Good evening everyone! It is good to be back home— here at HVS!
Before I begin, I want to thank all of you for giving me the opportunity to stand before you on this momentous occasion. Ten years ago, I sat where these graduates are sitting now. Tonight, I have the privilege of returning to the place that helped shape me into the man I am today.

The Henry Viscardi School is where it all started for many of us. It is where we cried, holding onto any body part of our parents we could find on that first day of school. It is where we discovered that we were not alone. It is where we found friends who understood our challenges without needing an explanation. It is where we learned to celebrate every victory, whether it was a good grade, an award, a medal, or simply accomplishing something others thought was impossible.

Tonight is a very special night—not just for me, but for everyone in this gymnasium.

We celebrate the accomplishments of your patients, your best friends, your sibling, your children, your students. Because none of us arrive at this moment alone. Behind every graduate is an army of people who believed in them, encouraged them, challenged them, and loved them.

Please join me in giving a round of applause to everyone in this room, because it is YOU who helped make these dreams a reality.

I would also like to thank School Superintendent Angelo Zegarelli, CEO and President of the Henry Viscardi School and the Viscardi Center Dr. Chris Rosa, Nassau County Executive Bruce Blakeman, our elected officials, alumni most importantly, the graduating Class of 2026.

And Kim—I haven't forgotten about you.

Before I continue, I want to recognize someone very special.
Last weekend, I was sitting at my computer texting everyone I thought would care enough to celebrate this moment—but not enough to actually show up.
The message read:
"Ever feel inspired when you hear about a full-circle moment? Tune in or join me in person on June 25th as I have the honor of returning to my alma mater ten years later to deliver the commencement address."
I stared at it for a minute and thought, "This needs something more."
So I asked my sister, "Luisa, what else should I say?"
She looked at me with genuine concern and asked,
"Wait... that's your speech?"
Like a kid getting caught doing something wrong, I immediately replied,
"No! Of course not!"
Then I stopped and thought about it.
And I said,
"No, Luisa... that's not my speech.
It's IN my speech."
So thank you for helping me write part of tonight's remarks.
Dr. Luisa Alvarez could not be here when I graduated ten years ago but she's in the house tonight.
And that, to me, is another full-circle moment.

Tonight marks ten years since I graduated from Viscardi. Back then, I was a bright-eyed young man sitting on this very stage, excited about the future. I was 2'3" tall.

Today, I'm 2'5".So if anyone was hoping for a dramatic glow-up, I'm sorry to disappoint you. I don't look much different than I did back then. I haven't really grown much besides my brain. And some days, even that is debatable.

Fourteen years ago, when Kim Brussell was the Director of Marketing, she asked me what my biggest goal was. I said, "I am going to be valedictorian of my high school class." With her positive voice, Kim replied, "All right. Go for it." To this day, I don't know whether she genuinely believed in me or simply didn't want to crush my dreams before lunch.

Either way, I did it. And now, after all these years, Kim is the one signing my paycheck.
Life has a funny sense of humor.

This is all to say: stay humble and remember where you come from. Because you never know who's going to help you launch your career.

A lot has happened in a decade. We have been asked to weather past an unprecedented global pandemic by adjusting to a new virtual reality, but you guys answered the call to reinvent yourselves and deliver better results with dedication; our quality of care has been threatened at both the state and federal government but our family continues to scrape the crumbs to keep us safe; the White House has completely gutted our Department of Education to the point where there is no agency anymore but you are all here writing a new chapter in your lives.
Today, Viscardi releases a new generation of young, bright minds into the world, who will make every day their special day by making them count instead of counting down the days of their last breath.

At eighteen, I thought success meant reaching goals. At twenty-eight, I've learned that success is becoming someone worthy of those goals.

The diploma you're receiving tonight is not the end of your story. It is a permission slip to begin writing the next chapter. Many people will look at your wheelchair, your walker, your crutches, your disability, or whatever challenge you face, and assume they know what your limits are.
Let them.
Then surprise them.
Not because you have something to prove to them but because you owe it to yourself to discover what you're capable of. The Henry Viscardi School taught us something that the world often forgets: disability does not diminish possibility. This school taught us resilience before we even knew how to spell the word. It taught us that acceptance and dignity are not privileges. They are rights. It taught us that obstacles are not stop signs—they are opportunities to find another route. Most importantly, it taught us to believe in ourselves.

