



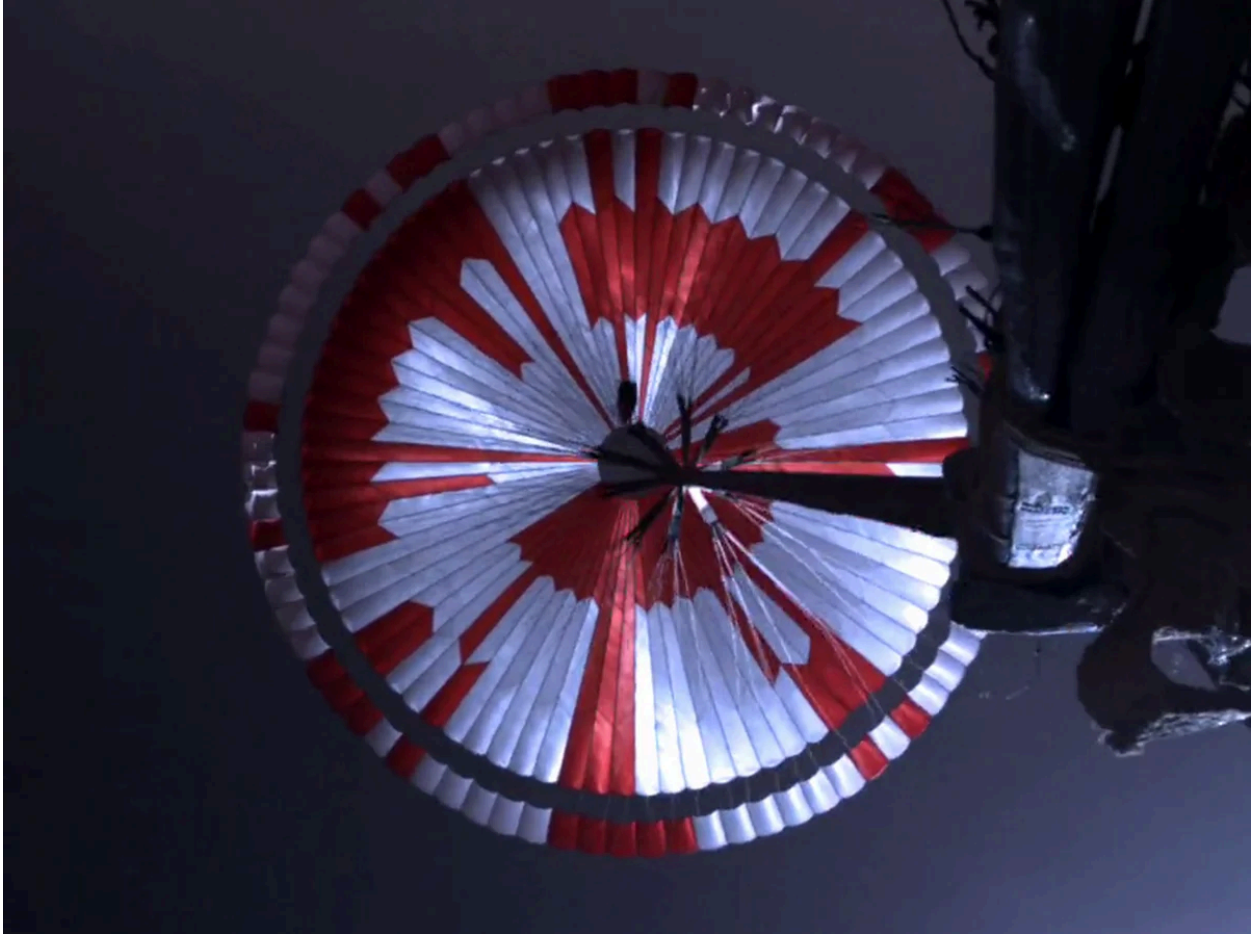
Dear 11th Grade Families,

Welcome to junior year! It was such a joy to see everyone on campus yesterday, looking a year older and (hopefully!) wiser. The students seemed to appreciate the opportunity to reconnect with their teachers and peers in positive community gatherings before getting down to the business of attending classes today. We had a lot of time to catch up, refine schedules, practice our fire drill lineup, and set some expectations for the year ahead. Watching the 11th grade Peer Mentors usher the new 9th graders into our Upper School community was but one especially visible reminder of the myriad ways in which our '26ers are stepping up to take on the leadership of the school.

At our opening grade meeting I shared with the students something of my fanatic obsession with the Mars rover *Curiosity*. As a self-avowed, lifelong history nerd who was never especially confident in math or science, even I find the unique and overwhelming sense of wonder this little robot inspires in me a bit, well, curious. I think it has something to do with what NASA engineers call "[the 7 minutes of terror](#)" - the time it takes for the rover to land softly on the planet's surface once it enters the atmosphere at 13,000 miles per hour. Because it takes 14 minutes for a signal to travel from Mars to Earth, the whole complicated landing sequence - which involves 6 different vehicle configurations, several precise maneuvers, and over 500,000 lines of code - has to be preprogrammed. The lag time also means that by the time Mission

Control receives notification that the landing sequence has begun, it is, in reality, already over: the \$2.5 billion rover is either operational on the planet surface, or smashed into smithereens. All the engineers can do is sit, wait, and hope that all those years of careful planning and hard work have paid off.

Our kids are deep in the hard work of engineering their futures, and it is, at times, terrifying to them. Soon, they too will send their very best efforts out into the universe and hope to receive news of a positive outcome they can no longer intervene to control. But it's really important for them to remember that in this extended metaphor (and forgive me for belaboring the point), they are the engineers, not the robots. Now is the time for them to "dare mighty things" and embrace setbacks as gifts: to learn from their mistakes, work out the bugs in their code, and course-correct where necessary. This takes a growth-mindset and a willingness to engage others in collaborative problem solving, and while most of the work our students do in life may not be *literal* rocket science, the stakes are going to feel that high for them a lot of the time. *Curiosity's* engineers [failed a lot](#) along the way, but they learned to "fail again" and "fail better," and I hope we all can give our students the support and encouragement they need to find meaningful inspiration in that.



("Dare Mighty Things" inscribed in binary code on the parachute of the rover *Perseverance*, which followed *Curiosity* to Mars in 2021. Photograph: NASA/UPI/Rex/Shutterstock)

It's going to be a great year! As always, I look forward to supporting our students in partnership with you. Here are a couple of dates worth noting, all of which I'll be in touch about again soon:

- Deadline to **add** new class for the fall semester: Thur 9/19
- Class **field trip** to Ellis and Liberty Islands: Friday 9/20
- Deadline to **drop** classes for the fall semester: Wed 10/2
- 11th grade **Fall Parent Forum**: Wed 10/30 (rescheduled!)

Wishing you and your families a wonderful start to the year,  
Emily