



**2017 Albany High School Graduation  
Speech by Valedictorian Jacob Citone  
June 25, 2017**

Good afternoon, Dr. Wilkins, the Board of Education, administrators, esteemed guests, faculty and staff, friends and families, and fellow graduates.

It is an honor to be standing before you all today. And it is a distinct honor to be delivering this address as a member of the first class celebrating graduation at the Times Union Center!

But beyond today's venue, we are gathered to celebrate what is the first true milestone in our adult lives. And there is a *lot* to be celebrating. I'd like to highlight a fraction of our class's distinctive accomplishments, as well as Albany High School's unrivaled academic and extracurricular offerings:

Hundreds of students have benefitted from Apex Learning, a unique, online, credit recovery program allowing students to earn back course credit that has contributed to improved academic achievement.

Albany High continues to remain one of only five high schools in the Capital Region to offer the internationally recognized International Baccalaureate program, in addition to a remarkable 21 Advanced Placement courses.

The Junior ROTC drill team was nominated in its first year to compete in nationals.

The Theatre Ensemble's production of "Oliver!" earned six nominations in the regional High School Musical Theatre Awards.

Select Choir earned a "gold with distinction" rating at the NYSSMA Choral Festival, performing at the highest degree of complexity. At the NYSSMA Major Ensemble Festival, both the Wind Ensemble and Symphonic Band captured silver ratings.

Albany High students and faculty donated a record amount of life-saving blood to the local American Red Cross this year.

The environmental science program raised thousands of dollars in its Charity Water Project for communities in need of clean water. And we now have an expansive, organic garden and outdoor classroom, known as Falcon Farms.

We had record numbers of students participate in sports and earn scholar-athlete recognition this year. The sprint relay team shattered decade long records and headed to nationals! We celebrated the completion of our new pool. And this past fall, the football team finished 5-4, their first championship season in 12 years!

While this is by no means an all-inclusive list of the plethora of commendable achievements, it embodies the true Albany High School: a strong community providing a meaningful, multicultural experience where everyone can strive to reach their full potential. I am humbled by the amount of talent I see in the class of 2017, and thankful to have been a part of it. I am proud to be a Falcon. And I will *always* be proud to be a Falcon.

To all of our administrators, teachers, faculty, guidance counselors, coaches, mentors, and families: our success is your success. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to each and every one of you. We thank our teachers for inspiring us, challenging us, empowering us, and giving us the tools to succeed. And we most importantly thank our families for always being there for us and supporting us in our endeavors.

Whether we move on to college, the workforce, or the armed forces, we will face uncertainty in the future. But that future is in the hands of our generation. We will be forced to confront structural inequities and injustice in our lives, whether it be in the form of corruption, economic inequality, social injustice, racial injustice, or environmental injustice. I implore you to think big, think bold, stand up, and speak truth to power. It takes guts to challenge the system, and courage to stand upon one's convictions. But despite whatever forces out there try to shut us down, we have shown that we are ready to take on the status quo. By continuing to embody Albany's motto, *assiduity*, defined as *a great and constant attention*, we can set out to accomplish anything.

Congratulations Class of 2017. I wish you all the best of luck.

Thank you.