



High School Graduation

June 9, 2002

Speech by Wes Gibson, Assistant Head of School

Welcome to the graduation of the Georgetown Day School Class of 2002. In addition to our blissfully happy seniors, I want to extend warmest greetings to your proud parents, family, and friends and to the faculty and staff who guided, inspired, supported, and cheered you on during your years at GDS.

There are two reasons why I have the honor to kick off today's celebration. First, as most of you know, our Head of School Peter Branch is attending his stepson's graduation at Dartmouth College and deeply regrets that he can't be part of this important day. Second, with Ben Benskin's retirement last year, I now have more GDS seniority than anyone else who wanted to speak.

From the perspective of my years of experience, I would like to make an observation about one of the effects of working at Georgetown Day School. GDS ages adults at far a more rapid rate than students. This phenomenon is caused by the fact that educating a Georgetown Day School student is, while often joyous, an intense, all consuming and draining experience. In fact, I calculate that a GDS teacher ages two-point-two years for each year spent at the School, and administrators age even faster. Most of you probably don't realize that Paul was only twenty one when he became the GDS High School principal just fourteen years ago. In those days he had thick wavy hair and drove a red convertible.

It has been an honor and a privilege for me to be involved in the admission of the entire Georgetown Day School Class of 2002, except for those of you who entered in pre-k. For you, I accept no responsibility. It is a fascinating process to build a class in a pre-kindergarten through grade twelve school. We could only wonder at what the class of 2002 would be like when we admitted thirty eight of you as pre-k, k, and 1st graders (we knew you were cute, but who could tell then if you could solve quadratic equations or hit a curveball). From thirdrd-seventh grade we added twenty nine more GDSers to your class. Now, with more to go on it was a bit easier to determine who had learned how to share and play well with others. By ninth and tenth grade,

when the final fifty members of the class of 2002 were admitted to GDS, we had nearly a decade of your previous school experience to help us determine that your interests, talents, and values would make a strong class even stronger. And, we chose well.

Now, as you finish your GDS years today, we celebrate what you have accomplished and who you have become in your time with us. Brilliant painters, scientists, writers, filmmakers, athletes (including All-Met performers in soccer, cross-country, golf, and track and field), debaters, actors, singers, dancers, diversity leaders, classics scholars, musicians, politicians, It's Academic stars, masters of improvisation, lights and set designers, published authors, humorists, linguists, graphic designers, community service innovators, school spirit directors, a ballerina, and a Presidential Scholar.

We will not soon forget the joys of your musical and dramatic performances, the wonder of your paintings and ceramics, the excitement of your athletic triumphs, and the leadership you showed in guiding us through the discussion of difficult issues. And, you are to be commended for your hard work and outstanding record of college acceptances that show the quality of your efforts and breadth of interests.

But your growth as individuals and as a class is defined even more by the depth of your friendships, the strength you have found in your diversity, and your development of a social perspective. Whether you have been engaged in the hard discussions about issues of equity and justice at GDS, helping children learn how to read, offering assistance to elderly residents in the neighborhood, or taking a stand against human rights violations halfway around the world, we applaud your desire to be involved, to want to make things better, to want to make things right.

And, now as you prepare to continue your educational and life journey I pose this question:

Are there legacies of your GDS experience that will serve you well?

Let me offer a short list of what I believe are some of the most important qualities of the GDS culture which have been useful legacies to the alumni who graduated before you. You'll have to come back in a few years to let us know if they proved to be important for you as well.

1. The closeness of the GDS family. It really is true that you can go to GDS for years and

never know the last name of some of your classmates or your teachers. But this special informality and privilege does help you learn to talk with adults effectively and respectfully. Most important, the closeness of the GDS family builds friendships with peers and with teachers who will be a source of advice, love, and support for years to come.

2. Your writing experience at GDS. It was stimulated initially by your discovery of how words become windows to ideas and feelings, then painstakingly developed through inspired instruction and hours of writing and rewriting-until you were able to craft powerful persuasive expository essays and imaginative creative pieces. You should make a special point of thanking your teachers before you head off to the beach today.
3. The intellectual character of GDS. Fostered by the day-to-day exchanges with your teachers and your classmates, it is characterized by questioning, outside-the-box thinking, and spirited discourse. It probably ensures that you will want to seek out the company of people with ideas and never be intimidated by pretense. A GDSer can always distinguish substance from form.
4. The joy of artistic exploration and expression. Arts have always been core to a GDS education. Whether or not it becomes your life's passion, your enjoyment of the arts will likely be a refreshing counterpoint to your academic work in college and your career.
5. The appreciation of diversity in all its forms. We have worked hard at GDS to teach you to appreciate and celebrate differences and to seek out dissenting ideas from diverse groups of people, even including those who may dislike or disagree with your way of life. In view of recent events, this cornerstone of our mission has never been more important and relevant.
6. Social and political awareness. In one of my favorite Calvin and Hobbes comic strips, Calvin says to Hobbes: "When I grow up I'm not going to read the newspaper and I'm not going to follow complex issues and I'm not going to vote. That way I can claim that the government doesn't represent me. Then when everything goes down the tubes, I can say the system doesn't work and justify my further lack of participation." Calvin's view is, of course, antithetical to the GDS way. Your sense of activism may be latent right now, but it's there. "GDSers do not simply go along, look the other way, or do what we are told-without close scrutiny of the integrity of the authority."
7. The comprehensive nature of a GDS education. Your in-depth exposure to mathematics, science, literature, foreign languages, arts, history and social science, and physical

education will open doors to all kinds of college and career options. Whenever I meet a group of GDS alumni I'm always struck by the rich variety of fields they have chosen to pursue and their happiness with their choices.

8. Respect for the integrity and worth of every person. We've tried to nurture in you a sense that all people are gifted, that all people are precious. As Alice Randall, a 1977 GDS alumna and bestselling novelist put it, "A true GDSer loves people for who they are, not for what they have or who they know."
9. A love of learning—another core part of the GDS mission with a very practical application given the unpredictability of today's world. This legacy encompasses both the idea of learning for learning's sake and knowing how to learn, and will ensure that you will be able to deal with whatever changes and challenges the future may bring.
10. No matter where you go from here, whether you become a tiger, bulldog, terrapin, cardinal, or badger at the next level—you will always bleed true green, you will always be a Mighty Hopper.