



NEW BRITAIN HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION SPEECH

DR. TONY GASPER, SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

Greetings Graduates, Families, Ms. Reyes and Members of the Board of Education, Mr. Pearce and Faculty and Staff of New Britain High School, Mayor Sanchez and Invited Dignitaries. It is my pleasure and honor to address you today.

As has become my tradition, I would first like to honor the graduates who have chosen the noble path of serving in our nation's armed services. If you are graduating today and you have enlisted in the United States Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, or Space Force, please stand and be recognized! Your service is appreciated and we honor you. Thank you.

As a former language teacher, I believe words carry a lot of meaning. At these ceremonies, I like to remind us all that another word for graduation ceremony is "Commencement". While I know that today feels like the end of something to you and your families, it's actually a beginning: a beginning of your continued education, a beginning of you serving your nation or community to make the place where we live an even better place, a beginning of the career of your dreams.

Critical to your future success will be a mix of humility and confidence. You'll need humility to realize that you are entering jobs, environments, and institutions of higher learning where you will be the newest person there. And, that you can learn a lot from the people surrounding you. You'll need confidence to remind yourself that the doubters are rarely ever right when you bring your full force and effort to a task before you.

So, today, celebrate and be proud of what you've accomplished. But also, be thankful. So, with a hug, a handshake, or a prayer, say thank you to the family, friends, teachers, and school staff members who helped get you to this day of new beginnings.

Congratulations to the Class of 2026.

THE HONORABLE BOBBY SANCHEZ, MAYOR OF NEW BRITAIN

Good morning, graduates, families, teachers, administrators, members of the Board of Education, and distinguished guests. Most importantly, congratulations to the New Britain High School Class of 2026.

Today is a celebration of everything you have accomplished and everything that lies ahead. It is a moment you have worked toward for years, and a moment your families, teachers, coaches, mentors, and loved ones have helped make possible.

As you sit here today in your caps and gowns, ready to take the next step in your lives, I want you to know something: your future is not determined by where you started. It is determined by your character, your perseverance, and your willingness to keep moving forward when life gets difficult.

I know that because I have lived it.

I was born and raised right here in New Britain. This city shaped me. It taught me resilience. It taught me hard work. It taught me the value of community.

Growing up, life was not always easy. I experienced racism and discrimination. There were times when people underestimated me, doubted me, or tried to convince me that certain opportunities were not meant for someone like me.

But instead of allowing those experiences to define me, I used them as motivation.

Every obstacle became fuel.

Every setback became a reason to work harder.

Every closed door pushed me to find another way forward.

As a teenager, I became involved in community activism groups because I wanted to help people who felt unheard and overlooked. I learned that real leadership isn't about titles or recognition. It's about standing up for others and using your voice to make a difference.

I became the first person in my family to earn a bachelor's degree and later a master's degree. I had the honor of becoming New Britain's first Latino State Representative representing our city at the State Capitol. And today, I have the privilege of serving as New Britain's first Puerto Rican Mayor.

Those accomplishments are meaningful to me, but they are not what I'm most proud of.

What I'm most proud of is never forgetting where I came from.

Never forgetting the people who helped me along the way.

Never forgetting the community that raised me.

And that is the lesson I hope you carry with you today.

Many of you will leave New Britain in the coming months. Some of you will head off to college. Some will enter the workforce. Some will start apprenticeships, launch businesses, or serve our country in the military.

Each path is valuable.

Each path is honorable.

And each path has the potential to create a meaningful life.

But wherever your journey takes you, never lose sight of your roots.

Remember the city that helped shape you.

Remember the teachers who believed in you.

Remember the neighbors, friends, family members, and mentors who supported you.

And most importantly, remember the responsibility that comes with success.

Success is not measured only by what you achieve for yourself.
It is measured by what you do for others.

