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OFFICE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS & MEDIA CONTENT

341 S. Bellefield Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15213

For Immediate Release

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Pittsburgh Public Schools Kicks Off Class of 2026 Commencement Week by Celebrating Top Scholars and Student Leaders

District recognizes 68 valedictorians and salutatorians at the 5th Annual Breakfast of Champions and honors student leadership at the 2026 Student Voice End-of-Year Celebration.

PITTSBURGH, PA June 9, 2026 — Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) kicked off commencement week in a big way on Monday by celebrating 68 of its best and brightest students at the 5th Annual Breakfast of Champions.

Hosted by the University of Pittsburgh, the Breakfast of Champions brings together the District's valedictorians and salutatorians from 10 high schools to recognize their academic excellence, leadership, and post-secondary plans. The annual celebration highlights some of Pittsburgh Public Schools' highest-achieving graduates as they prepare to take the next step toward college, career, and life.

Through the Pittsburgh Public Scholars program, all valedictorians and salutatorians in Pittsburgh Public Schools are guaranteed admission to one of the five University of Pittsburgh campuses.

"The Breakfast of Champions is a powerful reminder of what is possible when talent, determination, and opportunity come together," said Superintendent Wayne N. Walters, Ed.D. "These students represent the very best of Pittsburgh Public Schools. Their achievements reflect years of hard work, the support of families and educators, and their own commitment to excellence. We are incredibly proud to celebrate them as they prepare for the next chapter."

The 2026 Breakfast of Champions featured remarks from Superintendent Walters; University of Pittsburgh Director of Undergraduate Recruitment Rachel Banks; and University of Pittsburgh Director of University Educational Outreach Center Lena Dowdell. Pittsburgh Public Schools, Director of Communications and Stakeholder Engagement, Mercedes Williams also delivered a special message to students as they prepare to begin the next phase of their academic and career journeys.

Pittsburgh Public Schools concluded the evening with the **2026 Student Voice End-of-the-Year Celebration**, held at Duquesne University's Power Center Ballroom. The celebration, themed **"Bold Voices Shape Bright Futures,"** honored student leadership, advocacy, and impact across the District. Student Voice members were recognized for their dedication, courage, and commitment to making a difference in their schools and communities.

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Throughout the 2025–2026 school year, Student Voice members met regularly to share ideas and provide input on District initiatives, led meaningful conversations on school climate, mental health, equity, and student engagement, participated in community service projects and school events, and collaborated with District leaders to help inform policies and programs that support student success.

PPS is full of talented students who graduate prepared for college, career, and life. The Breakfast of Champions and Student Voice End of the Year Celebration provide opportunities for the Pittsburgh community to celebrate the District's top students, emerging leaders, and young people using their voices to shape a brighter future.

Commencement ceremonies for Pittsburgh Public Schools at the Petersen Events Center will begin this week as graduates walk across the stage surrounded by family, friends, educators, and school communities. For the full commencement schedule, please visit pghschools.org. Graduation ceremonies may also be viewed online at <https://vimeo.com/pghschools>.

The last day for Pittsburgh Public Schools students is June 12.

Pittsburgh Public Schools is proud to recognize the following 2026 valedictorians and salutatorians:

Pittsburgh Alderdice High School

Valedictorians: Thomas Aldous, Mylo Carter, Zoe Casci, Zachary Coffey, Sivon Feinberg, Markus Kuhn, Lilja Heller-Matza, Priya Holloway, Alexandra Koedinger, Max Lisien, Arathena McCormick, Annabelle Oberbarnscheidt, Kofi Opoku Dakwa, Nora Jeanne Molyneaux, Luke Pena, Vanessa Prentiss, Samuel Stavchansky, Graham Whitacre, Olin Woods and Matei Zivanov.

Salutatorians: None.

Pittsburgh Brashear High School

Valedictorians: Sidra Almontaha Alhariri, Alaa Mohamed Arafah and Sabrina Snyder.

Salutatorian: Hunter Rodrigues.

Pittsburgh CAPA 6-12

Valedictorians: Veronika Harless, Ava Linton, Charles Russell and Finn Shaffer.

Salutatorians: Laila King, Irmak Kucukakosy and Sebastian Wilburn.

Pittsburgh Carrick High School

Valedictorians: Karim Bey and Carol Ou.

Salutatorian: Gabriel Bodien.

Pittsburgh Obama 6-12

Valedictorians: Viola Aderholt, Carl Cogan, Savanna Duckett, Sean Gaines, Samuel Pellegrino, Orli Trumbull and Isaac Werner.

Salutatorians: Kennedy Gilliard, Georgia Jones, Charles Bottoms and Diori Cervantes.

Pittsburgh Online Academy

Valedictorian: Talia Rentschler.

Salutatorian: Ernest "EJ" Yasaña.



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Pittsburgh Perry High School

Valedictorian: Makaila Nyambe.

Salutarian: Kendall Roberts.

Pittsburgh Science and Technology Academy

Valedictorians: Penelope Bard, Sebastian Bard, Jacob Blackledge, Morgan Brown, Roscoe Fey, Roman Gray, Timothy Kovacs, Chapin Nienhuis and Ainsley Schroeffel.

Salutarians: Jack Dempsey, Pum Khan Khual, Mariska Kiraly, Xavier Lysaght, Caleb Myers and Ian Potts.

Pittsburgh Milliones (UPREP) 6-12

Valedictorian: Achaela Riggans.

Salutarian: Aiden Kabo.

Pittsburgh Westinghouse Academy

Valedictorian: Gabrielle Cook.

Salutarian: Jeremiah Bowey-Sinclair.



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