

RISE

/rewind

Summer 2026



CELEBRATING OUR GRADUATES

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Celebrating Our Graduates

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As the RISE Class of 2026 prepares to step into the next chapter of their lives, their stories are a powerful reminder of how far students can go when given the right support, community, and belief in their potential. This year, we witnessed inspiring journeys of growth, perseverance, and achievement. Whether through academics, athletics, the arts, or leadership, our seniors exemplify the RISE's culture of achievement and promise.

Many of our graduates shared how much they've grown — not just academically, but personally. Isabel reflected that she learned how important it is to rely on a strong support system and continue pushing toward long-term goals even during hard moments. Khobi shared that he's matured personally and learned important lessons about responsibility and perseverance. And Jaylen, *the very first recipient of the Timothy M. O'Neil Scholarship*, is among this year's distinguished graduates.



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For many of our scholars, extracurriculars continue to provide purpose. Being part of a sports team provided more than just structure — one of Manny's favorite high school memories was playing football, an experience that helped him build confidence, discipline, and teamwork skills. Others found belonging and personal growth through the performing arts. Anaya credits her a cappella teacher, Mrs. Serotta, for teaching her that her voice matters both in music and in life.

Please join us in celebrating these impressive scholars. What a privilege it's been to watch them soar.

CONGRATS TO OUR GRADUATING SCHOLARS

JAYLEN REYNOLDS • MILIANNA PINTO • DONALD YOUNG

EMMANUEL BARBOZA • ISABEL FRANCISCO • JADE WALKER

JEKHOB "KHOBI" MARSH • NAOMI FUGATE • CHRISTIAN DAWKINS

JULIUS BROGAN • ANAYA WILSON • JIREH SMITH



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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

There are some moments each year that remind me exactly why RISE exists, and graduation season is always one of them.

This spring, we are celebrating 12 incredible RISE seniors as they graduate and prepare for what comes next — from college campuses to trade schools and new opportunities that are uniquely their own. While each student's path looks different, what connects them all is their resilience, determination, and the hard work it took to get to this moment.

Over the years, I have had the privilege of watching these students grow not only academically, but personally. I have seen confidence build, goals take shape, and young people begin to recognize their own potential. It is impossible not to feel proud watching them step into this next chapter.

What I admire most about our seniors is not simply what they have accomplished, but who they are. They are thoughtful, hardworking, compassionate, funny, determined, and deeply deserving every opportunity ahead of them. Many have faced challenges far beyond what most people realize, yet they continue to move forward with strength and hope for their future.

At RISE, we often talk about the importance of support, mentorship, and opportunity. Our seniors are proof of what can happen when young people are surrounded by people who believe in them. Their mentors, families, teachers, sponsors, and supporters have all played a role in helping them reach this milestone, and I know our entire community shares this celebration.

To our seniors: thank you for allowing us to be part of your journey. We are so proud of you, and we cannot wait to see where life takes you next. Your future is bright, and this is only the beginning.

With gratitude,



Kaitlin Della Grotta
RISE Executive Director



graduate SPOTLIGHT:

Jaylen

Jaylen's experience at Bishop Hendricken was shaped by friendships, football, and learning the importance of discipline and responsibility. One challenge he worked hard to overcome was consistently getting to school on time, something he improved by building better routines and staying more focused on his goals. Academically, Jaylen pushed himself every year, earning honors throughout high school and making the President's List as a senior. He is especially proud of both his academic accomplishments and being accepted into college. Outside the classroom, Jaylen completed an internship with the Johnston Police Department, where he gained firsthand experience observing police officers and exploring his interest in criminal justice. He plans to continue playing football in college while studying criminal justice, with hopes of eventually attending the police academy. As the inaugural recipient of the Timothy M. O'Neil Scholarship, Jaylen says RISE helped support him throughout high school by making sure he stayed on the right path and always had encouragement behind him.



