

PKYPTO School Safety Meeting

March 8, 2018



Developmental Research School
at the University of Florida

Student Speeches

Samuel J. Ray – Student Body President – Class of 2018

Often in life it seems that it is far easier to alienate yourself from that which is different—to bury yourself in a coffin of familiarity rather than to allow beliefs, opinions, or ideas that run counter to our own to filter through. To scapegoat that which is foreign, and point fingers at that which is different from oneself. No one is completely innocent of doing this, it's a universal human trait, but that doesn't make it acceptable.

I like to brag about us; about P.K. Yonge. Whenever we play a school in any sport, no matter how good they are, I'm always the first to send a text to their Student Body President and let them know that they're about to hold an "L." And while that doesn't always work out as I'd hope, I always make sure that I do, because here at P.K., we're just a little different from their high schools. Here, we can pretty much identify everyone in our class by face or name. We've got teachers who do handstands in class and others who sing to us about doing our ROPES, and students who are every bit as eccentric to match. See that's what makes us special; what makes us unique is our sense of community—of family. And while family doesn't always get along, and we most definitely don't I'm sure we can agree, it's important to bear in mind that family always looks out for one another. We respect our differences rather than letting them divide us, and we show love to one another rather than hatred. We're always quick to condemn bullying, or treating others unfairly, so it's about time that we put those words into action. If you know bullying is occurring, don't stand idly by. Go to a teacher or administrator and let it be heard. Don't empower wrongdoing with inaction, and you yourself can the effort to be inclusive rather than exclusive.

There's a Jamaican proverb, roughly translated it is: "kindness is the hardest gift to give away; because it somehow always finds its way back to you." Reach out to those around you with a little bit of kindness, and I'm sure it will be returned. Invite the kid who usually sits by himself at lunch to eat with you once, they're probably a lot cooler than you'd think. Partner up with someone other than your best friend for an assignment in class. Smile at people as you walk by them in the halls, it's a lot less awkward than half nodding at them anyway. You don't have to wait a single moment before you can make the world, and our school, a better place. Begin today, so that we won't have to regret tomorrow.

Thank you.

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Emily Bloom – Class of 2019

Hey guys, I'm Emily and this is my third year at P.K. as a junior. Those of you that know me, probably know I'm terrified up here. I can do a play up here no problem, but I can't act right now; this isn't a scripted puppet on stage kind of set up. I'm here to talk to the student body.

I'm trying to reach out, sympathize, and realize everyone in here from all spectrums of cultures, races, and gender. And maybe an iridescent, white girl on stage isn't the most reassuring, right? Who am I to stand up here and try to 'sue you? Well, I am a student here at P.K. Yonge and the best friend of survivor at Marjory Stoneman Douglas.

The shooting that happened at Marjory Stoneman Douglas was one of the most vile and disgusting things that could ever happen in a high school. And along with the traumatized survivors who can't stomach to leave their rooms, the students getting bulldozed down by politicians and adults who can't condone change, and the 17 beautiful high schoolers that died for us to realize we are doing something totally wrong, one good thing has happened: this shooting has us woke. Administrators and teachers at schools around the country are doubling down on the students who are potential threats. They are double checking and triple checking student records, monitoring social media, and making sure they know their students. And what is our administration doing?

The very same thing. I and my friends were terrified that P.K. Yonge Developmental Research School would end up in the same history lesson, and I can say after marching my way up to Dr. Geiger's office: our administration is looking out for us. Heck, they're scared too. They have kids here, friends here, us here too. They don't want to be the administration that missed something. But it's not all about them. We are culpable for what happens at our school too. We create the culture of P.K. We have to resist the urge to hate. The thing about man is that we're so polarized. It's so easy for us to be them vs us, to turn into parties, into cults, and into hate. It's more than reasonable to be scared right now, but what makes us truly human is understanding and empathy.

We can't battle hate with hate. There are going to be people who hate us for our skin color, our beliefs, and our sexual orientation, but we won't win by hating them back. Like our girl, Michelle Obama, said: "When they go low, we go high." So yes, now that we are woke, we have to be careful that we aren't paranoid.

Being woke does not mean we can choose hate first. Being woke means we keep our eyes open. Being woke means that we make sure no man or woman is left behind in the hole that is high school social life. Being woke means we love before we fear. Or else we're just repeating history.

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Alfredo Ortiz – Class of 2019

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak before you. You may already know that the impact of social media in this day and age is huge. It has served as a hub for, lacking a better word, revolution. Examples of this can be as positive as the #MeToo movement, but also as destructive as cases of systematic bullying that lead to terrible consequences. With the tragedy in Parkland, it is understandable that people are skeptical and afraid. It is understandable that people are resorting to online means as a way to express their fears. It is understandable that people want to protect themselves now more than ever. In our democracy, justice is blind to age, and so I salute the early involvement of the people across this country. For this very reason, it is also important to respect the opinions and differences of others.

However, it is important to be careful with what we get involved in. Like I said before, some movements can be destructive instead of constructive. This isn't because the intention is bad, but because we may be acting out of fear. You should feel safe to go to school. You should feel safe about going to talk to the administration when you feel that you are afraid. When you feel cornered, or when you feel targeted, brushed aside, and intimidated, you should need to remember that the administration is here to help. They know what is best for both you and whoever else may be affected. What I would like to say is that the worst thing you can do to yourself and others is do nothing. Don't be afraid to speak up.

Once again, thank you.