

DR. BRIAN BROTSCHUL

Good afternoon Class of 2020 graduates.

On behalf of the Delran Township Board of Education and every single member of our team here with us today, watching online and those that have supported your growth and development from up close and afar throughout the years, I congratulate you for the completion of your high school academic program. This is a tremendous accomplishment and one that is deserving of one last full class moment for you.

Delran, as you know, is a town of tradition, a town of pride and a town that supports unity and togetherness in many ways. The District is no different, particularly for the senior class. Opening day tailgate; Homecoming and all of its accompaniments; Fall Play; Spring Musical; Spring Sports; Senior Trip; Prom and the simple reminder of the power of being a student at Delran High School.

It's likely none of you know this but you almost didn't make it to Disney. Leading into the trip there was certainly a great deal of uncertainty worldwide regarding public health. While New Jersey had yet to experience what was coming across Europe, it was certainly on my mind and the health, safety and wellness for you all was paramount.

I spoke with the Burlington County Department of Health; I spoke with similar folks at Disney; representatives from the Health Department in Florida and concluded that it was more likely that you would be safe than in harm's way.

I was still nervous – very nervous regarding the unknown to the point where I wasn't sleeping and it was all I thought about. I almost pulled the trip as other Districts did at the 11th hour. But, you went. With Mr. Finkle at the helm the entire staff travelled with you to Disney did an amazing job focusing on your own health, your wellbeing and ensuring you had a moment together. Shortly after you left, I was certain that you may not see each other again after this experience as a group in our school.

Later in the week I experienced the single most deflating experience of my professional career. I sat on a conference call with over 40 school

superintendents from Burlington County and was directed to close the District – at the time for over three weeks.

I sat in my chair after I hung up the phone and tried to capture what this meant for the school year because, again, it was my fear that you wouldn't see each other as a group for very long time. The gentlemen that closed the District represented the County Health Department and his authority was greater than mine on this particular issue. His order as non-negotiable.

I sat in my chair as district after district made their communications to their own particular townships. I was the last. To the point where people were reaching out to me to remind me everyone else had cancelled.

There was something pulling at me and I believe it was tradition. I believe it was the power in our students and I believe it was the fact that life as we all know it was about to change. I wanted to do everything in my power to stop the train of the virus; the train of the cancellations; the train of essentially taking student experiences away.

So, now you are here. Together. As a group. One last time. I suspect it's important to you – I have seen as much over six years with other classes and providing an experience that was noteworthy for the Class of 2020 was the single biggest driver of all of my work with the school administration.

The public health emergency offered us the opportunity to craft something great for you - to the best extent that we could.

We visited your homes and dropped off lawn signs; we visited your homes and held personalized graduation ceremonies and created what was the professionally rewarding experience of my entire career. We remained committed to the power of the group by having you all here this afternoon.

With great change – like a pandemic – comes great opportunity. Your life has officially changed. Embrace it. I'll leave you with a quote from Roy T. Bennett, author of *The Light in the Heart*.

“Instead of worrying about what you cannot control, shift your energy to what you can create.”

Over time all of us here at the District accepted what was in and out of our control but wanted to create great things for kids. Great things for the Class of 2020. I believe we met the challenge and I can only encourage you to meet the next steps in your life by shifting your energy to creating something productive, something lovely and something that contributes to others in some way.

Congratulation to the Class of 2020. You've earned this. Best of luck in your next steps.