

Convocation Remarks Given By Dr. Leland Cox on October 10, 2018 At Convocation on the Occasion of His Celebration as President Emeritus.

First of all, I want to express my sincere thanks to Chairman Campbell and the board of trustees of the South Carolina Governor's School for Science and Mathematics for this recognition. It is as deeply appreciated as it was unexpected. I've been blessed with a great career and terrific leadership opportunities but my twelve years at GSSM stand indisputably as the jewel in the crown and I remain forever grateful to have been part of one of the boldest, most visionary, and most important educational initiatives in the history of our state.

I'm especially happy to be here today with my friend, mentor, and brother Dr. Leroy Davis who is being honored today as Chairman Emeritus. There are always individuals and events in the life of an institution that are key to its vitality and sustainability. In this regard Dr. Davis' long service as a GSSM trustee and board chair has been a godsend. His leadership, experience, wisdom, and devotion are woven into the very fabric of our school's success. God bless you, Leroy.

And I also want to thank GSSM president Dr. Hector Flores for his friendship since taking up the mantle of leadership. We have been getting to know each other better and better since his arrival. Hector, I just want to say publically that it has been a pleasure getting to know you and I am enthused and encouraged by your character and the clarity and reach of your vision. I am confident that you will guide our school into an ever brighter future.

On this our 30th anniversary we do well to reflect on origins. Thanks to Carlanna Hendrick we do have a Founders Day to remember and celebrate beginnings. But I want to take advantage of this occasion and this larger audience to be just a bit more expansive and to suggest what I think is the real foundational meaning underlying the core value of our school and which I hope will speak to you students sitting here today.

To be sure, ours was a birthing owing to many parents. They were Governor Carroll Campbell and SONOCO CEO and board chair Charlie Coker who together formed one of the most unique and effective public/private partnerships in the history of our state. Governor Campbell, using the bully pulpit of his office, led the legislative effort while Charlie Coker led a private campaign that capitalized the cost of the school. Jim Daniels, then president of Coker College, was an avid and critical member of the founding team as well as a valued friend and colleague to me. Florence newspaper editor James Rogers, one of the most politically connected men in South Carolina and a zealous champion of all things promoting educational excellence, used all of his connections to good effect. Hartsville's own Senator Ed Saleeby played a key role in the legislature. Harry Lightsey, then president at the College of Charleston and formerly dean of the USC law school brought gravitas and critical leadership as a founding team member in serving as the school's first board chair. Doug Smith, who had recently retired as president at Francis Marion University, was initially the man in charge and worked tirelessly putting together all the essential pieces necessary to the formation of a new school, and is in fact the person who recruited me to come here in June of 1988. And, later, others. Nella Barkley of Charleston, an accomplished business woman and civic

entrepreneur, who led the establishment of the GSSM Foundation and whose telephone call (remember telephones?) to Roger Milliken secured the gift of property where our school now stands. Also in the school's earliest days, she and Charlie Coker partnered in a capital campaign that created a \$4 million dollar endowment for the GSSM Foundation, an incredible achievement for a school with only a couple of graduating classes and no developed alumni base. And House Representative (now House Speaker) Jay Lucas who I dubbed the "six-million-dollar-man" was a champion in his successful efforts to procure state funding for construction on the new campus.

Heroes all. And all people of significant, multiple individual accomplishments with nothing they needed to prove personally or professionally. So what of their motivation? Certainly this was a compelling investment in intellectual capital for our state with good arguments to be made in that regard. And yes, there were many other factors and moving parts in play—political, economic, and educational. But I believe that their true driving passion, the gravitational glue that held all the rotating parts together, was their conviction that it was at the heart of the matter the right thing to do. It was the right thing to do for you, for all of the students who have preceded you and for those who will come after. Ladies and gentlemen, I submit to you that the creation of the South Carolina Governor's School for Science and Mathematics was a moral act of the highest order undertaken for the greater good. And students, I ask you to consider this simple proposition: that individual self-serving success (and I don't use that term in a pejorative sense at all) is just that: individual, self-serving success; and that your achievements will be most fully and richly

realized to the degree that they lead you to selfless acts, doing the right things for your communities and those around you.

And so here we are entering our 30th anniversary year. Thirty years of success building on success serving not just the students here in residence but, through far flung outreach programs, thousands of students all across South Carolina. Wow! But it wasn't foreordained to be so. In 1988 there was no track record to show to prospective families—no long lists of college acceptances, no astronomical amounts of scholarships offers, no mind-blowing SAT and ACT scores, no National Merit finalist and semi-finalists to showcase. We were only the 4th school of its kind in the entire country (North Carolina, Illinois, and Louisiana preceded us). And we were a complete hybrid; sort of like an independent private boarding school but not; sort of like a small liberal arts college but not. All families and their children knew was that they wanted something better and in seeking that something better they put unbelievable amounts of trust and hope in an *idea* called the South Carolina Governor's School for Science and Math.

Breathing life, the creational "ruach," into that idea fell to the school's charter faculty operating as completely free of regulatory restraint (in hiring, in curriculum) as it is possible for a school to be. Just think of it: a hybrid school with a tubula rasa to write upon. We were given an educator's dream but also with more than enough rope to hang ourselves with. Success was by no means certain or guaranteed and there were some interests in the state that would not have been sad to see us fail. But we didn't. And the primary reason for that success is the work and skill and dedication of the GSSM faculty in the crucible of our school's first two years leading up to the first graduating class. (Yes, it was a team effort but I don't believe anyone will be

offended by the primacy accorded to this group.) Because therein lay GSSM's cornerstone of credibility and if that cornerstone had been weak or faulty in any way the edifice itself would have crumbled. And that is the group in closing that I would like to recognize and honor today. I give them to you alphabetically and without academic rank or discipline designation because I wish to honor them as a team working with one mind, one will, and one heart. They are:

Bill Alexander

Bill Brow

Stephen Eure

Carlanna Hendrick

Bill Hilton

Will Huntley

Beverly Johnson

Kathy Kellam

Den Latham

Fred Lynn

Joe Mitchener

Taha Mzoughi

Wayne Radcliffe

Mary Sherlock

Clyde Smith

Seth Smith

Bob Trowell

Carol Winkel

There is a quotation attributed to Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (and which some have contested, saying it belongs to the American philosopher Will Durant in his commentary on Aristotle). No matter. It is the truth and power of the quotation that is salient: “We are what we repeatedly do; excellence therefore is not an act but a habit.” Not an individual act, no matter how brilliant, but a habit. That is the principle of excellence that was embraced by the charter faculty of our school. Those who have followed and those who are sitting here today are the living legacy of that commitment and I feel confident will also be its perpetuators. Certainly it is to them that I owe the recognition I have received today. For make no mistake: our school did not succeed because of me. I succeeded and our school succeeded because of you.

Again, my deep and sincere thanks. And Go Eagles!