



High School Graduation

June 11, 2023

Speech by Yom Fox, High School Principal

Good Afternoon; I am so happy to be here with all of you. This is an important moment. For you, the Class of 2023, this moment, your High School graduation, is an important ritual. It is designed to mark an occasion that you get to share with those who know you the best, your families, your friends, and of course, your teachers. This afternoon, together, we will celebrate each of you and your accomplishments and also celebrate our connection to one another and everyone in this room. Congratulations, graduates!

Something I don't often share publicly is my love of teen movies, an affection that is really about seeing where we have come from and the endless possibilities of life. Perhaps it's growing up in the late 90s and early aughts, with trips on Friday night to Blockbuster, that cultivated my fondness for this genre of films, or possibly it's the opportunity to re-experience high school with greater sentimentality and less stress. It may even have led me to this moment right here on this stage. If you watch any teen movie worth its salt, you'll notice key elements that make up its plot: the misfit protagonist convinced of their unwelcomed existence, the clique or popular group convinced of their authority on the acceptable and unacceptable ways of existing, perhaps a romantic interest often of questionable standard for such, and the most important element, the transformative journey. While seemingly light-hearted and entertaining, these movies often hold valuable lessons and reflections on our experiences of belonging, authenticity, and our insecurities as we attempt to fit in. Films can teach us how to live; in my opinion, these teen films do it better than any other, sometimes even better than real life. The director can make edits, cut through the noise, find the perfect words to capture a moment and a feeling and make what seems foreign suddenly familiar.

When writing this speech, I could have turned to Chat GPT, but instead, I went the old-fashioned route. I posted a question, "Which was your favorite?" Facebook and I canvassed my circle

of.....we'll say 'equally life-experienced friends. Among these friends, the consensus was around many movies, and we managed to get it down to 3. We all agreed that the best one of these rather magical films for us was the 1985 classic "The Breakfast Club." I will do my best not to spoil it, but needless to say, it reaches most corners of the teen experience even as it boils down to tropes.

In *The Breakfast Club*, students from different social groups are stuck in Saturday detention. Upon arrival, they are tasked with writing an essay describing who they think they are. And, of course, their story begins to unravel. Why? The students arrive defined by how others see them rather than how they see themselves. We see that each has inaccurate views not just of the others they have been 'othering' for so long but also of themselves. As the story unfolds, there is much to be learned- and it's funny, poignant, and worth a watch.

It's a lovely reflection on the human condition at any age, and I hope that most of you can take the time to experience it for yourselves. So what's the message I got from *The Breakfast Club*? Simply put: there will be times when the things you are stubbornly holding on to belong to versions of yourself that no longer serve your growth, those things that represent who you were or think you want to be. That is true of all of us. But how often do we give ourselves the chance to step back and take another look?

At times, we are all, challenged in our evolution to find the essential pieces of ourselves on which to hang the pride of those who care for us most. It's one of the most relatable parts about *The Breakfast Club*, in my opinion.

I hope that in your life's journey that you will fill it with people like me: proud of you for exactly who you are in each moment that will make up your life. The days you've failed will probably feel like the hardest, but let me assure you, the most difficult—and important—times are those when you are bold enough to believe in what is difficult but right for yourself and the moments when you decide to take action on your hopes for yourself—as a person, as an individual, and as part of the human experience.

My hope for you is that you come, more and more, to know yourself, to like yourself, knowing that you will never be as perfect or as flawed as you or anyone else may think. Learn yourself a little more each day; connect with people you don't think you have anything in common with,

*Speech by Yom Fox, High School Principal
June 11, 2023*

you may find yourselves in the company of the most unexpected kindred spirits and folks who will show you a new, better way of existing.

When our Breakfast Club protagonists arrive in detention, they can't possibly imagine that they are more alike than not. Perhaps you have experienced a similar disconnect on occasion, with your peers here in High School. But perhaps, like our protagonists, you have come to find, as the "jock" Andrew Clark, played by Emilio Estevez aptly puts it, "We're all pretty bizarre here. Some of us are just better at hiding it."

By now, you already know the opening lines of our mission by heart "Georgetown Day School honors the integrity and worth of each individual"... I like to think being bizarre or "GDS Weird" is a membership badge of honor, that it is as much a shared identity as an individual marker. GDS'S goal for you is to provide a challenging but safe place for you to figure out what defines you. Truthfully, we know that who you are now as you graduate is only a fraction of who you will become.

