

2020/2021 Graduation Ceremony Transcript

OPENING REMARKS

Welcome to our fifth annual awards and graduation ceremony. For those of you who are not entirely familiar with the culture and nuances of the Education without Walls community, please bear with us. We love our shenanigans and inside jokes. We are so grateful that all of you have chosen to spend your day here with us celebrating the accomplishments of these students. I always like to begin with an acknowledgement of the hard work of our parents and this year I want to especially thank all of you for entrusting your children to the staff at Education without Walls. For many of you, in a world dominated by COVID, this was a huge leap of faith. It is with immense gratitude that I kick off this event.

This year, our theme is celebration. I was going to discuss the importance of choice in education or the need to get kids up the stairs when educating them ... support and push, support and push, but, being the grasshopper that I am, I decided to save those for the newspaper column, and instead talk about celebrations. If nothing else, it was a great excuse to get some toys for the tables. We need to celebrate, and, I think it is safe to say, we have earned it! And there is so much to celebrate, both on a large and small scale.

On a small scale, I want to celebrate - and really embrace - the seemingly little events that happened this year. Here is a highly truncated list to give you all an idea - my original list was about two pages long, but we do not have time for that today, so a few highlights:

Monica Hruschka, who I have deemed our fearless math and science leader, came to me a couple of months ago practically glowing, ear to ear smiles because one of her students had written out all of his geometry proofs correctly. That is a moment worth celebrating.

Lilah Poston came reverently into my office, gently cradling in her hands a tiny, recently hatched, robin's egg blue shell. "Lockey, look what I found." Her reverence and wish to share it is something to celebrate.

Zack Dempster. Where are you, Zack ... hello. Zack Dempster told me that he was going to college in a rather dramatic fashion, of course. He waited patiently for me to come into the library at 65 Bridge so that Lucy could record the moment. Zack's excitement and pride are worth celebrating.

There were the innumerable times that Chris Carrara empowered his peers, accompanying them into my office while they asked a question. The answer would most likely have been a hard 'no' if not for his eloquent re-phrasing or characterization of the request. Sometimes the answer was still no, but I am not going to lie, his efforts did change my answer on far too many occasions.

Listening to the ninth grade girls run up and down the stairs and in and out of the kitchen, believe it or not, is worth celebrating. Looking at them now, you might not realize how intimidating they are, especially as a unit. This year they have grown into the most effusive, chatty, and absolutely gloriously terrifying tight knit group of girls you will ever see.

They are messy, loud, and, are, generally, oblivious to most everyone around them. Many days this year I got to sit in my office, close my eyes, and listen to their joyous interactions with one another. A lot of them had to work through some pretty difficult issues to get to this day, but they did it together, as a team. This bond, this work that they have done together, is truly worth celebrating.

The list goes on and on ...

- The science egg drop this year, which was quite an event.
- Zack and Broghan dressing up as each other - hysterical. There are photos in the yearbook, if you are interested.
- A great song that everyone loves - literally everyone - from Guardians of the Galaxy. It comes on and there is a lovely relaxed hum to the whole building. (Come and Get Your Love by Redbone, BTW)
- The looks on the faces of students visiting for the day. Sometimes overwhelmed, sometimes envious, always surprised.
- Virginia's dedication in her poetry book. Thank you Virginia.

And then there are the life-changing, perspective-shifting, rather large celebrations. Of course, the adoption of James Irish and the subsequent celebration falls into this category. I have never been more proud of our community. These kids, all of them, showed up on time, looking fabulous, fresh-faced, and actually happy at 8 am. No complaints - seriously - not one. The t-shirts read Family is More Than Blood, and the Education without Walls family was certainly there in full force that day. The love and support and camaraderie of this event is something to celebrate.

The House Hunt - an entire list of moments in and of itself.

- Alum Max Ringer coming on the last day to oversee the events was more fun than I could possibly relate.
- Watching the kids race out of the building - literally - mid-afternoon every Friday this Spring. Absolutely priceless. And they all raced - yes all of them.

In these totally made up, silly, purley for fun trials, these kids find that they are part of something bigger than themselves. It also happens to teach them negotiation and team building skills, pulls them out of their comfort zones, gets them outside and moving, and is a ton of fun for participants and onlookers alike. Thank you Shea and all of our students for making this year's House Hunt the best one yet!

