

Chloe Davis-Carden's Sposato Graduate School of Education Graduation Speech – 2014

Graduates, congratulations! Friends and family of graduates, thanks so much for being here. For those of you who don't know me, I am Chloe Davis-Carden. I want to preface this speech by confessing to you all that I... am a math teacher. I am used to talking mostly about numbers, so this should be interesting for everyone.

Today I am going to tell you all a bit of my story and hopefully, through this, you all will see why I feel so lucky and grateful to have been a part of the Match Teacher Residency and Sposato Graduate School of Education.

I found teaching through a bit of circuitous route. When I was younger, I recognized the importance of getting a high school and college degree. However, I did not like school. I was not inspired, motivated or interested in what was going on in the classroom. I did enough to get by but my passion lay in sports. All through college, I was one hundred percent sure I wanted to be a college basketball coach. After college, I got my dream job as an assistant coach at Brandeis University and realized, I did not want to be a college basketball coach. I loved the coaching piece but the off court piece was not for me. I spent a few years working as a personal trainer, and for a non-profit to try and figure out what it was about coaching I loved and how I could duplicate that as often as possible in my career. I finally fell upon teaching- the job my mom had always insisted I was made for- so I therefore knew was completely wrong for me. So why did I land on teaching? First, I realized that even though I never liked school, I loved learning. I loved learning but the way I learned best was by doing. That was why I loved sports so much. I never had a teacher who was able to tap into that love of learning for me and I wanted the opportunity to do that for students. Second, I went to a very diverse high school that made apparent to me the significance of the achievement gap. I knew, that if I was going to teach, I wanted to teach students who, in my high school, were ignored, assumed stupid, and not given the same opportunities that I was given in the same school.

So, I took all these thoughts and self-reflections and I began looking for a program to teach me how to teach. I looked at a number of different schools and alternative ed programs. In the end, I decided to apply to one program. The Match Teacher Residency with an opportunity to get a master's from the Sposato Graduate School of Education. I was attracted to MTR for three big reasons. First, because it appeared to take an alternative approach to teacher training and as I said, I learn in a way that is different than what most graduate school offer. Second, its mission was to place effective first year teachers in schools who were actively working to close the achievement gap. Finally, it was described by almost every first person account as the most challenging year of their life and as I always tell my students, challenges make champions.

MTR lived up to my expectations.

MTR training was not just sitting in a classroom, listening to the staff talk. They modelled for us, exactly how I try and teach. They would break the skills of teaching down into bite size pieces and then immediately let us practice. I sometimes wonder what an outsider might think if they walked into our room and saw Gaby and Sam standing next to each other going “Gaby, that’s a demerit. I need you to sit up.” “Sam, that’s a demerit. When I write, you write.” “Gaby, that’s a demerit, I need you to read in a loud professional voice.” Or if they saw Jackie in front of the classroom teaching a bunch of adults how to solve for x while said adults made noises, passed notes, and didn’t follow directions but that’s what they would see and it worked.

MTR challenged and pushed every student. MTR gave feedback for everything, and I mean EVERYTHING. They even gave us feedback on our ability to take feedback. It sounds crazy but I was so grateful. It made the program differentiated to every graduate student in it. Every one of us got specific feedback at the level we needed it with tangible ways to get better. Every time I taught, whether it be adult students or real students, I was given a specific way that I could get better. It was like being an athlete all over again. I was in a program that was results driven and responded to the needs of every student. MTR made me a better teacher every day.

After we finished our residency year, it was game time. First year of teaching and second year of grad school. I was lucky enough to get a job here at Match High School and to be surrounded by colleagues who had been through MTR and side-by-side with my peer Jackie as we tried to finish our course work together.

Now I haven’t done every job in the world but I am confident that teaching is one of the most humbling professions there is. No matter how good you think you are, once you’re up in front of the unpredictable creatures we call teenagers, you never quite know what kind of day it is going to be. Add to that the fact that as a first year teacher, it is really scary to know that if I am not a good teacher, my students won’t learn and will get behind in their path to academic success and beyond. Everybody has to have a first year but nobody wants their first students’ to be at a disadvantage because of a teachers’ lack of ability. I am so grateful for the training before and during my first year of teaching because I truly feel that myself and my colleagues exceeded the expectations of what a first year teacher is. The assignments in MTR helped us seek feedback and implement feedback. Through the MTR assignments and one-on-one, I was continually pushed to be better during a challenging year. In the end, MTR is just as results driven as the schools we teach at. Every single one of the graduates here today, is here because they were scored alongside non-MTR first year teachers and successfully outperformed them. That is something to be proud of.

Overall, MTR offered a combination of care, challenge and hands on learning that helped me not only grow as a teacher, but also know how to seek feedback, implement feedback and consistently become a better teacher. There is no perfect teacher, so if we are not all striving to get better every day, then we need to come back for a refresher session with MTR.

I want to end with what I believe are some of the most important words that are too often left unsaid. Thank you.

First, thank you to the incredible staff and instructors at the Charles Sposato Graduate School of Ed. Thank you for having the courage to start a hands-on Master's program. Thank you for your commitment to the success of your graduates. Thank you for holding us to a high standard of success. Thank you for the care and mentoring you showed each one of us. How many grad school students can say, I have every one of my professors numbers and can call them anytime I have a bad day and they will help me get better? We are truly lucky for your commitment. Anecdotally, I am the 9th grade team leader this year and I am lucky enough to work with 3 current Sposato Graduate School students. It is the easiest leadership position I will ever have. Thank you MTR staff for instilling that incredible work ethic, enthusiasm and commitment in those three.

Second, thank you to my fellow graduates. We would not have gotten through these two years without each other. This small MTR family has been a support for me. I especially want to thank Jackie who I still work with at Match and who, as a fellow career change has been an incredible ally through every up and down.

Finally, and most importantly, thank you to the family and friends of our graduates. This program is demanding. It is especially demanding on time. Thank you for supporting us, sticking with us, and picking up our slack because we would not have succeeded without you. Thank you to all the spouses and partners of because I know you are all as amazing as my wife to coexist within the crazy life of a charter school teacher.

I am proud to be a member of this MTR family and to graduate alongside all of you.