Milianna

During her time at Saint Raphael Academy, *Milianna* grew academically, personally, and emotionally. One of the most meaningful parts of high school for her was building stronger bonds with classmates and realizing how important supportive friendships can be. Throughout high school, she faced personal hardships, including losing friendships and navigating difficult moments, but leaned on trusted friends and her support system to help her through those challenges. Over the years, she became more independent and learned how to better manage both her grades and personal responsibilities. She credits one of her teachers, Mrs. Nelson, for making her feel supported and confident in the classroom, especially by encouraging her to ask for help without feeling judged. Milianna is most proud of making it through all four years while maintaining strong grades despite everything she faced along the way. She plans to attend college to pursue a career in nursing and says RISE gave her not only practical support, but also a community where she felt understood and less alone.

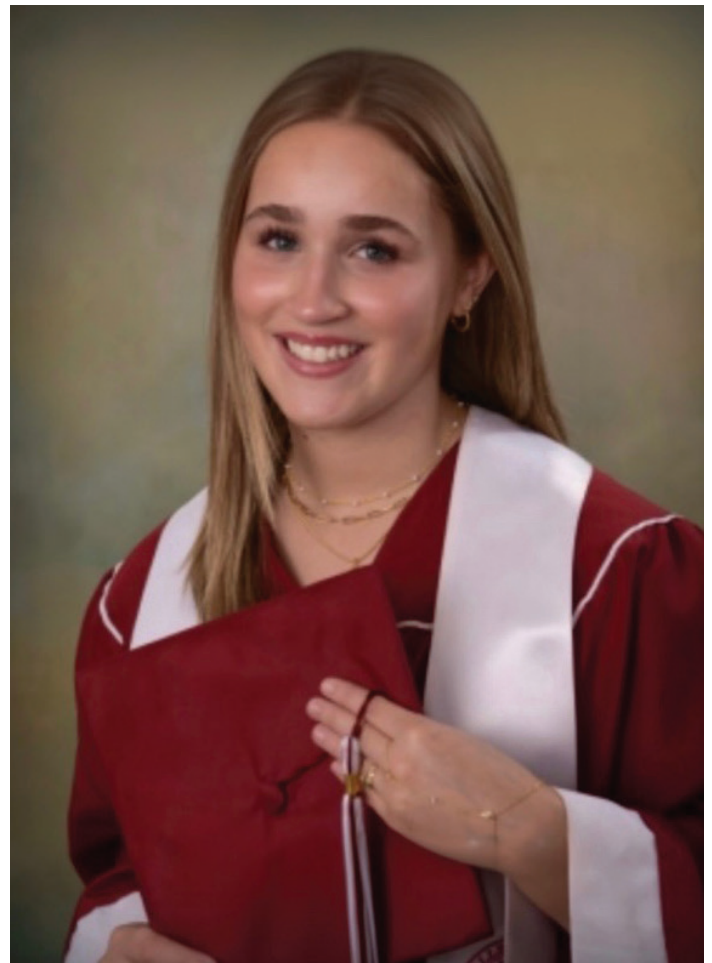


Donald



Donald's time at La Salle Academy taught him valuable lessons about maturity, independence, and staying true to himself. Looking back, he says even the mistakes and “pointless troubles” he got into became opportunities to learn and grow. One of his biggest challenges was staying focused and motivated, especially during moments when he did not feel like doing schoolwork or thinking long term. Over time, he learned how important it was to stop focusing only on the moment and instead think about the future he wanted for himself. Donald is especially proud that he avoided negative peer pressure and stayed authentic instead of trying to fit in with everyone else. He credits his support system and the people who believed in him for helping him stay motivated during difficult times. After graduation, Donald plans to attend college and hopes to remain involved with RISE as a future leader or alumni supporter who can give back to younger students the same encouragement he received.