Now, I cannot blather on much longer because Shea has to run to her tech rehearsal for A Midsummer Night's Dream in Sharon, but first, she has a few bits of business to take care of, including announcing this year's winner of the House Hunt. She will be assisted by the last House Captain to win this event, Tucker Coughlin.

Shea, Tucker, let's do this.

HOUSE HUNT

Tucker

Ladies and gentlemen, we have all gathered here today to celebrate the excellence and perseverance of the four great houses of our esteemed institution. For those unaware of the great hunt, every year the strongest members

of the Education Without Walls community gather for a great scavenger hunt and mystery game known as the House Hunt. The students are sorted into the four historic houses Legendaw, Pandor, Brumblin, and Snowpex. These four Houses compete for the title of house champion by completing puzzles, locating clues, enduring physical activities, and showing grit in the face of adversity. This year our four houses were led by the 2021 house captains, Brenden Parker of house pandor, Zackariya Dempster of house Legendaw, Henry Steen of house snowpex, and Virginia Steen of house Brumblin.

Shea

The House Hunt, originally begun by Leopold Legendaw in 1398 was carried on in previous years by alumni Max Ringer. After his graduation the Hunt faded into the mists of time, only to be resurrected by me with the help of former Legendaw and Snowpex House Captains, Tucker Thowless Webb Coughlin and Campbell Delany Lee Coughlin. Through the winter, much anticipation grew as all were sorted and small clues and lore were posted to the official house hunt website.

The return of the house hunt was a thrilling venture. Of course, this was only to be expected given the caliber and commitment of our house members this year. Artifacts were won and lost, alliances formed and dissolved, and many shenanigans ensued.

Before we announce the final standings, it must be stated that each house was in first place at one point or another during the final task. It was truly anyone's game and all participated with valor, honor, and grit. As such, we would like to give special recognition to some of the most standout hunters this past spring.

Firstly Henry Steen, house captain of Snowpex, for carrying the often dejected house of Snowpex through much of the hunt and his many athletic maneuvers including several table vaults throughout the course hunt. Snowpex, while having the least active members, gave all other teams a run for their money through the sheer willpower of Mr Steen.

Tucker

Second for Broghan Dowler of Pandor, who on numerous occasions looked out for his fellow hunters in all houses. Broghan showed compassion and was committed to keeping the hunt fair and fun for all involved. All the while keeping a competitive spirit and exemplary decorum. Mr Dowler had the perfect balance of mercilices energy, house spirit, infectious enthusiasm, and an inclusive attitude.

Shea

Credit must also be given to Zackariya Dempster of Legendaw whose exile and eventual return after the Great Box Controversy can only be described as redemption at it's finest. According to House Lore as recorded by Max Ringer, "A darker side develops in Legendaws more heavily in late adolescence and they do not always handle this transition well." Mr Dempster however is an exemplary model for all Legendaws who encounter this dark side, now and yet to come, for his graceful return to the hunt and ultimate retrieval of one of the final two artifacts of the hunt.

Tucker

Lucy McKay of Legendaw must be acknowledged for her generosity in sharing information with other houses and remarkable diplomacy skills which during many tasks kept Legendaw house from inciting an excessive level of chaos. Ms McKay is also an exemplary puzzle solver, being the only one in all of education without walls to decode the final clue of the entire house hunt. This led to the discovery of the final artifact, whose points were split with Chris Carrara of house Brumlin.

Shea

I am certain all attendees present today wait with baited breath for the unveiling of the ultimate champion of this year's house hunt. All four teams have shown admirable dedication and determination in the face of many challenges including but not limited to, the Great Jeopardy face-off, Pandor's Revenge, The doomed Treaty of Broplex, The House Hunt nearly being canceled, the Great Marathon Task, and of course, the Final House Throwdown for which Max Ringer himself was present to preside over the hunt.

But alas, there can only be one champion. After careful tallying, final House standing are as follows:

In fourth place, Snowpex with their cold calculated tactics. Snowpex captains, come claim your runner up award.

In third place, Brumblin with their diplomacy skills and astounding ambition. Brumblin Captains, come claim your third place prize.

House Captains of Legendaw and Pandor, please step forward.

