

August 24, 2015

Mindy Hong's Address to Upper School Students - Opening Assembly

My dear Upper School Students,

I am so excited to welcome you to TASIS England! As your Head of Upper School I am so fortunate to share these critical years of your life. In this very unique school, we have about 409 students in the Upper School, the largest number yet, and over 50 nationalities are represented. There is no school, no place, that can boast such diversity and therefore such rich, multi-layered experiences.

I want to ask the audience:

Who here has a nationality other than British?

Who in the audience has travelled to a country other than the UK this summer?

Who here speaks more than one language?

We are a community of world travellers and dwellers! Furthermore, as we live, study, and grow with each other, we gain the pivotal lessons of diversity – to truly respect and to understand cultures other than ours. In fact, this ‘other’ becomes part of who we are when we collaborate and work along side each other. In this world – in this global landscape – where regionalism and myopic tunnel vision have created strife, war, and devastation – TASIS England can be a haven to cultivate world leaders who can make the hard and nuanced decisions, based on synthesizing complex points of view.

This summer, your US school team of teachers has been grappling with the idea of industry leadership – how can we lead you as the best school possible? You will hear that buzz word often in the lexicon of college applications and building your resume – to be in leadership positions.

But, do you know how good leaders are created? They must understand that the subtle and strident opinions that vary from the disenfranchised to the fundamentalists need to be amalgamated. From multiple points of view, a leader must create a direction / a view – sometimes a sublime one – that can rally everyone.

At TASIS England, you are in the perfect environment to develop your leadership skill set. Be open to the opinions of your peers who come from very dissimilar backgrounds. In fact, do not seek the familiar – because it is our human tendency to find comfort in friends who are like us in dress, race, culture, social affiliation – but it is in the unfamiliar where we will learn the greatest lessons of diversity.

I have high expectations for each of you, here at TASIS and beyond. You have the potential, and the perfect environment at TASIS England with your excellent teachers, to become truly the leaders our world needs. Develop your sense of fair play. Learn that racial and religious ignorance can lead to dangerous intolerance. Start in this microcosm of the world and practice being better here, to make a better world. I am counting on you to take on this leadership role, and our teachers are here to help you on this journey.

Ok, if the end goal is world dominance – wait, no, world leadership – let's move on to how we get there.

First – it starts with us getting to know each other. I am learning your names, be patient with me. I promise to learn your names and to learn about you. Because it is my job and it is the job of all our teachers and staff.

Second – I want to create a bespoke college guidance program to really help you all land in the best possible place after TASIS England.

Lastly – it starts with thriving and flourishing. How do you thrive? How do you flourish? Realistically, it cannot be every day that you are flourishing and thriving. You will have your down days – when things get compressed and the world will feel so small. You have to anticipate and plan for such days.

There is a Duke University study that looked at the effects of regular exercise to mitigate against depression and illnesses such as colds and viral and bacterial infections. The effects of cardiovascular exercise were better than any medication or therapy. We will go through the vicissitudes, the inevitable ups and downs of life, working as hard as we do in this learning community. But please remember that in order for your mind to be strong, your body must first be healthy. It will not be putting one more hour of studying that will make the difference, but the hours you spread out during the week to get proper exercise to maintain your physical and mental health that will make the difference.

I want to share a quote from the Bible that resonates with me:

The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all.

Prepare for the vagaries of life – chance – by first being good to yourself. Eat healthy and condition your body to be ready to strive for the excellence we expect and you expect of yourself.

Thus, my dear students

1. Seek to truly engage and embrace diversity – you are preparing for your role as world leaders
2. Be good to yourself – be steady in your race – to thrive mentally and emotionally. Physical exercise is the symbiotic link to flourishing and thriving.

As your Head of Upper School, I could not be more excited to learn with you, to share with you, and to lead you. Let us flourish and thrive together in this 2015-2016 academic year!