As you grow in your careers and your lives, I challenge you to look beyond your own achievements.
Help someone who is struggling.
Mentor a young person.
Volunteer in your community.
Stand up for someone who doesn't have a voice.
Treat people with dignity and respect, regardless of their background, race, religion, or circumstances.

The world doesn't just need more successful people.
The world needs more good people.
People with compassion.
People with integrity.
People who choose kindness when it's easier to walk away.
People who use their talents not just to improve their own lives, but to improve the lives of others.

Every generation faces challenges. Your generation is no different.
You will encounter uncertainty. You will face disappointment. You will make mistakes.
That is part of life.
But do not let fear stop you.
Do not let failure define you.
And never allow anyone else to tell you what you are capable of becoming.
The truth is, the potential sitting in front of me today is extraordinary.

Among you are future teachers, nurses, engineers, entrepreneurs, artists, tradespeople, scientists, first responders, military leaders, and public servants.
Among you are also future members of the City Council, state legislators, members of Congress, or even future mayors of New Britain.
Some of you will change lives in ways you cannot yet imagine.

And while I don't know exactly where your path will lead, I do know this:
You are stronger than you realize.
You are more capable than you think.
And you are prepared for this moment.
Class of 2026, today marks the end of one chapter, but it is only the beginning of the story you will write for yourselves.
Dream big.
Work hard.
Stay humble.
Lift others up as you climb.

And never forget that no matter where life takes you, New Britain will always be proud to call you one of our own.

Congratulations, graduates.

May your future be bright, your purpose be strong, and your commitment to making the world a better place never fade.

God bless you, and congratulations to the New Britain High School Class of 2026.

JOHN MAYETTE – NBHS SATELLITE CAREERS ACADEMY PRINCIPAL

Good morning Superintendent Gasper, members of the Board of Education, Mayor Sanchez, staff, families, friends, and most importantly, the graduates of the Class of 2026.

Congratulations on reaching this milestone. Be proud of what you have accomplished, but know that this is one chapter, not the whole story. Wherever you go from here, whether it's work, college, the military, or right here in this community, keep challenging yourself to grow and to be someone others can count on. The world needs people who are fair, respectful, and willing to work hard, and every one of you sitting here today has that in you.

There are two things I share with every graduating class. First, take time to thank the people who got you here. Your families, your friends, and the teachers and staff who believed in you deserve to hear it from you directly. Second, find something in your life you truly care about and pursue it with everything you have. Success is not given to anyone. You have to go out and earn it, and you have already proven you know how.

To our SCA graduates, I want to offer a special congratulations. Your road to this field was not always a straight one. It included real obstacles and real life challenges, and you met them with persistence, in the classroom and beyond it. The strength you showed to get here is yours to keep, and it will serve you in everything that comes next. I can speak for our entire staff when I say how proud we are of you. Thank you for letting us be part of your journey. You will always be part of the SCA family, and our doors will always be open to you.

To close, I would like to share some words from our SCA Student of the Year, Liamya Hernandez. She wanted to say this to her classmates and to the staff:

"When I came to Satellite Careers Academy, I faced many challenges and was unsure of what my future would look like. Over time, I learned that progress is possible with hard work, determination, and a willingness to keep moving forward. This experience has shown me that our circumstances do not define us; our choices and effort do. I am grateful for the support I received at SCA, and I hope my journey encourages others to believe in themselves, embrace new opportunities, and never give up on their goals."

Congratulations, Class of 2026. We wish you all the best in the years ahead.

DAMON PEARCE – NBHS PRINCIPAL

During your freshman year, Chat GPT was released to the public. And in those four years, our world has changed dramatically and there is a concern that AI is taking over. So let's test that theory. In what will be your final assignment, I am going to ask you to listen to two short passages about your time at NBHS. One passage I generated using AI with the prompt "to use cool, teenage lingo". The other passage I designed. You be the judge on which passage was written by a human.

