

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

Johnnie Thomas

EdD (MSW '00) • SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS, RICH TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 227



Johnnie Thomas, EdD (MSW '00) is the superintendent for Rich Township High School District 227 in Matteson, Illinois. As an education executive, author, and international public speaker, Dr. Thomas is a thought leader and professional development facilitator in the fields of equity, differentiated education, crisis intervention, and advocacy for young men of color to help them overcome obstacles to success.

Dr. Thomas has a bachelor's degree in sociology from Southern Illinois University. He earned his master's of social work degree from Loyola University Chicago and later his doctorate in educational leadership from DePaul University. He began his career as a social worker in the Chicago Public Schools, and later was appointed executive director for student services in Valley View School District 365U, southwest of Chicago. Dr. Thomas next served as associate superintendent at the Township High School District 214, the second largest high school district in Illinois, based in Arlington Heights, before taking over as superintendent of Community High School District 155 in Crystal Lake, IL., in 2012. He was

appointed superintendent at Rich Township in 2017.

Throughout his career in education and public service, Dr. Thomas has been recognized for his collaborative and community-focused approach to leadership. He has strengthened the academic offerings and increased opportunities for students in Rich Township by introducing initiatives such as INCubatoredu, an entrepreneurial program for high school students, and the International Baccalaureate Middle Years and Diploma programs. He achieved acceptance for Rich Township students to participate in the College Board Pre-AP program that is now part of the curriculum, one of only 100 schools nationwide to be admitted to the program at the time of its inception.

As an executive, Dr. Thomas oversaw the passage of a \$105 million bond issuance for the Rich Township High School District, which funded significant renovations to improve school facilities for students, created a new manufacturing and engineering wing of the STEM campus, a new commercial-grade culinary kitchen, a state-of-the-art football stadium, and a 90,000-square-foot field house at the Fine Arts and Communication campus. His success in these endeavors has led to significant donations from Amazon and the College Board.

Dr. Thomas is currently the president of the Superintendent's Commission for the Study of Demographics and Diversity. He has served as a member of the Loyola University Chicago School of Education advisory board, and on the boards for McHenry County Big Brothers Big Sisters, and SPEED cooperative. He is also the membership chair for Illinois Association of School Administrators, South Suburban Chapter.