Isabel



Isabel's high school journey at La Salle Academy was filled with creativity, perseverance, and personal growth. One of her favorite memories was participating in La Salle's production of *Into the Woods*, where she played Rapunzel. In addition to theater, she challenged herself to try new experiences, including cheerleading and other extracurricular activities that helped her grow in confidence. During high school, Isabel also faced significant personal loss, which made balancing school and everyday life especially difficult at times. Through those experiences, she learned how important it is to rely on a strong support system and continue pushing toward long-term goals even during hard moments. Isabel credits teachers like Mrs. Denault for helping her stay motivated and believe in herself academically. She plans to attend St. John's University and hopes to eventually become an OB-GYN. Through programs like Brown Pathways, she was able to explore careers in medicine and strengthen her passion for healthcare. Isabel says RISE provided encouragement, guidance, and a community that supported her through every challenge and celebrated her growth along the way.



Emmanuel

At Providence Country Day School, **Emmanuel** found growth through athletics, academics, and mentorship. One of his favorite high school memories was playing football, an experience that helped him build confidence, discipline, and teamwork skills. Academically, Emmanuel faced challenges with grades early on, but by dedicating more time to studying and surrounding himself with supportive mentors and tutors, he was able to improve significantly, especially in writing and math. He is incredibly proud of graduating and making his family proud after all the hard work he put in throughout high school. Emmanuel will attend Boston College to study business, and he has already begun exploring career opportunities through a business internship at a local Providence store and gallery. He says the experience helped him better understand what he may want to pursue in the future. Emmanuel credits RISE with supporting both him and his family academically, financially, and emotionally, and says the organization showed him the importance of helping others and building strong support systems.

Jade

Jade's experience at Saint Raphael Academy helped her become more mature, independent, and focused on her future. She says one of the most memorable parts of high school was meeting new friends and learning more about herself over the years. Academically, Jade worked hard to distance herself from distractions and make more time for schoolwork, something she says was not always easy. She credits teachers like Ms. Paiva and Mrs. Nelson for positively impacting her high school experience and encouraging her growth. Jade is most proud of the relationships and connections she built throughout high school, as well as her ability to stay positive during difficult moments. Her mother's support and encouragement helped keep her motivated and focused on her goals. After graduation, Jade plans to attend Rhode Island College to study Elementary Education and hopes to become a teacher. She says RISE supported her in countless ways, from helping provide meals and covering school expenses to creating a supportive community where she always felt cared for.





Naomi

Naomi's time at Saint Raphael Academy has been a journey of growth, resilience, and meaningful connection. Looking back, she says senior year has been especially memorable because it gave her the opportunity to reflect on how quickly high school passed by and how much she has accomplished. Throughout high school, Naomi faced challenges adjusting to a new environment, balancing academics with responsibilities at home, and managing the stress and expenses that came with the college application process. Through it all, she relied on her faith, family, school community, and RISE support system to stay motivated. Naomi is proud of being accepted into her top-choice college to study nursing and hopes to work in healthcare while continuing to build a stable and fulfilling future for herself. She also participated in dual enrollment courses at Johnson & Wales University, helping expand both her academic experience and confidence. Naomi says RISE supported her not only financially, but emotionally as well, constantly reminding her that she had people cheering her on every step of the way.

Christian

Christian's experience at East Providence High School was shaped by perseverance, growth, and learning how to adapt to change. One of the biggest challenges he faced during high school was transferring schools and adjusting to a completely new environment, something that pushed him outside of his comfort zone. Although the transition was difficult at times, Christian stayed focused on making it through and reaching graduation, which he considers one of his proudest accomplishments. He credits his mother for always encouraging him and motivating him to keep going, even during stressful moments. Along the way, he learned the importance of staying on top of responsibilities and not putting things off, advice he now shares with younger students. After graduation, Christian plans to attend trade school and begin building a future through hands-on career training. He says RISE played a major role in helping him stay on track by consistently checking in, providing tutoring and support whenever he needed it, and making sure he always had people he could turn to for help. Through the program, he also built meaningful friendships with peers he still stays in contact with today. Christian describes both his high school journey and his time with RISE as "character development" because the experience taught him resilience and helped shape the person he is today.





