**14414, Garry Swartz**

Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to all the parents, family members, and friends of our graduating students this year. This is an important night for all of them and it means a lot to them for all of you to be here for them. It is a great privilege for me to be standing here in front of you to express the happiness that we feel in our hearts today. They say, “People only remember the first and forget the rest.” But I believe that these three years have been a journey and we will take many memories with us.

Our students experienced several “firsts” this year. Port Susan Middle school in Snohomish County was the only middle school that received the Washington Achievement Award for high progress. Students are recognized for their performance for reading and math growth. CONGRATULATIONS! This award is based on state wide assessment data for the three previous years. This year’s 8th graders are a very big part of our academic success. I had the dubious honor of representing our school in accepting the award from Randy Doorn who is the Washington State Superintendent for the Office of Public Instruction. This proves to all of us that these students’ dedication and exceptional work ethics has paid dividends and has provided success for all. Please join me in giving these kids a hand for their achievement.

Next, our 8th graders have taken the Smarter Balance Test. But, you don’t worry about remembering the name of the test, it might change by next year. You know how officials are, always coming up with hew names for doing the same thing or taking the same name and changing what it does. They just love change.

And, last but not least, tonight is the first time our class has seen Allie Jones wear a dress. You look great Allie, even though we all know you’ll be back in blue jeans as soon as you get home.

Earning these awards were great accomplishments for our students but, we do not need an award or a medal just to prove that we have something special within us. All of us are blessed with talents and are worth congratulating. That’s what this day is all about. How many times have we imagined what this day to be like? I have to say, I have thought about this day so many times I could have memorized every imagined scene. But not even the best of my imagined scenes could compare to the real scene I am greeted with right now. Every one of you has come a long way from the first day you attended this school three years ago.

It took us all three years to finally arrive at this 8th grade promotion. Who would have thought that our then nervous thirteen or fourteen year old selves would survive the roller coaster ride of middle school and would be here listening to this speech? We have come a long way in our journey indeed. Now that we have passed the challenges of Port Susan middle school, it’s time for us to move on to a bigger challenge—high school. The lessons you have learned in class will surely help you get through that next stage, but we also need to remember that all those formulas, poems—everything we have memorized—are not the only things that will help us through.

We also need to retain the things we have learned other than the academic stuff. Gaining the courage to stand in front of the class when we can barely work the nerve to talk to the person next to us; having the dedication to complete all our math homework when the only thing we actually know about it is the fact that we have to solve it. Those are but some of the things that we have learned about ourselves that go beyond our text books. Those are the things that we will need not only in high school but even after that. And there is yet another thing we all need to remember; it is a lesson that I have learned through the years. Learn to appreciate others. Remember that we cannot stand on our own. We will always need each other.

Eighth graders, you have more information at your fingertips than any generation before you. I had volumes and volumes of obsolete encyclopedias and microfilm when I was in school. You have Google and Wikipedia. I had three black and white channels on TV and when we wanted to watch it, we had to hold the antenna and make high tech adjustments with a wire coat hanger. My first cell phone was the size of a brick and just as heavy; yours are the size of those little matchboxes. I remember waiting all summer for one movie—True Grit. Now there’s a blockbuster every three days. The outcome of all this is that you are bombarded with images and music and stories and news and opinions every day, non-stop. It is so very easy to be distracted in a world like that. I know. It is so easy to be entertained without being alert. It is so easy to let the world wash over you. I encourage you to carefully consider all the information you receive. Check it out for accuracy and don’t blindly accept what you read and hear just because it’s on television or the internet. It’s too easy to post, publish, or promote information. Use your heart and mind to sort through the mass of information you have thrust at you to make your own decisions. Part of your education, in addition to all the memorizing was learning to think and reason. Use that skill as you grow and mature to make wise decisions.

A lot of students here are very conscientious and concerned about their letter grades. However we should not forget that knowledge will stay with us longer than our letter grade and what you learn is what you have retained for life. Here are just a few words of wisdom that I’d like to offer you.

The essential thing is not to succeed; the essential thing is to put forth a great effort. Critical and deep thinking will never go out of style. You’ve got a good start here, continue to work hard and be responsible because you know how to do it. The road to success in education is always under construction, however there is no education like adversity. Adversity brings out character and you have to deal with that before you can deal with success. Success is measured by how high you bounce when you hit bottom. Continue to work hard, be responsible, and retain the good work ethic you have demonstrated the last three years. Oh, yes, and talk is cheap except when congress does it.

Congratulations to each and every one of you and good luck as you move up to high school.

Thank you.