THE BIRCH WATHEN LENOX SCHOOL

SCHOOL PROFILE 2025-2026

About Birch Wathen Lenox

The Birch Wathen Lenox School is an independent, non-profit, nonsectarian, college preparatory school on Manhattan's Upper East Side with roots going back more than 100 years. The school was created by the merger, in 1991, of The Birch Wathen School, which was founded in 1921, and The Lenox School, founded in 1916.

BWL's Reimagining: Rooted in Tradition, Ready for Tomorrow

BWL is in the midst of an exciting transformation. Over the past three years, the school's rigorous college preparatory curriculum has been energized by innovative programs in entrepreneurship, constructive dialogue, science research, environmental science, and robotics. Beginning this year, students may now pursue an academic concentration by combining coursework with experiential learning.

BWL has established partnerships with leading educational institutions to equip students with skills for well-being and future success. These collaborations support our passionate and dedicated faculty in engaging with our students in a challenging and enriching environment that inspires lifelong learning. When our seniors graduate from BWL, they are prepared for success as college students and citizens of the world.

Key Facts

- BWL enrolls 327 students (K–12), including 34% students of color, 41% receiving need-based aid, and 19% from outside Manhattan. The Class of 2026 includes 42 students.
- BWL does not rank its students nor provide a GPA. The school's grading scale is based on letter grades, A to F, pluses and minuses.
- The college preparatory curriculum at Birch Wathen Lenox is rigorous, and students are expected to carry no fewer than five academic courses each semester. They may also select electives from non-academic disciplines. Our honors math track begins in 9th grade and honors, advanced, and AP coursework in English, History, Computer Science, and Science is typically available starting in 11th grade.
- Honors, Advanced, and AP courses—available with faculty approval—require high achievement, self-motivation, and the ability to handle college-level work.
- BWL is proud of its rich music, theater, and visual arts programs. Many students participate in audition-based performance ensembles that require a high level of musicianship. These courses are designated as advanced. Our advanced studio art offerings enable the artistically inclined an opportunity to develop their talents and display their work in NYC galleries.

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210 East 77 Street
New York, NY 10075
212.861.0404

CEEB Code: 333461

Bill Kuhn
Head of School

Amy Young
Co-Director, Upper School

Guillermo Salgado
Co-Director, Upper School

College Counseling Team

Patti Cohen
Director
patti.cohen@gbwl.org

Laurie Polikoff
College Office Assistant
laurie.polikoff@gbwl.org

Roheeni Saxena
Associate Director
roheeni.saxena@gbwl.org

Curriculum

The BWL curriculum develops critical thinkers, expressive creators, effective communicators, and compassionate citizens. **The chart below shows our graduation requirements and the most advanced courses in each subject.**

SUBJECT	GRADUATION REQUIREMENT	MOST ADVANCED COURSES
English	4 years	AP English Literature & Composition, Honors English: Poetry, Honors English: Creative Writing & Portfolio
History/Social Sciences	3 years	AP US History, AP Comparative Government & Politics, AP Psychology*, AP Microeconomics*, AP Macroeconomics*, Advanced Seminar: International Relations I & II, Advanced Seminar: Democracy & Dissent (9, 10, 11, or 12), Advanced Seminar: Humanities Research (10, 11, or 12)
Mathematics	3 years	AP Calculus AB, AP Calculus BC, AP Statistics
Science	3 years	AP Biology, AP Physics 2, AP Chemistry*, Advanced Seminar: Science Research (10, 11, or 12)
World Languages	3 years of a single language: French, Spanish, Japanese, Chinese	AP Spanish Language & Culture, Post-AP Spanish, Advanced French 5, Advanced Chinese 5, Honors Japanese 3
Technology	Recommended	AP Computer Science A, Post-AP Computer Science
The Arts	1 year of Music 2 years of Art	**Music:** Advanced A Cappella, Advanced String Orchestra, and Advanced Rock Band are audition-based groups requiring a high level of musicianship **Art:** Advanced Studio Art, Advanced B&W Photography **Theater:** Advanced Audition Skills
Physical Education	4 years, including one semester of health	

** Courses with asterisk are offered through the Constellation Learning Consortium, a national network of independent schools providing flexible, collaborative online courses. These courses are available to students who wish to explore new subject areas or accommodate scheduling conflicts.*

Class of 2026 Grades

Below is the grade distribution for members of the Class of 2026 in BWL's academic courses.

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-
38.82%	19.36%	14.43%	10.25%	7.78%	3.61%	3.61%	0.95%	0.38%	0.38%	0.38%

0 students had all grades A

4 students had all grades A- and above

3 students had all grades B+ and above

3 students had all grades B and above

2 students had all grades B- and above

Grades in coursework completed at other schools by students who transferred to BWL are not included in the above distribution.

Signature Programs

Advanced Seminar: Democracy & Dissent

As part of BWL's Constructive Dialogue Initiative, this seminar explores First Amendment freedoms through landmark Supreme Court decisions, judicial opinions, and debates. Students critically examine judicial opinions, analyze law review articles, and engage in thoughtful debate.

Engineering: Robotics

BWL's robotics team trains extensively throughout the fall to prepare for competition season, building expertise in robot design and construction. During the intensive "build season," students brainstorm, design, construct, and test their own original robots. The year culminates with the team's participation in the annual FIRST NYC Regional Competition, where students showcase their technical innovation, collaboration, and problem-solving skills.

