

AWARDS ASSEMBLY SPEECH

For Secondary Students

I want to confirm a little piece of research

Take your two hands and clasp your fingers. Which thumb is on the top? Is it the right or the left?

Now repeat by folding your arms.....

Are they folded the same as your thumbs. i.e. which is on top the right or left?

Research says that if you fold them the same way you are good looking.

Opposite way means you have intelligence

I can see that this group has both good looks and intelligence

Mr. Principal, Ms Vice-principal, platform guest, honoured students, parents, teachers and guests, on behalf of the Trustees, the Superintendents and everyone in the Board, I bring greetings to all and express our congratulations to the students who are being recognized for their significant achievements today. I also wish to extend our congratulations to all the others – the teachers, parents, friends, and community partners who have supported these students in their quest for being the best.

I am very pleased and honoured to participate in your awards assembly. It is great to be with people, who exemplify all that is good with our schools and our education system.

Students, I congratulate you on your achievement, you should be proud of your accomplishments. You are being recognized as top performers, an achievement that did not come about very easily. It took hard work, a lot of commitment and a lot of support from others.

It's because of students such as your self, right across Ontario and Canada, working with well qualified and dedicated teachers, supported from home by their families that Canada compares quite favourably on international tests. In Canada we rank 3rd in Science, 4th in Reading and 6th in Mathematics, only behind Korea, Finland, Hong Kong, the Netherlands and Switzerland. That is a great achievement, but we cannot rest on our success. We need to continue to improve how and what we are learning because other countries all over the world are focussing on improving student learning. We want to remain at the top and in fact, we need to continue to lead in world if we want to

continue to enjoy our lifestyle we are privileged to have in our country, our province and our community.

I encourage everyone to maintain a passion for learning, a passion for excellence, a passion for being the best that you are capable of being ... and many doors will be opened to you in your future.

At this point, I normally would have said that because you are high achievers you are going to be the Leaders of the future. I would have said that in the future, you are going to make great contributions to our society and that because of you the future of our society is going to be in good hands.

That's what I would normally have said.

But a few year ago I heard two inspirational speakers. One was Justin Trudeau – Son of Pierre Elliot Trudeau, and now Prime Minister of Canada. When Justin was a young man he was making a great impact in his community especially with his work on the Environment, Youth and Public Service. When I heard Justin Trudeau speak he was just a young man but had been a teacher and was then the CEO of Katimavik (Ka-ti-ma-vik). Justin went on to be a Member of

Parliament for Papineau, Quebec and now he is Prime Minister of Canada.

The other was a young man who at a very young age was the CEO and founder of Free The Children Organization. His name is Craig Kielburger.

Both Justin Trudeau and Craig Kielburger encouraged those of us who have the opportunity to speak to young people to stop telling young people like you that you are going be future leaders. They told us that this message is selling you short. They told us to start telling you that you need to be leaders today. They told us to encourage you to use your gifts and talents to make a positive difference today, in your school, community or the world.

Kielburger is an excellent example of how one young person, at the age of 12 made a difference that changed his world.

Craig Kielburger age 12 became an advocate and spokesperson for children's rights. It started one day when searching for the comics in the local paper, a front-page article caught his attention. He read about a young boy from Pakistan who was sold into bondage as a carpet weaver, who escaped and was murdered for speaking out against child labour.

Craig Kielberger was so moved by the incident he went to school and talked to his teacher and fellow students to see what they could do about stopping child labour in third world countries. Craig later went on and founded the organization (Kids Can) Free the Children.

Now At 27 Craig's work on human rights has led him across more than 50 countries, meeting people from all walks of life along the way-from isolated tribes in Africa to street children in South America. He frequently addresses business groups, government bodies and students and he has met with celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey, Prime Ministers, Presidents and CEO's, as well as some of the greatest spiritual, political and social leaders of our time, such as Mother Teresa, the Pope, the Dalai Lama, Queen Elizabeth, and Nelson Mandella.

These are but two examples of young people, and there are many others, not much older than you, who started to make a difference in the world around them and who are now national and international leaders. Our world needs more Justin Trudeaus and Craig Keilbergers.

So I encourage you to think about what you can do to make difference today. You never know what your actions will accomplish and where your helping hand will lead you and those around you.

One simple thing you can do, starting today, is to help some one else in your school that is not sitting in this assembly to do better at school so they too can be sitting here next year. While it is great for all of you to be sitting here, as high achievers, how much better would our chances of success, as a society be if every student in this school could also be sitting in this assembly with you. Everyone's success is our success. You can help. You can encourage them, teach them, mentor or tutor them. If each of you helped just one person, think how much better this school, our city, our society would be. Think how great you will feel if you played a part in that, so that we remain on top as one of the best educated population in the world.

So I am not going to tell you that you are the Leaders of Tomorrow, I am going to tell you that you are the Leaders of Today.

Because in the end, just one single person can make a world of difference.

So let me again, congratulate you on your achievements so far, and I hope that your first class standing is an indication of what you are capable of achieving, not just in the future, but starting today.

I wish you the very best in your leadership journey.