

IEKHS Class of 2025 Graduates With \$4.8M in Scholarships and Messages of Resilience

Nearly half of the class graduated with honors, every student applied to college, and the class earned \$4.8M in scholarships. Speakers emphasized growth, mental health, and perseverance, including a valedictorian who overcame major personal struggles.

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Janeke Simon **May 23, 2025**

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The Class of 2025 at Ivanna Eudora Kean High School marked their graduation on Thursday with messages of perseverance, growth, and resilience. From record-setting scholarship awards to deeply personal reflections, the ceremony highlighted the many ways this class has defined success on their own terms—through academic achievement, personal struggle, and a steadfast sense of community.

“Success is something you build step by step through effort, resilience, and belief in yourself,” said Ivanna Eudora Kean High School Principal Sally Petty as she addressed the 146 graduating seniors.

She acknowledged that success would look different for each of them. “For some, success might mean college or a dream career. For others, it may mean starting a business, traveling the world, or simply figuring out the next step.” No matter the path, she urged, perseverance is essential.

By the numbers, the Class of 2025 has already demonstrated an impressive start. Nearly half the cohort graduated with honors, and every student applied to a university. Half of the graduating class had already been accepted to a college, university, or trade school. The class collectively secured over \$4.8 million in scholarships, signaling strong academic potential and preparation for the next phase of their journeys.

“Remember, it’s your story and you have the pen,” Petty told the graduates, before referencing a line from Kendrick Lamar’s chart-topping hit released last November: “Remember, they are not like us.”

Salutatorian Jah’kayda Maloney followed with remarks centered on the idea that success is rooted in continuous growth. “Being here isn’t just about grades or test scores,” she said. “It’s about growth... it’s about how we kept moving forward, even when the road was unclear.” Quoting poet Maya Angelou, Maloney encouraged her peers to use what they learn to improve themselves and uplift others.

Valedictorian Shade Mark deepened the message by sharing her personal story of struggle and perseverance. “Persistence over perfection” was her mantra, as she recounted a “far from perfect” high school experience that included battling anxiety and panic attacks during 11th grade. At one point, she admitted, “I felt broken and lost.”

Her journey to becoming valedictorian, she explained, involved resilience and a range of support mechanisms: “It was constant prayer. It was watching countless AP classroom videos, asking questions, studying late into the night, failing and trying again. It was seeking therapy when my mental health declined, and most of all, it was pressing on after learning that my mother had been diagnosed with cancer.”

Self-compassion, she said, was critical to staying the course. “We will make mistakes, we will trust the wrong people,” she reminded her classmates. “Even when you get a bus’ chest, have grace on yourself.” Principal Petty had earlier noted that Mark had received more than \$750,000 in scholarship offers.

Keynote speaker Kyle F. Powell Jr. offered practical advice for the graduates’ next chapter, urging them to observe and understand the world before trying to change it. “Master the old people’s way first, then give us some advice,” he said. Powell emphasized the importance of developing resilience, reliability, problem-solving skills, and accountability to succeed in today’s job market.

The ceremony concluded with remarks from Governor Albert Bryan Jr., who praised the sense of unity and shared celebration he witnessed. “People talk a lot about what we don’t have, but what we have is a very loving community,” the governor said. “You inspire me every graduation I go to... I want us to continue to inspire one another.”