

Principal Swanson
Remarks at Open House
September 26, 2019

Good evening, parents, and thank you for coming out tonight for our annual Open House. My name is Rick Swanson, and I'm the principal here at Hingham High School. On behalf of the entire faculty and staff, it's my pleasure to welcome you to HHS for what we hope will be an informative evening.

During the next hour and 45 minutes, you'll have an opportunity to go through your child's entire schedule, all seven periods, A Block through G Block. You'll get to meet all of their teachers, and you'll learn more about the wide variety of courses they're taking this year. The schedule is abbreviated, so every class will meet for ten minutes, with four minutes of passing time between periods. Our program tonight is not designed as an opportunity for individual conferences but rather as a chance for you to meet the teachers and learn more about the curriculum, class materials, and course expectations. Any parents who wish to meet individually to discuss issues pertinent to their own child should contact the teacher directly, ideally by email, to schedule an appointment. Tonight, the real

focus is on highlighting the HHS experience as a whole and giving all of you a sense of what it feels like to go through a typical school day, engaging with a robust curriculum and interacting with members of our outstanding faculty.

Moving through the schedule and hearing from our teachers will represent the highlight of the evening for all of you, but before we move on to that part of the program, I'd like to first borrow a few minutes of your time to share some thoughts of my own and highlight several items of importance. For those of you who have attended an Open House here in the past, you'll remember that these remarks from the principal have typically been delivered live in the auditorium. This year, for the first time, we decided to try a pre-recorded message instead. The reasons are two-fold: first, as our enrollment continues to grow, we're recognizing that our 600-seat auditorium simply cannot accommodate a presentation for all the parents who attend our Open House; as a matter of fact, our student body this year exceeds 1300 for the first time in many, many years. I think it's fair to say that we would probably need several auditoriums to fit all of you who are here tonight. Our second reason is this: Since you're already in your son or daughter's A Block class, you will not have to go anywhere

when I'm done with these remarks. This is going to save all of us some time, since you won't be getting lost. Or, at least, you'll now be getting lost one fewer time than you would have, otherwise. As a result, we'll be finished tonight at 8:48 PM rather than at 9 PM, as in years past. And given the kind of traffic you're likely to face at the end of the night, every little bit will help.

Although we're changing the method of delivering tonight's opening remarks, I'd like to preserve the recent tradition of offering you a "Top Ten" list of things to know as we start the school year. [Insert Slide] The order of the items should not be viewed as an indicator of their relative importance, since I think they're all equally significant, but I hope the list, taken collectively, will help you to gain a sense of what's at the front of our thinking these days at HHS.

I'll start with an item that has garnered a great deal of attention, and rightfully so, over the past year. As you surely know, our district recently welcomed a new superintendent of schools, Dr. Paul Austin, who began work in July. [Insert Slide - #10] The transition is bittersweet, since it means saying goodbye to a well-loved leader who had served Hingham Public Schools for more than a half century. But we are thrilled to welcome Dr.

Austin, and we're looking forward to an exciting new chapter in the history of our school district. He is already establishing a reputation as a responsive, thoughtful and energetic leader who possesses a clear vision for the future of our schools. [Insert Slide] Essential to that vision is a renewed emphasis on issues of equity and inclusion. We all look forward to working with Dr. Austin on those all-important issues matters of justice. Nothing matters more.

Just as our school district is experiencing a watershed moment of sorts with this change in leadership, our students inevitably get that sort of “re-set” moment with the start of every new school year. [Insert Slide - #9] Both in terms of academic and extracurricular pursuits, the opportunities for learning and growth are truly endless. I'd like to call particular attention to the more-than fifty clubs available to students here. The photograph you see on this slide was taken at the “Clubs and Activities Fair” at our freshman orientation a few weeks ago, and I think it captures some of the energy that surrounds extracurricular life at HHS. Parents, I hope you'll encourage your sons and daughters to take full advantage of opportunities that exist outside the classroom. And if they're looking to get more involved, send them to the brand-new “All Clubs” bulletin board in the

cafeteria, which lists club officers and advisors, along with dates for meetings and other events. You can check that board out, yourself, if you get a break in between classes tonight.

HHS clubs have often drawn financial support from our PTO [Insert Slide - #8] but that's just one of many ways the PTO enriches the life of our school. They provide grants for innovative classroom projects, thereby helping to accelerate academic achievement for our students; they regularly deliver meals to our teachers, as they did tonight, thereby helping to boost morale and improve our school climate; they organize events like Senior Night that deliver unforgettable memories for our students, all while ensuring that they stay safe; they even work hard to beautify our grounds, helping to provide an outward reminder of our inward commitment to excellence. Our PTO's contributions to HHS are endless. Please heed their call for dues and join in the great work they're doing.

