

BWL Class of 2026 Graduates with a Legacy of Belonging, Ambition, and Growth

NEW YORK CITY, NY, UNITED STATES, July 27, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- On Thursday, May 21, the [Birch Wathen Lenox](#) community gathered at Congregation Rodeph Sholom to celebrate the 41 members of the graduating Class of 2026. The ceremony was a moving and inspiring tribute to the spirit of unity, pride, and leadership that this class brought to the [BWL](#) community.

The ceremony honored not only the students' academic achievements, but also the profound sense of home and belonging the Class of 2026 built together throughout their years at BWL. Student speakers Jaevian Pardo '26 and Dolcé Rehbein '26 offered heartfelt reflections from two distinct perspectives that together captured the spirit of the class.

Dolcé, Co-President of the senior class and a BWL student since Kindergarten, reflected on growing up at BWL and the deep sense of belonging she found within the community over the course of 13 years. Framing her remarks around the Winnie the Pooh quote, "How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard," she spoke candidly about the bittersweet reality of graduation and the ordinary moments that ultimately became the most meaningful—mornings in familiar hallways, classroom traditions, spirited dress code debates, and friendships that came to feel like family. Describing her BWL experience as "kaleidoscopic," she reflected on the ways the Class of 2026 grew through uncertainty, challenges, and change, encouraging her classmates to embrace growth, cherish the present, and carry the connections they built at BWL with them wherever life leads next.

Jaevian, who joined BWL as a freshman, reflected on entering the school without knowing anyone and gradually finding a sense of belonging within the community. Speaking candidly about the uncertainty, challenges, and growth that shaped the past four years, he emphasized



that many of the most important lessons of high school came not from assignments or exams, but from relationships, resilience, and shared experiences. He spoke movingly about the meaningful connections he built with advisors, teachers, staff members, and peers, describing the BWL community as a place where students are truly known and supported. Highlighting memories from class trips, the senior retreat, and everyday moments that brought the class closer together, Jaevian celebrated the Class of 2026 as more than just classmates, but a family. He concluded by encouraging his peers to move confidently toward the future, carrying with them the strength, support, and sense of community they found at BWL.

Several students were recognized during the ceremony for their exceptional contributions to the school community. Dolcé received the Book Prize, awarded to a student who exemplifies outstanding academic achievement while demonstrating deep commitment to the life of the school through curiosity, leadership, citizenship, and service. Maia Salgado '26 received the Faculty Prize, an honor bestowed upon a student whose integrity, compassion, and respect for others consistently elevate the BWL community both inside and outside the classroom.

This theme of gratitude, opportunity, and responsibility was echoed in the remarks from graduation speaker Josh Bekenstein (BW '76), a proud alumnus of The Birch Wathen School, which merged with Lenox in 1991. Mr. Bekenstein, who helped found Bain Capital in 1984 and served as a partner there until transitioning to Senior Advisory Partner in 2023, currently chairs the Board of the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and recently completed his term as Senior Trustee at Yale University. Speaking candidly about the sacrifices his family made to send him to Birch Wathen, he encouraged graduates to appreciate the opportunities before them and to give back to others, quoting President John F. Kennedy: "For of those to whom much is given, much is required."

Retiring faculty member Josh Russell also took to the podium, delivering a heartfelt and deeply personal farewell speech at his final BWL graduation after 35 years of service. Reflecting on the joy and meaning the school community has brought to his life, he thanked the students, faculty, and staff for becoming his extended family and making BWL his second home. He concluded by quoting Max Ehrmann's *Desiderata*: "With all its sham, drudgery, and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world. Be cheerful. Strive to be happy." Mr. Russell shared that BWL had brought him immense happiness and encouraged everyone to continue building a community rooted in joy and connection.

Head of School Bill Kuhn captured the spirit of the occasion in his remarks, reflecting on the growth, leadership, and resilience that defined the Class of 2026. Addressing the graduates directly, he acknowledged the uncertainty of the world they are entering while reminding them that their time at BWL has prepared them not only academically, but also as thoughtful, compassionate, and engaged citizens. He praised the class for embracing the values they identified for themselves—belonging, ambition, and growth—and highlighted the many ways they brought those ideals to life throughout their senior year. From civic engagement and leadership to artistic expression, athletics, community service, and spirited advocacy, Mr. Kuhn

celebrated the class for learning how to think critically, support one another, and navigate complexity with empathy and integrity. Above all, he encouraged students to protect their attention, trust their own judgment, and remain open to growth as they move into the next chapter of their lives.

As tassels were turned and caps soared through the air, family, friends, faculty, and staff rose to their feet in celebration. The Class of 2026 has helped shape the story of BWL in profound and lasting ways, and their legacy will continue to echo throughout the halls of the community for years to come.

Congratulations, BWL Class of 2026!

The Class of 2026 will be attending the following colleges and universities:

American University
Boston University (2)
Bucknell University
Carleton University, Ottawa
College of Charleston
College of the Holy Cross
Cornell University
Drew University
Elon University
Franklin & Marshall College
George Mason University
Lehigh University
London South Bank University (UK)
Northeastern University
Parsons School of Design
Rochester Institute of Technology
Savannah College of Art & Design
Skidmore College
Smith College
St. John's University
Syracuse University
Tulane University
University of Chicago
University of Maryland
University of Michigan
University of Southern California
University of Texas—Austin
University of Virginia
University of Wisconsin—Madison

Villanova University
Washington University in St. Louis

Earlier this spring, BWL hosted a celebration in honor of National College Decision Day, marking an exciting milestone as our Class of 2026 shared where they will be heading next fall. Wearing college apparel and surrounded by classmates, faculty, and counselors, seniors spent the day reflecting on the experiences, relationships, and growth that shaped their journey at BWL.

Throughout the college process, BWL's College Counseling team worked closely with students and families, offering guidance, encouragement, and personalized support every step of the way. The celebration was not only about college acceptances, but also about the confidence, resilience, and self-discovery that defined each student's path. Hear about the College Counseling experience in our students' own words here.

We are incredibly proud of the Class of 2026 and all they have accomplished during their time at BWL. As they prepare for new campuses, opportunities, and adventures ahead, we know they will continue to lead with curiosity, compassion, and courage.

[Click here](#) to read more about the College Counseling experience at BWL.

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