

**2025 PHS COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS**  
**Jeremy Bowers | Piedmont Chief of Police**

Hello everyone! What a beautiful day to celebrate such an important milestone. How's everyone doing?

Before I go any further, I want to take a moment to recognize and thank the PUSD Board of Education, Superintendent Jennifer Hawn, Principal David Yoshihara, and the Parent Club selection committee for inviting me to speak today. I'm deeply grateful for the opportunity.

And now, let's give a huge round of applause to the parents and guardians, the teachers, coaches, counselors, band leaders, drama directors — everyone who supported and guided these graduates to this moment. Their dedication and love helped make today possible.

Now, I have three children of my own. Two of them have already walked across this field—one in 2021, the other just recently in 2024. So, to be perfectly honest, I thought the next (and likely final) time I'd be back at a Piedmont graduation would be in 2027, when my youngest is set to graduate... hopefully. Just kidding— she's a great student. Most days.

So yes, I've been here before—sitting up in the stands, squinting into the sun, thinking things like: "Wow, it's hot," "I hope the speaker is brief and brilliant," and of course, feeling that overwhelming mix of pride, excitement, and a little nervousness about what lay ahead for my kids as they closed one chapter and prepared to open another.

When Principal Yoshihara asked me to speak, I said yes—but with one request. I asked for the chance to sit down with some seniors and ask an important and not so simple of a question: What are your thoughts, feelings, goals, and concerns as you prepare to leave high school and begin the next phase of your life? I wanted to do this because no words I could offer would have meaning without first listening to you. You are the heart of today.

And the insights some of you shared with me were, in some cases, exactly what I expected. But in many others, they were surprising, thought-provoking, and deeply honest. While the views shared by the groups of students I spoke with may reflect the sentiments of many in the class, I also recognize that there are likely other perspectives that weren't represented. Each graduate's journey is unique, and I want to acknowledge and honor that diversity of experience.

Among the predictable views shared were the excitement for newfound freedom, the anticipation of college life, the desire to explore new passions, and the bittersweet feeling of leaving behind the familiar comforts of high school. The concerns echoed some of those feelings — the anxiety of the unknown, the pressure to succeed, the fear of making the wrong choices, and the sadness of parting ways with close friends.

But what truly resonated with me were the unpredictable responses, the insights that spoke to the unique character of this graduating class. Some expressed a profound desire to make a tangible difference in the world, whether by helping others, contributing to their communities, or engaging in causes and careers they feel passionate about. Others spoke with a quiet determination to pursue unconventional paths, to forge their own definitions of success, and to prioritize personal well-being.

One student shared a powerful metaphor: "High school was like walking a challenging but familiar path which has, to an extent, been paved for them. Now we're at a point where the path must now be paved by us." Others spoke eloquently about the importance of authenticity, exploration, and vulnerability and the courage to embrace failure as a necessary step towards growth.

Several articulated a deep appreciation for the teachers and mentors who had guided them, not just academically, but as young adults finding their way. And others spoke about importance of community, specifically the importance of being part of one, with all of its good points and areas for improvement, nevertheless community was important.

Graduates of Piedmont High School, your responses revealed a depth of self-awareness, a sense of purpose, and a refreshing blend of idealism and pragmatism. You are not just moving on; you are moving forward with intention.

I want to take a moment to acknowledge the elephant in the room, something we talked about -- Your next steps, whether they be to college, a gap year, the work force, the military, some mixture, or none of those, are happening at a time marked by extraordinary uncertainty and rapid transformation. The political climate is turbulent, social dynamics are shifting, the environment is under immense pressure, and technological advances are reshaping how we live, work, and connect. These changes are not abstract—they are happening in real time, and they are shaping the world you are inhabiting.

To add to that, many of you may soon find yourselves in places very different from the Bay Area. You may encounter perspectives, cultures, and values that challenge what you've known. That can feel disorienting. It's natural to have doubts, to feel apprehensive about what lies ahead.

But here's what I want to say to you: Uncertainty is not just a challenge, it's also an invitation. An invitation to be curious, to grow, to lead with empathy, and to adapt. And as you do, hold tightly to the values that define you. Let them be your compass, not your anchor, guiding you without limiting your ability to engage with others, particularly others with different views. Values rooted in integrity, compassion, equity, and respect—these are not to be sacrificed for the sake of fitting in or going along. They are the foundation on which you will build meaningful relationships and a purposeful life.

You've been educated in one of the most dynamic and forward-thinking regions in the country. You are equipped with the tools to think critically, to ask bold questions, and to build bridges where others see divides.

So -- as you enter this next chapter, don't back away from the unknown. Face it with courage to explore, humility to learn, and a steady commitment to growing, without losing sight of the values that define you.

The future is uncertain by nature, but that's your call to step forward, stay grounded in your values, and meet it with the resilience it requires. Carry forward the lessons you've learned here, both in and outside the classroom. And don't hesitate to lean on your support systems, your family, your friends, your teachers, as you navigate what comes next.

Give yourself room to stumble. Be willing to take detours. Redefine success as you go because life is rarely a straight path, and it's often in the unexpected twists and turns that you discover who you really are.

And finally, lead with kindness. Let empathy and service guide your actions. The world needs your talents, your perspective, and your heart. Use what you've learned not just to succeed—but to uplift others and build stronger communities.

Graduates, I stand before you today not just as the Chief of Police, but as a proud parent of Piedmont students, a neighbor, and someone who sees in each of you the strength, insight, and compassion that our future depends on.

Class of 2025—you did it! Celebrate this milestone with pride, carry your values with confidence, and step boldly into the future you will help shape. The world is waiting—and I, for one, can't wait to see what you'll do with it.