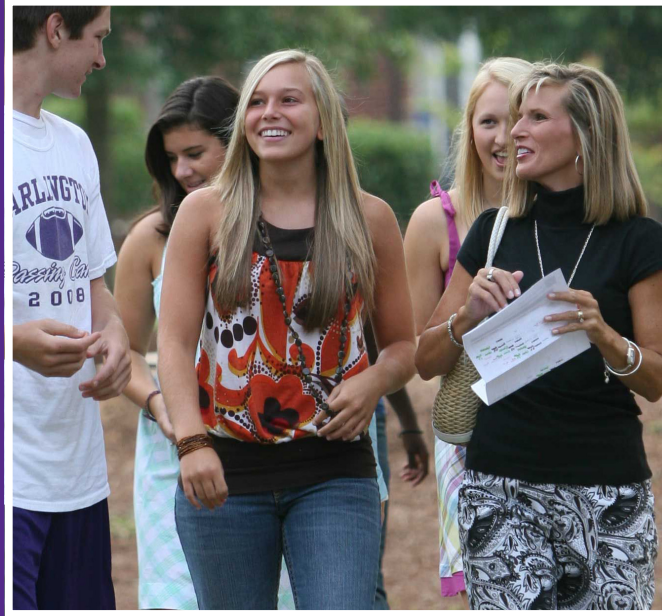


# On While Letting Go

Weekly Support for  
Boarding School Parents



By James Milford

Assistant Headmaster

Darlington  
SCHOOL



# Introduction

Every independent school aims to provide a safe and caring environment for each and every student. This need is even greater at a boarding school, where teaching faculty may or may not be in sync with those caring for the students once the school day is over. At Darlington, we provide a stable, challenging and supportive learning environment where our academic and residential programs blend to ensure that each student is on a path to success. And we do it well. This could probably be said for any number of schools; however, what we do better than most – and improve upon each and every year – is developing relationships with students, parents and alumni who are more than satisfied with their Darlington experience and the benefits they reap as a result of it.

The letters that follow are an example of one of the many ways we erase the distance that many boarding parents feel when they allow their children to leave for school. These letters are specific to Darlington's calendar and program, but are general enough for you to feel the roller coaster of emotions and find the steady themes of success that are apparent, but often overlooked. At the time they were written, author James Milford was a head of house and director of residential life at Darlington School, whose boarding program houses a little less than 200 college-preparatory students each year. He was eventually promoted to director of student life and, recently, to assistant headmaster. Written in a quiet campus apartment (for those of you who have lived in a dorm, you know that is an oxymoron) on Sunday afternoons, these letters are intended as a resource for parents to let them know how they and the school can help each other. We hope you find this book helpful, instructive and supportive.

Founded in 1905, Darlington School is an independent, co-educational, college-preparatory day and boarding school located in Rome, Ga. For more information, visit [www.darlingtonschool.org](http://www.darlingtonschool.org) or contact James Milford at [jmilford@darlingtonschool.org](mailto:jmilford@darlingtonschool.org).

# 1 Week

- Anticipate ups and downs while your child gets settled.
- Keep in touch with your child and the school.
- Learn your schools grading and reporting system.
- Push your child to get involved.
- Ask questions of your school.

As we are settling in for the first normal day of school, I am excited to share great news of a wonderful orientation weekend with you. We only have a few additional students from overseas to welcome tomorrow, and we will have our boarding class complete. After spending the summer months on the quiet campus, it is wonderful to have all of the faces – new and old – back on campus.

We had a great time during our orientation program that the head prefects prepared for the new resident students, and I'm sure that the kids will never forget the ringing of the school bell at our opening assembly.

This first week is always a tough one for the students to adjust to, but by and large the reports I'm receiving and the students that I see are handling it very well. We will be concentrating this week on getting the students into the routine of Darlington. We expect them to be late to a class now and then because everything is new; this is even tough for some of our returning students. The students look great in their uniforms, and I believe this new move at Darlington will be a positive one.

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**“[The students] will be pushed out of their comfort zone, but it is outside of the zone of the familiar that their greatest growth will occur.”**

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The weekend approaching will hold a home varsity football game, a First-Year House lock-in with day and resident house members, a huge servant leadership opportunity with the Boys & Girls Club, and tons of activities on campus.

Continue to keep an attuned ear to how your child (or children in some cases) is doing. If you have concerns, please let your head of house know.

A few things to keep in mind...

The online gradebook is a wonderful tool, but can show vast swings in grades early in the grading period due to the small number of grades in each

class. Some classes may have several homework assignments and the grade may be very high until a test or quiz comes around. The opposite may also be true; a low grade may be entered first and all of a sudden the average is low. The best thing to do is continue to encourage them to do their best and wait for those grades to level off as they find their skill and learning level at Darlington.

We don't expect you or our students to know all the answers, and neither of us can completely anticipate and prepare the students for every situation they will encounter. They will be pushed out of their comfort zone, but it is outside of the zone of the familiar that their greatest growth will occur.

As always, I am here to help and support you and the students any way I can. Please feel free to contact me for any assistance you need. Thank you for sharing your most treasured gifts with us – we are glad that they are here.

Yours,

**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*

# 2

# Week

- **Listen and help your child work through the potential minefield of peer relations.**
- **Expect negative communication from time to time.**
- **Familiarize yourself with your school's weekend leave procedures. Make sure to over-communicate expectations with the school, your child and the host, if applicable.**

Greetings from an extremely hot and humid Darlington School. August is usually our hottest month, but after four weeks of 95+ degree heat, we are all ready for fall to arrive. With the first week under our belts, we are looking forward to a long weekend and a short class week next week. This past weekend was fun and a little crazy. We had about 60 “bleacher creatures” prepared to cheer on our Tigers at the football game; however, a thunderstorm postponed the game ... but not the fun! We converted the night into a social and dance in The Grill and lock-ins in the residential houses. Saturday and Sunday were slower paced, and the students enjoyed some much-needed rest and down time.

As we start our second week of classes, I want to let you in on some struggles the kids may be facing and give some advice on how to support them from where you are.

Last night, we had our first official meeting in the residential curriculum series. We discussed, among other things, their skill level in several areas of social cognition. We worked through several areas in their social skill set. We discussed talking to peers and adults differently, building healthy relationships with adults, timing the speed of relationship development, how to start healthy relationships, and how humor should and should not be used. I asked each of them to reflect on each topic as I presented it, and then gave them a self test at the end. Our goal is not the diagnosis of any social weakness, but rather the intentional development of their self-monitoring and their understanding of where their individual strengths and weaknesses are. Our next focus will be on our core values and convictions. These will be carried out through the houses with discussion lead by the head prefects and duty teachers.

Your students are going through a time of adjustment. Whether this is their first time away from home or their fourth year as a boarding student at Darlington, they are all making an adjustment to a new environment. Some just have more experience at it than others. In your conversations with them, remain positive and help them by modeling and redirecting toward the positive aspects of their experience while

acknowledging that how they feel is OK. Don't tell them that they should not be frustrated with the amount of work they have, or how they don't like the way their roommate makes their bed. It is OK for them to feel how they feel. What is important is that we all work together to help them develop coping mechanisms that they will need later in life. Listen to their frustrations and comfort them, then help them understand that they are in a process of change – which can be both difficult and uncomfortable at times. Help model for them positive coping skills by redirecting them toward the positive aspects of their experience and the positive reasons that they chose to apply and come to Darlington.

