

Thank you Mr. Miranda, and to Mr. Safran and Ms. McDonough for inviting me to speak today, and for all that you and the rest of the MATCH staff do for young people. As Mr. Miranda said, I am here to give the parent address, but strictly speaking I am not a parent, nor a guardian. For the past six years I have been caretaker for three MATCH students, all of whom came to live with me through their participation in a tennis and literacy program called Tenacity, which many of you have heard of and some of you have participated in. All three of those students are here today, and before I get to the one I'm honoring today, I want to acknowledge the first two: one will soon complete a full year as an Americorps volunteer at Tenacity, after which he will return to school, Sokun Phy; and the other is about to enter his junior year in college; he's the first MATCH graduate to attend Boston College: Luis Sanchez.

I have mentioned Americorps, and I want to recognize the role that your Americorps members, your MATCH Corps, have played in the development of this school. My buddy Sanchez provides us with two perfect examples of this contribution, because his very first tutor, freshman year, was none other than your Dean of Students, Mr. Collins. And his tutor his sophomore year was none other than your other Dean of Students, Mr. Taillefer. First Collins and then Taillefer, how amazing is that! And there have been so many more great tutors, for Luis, Sokun, Vatana and every one of you. A few years ago, this school changed its name—it used to be Media and Technology Charter High School, but there wasn't that much media being taught, and to be honest, not that much technology either. I am one of those persons who thought that MATCH should stand for Tutoring and Mentoring Charter High School. While I will be the first to say that you graduates have had some of the most outstanding teachers and staff anywhere, what makes this school unique are the young people living on the third floor of your building and working with you all day and into the evening. MATCH Corps, you are the best.

We all know life at MATCH is about Courage, Discipline and Perseverance, so I'm going to tell you a brief story that demonstrates those qualities as well as any I can think of. This isn't a story just about a student. This isn't just about Vatana. This is also a story about Vatana and Sokun's aunt, Salan Pin-Grant, who is here with us today, and I hope

many of you will meet later. Salan came to this country years ago to escape the devastation that occurred in Cambodia as a result of the Khmer Rouge. She came with her two young children, and made a new life in America, but she didn't stop there. She took it upon herself to bring as many other family members as possible to this country, at great sacrifice to her own health and well-being. She didn't have to do this, but she had the courage, discipline and perseverance to continue working at this for her extended family to this very day, and it is because of her that Vatana and Sokun have had amazing opportunities. In 2004 Salan had to make a very difficult decision, because she had to relocate her family to Lowell even though Sokun had won the MATCH lottery. And that's how he came to live with me. Two years later, she had another difficult decision. Vatana was all set to attend a vocational high school in Lowell, but the opportunity to attend MATCH was also there.

We didn't know it at the time, but Vatana was and is dyslexic. What we did know was that for him to get through four years of MATCH would take an effort so extraordinary that it might not work. Nobody was sure about the right way to go, but Salan had the courage to let Vatana make up his own mind, and Vatana had the courage to choose the path with much greater challenges and much greater rewards. He has persevered through his disability, he has shown unbelievable academic **and** social courage, and he has demonstrated so much discipline that even prior to graduation he was hired as a member of the front office staff.

This has not been easy, for him, for his family, and to be totally honest, for me. When the tv is on, I like to watch the Red Sox and the Yankees, he likes to watch Hannah Montana and Sarah Jessica Parker. I get by on about two pair of shoes, he gets by on about 40. We're an unlikely pair, but we have made it through four years together. I love him very much and I have total admiration and respect for his courage, his discipline and his perseverance.

And I also know this--that every one of you seniors has your own unique and truly compelling story. We heard many of them last night at the senior dinner. You have **all**

made it through four very difficult years, sometimes even more, but you have stuck with it, fought through it, and here you are. So, as my great friend Vatana likes to say, today's the day, class of 2010. You did it, you made it, you're graduating from high school, you're going to college, today's the day, today's the day. Thank you.