



June 9, 2024

Speech by Joseph Stocker, Class of 2024

Good afternoon everyone. Thank you all so much for coming. I am truly humbled to have been chosen to speak on behalf of this tremendous graduating class.

Speaking of which, let's quickly remind all of these kind people in the audience who we are. 20.
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I'd like to start out by telling the story of my first day at GDS, which I still remember vividly. I kicked and screamed as my mother dragged me from the car. I clutched onto her dress, peeking out from behind her at all of my soon-to-be classmates as I nervously sipped on my juice box. Indeed, starting ninth grade was rough. When I reflect on that day, I can't help but feel so proud of how far we've all come in the four years since then.

In 2020, everyone was disconnected, lonely, and afraid, but the GDS administration did everything in its power to ensure that we didn't... make any friends. In all seriousness, the situation was impossible to navigate, and I applaud the efforts of our school's leadership to make some things feel normal. At the very least, we got to experience some moments that we will never forget, as hard as we may try. I'm sure I don't have to remind you of the remarkably awkward silent disco in the LMS parking lot. If you weren't there, here is a little taste of what it was like— I ask that everyone be very quiet for this part. [*Dance routine*].

Entering high school without really knowing anyone is already a wildly awkward process, and it was only exacerbated by pandemic restrictions. I think we managed to survive because we embraced the awkwardness (sort of like I just did). This class made the effort to break those long silences in Zoom breakout rooms. This class arranged 20-person games of Among Us. And because we got over that, this class has more recently managed to band together for some seriously coordinated undertakings. How did a hundred high school students manage to wake up at 4:30 in the morning on a Monday to watch the sunrise? How did we manage to fill the

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freshman pit with ball-pit-balls and erect a 40-foot tall cardboard mural of our beloved calc teacher Ed Stern dressed in a circus-clown outfit? And who would've imagined that one of the best-attended events of the year would be the Integration Bee?

I would argue that the atmosphere of GDS encourages this kind of behavior: it doesn't matter who you are; whatever you want to do, just go out and try it.

Say what you will about GDS students, but we sure do branch out. I think it's a wonderful thing that Olympic-level rhythmic dancers share the stage with beginners in the always phenomenal Fata. Even the swim team is open to generational talents like Adriano and Curan, but also, Aidan. Programs like Minimester allow us to spend some time exploring often extremely niche topics like the strategy of designing escape rooms, the mental health benefits of green spaces, or modern art history. Through these unique opportunities and within class curricula, GDS teachers are encouraged to bring their own passions and interests into the classroom, and we can truly tell that our teachers care about and enjoy what they do. Because they are enthusiastic and happy, so are we.

To all of our teachers, as well as the faculty and staff, we are so thankful for your devotion, care, and ever-positive attitude. You have fostered that culture of taking academic risks, putting oneself out there and trying oodles of new things without judgment.

To the relatives in the audience, especially the parents, we thank you for working to give us such wonderful opportunities, and for supporting us in countless ways.

Finally, to my classmates, I want these three things to be known:

1. First, this class is exceptional. Throughout our four years together, I have been constantly reminded of my peers' remarkable talent and commitment whenever I've witnessed an inspired jazz solo, a skillful play on our soccer pitch, a masterfully designed robot part, a moving spoken word poem, or the extremely rare occasion that Juju scores a point on me in ping-pong.
2. Second, for that reason, go forth and taste from a whole buffet of things. You each have ten fingers for ten different pies, so start sticking them in. If even just for a single semester in college, join a few random clubs for fun. The people that you wouldn't otherwise meet often turn out to be lifelong friends. Also, the future world's best

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underwater bocci player could be in this room, and how could I sleep at night if you went undiscovered?

3. My third and final point is this: we all know each other now. We've moved beyond the division of our freshman-year cohorts. (Although, a quick shoutout to Cohort B). We are now connected by what we've shared over the years, and we have this network—this community to return to.

Last year, I had the privilege of speaking with a fellow Hopper, Congressman Jamie Raskin. In speaking about his own time at GDS and the friends he'd made, he quoted Thomas Jefferson, saying, "I find as I grow older, I love those most, whom I loved first."

These are the people I loved first. Even when we go off and meet amazing people in the future, we will always have a safe harbor of our friendships here at GDS. Perhaps the real GDS was the friends we made along the way. I cannot overstate how proud I am to be part of this incredible group. It is my deepest hope that we stay in touch with one another— that we won't just go "no contact" until the next reunion. I am already excited to get coffee or go for a walk with you folks when we're in town to hear what I have no doubt will be enthralling stories from our time apart. Don't dodge my calls, or I will find you, and I will take you out to lunch when you least expect it. Take comfort in knowing that the next time we see each other, no matter what, it can't be as awkward as that silent disco.

Congratulations, congratulations, congratulations class of '24.

Thank you.