Depending on their years at Darlington and their class year, they may be dealing with anything from separation anxiety from mom and dad, stressing out about the upcoming SAT, trying to manage the social waters of teenage life, or just trying to learn to communicate with so many different people who speak a language that is foreign to their own.

You should expect some calls or e-mails home from your students when they hit a rocky patch. Until they form and trust their support structure here, you will be their avenue for complaints and support. Remember to keep it in context and continue to encourage and remind each other of the good reasons they came to Darlington and the opportunities and experiences here that they now have in front of them. Make sure to communicate with your head of house about any issues that you think they need help with or if they simply need a pat on the back. Continue to encourage them and watch as they grow; in turn, your relationship with them will grow stronger.

A small piece of business: This upcoming weekend is Labor Day holiday. There will be no classes on Monday. Therefore, students may take an extended leave for the weekend as soon as they have completed school or their after-school activities on Friday. If your student is planning on taking a leave, please have your plans in place by Wednesday night and confirm those plans with your head of house by Thursday night. All students who are on leaves should return to the dorm before 8 p.m. on Monday night. There will be no study hall Monday night, but classes will resume Tuesday morning.

As always, I am here to help anytime you need me.

Yours,

**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*

# 3

# Week

- **This week should mark a normalization of schedule and an easing of stress for your child.**
- **Now is also the time that limits may be tested.**
- **It is important to find the correct relationship balance with your child as he or she tests these limits.**
- **If you feel that your child is having a more difficult time adjusting than you anticipated, call your residential director or adviser.**

Greetings from Darlington. For those of who love math and are keeping count, we have completed six percent of the school year. There are times during the year that seem to pass quickly, but sometimes they go by quite slowly. We are beginning our third week and are on the tail end of our first long weekend. We had close to 70 extended leaves this weekend, so many chose to go home or visit friends over the break. We have had a nice, relaxing weekend here on campus peppered with excitement as the football team won 10-8 in a fourth-quarter comeback. The bleacher creatures and Pep Band kept the spirits high. The Back to School Bash, sponsored by the Parents Association, is an annual tradition that takes place after the first home football game. We had a great time there. On Saturday, the 40 students who went with us to the Dawsonville Factory Outlet Center enjoyed nice weather. Monday was a nice lazy day with rest and homework on the agenda. The students are looking forward to a short week; however, many will encounter the first major test in some classes.

We will be raising our awareness of the students' well being as we start this period between Labor Day and Fall Break. I have been pleased with the general mood of the residential community and their willingness to get involved and push themselves to become part of the Darlington way of life. As many visit home or have new friends return from going home this past weekend, we need to be mindful of how it will affect their separation anxiety from home and old friends. For some, it will serve to strengthen their attachment to Darlington because they will have already processed the transition to the Darlington routine. For others, it may be a slight set back. However, if we continue to follow the same process we started the year with, we will be back on track in no time.

During the next couple of weeks, students typically report that their routine is in place and their anxiety about getting lost or messing up the schedule is gone. Some are still testing several groups of friends to see where they are most comfortable, so they may hit some bumps in the road with friends because of some social

choices they make. They are learning that there are consequences to exercising their freedom to not do homework. We took up five cell phones in my house this past Thursday night because of either failed room inspection or failing to turn in assignments on time. Across the houses, we are doing our best to be consistent and diligent with our guiding principles and rules. The final thing many of them report having a rough time with is figuring out what to do with their free time. The default parental answer is, of course, homework. Where they have the toughest time is finding a balance between schoolwork and taking care of themselves emotionally and socially. This is a learning process; they will go through times of being overwhelmed and times of having "nothing to do."

As your student is passing through this part of the year, continue to encourage him or her to branch out from the "home routine" and get involved in the many activities we offer here. We all come to Darlington for different reasons, but the individuals who get the most from Darlington are the ones who get involved. Some little things that the students love are care packages from home, and letters or e-mails from home – even if they don't respond. Remember that they are trying to become independent, but are not quite sure how much contact with home is the right amount; together, you should find that balance. If your student does earn some sort of punishment or poor grade, help guide him or her in taking responsibility for it and discovering how to keep it from happening again. A milestone of maturity and independence is taking ownership of our own mistakes. Having the students work toward this is a constant goal.

I hope each of you and your families are doing well. Please let us know if you are having any difficulty, and your head of house can help in getting those issues resolved.

Yours,

**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*

# 4

# Week

- **Encourage social growth through activities with peers.**
- **Struggles that your child is facing are probably very normal.**
- **Disappointment is a natural part of becoming more independent; help them learn and grow from it.**
- **Always be a source of positive. Lift their spirits and they will continue to openly communicate with you.**

As we enter our fourth week at Darlington, we are enjoying a wave of excitement and participation. The students had a spontaneous cookout in The Cove this past Friday night while the bleacher creature paint party was taking place. We took a large and spirited group of Tiger fans to our away game to cheer on the guys to a decisive victory over Cedartown. The creativity of the bleacher creatures' cheers and outfits still impress me. I was told tonight that they were building their own drums to create a drum line. I can't wait to see and hear that.

We struggle at times with trying to find the correct balance between technology and the development of social skills with students. Over the last few years, we have seen that students (mostly boys) are increasingly playing computer games and spending an extreme amount of time in front of their computer screens – alone. Even though many of the games are played against other people online, there is a void of human interaction. In response to this growing concern, we created a portable network on the campus and hosted a gaming tournament this weekend in The Grill. It was great to see the guys doing something they loved, together in the same room. Also, a great tradition at the school is the I.T. department spelunking trips. This trip took students to a dry cave in north Georgia yesterday, and they are already preparing for another – this time to a wet cave.

Last night, the students participated in their first Connect service where the head prefect of Moser House talked about his past and his faith background. He shared with us how being joyful and having a positive outlook on life can inspire all around you. He urged us all to be thankful that we have the opportunity to be where we are. We are all able to walk, talk, attend a great school, and interact with so many different cultures and individuals. There are many who find themselves wanting what many of us take for granted. He challenged all of his peers to wake everyday and live that day to its fullest.

Taking a cue from this message, I want to remind you of some things your student may be struggling with that are completely natural. By week four, the students most likely will have hit some sort of bump in the road. It may have been...

...the trip home over Labor Day that made them a little more homesick than when they left Darlington for the break.

...a test they did very poorly on.

...not getting in the class or performance group on which they had their heart set.

...being disappointed by the actions or words of a new friend they had put too much trust in too quickly.

Whatever the bump in the road might be, it is OK for them to feel disappointed about it. It is in that disappointment that they will learn not to make the same mistake again. Depending on the issue, a given student may learn his or her lesson the first time, or it may take several times to figure out the right way to do it.

Continue to encourage them, continue to be excited for them and continue to use your discernment with the information they are sharing with you. In the beginning of the year – especially their first – students may not have a person to confide in at school, so they will share all of their frustrations with someone familiar. You may find the calls or e-mails home to constantly have a negative tone. If this is the case, make sure to redirect to the positive and ask about the good aspects of their experience. You will find that this little piece of advice is repeated many times by me. Finding the positive in any situation is a vital lesson that they need to learn, but it takes practice and positive modeling.

