International Week 2017: Opening Ceremony
A speech delivered by Headmaster Lyle Rigg on February 13, 2017

Welcome to this ceremony to start International Week—one of the biggest celebrations of the year at TASIS and one of my favorite events. This also is one of the only occasions all year, when we are all together as one school from Pre-K to postgraduates.

Yes, the more than 60 different nationalities represented at TASIS this year are here as one community. Quite remarkable.

I want to say a very big thank you to the many, many people who have worked so hard to make International Week such a special event at TASIS. I especially want to recognize Ms. Eleonora Pinton, who has been the overall coordinator of the whole celebration.

Although we soon will have a Parade of Flags to recognize and honor each different country represented at TASIS (and it is good and okay to take pride in one's country), I think that the most important thing that happens here today is that we celebrate the fact that we are one community. At TASIS we work hard to emphasize the things that unite us.

Yes, as headmaster of TASIS and a citizen of the world, it is my strongest wish that we create an environment here where we take down walls—

Walls that divide us.

Walls that prevent us from seeing each other, and hearing each other,

Walls that keep us from interacting and understanding each other,

Walls that prevent us from learning from each other.

Walls that keep us from enjoying each other.

I realize that some of the walls that divide our world won't come down overnight, but I believe that we must keep chipping away at them.

Brick by brick I am confident that we can help achieve Mrs. Fleming's dream of "replacing the teaching of hate and fear with the teaching of understanding and respect for the dignity of all human beings."

As TASIS Foundation Board member Michael Aeschliman writes in an essay on "Community and Diversity at TASIS," we emphasize the common human factors of civilization that unite people rather than separate them. At TASIS we emphasize the common humanity of students, teachers, and staff—not their differences.

So as we celebrate International Week, I think it is very fitting that tomorrow is Valentine's Day—a special day when many of us express our love for others (and not just romantic love). Perhaps it's also an ideal occasion to express our love for humanity.

In the words of the well-known American author, Maya Angelou,

"Love recognizes no barriers,

it jumps hurdles,

leaps fences,

penetrates walls,

to arrive at its destination full of hope."

Thank you for being the kind of community that takes down walls and that provides me with so much hope for the future.

Now let's enjoy the parade and the celebration.