

SPEECH FOR PAT BRANTLEY, FRIENDSHIP CHARTER SCHOOLS

525,600 minutes, 525,000 moments so dear. 525,600 minutes. How do you measure a year, measure a year? How do you measure a year in the life? We do it with grades, through attendance, etc. But as the song says, these moments are better measured in daylights, in sunsets, in cups of coffee, in togetherness, in love.

I came to work on Monday. When I walked into the building there were taping sessions in progress. They were necessary because we weren't together.

When I sat down in my office, I felt grief. I felt what a lot of you have felt over this past year. I breathed in that grief for a moment, and then I got a text from a staffer about math.

"The session reignited my love of math."

I saw another staffer in the hall who told me that the Blow Pierce middle-school panel impacted her. The students truly valued how much the educators showed up for them.

The world changed and we did things differently. I realized that instead, the glass wasn't half empty. In fact, the cup was running over. It's running over because at Friendship we understand how to focus on outcomes and what we can do.

Friendship, it's been 17 months.

17 months of breakthrough ideas, unparalleled collaboration and more Zoom meetings than we could every count!

peaks and valleys.

But moments of sheer amazement. 525,600 moments a year.

Friendship, through it all, I knew – **WE knew** – that we would see each other again – face to face. And it's been 25 years. Thirteen million, one hundred forty thousand moments of greatness and opportunities for us to go higher.

For 25 years, we've continued to prove our resilience every day at Friendship. Just look at what we've accomplished.

I can tell you that our journey has made us more creative and proactive. It made us reimagine ourselves and our classrooms – and this year, we did it, practically overnight.

Out of chaos- we realized that not only are we able to bounce back but that we can adapt to ANY situation.

When others thought that the physical distance between us would stop us in our tracks, WE showed them how it brought us together and made us stronger, faster, and more motivated.

We've proven ourselves again and again. Through sheer determination, we uncovered a **Mindshift** about access to education that we never thought possible.

We even became a role model for other schools and institutions around the nation.

Just look at what *Business Wire* wrote about us.

Say out loud: *Amid COVID-19- Friendship Online Offers More Learning Options.*

And what our scholars had to say on ABC News Channel 7.

Say out loud: D.C. students change Zoom screen names to practice 'Mindful Mondays' with Gary Cameron.

Show ABC 7 clip: “Even though we are still in quarantine in our houses, we can still learn, we can get some real knowledge and get better every single day.”

How did we do it?

First, we recognized the humanity of our all our people, big, small, and everything in between. We knew we had to reach you through relationships and connections. It was how we would fulfill our mission.

Then, we set the standard for school safety, student and team member COVID testing and vaccine access.

We made the curriculum transparent to families so that our scholars could learn at home.

We supplied our kids with the technology, meals, tutoring, counseling and other supports they needed to facilitate their learning.

And we expanded our online platforms to make it easier for teachers and families to engage more fully with our scholars remotely.

Many have looked to Friendship as a model. But did you know they looked to us in awe?

That's because we are trailblazers.

Friendship Forward means that we keep moving ahead no matter what obstacles come our way.

Our ability to be ever-resilient evolved from a vision spearheaded by none other than our Lead Architect, Donald Hense.

We pursued Donald's guidance for the past 25 years and built our foundation on excellence and perseverance.

We created a sanctuary where love and leadership thrive both inside and out.

We fueled a community that expects nothing less than superior outcomes from Friendship schools and our students.

Twenty-five years ago, no one would have believed that we could have produced multiple Tier One schools.

They would never have imagined that schools in Ward 7, 8, 1, 2, 4, 5- every place where Friendship is- could repeatedly turn out Ivy League scholars, Ph.D. candidates and thousands of alumni with bachelors and master's degrees.

I say we're like Olympic sprinters Sydney McLaughlin and Dalilah Muhammad.
We keep running.
Adjust in the moment.
Push each other to be better.
And, then shatter records.

So, I want to remind you this morning of just how far we've come.

I want to applaud you for the enthusiasm and commitment that you demonstrate every day, in every way, to our Friendship family.

And I want you to know that the people who helped shape our first 25 years, the pioneers of our first chapter, are beaming ear-to-ear because they, like me, are overflowing with pride.

It's a pride that's more than well-deserved. We've worked hard to connect to lasting priorities and values.

And we've asked ourselves some tough questions.

I've asked myself how do I want to live my life more authentically? What does excellence mean to me?

Perhaps, you've done the same? It's because we care so deeply about who we are and what we do.

We all know and love gymnast Simone Biles who has won a total of 32 Olympic and World medals.

Yet, she withdrew from the 2020 Tokyo Olympics to take a mental break. When she came back, she earned a bronze medal for the team.

She showed the world that even the best and strongest athletes need to recharge, and that mental health should never pay the price.

Simone acted from courage and ultimate presence.

She demonstrated how vital it is to be truthful and honest with ourselves and with each other.

What stands out for me- her words.

“As a gymnast, I love performing. I came in and felt like I was still doing it for other people. That just hurts my heart that doing what I love has been kind of taken away from me to please other people.”

You came to Friendship because you love what you do. Yet, your love is sometimes tainted by forces outside your control. Still, we persist- we pursue- for 25 years.

Like Simone, we will do what we love. We will shine. And not rely on external validation but because of what we provide our scholars, the stuff that feeds our souls.

Truth and Honesty. They define us at Friendship.

We resonate with those qualities. Not only because they are inherent in our foundational pillars but also because we're continually striving to be the very best for our scholars.

I want to give you a very tangible example.