As we look forward to the next several weeks, there is a break approaching in October. Fall Break is an extended weekend that comes at a good time for the students. They will push ahead for five more weeks, and then they get a few extra days off. Fall Break will begin on Wednesday, Oct. 17, at 1 p.m. and run until Sunday, Oct. 21. Classes will not resume until Monday. Only one girls' house and one boys' house remain open over the Fall Break to accommodate those students who are unable to take a leave or those who choose to stay. As you make your travel plans for Fall Break, please ensure that your student does not leave campus before noon on Oct. 17 and that he or she arrives back on campus between 2 and 8 p.m. on Oct. 21.

Thank you to all who have provided feedback about these e-mails and other communication from the school. Continue to keep an eye on the announcements and the Web site for upcoming events. Make sure to check out the link to Parents Weekend. We would love to see you!

As always, I am here to help any way I can. Please let me or your head of house know if there is anything we can do to help.

Yours,

**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*

# 5

# Week

- **What is your school teaching your child in terms of character? Service? Respect? Discuss this with your child.**
- **Review grades and performance in class.**
- **Study hall should be routine by now. Ask how that is working.**
- **Grades are one of the few measurable things that mark a child's performance and progression. Encourage your child to do his or her best – keep expectations reasonable.**

I have found that each week and weekend has a personality of its own. This past weekend seemed to be a restful one. Most classes ended the week with a major test, so many students were recovering from a hard week of studying. This weekend offered a wide variety of activities. A bus of bleacher creatures braved the almost two-hour trip to Dade County to cheer the football team to victory. This was the bleacher creatures' first bucket drum line performance, and they did a great job. The Rome airport also hosted an aircraft, car and motorcycle show over the weekend. They reenacted a famous battle, and the campus was on the outskirts of some of the flight plans. Seeing the older planes flying overhead was great. On Saturday, we journeyed with 42 students to Atlanta to visit an Asian marketplace. Sunday, we woke to a cool morning as the bus departed for a white water rafting trip on the Ocoee River.

Sunday night was the first student-led residential curriculum meeting, and it went well. Each house discussed respect and how each of us, as members of the Darlington Community, can and should act. Each house agreed on things that respectful individuals do and don't do. We made essential agreements to which we will strive to adhere throughout the year. I will take these agreements and use them as I write the primer for the "Serve with Respect" piece on the Web site, alongside the other primers for the First-Year Experience.

All grades for the first four weeks were entered before 9 a.m. this morning. Study hall rosters and various privileges are determined by these four-week grades. In the houses, we will use these as benchmarks as we go forward in determining privileges and rewards. We are interested in what their averages are at this time. However, we are more concerned with the students' understanding of why they received the grades they have. For example, did they receive a good grade on a particular test because of the study method, the ease of the material or other factors? Or, on the contrary, is a poor mark the result of a failure to study effectively or not turning in an assignment?

As we move forward through the year, we will be looking for these and other trends that will help guide our directed interventions for study methods and time management. There are eight more weeks before the first trimester is completed, so there is plenty of time for grade movement between now and then.

This week is when reality hits many students, and if we named weeks, we would name this one, "the honeymoon is over." Day study hall rosters change, and the release from study hall is a great incentive for many students. These students need to be mindful that they are losing 45 minutes of study time every day if they do not choose to use it properly. Many students who neglect to use this new time in their day properly find themselves earning their way back into study hall at the next four-week mark. Freshmen remain in day study hall the entire year. All other students may earn their way out of study hall by having an average over 80 and no grade below a 70 at each four-week grading period.

This is the time of year that the "camp" mentality is tossed out the window. International students and domestic students alike are seeing that Darlington is not 100 percent fun and zero percent work. The first official grading period forces many students to face the fact that there must be a balance between having a good social life and having good grades. Remain positive in your communication with them, and let them know that minor setbacks are OK and natural. Encourage them to keep trying hard and striving to do better. Most have settled into their friend groups by now and should be able to manage the rules and regulations that govern their lives here at Darlington. The largest question that many are wrestling with now is how much work to put into their academics in order to see the improvement expected of them. We will be pushing the students toward this, and with you doing the same, the message of what is expected will be clear to them.

I look forward to meeting many of you who are able to visit over Parents Weekend. If you are unable to attend, please know that you will be missed. If you have any concerns or questions, please call or write. We are here to serve you and your son or daughter.

Please remember to plan accordingly for Fall Break Oct. 17-21. You may reference last week's letter for further information about this upcoming break.

As always, thank you for sharing your greatest gifts with us.

Yours,

**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*

# 6 Week

- As relationships deepen at school, there is a greater need for critical thinking.
- Listen and ask leading questions to help your child make good decisions.
- Homesickness: How to deal with it
- Evaluate your relationship with your child. Has it changed? Why or why not.

As I write this letter to you, I find myself out of my element and missing home. I am out of town on a small school trip, and I'm sitting in a room identifying with our students' struggles with being away from home. I have the benefit of knowing that this is only a one-night trip, and I have the coping skills that our students are currently developing. I admire these young men and women's dedication to being a part of Darlington.

Likewise, the transition is tough on you at home. Your students have a support matrix here, but oftentimes moms, dads and siblings are left to fend for themselves. I want each of you to take heart and know that you are more important to your children now than you ever were. Your relationships will progressively become deeper with your child as he or she finds that life is not as easy as he or she once thought it was. The students find that mom and dad were right about many things that they will never admit to you. I was so pleased with the turnout for Parents Weekend and also the contact made by those parents that distance kept from visiting us. The House System at Darlington is firmly based on creating a community or family atmosphere on campus. It is clear to me that we have strong extended families supporting all of our students as well. I can feel it when interacting with the students in and around the campus; it is warm, safe, inviting and most of all healthy.

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**It is so easy for us to quickly see the best response to an issue our children are facing. What we must remember is that fixing every problem for them will rob them of the experience that leads to wisdom.**

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We had an excellent week leading up to the weekend. The chapel speaker of the week was the president of Agnes Scott College, Dr. Elizabeth Kiss. She did a fabulous job talking about ethical decision making in a way with which the students could identify. I encourage you to visit the online

gallery and listen to her speech. Following up on her groundwork, we had our second residential curriculum meeting last night on ethical dilemmas and critical thinking. Each house had several challenging situations to wrestle with. Together, they worked through what seemed to be the right action for a given problem. As additional circumstances were added to the situation, they had to react by deciding if they would change their original response, and then defend that response. We will use their responses to help us understand how our students process these types of problems. With this data, we will also generate an online guide or quiz for our incoming students to work through. This is simply another way to provide positive guidance that meets the students where they are developmentally.

It is so easy for us to quickly see the best response to an issue our children are facing. What we must remember is that fixing every problem for them will rob them of the experience that leads to wisdom. We can see the solution because of the decades of experience we have over them. The more you communicate with your student, the more likely they are to confide in you. If your child shares something he or she is struggling with, there is a good chance a solution is not wanted. He or she may simply be processing the problem out loud. Work to discern when your child is thinking out loud and when he or she is actually seeking help. Model good active listening and ask open-ended questions that guide them to reflective answers. The teenage mind is spinning at an incredibly rapid rate; getting it to slow down long enough to think is most of the battle. Students are oftentimes the model of independence one moment and a tearful wreck the next. As their critical thinking and problem-solving skills improve, so will their ability to handle the stressors of teenage life. Continue to encourage them through this learning process. I remember having bumps in the road during my teenage years. I thought I had all the answers, but clearly I did not. Each student comes to this realization in time, some faster than others.