The first and second place houses are truly neck and neck, separated by a mere six points. However the winner of the 2021 house hunt, who will be bringing home the penultimate house cup, is... Pandor! Pandor, your united house spirit as well as your dedication to inclusion and support of the other houses ultimately earned you the 2021 House Cup.

Legendaw, come claim your second place prize!

Congratulations to all - and until next year..... Alea Iacta Est!

SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARD

Lockey knows that I campaigned hard for this student to receive an award for their contribution to EWoW, and now I suppose you all know too! When this student joined my class in January, I was unsure how they would hold up in a classroom full of rowdy, opinionated boys. I often had to shush the rest of the class so they could hear this student speak. However, over the next months, this meek, laconic student transformed into a remarkably precocious, outspoken, and hard working, young woman.

This student has exceptional grades, which many of her classmates take for granted as obvious, however I would like to reiterate that these good grades are not always easy for her to achieve. The work she puts in includes long hours of studying, making time for collaboration on group projects, retaking tests, and constantly asking "what can I do better?" This is the kind of hard work that not only bears personal fruit, but also elevates the work of every other person in the classroom, whether they realize it or not.

Combine this with her willingness to help out, whether it be watering plants, cleaning classrooms, or helping a friend with a challenging homework assignment. As well as her ability to fall into the fold at EWoW, making fast friends and including those new friends at her sweet 16, it was clear that Aliyah Morgan deserved this year's special recognition award. Thank you for your contribution to EWoW.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

We will have a 30 minute break for lunch, which is served in the other room. Please take this opportunity to check out these kids' incredible artwork. Parents, you are welcome to bring your child's artwork home with you at the end of the event. We have boxes and packing materials available for your convenience. Yearbooks are for sale. \$20 for soft cover books, \$30 for the hardcover copies.

AWARDS

I want to emphasize that this event, at its heart, is meant to celebrate our community as a whole, and the hard work that all our community members put in. This event is not about individual recognition. When a student receives an award here, it is a celebration of their work, of course, but in a larger sense, it is a nod to everyone who helped them to work through their difficulties over the course of the year – friends, teachers, mentors, parents, and peers. Here, we spend a lot of time acknowledging those people who have, in some way, transformed themselves or their community for the better. And so, I think it is appropriate to open with an award created to honor a person or people in our community that help to keep it on track. We call it the Compass Award.

COMPASS AWARDS

My favorite student will always be that kid who challenges me. The one who fights for every scrap of freedom; for every nuance of respect; for their privacy and their right to BE whom they are. In doing so, they learn to advocate for themselves, and this often leads them to advocate for those around them.

At EWoW, these fighters are my compass. Occasionally, their contribution can be very subtle, going unnoticed over the course of the year. That is definitely NOT the case today. I think everyone is aware who our community advocate is this year. This truly one of a kind kid worked tirelessly to advocate for his peers and, in so doing, to help keep Education without Walls on course. Christopher Carrara, thank you so much for your honesty and willingness to ask the tough questions, but more than this, thank you for supporting and encouraging your peers to do the same.

LYONS HEART AWARDS

This award is inspired by the Purple Heart, which is earned by members of the United States Armed forces who are wounded in action. It is specifically a combat decoration. I am of the considered opinion that every parent should be a recipient of this award. The Lyons Heart Award, named for former student Ben Lyons, is given to students who have worked through continuous and ongoing struggles over the course of the year. Because they struggle with forces that they often cannot control, these are the kids who, just by walking through the door, make my day. I am always happy to see them and their successes are much of what drives

me through each day. They are an inspiration. Thank you, Chris Karle, Lizzy Berry, and Rey Brass for showing the rest of us the true meaning of bravery. Please come up and gather your awards.

MEDALS: ACADEMIC, SPECIAL RECOGNITION & CITIZENSHIP

Academic Awards

Awarded by teachers to students who have shown grit in their studies, as well as support for both their peers and their teachers. These awards are given to students who elevate those around them in a class or subject. These awards are not necessarily for the 'A' student, but for the kids who show the most character in class.

