

C.M. RUSSELL HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION
Sunday, May 27, 2018, 7:00 p.m.

Thank you, Mr. Parsons, for confirming the Class of 2018. Congratulations to you and your staff on a fine school year with many things to celebrate including this commencement.

Graduates, staff, and all of our guests here this evening, I am honored to be here tonight as the Superintendent of Great Falls Public Schools to not only present this class but also to applaud this Class of 2018 for its many accomplishments. Those accomplishments as well as information about their differentiated diplomas and the colors of the staff regalia have been included on the insert in your program. Please know that the list is just a sample of the many, many contributions of this fine group.

As you review the accomplishments of this class, I hope you feel the same sense of pride that I do. There were several times throughout this year that I sat in awe of these students. I watched as they won state team championships in boys' basketball and golf, and an individual state championship in cross country. I watched them entertain crowds on the stage in Bill Williamson Hall. I watched them excel in their classrooms and win award after award at state student organization conferences. I have watched them give blood and give money to causes they care about. I have a yearbook on my desk that chronicles this year as these students "lived it up" and "kicked it up" from homecoming to this very moment. This class has left its mark on our community and our future.

And now speaking specifically to you Graduates: I am confident in the education you have received in Great Falls Public Schools. I am confident that your diploma matters. That it opens doors for you. That it provides a pathway to success. This graduation ceremony, as long and drawn out as it might seem to be, should take a bit of time because it is the culmination of an entire body of work: 13 years of educational opportunity for you, our students. 13 years of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and learning...all with today's ceremony of celebration in mind.

I'm sure you are all excited for tomorrow. As you pursue your next goals in life, some of you are staying in your hometown and some of you are moving on and/or moving away. I look forward to watching those of you who stay as you continue to make our community great and I look forward to welcoming those who leave as you come back for summer vacations, holiday breaks and eventually class reunions as I know you will have stories to tell and adventures to share. And I hope you DO come back. I hope you come back to a robust Great Falls community. I hope you come back to a community that makes you proud of your roots.

Speaking of roots Graduates, your yearbook is titled "From the Ground Up". You have watched a new era of CMR facilities take root and be built from the ground up over the course of your senior year. You witnessed a historic moment in Great Falls when you were juniors, with the passage of the bond levy in October, 2016. A significant portion of that money is being spent on what is now your alma mater.

As you watched that construction take place, I'm sure you noticed that the new multipurpose space and the new STEM Center didn't just pop up overnight and that the work wasn't done by just one person. It has been a process done by a crew of workers. Building something worthwhile takes time and a team.

Like the new buildings, your success, measured by the diploma you are about to receive, was a 13-year process supported by a team of people. Each of you can name the people who provided the wind beneath your wings: your parents, your teachers, your administrators, your friends and your family...the people who have supported you on this challenging journey.

We also need to recognize and thank our local taxpayers, as they provide public funds for our public schools. We thank them for the buildings over our heads and for the learning that takes place inside them. Students and staff, please stand and applaud all of the people, including local taxpayers, for being part of the team that got you here today. (APPLAUSE)

Your class motto, a quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson, says, “Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.” Your diploma is what allows you to take your next steps, to head down your path or trail wherever it may lead. Good luck to each one of you! I applaud you, commend you and congratulate you. (CLAP)

And now...

With the power vested in me by the state of Montana and the Trustees of the Great Falls Public Schools, I hereby declare to all of you that these ladies and gentlemen, who sit before you this evening, have fulfilled all the requirements of the State of Montana, the Montana Board of Public Education, and the Board of Trustees of the Great Falls Public Schools. And, with the affirmation of their principal, Kerry Parsons, I hereby attest that they DO FULLY QUALIFY for the high school graduation diploma from Charles M. Russell High School.

Guests, colleagues and trustees,

I present to you the 2018 graduates of C. M. Russell High School. It is now time to award their diplomas!