

## STUDENT SPEECH: JIANNI WOODSON-BROOKS (DC PREP CLASS OF 2017)

Good evening, everyone. I want to start by thanking Principal McClam, teachers and staff, trustees, and my fellow members of the Class of 2017.

I'm here to share how DC Prep helped me learn that I can do anything I want to do. And it is simple – hard work is the only thing that will ever pay off. The younger me thought that doing “okay” was good enough. But it's not. When you do just enough to get by, your results will never be as good as you want them to be, whether it's at a track meet, on a test, or at a job.

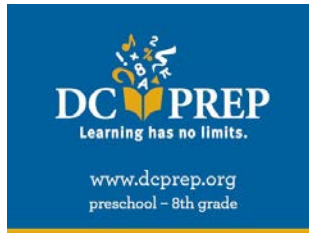
Life is like an airplane. If you just “go through the motions” you stay “earthbound”, passing time, not accomplishing anything while you get closer to death. When you stay earthbound, without structure or goals, you feel purposeless. You are just “basic”.

That's the way I felt in 4<sup>th</sup> grade. I was not doing well in school. I wasn't doing homework, I was late to school, and falling asleep in class. Even outside of school, I looked at life as “get through the day at school, play a video game, eat dinner . . . and then repeat”. I never thought about tomorrow. I didn't have goals for myself or plans for my future.

At the end of second quarter, the teachers read out the names for Honor Roll, and when I didn't make it, I cried. At the time, I had 3 Fs and 1 C, but I cried as if every night I was going over my work and checking in with teachers about my grades. Then-Principal Pergament pulled me aside and told me straighten up – if I wasn't going to do my work, I wasn't going to make Honor Roll. She used an analogy with RG3 to explain it to my small mind, because she knew I loved football. But she didn't sugarcoat her message. She was clear that if I didn't work, I was not going to get anything I wanted in life.

Until then, I had been earthbound. Principal Pergament was the fuel that helped me take flight. And then my teacher, Ms. Combs, helped me stay on the flight plan. She knew I wanted to do better and she was on my back every day. I saw my F turn into a C. It boosted my confidence, and I thought to myself, maybe I could move this up to a B. And then I thought, I can get an A. I can do whatever I want. The next quarter I did it. I made the Honor Roll and the breakfast to honor the students tasted better than I ever expected – especially for school food!

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After three years of making the Honor Roll, I walked into 7<sup>th</sup> grade thinking that I had it all figured out. I thought I was the best hybrid football player and student ever. I thought that because I had success I didn't have to work as hard. I was becoming earthbound again.

My attitude in my ELA class was that I had already learned all there was about writing. The first book we read was *Bronx Masquerade*, and I wrote an "okay" essay. Then we did a project on *Lyddie*, a book about a girl who grew up in the 1850s. I didn't take it seriously at all, and once again I was just going through the motions. I ended up with an overall C.

Every day I came into class earthbound. I made no progress. I was listening, but I wasn't *really* listening. I could see my classmates taking flight. I was not going above and beyond to understand the content. I stayed at the same altitude. But when you stay earthbound, life is boring. When you are too lazy or too scared to take flight, you aren't happy. And I wasn't.

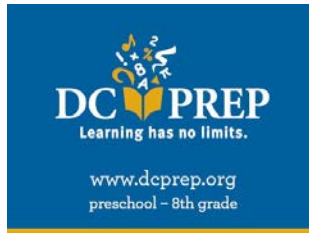
This time, though, I didn't have teachers looking over my shoulder making sure I did my work to the best of my ability. I had to want it for myself, so that I could go to a great high school. I remember thinking, "If I can't even make a B in Mr. Stuart's class, how can I ever go to an Exeter, Episcopal, or Woodberry?" I was afraid to try to get off the ground; I was afraid I would fail.

So this time I asked for help from Mrs. Moeller and my other teachers. I remember staying up long nights working on Mr. Stuart's assignments. Every single day I had millions of questions on how to make my essays better. He told me that I called him more times for help than his wife did all of last year!

From that first quarter on, I was miles high. I had gone from no Honor Roll, to making First Honors every single quarter. I was happy with myself, with my results, and I felt like I could go to a good high school.

I've come a long way since 4<sup>th</sup> grade. The big takeaway I have gotten from DC Prep is that you cannot stand still or be earthbound – you will rust and be unhappy. You must fly, fly far to get to the places that you want to go. The Class of 2017 and I will be flying very high during our high school careers and we will not stop there. Because learning has no limits.

Thank you.



## POET LAUREATE: J'YONA CALLOWAY (DC PREP CLASS OF 2017)

### **It Takes Every Part to Make Up a Whole**

Broken up in pieces,  
with a million parts.  
Don't know what I should do,  
with all the feeling in my heart.  
Should I leave or should I stay?  
Shall I try to push through another day?  
A part of me is so excited yet another wants to cry,  
I know that once I leave this place a part of me will die.  
A part of me is happy and another is sad,  
I will always have a part to hold the moments that we had.  
A part of me is ready but the other doesn't want to move on,  
I don't want to experience life after all of you are gone.  
A part of me doesn't want to walk across that stage because I know that it means the end.  
A part of me wants to rewind all the way back, press play and start again.  
A part of me wants to be here, but another wants to go.  
A part of me will even miss the teachers on the low.  
All my parts are thankful of this journey even if it doesn't show,  
All my parts loved it here with you all if you must know.  
The parts of me may contradict but the one thing they all together agree  
Every single one of you have a different and special part in me.