



# High School Graduation

June 11, 2023

Speech by Andrew Mikhail, Class of 2023

I'd like to tell you all the story of when I first came to GDS.

I came here in fourth grade. Before that, I went to Beauvoir, which, for those of you that don't know, is the elementary school at the National Cathedral that feeds into St. Albans and NCS.

It wasn't obvious I would end up at GDS—I was torn, you know, all my friends were going to St. Albans—and my parents actually let me make the choice. Looking back, I'm a bit surprised that they trusted third-grade me as a decision maker—I had just put my entire net worth into baseball cards and PEZ dispensers—but I went with it.

I toured St. Albans first, and the only part of the day I really remember is lunch. They have a thing there, or at least they did back then, where boys from every grade sit together and eat—so you have a fourth grader, a fifth grader, and so on, all the way up to high schoolers. I remember the guys at my lunch table asking me where else I applied. I told them GDS, and they had a lot to say.

One kid told me they call it "Gaytown Drug School." Another said he knew a lot from his cousin who went to GDS—he talked about a backwards place where kids call teachers by their first names and there are girls and the only dress code is that you need to wear shoes. And I'm sitting there, tugging on my necktie, like, "Oh, yeah, no, that doesn't sound fun at all."

Then I toured GDS, and it quickly became clear that those kids from St. Albans had no idea what they were talking about. I saw plenty of people without shoes. Oh, it was horrifying. At every turn, someone was promoting cultural Marxism or pushing adult sexual content on me. I called Breitbart right away.

Here's what I remember from my GDS visit. In some group discussion, it came up that I'm Egyptian. And afterwards, the kid who I was shadowing, he pulled me aside and he said, "Listen, er...this is awkward...I'm actually Jewish." *Pause*. "But don't worry," he said. "I'm not mad...about Egypt."

And I, of course, was like, "*Phew*." Weight off my chest. I mean, what a tour guide. This kid's nine years old, clearing up tension I didn't even know was there. He left GDS a while ago, and I actually saw him for the first time in years at a prom a few weeks ago. He embraced me, gave me a big bear hug. So I think he's still not mad.

So, in 2014, I joined the GDS class of 2023. I remember thinking even then that it's pretty cool that as a grade, we're labeled according to when we graduate. If the magnitude of today is at all lost on you, think about how every time we've been called the class of 2023—every class meeting, every grade-wide email—they've all been a reference to this moment.

We weren't all kindergarteners together, we weren't all fourth graders here, we weren't all juniors. We won't all graduate college at the same time, (or at all necessarily). But we've all been members of the class of 2023 together. That's something we share with each other.

It's also something we share with Kamal Nashid, who died tragically four years ago this Thursday and whom many of you were lucky enough to know. Recently, since I started writing this speech, I was telling a friend from another school about Kamal, and I pulled up his Instagram to show her a photo of him. I saw that the only thing in his bio is *Gds '23*. I'm not going to overinterpret that, but, like I said, it is a reference to today and a reminder of how lucky we all are to be here.

Today is a big deal. Today, GDS loses its best. To the parents, I know all parents think their kids are so talented and interesting, and this is a rare case where you're absolutely right. To my classmates, I am so impressed with all of you and thankful for the ways that you make this place great, and for the opportunity to tell you so today. Since I joined this class, I've spent every day surrounded by creative people exploring their passions and sharing them with one another, and that has hugely benefited both me and our school.

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The same goes for our teachers—we're so lucky to have learned from such a committed, badass group, and you all have set the bar impossibly high for our college professors.

The number 2023 means a lot to me—I'm considering getting it tattooed. Dad, I'm joking. Everyone else, I'm not. So on that note, one final order of business. Seniors, you know what to do. This'll be our last one, at least until the reunion. Ahem. *Pause*. 20.

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That's my time. Seniors, congratulations.