Here is passage #1:

"High school was an absolute movie, and honestly, the vibes were immaculate. From day one, we were locked in, striving to cook up a bright future while trying not to fold under the pressure of finals. We survived everything from brutal exams to the daily side-quest of navigating the traffic jam by the trophy case, just trying to find an open lavatory. We had moments that were pure brain rot, but looking back, the memories we made together completely ate."

Here is passage #2:

High school was lit, clockable aura. The vibes were giving. From day one, we were locked-in, it was definitely serving. It was giving we needed to work our way up, while trying not to crash out under the pressure of masteries. The bathroom lines was too much and if you made it through the trophy case traffic, you knew what you was doing. Periodt. There were moments we were doing the most but looking back, the memories we made together completely ate. We showed up, ate down, and left no crumbs, nothing on that plate. Click it, Clock it, thank yuh."

JIMMY LE HUYNH – NBHS VALEDICTORIAN

[GREETING]

Good afternoon everybody, staff, students, and parents. How are we doing today?

[CROWD RESPONSES]

Raise your hands if you've heard of The Three Little Pigs and the Big Bad Wolf?

[PAUSE FOR HANDS]

Now, what if I told you there was a fourth pig? His name is John Pork.

[LAUGHTER]

[INSPIRATIONAL ANECDOTE]

John Pork was a salesman from an impoverished family in Ohio. From 9 to 5, he went door-to-door selling baseball bats, but his attempts all ended the same way: "No," "Get off my property!", and even "Get a real job you pig."

Despite this, he kept knocking.

Tung-tung-tung, no response.

Next door. Tung-tung-tung, again, no response.

The sun had sunk beneath the horizon. He wanted to give up, but he had to provide for his family. So he walked to the final ominous house. John Pork knocked. "Anyone home?"

Suddenly the door swung open. "What do you want, pig?"

John Pork shriveled—tall stature, grey fur—face-to-face with Ohio's final boss: the Big Bad Wolf. "I'm here to offer you an amazing baseball bat. Only \$67, quality yet affordable."

The Wolf ignored him. "Don't you remember who I am? I ate your brothers, Michael and Ethan."

John Pork responded, "I know what you did. But we live in the current moment. All we can do is move on and grow."

"You know what, I'll buy the bat. I see your ambition," said the Wolf. From there, they scaled their business to billions.

[PLOT TWIST]

Now, what does a pig from Ohio have to do with us?

Think about what we've gone through: last-minute cramming, realizing you were lowkey cooked; surviving that horrendous smell in the 200s; and watching Italian brainrot on Instagram reels. Yet we're still here, ready to graduate.

Maybe you're wondering, "What does my future look like? Am I cooked?" No, you aren't.

I felt this way too. On December 1st, my college decisions dropped. Stanford, MIT, UPenn, Columbia, Cornell, Princeton—all rejected. 6/7 rejections.

But then I realized: What had I really lost? I still had family, friends, and passions.

The next day, I got my 7th result—accepted to Harvard. But I was still myself. Nothing changed—my ambitions, mindset, and community were all still here.

And that's when it hit me. That pig from Ohio who faced rejections? That was me.

[PAUSE]

I was John Pork. And honestly, we're all John Pork.

[TAKEAWAY]

We face adversity—financial, mental, academic. We can't avoid it. But our mindset determines the outcome.

Do you give up when you're tired?

Or do you tung-tung-tung on that next door?

[CONCLUSION]

So as you step into the unknown, embrace the uncertainty, enjoy the moments, and when you look back, you'll realize you've lived a life full of purpose.

New Britain High School Class of 2026, "Stand proud, you are strong."

JAKUB SEK – SALUTATORIAN

Good morning, faculty, proud parents, distinguished guests, and most importantly, the graduating NBHS Class of 2026! We have assembled here today to honor and celebrate the successes of our class—both in and out of school. Traditionally, it's the role of the salutatorian to reflect on the past, and pfft, I think it's safe to say we've had an unforgettable last four years. I mean, just tell me how we still don't have a working system for the bathrooms? Don't even get me started on that horrid smell that's plagued our school for the last few weeks; I think each of us has had to hold our breath walking through the 200s at least once. AND when the AC stopped working in humid weather too? That was bad. And what about that online/digital pass thing we tried to do our sophomore year? That clearly didn't work out.

