

"WHAT IT MEANS  
TO BE A TEXAS SCHOLAR"

TEXAS SCHOLARS RECOGNITION  
for  
C. E. KING HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

Remarks by

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Good morning.

During your eighth grade classes, many of you heard from a business representative like me or one of the other guests seated in the audience. We introduced you to the Texas Scholars Program and encouraged you to challenge yourself by signing up and completing either the state's Recommended High School Program or Distinguished Achievement Program curriculum in high school.

Why did we do it? Because we know that the best jobs—and the most fulfilling careers—go to those who have prepared well for their futures. In business, we are looking to hire young people with well-rounded, rigorous academic backgrounds who demonstrate a good work ethic, an inquiring mind, and the ability to make decisions and to work effectively as part of a team.

Let there be no doubt: the **stakes are high** for all of us. The *Houston Business Journal* reported last Friday that Houston ranks near the bottom of 100 cities in a study that identified metropolitan areas across the country with the highest levels of collective brain power based on education levels. On a hundred-point scale, Houston has a brainpower index of 41.05, ranking us 83rd in the nation.

Who ranks highest?

- Madison, Wisconsin
- Washington, D.C.
- San Jose, California
- Bridgeport/Stamford, Connecticut, and
- Boston, Massachusetts

The highest-ranking city in Texas is Austin, which ranks 12<sup>th</sup> in the country. The study found that

- only 9.2 percent of Houstonians have a graduate or professional degree
- 20 percent did not complete high school, and
- 25 percent stopped their education at a high school diploma.

That means that 45 percent of our local population has a high school diploma or less!

The experts say that Houston's economic boom will turn to a bust if we don't succeed in getting a significantly larger percentage of students to complete postsecondary education or training. So there's a lot at stake for our community—and there's much for you personally as well. The *Houston Business Journal* reports that a high school graduate, on average, earns approximately \$29,448 per year.

Someone with a certification or two-year degree averages almost \$38,000 per year. A bachelor's degree holder earns almost \$55,000 per year—about twice as much as someone with only a high school education. And advanced degree holders earn from \$68,000 to well over \$100,000 per year, depending on the type of degree.

These are averages, of course, and actual salaries depend on a number of factors. One thing to keep in mind is that the demand for technical certifications is growing rapidly, and many people with two-year degrees and certifications can command higher incomes than four-year college graduates, especially those with degrees in low-demand fields.

Money is certainly not everything. Most of us also hope for work that we find satisfying, work that allows us to grow as individuals. Completing high school is the first step toward a successful future. The fact that you are here today is an indication that you accepted and met our challenge.

### **So what does it mean to be a Texas Scholar?**

It means you have gone the extra mile to get a good education.

It means that you took harder courses—particularly in math and science—so that you would be better prepared to go to college, to the military, or into the workplace, as well as to become an active, informed member of the community.

You did not limit yourself just to meeting minimum graduation requirements, even though taking the tougher curriculum may have meant sacrificing a higher grade-point average. “Getting by” wasn't good enough for any of you!

The path may sometimes have been difficult over the last four years, but you have made it. You have now joined a large but superior group of students around the state who will be graduating as Texas Scholars. You have reached a major milestone in your lives.

However, we hope that your high school graduation represents **not an end, but rather a beginning**. You now have the tools that will help you be successful in whatever you choose to do. Some of you may be heading to college or a technical institute. Others may opt for the military or a full-time job. We hope you choose the path that is right for you.

Even if you have decided to go directly into the civilian or military workforce, you may still want to consider higher education in the near future. Many employers provide reimbursement for college courses. College is do-able, and you definitely have the knowledge and skills you need to be successful.

You young men and women being recognized today are some of Sheldon Independent School District's best and brightest. On behalf of the local business community, I am proud to salute you and to help present your hard-earned Texas Scholars' medallions.