Julius

Julius's experience at St. Patrick Academy was a story of growth, maturity, and learning to focus on his future. Early in high school, he admits he struggled academically and spent time around the wrong influences, but by senior year he made the decision to focus on himself and his goals. That hard work paid off, as he consistently earned honor roll and even achieved high honors during his final year. Julius says one of the most memorable parts of high school was the support of his family and girlfriend, who motivated him to keep pushing forward even during difficult times. He is especially proud of the person he has become and the maturity he developed throughout the years. After graduation, Julius plans to attend Rhode Island College and is considering studying finance or accounting. He credits RISE for helping prepare him for his future by encouraging him to stay motivated, focused, and committed to building a successful life for himself.

Jireh

Jireh's experience at Saint Raphael Academy was filled with friendship, perseverance, and personal growth. One of the most meaningful parts of high school for her was being able to spend time with friends and create memories with the people around her. As a student athlete, balancing schoolwork, homework, sports, and everyday responsibilities was not always easy, and staying consistent academically was one of her biggest challenges. Through it all, Jireh relied heavily on her faith and the support of her family to stay motivated during difficult times.

Over the past four years, Jireh says she has grown into a stronger and more confident young Black woman who now feels ready to take on the world after graduation. She is especially proud of making it through high school successfully and having the opportunity to participate in dual enrollment courses through Johnson & Wales University. This fall, Jireh plans to attend Curry College, where she will major in Criminal Justice and minor in Forensic Science, while also considering joining the basketball team. She says RISE played an important role throughout her high school journey by helping support her family financially, checking in during difficult moments, and exposing her to college experiences through organized field trips and opportunities. Through RISE, she also built deeper relationships with friends and learned that she never has to face challenges alone. Jireh hopes to stay connected to the program by motivating and encouraging younger students who may one day follow a similar path. She describes her overall experience with one word: "grateful," because of the opportunities, support, and community she found along the way.



Jekhobi

Khobi's years at La Salle Academy were filled with memorable friendships, personal growth, and learning how to push through challenges. While homework and grades were sometimes difficult for him, Khobi recognized that success came from putting in more effort and staying focused on finishing strong. Over the years, he says he matured personally and learned important lessons about responsibility and perseverance. Although he describes himself as still growing academically, he is proud of making it to graduation and staying committed to his future. Khobi plans to attend trade school after high school and is looking forward to building a career for himself. He says regular check-ins and encouragement from RISE helped him feel supported and reminded him that there were always people looking out for him. One of the biggest lessons he learned through the program was the importance of treating others with the same care and kindness that RISE showed him throughout high school.

Anaya

Anaya's time at The Wheeler School was filled with personal growth, unforgettable opportunities, and discovering the power of her own voice. One of the highlights of her high school experience was traveling to Japan through school, as well as performing at Metropolitan Museum of Art with her cappella group. Throughout high school, Anaya faced challenges with balancing pressure, expectations, and self-confidence, especially during freshman year when everything felt overwhelming. Over time, she learned that growth comes through persistence, asking for help, and stepping outside of her comfort zone. Through leadership opportunities, academics, and music, she became more confident in herself and more willing to speak up and advocate for herself. Anaya credits her cappella teacher, Mrs. Serotta, for teaching her that her voice matters both in music and in life. Academically and personally, she developed stronger time management skills, resilience, and confidence in her future goals. This fall, Anaya will attend Skidmore College on a full scholarship, where she plans to major in Biology on a pre-med track while minoring in music. As a first-generation college student, she describes her journey as "beating the odds," explaining that her experiences taught her resilience, confidence, and the importance of believing in herself no matter the obstacles in front of her.





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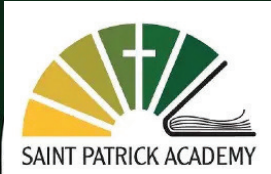
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is proud to invest in the next generation — celebrating the resilience, dedication, and hard work of the RISE Class of 2026. As these remarkable young men and women step into their futures, we couldn't be more excited to recognize their achievements and cheer them on every step of the way!

Tricia S. O'Neil, CFA
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