



Update from the Superintendent

To: BDS Employees
From: Bill Husfelt, Superintendent
Date: May 6, 2022

This is the first in a series of weekly articles featuring some of the accomplishments of students in the Class of 2022 at each of our high schools. We're going in the order of graduation and so we're kicking off this series with J.R. Arnold High School

Attending the graduation ceremonies of our students each year is one of my favorite duties, and honors, as Superintendent. This year, I want to make a concerted effort to share some of the stories of those graduates with you so you can join me in marveling at their poise, their resilience, their dedication and their determination to make a difference in the world around them. We begin this series with J.R. Arnold High School.

As a first-generation American high school graduate, and the daughter of immigrant parents who speak little English, J.R. Arnold High School Senior Tiffany Gao has a unique perspective on the challenges her class members have faced in high school.

“When our community was hit by Hurricane Michael, my house received catastrophic damages but because my parents do not speak fluent English, I was the one who had to make the insurance calls,” she said. And when Covid hit, and her parent’s restaurant closed temporarily, Tiffany juggled a lot of additional stress while trying to figure out virtual learning. “I did not have a normal high school career which I regret,” she said.

Thanks to the resilience learned first-hand through the aftermath of the hurricane and the pandemic, however, Tiffany and approximately 300 classmates will proudly walk the stage on May 18th when J.R. Arnold High School graduates the Class of 2022.

This class, according to Principal Britt Smith, has much to celebrate.

Arnold’s Class of 2022 has nine students enlisting in the military, two students earning their high school diplomas AND Associate in Arts Degrees (Jalina Hess and Audrey Wright), seven Advanced Placement Capstone Diploma recipients (Maria Amaya, Morgan Campbell, Tiffany Gao, Chloe Rook, Maggie Steelman, Sealey Warren, Audrey Wright) and 38 seniors who have earned special AP recognition. This class also includes students who will be the first in their families to attend college and students who have balanced academics with a need to work to help their families financially. ALL of these students deserve to be recognized and celebrated and all of them have been the beneficiaries of years and years of education, love and support from BDS.

Lena Ottinger, a proud member of the Class of 2022 and a BDS student since 2012, credits the success of her class to the teachers and staff who invested in them. “BDS employees have always led and guided me through some tough challenges physically and academically, allowing me to achieve my goals and have

the opportunities to give me the best education possible,” she said. Ottinger also credits her leadership experience in JROTC for giving her the best foundation possible. “As the Command Master Chief, you are the motivator and most of the time that motivation is much needed by incoming cadets. It’s not an easy task by any means but it’s part of the challenge,” she said. “However one of the toughest parts of the job is keeping that mindset while having a hard day yourself.”

Lena plans to study marine biology and environmental science at Florida State University and hopes to “create a culture of conservation and sustainability and achieve my goals in service to my neighbors, community and to my planet” after graduation.

Lena’s classmate Senior Warrick Wilmot has also experienced some tough days during his tenure in high school but he says the “superheroes” at BDS never failed to encourage him. “I’m forever in debt to this amazing district and the incredible schools I have attended,” he said. “I can’t wait to see what lies ahead of me in my future but I’ll never forget the people in my past who brought me to my present state.”

Warrick, who began his education at Breakfast Point and then Surfside, said the hurricane and pandemic taught him that he can overcome anything. “The hurricane shut down my freshman year of baseball season and Covid shut down my sophomore year,” he said, noting that his Baseball Coach David Pedro helped him work through those challenges “and really showed me what it means to be mature.” Warrick also gave a shoutout to Arnold ELA teacher Erik Cobb and to his fourth-grade teacher Amanda Walker. “I’ll never forget my amazing fourth-grade year with her at BPA,” he said. Warrick hopes to continue his baseball career “to the furthest extent

Lena credits her JROTC instructors Robert McKibben and Jim Coupe with ensuring she met her high school goals. She also credits middle school science teacher Morgan Sansbury who was the “middle school engineering and robotics teacher who mentored me.” Tiffany wanted to thank “Ms. Flaig, my guidance counselor ... and Mr. Gussaroff, my math teacher during my freshman, sophomore and junior year.” Gussaroff, she notes, “not only became one of the best teachers I’ve ever had but also someone that I could go to when I faced any problems.”

Members of the Class of 2022 at J.R. Arnold High School came in as Marlins four years ago and are leaving as good citizens, future servicemen and women, accomplished athletes, amazing students, capable employees and so much more. Tiffany, who plans to study “the connection between neuroscience and the musculoskeletal system” on a full-ride scholarship to the University of Florida knows that she will always take a part of Bay County with her wherever she goes.

“Although my time at Arnold was anything but normal, I had an amazing time there,” she said. “All the hurdles that we as a community jumped through made us more collaborative and brought us closer than ever!”

Congratulations on your graduation J.R. Arnold Marlins ... please know that we are incredibly proud of the more than \$6.5 MILLION you have garnered in scholarship offers. I’d also like to thank all of the BDS employees who invested in the lives of these talented young men and women. We can’t wait to see what the future holds for the Class of 2022 and we’re honored to have been part of your education.