

## NHHS class of 2024 holds graduation ceremony



By Bill Kilpatrick

A packed gymnasium saw 88 graduates cross the stage at the 2024 North Hastings High School Graduation that was held on June 27. Of the 88 graduates, 59 made the honor society, 29 were Ontario Scholars, and another eight received a special diploma for being an Environmental Specialist High Skills Major. There were tears, laughter, hugs, goodbyes, and lots of well-wishing for future endeavours. Principal Duane Wiltshire welcomed everyone and after passing along a congratulations to all the graduates from educator Jaine Thompson, who was unable to attend the ceremony, he outlined some of the struggles, outside of the regular academic struggles, that the students had to overcome to get to this important moment in their lives, 'You've done it. You made it through masks, social distancing, a certain number of people being allowed in the bathroom, cohorts, and bubbles, and two weeks of 'flatten the curve.' You made it through all those things and you're still here. Some of you have learned how to take apart an engine, you've laid the perfect bead in a weld, you've learned how to use the Pythagorean Theorem and how to factor. You've done bellringers, you've done beep tests, you've done the 12-minute run and you've survived. You've all certainly earned the right to be here tonight.' Wiltshire then challenged the graduates to become the best version of themselves that they could be, 'The challenge is to make a choice everyday to become a better version of yourself. It's a two-fold challenge. The first challenge is to continue to develop grit. Angela Duckworth says that developing grit is the single biggest predictor of success in your future. The second part of the challenge is while you are earning your successes that you add kindness to that grit. Kindness is going to make the world a better place and it's going to do you so many favours. You're going to have choices everyday to be kind or not to be kind. Playwright, George Saunders, says that 'the only regrets I have in life are the failures of kindness.' So, I challenge you while you are being successful and while you are embracing hard work showing that grit, I encourage you to be kind.' Valedictorian Mikayla Mills echoed similar sentiments and after also pointing out the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on herself and her classmates, such as not having a grade 8 graduation, she had this to say, 'One-year, five-years, or even 10-years from now, we won't be remembered by our grades, popularity, or the number of group chats we were a part of; we'll be known as the graduating class that inspired change. With the formation of the Increasing Awareness Erasing Stigma group, Wolfpack, Student Council and sportsmanlike athletes, every student before me today has in some way been involved in bringing justice to discriminated groups. For the first time our school had a Pride Day, a Black History Month assembly and continued showcasing the truths of Indigenous history, giving Indigenous people the credit and respect they deserve. It is important to note that all of those events were student

driven. Whether you were the voice that suggested one of these events, someone who helped facilitate & plan, if you participated in these activities or helped shutdown homophobia and racism in our halls, thank you?. Thank you for being a changemaker within your families, friends and community. It's terrifying to go against the crowd, but its impact is already showing within our school and community?? Mills finished her speech by thanking her fellow students, ?Thank you all for making my high school experience an unforgettable one. I want to end with one last piece of advice, ?take pride in how far you've come, have faith in how far you can go, but don't forget to enjoy the journey.?'?