Hingham schools are blessed with an incredible degree of community support, and not only from the PTO. [Insert Slide - #7] Indeed, it's hard to imagine what life at HHS would look like without the support of the Hingham Education Foundation, the Hingham Sports Partnership, and the Hingham Music Parents Association. All of them make enormous

contributions to our programs, and they all deserve your support. These organizations all demonstrate a spirit of genuine stewardship, and they all make a positive difference in this community. I hope you'll join them in that endeavor.

Besides supporting us in those ways, I also hope you'll just come out to have a good time with us. I can think of no better way than by attending the annual Fall Musical. [Insert Slide - #6] This year, for the first time ever, it's "Mamma Mia," and it's sure to be amazing. Mark your calendars, and get your tickets early. I look forward to seeing you there.

Now that we're into the fourth week of school, academic rigors are no doubt creating some degree of stress for students. Please know that HHS works hard to provide a variety of supports for students, not only in the classroom, where teachers are available to offer extra help, but also in our counseling office, where school counselors and adjustment counselors provide an extra layer of support. [Insert Slide - #5] Our library is open later than ever before (until 4:30 every afternoon) and it also hosts a "Homework Club" that features free peer tutoring every Monday night at 6:30. Parents: Please encourage your children to take full advantage of these supports.

As students look for ways to cope with multiple sources of stress, academic and otherwise, we all want them to do so in ways that are healthy and productive. Toward that end, all of us, educators and parents alike, *must* work together in partnership. And we must keep our eyes wide open. One way to do that is to look at the data contained in the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. [Insert Slide - #4] The survey is administered annually to all HHS students in grades nine and eleven, and its findings offer a clear glimpse into the life of teenagers in this community. I urge you to look for it on our website and to reflect on what it has to tell us.

While you're online, you might also want to take a look at the results of the 2019 MCAS exams. [Insert Next Slide] The results were just released today, and they can be found on the website of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. And while standardized test scores provide just one indication of a school's success, I think you'll find those scores to be a source of pride for our community.

Throughout the year ahead, I hope you'll stay apprised of what's happening at HHS. The best way to do so is, first, to sign up for the weekly PTO newsletter and, second, to visit our website regularly. [Insert Slide -

#3] On the website, you'll find all daily announcements, links to teacher web pages, messages from the principal, and a link to the Aspen portal, where you can check, if necessary, on attendance and academic progress. I say "if necessary" because our shared hope is that your children will become increasingly independent, thus requiring less and less direct supervision.

When you're on the website, you'll also see a link to a Twitter account [Insert Slide - #2] that I use to provide daily updates on school events. I envision this Twitter feed as a window into the life of our school. I hope you'll consider following, since it offers one more way for you, as parents, to stay connected with what's happening here each and every day.

Finally, some of you may have heard that Hingham High School was recently named the winner of a prestigious award given out annually by the Boston Globe. [Insert Slide - #1] The Ames Award goes each year to the school in our division with the highest combined winning percentage in all varsity sports. Hingham had come close a few times in the past but we had never won it. Until now, that is. Last year, not only did HHS compile the best winning percentage of any school in our division, but we also collected more victories than any other high school in Massachusetts. This

accomplishment owes to the combined efforts of so many coaches, and so many student-athletes. Given that 78 percent of our students participated in at least one sport last year, a very large number of them played a direct role in HHS winning this award. But, in a real way, I think we can *all* claim a piece of the Ames Award. That's because the Ames Award recognizes a commitment to excellence. It can be claimed only by a school where students learn to strive, where they learn to believe in what they might become, and where they are supported in that endeavor not only by loving parents but also by talented teachers. You'll see those things on display tonight because that's the kind of school we're continuing to build here.

Thank you for helping us to do just that. Parents: You are taking up your role in this enterprise by coming here tonight and by staying engaged with the life of this high school. I hope you'll return again and again [Insert Next Slide], perhaps later this week, when HHS will again serve as a community hub under Friday Night Lights. Whether it's for that game, a concert, a play, a PTO meeting, or all of the above, remember that you're welcome here, and that we're counting on you as essential partners in the work we do.

A Block begins now [Insert Final Slide]. Thanks again for being here,
and have a great night!