



On behalf of our principal, Dr. Erica Taylor, and the entire Baldwin Middle School community, we extend our deepest gratitude to our inspiring male figures, community leaders, and role models for being part of this momentous occasion.

Your presence, wisdom, and heartfelt words have made an indelible mark on the hearts and minds of our young men. The encouragement and tools you have imparted today will not only guide them as they navigate their paths but will also serve as a beacon of hope and possibility for years to come.

We believe that because of your investment, our boys will walk with greater purpose, confidence, and pride. It is our greatest hope that as they grow, they will honor your example by paying it forward, becoming the next generation of Men of Excellence who inspire and uplift others, just as you have inspired and uplifted them.

Thank you for being the village that helps raise our future leaders. Your impact will be felt for generations to come.

"True manhood is defined by integrity, compassion, responsibility, and leadership."



Young Men of Excellence

MOVING INTO MANHOOD

Ceremony

June 2, 2026



Moving into Manhood

The Young Men of Excellence “Moving into Manhood” ceremony celebrates the growth, leadership, and character development of our young men as they continue their journey toward adulthood. This meaningful experience recognizes not only their academic and personal achievements, but also their commitment to integrity, responsibility, respect, and perseverance.

As these young men move into manhood, they are reminded that true strength is found in character, compassion, discipline, and the ability to uplift others. Through mentorship, reflections, brotherhood, and leadership, they have learned that manhood is not simply an age or title; it is demonstrated through actions, choices, and the way they serve their families, schools, and communities.

This ceremony symbolizes a rite of passage and serves as a powerful reminder that our young men are capable of greatness. As they continue to grow, may they lead with confidence, purpose, and excellence in all they do.



Symbolism of the Necktie

The vision of the Young Men of Excellence Club is rooted in preparing our boys to transition into manhood with integrity, confidence, leadership, and purpose. The symbolism of the necktie perfectly reflects that mission.

For our young men, the necktie represents far more than formal attire; it symbolizes growth, responsibility, and the understanding that true leadership begins with character. Just as a tie is often worn during life's important milestones, such as graduations, ceremonies, interviews, and leadership moments, our program seeks to prepare students for the meaningful moments they will encounter throughout life.

The tie also represents professionalism, self-respect, and accountability. It reminds our young men that how they carry themselves, speak to others, and respond to challenges reflects their values and the type of men they are becoming. Through mentorship, reflection, service, and brotherhood, Young Men of Excellence teaches that excellence is not simply about appearance, but about discipline, resilience, and treating others with dignity and respect.

Additionally, the necktie symbolizes belonging. When our young men wear their ties, they are connected to something greater than themselves. They are a brotherhood rooted in unity, leadership, and excellence. While each young man brings his own unique personality and style, the tie serves as a shared reminder that they are part of a community that believes in uplifting one another and leading by example.

Ultimately, the necktie embodies the heart of Young Men of Excellence: developing young men who understand that true manhood is defined not by status or appearance, but by integrity, compassion, responsibility, and the courage to positively impact the world around them.



Kenny Ware

Educator, Journalist

Kenny Ware is a respected business owner, School Board Trustee, and community leader. As the owner of Backyard BBQ, he has successfully built strong partnerships with esteemed institutions, including Cornell University, Adelphi University, and the Supreme Court of Nassau County.

Mr. Ware serves as President of the Black Restaurant Owners Coalition and is actively involved in supporting political candidates as both a sponsor and representative. With a strong record of leadership and service, he is also a future candidate for public office, with many additional accomplishments that reflect his ongoing commitment to community advancement.

The Young Men of Excellence program at Baldwin Middle School is committed to fostering the personal and academic development of our male students, equipping them with the tools necessary to thrive both within the classroom and beyond.

Today, we are privileged to welcome a distinguished panel of guest speakers, each of whom will share invaluable insights and experiences to inspire and empower the young men in our community.

Honored Guests

● **Zachary Dowdy**
Educator and Journalist

● **Marcello Erickson**
Educator, Community Leader

● **Kenny Ware**
Business Owner, Community Leader



ZACHARY R. DOWDY

Educator, Journalist

Zachary R. Dowdy is an Assistant Professor of Practice at Stony Brook University's School of Communication and Journalism and a longtime, accomplished journalist. He has reported for major publications including *The Boston Globe*, *The Boston Herald*, and *Newsday*, covering a wide range of topics such as criminal justice, urban affairs, and international issues.

In addition to his distinguished reporting career, Mr. Dowdy has taught journalism at several institutions and is deeply committed to mentoring young writers through programs such as the Robert W. Greene Summer Institute for High School Journalists. A proud Baldwin resident, he remains actively engaged in the local community and supports a variety of educational initiatives.



MARCELLO ERICKSON

Owner of No Good Burger

Marcello Erickson is a successful restaurateur and franchise owner, operating multiple No Good Burger locations along with a fleet of highly popular food trucks. Known for his commitment to excellence, he has earned numerous accolades, including recognition for Best Burger and Best Restaurant.

Originally from Baldwin and a proud graduate of the Baldwin School District, Marcello continues to expand his rapidly growing and highly successful brand while maintaining strong ties to his community.