Our Tigers played their hearts out on the football field Friday night, but ended up losing to Bremen. Afterward, we had our first Ultimate Frisbee game on the field – a welcomed diversion from the loss. Saturday morning started early with parent/teacher conferences. Sunday was topped off with a highly anticipated badminton tournament. It is reported that we have several serious players this year. The winner was awarded the Golden Racquet during assembly today. The best player at the school possesses the racquet until he or she is defeated in tournament play. Next weekend will bring another tournament in a new sport where a similar prize will be awarded.

With Fall Break approaching, there is no doubt discussion about plans for the long weekend. I have received several questions about homesickness and what to do about the break if a student is still

struggling with this issue. There is usually a question of whether or not coming home would be a good idea. There are a few things you need to know in making your decision. First of all, there are no hard and fast rules about what to do at this point. It is advisable that students who are struggling with homesickness not return home in the first two to three weeks of school, but we are past that stage. You should also know that the students have a hard time describing what it is about home that they are homesick for. I always believe that spending time with family is a positive thing to do. If you are concerned that their return home will have a detrimental effect on their transition into the Darlington way, work with your head of house and student to find alternatives.

It is very hard to predict when the feelings of homesickness will strike a student. It is often the smell of their kitchen, the feel of their favorite comforter, interaction with the family pet or simply the sight of the town that they grew up in that has the most powerful emotional impact on them. If this happens, you simply go through the process of talking about the natural connection they have with home. This connection is positive and important, and it is a great sign of the connections he or she is capable of forming. They will never lose that connection to home; they will simply make many new connections to Darlington and their extended family here. My experience teaches me that some of the students who graduate from Darlington with the deepest love for their alma mater are the ones who had the

toughest time with homesickness. Homesickness is about deep connections. Encourage them to cultivate their connections here. Those connections are the keys to successfully moving forward.

The upcoming week is a busy one. We will attend the Maya Angelou lecture at the Rome Forum on Thursday night as a school. There will be no homework or study hall that night, and we will travel downtown together to attend this event. On Sunday, we have several visiting choirs that will be performing in the Van Es Arena of the Huffman Center. All students will be in attendance for this event in lieu of the Connect service that night.

Thank you again for supporting your students through these turbulent teen years. Continue to work with them to find the right balance of communication that they need from you. Finding the contact balance will provide reassuring structure for them, which helps their feelings of ease and comfort in their newfound identity.

If you were unable to see or contact your son or daughter's teachers over the weekend, please feel free to contact them directly by e-mail or phone. We are all here to help guide and aid in your positive experience at Darlington.

Yours,

**James Milford**

*Director of Residential Life*

# 7 Week

- **Stretching and growing through involvement**
- **Encouraging success in all areas**
- **Keys to unlocking your child's future**
- **Effective motivation**

This week, I aim to focus on the strategy that experts say is the key to overcoming transitional roadblocks and finding success at a new school – getting involved. This group of residential students is the most involved I have seen in all of my years at Darlington. The students want to do things together, they want to participate, and many times they will sign up for an event before they even know the details. We received the following message from a student on Wednesday: “What is this Powder Puff Game? Whatever it is – I want to do it.” What a great attitude! This is the attitude of a student who is on the road to success.

Most of the Homecoming events during the week could be classified as silly. I want you to believe in them as important. Oftentimes, it is not the event itself that breeds the desired outcome, but the goodwill and collective spirit that arises out of a common experience. When you have positive reflections of memories in your past, they are normally about experiences, not facts. It is not the fact of Tacky Dress Day that makes it great. It is the plaid pants, polka dot tie and mismatched socks that you and your friends wear that will make it special. Encourage your child to try it and make it his or her own. Students will make friends on that day with people they never would have otherwise because they will be out of their comfort zone. I tell the kids all the time that they will get what they have always gotten unless they do something different from what they have always done. It is when we stretch that we grow.

This week has the ingredients to be the best week of any student's year, whether he or she is new or returning. The energy on campus is positive, the week is full of activity, and this is a beautiful time of the year on the Darlington campus. As we begin week number seven, we are now a fifth of the way through the school year, and it has been excellent so far. We will continue to push as hard as we have been to ensure the success of each and every student; I thank you for partnering with us in this highest of callings. To teach love, courage, wisdom, service and honor; these are the keys that will unlock their futures.

I think back to several years ago when we did not celebrate Homecoming the way we do now. Darlington was founded as an all-boys school and remained so until we co-educated with Thornwood School, the local all-girls institution. When the schools joined together many traditions were

continued, some ended and new ones were created. However, Homecoming week as we know it now did not originate then. In 2002, I was having a conversation with a young resident student from North Carolina, who was also one of our Cornwell Scholars. She was having a tough time adjusting to life at Darlington. In one of our conversations, she gave a specific example of something that gave her pause. She commented that her friends at home were enjoying a Spirit Week and electing a Homecoming court, which would culminate in the crowning of a king and queen. It was evident at that time that many of our students felt that they were missing out on a piece of American culture.

We worked with the House Senate and the first-ever Homecoming Spirit Week took place in 2003. There are few events that pull the entire school together as well as Homecoming does. The week has assigned days where the students have the freedom to dress according to a fun theme. This year, the House Senate has chosen themes of Tacky, Nerd and Superhero Day. Last year, the president of the House Senate and one of our heads of house were indistinguishable twins of our associate headmaster on Twin Day. For the past week, many students have been planning their outfits and partners for this fun week.

On Tuesday, the school's cheerleading squad will compete at the Coosa Valley Fair. For years, we have enjoyed this night out at the fair. Complete with rides, games and funnel cakes, the fair offers a taste of traditional Americana that is sometimes hard to obtain. On Thursday night, 120 girls will participate in the annual Powder Puff Game. The football players will be the coaches and line crew; and our girls will be competing in a game of flag football. This is an extremely fun and competitive event for us each year.

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**“Make sure to continue a steady and consistent communication stream with your child. This stability allows them to extend in other parts of their lives.”**

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The crowning of the king and queen on Friday night is the first big event of Homecoming weekend. The student body votes by class on the Homecoming court, which is comprised of girls and boys from each grade. The entire court will be recognized during halftime of the football game, and then the king and queen will be announced. Last year's queen will be here to crown her successor.

The Homecoming Dance is sponsored each year by the House Senate. Tickets and T-shirts have been on sale for the past two weeks, and everyone is anxiously awaiting Saturday night. The dance will be held on the Zelle Patio. It will be a beautiful and, hopefully, a moderately cool night. Some students ask others to be dates for the night, but many choose to go in groups of friends. We will post photos from the event in the Web galleries for you to see.

We will be asking for Fall Break leave plans next week, so please make sure those plans are in order. If flight arrangements have been made and you need to arrange transportation to or from the airport, please e-mail your plans to the transportation coordinator in the Student Life Office.

Some of you may begin seeing a slightly more aggressive stance taken in the houses toward negative behavior or avoidable academic irregularity. Each student has had enough time to learn the academic expectations in their classes. If we do not feel that they are making a reasonable effort toward academic improvement, we will work

to help them with their motivation. Each student will be motivated in a way that is effective for them. This is something we are able to do well in the House System. Your head of house will be an excellent ally with you in this endeavor.

Make sure to continue a steady and consistent communication stream with your child. This stability allows them to extend in other parts of their lives. With a solid foundation at home, the students will feel more comfortable extending themselves in situations they would never think of if that foundation were absent.

