



# High School Graduation

June 12, 2011

Speech by Tom Yoder, Class of 2011

Good afternoon parents, faculty, friends, and members of the graduating class of 2011.

In the ninth grade, most of you – today’s graduates — had the experience of reading Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations*; for some of you this experience with the lengthy nineteenth century prose was, as quoted in a different Dickens’ novel, “the best of times” and for others perhaps “the worst of times.” Dickens’ observations of the complexity of his world capture the nature of the world we inhabit today. On this commencement day, we want you to know that we have every confidence that you will be prepared to handle the best and worst that lie ahead.

Our confidence is based on the fact that at GDS you were given the freedom to make decisions — lots of decisions, from the mundane to the significant. Your education at GDS has helped you to develop the fundamental skills that support making choices and decisions that can benefit you and others. These include: listening carefully to one another, arguing respectfully and confidently for what you believe is just and fair, revealing an ability to be empathic, and showing a willingness to give back to your community. In order to navigate the vicissitudes of life successfully, you will need to elevate the analytical and decision-making skills you learned at GDS to levels that encompass the greater complexities of career, family, and community.

I am confident that as you make your way into and through adulthood, every one of you will contribute on many occasions to “the best of times.” When you leave this auditorium today, we expect you will venture forth with an awareness and a spirit that have flourished at GDS so that whatever opportunities or challenges come your way the world will benefit from your presence.