- Social Science
 - Multi-Media US History, Teacher Abby Luis: Dmitriy Marker
 - History through Film, Teacher Lockey Coughlin: I have never encountered a student who was more honest, insightful, and brave in class discussions as this young woman. She clearly enjoys history and asks terrific questions, and shares her thoughts without apology. Truly a young woman deserving of our admiration. Carolyn Huegi
 - Honors US History, Teacher Lockey Coughlin: The progress that this student accomplished over the course of this last trimester has been outstanding. He turned in every assignment early, beat out all of his peers for the highest test grade in the class and was in the hunt for the highest grade overall right up until the very end. And, he never said a word about it to anyone. James David Irish, you rocked US History this last trimester and I could not be more proud of your hard work!
 - Binder/Timeline US History Prizes: For those of you familiar with the book Freakonomics, I decided to give incentivizing student work a try. Students were offered a large cash prize for both the best binder in US History and the best Timeline in US History. Prizes and criteria were announced in September and winning required some pretty consistent work throughout the year. This was a strong group of highly competitive students and their work, as a group, by the end of the year, was some of the best I have seen. I put two of the binders in the art show because I truly believe they are works of art. Several students gave it a good run. Honorable mention for the binder category goes to Christopher Karle. Honorable mention for the Timeline category goes to Mary Houldin. But, alas there can be only one winner for each category.

- Timeline Award: Christopher Carrara
- Binder Award: Virginia Lokken Steen

- Foreign Language
 - Spanish, Teacher Monica Vazquez: Broghan Dowler ... From Monica Vazquez Broghan Dowler deserves an award for Spanish class because he tries his best in and out of the classroom. He contributes to every discussion and does it in Spanish whenever has the chance. Broghan is an example of "Anyone can achieve their goals when they are committed to do so."
 - French, Teacher Helen Brazil : Mary Louise Mapes Houldin
 - Japanese: Teacher Sandy Ho: Gwendolyn South Moran
 - Latin, Teacher Sandy Ho: Carolyn Huegi
- Robenburg Technique, Teacher Leland Williams

- Brendan Parker
- Lucy McKay
- Language Arts
 - AP Literature, Teacher Kat Schwarz: Virginia Lokken Steen
 - Literature 1A, Teacher Kat Schwarz: Ariel Battlestein
 - Literature 1B, Teacher Kat Schwarz: Parker Moss
 - Literature of The Roaring 20's, Teacher Shea Coughlin: Henry Steen.... From Shea: Henry is consistently engaged in my classroom. He participates in discussions enthusiastically and always has something constructive to say about readings and movies watched in class. Moreover, his ability to push through and persevere when he had occasional struggles completing classwork makes him all the more deserving of this honor.
- Science
 - Chemistry, Teacher Spencer Lord: Lucy McKay deserves an award for my class as she is active in class discussions and quick to assist other students on material that she understands.
 - Entomology, Teacher Spencer Lord: Broghan Dowler deserves an award for my class for venturing outside of his comfort zone to actively partake in activities and has an acute eye for detail when observing insect specimens.
 - Mycology, Spencer Lord: Brendan Parker deserves an award for my class for not only providing valuable insights to class discussions, but also actively extending his knowledge outside of the classroom in the field of fungi.
 - Biology, Teacher Monica Hruschka: Claire Rocky earned this award for her interest in the world around her and sharing that goes beyond the classroom work.
 - Physics, Teacher Brodin Raymond: Parker Moss is always interested in the topics being taught. He always participates and does his best to ensure he is understanding the topics at hand. He clearly has a strong drive to discover and learn.
 - Herbalism, Teacher Shea Coughlin: Zackariya Dempster was always there, ready to go, and interested in class, on the numerous occasions he had to join via zoom, he was present and still participated in discussions.
- Math
 - Calculus, Teacher Spencer Lord: Mary Holdin deserves an award for my class because she is always determined to find the correct answer and ask questions to get there. She also provides valuable contributions and spirit during lecture.
 - Algebra 2, Teacher Spencer Lord: Lizzy Berry deserves an award for my class because she participates regularly with a positive attitude that is not only contagious, but constructive for the class as a whole.
 - Pre-algebra, Teacher Joslyn Chen: Shayla Morgan goes above and beyond to understand the work and puts in the time and effort to succeed!
 - Algebra I, Teacher Monica Hruschka: Gwen South Moran
- Art at 65 Bridge Street
 - Photography I: Kyla Steen
 - Photography II: Aidan Doyle
 - Sequential ArtTeacher Gabriel Pages: Liliah Poston and Aliyah Morgan From Gabe: Sorry, this question is impossible to answer, since students bring different strengths to the

collective to create the environment. However, I will say that Gwen, Lilah and Claire are very creative and dedicated. Caroline is very talented. And Alyah is a great fiction writer.

