Welcome class of 2023. I want to start off by saying it is nothing short of surreal to be standing here right now, apparently as a senior, talking to all of you ninth graders. It feels like just yesterday I was sitting in your seats.

It may not seem like it now, but these next four years will be some of the most formative years of your life. Yes, intellectually, as you’re taking new classes. And yes, physically, because in four years you’ll definitely look back at your freshman photos in awe, and maybe even confusion. But the main form of change is an internal one, and I challenge you to embrace this.

Now, this isn’t to say you become a completely different person by the time you graduate. But throughout your years here, you experience success, failure, happiness, sadness, confidence, doubt, and everything in between. You will make friends, lose friends, grow to hate certain subjects, and grow to love others. I spent a large part of my time here trying to stick to one particular version of myself because I was afraid of changing. This idea of my authentic self was predicated on things I had experience with, or I thought I was good at, like computer science or visual art. I felt that I had to stick with my thing in order to make a name for myself, because anything short of success wasn’t an option. But what I’ve learned in the past year, and am continuing to learn, is that my mindset was preventing me from truly understanding myself and what I was passionate about. It prevented me from trying things out just to see if I enjoyed them, because of my fear of being less than adequate. The truth is, this is the exact reason why you should try new things. Sit next to someone you’ve never talked to before. Join a club you have no idea about. Any steps you take to challenge yourself is a step in the right direction.

I challenge all of you to embrace the parts of yourself, and others, that deviate. I hope you all have a great year full of growth and learn to appreciate every aspect of yourselves over the next four years.