

Installation Remarks

Suzanne Buck:

It is my honor and pleasure to accept this from you on behalf of the Board of Trustees and lead Western Reserve Academy with excellence, integrity, and compassion.

[Presentation of Cloak by WRA Board of Trustees Co-Presidents Andrew Midler '79 and Tim Warner '69. *"As a special symbol of today's ceremony, we are pleased to present you with a gift on behalf of the entire community. Suzanne, you have always put students first, and your school spirit is evident (allegedly there was a very loud cheer coming from Pierce House last night when the boys soccer team was ringing the Victory Bell). Already, you have become one with the community, and shown solidarity with the students in many ways. So today, we present your own version of Reserve Green, a lovely cloak in our tartan Reserve plaid. With this gift, we acknowledge you literally becoming a part of the fabric of our community. We know you will wear it with pride."* - Tim Warner]

Suzanne Buck:

Can you all see me? Oh shoot. I am sad to discover this is not a cloak of invisibility. All kidding aside, I am truly honored and humbled to serve WRA. I am indebted to the leaders who have come before me, to the Boards of Trustees who have worked tirelessly to secure the School's future, to the alumni who have shared loyalty, to the faculty and staff who have demonstrated passion, to the students who have dared to learn, to their families who have put their trust in the institution, and to our friends of the school who have fostered partnership and community. WRA's history is indeed rich and her trajectory strong, thanks to the efforts and accomplishments of her amazing people.

Western Reserve Academy has been in existence for nearly 200 years. I am the 32nd Head of School and the first woman to assume this role. Reserve, I have one question: what took you so long? Regardless of the path to this point today and perhaps because of it, I couldn't be more thrilled to be in this place at this time. And, as excited as I am, I do not want this ceremony to be about me. I want today to be a celebration of us-- of community-- and of a community that deeply cares for and values this school.

I love a celebration. Nothing evokes greater joy than sharing happiness for an individual, event, or idea. Through celebration we come together as a collective of people and elevate a concept. We create meaning. For example, think about birthdays. Our calendar presents 365 days in a year, and a specific date marks the annual passage of time from when you were born. We note this date, not because the date on its own is of interest, but because you are. We acknowledge and give gratitude for your presence in our world. A birthday party, like the one held last night at

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Pierce House for Septemberites, provides opportunity for us to honor the magnificent creation of you. We take a moment to step away from our day-to-day habits of dressing, speaking, and eating. We instead don silly hats, sing, and eat cake. We provide mechanisms for celebration; we discover, create, and experience joy.

By now you know that joy is an important concept to me. I see joy as something to be cultivated both in education and in life. Neither school nor the human existence are without challenge, making joy even more precious. Last weekend in my address to parents I spoke about the synergy between resilience and joy. Today I wish to focus on the relationship between gratitude and joy.

In the field of positive psychology, Dr. Martin Seligman is pioneer. Acknowledging the pain and adversity experienced in life, his research focuses on happiness and how we sustain good feelings. His work speaks to the importance of combating that which is referred to as “hedonic adaption” or the “hedonic treadmill.” Hedonic adaption is the phenomena of becoming accustomed to that which was once pleasurable. This creation of the new normal dulls happiness responses and diminishes feelings of joy. In an article for Very Well Mind Elizabeth Scott provides the following examples of hedonic adaption:

People who win the lottery tend to return to roughly their original levels of happiness after the novelty of the win has worn off. (Some even end up less happy because of changes in relationships that can occur.) There is an initial influx of joy, of course, but after about a year, people in their day-to-day lives experience the same general sense of happiness.

Research has found that the first bite of something delicious is experienced as more pleasurable than the third or the tenth. People become accustomed to the pleasure rather quickly and soon, the same mood-lifting little treat doesn't bring the same influx of joy.

So, how can we sustain joy? According to Seligman there are a number of ways. These include participating in tasks that are challenging and require your holistic engagement. Hmm... Does that remind you of what we do at school? Another is to do activities that you enjoy. Unlike the happiness found in acquiring material goods, happiness found through participation in activities actually increases over time. So, I encourage you to do that which you love. Whether in the music hall, on the athletic field, in the WIC, or in any venue in between, play on! And finally, we can prevent hedonic adaption by acknowledging and giving thanks for that which brings happiness. In other words, by practicing gratitude we can sustain joy.

As part of today's events, I invite you to acknowledge and give thanks for that which brings you joy. In each of our celebration venues there will be banners on which you can write. Share what happiness looks like to you. List that for which you are grateful. As a community, we come together in the sustaining of both individual and collective joy.

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I am grateful to serve Western Reserve Academy. Nearly two centuries old, we are a school of both tradition and innovation. We are Pioneers. Embedded in our DNA is the compulsion to carve new paths, to challenge assumptions, to transcend the status quo. I am honored to lead this institution and with you, members of our collective community, create a joyful and transcendent future.