ambassadors of Boston's future. It is a future in which we preserve our historic identity, but we open our doors to the world.

And that is a future where everyone can dream big dreams. We are a place where a kid from Dorchester and a student at the Newman School could become the mayor of one of the greatest cities in the world. Now you, today's graduates of the Newman School, have an opportunity to go even further. You will change the world in ways we can't even imagine yet.

So today is the start of an amazing journey. You've taken an important step. But you will have many more opportunities to learn and grow and dream. My message to you is that you can do absolutely anything you choose in life, if you work hard and stick to the values you learned at this school. You can live your dreams, you can be successful, and then you can dream even bigger dreams. You can change the world. And I don't want you to settle for anything less.

Thank you, and congratulations once again.

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