



Jersey Community High School Salutes Class Of 2020 In Long-Awaited Graduation Ceremony

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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JERSEYVILLE - The Class of 2020 at Jersey Community High School was honored in a long-awaited graduation ceremony held Saturday evening at the school's football stadium, a ceremony that was delayed because of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The commencement exercises observed all rules of mask-wearing and social distancing due to the pandemic. In his speech, JCHS Principal Cory Breden saluted the graduates, mentioning that he had known many of them since entering fourth grade when he was principal at Illini Middle School, and had the honor of watching them grow into wonderful men and women.

"As I told our graduates when I met with them at the middle school, I told them our goal this evening was to honor them," Breden said, "by allowing them to have their moment, walking across this stage. It has been a long time coming. They have both earned it, and they deserve it. This is a ceremony like none before, and hopefully, unlike any from here on out. On Monday, March 16, this group of graduates walked out of JCHS for the last time. At the time, none of us could have imagined that it would be the last day of what we call In-person schooling for the 2019-20 school year. But as the days and weeks passed by, more and more of what makes high school a great experience was lost. The spring musical, spring sports, the prom, honors banquet, silver medallion, banquets and graduation, just to name a few. But most importantly, the final days of being a

JCHS senior slipped by. I'm sorry that you had to experience this, and I also would like to apologize for the mistakes I made along the way.

"I would also like to thank the graduates for their flexibility and understanding over the last several months," Breden continued. "I know that it has been a very difficult time. We have been dealing with a lot of uncertainty, and watching how all of you have coped with this has truly helped me. I also would like to thank you for allowing me to watch you grow. For many of you sitting here today, we first met when many of you came to the middle school in fourth grade. Not many are fortunate as I am to get to watch a group grow from 10 years old to the young men and women that are here before us today. And that's a big reason why this graduation was so important. Many of us have been taught to finish what we start. If we weren't able to have this graduation ceremony, I felt like we wouldn't have been able to finish what we started all those years ago.

"While this will not make up for all that was lost," Breden concluded, "we do hope that this helps a little."

Breden also thanked the parents, guardians and caregivers of the Class of 2020 for being involved throughout the process of their children's education, thanking them for their patience and flexibility as well.

Following the introduction of Jersey Community Unit District 100 superintendent Brad Tuttle and the members of the Board of Education, followed by the recognition of departmental awards, a salute to graduates who will be entering the military following their graduation, and honors graduates, Grant Morgen delivered the senior speech, in which he emphasized the Class of 2020's resilience in the face of adversity.

"I bet a lot of us are wondering how we ended up here, instead of in a gym, or on a field. A field where many great games have been played," Morgen said. "But nonetheless, it's still not what we were anticipating. For many generations, an individual senior year was virtually the same. Sure, there were little nuances that made each year unique in its own way, but by and large, each senior year followed a pattern. A cycle that lasted for decades, and was never broken or changed. Until now. Clearly, this isn't the senior year we all wanted. We all had this picturesque vision in our head. I think we all thought that this was going to be our year. The year where we were all going to have amazing experiences and memories. However, we only made about 75 percent of the way there. But that's not bad, because that's over half, so I'm not complaining. So yes, this year didn't go according to our plan, and in fact, it greatly derailed. However, I think that an event like this perfectly conveys the kind of generation we're going to be."

Morgen said every generation is defined by many events, songs, movies and other criteria, and their perception of the world is defined by many events. The class was born

when the country was reeling from the September 11 terrorist attacks, followed by the Great Recession of 2008, and currently stands in the midst of the 2020 events such as recessions, wars, pandemics and other national tragedies. Each event has altered the course of history and the way the world functions and operates.

"We have faced adversity in every single part of our lives," Morgen said. "Although we have suffered from egregious events, although our class has faced great misfortune this year, life is not ending. Instead of simply relenting and giving in, our class is going to prosper. Our class is going to persevere, and our class is going to go above and beyond, because we have to. In this ever changing world, life seems hopeless. It appears to be irreparably damaged. But it's not. Our class is going to shock the world, because of our tenacious and industrious attitude. An attitude that doesn't relent at the sight of struggle, An attitude that instead decided to vigorously fight for what we believe in. Our class is so incredibly talented. We will be made up of teachers, nurses, engineers, plumbers, technicians, scientists, farmers, mechanics, servicemen and women, lawyers, and maybe even a president.

"Every single member of our class is going to do something remarkable," Morgen continued. "And with this remarkability, we're going to positively impact the world, and in a plethora of ways. We're going to change it for the better. We're going to heal long injured wounds, and we're going to ensure that crisis will not be the end of us. The times are a-changing, and our class is going to utilize this change to our advantage."

Morgen also thanked the teachers, janitors and lunch room workers for helping the school function, and expressed his appreciation of their efforts. He also left his class with one more message.

"The times are a-changing," Morgen said. "So let's embrace this change, and change the world."

The Class of 2020 was then introduced and presented with their diplomas, after which Breden thanked the class for the accomplishments and wished them the best in their future endeavors.

"It has been an honor to be your principal," Breden said, "and I thank you for allowing me to be a part of this journey. Good luck, and God bless you."

[Charles Thomas also contributed to this story.](#)