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Yates valedictorian overcomes health problems to become the first in her family to go to college, earn more than \$80,000 in scholarships

*Student among high school seniors graduating this
weekend with help from Houston Housing Authority*

Yates High School's Kierra Lee knows she beat almost inconceivable odds to graduate this month as class valedictorian.

Kierra will graduate from Yates High on Friday, May 29, with support from the Houston Housing Authority, which she recognizes for providing a home and inspiration for a better future. The graduation ceremony will be held at 7 p.m. on Friday, May 29 at Texas Southern University (3100 Cleburne St., 77004) in the Heath and Physical Education Building.

Raised by her ill grandmother who had little more than Social Security disability income to support her, Kierra was diagnosed with Crohn's disease at age 12.

Kierra was in and out of hospitals after multiple misdiagnoses, and missed many days of school as her weight dwindled. She kept her fighting spirit as she not only kept up with school work, but excelled in her classes despite painful treatments and monthly intravenous medication.

Through it all, Kierra refused to let anything stop her. She studied and worked hard to excel in school and graduate this week from Jack Yates High School as valedictorian of her class.

Kierra remembers the turning point in her life, crediting the Houston Housing Authority with giving her the opportunity and confidence she needed to go out and fight for her future. In addition to providing a safe environment for her to grow up in, officials from the Houston Housing Authority offered her a volunteer opportunity that she says changed her life forever.

"I worked with the elderly in the Houston Housing Authority community. They gave me responsibility, and I saw that I could do it," Kierra said. "By giving me a chance, they gave me confidence. They taught me that although I might have a disability, I could get a real job and not stay in housing the rest of my life. The Houston Housing Authority shaped me."

Kierra's attitude and determination has molded her into the successful, driven young woman she is today.

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“True happiness can be achieved not by how much money one has in their pocket, but by the wholesomeness of a person’s daily activities. I am pursuing a college degree because I am a compassionate individual who believes that I am destined to help others like me. I believe education is critical in life and in order to successfully achieve my dreams, I must gain the knowledge of the world around me,” Kierra said.

Earning more than \$80,000 in scholarships, she will be the first in her family to attend college. Kierra will achieve her dream this fall by attending Texas A&M University, majoring in biomedical engineering. She plans to also get a graduate degree in sociology.

Before going off to college, Kierra plans to intern at the Houston Housing Authority and serve as a teacher’s assistant at the Rice Summer Business Institute. She will travel for the first time out of Houston, on her first flight, this summer when she goes to UCLA on a Magic Johnson scholarship.

The California trip will be a vacation from Kierra’s many responsibilities taken on throughout her high school career, including an internship at Merrill Lynch, roles as National Honor society member, Student Council historian, Student Youth and Government historian, editor supervisor for the media technology club, volleyball manager, and volunteer for the YMCA and Houston Blood Bank.

She is compassionate and finds fulfillment through helping others. Kierra has a passion for children and is completing her internship with Children’s Protective Services.

“It is possible that a flower of success can blossom in the midst of poverty and adversity,” Kierra said.

Her grandmother is her biggest cheerleader and supports Kierra in all she does. She and her grandmother are ready to celebrate her graduation, but even attending graduation is a struggle Kierra must face. Without a car, Kierra must take the bus system to TSU Friday evening.

“You learn the bus routes and you make it work. It may take us an hour and half or two hours to get there, but I will make it,” Kierra said.

Her tenacity and strength overflow as she speaks about her upcoming graduation.

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