Thank you again for an outstanding year. Your support, kind words and children are unmatched. As always, please let your head of house or me know if we can do anything to help.

Yours,

**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*



# Week

- Check in on grades and see how they are progressing.
- Importance of open dialogue with your child
- Be conscious of trips home and their effect on your child's attitude and transition.

Last week was a lot of fun. The kids looked great during Spirit Week. The head prefect of Moser House pulled off Nerd Day to precision with his clothing selection, shoes, keychain collection and the "kick me" sign taped to his back. Tacky Day is always fun to see; the color combinations sported by students on that day are particularly egregious. Our new Homecoming king and queen have earned their positions with integrity and service to others; they are very deserving. The Homecoming Dance was great fun as well. The Zelle Patio was transformed into a Greek palace, complete with columns, ivy and Greek-themed food and drinks. It was a beautiful site as you ascended the chapel lawn along the candlelit pathway. We all had a wonderful time, and an impromptu karaoke performance by some of the guys during cleanup topped off the night.

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**"The challenge to parents is finding the inverse position of providing the correct amount of structure and rules with a healthy amount of space and trust."**

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This is the last week in the second grading period. These mini-grading periods help the students benchmark their grades and gauge their progress. We will be looking at the level of each class grade as it relates to the class grade from the previous four-week mark. This week, we will be focusing on making up any missed work and preparing for the tests that will come toward the end of the week.

Fall Break is long enough for our domestic students to go home, but not necessarily long enough for many of our international students to return home. I have been impressed with many of our students who are inviting their new international friends home with them over the break. Darlington offers a very special and unique glimpse into many cultures. It is inspiring to see the students appreciate and absorb the nuances of different cultures as they all find their place at Darlington.

For those parents who will have their child come

home over the break, there is a paradox I need you to keep in mind. Your child's view of himself or herself has changed at an accelerated rate. However, your view of your son or daughter probably has not changed at the same rate. There is a long-held view of teenage development that speaks of the mind and body split. It examines how these two facets of the teenager's life are transforming at an ever-increasing and sometimes conflicting rate. With these changes and the complexity of cultural pressures on students today, it should not be surprising that they find difficulty managing their lives from time to time. It is common for teenagers to have a facade of being in control of all aspects of their lives and having all the answers. It is also common for the same teenager to spend time late at night worrying about what to do about any number of situations they have been in or anticipate facing in the future. If you can engage them in comfortable conversation, the things that are on their minds will naturally come out.

Your reaction to your child's openness to you will determine your future success in open dialogue with him or her. I have spoken before of how the kids are trying to figure out where they are in the continuum of independence. The challenge to parents is finding the inverse position of providing the correct amount of structure and rules with a healthy amount of space and trust.

We will be working with the students this week to finalize their Fall Break plans. If your plans are in place but you have not yet communicated them to your head of house, please do so at your earliest convenience. The school will remain open for students to stay over the long weekend if you would like them to do so. Events on campus over the break will be very basic, while remaining sensitive to the students' down time.

As we rapidly approach this break, we need to be thinking about the one after it as well. When we return from Fall Break, we will attend classes for only four weeks until the school closes down for 10 days. These four weeks will consist of three weeks of normal classes followed by an exam week. Your *Tiger Way* handbook outlines how to make travel arrangement for this break. If you look at the Web calendar, you will see that Darlington officially closes for the break on Friday, Nov. 16. However, most students are able to leave for the break on Nov. 15 after 11 a.m. The school remains open the additional day for make-up exams or for students who are taking multiple sections of one subject (two science classes, for example).

If a flight is arranged for Thursday, the departure time should be after 4 p.m., if possible. If the flight departs much earlier than 4 p.m., the student will be rushed in his or her exam that morning in order to catch an earlier shuttle to the airport. The residential houses are open Friday until 2 p.m. Typically, around 10 students stay with us Thursday night because of travel restrictions or various other reasons.

The houses will reopen Monday, Nov. 26, at 2 p.m. We ask that all students are back to the houses by 8 p.m. This curfew time is in place for two primary reasons. One is for safety; it will get them off the road before nightfall. The other is for a healthy transition back into the Darlington routine. We will have classes the next day, and it is important for the students to have time in the house with their friends. When students arrive back very late from a break, they miss out on the opportunity to casually reconnect with those friends they have at Darlington and get to bed at a proper time. If they arrive too late, they are inclined to either go to bed quickly because they are tired from the travel or stay up late with friends. This hinders the transition back into the Darlington routine.

Homecoming was simply another great week to an exceptional year so far. It was encouraging for me to hear all the good news from our alumni, many of whom I have seen grow over the years. It reminds me of our responsibility to challenge while supporting these young lives. Thank you for your sensitive support of your children through this challenging time in their lives. As our alumni shared with us this weekend, it will be worth every trial and every smile.

Yours,

**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*

# 9 Week

- **Short weeks and time off**
- **How are your child's values and convictions aiding them in their new environment? Are they being strengthened?**
- **Make sure to use time together wisely.**

Needless to say, the students really love weeks like this. They are ready to receive a much-deserved, four-day break after two months of school. On Wednesday morning, the PSAT will be administered to all underclassmen while the seniors have a separate program. We will not have an official study hall on Tuesday night. Rather, we will do some activities in the houses that will offer last-minute advice on PSAT strategies and encourage students to get to bed on time. The PSAT is an extremely important test for benchmarking and gauging individual student comfort and ability with standardized tests. It is an essential tool when preparing for the SAT and college selection. Students must take it seriously and do their best.

Last night, we delivered the next lesson in the residential curriculum series, a process of self-discovery guided by Darlington's mission statement. The activities are designed to initiate discussion and to set thoughts into motion that are not typically on the list of topics a teenager would think seriously about. Matters of respect, honor, values and inclusivity are not characteristic of normal teenage conversation. Our time together last night was an exploration of our individual values and convictions. Our mission statement guides us to act with courage and conviction. We explored the different convictions of the cultures represented in each house. We discussed underage drinking, the taking of someone else's life, the inequality of genders and races, views of academic integrity and how different cultures view teenage dating relationships. It provides our students a broader view of the world to hear how women are viewed in the Czech Republic, how academic integrity is viewed in Italy, and how teenage dating is viewed in Korea as opposed to Germany.

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**"You know what touches them and brings them joy. It is often the smallest things that make the largest impressions."**

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We discovered that you gain convictions from two main sources. You are reared with convictions that come from your family and culture. You are also invited to adopt convictions from organizations and communities that you choose to join. For

example, Darlington has convictions about behavior by which we expect our students and faculty to abide. To successfully perform at Darlington, you need to adopt these convictions and choose to act accordingly. Below is an excerpt from the primer from the First-Year Experience Web site used during the meeting last night.

We believe that our purpose is not to groom you for a particular college or career; rather, we want to prepare you to choose the pathway that is right for you. This is why our motto states, "Wisdom more than Knowledge." Without wisdom, life is an experiment and the result is frustration. The knowledge becomes hollow if you do not develop the wisdom to use it. Wisdom is found in understanding our design. We are all alike and different at the same time. Each of us carries within us gifts and talents that are unique. These traits flow out of our design. Darlington believes in the individual; we believe that you should not change your design because it is intended for a purpose. Rather, understand your design and the talents that it brings and strengthen them so that when your purpose is realized you are fully equipped. Remember, what you are is based on who you are. If this is the case, seek goodness, seek honor, seek integrity.

