

Dear Colina Parents,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you this morning. When the task of addressing a group of parents was first proposed to me, I admit that I was terrified as words and thoughts eschewed me. As I searched my mind frenetically for ideas, I realized a fundamental aspect of my life – that change was the most assured constant I had ever befriended.

Born in the quiet and then indolent city of Bangalore, India, into a lower middle class family, expectations were low and opportunities even lower. My parents went to work before I arose and returned well after bed-time. Regardless of our situation, I carved a name for myself even before I learned how to speak – Wherever I went, titles as esteemed as “neighborhood monstrosity” and “kindergarten enemy #1” were conferred upon me as parents and their children retreated before the onslaught of voice. So powerful and sonorous were my vocal cords that my grandparents resorted to strange habits to keep me quiet, one which included rubber bands.

Fatigued by my adventurous excursions into the neighborhood and unable to reign in my energy, my grandparents sent me to the local kindergarten at the age of 3 and ½, where promises of free chocolate milk at the end of the day were expected to keep my energies in check. My mother always drilled and grilled me on my multiplication tables and arithmetic rules whenever she returned home from the clinic and my father often put me to sleep again by showing colorful pictures of the heavens above or with a simple smack. Ambitious to explore the world, my father, mother, and I left India in the spring of 1996 for Singapore.

Having spent our savings on the plane tickets, we arrived in Changi International Airport awash with dreams but with little cash. The first three years in Singapore were the most difficult years of my life. I was forced to go through first grade again having failed my preliminary exams in Chinese and Tamil. I struggled through those years with

financial difficulties at home, social difficulties at school, and language difficulties in the country. Our fortunes improved when I entered fourth grade and we spent much of our savings traveling the Western Pacific. As I observed and sampled the cultures from Tokyo to Kuala Lumpur to Jakarta to Sydney, I developed a profound affection not only for human ingenuity but also for the world. When I boarded the flight to Los Angeles in the winter of 2000, I hoped that my new adventure would not be a repeat of the past.

To brush up my English before my interview with Mr. Kane, I started reading the newspapers. What I acquired was more than just a few American catch-phrases and vernacular, instead I walked away with a global mindset and a yearning to better understand the world and its intricacies with which my life had become so inexorably intertwined. In retrospect, I owe my current good fortune not to any particular class but rather to the creative and liberal spirit of the American education system and the people who have poured their lives into molding it.

The world that you knew, that I know, and that which your children will come to know are, in my opinion, mutually exclusive. Before the advancement of modern communications, regions and people alike were isolated and as such the comparison and competition was the neighboring town. Today in the electronically intertwined world, we compete not only with those in the neighboring cities but also with those across the world. With the dawn of the information age, splashes of ingenuity and entrepreneurship are penetrating what Joseph Conrad once characterized as the “darkest places on earth.” Today, in a world where services and goods are being traded with increasing efficiency and speed, one cannot help but wonder – what will happen to my future and that of my children. In what New York Times author and columnist, Thomas Friedman, refers to as the “flat world,” there are no such things as American jobs or industries – there are merely jobs which will go to those who are best suited and equipped. So how does one succeed in the global world. The answer to that question lies in this room.

Today, education is much more than academic strengths. Gone are the days when simple academic and athletic credentials were enough to guarantee a place at Stanford or UCLA. Colleges and Employers today value those who are socially adept and able to network and communicate effectively, for such talents can never be outsourced or exhausted. Good communication skills evolve from broad mindsets and broad mindsets can only be cultivated by tapping into the extensive knowledge databases. A simple habit such as spending fifteen minutes browsing the newspaper often cultivates intellectual curiosity as well as a healthy awareness of the environment around you. A successful student and adult in the information era is not just one who is intelligent but also able to adapt quickly and flexibly to any circumstance.

A field trip to LACMA or the Getty Museum or other houses of international culture are some ways of exposing students to the world around them. I believe that all children are born with what the 18th century English philosopher John Locke termed as “tabula rasa” or blank mind. Exposing young minds to the world, its diversity and its problems, often instills and promulgates the most powerful of all human emotions – curiosity. Curiosity cultivates passion and passion engenders curiosity. That is where the role of teacher becomes most important. The teachers here at Colina not only sponsored and supported my curiosity in Science but ignited other tangents into Philosophy, History, Art, Music, and Literature. I remember the maelstroms of thought which the Colina history textbooks provoked in my mind.

Computers have, without a doubt, proven that they can process algorithms and conduct analyses more efficaciously and accurately than the human brain yet no computer can match the creative power of our mind. It was creativity that authored *Romeo & Juliet*. It was creativity that inspired Raphael to paint his *School of Athens* and it was creativity that inspired the Wright brothers to build the *Kitty Hawk*.

In order to reinvigorate today's youths about innovation and creative thinking, I believe it is necessary to teach them to ask the right questions and stimulate their inner curiosity. I was never happy using a machine or a tool unless I completely understood how it works and why it works that way.

I conclude this morning with a quality I feel should not be excluded from the list aforementioned. I believe that it is crucial for students and adults to cultivate empathy rather than sympathy. Empathy motivates you to apply your talents to improve another's life. I believe that there is more to life than material or even intellectual affluence – we are remembered for our deeds and how we reached out and made a continued effort to change the world around us, not for our intelligence or financial success. The most important capital to building a successful individual is human capital – or the ability to interact with anyone, anywhere, whether in Boston, Beijing, or Bombay. The phrase “I do not care” should be eliminated from each and every student's lexicon; because as students in the information and global era, we have to care about everything; otherwise we shall forever be manacled by those fetters of ignorance and ultimately become dissatisfied not only with the world but also with ourselves.

Thank you once again for this opportunity to share my thoughts with you. I offer my sincere thanks to Ms. Sandra Goodman and Ms. Kathleen Woodward for having made this opportunity possible. I can answer any questions at this point.