

Premier High grads told to set goals high, chase their dreams

By Scott Kirk Special to the Reporter-News

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Without question, many of the 68 graduates of the Class of 2011 from Premier High School overcame obstacles to walk across the stage at Southern Hills Church of Christ on Thursday night, and the message they got from commencement speaker George Levesque was that anyone can accomplish the goals they set.

Premier High School in Abilene is one of 23 Premier High Schools across the state focusing on students who have fallen behind in other schools or those who want individualized instruction. The school's graduates meet Texas Education Agency standards.

Levesque, the news director at KTXS television, said he was kicked out by his parents during his junior year in high school in Colorado City after telling them that he intended to go to college. His parents were members of a religious movement that considered education "of this world, and we were not of this world," he said.

"High school had been a very long road for me," Levesque said. "My high school experience, like yours, was very different. I knew I wanted more."

Upon leaving his home, he stayed with one of his teachers and got a job at a convenience store as "the guy who deep-fried burritos after school."

After graduation, he went to McMurry University, where again he said he was helped by others who reached out to him.

"My friends there became my brothers and sisters and my professors became my parents," said Levesque, who told the graduates he has had one conversation with his parents in the past 21 years.

"The credit goes to many others," he said. "It's easy to fulfill dreams when you have people who are willing to do anything and everything to open up the path for you. Would you be walking the stage today without help from others?"

To illustrate the point further, Levesque told the story of his brother, who also left home when he was 16 to pursue other objectives — but ended up in prison.

"Why can two brothers with the same goal end up so differently?" Levesque asked. "Could it be he didn't accept the help when it was offered to him. My advice to you is

very simple: Accept the help people offer. Maybe someday you can do the same thing."

Sue C. Pond, director at Premier, described the school's 12th graduating class as an especially successful one.

"This class is just amazing," she said. "They've done everything they were asked."

Michael Stephens delivered the valedictory address and thanked the faculty at Premier for helping him succeed academically.

"We knew we were capable of learning anything kids anywhere else learned," he said. "I can honestly say I learned more here than I have anywhere else I've attended."

Brittney Niemczyk, the salutatorian, also thanked the faculty and staff.

"Some of us would not have been here if it wasn't for Premier High School," she said. "The regular school system failed us."



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