



High School Graduation
June 7, 2026
Chris Levy, High School Principal

Good afternoon.

To the faculty and staff who have guided and supported you through the years;

To the parents, families, and loved ones who sacrificed so much to get to this moment;

And to the incredible Class of 2026, congratulations!

Today is a celebration of everything you've accomplished, but it's also something more. It's a beginning. A starting line. And like any journey, the question isn't just *how did we get here?* But *where are we going next?*

As I was thinking about what I wanted to share with the Class of 2026, I decided to consult two experts, individuals with whom I have deep connections, and the kind of people who, in theory, would never steer me wrong. They're very opinionated and rarely hold back, so I felt pretty good about seeking their advice. Even though we've had our disagreements, I've come to appreciate them as "learning opportunities."

The first expert, with concern in her voice, said, *"Dad, promise me you won't tell any dad jokes, because you'll be the only one laughing."*

Now, I felt that was a little harsh, but also, probably accurate.

The second expert was much more confident. He said, *"You should talk about LeBron, or better yet, tell the story about the time I beat you in soccer."*

By now, you've probably figured out who these experts are. While they are my 12- and 14-year-old children, I realized something important: they are experiencing the world in a very different way. And that difference shaped their responses.

And even though they did not steer me in the direction I had hoped, they spoke from a place of love. One didn't want her dad to embarrass himself... and the other wanted to remind me that I'm not as young as I used to be.

But they did get me thinking about something important:

Whose advice should we seek?

At first, that question seems simple. But it's actually more complicated than we think. Our circle includes friends, family members, teachers, classmates, and even ourselves. And from this moment on, the world is going to have a lot to say to you.

You see, when I was growing up in the 80s, things were different. The adults in my community were seen as the only qualified voices for guidance. So as you can imagine, there was very little patience for following the advice of my friends, because they were just as young and inexperienced as I was.

And in my community, the adults relished the idea of being the only Sages. In fact, they even *spanking rights*. That's how serious it was.

So when I went through a phase of aspiring to become a physician, it wasn't just my dream anymore. It became everyone's expectation.

The sages began telling me how I should live my life, what I should study, how I should behave, and what my future should look like.

But as you can probably tell, that dream didn't quite pan out.

Years later, not much older than you are today, I found myself at a crossroads.

I had to decide:

Was I going to take the MCAT and pursue medical school, or choose another path?

And for the first time, I had to say out loud:

"I don't see myself becoming a doctor anymore."

I didn't know how to break the news to mom, but when I did, she listened, hugged me, and said, I'll be proud of you whichever path you choose. She understood that childhood dreams could change. So she stayed curious and supported me as I tried to figure out what was next.

*Speech by Chris Levy, High School Principal
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Now my dad had a different reaction!

He wasn't pleased. He had questions, not the kind that invited reflection, but the kind that highlighted just how unsound he believed my judgment was. So the interrogation began!

And with his Jamaican accent, he leaned in and asked,

Did those college friends of yours change yuh mind? Or was it your girlfriend from New York? It hadn't resonated with my dad that, as a young person, I, too, had a say in the direction I wanted to go.

And so, before I could even explain myself, it felt like I had to support *him* through his disappointment.

You see, for my immigrant family, medical school meant everything. I was the first to graduate from college, and the expectation was that I would become the first physician in the family.

So in that moment, the reality shifted. Especially for my dad.

So there I was, standing at a turning point in my life, asking the same question many of you are asking today:

Where do I go from here?

The truth is, I didn't know.

I just knew it wasn't medical school.

And this is where my journey really began.

Because I had to figure out—**who could I turn to for sound advice?**

There was no Google. No quick answers. And trying to get dial-up internet to work while the phone was in use... was nearly impossible.

However, there was this one book that caught my attention: *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* by Richard Bach.

It's a story about a seagull who refuses to live an ordinary life. While the rest of the flock is focused on survival, he becomes obsessed with something different: growth, mastery, and purpose.

He pushes beyond limits. He challenges expectations. He chooses a path others don't understand.

And through that journey, he discovers something powerful: that life isn't just about fitting in, it's about becoming who you're meant to be. So here I am, not the physician my parents wanted me to be, but an educator, and not just any educator, a GDS faculty member.

Class of 2026, you are stepping into a world full of noise.

Technology. Social media. Opinions. Expectations.

Some folks will have something to say about who you should be, what you should do, and how you should live your life. And that's all good! But you get to decide the path to travel.

So here we are—whose advice will you follow?

Now that's for you to determine, but consider seeking out those who will challenge you, ground you, and push you toward your purpose. When things get difficult, and they will, remember this: life comes in seasons, and nothing lasts forever. There will be seasons of growth, seasons of change, seasons of struggle, and seasons of renewal. Don't confuse a season with a destination. Whatever you do, don't quit in the winter. Because if you do, you'll never experience the spring.

Class of 2026, Congratulations!

Your journey is just beginning. **And, if you need expert advice, my kids will be more than happy to give some!**