Our time together ended with an activity that was completed individually. Students were given a sheet of paper with 80 personal values that they had to narrow down to their top three. We then asked them to rank their top three. It was enlightening for them to experience how difficult it was to narrow down what is really important to them. It is difficult to weight the importance of safety against love or health. Many people never think on such things unless there is a disruptive event in life that forces them to do so. In the safety of their houses Sunday night, each child did a very mature thing by stepping out of the typical self-absorbed teenage existence and answering the question, "What is really most important to me?"

The timing of this lesson is no mistake. Over the break, you will have opportunities to talk to your child about what they are learning as well as who their new friends are and what they are like. I wanted to give you a common experience to share together. Your child will have already gone through this activity. I invite you to do the same and compare answers with your child. It is natural to discuss why we include some values and leave others out as you work through the activity. Studies show that a student's conviction about any given value is most influenced by his or her parents. However, in a time when your teenager is purposefully trying to distance him or herself from you in some areas, you will find common ground in your values. Start with these shared values as a base of further conversation about other aspects of life. Remember, you are battling with cultural pressures that are difficult to control; your active guidance is the most powerful force in your child's life.

I know our students will enjoy their time away from classes, wherever they are going. If you are not able to see your child over the break, he or she will miss you a little more because structure and routine will be upset. This is normal and should not cause any extraordinary concern. Refer to the techniques I have explained before to help him or her process these emotions and ground him or herself in the decision to be at Darlington.

If your students are coming home for the break, sneak some goodies or notes in their luggage before they return to school. A note telling them that you are proud of them, which they randomly find in their uniform pants pocket, is a simple thing that will really make their day. You know your child better than anyone. You know what touches them and brings them joy. It is often the smallest things that make the largest impressions.

I hope you have a wonderful week. If you have any questions about the values activity, please let me know, and I will gladly help any way I can.

If there are any questions, changes or trouble with travel arrangements to and from the airport for this break, please contact the transportation coordinator in the Student Life Office. Your head of house is also an appropriate first call for these as well as non-flight transportation issues. If you have not confirmed your break plans with your head of house, please do so as soon as possible.

Thank you again for a wonderful start to the year and for sharing your most precious gifts with us.

Yours,

**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*

# 10 Week

- Starting to think about exams
- Working and learning along with others
- Helping your child find significance

Welcome back! This was a popular phrase spoken yesterday. It is always nice to see the campus come alive after a short break. The timing of this break was perfect. The students have had two grading periods and plenty of time to establish themselves in their classes. Today begins a three-week stretch of classes followed by four days of exams. The students have this week to regain their hold on the routine. Beginning next week, they will need to begin organizing for exams. Each student must give up some of his or her disposable time to study for these important tests. Each exam will count at least 25 percent of each class' average for the trimester. At the end of the year, the three trimester grades will be averaged together to determine the final grade for the year. For the math lovers out there, that means that this single exam in each class is worth at least 8.3 percent of your final grade. This requires out-of-the-ordinary study time and preparation. If you are concerned with a particular class and you have not yet spoken with the teacher, make contact with him or her. They often have information that helps you in supporting your child to do his or her best.

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**“It is exciting for me to watch these young adults grow and learn how to be men and women of integrity and purpose.”**

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Depending on the experience that your child had over the break, he or she will be at varying levels of readiness to get back to classes. We will be working on getting them back on track and settling back into their home here at Darlington. This week's house activities will remind them of their connections here and their importance to their respective houses and the school itself. If you had your child home for the break, take some time for yourself to check on how you are doing. Remember that homesickness can strike mom, dad and siblings just as hard as it strikes the students here. If you are having trouble in this area, please review some of my earliest letters for tips on dealing with the emotions, or feel free to give me a call and we can talk it through.

The next lesson of the residential curriculum will focus on finding happiness or satisfaction in our lives directed by the last line of our mission statement: “both as individuals and as members of the world community.” My desire is to make each

student's experience at Darlington the best it can be. As we increase our understanding of the factors in each student's success at Darlington, we see several truths that arise as self-evident. Teenage happiness is a complicated and sometimes illogical science. I gave up measuring my success by making the students happy long ago. I now strive to understand and teach the truths that lead to fulfillment, satisfaction and sensitivity to the expansive world around them.

One of the truths that students find hard to verbalize is the fear of irrelevance. All humans, especially teenagers, need to know that they are relevant or significant to someone. It is essential to a child's happiness – for lack of a better word – that he or she be needed and have an impact on someone other than him or herself. It gives them meaning in a time of their lives when society is telling them that their worth is tied up in financial achievement and beauty, two things that they arguably have little control over.

Children's emotional energy begins to diminish when they do not have constant reminders that they are needed and that what they do affects other people; it makes them feel important, essential. Wouldn't we all want our children to feel important because of how they serve other people, rather than because of something they feel they must to do impress a peer? The second line in our school motto is “Service beyond Self;” this speaks to the importance of finding meaning and purpose outside the confines of our own skin. It is living and breathing for the opportunity to affect others. It is to exist for the purpose of making life better for someone else. There is an undeniable pride and connection that can be felt when we use our lives to serve others. This is the principle spoken of when we say “members of the world community” in our mission statement. When we refer to the world community, we are referring to your world community. Touching everyone in the actual world in some meaningful way is really not a feasible goal for most people. A teenager's world can seem very small sometimes, but it is at that level that they are able to live the mission by touching all of those in their world. We will deliver this lesson in the houses in the upcoming weeks. We will be challenging the students to explore all of the different relationships that they influence, exposing the power that each has to influence for good, or for bad.

What I do know is any student who finds fulfillment will live with more passion, enthusiasm and purpose than those who do not. This happens because they find a sense of pride and ownership in what they are doing. It is exciting for me to watch these young adults grow and learn how to be men and women of integrity and purpose.

If you have not already planned for the upcoming Thanksgiving Break, please give the calendar a look. The school and houses will be closed from Nov. 16-

26. A few weeks ago, I explained that most students would be free to leave for break on Nov. 15. Please plan accordingly, and know that your head of house is a great resource if you have any questions about travel arrangements, dates or times.

This upcoming weekend brings a home football game against a local high school. I already hear rumblings that the bleacher creatures are dressing as Spartans to help intimidate the opposing team and bolster our morale. Our fine arts department will host "Actin' Out" in our black box theater, as well as a festival on Sunday. We will also enjoy the fun times that Halloween brings with a pumpkin

carving contest and our Halloween Dance on Saturday night. Prizes will be awarded for costumed guests in several different categories.

Your children have been remarkable, and we are lucky to have each one with us. Please let us know if we can help in any way.

Yours,

**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*

# 11 Week

- **Stressing out and buckling up for exams**
- **Find a healthy expectation about exam prep and performance.**
- **Expect some changes in attitude and demeanor because of the stress.**

Even though the words “excitement” and “exams” start with the same letters, they are not closely related in a student’s mind. To most students, the only remotely good thing about exam week is the break that will come afterwards. We have two weeks of classes left before exams are here. One of the unique things about Darlington is the balance of tradition and flexibility that is built into our House System and leadership structure. We believe that set expectations of study times in the weeks and weekends leading up to exams will help prepare the students for the tests. However, we do our best to listen and adjust to the needs of our current students and enhance support where we feel it is needed most.