Advanced Seminars: Science Research and Humanities Research

Students in grades 10, 11, or 12 may apply to the Advanced Seminar in Science or Humanities Research, one-year programs that culminate in independent projects and presentations. Both seminars guide students through advanced research methods, critical analysis, and original inquiry, preparing them to communicate their findings with confidence.

Entrepreneurship Program & Lab

A selective 3–4 year sequence, the program challenges students to design ventures addressing real-world needs. Teams develop business plans, refine them with mentors, and pitch to entrepreneurs. The first cohort graduates in 2026.

Independent Study

Students design and pursue projects that empower them to dive deeply into subjects they're passionate about and produce original, high-level work. Each project is guided by a faculty mentor and a faculty/administrative committee to ensure both freedom of exploration and academic rigor.

Unique Alliances

- Through our collaboration with **The Constructive Dialogue Institute**, and **The Mill Institute**, we train student leaders and faculty in pedagogical approaches that foster critical inquiry and emphasize learning how to think, not what to think. Our inaugural Constructive Dialogue Summit brought together students, parents, educators, and community leaders to strengthen listening skills and practice navigating complex conversations with empathy and respect.

- Our work with **The Social Institute** equips students to make healthy, values-driven choices in their social worlds—both online and offline—while strengthening school culture. In alignment with this initiative, BWL implemented a forward-thinking policy requiring students to store their cell phones in secure lockers during the school day, allowing them to be more present, focused, and engaged.

- In 2024, BWL was honored to be invited to the prestigious **Teen Advisory Board at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill**, where students in grades 9–11 collaborate with leading research scientists. In our first year of participation, BWL students helped design research questions, collect and analyze data, and develop actionable strategies—gaining authentic, hands-on experience in high-level academic research.

- Experiential learning also flourishes through our partnerships with the **Central Park Conservancy** and the **Billion Oyster Project**, where students engage in urban ecology and environmental restoration efforts—including the ambitious goal of restoring one billion oysters to New York Harbor by 2035.

- Most recently, BWL was selected as one of a small group of schools invited to apply for the 2025–2026 cohort of the **President's Junior Leadership Council at Northwell Lenox Hill Hospital**. This prestigious leadership initiative empowers students to serve as ambassadors between the hospital, their peers, and the broader community, with a focus on advancing the health, safety, and well-being of young people in Manhattan.

Student Leadership

Peer Leaders

The Peer Leader Program is a selective opportunity for Upper School students recognized for their character, empathy, and leadership. Peer Leaders mentor 9th graders and new students, and foster a sense of belonging in the BWL community.

Student Government

Student Government includes two Co-Presidents, a Secretary, and a Treasurer elected in school-wide elections, along with Grade Representatives chosen by their peers.

Editorial Leadership

Talented student writers are selected to lead *Range Magazine*, BWL's literary and arts publication. Editors curate writing, photography, and artwork, showcasing creativity across the school community and amplifying student voices

Communications Interns

Communications Interns, selected through an application process, work with the Director of Communications to capture events and highlight student life through photography and storytelling for the school newsletter.

Student Tour Guides & Ambassadors

This selective program trains a small group of Upper School students to lead tours, share their own experiences, and provide prospective families with an authentic perspective on the school community.

Peer Tutors

Peer Tutors are strong academic students who provide one-on-one support to younger classmates, helping them strengthen skills, build confidence, and improve study habits.

Awards and Honors

Each spring, top-performing juniors receive academic department awards, and additional awards are presented to seniors at graduation. One student annually earns the John Stuart Mill Award for Outstanding Achievement in Constructive Dialogue.

Interschool Sports

Varsity soccer, cross country, basketball, swim, baseball, tennis and track and field for both boys and girls; volleyball for girls. As students at an urban school with no playing fields, our athletes travel up to 1.5 hours for games and practices.

College Destinations for the Classes of 2021 - 2025

American University
University of Arizona
Bard College
Boston College
Boston University
Bowdoin College
Brandeis University
Brown University
Bucknell University
Carnegie Mellon University
Case Western Reserve University
Chapman University
University of Chicago
College of Charleston
Colby College
Colgate University
University of Colorado at Boulder
Columbia University
Cornell University
University of Delaware
University of Denver
Drexel University
Duke University
Elon University
Emory University
Fashion Institute of Technology
University of Florida
Fordham University
Franklin and Marshall College
Georgetown University
George Washington University
Hamilton College
Haverford College
College of the Holy Cross
Howard University
Indiana University at Bloomington
Johns Hopkins University
Kenyon College
Lehigh University
Marist College
McGill University
University of Maryland
University of Miami
Michigan State University
University of Michigan
Middlebury College
New York University
Northeastern University
Northwestern University
Oberlin College
University of Ottawa
Penn State University
University of Richmond
Rochester Institute of Technology
University of Rochester
Rutgers University
Sarah Lawrence College
Skidmore College
University of Southern California
Swarthmore College
University of South Carolina
University of Southern California
Southern Methodist University
Spelman College
Syracuse University
University of Texas at Austin
Tufts University
Tulane University
Union College
SUNY Buffalo
University of St. Andrews
Vassar College
University of Vermont
Villanova University
University of Virginia
Wake Forest University
Washington University in St. Louis
Wesleyan University
Williams College
University of Wisconsin, Madison

The Birch Wathen Lenox School is accredited by the New York State Board of Regents and the New York State Association of Independent Schools. We are members of the National Association of Independent Schools, and the National and State Association of College Admission Counselors. We comply with the NACAC Statement of Principles of Good Practice.