

2010 Valedictorian Speech

Read the inspiring speech by our 2010 valedictorian, Sam K!

Honoured Guests, Family and Friends, Parents, Teachers, students and Fellow Graduates,

Good Afternoon!

Wow! I can't believe that I am standing here today addressing you on our graduation! This is an honour for me and a dream for me and my fellow graduates! In this moment one dream that began several years ago has come true. Today is the beginning of many new and exciting journeys for us. For some it has been 2 years, for some it has been 3 years and for others like me it has been 4 years! ...some have been here for 5 years! The time that we have spent here in years is not what is important, but what is important is that we are all here before you today as proud graduates of the Eaton Arrowsmith Program. Four years ago when our parents dropped us off at this school and we learned what our days would consist of, we seriously wondered if it wasn't our parents who should be here and not us! Things sounded crazy here! But over a million lines of tracing and more than a million columns of word, here we are ready to embark on a new journey in what some would consider the "real" world! I can say without a doubt that we all feel ready to start our journey in our new schools – word, tracing, phrases, broca's – all this and more has somehow wired us to succeed where we were unable to manage before! I know we are ready, but I know our future success will not come without hard work and determination – and after spending a few years here, we all have a very strong sense of determination and hard work – how else could we ever have survived without hard work and determination at Eaton Arrowsmith School.

When I was creating this speech, I wasn't sure what to say. I spent days and nights worrying about what to say. My Mom asked me a simple question: "What have I learned at EAS?" Good question! - But a better question is "What haven't I learned here?"

- I have learned: tolerance, and patience – we are all unique in our own ways, and these ways are special to each person and makes them who they are.
- I have learned that hard work pays off!! – That working hard a little bit a time gives you the strength to overcome the bigger challenges.
- I have learned to stand up for myself and to reason for what I think is right and know when to sit things out if they are wrong.

I have learned to read, to write, to think, and stand up for myself. These are the life skills that I have learned at EAS! What more could I ask for!

To my fellow students and classmates continuing on here at EAS - it's hard to believe that any of the work that we do here at EAS every day makes a difference. It's tough to understand, it's tough to tell people what your school is all about and it's tough to believe that it can make a difference – but let me tell you one thing! It works!! All I can say is, work hard, focus and continue your determination to the end of the program – last year at this time I wanted more than anything to leave and be in a regular school – I wanted to be with my brother, and I wanted to be with my friends. But in the end I finished my last year at EAS and it's been the best year here – the progress that I made in this final year is in no way measureable to how unprepared I would have been if I left last year! So my words to you are – don't leave if you're not ready, don't leave if you are not done. Stay here and be confident when you are ready to leave.

So today is our last day here! And coming here every day was made easier knowing that we had special people waiting here for us.

To our cognitive teachers, and there too many to name... You all are a special group of people. Your commitment and dedication and your willingness to make each individual student reach their success is what is at the heart of this school. Thank you all so much!! My special thanks to my very own cognitive teachers Mr. Williamson and Ms. Francis - you made this last year so enjoyable for me and the whole D5 class.

To our Academic teachers – Ms. Unger, Miss Trayers', Miss B., and Ms. Poirier. Your job is to keep us in touch with the real world! The world of Academics! This will be what our lives are going to be all about from now on – thank you all for giving us a great start.

And of course Mr Eaton, if it wasn't for you, none of us would be here today – we'd all be in Toronto! So thank you so very much for your dedication in bringing EAS to life so that we can all benefit from your commitment.

Mr. Watson, and Ms. Cohen – you are the leaders in charge. From your cheery smiles first thing every morning to your farewells at the end of the day and for all the things that you both do in-between these times – Thank you so much! We appreciate everything you do for us to keep this school here for us!

To our parents! You are heroes in our educational journey. If you didn't care, we wouldn't be here; but you all cared enough to take us out of our schools, away from our friends and out of our communities to a place that sounded as strange anything that we had ever heard of. You couldn't even explain what went on here. But because you cared so much, we pushed through – and look at us today! Because of you, we were given the opportunity to grow in a way that was meaningful for us. Thank you for caring, thank you for your sacrifices, and thank you for believing that this would work for us.

And finally to my very special friend Ms. Heusel - I've known you for so long, I knew when you were Ms. Hansen! I want to say that you and I have come a long way together, but in actual fact, your guidance and kindness, your generosity and caring has brought ME a long way. You will always be my special and best friend. I owe a lot of my success to you! So, thank you.

In closing, I just want to pass on the following inspirational passage that I found while I was creating my speech, from an unknown author to my fellow graduates and classmates; I feel this passage summarizes today's graduation and our journey and could not be said any differently: "Always remember your achievements with pride. Through the years you have set goals and met each

challenge with enough courage and determination to overcome the many obstacles you've encountered along the way. Success is not measured by how well you fulfill the expectations of others, but by how you honestly live up to your own expectations. Success is not a place at which one arrives but rather the spirit with which one undertakes and continues the journey. Because you have been true to yourself in the pursuit of your dream, you have earned this moment and the right to be proud of your accomplishments."

Thank you!