E came to Friendship in 2018. Classified as a student with multiple disabilities, E started his journey in PK3 with us. When he was in the first grade, E experienced several traumatic life events. His parents were absent. The guardian who was assigned to him was in an accident and could no longer care for him.

Three years old and E didn't have stability in his life- but he had us.

As is characteristic of our Friendship family, the faculty and staff intervened.

Teachers brought balloons and a cake for his birthday. The principal took E to his new foster care home with dinner when the bus did not show.

Today, E is in the 4th grade and is academically growing. He's made friends, he has his teachers and is a very happy child.

At Friendship, we're not just about grades and test scores. Yes, E's story shows our dedication to best practices in our classrooms, it also demonstrates how much we honor humanity.

It shows how Friendship educators are willing to step outside of classroom boundaries to honor student exploration and how we stand behind our scholars through thick and thin. No, it's not just an expression for us. Friendship is Family.

I also want to share some results from our new program- our Explorer's camp.

We tried something new, not because what we've done before wasn't good enough, but because we are dedicated to evolution.

Our Explorers camp partnered with the Whittle School in northwest D.C and it was a huge success. Why?

Because not only did we actively engage our students, we also actively engaged our educators to design innovative programs for young people. We fostered the love of self-driven exploration for both adults and students.

Just look at the data:

- Students said that the camp deepened their interest in STEM
- The students appreciated that at camp learning took place everywhere – from nature trails to science labs.
- Our students said they wanted to see similar, year-long experiences.
- Students responded that camp made them want to attend either Collegiate or Tech Prep!

I want to reinforce the point about how our middle and high school educators came together to create a program that used a variety of experiences to immerse students in learning and open their minds their unique interests, talents, aspirations and what they can do to have a positive impact on the world.

It brings me joy to see how you, all our educators and team members, responded to the Explorers program.

I love these photos!

Your expressions say it all; they speak volumes about why you love what you do.

In the upcoming school year, we'll expand on our success. We will capitalize on our legacy and commitment to exploratory learning. We will continue to make a new way of learning more accessible and more fun.

Part of defining our next chapter is our commitment to launching programs that are driven by your passion for growing minds and for fostering the potential of children.

Look at what we're doing with our Friendship Learning Lab led by Felicia Owo Grant. We're training emerging leaders within Friendship and expanding our reach to other schools and educators.

The Friendship Learning Lab is the only program that places leaders and educators at the center of their learning.

With our Black male teacher residency led by Joseph Speight, we're launching a pipeline program to identify and support black male educators as they exit college. Our goal is to double the number of African American male teachers at Friendship within five years.

Today, approximately 2% of public-school teachers are African American males. Friendship will change that statistic.

Our Early Childhood Distance Learning Project led by Tasia Bhagani, will establish a laboratory for creatives of all ages to share ideas and inventions.

In Arkansas, our Friendship Foundation led by Joe Harris, produced results in Math and English that beat district, state, and national outcomes.

Let me remind you that these solutions and many more began with YOUR ideas and desires.

So, now here's the part where we start dreaming out loud.

I want to know, what are you thinking about for the next 25 years?

What would you like to see in our next chapter?

I'm talking about taking Friendship to every student wherever they may be.

I'm talking about all of you getting on board with me to catapult our Friendship family, our Friendship forever home into the next cosmos.

I'd like all of you to switch on both the left and right sides of your brains. I want you to harness all your creativity. Open your heart.

Let's start the process right now with an interactive poll.

Don't forget to text "FriendshipForward466" to 22333.

Here's the first question:

QUESTION: What is the most important lesson from the first 25 years of Friendship?

Multiple Choice Answers:

- a) We are more powerful together.**
- b) Every moment with our students matters.**
- c) Investing in staff talent is critical.**
- d) Friendship students are the leaders our world needs.**
- e) We must lead organizations that uplift our children.**

Pat reacts in real-time to the results of the poll.

Bravo, Friendship! I'm thrilled to see how our first 25 years impacted your thinking.

Now, let's take a look ahead.

Cause, I'm eager to see what matters most to you.

QUESTION: What do you want from our second 25 years?

Multiple Choice Answers:

- a) Greater student voice**
- b) Educator-led innovation**
- c) A focus on social justice**
- d) Adding student enterprise to our curriculum**

Pat reacts in real-time to the results of the poll.

This outcome is incredible.

Are you ready for the next 25 years? I know I am.

I'm looking forward to the next chapter.

I see Friendship's future shaped by how our family helps YOU manifest your vision, ideas, and dreams.

Your role in crafting the next chapter is paramount.

I need all of you in the house and ready for action.

Armstrong- are you ready?

Blow Pierce- are you ready?

Chamberlain- are you ready?

Collegiate- are you ready?

Ideal & Lamond- are you ready?

Online- are you ready?

Southeast- are you ready?

Tech Prep- are you ready?

Woodridge- are you ready?

The Friendship of the future will reform the educational system as we know it.

The fact is, it's already happening. We will be bigger.

In fact, we added one campus this year. (adding others...) We will continue to support the expansion of Friendship throughout the country. We're already in Arkansas, and expansions to Texas, Oklahoma, Maryland and Pennsylvania are all on the horizon. Like I said, we're already reforming the educational system as we know it.

I've been listening to you. And I promise that I am committed to providing the resources and support for every one of you to birth your dreams.

For the next 25 years, I challenge us to be even better. I'm asking us to be even greater.

As we move into our next chapter, I want to envision a future where we join hands in celebration. Together, we will fill our Friendship house with the fruits of endless possibilities.

We are One Mission. One Vision. One Friendship. Thank you.