



High School Graduation

June 11, 2017

Speech by Savannah Wade, Class of 2017

In my time at GDS, I have learned a key lesson I will strive to remind myself throughout life, and it is a message I believe everyone in this room should hold dear to their heart. This lesson does not come from my education at this school, but rather the culmination of experiences this institution has presented to me. In what is closing to now my tenth year at GDS, I have learned what it means to be an investment; to be a living representation of what either parents, teachers, classmates, or friends see as worthy of money, time, trust, or love, and the power that comes with that profound privilege.

Inherently, as students of a private school, we are investments of money and time. I don't know about you all, but I have been made very aware of that fact. Thank you, Mom. Whether it be driving across rush hour D.C. traffic, attending Capital Educators SAT prep courses, or buying equipment for soccer, swimming, track, cross country, softball, rowing or climbing (by the way, those are all sports I've tried but never stuck to), we all know that being a student here requires a commitment from parents and family members that at times can go unrecognized, so to that I'd like to say thank you.

Like many of my classmates, I have attended GDS carrying the understanding that my presence here has been a result of hard work, and sometimes sacrifice, and has been at the willing expense of those who see value in premium education. But what is sometimes harder to understand, let alone notice, is the "why?". Why do our parents believe in paying for a high school tuition that is worth more than that of the average American college? Why do some parents willingly sleep only three hours to work that second shift? My answer is a reality that has

taken me years to even begin to believe, but it is simply that we are worth it. We are worth every cent, every minute, and every sacrifice. Some of us have been reminded of this fact. Some of us are hearing these words for the first time, or have never heard it from the individuals that are supposed to love them most. Yet, what is so beautiful about the message of being a worthy individual is that it is not determined solely by the people you were born into, but also by the people you choose, and who choose you in return.

Now Class of 2017, we didn't really choose each other, but I see a distinct quality in this group of people that frankly has set us apart from previous classes. It is the willingness to invest in each other. The key moment for me that determined this observation was in what many of us would call "Crisis Week". Our junior year, the GDS high school dedicated a week to open forum conversation generally about students' critiques of this institution and how matters of race, gender, class and many other topics were being handled. I make this event sound tame, but in reality it was rather chaotic. If there was one word I would ascribe to that week, it would be "painful". Students of all grades exposed sides of their lives that they felt the GDS community ignored, including myself. I spoke about my experience as a woman of color in this school and in my personal life. As a black Latina woman, and one of twelve black students in this class, I felt vulnerable and exposed. Moments later, a fellow student, Nicolo Pisoni, stood up saying that as a white man, he had never heard or thought of my experience as a woman of color, and encouraged everyone in our class to tell their story because like him, we all can learn and grow from this knowledge. I was moved to tears that a person I hadn't talked to in my ten years at this school noticed me and was willing to openly acknowledge my pain. After that moment, individuals in our class expressed their struggles in being their own person and were immediately supported in the space we all had created for each other. I will always remember that day. It was then that I realized even a mere acquaintance could validate your experience as

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a human. This in it of itself is an investment of belief and kindness that has changed the way I see and value my own experiences, and to that, I also say thank you.

Whether it be a quality education or the support of a person in our grade, the fact of knowing that we are all believed in is a priceless gift. With this fact comes the power to believe in yourself and your own capabilities, and as we embark into whatever life we choose, know that you have limitless power to influence and change. You come from families that see the worth in your academic, athletic, and artistic success. You have created small and large communities around you that see the best parts of your leadership and creativity. Know that your contribution to the future is destined to reflect the power that each of these wells of support has meant to you in your lifetime. I know your capacity for greatness is boundless.

Now I want to do a couple of shoutouts. First, to my best friends: Nico, Gavi, and Mai-Han. I thank you for changing my life in ways I never thought possible, and for grounding me with each of your own individual strengths. You are my greatest gifts of high school. You are my beans (it's an inside thing). Then, to my mentors and second parents: Michelle Cobb - the backbone to my artistic success. You have been a role model to me as a friend, an artist, and a black woman. I have always appreciated your stern words and long lectures, even when I would avoid you, or the art room altogether, when I did something wrong. Thank you. Adrian Loving, my first art teacher and the coolest DJ around. You inspire me to create and collaborate. So much more of the GDS community and of course my family, both extended and immediate, have shaped my life in tremendous ways. Finally, my mother. Anyone who knows me knows I love my mother. She is my anchor, my support system, and my idol. With the broadest set of shoulders, she has helped raise me and my six siblings while still maintaining, and excelling in, her full time job. She is the most determined, stubborn, hard-working, motivated person I know.

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Your love is boundless and I will recognize you in every accomplishment I make. You are why I stand on this stage, and dedicate this speech of believing in yourself and others.

Class of 2017, I hope you can take this lesson and apply it to your lives. You are are remarkably talented individuals. I believe in your futures. I love you. Thank you.