



# High School Graduation

June 12, 2022

Speech by Miles Huh, Class of 2022

Congratulations Class of 2022! It's always an honor to follow Maddie Feldman. It is especially meaningful to be here with Judge, and soon to be Justice, Ketanji Brown Jackson. I appreciate your giving me this chance to speak with you all today. It's hard to believe that we are all here. We've had four tumultuous years headlined by a pandemic that never seems to go away. Despite the many unimaginable crises happening in the world around us, when I think about what GDS has meant to me, the feeling I have is one of safety. It's a word that has been on my mind for the last few months. Let me set the scene.

My friends and I were spending a sunny April day lounging on the field watching a gym class play softball when Danny Stock, everyone's favorite storyteller, approached us. He asked if we could shoot a short video clip to help convince prospective students to choose GDS. Doing nothing better, we all readily agreed. . Danny prompted us to describe GDS in one word. I wanted to have a little fun, and figured it wouldn't harm anybody if I tried to give the most GDS student answer possible. You know something a little out there with enough word salad accompanying it that it sounds impressive. Churning my gears, I settled on the word "safety." I gave what I like to think was a convincing 30 second snippet and called it a day. As graduation approached, the more and more those words resonated with me.

As I think back to my freshman year self, when I first started at GDS, I know that I have changed. GDS was unlike anything I'd experienced before. For one, it is academically challenging. What I know now, is that I had not learned to study before, and I was extremely uncomfortable asking for help. To me, asking for help was akin to admitting failure. I'll share a few moments that encapsulate my freshman year. One was my struggle in biology class. I got off on the wrong foot with my teacher, admittedly largely in part due to falling asleep in class. The rough start became a bad first two months and quickly led to getting thrown out of

class, my teacher claiming I was the first kid he had kicked out in the last 23 years. I think everyone can agree that's not exactly the way one wants to start high school.

Another was the time I got caught skipping assembly. My friends and I made the questionable decision to start our lunch a little earlier and head to my house before assembly began. My grandmother, Sue, from my mother's side, was in town and was delighted to meet all of my friends. We told her that our school gave us lots of breaks to explain why we were home at 11 am. To remember things, she likes to take a video of everyone she meets. My grandmother had all of my friends say their names on video. They were all good sports, even though this was kind of embarrassing for me, and we quickly headed out. Not long after, unbeknownst to me, my grandmother went to school to drop off her generous contribution to my tuition. Imagine her confusion when she saw the whole school packed into the forum eagerly listening to a speaker. Somehow she ended up Katie. Proud of my ability to make friends, my grandmother excitedly showed her the video of all of my friends saying their names. Not only was Katie the principal, but to make matters worse, she was and still is my advisor. She sent an email to my parents alerting them to the missed assembly. For the rest of the year I squirmed around in advisory and all of our 1-on-1 meetings, dreading the moment Katie would raise the topic. When she didn't raise it, I caved and ended up asking her about it. She said something along the lines of how she knew I wasn't being malicious by skipping assembly and that she was trying to help me learn from my missteps. Katie saw the best in me and was rooting for me to figure things out.

In addition to the support I've gotten from Katie over these years, my teachers, my coaches and our administrators, all have a knack for meeting students where they are and helping us understand how to grow. I'll be the first to admit that I have done a lot of growing up since then. I try my best to attend every GDS event I can, and I have become comfortable enough to challenge myself academically knowing that I had the safety to struggle. Even when a class ended up being harder than I hoped – which was pretty much every class Junior year –just knowing that no matter how daunting it may be, that GDS is invested in my success, propelled me to keep working hard.

Not only has GDS encouraged me to take on new academic challenges, but the GDS community has offered the safety for me to develop my own identity and become comfortable in my own skin. Prior to high school, I had a complicated relationship with race. In the D.C. public school system there aren't many Asian students. In my middle school of over 1500, I can say with certainty that it had fewer Asian American students than the GDS highschool. It was hard to

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embrace a culture that seemed always to be the butt of the joke or create an expectation of academic inclination. GDS gave me a place to work through my feelings about race and embrace being Asian American. An oft talked about moment in our Asian American affinity group, AAA is the recruiting tactic they used at our freshman year club fair. It was this huge poster board plastered with famous Asian actors and actresses on one side, and on the other in big lettering was the question, Are you Asian? The student holding the sign would wave it around and silently point at students they identified as Asian. I know more than a few people were incorrectly asked, but the sign served its purpose. I felt seen. For four years, the affinity space at GDS has been a safe space for me. It showed me I wasn't alone. That I can take pride in my culture and history. That I could be a leader. I credit a lot of that to my classmates and the students before us who have fostered an intimate environment where we can succeed.

And then there was Covid. Over the first year of the pandemic, I lost both of my paternal grandparents, and I miss them so much, especially today. I thank my uncle Kyung Bae and Aunt Haesook who took such good care of my grandparents when they were ill, and made the trip from New York to join us today.

As my world turned upside down, I became acutely aware of how much I relied on the support and safety of the GDS community. As many of us lost cherished family and friends, we also faced the stress of isolation, zoom fatigue, and the looming college process -- not to mention the growing challenges in the world. At GDS, having a place to discuss the big problems, everything from how to care for our mental health, to the state of our democracy, climate change, and racial inequity, provided me a place to explore what I stand for, and what provides me with purpose.

As we say goodbye to our high school years, I will admit that I have shed some tears. I have made friends that I wouldn't trade for anything in the world. I'll forever think fondly of cross-country winning the MAC, the baseball trips to Florida, attending GDS theater productions, eventually performing in one, and all those little moments that make GDS so special like hanging out in the forum after school or going into the admissions office and getting a mint from Michelle's desk. I appreciate each and every one of you for making these past four years so memorable. I thank GDS for providing me with a parachute to catch me when I fall, and the strength to pick myself back up to embrace all that lies ahead. Our GDS community will stay with me always. Congratulations to all of you for making it together.

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