Trust me.
I learned that lesson at Adelphi University. I was president of the radio club. Producer of the television club. Staff writer for the student newspaper. Beat reporter for the softball team. The only thing I failed to do was hold onto my college sweetheart. Now, before you feel bad for me, let me explain. One day, I brought her along to help me interview a student-athlete for a feature story. I thought I was chasing a headline. Apparently, she was chasing her future husband. I got a byline. She got married. To this day, that remains the most successful story I've ever covered.
Life has a funny way of reminding us that not every story ends the way we planned. Sometimes it ends differently. Sometimes it ends better. But it always leaves us with a story worth telling.
And speaking of stories worth telling—

Bruce, I have not forgotten about you either. Recently, at a Knicks rally, Nassau County Executive Bruce Blakeman introduced me and called me his "future Chief of Staff" if he becomes Governor. Bruce, I don't know if that's legally binding. But I brought several hundred witnesses tonight. I'm holding you to it.

See something, say something. Last month, I went back to my roots and attended a wheelchair basketball game at the Empire State Games. And honestly, it brought me to tears. Not because of what I saw. Because of what I didn't see. there weren't any teams to compete with us at a high level. Coaches we love you but if standing up, you're past your prime, on a wheelchair, we're more abled-bodied than you. My editor, Joie Tyrrell, is in the house tonight. Joie, I'm putting you on the spot. This is a story we need to write. We need funding. We need the schools back. We need the teams back. We need to raise another banner because all I see in front of me right now are winners and champions of life. every child deserves the chance to discover what they are capable of.

When I look across this room tonight, I don't see disabilities. I see possibilities. I see people who have already overcome challenges most adults could never imagine. The world calls that disability. I call it preparation. Because while others learned how to navigate a world designed for them, you learned how to thrive in a world that wasn't.

Before I finish, I have one final confession. I wrote this speech with AI. Actual Intelligence. Not Artificial Intelligence. Because disabled people don't need a chatbot to tell our stories.

So Class of 2026—never, ever count yourself out. Ten years ago, I sat where you sit now. Tonight, I stand where every graduate hopes to be—still dreaming, still growing, still learning. Not much taller but hopefully a little wiser. As you leave this place and begin the next chapter of your story, I want you to remember something. Whatever you choose to do in life, remember what made you fall in love with it in the first place. Remember why you started. Remember who you're doing it for. Remember the people who believed in you before you believed in yourself. And ask yourself one question: How do you want to be remembered? Because someday—sooner than you think—you will look back on this night. The applause will fade. The diploma will collect dust. The photos will find their way into albums and phone galleries. But your character, Your courage? The lives you touch? Those are the things that remain. So my fellow graduates, I have a challenge for you. Ten years from now, write yourself a letter. And make sure you can begin it with this sentence: "I am who I always wanted to be." Not because life went exactly according to plan. But because you became someone you respect. Someone who kept going when quitting would have been easier. Someone who stayed true to themselves. The hard things in life are worth doing. The dreams you abandoned may still be worth pursuing. The risks you're afraid to take may become the stories you're proudest to tell. Because despite all the obstacles we face, this world remains full of beautiful things. And you deserve to experience them all. Perspective is everything. Most people are not limited by circumstance. They are limited by what they believe is possible. The greatest disability in the world is not physical. It is believing that your future is smaller than it really is. Be the best version of yourself—not the version others expect you to be. The version you were created to become. Ten years ago, when I graduated from Viscardi, I told my classmates to reach for the stars, make it big, celebrate often, and enjoy the journey. Tonight, I leave you with that same message. And if one of you comes back here ten years from now as the commencement speaker—Do me one of two favors. Grow more than two inches or MARRY THAT GIRL.

Congratulations, Class of 2026. Thank you, God bless you, and congratulations to the graduates.