

September 19, 2007

Dear Parents,

We are off to a great start this year at the Shady Side Academy Senior School. Like many of the new Third Form Students, I have wandered the halls in a fog, wondering what might be around the next corner. As I hope the third formers also have discovered, I have often found the scene around the next corner to be comprised of more warm, caring, and thoughtful people focused on the important work of learning and growing. I particularly want to thank the wonderful parents who have gone out of their way to make me and my family feel welcome here.

As idyllic as this all sounds, teenagers change a great deal and, as I spoke about in Assembly, change is hard. Given all this change happening here at the Senior School - third formers changing into fourth formers, students meeting requirements, students learning through the experiences of the Senior School - we, the faculty members and parents blessed with working with these students, need to take a deep breath as this difficult transformation unfolds and know we best help these children grow to adults when we work together to provide clear and consistent messages about how this community is connected to our Guiding Principles.

As Tom Southard's letter of September 10 noted, Responsibility, Respect, Kindness, Honesty, and Safety guide all that we do at the Senior School and those values underlie the supports we have in place as we help students navigate the challenges of adolescence. We have advisors, a school counselor, teachers, coaches, and deans, each working to help your child navigate this time in a way that is constructive and helps the student see the person he or she is and can become.

Although students are developing as individuals, identity groups help students to navigate the challenges of adolescence. They often discover kindred spirits through these groups. Within the context of such groups, we work to help our diversity of perspective find a common ground where each person can be heard and feel valued. Each of these groups, in its own way, helps all of our differences come together in a safe and functional community for all of our students.

In closing, the learning of our students and your children results in their change and development, helping them become the adults they and we hope they will be. As we are all in this experience together, please do not hesitate to send me questions or concerns about what we are doing and how the School is functioning. Your child's advisor is also a great resource, as he or she will have a working knowledge of your child. I am thrilled to be a part of Shady Side Academy Senior School and thank you all for your help and support.

All the best,  
Jeremy LaCasse

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