The point is, we've persevered together through diverse adversities, and our years of sweat and hard work culminate today, in this moment. So, take a chance to reflect on how far you've come, and admire it before you start stressing about your future. You've got the whole rest of your life to work and worry—you're only graduating high school once. Take it in and embrace it. Look around; this could very well be the last time you see these people ever again, so make it count. Hug them a little tighter.

To all of my friends, current or former, know that you have impacted my life in ways I tend to look back on and reminisce about often. Of course, I don't let this hold me back, for it is when you are kept in the past that you cannot continue to grow. Instead, I like to think of myself as a mosaic—a full picture assembled by small, irregular, and colorful pieces, created and forged by all of the different people I have experienced my life with. Each person I have interacted with has had something of value that has stuck with me; I am the result and embodiment of those exact interactions.

I've gone through many different friend groups and each one has changed me in a distinct way. What I've learned is that some people are just seasonal; they're meant to be ephemeral, coming into your life at just the right moment—exactly when you need them—before drifting apart from you. No matter how hard you try to bring them back, it will be like attempting to bring the same poles of two magnets together, repelling with seemingly no reason. You never see it coming, you just get to see it go. We seldom have any control over when happy or meaningful moments end; we can only observe them leaving. So, pick yourself back up, don't worry about it for too long, focus on the positives, and take what you learned with you for the rest of your life. Live in the present moment and make the most of it.

Furthermore, I will always, always, always be an advocate for underclassmen joining various sports, groups, or clubs. I've often heard the phrase: "Depression can't hit a moving target."—meaning that taking forward,

positive action physically and mentally makes it incredibly difficult for negative thoughts or sadness to catch up with you. I guess I took that too literally because I joined the outdoor track team this year.

Now, I've been a soccer player my whole life. So, when my friends first convinced me to join track this year, it was only supposed to be a just-for-fun way to end my senior year. Still though, as with every other thing in my life, I gave it my all: it's always been 100% or nothing. And honestly? It changed me in ways I didn't even think it would've. It got me out of a tough spot mentally and physically, and I felt at my best for the first time in years. I also definitely wouldn't be as close to the people I am friends with now, so it was immensely worth it. My advice to you? Continue to put yourself out there, if you haven't already.

And for those of you who need to hear it, healing isn't linear. You can feel like you're finally starting to regain your balance before feeling absolutely terrible the next day. That is okay. The greater the setback, the more miraculous the comeback—just look at the New York Knicks in Game 4 of the NBA Finals. As long as you don't sit and sulk, refusing to do anything for too long, you'll be alright. Get to the finish line at all costs—whether you can run or have to crawl; just don't give up.

No matter what the future has in store for us, let us remember that, regardless of what happens, the memories we made here will always live on. The mistakes we made here will always guide us. And the bonds we made here will always hold value. As we step out into the real world, I urge you to reflect on your journey thus far, make the most of your opportunities, and to never stop moving forward. And, as Corinthians Chapter 16, Verse 14 states, "Let all that you do be done in love."

To our families, friends, and the dedicated faculty here at New Britain High School—thank you for giving us the foundation we needed to reach this milestone. And to God, thank you for giving us the strength and courage that helped us make it through every difficult situation.

Remember, nothing in life is ever promised. Everybody dies but not everybody lives. Thank you, and congratulations NBHS Class of 2026!

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About the Consolidated School District of New Britain

In partnership with family and community, the Consolidated School District of New Britain works to provide the best personalized and comprehensive whole-child education at every level so students will be prepared for, and positively contribute to, a profoundly different future.