

**Class of 2018 set to graduate in ceremonies across the city**

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*May 25, 2018* – Nearly 11,000 high school seniors from across the Houston Independent School District will receive their diplomas at [graduation ceremonies](http://www.houstonisd.org/graduationcalendar) starting this month.

Students from HISD’s Class of 2018 have received more than 11,800 acceptances to colleges and universities across the country. To date, this senior class has racked up more than $313 million – and counting – worth of scholarships and financial aid awards.

Nearly 100 of these students will graduate at the top of their classes as high school [valedictorians and salutatorians](http://www.houstonisd.org/2018scholars). More than 400 seniors are graduating high school with associate degrees in hand, and many students also will graduate with industry certifications in high-demand technical fields.

HISD will feature the stories of several Class of 2018 graduates who have overcome challenging circumstances during their educational journeys through a series of heartfelt videos. To celebrate the end of this chapter in their lives, school leaders have asked the parents and teachers of select graduates to write a letter to their student in honor of their triumph over adversity. Students will read the moving letters for the very first time in these video vignettes. Several of these videos include the stories of:

* **Alexander Valdez**, *Austin High School*

Valdez has had difficulties handed to him at every turn, but has shown true grit by never giving up in his pursuit of going to college. Valdez, who is Latino and gay, lost both of his parents (his mother just last year after losing her battle to cancer) and was forced out of his home after it was destroyed by Hurricane Harvey – situations which left him legally orphaned, homeless and living out of his backpack. He will be the first in his family to graduate high school and attend college. He will be pursuing degrees in social work and pre-law at Albion College.

* **Micheal Brown**, *Lamar High School*

Brown made headlines in April after he was accepted to 20 colleges and universities including four Ivy League schools, all of them offering him full ride scholarships. Brown grew up in Houston’s Historic Third Ward and largely credits his motivation to his mother Berthinia Rutledge-Brown, a single mother who overcame her own challenges to set the example for her son. Brown will attend Stanford University and seek a degree in political science.

* **Jennifer Guzmán**, valedictorian, *Sterling Aviation High School*

Guzmán will graduate as a history-making Sterling alum after becoming the first Hispanic female drum major of Sterling Aviation High School’s Wall of Sound Marching Band. She initially enrolled at Sterling because of the school’s music magnet program, but discovered her love of aviation shortly after. Thanks to the school’s aviation magnet program, Guzmán has completed FAA-approved courses and will obtain her private pilot’s license over the summer. In the fall, she will enroll at either Texas Southern University or Southern University and A&M College to major in music education and minor in aviation.

***Media interested in interviewing graduates or covering graduation ceremonies should contact the HISD Press Office.***

The district’s first graduation ceremony will be held Saturday, May 26 for the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts. The ceremony is scheduled for 7 p.m. at The Hobby Center for the Performing Arts (800 Bagby St., Houston, TX 77002).

Additional ceremonies will take place between Thursday, May 31 and Sunday, June 10.

To learn more about the students from HISD’s Class of 2018, follow the hashtag #HISDGrads on social media and visit [HoustonISD.org/grads](http://www.houstonisd.org/grads). To view the district’s high school graduation calendar, visit [HoustonISD.org/graduationcalendar.](http://www.houstonisd.org/graduationcalendar)