

Dr. McGee's Convocation Address 2012

August 20, 2012

Convocation is our ceremony that marks the beginning of the academic year as both a celebration and affirmation of who we are and what we are here to do. We come together as a community distinguished by a bold mission that is our calling—"to ignite and nurture creative, ethical, scientific minds that ..." <Student Response>

Convocation is a time to resolve to make this year exceptionally excellent for our community and for the students and teachers we will reach well beyond the borders of our campus. This year is especially important because last year we celebrated our first twenty-five years, and now we begin the next quarter century. It is a time to strive for excellence in pursuit of our mission because it matters deeply not just to us, but to our state, our country and our world.

However, it is one thing to talk about our mission and quite another to act upon it. So I have two questions for you:

1. What will be our community's evidence of excellence?
2. How are you as an individual going to contribute to our community?

In this day and age excellence can be elusive. In his book, *That Used to Be Us*, Thomas Friedman describes America's slow descent into mediocrity and adequacy in his book "That Used to Be Us." Yet there are bright spots ... for example on August 10th – Curiosity landed on Mars and the U.S. womens 4 x 100 won an Olympic gold medal and set a new world record. As disparate as these events were, they share some commonalities. They were united by fierce passion, exceptional dedication,

remarkable talent, extraordinary teamwork and a community of believers.

Likewise education in America has become more about meeting minimum standards than excelling. More about satisfactory than superior. Yet there are bright spots ... and IMSA is one of the brightest. We must continue to be that bright beacon. IMSA must not be just a good school, not just a great school but truly the world's leading teaching and learning laboratory for imagination and inquiry. In this laboratory we will need to produce evidence of excellence for others to emulate.

Yes, excellence is elusive but we will succeed. How do I know ... I know because of our diversity. Look around. IMSA is so diverse but we are united in our mission and our beliefs among them my personal favorite: "diverse

perspectives enrich understanding and inspire discovery and creativity.”

I know we will excel because of our sophomores, the phenomenal class of 2015. Sophomores please stand – I know a few of you, and before you graduate from IMSA, I will know all of you. I intend to have you ALL graduate. We will work our hardest to make sure every one of you walks across that stage, but we cannot do it all. We can support you, but you have to engage – not just in concepts you learn but also with the people of this incredible community. You will succeed to extent you pursue the extraordinary opportunities only IMSA can offer.

I know we will excel because of our juniors, the extraordinary class of 2014. Juniors – we all know that the academic demands of junior year are the most

challenging, so get to work. Seriously, junior year is an important year in developing your identity and personal mission. It's a time of extraordinary transition when you will be making decisions that will shape your life. It's a time to seek answers and formulate questions and to grow mentally, socially and physically strong and resilient. I have faith that you will not just succeed but excel.

I know we will excel because of our seniors, the exemplary class of 2013. Seniors – there is more to life than college applications. Not much more. You are our leaders, and I expect you to lead wisely and well by serving our community, connecting with the 14s and 15s. As a reminder, the start of the second semester is not your graduation day. I expect and I challenge you to lead, to learn, to engage and to connect throughout the entire year by demonstrating that you are expert learners, that you not

only have acquired deep conceptual understanding but are applying it toward achieving our mission.

I know we will excel because of an exceptional staff and outstanding faculty who devote themselves to preparing you to be fierce, passionate learners throughout your lives; to have the character, confidence, courage, creativity, communication capability and cognitive competence to tackle society's toughest problems; to excel at jobs and in fields that may not even exist today, and to have a lifelong commitment to "advancing the human condition."

Finally, to our collective community ... our mission is more about words on a wall; it is a call to action.

Likewise, it is one thing to talk about excellence and quite another to demonstrate excellence. Excellence requires the engagement, commitment and support of an entire network for a mission that matters. Let us excel at

teaching and learning, at being strong leaders and thoughtful followers, at being passionate and compassionate, at showing humility and kindness, and at igniting and nurturing.

In closing, why is evidence of excellence important?

Because today we begin writing the story of IMSA's second quarter century. And as with any story, the first chapter is the most important. Will it be so extraordinary that people will want to read more or so ordinary that it will be shelved. Will it be so terrific that people will share it worldwide or so mundane it will gather dust at the bedside. Knowing this community and knowing each of you, I am certain that we can and we will make this opening chapter one of excellence for the ages. So let's get to it!