- Blacksmithing: Dima Marker

- Art at the Village Center for the Arts
- Sharon Kaufman, Instructor
 - Overall: Mary Houldin; Mary is motivated, excited to be in class, voracious in her need to learn and grow as a student and as a person, and happy to help anyone in class who needs it. Mary is an extraordinary human being who I'm proud to have worked with. I hate to see her leave for college...but she'll wow them there too!

- Drawing I: (most improved) Dima Marker
- Drawing I: Mary Houldin
- Drawing II: (most improved) Broghan Dowler
- Drawing II: Carolyn Huegi
- Pottery: (most improved) Rey Brass
- Pottery: Gwendolyn South Moran
- Drawing Special Mention: Claire Rocky

A Word from Our Seniors

The seniors have asked Chris Carrara to say a few words on their behalf. Thank you, Chris!

Hello everyone, my name is Chris Carrara, and I am going to be speaking on behalf of my fellow seniors. To say that this year has been tough is a criminal understatement. The last almost 18 months taught us to be grateful for what we have and what we are all going to miss, like the trips to All Aboard, the house hunts, the games of pool, foosball, tennis, and football, the smoothie runs, passing notes during Lockety's class, getting my butt whooped in chess against Parker, the lock-ins, game nights, short-lived film class, stressing over Post U classes and, of course, Finn the Dog.

I came to EWoW two years ago. Obviously, the decision, like everyone else who comes here, was carefully thought over. I spent a great deal of time thinking over what I might be missing out on by going to EWoW. Everything I just listed is what I did not miss out on and what I am so glad that I got to experience with all of you.

So, my seniors, I am going to say something nice about all of you. I will go around the table. Dima, I worked hard to get to run faster than you this year, just so that I could be faster than you at football. Mary, I am sure that I speak for every student here when I say that you are an incredible friend and a shoulder to cry on.

Brendan, your casual demeanor and help during post classes really got me through financial accounting.

Virginia, your competitiveness, especially this year, kept me honest and I am glad that we each won the binder and timeline. Abi, unfortunately, we did not get to see too much of you this year, but we are really glad you showed up for one last little get together. Finally, Zack, your love of the show, and in general, Community, really speaks volumes about your character.

I also must thank Lockety, of course. Give a round of applause. And, of course, all our teachers. But especially, everyone that you see at the table here in front of you. You have always been there for me, and I love you so much. Thanks to my brother, who is here on his birthday. Thank you

CITIZENSHIP AWARDS

Support of Students & Staff – Thank you!!

This year, I felt the need to acknowledge the powerhouse student body with which we have been blessed. First in class is awarded according to the votes of teachers and staff. The unbelievable number of nominees speaks to the strength of this group. Usually, there are one or two standouts who get most of the votes. Not so this year, so I have a long list. Kids, please come up as your name is called to get your nomination medal. Think of this like the academy awards. Somewhere in this list are the winners, which will be announced after the diplomas are handed out.

Students

- First in Class Nominees
 - Shayla Morgan
 - Lilah Rose Poston
 - Gwendolyn South Moran
 - Ariel Battlestein
 - Claire Rocky
 - Parker Moss
 - Broghan Dowler
 - Aliyah Morgan
 - Scott Emitt Taylor
 - James David Irish
 - Aidan Doyle
 - Lucy McKay
 - John Christopher Karle
 - Mary Houldin
 - Chris Carrara
 - Virginia Lokken Steen

These students pushed through some difficulties this year and I wanted to acknowledge their efforts. For one it was completing high school virtually, for one, it was dealing with hospitalizations for a crazy, highly unpredictable allergic reaction, and for the third, it was for a recurrence of health issues that we all thought were almost done. I was so impressed with their ability to persevere in the face of their challenges and to continue their work towards their, no doubt, indomitable futures. Their medals did not come in with the rest, so instead, we are giving them slinkys, which are not only fabulous in their own right, but are also, I hear, ending their production. Have fun with these. Try not to break them - I guess they are collectors items now. ;)

