

Dear Senior Families,

Our last first day of school is done, and (as the kids quickly informed me) we have 270 days to go until Commencement. Senior year is officially underway! We came together as a grade to set the tone for the year ahead, and to mark the seniors' induction into their role as campus leaders with the ceremonial signing of the Senior Rock. Special thanks go out to Anna Ibargüen, Max Koppelman, and Nisha Rajan for giving generously of their time and talent to get the rock ready for this beloved first-day tradition.



My sense of the class is that they're excited, focused, and of course a little trepidatious about the months ahead. I've given them a lot of metaphors in the past to help them make sense of their high school journey. Last year, you may recall, I told them about the "seven minutes of terror," which is what NASA calls the time it takes for the Mars rover to complete its entry, descent, and landing protocol. It's an incredibly complex process involving 6 different vehicle configurations, 76 pyrotechnic devices, the world's largest and strongest supersonic parachute, and 500,000 lines of code. And because it takes 14 minutes for a signal to travel between Earth and Mars, the whole perfectly-choreographed sequence has to be *preprogrammed*.

While I imagine that a lot of our kids find it pretty accurate to compare the college process to landing a \$2.5 billion robot hurtling through space at 12,5000 miles per hour safely on the surface of Mars, there's a reason I gave them this metaphor last year instead of this year. As important as this fall is for them, the fact of the matter is that the vast majority of their programming is already done, and the time is quickly approaching when they will need to trust their code, send it off into the universe, and wait patiently for news of an outcome they can't actively control. I get that it's scary. You might even say it's terrifying. So we talked a bit about how we're going to show up for each other this year and support each other through the intensity, the worry, the celebrations, and the setbacks.

I also gave them a new metaphor that I hope will keep them grounded through the months ahead, one that comes from landscape architecture. This summer, in reading about the life and work of Ralph D. Cornell - the "Olmstead of the West" - I encountered a term for those shortcuts parkgoers create when they "vote with their feet" and veer off the intended course: "pathways of desire." Ideally, a landscape architect will observe the way people move through a space and understand the pathways of desire *before* they build a park; Cornell spent hours roaming on horseback through the hundreds of acres that he would develop into Los Angeles's Griffith Park, understanding its topography, identifying its native plants, and thinking about how to accentuate the vistas and screen the eyesores without distracting from the overall experience. Cornell eschewed the conventional wisdom of his time ("plant what looks good now, water the heck out of it, and hope for the best") because he knew it wouldn't work in Southern California's drought-prone climate. Instead, he focused on preserving the natural landscape. To this day, Griffith Park is celebrated for the way it highlights the area's natural beauty by following its pathways of desire.

The paths our seniors will take when they leave D-E are not yet set. One of the most important things they will do this fall is visualize their own "pathways of desire" before they start carving them into the landscape of their lives. They should think about their natural strengths as well as the environments in which they'll thrive in the long term, rather than focusing on "what looks

good now.” It takes peace and contemplation to do this well, and those things may certainly be hard to hold onto in the months ahead. I hope that my office (and those of their counselors and advisors) will be havens in which they can stay centered in their own intuition about the way they want to move on from here. And, of course, what I love best about the concept of a “pathway of desire” is that it reminds us that if we look up at some point in the future and see that the path we’re on isn’t serving us any longer, then we can always “vote with our feet,” strike off in a different direction, and forge a new one.



As always, I’m looking forward to partnering with you in the year ahead! I’m including some important dates to remember below, and please feel free to reach out to me at any time with questions or concerns.

Best,

Emily

Senior Sunrise: Friday, September 5th at 5:30am

Senior Family College Orientation: Tuesday, September 9th at 7 PM (see email from CCO)

Deadline to ADD courses: Thursday, September 16th

Senior class field trip to Apple Ridge Orchards: Friday, September 19th

Deadline to DROP courses: Wednesday, September 26th

Senior Parent Forum: Thursday, October 23rd at 7pm

Commencement: Sunday, May 31, 2026