

STATEMENT ON GRADUATION ROBES
JANUARY 11, 2019

[Mr. Swanson, HHS Principal] Good morning, HHS. For this *Friday Show* message, I'm joined by two leaders from the senior class: Our student council president, Abby Fennelly, and our senior class president, Billy Johnston. The three of us wanted to share a few thoughts with you today about a topic that carries special meaning for our seniors but also has significance for the school as a whole.

As some of you may already know, the Massachusetts Department of Education recently issued an advisory designed to help schools establish a supportive environment for LGBTQ students. Besides summarizing some of the state laws that pertain to gender identity and discrimination, the advisory contains recommendations about how schools should handle a variety of related issues, from access to restrooms and locker rooms to participation in gym classes and school sports for students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. The advisory is quite lengthy (you can read it online) and it sets forth a number of policies to be followed by all public schools, statewide. In one section, the advisory explicitly states that public schools in Massachusetts should not use two colors (one for boys and one for girls) for graduation robes. Here in Hingham, this means we'll need to make a change. Our past practice, as you probably know, has been for boys to wear red and girls to wear white. That practice will have to change.

I have no doubt that many of you will embrace this as a positive and progressive change. And I would agree with that view. In my opinion, the time has come to let go of a gender-based dress code that has, in the past, forced some of our students into an awkward and uncomfortable position. Even if the state board that governs public schools was not telling us to make this change, as they are, I would still recommend this as the right thing to do. But I also

recognize that this change is likely to meet some resistance. Change is not always easy, and I'm sure some of you (especially our seniors) will be reluctant to say goodbye to a longstanding tradition.

[Abby Fennelly '19, HHS Student Council President] The idea of changing the color of graduation robes came up at a meeting of the School Council, a group of students, teachers, parents, and community members, a few months ago, and then again at a meeting of the Superintendent's Student Cabinet, a group of students who meet regularly with Doctor Galo. In both settings, discussion was enthusiastically in favor of changing the robes to one style. While I, and everyone who was present at these meetings, acknowledge that the red and white is a tradition that has characterized the look of HHS graduation for years, this is definitely a change in the right direction. We are *one* class; we are *one* town; we will stand united in *one* color on our graduation day. To me, what is more important and more pressing than any state advisory is making sure that every student in this building feels welcomed, safe, and accepted. If that means we all wear the same color robe on graduation, so be it. On June 1st, as we all sit outside on the turf, together for one last time and surrounded by family and friends who have come to celebrate *our* academic achievement, I promise we won't be thinking about the color of our robes. We'll be thinking about the past, and we'll be thinking about the future. Some of us may be happy, some may be sad, and some may be terrified for what the future holds. But no matter what, we will have bigger things on our mind than our robes.

[Billy Johnston '19, President of the HHS Class of 2019] When I first heard about this year's graduation robes, it struck me as an opportunity for us Hingham High School students. An opportunity to continue to lead the way in not just academics, but in things much more important than that. Things like being a good person, caring for all people, respecting, valuing, and appreciating each other's differences. Or in this case, for us to show our answer to the

question of what is more important to us: the way someone looks, or the way someone feels? That's what this is, it is not just a break in tradition.

But above all, it is a small way for us to show everyone that we see Hingham High School, that we see this state, this country, and the world as constant works in progress. And that loving them requires much more than just following tradition or the status quo, but requires the occasional disruption, the occasional shaking up of tradition, and always fighting for what is right.

That is the opportunity in front of us right now. And as a school, a chance for us to take another step towards cementing our legacy as a place where every person in this building is valued; and for this little place of Hingham High School, in this little town of Hingham to be an example for the entire state and the entire country to watch as we constantly push the boundaries of equality.

[Mr. Swanson] Through the School Council process that Abby mentioned, HHS students, teachers and parents have all had a chance to participate in discussion about this topic. But it's important to me, as your principal, and also to your elected leaders (Abby and Billy among them) that students have an additional opportunity to shape what graduation looks like. So next Thursday, the last day before midyear exams, all seniors will have the chance to vote at lunch for the *style* of robe worn at this year's graduation. Seniors: You'll have four choices, including the traditional all-red robe and three others that include a mix of red and white. All students will be wearing the same robe at graduation this year, that much has been decided, but the particular style is up to you.

Our graduation will *look* a little different this year but I know the spirit and meaning of the event will be the same as ever. On June 1st, when close to three hundred of our seniors gather on the turf to receive their diplomas, something unique to our school's history will be happening.

The same unity our seniors have shown throughout the past four years will be visible like never before. And the value of such a statement is not merely symbolic; rather, it reflects our values as a community, and it moves us one small step closer to being the kind of place where *everybody* matters equally. Regardless of gender identity, or anything else, if you go to HHS, you *belong* here. We'll never stop striving for that kind of authentic community. And I hope you'll join us in the ongoing effort to make that vision a reality.