- Perseverance
 - Abigail Baird
 - Joseph Parascondola
 - Scott Emmett Taylor

Special Mention

I have to make special mention of a couple of students for their contributions, socially, to the fabric of EWOW this past year. We have a lot of students who are great at debate and really embrace the idea that they get to ask tough questions and challenge the status quo. I do embrace and encourage this ... most of the time. But I have to say that it is a breath of fresh air to have a kid that knows how to just go with the flow. It isn't always obvious in a casual conversation with these students, but they both have a lightning fast, quick wit. They help

to ease tensions when things get heated and are terrific at making everyone laugh and smile. Sometimes subtle, sometimes out there, but always relaxing. Thank you, gentlemen, for being an excellent and very necessary counterbalance to some of our more exuberant students.

- Joseph Parascondola: Most Agreeable
- Scott Taylor: Quick Wit

Parents

Education without Walls cannot function without parental involvement. This year, it has been tough for parents to find meaningful ways to contribute. I have missed the parents on so many levels and really look forward to having them on site more next year. But I do want to acknowledge a few parents who truly went above and beyond this past year to help make it so hugely successful:

BRETT STEEN
COMMUNICATION

BRIDGET MORGAN
POD AWARD

BEN MORAN
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

JENN SOUTH
PROPERTY BEAUTIFICATION

PETER HOULDIN
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

PRESENTATION OF HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMAS

Today is not only an awards ceremony, but also a graduation for seven of our students. This tends to be an emotional part of the celebration. I cry, the teachers cry, the parents cry, it's completely normal. We cry because we are all so invested in the success of these students. We have put a huge amount of time and effort into helping them along the way and, in doing so, we have also come to truly care for them and to root for them.

Raising a child or helping to raise a child is a battle on so many levels. Part of the mission is to help them to see the brilliance of who they are as individuals; to help them to see their gifts and unique abilities. Each of us is a crazy, mixed up, one-of-a-kind package.

In doing this - helping you all to see your own brilliance – we come to believe in you totally and completely. We all hope that you come to believe in yourselves as much as we most assuredly do.

Much of the following is pulled directly from college recommendations for these students. I love writing these recs, as it gives me an opportunity to brag about these kids. They certainly are all brag-worthy. But I feel

that it is important to remember and to remind them that it is their faults (and their struggles to overcome them - or embrace them, as the case may be) that make them so incredibly loveable.

Abigail Baird

Abi Baird is an extremely complex young woman. On the surface she is rather introverted, but warm, extremely respectful, and incredibly artistic. We have not gotten to be around her at all this past year, because she moved to upstate NY last spring and has been completing her classes remotely. Her AP Literature classmates were so excited that she would be here for graduation, that every time one of them was sad these last few months, all one had to say was, "But, wait, Abi is coming for graduation", and they would immediately perk up.

Most of Abi's artwork is digital and so is not shown in the room next door, but let me assure you that she is exceptionally talented.

I have asked Tucker to say a few words about Abi's experience at Education without Walls. I think he is able to speak to this much more eloquently than I. From Tucker:

I remember Abi's first day at EWoW very clearly. I think we had our first AP literature class and she was, no surprise, very quiet.

It can be easy to write off the more introverted students as just quiet or shy, as their entire personalities. But one of the wonderful things about Education without walls is that all of the students here over the years, since day one, are appreciated for their full character instead of surface level qualities or skills.

Abi and I became good friends my graduating year. It became quickly apparent that under the quiet exterior there was someone who had a wicked quick wit and was wonderfully artistic. By the end of the year when I graduated all of the teachers loved her and she was appreciated and valued by her peers.

We still keep up to this day, every once in a while sending each other memes or inside jokes. It's rare to find people in a community who will keep up with each other years later. From the looks of it, I'd guess that this entire graduating class will keep each other close for years to come.

Although I was not in attendance at EWoW this year, the perseverance and grit it takes to do a full year of online school is a feat of strength I couldn't imagine. Abi, although not physically at 65 Bridge Street this year, is just as much a part of the EWoW community as anyone. On the theme of the graduation this year. I think that is something truly worth celebrating.