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**“What the students don’t recognize is that stress is a useful tool if used properly and controlled.”**

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Earlier this week, the prefects and academic leaders in each house met together to discuss the academic needs of the residential population as a whole and how each house may need help preparing for the approaching exams. There were obvious differences when it came to new and returning students. This will be the first Darlington exam for new students, so their stressors are not fully understood, whereas returning students know what to expect. However, returning students have to be careful not to lessen their resolve to study properly for these exams. These students will sometimes remember their previous exams as less difficult than they actually were. As time extends from the previous test, their memory of the preparation required to do well on it dissipates. This results in a skewed perspective on what is needed to perform well on his or her exams. As a student progresses from year to year, his or her classes will progressively get harder; the exams get harder as well. Students must be careful not to allow themselves to fall into this trap.

We will begin placing some additional structure into the nights and weekends as exams get closer. These will be tailored to individual students, and most will not be blanket changes that will affect everyone. Most of the students already know what

good study habits are; they simply need to be continually reminded of them. We will be working toward awareness of sleep cycles, proper nutrition, effective study breaks, organizing class material, developing the right questions to ask and ordering their study time. We do this carefully so as not to overwhelm the students, as they are still carrying their full class work load until the last day of class before exams.

Over a student’s years at Darlington, there are many events that cause them to feel stress. Many are stressed about coming here before they even arrive on campus. This is natural and necessary. Exam time is usually the only time during the year that all the students are stressed out together. I know I have said that shared experiences are good for building community spirit; however, this would be a hard principle to sell to the students right now. Exams are necessary and a part of life at any school. Stress is a part of life as well, but it must also be understood and made useful. What the students don’t recognize is that stress is a useful tool if used properly and controlled.

Stress has served humans well since the beginning of man. It is stress that initiates the fight or flight response. It is stress that gives us the energy we need to deal with a threat that is placed in front of us. Our senses are heightened, our vision is crisp, sounds are more distinct, scents are clearer and our mind is supercharged to process all of this information. The 55 participants on the haunted house trip this Saturday night experienced these sensations as stress took the form of fear. I want to be careful not to equate the haunted house with an exam ... even though some students may see similarities! As a student’s stress level begins to rise in response to an exam, he or she must learn to harness the power that comes from this stress. If the students let the stress level go too high, it will expend his or her mental energy too quickly, and he or she will not be able to finish the exam effectively. If the student does not let the stress level rise at all, he or she will miss out on the benefits that it brings.

Stress gets the better of all of us sometimes. Like so many other things in life, it is in the balance that we find the answer. As our students pass through the teenage years, their brains are changing rapidly and, consequently, so are their responses to stressors. Students find that each exam week is a little different than the ones before. This is due to changing material and class levels, but also to their developing brain. The brain used during the last exam week is slightly different than the one they will use for this one. Recent brain research suggests that the brain does not stop developing until the mid-20s. Now is the time for the students to begin learning how to cope and adapt with their constantly growing and developing brain.

Expect some stress in your child. You may experience it directly from discussions about his or her concern about the coming exams. You may also

experience it indirectly from a change in demeanor on the phone or a change in his or her actions. This is the first Darlington exam period for our new students. However, as explained above, this is a different experience for our returning students as well. The challenge and process will bring with it accelerated growth and understanding. We will be working with the students to understand this process and how they learn and study best. It is in that process that we strive to help them find wisdom in and about themselves. It is this self-mastery that will drive them to success.

The cool weather that we are experiencing will cause some of the students to change their routines if they frequented the outdoors. Depending on where they call home, this may cause a slight longing for home. If they are from a warmer climate, the coldness may be uncomfortable, thus inspiring a desire to return to the comfortable. If they are from a colder climate, it may remind them of home and initiate the same feelings. Remember that this is an emotional response, completely natural and nothing to be feared.

This past weekend's agenda was overloaded, so we are now having a Halloween social on Wednesday night instead of last Saturday. We will have themed treats and prizes for those who are in the spooky spirit. Last night, we hosted a trick-or-treating hayride for the faculty children on campus; the 40+ costumed kids collected candy from administrators' homes on campus and all of the residential houses as well.

We will begin slowing our activity schedule considerably over the next two weeks to accommodate the increased need to prepare for exams. Please consult your head of house if you are having any trouble arranging plans for Thanksgiving Break.

Thank you again for your children. They are making Darlington great!

Yours,

**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*

# 12 Week

- **More struggles are normal struggles.**
- **Using your trained eye to help the school spot trouble.**
- **Check the calendar before holiday season.**

This time of the year always sneaks up on me. It is hard for me to believe that we are almost through the first trimester of the school year, and we only have two more to go after this. With a third of the year behind us, I can easily say that we have had the best start to a year that I can remember. The addition of the Servant Leadership Program, a reengineered student activities schedule and a completely veteran head of house team has provided a transition point for residential resilience this year.

The trimesters truly have a personality of their own; these play a large part in a student's satisfaction at the school. The end of the first trimester marks a milestone for many students. In some of my previous letters, I have discussed with you how your son or daughter has gone through a type of metamorphosis. These are classified in three areas of competence: intellectual, physical and interpersonal. Studies show that when students start a new school or a new school year, they experience a decline in all of these competencies. In a new school or new class year, the subjects are different and there is a decline in a student's confidence due to the new material. The interpersonal skills are also put to the test by the introduction of all the new faces of the new school year. It is not uncommon for a student's level of competence to take all year to develop back to the level it might have been at a previous school. However, by the midpoint of his or her second year, the competencies have developed and the student has a firm foundation on which to build. We witness this in students who, for reasons beyond their control, change schools year after year. They find it difficult to settle and find success at their new school.

The competence curve is climbed at different velocities by all students; our role is to remind them that they have been successful before and can do it again. If you find yourself in a conversation where your child is noticeably down about his or her experience and ability to be successful here, remind him or her of previous successes. We must constantly let our students know that we believe in their ability to be successful here at Darlington.

Keep a trained eye on any changes in your child's demeanor in his or her conversations with you. Last week, I discussed how stress has a drastic effect on the lives of these young people. Stress can be a powerful tool if wielded correctly, but can also be very destructive if not kept in check. Anxiety levels will be higher this time of year, but not only for exams. Exams are the simple answer when you ask your child what's wrong, but the heightened anxiety

level about exams will have an overflow effect on other looming issues as well. Students report that other struggles take on new life during this time; this may be in part due to the sensitivity caused by their more delicate emotional state.

There are a few things that parents can do to ensure that they are supportive of their child. Be prepared by being familiar with the school calendar and the times of potential stressors. Anticipate the call home and understand that the call usually comes in the heat of the moment. What you must determine is whether the call signifies a bad day or something that needs further attention. As the conversation progresses, resist the urge to fix the problems for them. Ask leading questions that guide them to explore what their next step should be in finding the solution. Continue to encourage and try to lighten the mood if you can without seeming disinterested. The goal is to model positive coping skills and partner with your child as he or she arrives at a solution.

Even with all of this, they will make it through and be stronger for it. The 10-day break on the other side of exams is always a great incentive for them to keep going. As we progress through this week, we will be reminding the students of the tasks that must be completed to prepare for next. However, we cannot forget that there is still homework, quizzes and tests that they are responsible for over the next four days.

The students will be filling out their leave forms this week, and we will be making sure that their departure and arrival plans are on file. There will be less than four weeks from the time we return to school from Thanksgiving Break until we leave again for a longer Christmas Break. The dates of the Christmas Break are Dec. 19 through Jan. 6. The school completely closes on Christmas Break, as it does for Thanksgiving Break, so please plan accordingly for the school's closing on Dec. 19. The houses will close at 2 p.m. and will not reopen until 2 p.m. on Jan. 6. Please contact your head of house if you have any questions about these breaks or other concerns.

