



# Darrow School

A Coed, College-Preparatory, Boarding and Day School for Grades 9–12

July 13, 2016

Dear New Darrow Family:

Welcome to the Mountainside! I hope your summer is filled with both relaxation and the excitement of joining the Darrow community soon. I personally share that sense of excitement, as approaching you with this letter is my first official task as Darrow's new Director of Studies. I can't wait to fully jump into my duties later in the summer, and to begin our journey together. The 2016-2017 school year is shaping up to be an exhilarating one, full of adventures and opportunities for us all. I look forward to working with you to make our shared learning experience as successful and multi-faceted as possible. Despite my recent arrival, I have already come to see Darrow as an exceptional community, with its unique program offerings, many electives, opportunities for community involvement and leadership – and, most importantly, its warm, welcoming, and dedicated people.

Indeed, it is the people of Darrow that were the most important factor in my choosing to come to the Mountainside. During my first visit to the campus in February I had the good fortune to meet with several students, and to engage in an open and frank discussion about their expectations for the school, its program, and for me. I was extremely impressed with their thoughtfulness, their pride for Darrow's uniqueness, and their ability to articulate their ideas clearly and forcefully. Clearly, they were deeply engaged with their education and wanted to make sure my vision for Darrow was harmonious with the qualities of their school they considered most important. It is this type of engagement that to me demonstrates the power of Darrow's approach to learning.

During my own 16 years in independent schools I have had a lot of experience with different types of educational communities. It is already clear to me that Darrow is the healthiest one I have yet encountered – a setting that caters not only to the academic learning that occurs in the classroom, but also the social and emotional one that happens in a close-knit community in which all members can feel safe and valued, and in which their diverse identities, interests, talents, and passions are celebrated. As we continue to develop Darrow's active curriculum this coming year, our goal is to make such holistic learning even more effective.

A draft of your schedule is included in this packet. This schedule should reflect the preferences you indicated, along with any core classes, in earlier registration conversation. If that discussion didn't yet take place, the schedule will include possible course choices based on your incoming grade level. We will have the opportunity to fine-tune it over the summer, if you prefer, or at Registration when you arrive. Please contact me via email or phone, after July 19, if you have any questions or concerns, or want to schedule a time to talk. Selections for athletics teams and Hands-to-Work crews will be made after you arrive in the fall. Academic Mentors will be assigned in the first week of school once classes are finalized. If you registered for this added support, you will have a chance to talk with Joelle Russo, Academic Mentorship Program Chair, during Registration.

Advisor, dorm, and roommate assignments will be mailed in August. Your advisor will be your primary support at Darrow, along with your houseparents, teachers, academic mentors, and coaches. For parents,

your student's advisor is the first point of contact when you have questions or concerns. They can help you find the right person or source of information. I can also help with questions regarding the Academic Program, while Dean of Students, Kate Johansen, can address issues related to student life and discipline. You will receive a link to the online Student Handbook in August, and this will give you a clearer picture of the various elements of academic, extra-curricular and residential life at Darrow, along with school rules and community expectations.

Student's login and password information for their Darrow email account is in this packet. To encourage a high level of communication and awareness within the community, students are expected to check their Darrow email at least once a day. Many teachers make announcements and share time-sensitive information via email and in our online portal, PlusPortals for Darrow School. Additional technology training will be provided to students during Orientation. A question that is often asked is whether students should bring their own laptop or other type of computer. We encourage students to bring a personal, portable device, but it is not required. Computers are available for student use in two labs, the Library, and each residential house. Printers are also scattered around campus.

I will be settling into Valentine House on campus in the second half of July. I can be reached in my office from July 19 onwards. It will be my pleasure to speak with you at that time if you have academic questions or would simply like to introduce yourself.

I very much look forward to meeting you over the summer or at the start of the school year.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mika Saarela', with a stylized, cursive script.

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