Remarks by James M. Danko, president, Butler University

Thank you, Dr. Johnson.

Good afternoon. I am extremely pleased to welcome the parents, families, friends, and especially our new students who are joining the Butler University family.

I am grateful to the Butler faculty who are participating here today and providing their support for our entering students. You are the foundation of everything we take pride in at Butler, and I am honored to be working with you.

I congratulate our new students for earning a place within a truly outstanding Butler University class. You should be extremely proud of the hard work that has brought you here today.

I know that everyone here at Butler will extend themselves to help you feel comfortable and welcome in your new home here on the Butler University campus.

When entering a new phase of life, it’s natural to feel a certain degree of apprehension about the uncertainty of what lies ahead. About meeting new people, and trying to make a good impression. After all, we all want to be liked.

For most of you, being independent is going to be a new experience. But being independent for the first time is not an easy proposition. It means you need to assume responsibility for yourself in many ways.

It means being separated from the daily support of your family; it means you get to experience a higher level of decision making—while also experiencing the success or failure that may result.
The good news is that you’ll find the Butler community to be a very caring and supportive one. There are many people and processes here to help you.

Not only can you reach out to any number of faculty, staff, and fellow students, you can also call upon an array of Butler resources that are here to help you academically, professionally, and personally.

Your college experience will give you an opportunity to thoughtfully consider where you want to be in years to come. As such, you must develop a plan, a structured course for getting to your future goals. Steps on that course certainly include good grades.

But they can also include related activities that add depth and breadth to your Butler experience—activities such as internships, study abroad, research projects, honors courses, leadership roles in student organizations, and service-learning projects that connect you to our Indianapolis neighbors.

I encourage all of you, during these initial few months here and throughout your entire time at Butler, to support those around you and to know that you are a vital part of this caring and intellectually rich community. View your education as an opportunity to truly grow in both heart and mind.

To our Parents, this is also an important milestone in your lives. As the father of two daughters, I have some sense of what you are experiencing.

I know when I moved my first daughter to college, I could not help but reflect upon my own first day on the campus of John Carroll University in Cleveland back in 1971. It also got me thinking about my parents’ role in both my own college decision making process at the time, and on my first days on campus.
The fact is, my mother, who still lives in the same house in which I was raised, just 15 miles from campus, has never set foot on the John Carroll campus.

Perhaps that fact says more about me than anything, but I have a feeling some of you parents can somewhat relate to a variation of that theme. As we dial the clock forward some, dare I say in my case, 40 years—we as parents, are different from our own parents.

By the time my first daughter was in grade school, I am sure I had spent far more time in school events and meetings with teachers than my parents had done over the combined academic career of my two siblings and me. Today, parents are more actively engaged with their children’s education. On balance, that is a very positive thing.

But now is the time to allow your daughter or son to have the freedom they will need to attain success, and sometimes failure, on their own. Allow them to make their own decisions and fight their own battles. They may very well make different decisions from the ones you might make. And some of their decisions will prove to be dead ends or mistakes.

At times like those, your student might turn to you for advice, and I believe you will be there for them. Just don’t always try to fix their problems. Let them be responsible for their own actions. Let them be adults.

Today, you parents will take a major step in that very natural progression, when you drive away from campus and your daughter or son stays here.

In most, if not all situations, they will do just fine on their own.

You can believe this because you know that you have passed on values and life skills that will help them with the challenges of college.
Your children know that you care about them and that they can contact you. They will want to come back home occasionally. Don’t redecorate their bedrooms just yet. They will even welcome visits from you, especially during Butler’s Family Weekend in early November.

I want you to know that I—and all of Butler’s faculty and staff—take our commitment to help our students succeed very seriously. We wouldn’t be in this profession, or at this particular university, if we didn’t feel that way.

Many of us are parents. All of us think as parents do, in our desire to create a nurturing environment here at Butler where young people can grow as critical thinkers and as well-rounded human beings.

Students, I hope you enjoy every adventure and challenge you encounter at Butler. I hope that you learn more than you can imagine—about the subjects you study and about yourselves.

And, I look forward to shaking your hand on the day that you receive your Butler degree and step confidently into your future.