

WARDLAW + HARTRIDGE

Pioneering. Thinkers.

August 15, 2022

Dear Wardlaw+Hartridge Families,

I hope summer has been treating you well, offering some relaxed family time and perhaps some exciting new experiences. Our administration works through much of the summer, though the season offers a less strenuous pace with fewer daily variables in the schedule. There is greater time to plan, to address bigger picture issues, and to build camaraderie as there is more time to linger in conversation. We also take some time for rest and relaxation. One highlight of my summer was joining a trip with 18 other school Heads for river rafting trip down the Salmon River in Idaho. We covered over 80 miles in five days on the river, with three nights camping. The river runs through the Frank Church – River of No Return Wilderness area, the largest federal wilderness area in the Lower 48 states. Fortunately, it did not live up to its somewhat alarming name. The river and the rafting and kayaking were spectacular, but equally valuable was the chance to connect with other peers, with much of our conversation being about how the pandemic had affected the intersection of our professional and personal lives and what we needed to do to lead our schools out of this difficult period and into new periods of growth in our programs and our sense of community spirit. I found it tremendously restorative.

The pandemic, as you are aware, has not entirely receded but has evolved, as have our responses to it. I will address our approach to managing its impact at school in a separate letter, within the next week or so. We will continue to approach it with careful monitoring, but it will not dominate attention the way it has for the last two years, barring unforeseen developments with the disease.

My main focus as we open the year is the continuous work we do to develop and maintain our powerful sense of community. In an accreditation report several years ago, the leader of the visiting team described our sense of community as a force field, which is an apt description. We aim to support individual growth and also recognize responsibility toward the community. Students learn best when they know they are physically and emotionally safe, that they possess internal resources and external support to rise to challenges, whether those are challenges within the school community or in understanding and responding to challenges in the larger world. We believe in rigorous inquiry and excellence in academics, the arts, athletics, and other



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extracurricular activities; we also know that providing those in an atmosphere of mutual respect and inclusiveness elevates all students and helps them reach their true potential. Many of our students and teachers view W+H as a second home. In her recent book *See No Stranger*, Valerie Kaur tells us that “home is the space within us and between us where we feel safe—and brave. It is not a physical space as much as it is a field of being.” That is the sense of community we aspire to.

We engage in this work in a spirit of partnership. A true partnership is not merely an agreement to abide by community rules and protocols, but also involves willingness to learn from one another. We ask all community members, especially in the face of misunderstanding or frustration, to assume the best intentions of each other, to ask questions and share constructive feedback, and to avoid rushing to judgment. Our children and students benefit when the adults in the community model these approaches to solving problems, and together we will reach ambitious goals.

I am looking forward to an outstanding school year. I have great faith in our ability to build the sort of community we know serves our families well and supports the growth of our students. It is a special privilege to work with an outstanding and fascinating student body, the parents who support and guide them, and colleagues who are dedicated to their work.

As this hot and busy summer powers inexorably toward autumn, I hope you will find time for some of the small but precious moments that build connections and warmth among family and friends, and that they then become cherished memories. As we look forward to beginning a new school year with you all in a few short weeks, we welcome some new educators and staff to our community. Please take a few moments to view brief profiles of them on the school’s [2022-2023 Welcome Page](#), along with news of other familiar faces who will take on new roles.

Warm regards,

Andy Webster
Head of School