



# High School Graduation

June 10, 2018

Speech by Katie Gibson, High School Principal

As I was reflecting on my first year at GDS, I thought back to my own high school experience and found that certain memories stood out as a connection \*make hand gesture\* (as they say in the lower school) and that other memories of my high school years differ greatly from the environment that GDS proudly fosters. What is similar to the students at GDS, is that my friends were people who cared deeply about social justice issues. We formed our school's service organizations, started diversity and equity clubs, and opened the first chapter of amnesty international. I surrounded myself with critical thinkers and change agents but at the time, where I went to school, we were not the norm. While my counter-culture friends and I were the outliers, here your strong student voice is embraced as central, and I marvel at the beauty of that. But I want to name that every community has it's outliers, people who feel like the other. I hope that as you head off beyond the walls of GDS you are able to remain true to yourselves while being open to others who are different from you.

When we were teenagers we spent a lot of time together listening to music that addressed themes of social change, activism, and protest. We were moved by lyrics that challenged societal norms and inspired us to action. My appreciation for meaningful influential music is not limited by genre, decade, or location. There is a relevancy across time and a universality across place with regards to the impact music can have. On any given day, from the time I was a teenager up through today I can be caught listening to a wide range of musicians who approached their artistry through many different lenses.

From Billie Holiday, Sam Cooke, and Nina Simone, to Fela Kuti, Hugh Masekela, and Bob Marley, to Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, and Ani Difranco, to Rage Against the Machine, NWA, Black Star, and most recently Kendrick Lamar.

Music is powerful. It can serve as a call to action, an escape, something to reflect on in solitary moments, and a force that can bring people together joyfully. For me this last part usually also

included dancing. Music unites people, in celebration, in action, in solidarity, and it has the ability to connect our humanity.

What makes your high school experience here at GDS distinct is that, unlike the vast majority of high school youth past and present (my own experience included), you have been a part of a school community where your rebellion, your anarchist spirit, your desire to challenge the status quo doesn't make you the outcast, it makes you the empowered student that others, both peers and adults, want to embrace and embolden with support. You have been given the gift of an incredibly rich, diverse, and inclusive educational experience. Your teachers have armed you with the ability to go off in the world and make provocative arguments, to debate topics intelligently with a deep understanding of history and literature, and to continue cultivating the skill of empathetic listening. The peers you've spent the last 4-14 years with have provided you with the most genuine kind of friendship there is; the kind of friendship where they will call BS when it's needed, and push you out of your comfort zone and challenge you, but they will still stand by your side while you figure that ISH out. Your peers on this stage have helped to shape you in more ways than you are able to yet understand or fully acknowledge. Even through the hard times, especially the hard times, you were learning about your identity, your privilege, your place in the world..... and that education is the one that will serve you best as you move forward in your life. I promise that you will look back one day and be grateful beyond words for the influence this community had in shaping your character.

Unfortunately I have only had a short time to get to know you, and while I wish it were longer, in less than a years time, you have made an impact on me that will last. Your fierceness and your willingness to take risks have inspired me.

Because you are unique risk takers it didn't feel right to make some average, traditional speech today. You deserve something as unique and risky as you are. So, I am gonna step outside my comfort zone one more time with you, the class of 2018, to show my gratitude for the lessons you have taught me this year. Because music can convey what words alone sometimes can not, I am going to sing something for you by Ani Difranco who I began listening to when I was in High School. The only people I ever sing for are my two children at bedtime so please bear with me.

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**Verse 1: (C/E –G/D)**

Your basic average super star Is singing about justice, and peace and love  
And I am glaring at the radio, swearing saying that's what I was afraid of  
The system gives you just enough to make you think that you see change  
They will sing you right to sleep and then they'll screw you just the same.

Chorus: F-G-Am

But I will wait -----Yes, I will

wait ----for the truth

I will wait -----I will wait for the truth

Yes I will wait for the truth

**Verse 2: (C/E –G/D)**

You've only got a minute Before you have to go  
A minute is all your life Will ever allow  
So grow old And stay together do it now  
Because you'll do all the jobs No one else will do  
And you'll step aside And let each other through  
You have all my respect I'll leave it here when you go  
Maybe I never told you Maybe you don't know

**Chorus: F-G-Am**

But maybe if we wait-----maybe if we wait things will improve

Maybe we just wait -----and things will improve

You know, they've got to improve

**Coda:**

**F-G-Am**

I know you have to go you have gone before

We are fighting on two different fronts, of the same war

But no matter what else I will do

**C-G-C**

I ---will wait –for- you.

Over the course of your lives, you will all choose music to sing, dance, love, cry and protest to.  
Each of you already has songs that elicit memories and define moments in your life. But we  
must always be cognizant that the lives we live and the paths we travel write a song that the

world will hear. At GDS, hopefully, we have empowered and encouraged you so that the song of your life will be one of equity, justice, peace and respect.

Class of 2018 - You are the truth and I can not wait to see what you do beyond the walls of GDS. You are beautiful fierce human beings and the world better get ready.