Brendan W. Parker

One of the most rewarding aspects of my work with Brendan is, surprisingly, when adjustments are required. He has a superb ability to hear a correction, internalize it, and move on. He communicates his difficulties and frustrations clearly and, if more adjustments are required, he works through it. Brendan is a young man who wants to do the right thing, the right way and this makes working with him exceedingly straight-forward.

Brendan has an abundance of admirable qualities. He is well-rounded, calm, honest, responsible, funny, intelligent, and warm. Brendan has a knack for completing his work with alacrity and competence, while making it all look easy. He is unfazed by any chaos and craziness that may surround him; he always helps when asked, with a nod and “of course”.

Dawn, thank you for sharing Brendan with us these last four years.

Christopher Carrara

Chris is the definition of a leader in the classroom. He is responsible, respectful, engaged, curious, and has a healthy competitive streak. He is the kind of student who elevates the work of his peers by setting a high bar and by engaging in nuanced class discussions. He often chooses to play devil’s advocate in these situations for the sake of diving deeper than the basic facts of a given topic. Chris is consistent and timely with his independent coursework, but group projects are where he really shines, because of his aforementioned leadership skills.

Chris is deeply curious about the complexity of societal structures, showing a particular fascination with the nuances and contradictions of governance. This combined with the above mentioned traits has made him an excellent member of our newly formed student council. He is organized, diplomatic, and calm even during contentious situations. During High School meetings, he ensures every student has the opportunity to speak up if they choose and keeps meeting agendas focused and brief. His warmth and grounded perspective are an excellent balance for some of our more creative and exuberant students and he has been integral in making the student council successful.

Laurie and Steven, thank you for sharing Chris with us these past two years.

Dmitriy Marker

I have known Dima since he was about six years old. He has lived a few houses up the road from me for all of his life. Having watched him grow up, I can say that Dima, above all else, is an incredibly hard worker.

I mean it. You have never seen somebody get a punch list of tasks done so fast as Dima. Sometimes I wonder whether he possesses super speed - hence the road runner mug for him - and my nickname for him, The Flash. From the time he was about ten, he was not only helping out around his house, but doing extra work at neighbors houses (including mine) acting as a PA at our local community theater, and working odd jobs almost all the time. Dima has also grown into a talented blacksmith. You can see his pieces in our art show in the other room. These are not the kinds of skills that are often given much credit in a traditional academic setting. Dima I am so proud of you and your earnest work ethic, these are invaluable skills that will serve you as you move into the working world. Congratulations.

Susy and Chris, thank you for your trust and support these past six years.

Mary Louise Mapes Houldin

Mary Louise Mapes Houldin came to Education without Walls midway through the 2017-2018 academic year. Finding the right fit for her high school career had been a challenge for her. When she found our little

educational institution, it was clear that she would be a great fit. Integrating herself into an entirely new community was, no doubt, a challenge, but this remarkable young woman took it all in her stride, jumping right in and taking initiative in her own academic and social life.

Mary is also deeply supportive of her peers inside and outside of the classroom. I would venture to say she has excellent shoulders on which to cry and is, honestly, one of the most genuine, caring individuals I know.

The current academic year finds Mary in both Tennis and the Outdoor Hiking Club, as well as continuing her work in Pottery, and tackling challenging classes such as Calculus and AP English. Academically, this is her most challenging year and she has risen to that challenge admirably, with her current grades the highest that she has achieved during her high school career. Mary is a pleasure to both teach and converse with. Her calming, supportive, and generous nature will be missed very much.

Peter Houldin, thank you for sharing Mary with us these past few years.

Virginia Lokken Steen

Miss Virginia Lokken Steen (how awesome is that middle name by the way? Love it!) has an innate sense of self. What is more, she is totally fearless showing it. Her extroverted, convivial personality livens up any room she walks into and her naturally outgoing nature allows her to find common areas of interest with almost anyone she meets. She is a force of nature when she sets her mind to a task as is evidenced by her US history binder which I have already mentioned is in the art show because it is so beautiful and expertly assembled.

The other area in which Miss Steen is naturally gifted is self advocacy. This is remarkable, considering how many adolescent girls struggle to make their needs known. She is always able to communicate her needs calmly and effectively. This warms my heart not only because I have seen the beginning of her growth into an unstoppable force of nature - hence the mug I chose to gift to her - but also because she sets the precedent for other young women to practice honest advocacy for themselves.

