

Maureen's Speech to the Graduating Fifth-Grade Class

Dear Graduating Fifth-Graders,

I first want to congratulate everyone in the fifth-grade class at Kennedy Elementary. All of us have worked hard at school. All of us have had fun at school. And now, all of us are getting ready to move up to middle school. It's a little scary, right? After all, we're about to move to different schools and meet different people. We will face pressure and stress like we never have yet before. To do our best in middle school and beyond takes leadership. We all need to be leaders. What are the qualities of being a leader? To me, a good leader has to have clear goals, strong communication skills, and a positive attitude.

One quality that leaders have is crystal-clear goals. To be a leader in middle school and beyond, we need to know exactly where we are and where we are going. We need to say to ourselves: what is it we really want to get out of middle school? And then we need to work toward that goal. Some of us might want to get good grades. Some of us might want to make new friends. Some of us might want to make the school a better place for everyone. Whatever that goal is, we first need to name it and then make a plan. Albert Einstein once said, "If you want to live a happy life, tie it to a goal." I believe that setting goals will not only make us happy, like Einstein said, but it will also make us better leaders.

To be a leader in middle school and beyond also takes strong communication skills. We have to be able to communicate well with so many people. Just think of all the different audiences we have to talk to! We have to be able to communicate with our families for later bedtimes and more freedom. We have to communicate to teachers when the material is too hard or too easy for us. We have to communicate with the principal about ways to make the school even better. Not to mention all the ways we have to communicate well with each other: talking, texting, writing notes. All of these need to be done well for us to be leaders and to succeed in middle school and beyond.

And last, but certainly not least, to be leaders in middle school we have to have a positive attitude. We have to believe that we can achieve our goals. We have to believe that the world can be a better place. I know this is true from experience. One day our teacher asked us to conduct an experiment. She challenged us to spend an entire day acting as though we were sad and bored. When we saw other students in the hallway, we looked away. When someone said hello, we said nothing. When we all talked in class, we all talked about miserable we felt going through life with a negative attitude. Then, the next day, our teacher gave us another challenge: to spend the entire day smiling and saying hello to everyone. I remember walking down the hallway and saying good morning to a group of first-graders. At first they looked nervous, but then they all smiled back and said good morning to me! Now, whenever I see those first-graders in the school, I always stop to talk with them and ask them how they are doing. This story shows that others are drawn to people with positive attitudes. If we are to be leaders in middle school and beyond, we have to have positive attitudes, too.

There are many ways to succeed in life. One way to succeed is to become a leader. Leaders don't have to be the most outgoing or the most intelligent. You can "lead by example," as they say. To be a strong leader, you have to have a vision. You have to be able to share that vision. And you have to be able to share it in a positive way. Congratulations again to all the graduating fifth-graders, and I hope you have a great summer!