Salutatorian speech

By Trenton Gilstrap

Good Mourning class of 2012!

I am blessed to be here today, not only because this gathering is the start of a new chapter in the book we call life, but also because I get to make a lasting memory with my very lovable peers. I will take care of the most suspenseful thing first. It might not be as important as LeBron’s decision, but I have decided to take my talents to the University of Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh has all the programs I need and their rank in my major, bioengineering, is 12th in the nation. Pitt used to be a school that was rarely noticed, but as their students worked hard and alumni changed the world, it became a world- renowned, top research university- which brings me to my message: you can change yourself and how others perceive you if you work hard enough. When I was a boy, I was very smart for my age and even had a choice to skip kindergarten, but my social skills were shabby. So-called ‘experts’ even said that I should stay in special, intensive courses. Then, at the age of 8, I found out that I was diagnosed with two disabilities: aspergers syndrome and epilepsy. The former is a mild form of autism that is present often in smart individuals but it hinders their social skills growth. When I was young, autism research just became a main topic on people’s mind, so people who had cases like mine were grouped with the mentally retarded. By this time, the verdict on me by my peers was that I was smart and ‘retarded’ at the same time. This is when I buckled down and worked hard. I went to therapy, improved my grades even more, and started to associate with more people. I began to make friends who believed in me and I think everyone who is successful needs those. Through the connections I made, I joined the band, started my own 501c3 non-profit organization and been involved in many other extra-curricular activities. Now, the community has called me an advocate, a great student and a good person. I used myself as an example, but in my wonderful graduating class, I’ve seen people who have changed themselves for the better, whether it was showcasing their talents in our art or poetry shows for the first time, getting on honor roll for the first time or getting into less trouble with administration. Our class has done well in my eyes and hopefully our underclassmen can follow through. I would like to thank all my teachers, administrators, special guests, family, my friends, my band mates and most of all, the heavenly father. Thanks for your time and God bless!