

Burlington County Times

BCSSSD graduates overcome challenges and look to the future at commencement

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Sixty-three graduates celebrated the challenges they overcame to receive their diplomas during Tuesday's commencement ceremony.

WESTAMPTON — There were many moments during her time in the Burlington County Special Services School District when Jessica Dugan was afraid she wouldn't be able to meet her academic goals.

But thanks to overwhelming support from her teachers and a lot of hard work, Jessica stood before BCSSSD high school and transition program class of 2018 wearing a cap and gown, and a huge smile.

"I want to say to everyone, don't give up. You will go far if you try," Jessica said.

Jessica and her sister, Megan, joined their fellow graduates in celebrating the challenges they overcame to receive their diplomas during Tuesday's commencement ceremony. BCSSSD serves youth with special needs, including children with autism and behavioral issues, across three campuses in Westampton, Lumberton and Mount Laurel.

Sixty-three students graduated from the district, including 21 from the transition program for students ages 18 to 21 looking to prepare for careers after high school. Six students have been accepted or are waiting for acceptance into a college program, and 28 high school graduates will move into the transition program.

Though they were preparing to go their separate ways, Megan Dugan was proud of the friendships her classmates had forged during their time together.

"No matter where we go, we will always have a home here at BCSSS," Megan said.

Another student speaker, Demetrius Bennett, shared a lesson with the graduates he'd learned in one of his classes; life is like a hot dog, he said. You can eat it quickly or with no toppings just to satisfy your hunger, or you can jazz it up with ketchup, mustard, or relish and eat amongst your friends.

"I am challenging you to celebrate life and make it a feast," Demetrius said.

Superintendent Christopher Nagy echoed calls for the graduates to enjoy life to the fullest, while always remembering to be proud of who they are.

"This campus is a campus where miracles happen, and is a place where no one size fits all and where masks are taken off and all of you are seen for who you are and what beauty, meaning and hope you bring to our world," Nagy said. "Now is the time to see what you can do and who you can be for the world to see."