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Sixth Grade Conference Day Remarks
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Good morning, boys and girls, teachers, administrators and Hofstra representatives. I'm very grateful for the invitation to speak with you today.

The topic I was asked to talk about today is inspiration. When I'm looking for inspiration, I often turn to the dictionary for help. So I looked up the word *inspire* to learn more about its origins. Its root word, *spire*, comes from the Latin *spirare* which means *to breathe*.

Spirare is closely related to the Latin word for *breath*, which is *spiritus*...or what we would call *spirit*.

You've probably heard the expression that success is 1 percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration. But have you ever noticed that the words *inspire* and *perspire* have the same root?

Spire....Spirare....to breathe.

The word *aspire*, as in your theme for this school year, *Aspire to Inspire*, also has that same root.

How did these words related to breathing and spirit come to be associated with dreams, desires, goals, motivation and persistence?

Let's start with *aspire*. It comes from the Latin word *aspirare* which means *to breathe upon*, or *pant after*. It means to desire, to seek with ambition, to have an ultimate goal.

When we think of *perspire*, we think of sweating, but it comes from a Latin word for *breathing through*, which is what happens when we exert ourselves, right? We breathe through the exercise. In fact, if any of you have done yoga, yoga teachers will often instruct their students to "breathe through the pose."

To breathe through means there is work to be done and so, we take a breath, get to work and keep on keeping on.

Finally, there's the word *inspire*. Its Latin meaning is to *breathe into*. Isn't that what we do to an idea or a dream? We breathe it into life, creating something that has never before existed.

Aspiring, perspiring and inspiring require a certain energy, wouldn't you say? A certain *spirit*? Because without that energy, or spirit, how would we *ever* have what it takes to set a goal and work for it step by step? How would we persist through trial, error, and failure upon failure, to finally vault over the hurdle and succeed? That spirit is what propels us so that we can *Aspire to Inspire*.

How does that work in real life? I came across a perfect example that I would like to share with you.

Several years ago, Nike, the sneaker company, set out to break the world marathon record. The record was set in Berlin in 2014, by Dennis Kimetto of Kenya. He ran the 26.2 mile race in two hours, two minutes and 57 seconds.

Nike's goal was ambitious. They called it Breaking2 because what they wanted to do was not just surpass the record by a few seconds, but to shave nearly three minutes from the mark. They wanted to prove that a human could run a marathon in LESS than two hours. To do that, a runner needs to achieve a speed faster than 13.1 miles per hour, or an almost four and a half minute mile. That is very, very, *very* fast. The idea of maintaining that speed over 26 miles is phenomenal. Only a handful of people in the entire world have even come close.

To break the record not by seconds but by minutes? That's not something ordinary humans can do. It takes extraordinary aspiration, perspiration and inspiration to achieve something so monumental.

Once Nike's CEO dreamed of the idea (*he aspired*), he assembled a team and went to work. Scientists working on Breaking2 tested the world's most elite marathon runners to measure the factors that help predict performance. Three runners emerged as the most promising.

When training began, the scientists monitored many variables from skin temperature, to muscles, to hydration, nutrition, the amount of drag on clothing, the training regimen, the course and how flat or bumpy it was, the temperature and humidity in the air and so on. Finally, of course, they looked at the perfect footwear to keep those running feet in motion.

Would you say there was a lot of *perspiring* going on? You'd be right. Marathoners can sweat out 10 percent of their body weight in the course of a race. And I'm sure that everyone who worked on Breaking2 put forth a valiant effort and that there was a lot of perspiration and nail biting when race day finally arrived.

This weekend, it was time to see what Breaking2 could do. It took place on a course outside Milan, Italy, on Saturday. I wonder if anyone can guess what happened? [Pause and look around.]

Boys and girls, Breaking2 failed. After investing millions of dollars, recruiting the world's fastest marathon runners, putting the finest scientific minds to work and creating a training regimen like no other, Nike missed the mark by 25 seconds. Breaking the two-hour marathon mark remains, for now, an aspiration.

The runner who completed the marathon, Olympic champion Eliud Kipchoge [El-ee-yood Kip-CHO-Gay] of Kenya, gave it his all but he fell short. Wired magazine wrote, "It became obvious by the final lap that Kipchoge was not going to break two hours. It was equally obvious that his run was already a triumph."

Wait. A triumph? He failed to beat the record. That was the whole point, wasn't it?

This, boys and girls, is what aspiration and inspiration are all about. You WILL fail. And if you don't, then you aren't trying hard enough. Failure is necessary. It's beautiful, really, because it makes us stronger and more determined to succeed. It is what we do when we Aspire to Inspire.

Here's what happened after the race. Kipchoge ran toward his coach and hugged him. Then he lay down on the track to catch his breath. Later that same day, he was already talking about his next attempt.

"The world is only 25 seconds away," he said.

Yes, he failed....this time. But he also showed us that it is possible to run a marathon in less than two hours. Eventually, somebody will do it.

So boys and girls, when you aspire to inspire, when you set your sights on a goal, remember to breathe. Put all of your energy and spirit into it. And, when you experience the inevitable setbacks and disappointments, don't let them stop you.

Like Kipchoge lying on the race track after his triumphant failure, take a moment. Hug the people who support you. Catch your breath.

And then? Gather your courage. Fortify your spirit. Breathe into it.

And begin again.

Thank you very much. I wish you a wonderful and inspiring day here at Sixth Grade Conference Day.