

## Address to the students of Webb Middle School

Hi, guys! On behalf of everyone at Townsend Press, I would like to congratulate you in showing such incredible academic improvement this year. It's nothing short of amazing and you should be very, very proud of your accomplishments. It's an honor to be here.

For those of you not familiar with the series of books Townsend Press produces, the stories revolve around young people like you. They are kids struggling to find their place in life. They are kids facing challenges and obstacles. And like you, they are kids hoping for a brighter tomorrow—kids facing real-life situations. I truly hope you take the time to read at least one of the novels because they have a great deal to offer about life's lessons.

In the book I helped to author along with Paul Langan, the main character—Martin Luna—experiences a great tragedy in his life when his little brother Huero is killed in a drive-by shooting. Martin's world is turned upside down and he struggles to make sense of things. He's confused, he's angry. He's depressed, he's alone. And sadly, Martin doesn't have high expectations for himself. He thinks he has to settle for a hard life because he doesn't deserve much better.

For the rest of the story Martin is forced to make one decision after another. Some of the choices that he makes are positive ones . . . and some of them are not so positive; choices that only bring more pain and suffering to him and his mother.

Well whether you know it or not, each of you is being confronted with a very important decision in your life right now. You're being faced with whether you want to work hard in school, or whether you want to accept things just the way they are. Maybe you even feel *you* don't deserve much in life.

Well before I step away from this podium, I want to remind you of something.

These people behind me, they are all very important and busy people. They have busy schedules, but you know what? They took the time to be here because they believe in you. They helped to bring thousands of books hundreds of miles because they believe that much in you. Then there's the story of your amazing community and how it chose to stand behind you. You know why? Because they believe in you! Now—and most importantly—we

need *you* to believe in you. We need you to continue to believe in yourself; that you can succeed if you put your mind to it.

And it starts with this, guys [[lift up Townsend Press novel](#)], because by reading you're thinking, by reading you're learning, by reading you're improving your writing skills. There is power here. There is power in books, guys.

The door to your future is open, but you have to step through it. You have to decide you want what is on the other side—a world where amazing things lie in wait like rewarding careers and fulfilling lives. It's all up to you. The opportunity to read is in front of you. Now the choice is yours.

To the community of Austin and the students and faculty of Webb Middle School, you've already proven you're no quitters. Continue to fight. Continue to believe . . . and great things . . . will continue to happen.

Thank you so much for allowing me to participate today.