

Corvallis Schools Foundation Speech
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Final Version (1/21/2020)

Good Morning. Thank you for inviting me to be here. I want to begin by sharing with you the last stanza of poet activist Dominique Christina’s poem, “My Dream about Shouting.” It is a powerful poem about finding one’s voice, and it closes like this:

“In the dream
I am waiting for my mouth to be born.
When she is,
Everything will be LOUD.”

Here is the story of finding my voice and how that voice connects to all of you:

When I was nine years old, I had significant anxiety. I worried about germs, uncleanliness, physical contact with strangers, disorder and spontaneous change.

Looking back, it is hard for me to place how exactly this started. I just remember being in it; I remember it feeling intense, and I remember that it controlled my life. The worries lived in me like small, insecure, yet very compelling voices that clouded my own self-knowledge.

Now, I got lucky. My mother saw what I was battling, and she “dug in” with me. We worked hard to counter the voices in my head.

Over a long and patient period, we created what I now call my “super power voice” – a loud inner voice of personal strength and agency.

This is the voice I am sharing with you today.

We all need a voice of strength to challenge the inner voices of worry or the external voices of a critical dominant culture. And we need spaces and mentors who help us cultivate that voice inside ourselves. My home was a good first place. But here is where our schools come in.

School is the place where most American children spend most of their waking hours. Schools are crucial to our personal health and well-being.

For many students, school is the only place of structure and safety in their lives. This is important, and it needs to guide our work.

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So once again, I am lucky:

I walk the halls of Corvallis High School every day, and I am part of a very special community. I participate in a range of activities, and I have incredible faculty who affirm my existence. They greet me by name when we pass in the halls.

I would like to share with you one place of involvement where YOU have been instrumental for me:

I am a member of the student organization, SAFE, an acronym for “Students Advocating For Equity,” and you actively support this group. We are students and faculty drawn from Corvallis High School, Crescent Valley, College Hill, and most recently, Cheldelin Middle School. We are a space of dialogue for students across the district; we offer leadership, community connections, and collaboration.

For myself and my fellow students, SAFE is a platform for sharing our own personal stories of living and learning in our community. Many of these stories are about harassment, bullying, and discrimination that have targeted our racial and ethnic identities, our sexual orientations, the non-english languages we speak from home, or our gender non-conforming bodies. Telling these stories alone is a powerful outcome of our group. But we do more. We use these stories to shape our contributions and design programs that strive to inspire our best community values of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Here are some highlights:

Last Fall, SAFE hosted an art installation to highlight multi-lingualism in our schools. The project affirmed so many students and families with diverse cultures and languages among us.

Serving in a community impact role, SAFE was invited to present our perspectives on issues of diversity and equity at a District Board Meeting.

And in the Spring, SAFE joined a community panel to give input at a Social Studies Curriculum Adoption Meeting.

SAFE is a leader in initiating the conversations that matter in our community. SAFE reaches out with its own warm welcome in our schools, and bravely takes on the inevitable places of resistance and fear that are present in every community when it is asked to grow. Through SAFE, the halls of my one school, where my name is known, extend out and into the larger living and learning communities we all share, and I believe this offers the opportunity for more of us to walk these halls and hear our names called in welcome.

I am truly proud to be part of SAFE.

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And I think you should also be proud.

I want to thank you in advance for your CONTINUED support, because while we celebrate our accomplishments, as we say in SAFE, there is always a “Try Tomorrow,” list. Or in the words of Dominique Christina, we all need a “dream about shouting.”

My hope is that we are here this morning to affirm our collective commitment to turn our energy, our resources, and our hearts to the work ahead. I am energized for this task -- I hope you are too.

Thank you for sticking by this work and our generation.

And thank you for sharing in this beautiful Loud Dream.