Brett and Dana, thank you for this incredible young woman. So glad to have a little more time with her.

Zackariya Dempster

Zack possesses many admirable qualities including humor, acumen, honesty, a healthy competitive streak, and a deep sense of self. In class, Zack is a leader and a conversation starter. He dives head first into course material and is relentlessly inquisitive. During class discussions, he is usually the first to form and voice opinions which is instrumental in helping the class as a whole form its own understanding of the material. He is especially adept at making connections between the text on the page, and the author's deeper message.

He also possesses a remarkable understanding of metaphor, motif, and symbolism in writing. As a writer, Zack is intuitive, and sincere. He is a natural storyteller who excels in the area of narrative writing. He is keenly aware of the contradictions of the human condition and tends to gravitate toward examining those contradictions in his personal writing. However, he has also developed an ability to engage in persuasive writing with clarity and structure. He is also a passionate debater and relishes an opportunity to examine ideological differences in the classroom.

Alicia and Bill, thank you for your trust and for sharing your passionate, opinionated child with us these last two year.

PRESENTATION OF FIRST IN CLASS AWARDS

See if you can guess the student before they are named ...

This Freshman is very artistic, humble, supportive of her peers, and is an exceptional writer. The art show was actually her idea and she helped to put it together. She is always ready to help, ran a food drive at EWoW almost single-handedly, is a very hard-worker and is also on the student council. You guessed it, Gwendolyn South Moran, you are first in your class. Congratulations!

This Sophomore has been at Education without Walls for quite some time. He is exceptionally bright, very humble, and works off part of his own tuition over the summer. We are all getting to see his stunning art work this year and, yes, he is the student that Monica Hruschka was beaming about in her Geometry class. I think we all have this one ... Broghan Dowler, you are first in your class. Congratulations!

This Junior has had a phenomenal year of growth. He has shown incredible bravery, although he would never discuss it. He is usually pretty quiet and hangs back in a crowd, but also leads by example, and has been quietly rocking his classes lately. I could not be more proud of you, James David Irish. Congratulations, you are first in your class this year.

This Senior is a young woman who takes charge wherever she goes. Her academics this year are off the charts and I will tell you, she has worked very hard to get them there. She consistently challenges herself, she is incredibly competitive, she is on our student council and is what I would term a true force with which to be reckoned. I am in awe of her strength.

Virginia Lokken Steen, I am sure that you have no idea yet of your own personal power, but when you embrace it, look out world. Congratulations, you are first in your class this year!

Top Honors

We have two students this year who truly have broken the mold and, as with Ben Lyons, I feel that their contribution to Education without Walls deserves a little something ... more. So, I have chosen to re-name our highest award here after one of them and to create a whole new award after the other. Let's start with the new award.

As many of you are aware, Education without Walls does not give out a Valedictorian award. It seems a little silly, given the size of our student body. However, I do feel that a student who is graduating from high school with 30 college credits deserves a nod.

Brendan's can-do attitude is the reason that he has so many classes to his credit. He has laid an excellent foundation for his future academics. By taking on so many college classes, Brendan has chosen to push his educational boundaries this year. He has excelled in his efforts. This is a young man willing to struggle through challenging work, meeting it with a deep breath, grit, and a sanguine attitude. (One word: Accounting.) Excellent work, Brendan. Congratulations, you are the first recipient of the

PARKER AWARD for ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Our next award, formerly known simply as FIRST IN SCHOOL, will soon have a new name. This award is given to the one student who best exemplifies the Education without Walls spirit through Grit, Zest, Self-control, Optimism, Gratitude, Social Intelligence, and Curiosity. That is a long list. This year, we are giving it to a student who will quietly take over the world, according to her peers. She is humble, has an incredible internal strength, intuitively knows how to help others to feel at ease, is bright, warm, hard working, and an all-around excellent member of our community. She can also be rather competitive. It is so much fun to see her get her game on. I am in awe of her strength, her willingness to look at the perspective of others, and her open heart. Education without Walls will not be the same without her next year. Mary Houldin, you are the first recipient of the

HOULDIN AWARD for EXCELLENCE IN LEADERSHIP, ACADEMICS, COMMUNITY SERVICE, STRENGTH OF CHARACTER, and PEER SUPPORT.