

6TH ANNUAL BASH • SEPTEMBER 30TH, 2016**STUDENT SPEAKER PENIEL OUABO (DC PREP CLASS OF 2017)**

Good evening everyone. My name is Peniel Ouabo. I am an emigrant from the African country of Cameroon. My family came here in 2006 when I was three years old, so that we could have a better life. My mother never went past the 8th grade because her family was too poor to pay for higher education and my father, who taught 11 years at a university in Cameroon, came to America and had to start all over again. We flew 11,000 kilometers from our home, on two planes for a day and a half. *I've come a long way to be here tonight!*

I've also come a long way since I got to America. I remember learning English from cartoons and being silent because I didn't know what to say. I also remember seeing snow for the first time and seeing different colored people for the first time. I was amazed at the variety in ethnicities this country had.

I went to another school before DC Prep. It was loose and sloppy with very little structure. We got a mediocre education and had too much free time. Then my mother heard about DC Prep – and in 2nd grade my sisters and I changed schools. Now, I am an excelling 8th grader who has limitless options for high school and my future. *DC Prep has helped me find the potential I didn't know I had.*

The teachers at DC Prep support us when the work is tough and reward us when we push through. When we were writing essays in the 6th grade, I sent my work to my teacher, Ms. Hyland. At night, she and I would message back and forth on Google Docs about what I could do to make a stronger essay. She also gave me challenging books to read. I'm not bragging, but I'm very intelligent – and Ms. Hyland nurtured my talent and also helped me to come out of my quiet shell. *Just ask anybody, I'm not shy anymore!*

I'm excited about high school. I'm ready to meet new people and to be part of PrepNext along with my sister, Grace, who goes to Don Bosco Cristo Rey. Right now, I'm thinking about an independent school because I'd like to go to school with all different kinds of kids and help break stereotypes about me and the ones that I have about other people, even subconsciously. I believe and fully trust that DC Prep will support me and get me where I want to be – both next year and all the way through college. And I know that DC Prep can't do it without your support.

Thank you.

STUDENT SPEAKER JIANNI WOODSON-BROOKS (DC PREP CLASS OF 2017)

My name is Gianni Woodson-Brooks and I am going to tell you how DC Prep has shaped me and my future. When I was in 4th grade, I was not doing well in school at all. I wasn't doing homework, I was late to school, and 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 F's and 1C. I was literally running home to get the mail and throwing away my report cards before my grandma could get them. Mrs. Pergament – our principal – pulled me off to the side. She said, "You're never going to be able to achieve something if you don't work for it." She used an analogy about RG3 because she knew I loved football – and that was back in the day when we thought RG3 might save the Redskins. Mrs. Pergament didn't sugarcoat the news that if I didn't work, I wasn't going to make the Honor Roll. She was clear that if I didn't work, I was not going to get anything I wanted in life.

This opened my eyes to the implications of my decisions. I started paying attention in class and doing my homework. One of my teachers, Ms. Combs, knew I wanted to do better and she was on my back every day. 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!

With Ms. Combs pushing me to do better I started seeing 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 sky's the limit*.

For years, DC Prep kept telling me I was going to go to college but I didn't really know what that meant. Now I get it. Where I live, I see what happens when people drop out of school and don't pursue college. Both my parents dropped out of high school – my dad has to work two jobs and it took my mom so long to find a new job last year. If people can't find jobs they end up on the streets with all types of people and all types of drugs, which can be easy to get caught up in. Then they end up in jail with nothing . . . all because they decided to drop out of school. Well, *not me*.

I am looking at a lot of high schools but hope to go to boarding school so I can have more independence and meet new people. Last summer, I won the scholarship for the leadership academy at Episcopal High School and I became friends with a girl from Puerto Rico. I also met this guy named Adrian. He was Caucasian and where I live there are not many white people, so I was glad I got to meet him. He was the funniest guy ever – and made me want to go to boarding school even more. If there are any boarding school alums in the crowd, I'd love to talk to you after this.

Overall, DC Prep has transformed my values. The school changed my priorities and set me on a path for success in my future. I intend to graduate from boarding school, attend and maybe play football for the University of Maryland, and pursue a career as an orthopedic surgeon.

I also promise to continue to return to DC Prep and set an example. I'll show the students I was just like them at one point. But you have to drop the act and get serious about school and see that – in fact – *learning has no limits.*

Thank you for supporting DC Prep. Because of you and DC Prep, I am becoming the best that I can be.