



# High School Graduation

August 2, 2020

Speech by Margaux Van Allen, Class of 2020

Hello everyone.

I would like to start off by sharing an embarrassing story. First, I'll paint you all a little word picture. As painful as this is, I want you to imagine me in sixth grade. Dressed in an all red head to toe Old Navy outfit wearing my infamous 3D movie theater glasses with the lens popped out. Now with that picture in mind, I'll continue my story. So in sixth grade, my parents had a parent-teacher conference with Oveta who was my advisor at that time. They walked into the learning specialist office, greeted Oveta, and sat down on the couch across from her. They talked for a bit and eventually Oveta asked "How's Margaux doing?" and my parents said "She's good. She likes her classes and everything." Oveta nodded along and said "That's great. That's great" and while she was saying this my parents noticed that she kept looking behind them. She then asks "So Margaux is comfortable with everything? No issues?" while looking at my parents then the thing behind them, then looking back to my parents. She did this back and forth a couple more times then stopped so my parents eventually ignored it. About 20 minutes later, they finished the meeting and the second my parents got up. They realized what Oveta was staring at. The whole time my parents were sitting in front of a giant rainbow pride flag hanging over the couch.

When I first heard this story, well into high school, I was shocked because all this time I thought I was at least a little slick. But I guess everyone under the sun knew I was attracted to women.

Now, my takeaway from this story is something my family and I talk about a lot. No matter what, we cannot deny that GDS allowed me to be myself. GDS looked at me and said "You can come out whenever you want, we don't mind, we'll just wait for you. No pressure." That kind of support was so unique and unmatched, and we knew that if I was at my old public school in Chicago, I would not be able to even have half of the supportive experience I had at GDS. I know that some people may disagree with what I'm saying. But, at the very least take it from me.

Someone who has really had their admiration for GDS tested in the beginning of their senior year, I am telling you that GDS is a place that actively works on creating an environment where

all kids should feel comfortable. Now having said that, my point here is not entirely on the outcome. It is on GDS' intent. The mere idea of this school wanting to make us safe is immensely important. I understand that a lot of you know that is not enough and as a result of that, you guys have done what GDS has taught us best. Criticize! If there is something wrong about the action taking place, GDS kids are more than eager to point it out and correct it. In the wake of all this heartbreaking and enraging stuff happening, I've seen you all call out people and places in power everyday when I turn on my phone. I see people making an effort to educate themselves and others. I see people going out together and protesting. I even see people making short films about mass incarceration and the prison system. It feels so immensely impactful and motivating to see this kind of outcry. It tells me that we have a ton of work to do but thank god I am not alone.

This is where the beauty of GDS manifests, it is not just the institution but the loud people within it. So thank you. My seniors. My boys. Look at us. Who would've thought?

What a wild and unexpected way to end the year. Although it's cheesy to say, I'm proud of us. We got totally dumped on. Our second semester was taken but we still made it. I'm so excited to see what we all do in the future. Most importantly, I hope that you all are happy with what you are doing and having a good time doing it. I love you guys. Thank you.