



# High School Graduation

June 8, 2014

Speech by Rachael Schneiderman, Class of 2014

Good afternoon, parents, teachers, families, friends, and fellow members of the Class of 2014. I want to thank all the teachers and administrators, from Lower School to High School, who have made it possible for our class to make it to this auditorium today. We all have that special person or two who have impacted our lives and without whose support, today's graduation might have seemed an elusive dream.

I also want to extend a special thank you to my grandmother, Oma—better known as Karen Schneiderman. Without your influence and love for Georgetown Day School, I might never have had the opportunity to experience GDS and have it become my second home.

Speaking of Karens, on behalf of all my fellow Hoppers here today, I would also like to give thanks to Karen Epstein for her love and dedication to GDS over the past 25 years. I feel sad for all those future high school students who won't have the opportunity to discuss with one another the pressing issue of every GDS day—what color outfit tomorrow will bring.

It is a great honor to have been chosen by my classmates to represent them as one of today's speakers. While it is not in my nature to stand up in front of so many people and speak, I do so because I am truly flattered, and I know how much our School and how much today means to all of us. Class of 2014, I thank you for the compliment and for your confidence in me.

Earlier this week when we had our graduation rehearsal, C.A. reminisced a little about our first days as seniors. Well, she sort of stole my thunder as I, too, had intended to look back on that preparation for our first day. Most of you know there is a tradition that the senior class starts the new school year with a bit of a show known as "senior run-in." Last summer when we were away for one of the last weekends of the summer, the Class of 2014 spent time deciding what theme we wanted to start off the year. After many possible options, our grade decided to have the theme be "Senior Military." Per tradition, we were announcing to the entire school that as seniors we were now the leaders of our school. But because we are GDS students, we

questioned what message we would send by shooting water guns while dressed in camouflage. We debated the subtle difference between calling ourselves the “Senior Army” rather than the “Senior Military.” After carefully considering whether it would be disrespectful to the men and women in the US military who put themselves in the line of fire and willingly sacrifice their lives to protect our country. So in the end we chose to stick with our military theme but to use the word Army so as not to be disrespectful. We ran in wearing all types of military-inspired clothing. But unlike other schools in upper northwest Washington, DC, who storm into gyms wearing camouflage clothing without thinking, we thoughtfully took time to consider the power of words and actions and how they impact others.

Learning is at the heart of being a member of the GDS community. It happens every day and in many ways. We don’t just learn from our textbooks and lectures but also from dialogue between our teachers and ourselves. After assemblies, community events, or guest speakers, our teachers have on numerous occasions put aside their lesson plans to engage in follow-up conversations. I cannot imagine that there are schools where there are better classes with smarter or more experienced educators who help students like us prepare for the next steps in our lives as adults. But what makes a GDS education unique, and for me what is perhaps the most valuable lesson I learned here, is the importance of being sincere and authentic, of being true to ourselves and to those around us.

Since my first year at GDS in Pre-K when we would pass “the talking rose” to give everyone involved during an argument a turn to speak to the anxious days leading up to tests and exams in high school when our teachers would spend countless hours outside of class helping us study, we have been learning by experience how to be genuine with others and with ourselves and how to be authentic in our hearts and actions.

Many people will argue that being authentic is an innate human trait—and I agree. We all have it within us, and it is up to each of us to decide whether we want to honor ourselves and utilize this trait. GDS cultivates in all of us a sense that we should be honest with our emotions and opinions. But it is up to each of us to choose to be accountable to the world and to live an authentic life.

“Authenticity” can be defined in many ways. But at its core, being authentic allows us to connect deeply with others. It requires us to be transparent and, perhaps more important, to be

vulnerable. But at the same time, it is also liberating. Our teachers have been open with our community; they've shared about their personal lives and experiences they've had. By watching them, we've learned about the difficulties that come with being completely honest with one another, but also about the rewards that follow. Being authentic gives us the freedom to make mistakes and to admit them, to be more engaged and honest with others and allow us to embrace our talents and abilities. And, most important, being authentic helps bring us closer to our core values.

We all start our GDS education, no matter what age we are, and whether we even realize it, learning the mission of our school—to value the integrity and worth of each individual through respect, equality, and sincerity. Whether it was in first grade as we marched into the Martin Luther King Assembly with protest signs or in 9th Grade Seminar when we talked about social justice and equity, we have been learning the important legacy of GDS, which is to be true to ourselves and to others.

And you, my fellow members of the Class of 2014, embody these values that GDS has instilled in us. We are an extremely diverse class, both on the surface by appearance as well as in our thoughts and feelings. We've created small, nuclear families. We have embraced our differences and despite them—and sometimes because of them—we have come together, supported one another, and become a bigger extended family. We have employed these values that we have learned throughout our years at GDS. The Class of 2014 has enjoyed success everywhere: We dominated the school in boy's volleyball, powder-puff, and the school-wide Olympics during our junior year. We supported each other as we climbed the ropes course on the boat at Calleva. We created spaces that have become homes to our school families around campus: in Sparta, at the chess tables in the Internet Café, in the library, the locker rooms, and countless other locations. We've even cleaned up after ourselves on occasion: taking initiative on Good Friday to clean the forum allowing our cleaning crew to go home early and spend the holiday with their families. We've struggled over decisions—like the t-shirt discussion at the Senior Trip—but we learned to come together as a class to make decisions that we can all be happy with, from something as simple as our run-in plans to deciding our legacy gift to the school.

It is obvious to me that no matter what our class chooses to do in the world after we graduate, we will all be successful. How can we not? We are smart, we are driven, and we have been

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prepared by teachers who are rooting for us to succeed. Sure, there have been countless GDS alums who have achieved a traditional definition of success—becoming famous and making money—and our class most certainly will add to this group. In addition to this conventional ideal of success, GDS and our teachers have taught us another version: Becoming people whom people can count on, who care as much about other’s successes, and who take time out of their day to do little things that wouldn’t occur to just anyone. Our teachers have shown us by example how to achieve this type of success in our life: they have given their lunch periods to meet with us about everything from homework to what they did the past weekend, they’ll pick up a lone pizza box in the Forum and throw it away on their way to their next class. All of our experiences at GDS, both good and bad, have provided all of us with the foundation to become people who will influence and make an impact on the world after we graduate. What makes GDS different and what has been imprinted on our hearts is that our teachers have given us opportunities to be authentic in all our actions and interactions.

In the words of John F. Kennedy: “As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.” If we act upon and live the values that we have learned throughout our time at GDS, we can and we will make a difference, a difference that will transcend the traditional definitions of success. So fellow classmates, remember what our School has taught us: Be authentic in all you do and success, however you define it, will surely follow.

Congratulations, Class of 2014, and thank you