

Hello everyone, my name is Ava Gulino and I graduated from Wilmington Montessori School in 2010. I now attend Bates College in Lewiston, Maine. I am a rising senior majoring in Environmental Studies with a minor in Religious Studies.

Congratulations to both Lydia and Addie! You both have completed eighth grade and you can now begin your adventures that take place beyond Wilmington Montessori School. It is a really exciting day that I hope you both enjoy and appreciate while also looking forward to things that are to come. I also understand that both of you graduated in sixth grade which makes both of you extra special because you not only get to graduate from Wilmington Montessori School once, but twice!

When I was thinking about what I wanted to say to you today, I thought about how WMS is the kind of place that allows you to make the decision as to what kind of experience you want it to be. Even when you are one of the little kids, you have agency over what you want to do. You have the ability to choose which activities you want to do, you are able to work on new skills, and you are always supported by an environment with peers and teachers who want you to succeed. This kind of environment lends itself to success after your time at WMS and will help you for many years to come.

Based on what I have heard about both of you, you are both resourceful, thoughtful, kind, bright, and intelligent young women who are more than capable of becoming successful high school students and beyond. I'm not sure how either of you are feeling about leaving WMS, but I know that after sixth grade I was

scared, and mainly because I was afraid of the unknown. I had been in the warm embrace of WMS from age 5, why wouldn't I be at least a bit nervous? However, I discovered then, and even after being away from WMS for nine years, I am reminded daily, that the things I learned at WMS, and the way I learned them, have lasting value and still help me to this day. And even though middle school and high school are really important years, I believe you will find, as I did, that your years at WMS are critically important in forming the women that you are.

Recently, at Bates College, I completed a study abroad program where I had the opportunity to travel to Vietnam, Morocco, and Bolivia over a period of 4 months to learn about Climate Change. The first two weeks of the program were spent in San Francisco where we had orientation and community building sessions with the members of the study group. Even though I travelled to so many exotic and far-off places and met so many accomplished and fascinating individuals, in San Francisco there was one speaker, and one quote from that speaker, that inspired me from the very first night. Since that day, I have carried this quote with me throughout my journey and I plan on continuing to use it as a guide moving forward. On that first night, the CEO and National Director of an organization named "The Butterfly Movement" came and spoke to us. It is an organization that helps young women and girls rebuild their relationships with the land and ecology through workshops and training. Her name was Brandi Mack, but she goes by "Mama B." She provided an inspirational introduction for the study group and infused all of us with the spirit that would carry the group for the rest of the trip. And when she spoke to us, she closed with this powerful thought, "Pay attention to your intention." It is these five words that I thought about when I was pushed outside of my comfort zone. These words are so simple, but so powerful because

they are a straightforward reminder to be aware of your goals, to be aware of how you treat others, and to be aware of how you approach a problem. I now use these words to ground myself before an important decision or before I jump into the unknown.

So, I encourage you to make that jump into the unknown with both feet. Do not be so afraid of the unknown that you do not make the jump when the jump is there to be made. Feel free to use Mama B's words to help you, but if they are not the exact quote for you, perhaps a different quote or another saying that you have learned at WMS can help you as you navigate through high school and the years following.

Both of you are more than well equipped to begin high school and I wish both of you the best of luck as you continue your lives beyond the nest of WMS and into the unknown and with the assurance that both of you are ready.