We look forward to hearing from you and about you soon and often as you continue this journey of discovery.

I want to reflect on a second film, one that has entertained us and taught us valuable lessons about what color we wear on Wednesday (it's pink), why Gretchen Weiner's hair is so big (because it's full of secrets), but more importantly, about kindness. Yes, you guessed it right: Mean Girls. Lindsay Lohan plays Cady, whose journey throughout the film, while leading to iconic quotes and laughs, actually points to a more simple truth: when kindness is the foundation for our actions, it allows us to evolve into the best version of ourselves.

But let me be clear: kindness is not always easy. It requires courage, empathy, and a willingness to set aside judgment and assumptions.

It demands that in a world too often harsh...and unforgiving, choosing kindness is a radical act—a rebellion against the negativity and divisiveness that we see on the news, in social media, and hear and observe in casual conversation. Kindness means extending a hand to someone who is struggling, offering a kind word to someone in need, and standing up for those who shouldn't have to stand up for themselves. At the end of the film, as she is coming to the end of her transformative journey, Cady realizes that "Calling somebody else fat won't make you

*Speech by Yom Fox, High School Principal
June 11, 2023*

any skinnier. Calling someone stupid doesn't make you any smarter... All you can do in life is try to solve the problem in front of you.”

At GDS, kindness means fostering a culture of inclusivity where every voice is heard. As our philosophy statement says, “Believing that students have obligations to others as well as themselves, we expect students to respect others, to appreciate others' successes, and to work hard toward their own.”

It is in the moments of kindness that we can find fulfillment, know success, and be grounded in love for self and others. It will be through your acts of kindness that you will shape a better world.

Finally, I can't leave this stage without mentioning the film that inspired so many senior skip days... *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. Determined to have the perfect day before graduating, Ferris, played by a young Matthew Broderick, convinces his friends that they should skip school and have the most epic day before heading off to college.

Ferris' quest for the perfect day reminds us, 4 decades later, to live in the moment and to savor and celebrate friendships. He reminds us that we should not be bound by the constraints of routine and conformity but instead take risks because, as you are now realizing, the high school years, filled with friendships and opportunities, will soon become cherished memories. You are about to embark on new journeys, but it's been these moments and these people that have guided you thus far.

Although it's too late for you to attempt to create that perfect day to remember your time at GDS, consider directing your own teen film. In it, you include the conversations that you have been waiting to have, go on the walk with your parents, spend time with a sibling, and tell people that you care about them. Stay up late and watch the sunrise on Ft. Reno. Go play on the Big Toy. Try something that scares you. So that sometime in the future, when you think back on this time, the final video montage of your high school journey plays back, you see all the little moments where you were coming into your own, you see moments with your best friends, the times you thought you were failing, now serve as the moments where you learned that you were strong and brave, that the risks you took were just steps to discovering your passions. The end of the movie is just the beginning.

*Speech by Yom Fox, High School Principal
June 11, 2023*

Graduates, You are all in a complex time in your life—a time that undoubtedly can feel a bit unnerving, and of which these teen films can only skim the surface. I wanted to acknowledge an aspect of what you and these films share. What these three movies offer you, members of the class of 2023, goes beyond a walk down memory lane with me. These films remind us that in the journey from adolescence to adulthood, high school to college, being able to see and know yourself, acting from a place of kindness, and living in the moment will fulfill GDS's goal for our students, that says, "GDS graduates leave the School with a love of learning, an abhorrence of bigotry and intolerance, a broadly rounded fund of knowledge, the ability to enter the great conversations of life, and the willingness and capacity to bring needed change to a troubled world."

You have shown yourselves to be good friends, kind to each other, day in and day out. Now, each of you, be kind to yourself. Celebrate all that you have become. Dream of the opportunities ahead. Be bold in your dreams, brave in your risk-taking. AND be clear-eyed... gentle but clear-eyed about the work you need to do, not just the school work but the life work ahead.

I hope that between today until you leave for your next adventure, whether college, a gap year, or climbing mountains, you remember, "Life moves pretty fast; if you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it." as Ferris Bueller so wisely said.

*Speech by Yom Fox, High School Principal
June 11, 2023*