We are working to keep this week as standard as possible to allow the structure to provide its full benefit to the students. This upcoming weekend will have additional study hall times, study sessions and teacher workshops for many classes. We will be working with each student to organize all classes and get a firm grasp on what needs to be accomplished in the next 10 days.

As always, your children have been wonderful, and we are blessed to be working with them. Please feel free to contact me if the need should ever arise.

Yours,  
**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*

13

Week

- Learn how to keep a level head while being in over your head with studies.
- Failing to plan and planning to fail: The benefits of working a good schedule
- Communicate vacation plans and enjoy time with family.

The common phrase around campus today is, “My brain hurts.” The students were great over the weekend in their study hall times, and I know it will pay off in their exam grades. The weekend was heavily programmed for studying, but there were a few events that allowed the students to unwind and take a break from their study halls. The football team had a great win over our region contenders on Friday night, advancing us to the state playoffs. The Musical Theater class presented a comical performance of “The Apple Tree, the Story of Adam and Eve.” It was an excellent show and a lot of fun. This past week was also French Week. All students who are in French classes participate in projects and also use our kitchens to prepare French cuisine to share with their classmates and the school on Friday. I was a very willing taste tester Wednesday night for the many chefs in my kitchen.

Saturday and Sunday began early with a wake up and cleaning. Each student had to clean his or her room and had a portion of the house to clean as well. In total, we scheduled eight hours of study time throughout the weekend. Most students found additional time to study with partners, or in class groups. Before each exam, the teacher will host their students for a review session. The English teachers held theirs yesterday, and math was held this morning after the English exam.

The cafeteria is open nightly this week for a study snack break after study hall. The students migrate to the dining hall at 9:30 p.m. for a quick treat, some social time and last-minute discussions on what their classmates in other houses expect the next exam to bring. Exams are held in the Huffman Center, specifically in the Johnson Field House. The subject teachers are available to each student for questions and direction. Each exam period is three hours, even though most exams do not take the full time to complete. The schedule of the week allows the students to have ample downtime and many hours of focused study time. We will continue to remind the students of healthy nutrition, proper sleep and efficient study methods throughout week.

As this trimester comes to a close, most of our students will return home. This is an exciting and fearful time for each of the students. Last week, I talked about how a student’s competencies at a new place suffer slightly. In a student’s mind, he or she is getting ready to return to a place of comfort and familiarity where these competencies are high – a place called home. Many find that what they expect is not perfectly in line with reality. They find that

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**“One of our hopes is to allow the students to gain the self-confidence and mastery that allows them to float easily between ... their community at home and their community at Darlington.”**

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their friends have changed, just like they have but in a different way. Conversations are sometimes harder with old friends because they are not that interested in what may or may not go on a Darlington. These old friends love to have their friend back; there is no doubt of this. However, there has been a void for the past three months; all the inside jokes are not understood and must be explained. All of the events over that time, the teachers, the classmates, the town, the culture of home, all of these things have not been shared. Even though it is not to the same degree, students find that their competence level at home has suffered just as it did when they came to Darlington. This is typically an unforeseen blow to many students, and they find it hard to understand and verbalize the feelings this causes. Technology has made this transition back to home a less volatile one; online communities, text messaging and the avid use of cell phones have allowed many students to stay in contact with their home communities. All students will encounter this to varying degrees; be sensitive to your child when they return from school and when they have interactions with their old friends. Your continued love, support and the stability you provide is exactly what they need in this time.

As parents, the greatest tool we have to help during this time is the understanding of what our child may face. Your child may come home and have no trouble plugging right back into his family and social group. One of our hopes is to allow the students to gain the self-confidence and mastery that allows them to float easily between these two communities, their community at home and their community at Darlington. Returning students should be at this level by this time in their second year.

The two pieces of feedback we hear most often from parents about the breaks are, “All he wanted to do was sleep, eat and watch movies!” and “She came home, dropped her laundry off and was back out the door to see friends.” Both of these are probably the extremes of what you will see, but they are both normal. Depending on your child’s desires, the 10-day break may take several different forms. Where the arguments and hurt feelings usually ensue is when mom or dad expects something from son or daughter, or vice versa, and they don’t get it. No one

wants to be pushy about what they want the other to do when there is a short visit home, but without communication you run the risk of this happening to you. Be upfront before or at the beginning of the break about your expectation for your time together. Listen to what their expectations are for the break and work toward some middle ground. Remember that they have been heavily structured at Darlington, but at the same time have been gaining self-reliance and independence. Each child will struggle with balancing the established rules of home with what has become familiar at Darlington.

This will probably be more prevalent with first-year students than with returning students. The returning families have figured out the cadence of the breaks and should know what to expect. Many have break traditions: going shopping, a special home-cooked meal or a favorite hobby that the family does together each time their child returns home from school. Overall, the students with a resounding voice say the thing they want most from mom and dad when they come home is a great big hug when they walk in the front door. I believe that is a universal desire that should be easy to honor.

Exam grades will be posted toward the middle to end of the week, and all should be in by the end of the weekend following exams. Support your child by sharing how proud you are of him or her for working hard. I know that we all want all of our children to do the best they can. What is hard, sometimes, is finding their best. As a general rule, I tell the girls in my house that they should look at their test average in the class, and then try to beat it. This tends to account for those students who may have trouble with testing, and it gives them a way to measure their grade against themselves – not just

the class average or where they fall on a 100-point scale. If the student is able to beat his or her average or highest test grade on the exam, then that student did a great job preparing and filling in the gaps that he or she may have had prior to exam week.

I hope everyone has a wonderful Thanksgiving Break. Enjoy your children while they are home. If they are not returning home over this break due to distance, you may want to slightly increase your communication with them. They will not have their normal structure provided by Darlington, so they may miss home a little more than normal. Encourage their host family to keep them busy, and encourage them to stay in contact with their friends from Darlington. Their Darlington friends will feel closer and more familiar than trying only to connect with friends back home over the break.

The school will be completely closed from Nov. 17-25. I will have my cell phone and e-mail access over the break if you need anything, as will most of the heads of house. Allow a slightly longer reply time than normal; several of us will be traveling and not checking them as frequently as we do when school is in.

If you have not already communicated with your head of house regarding your child's Thanksgiving travel plans, please contact them promptly. Thank you again for sharing your children with us. They are making Darlington a better place day after day.

Yours,

**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*

- **The benefits of the holiday season**
- **Attention to details in your child's grades**
- **What is going on after school?**

As I send this to you, most of our students have made their way back to campus. The holiday season sprint has begun, and it is a short three weeks until we are ready to leave for Christmas Break. Students find this time of year extremely busy. The Parents Association sponsors the annual Christmas Dance, and the "Y" Cabinet presents Lessons and Carols in addition to organizing Darlington Christmas, a student-led service opportunity in which student teams sponsor children in the community. These children spend an afternoon with their sponsoring student team opening gifts and having fun. Each house will be decorating and hosting a holiday party ... which reminds me, I need to try and find my Santa hat to wear around the house! All of the fall sports are now over, and winter season sports are in full swing. The thespians are also busy readying themselves for the winter musical, "The Music Man." The number of extracurricular activities plus the new academic period promises a tiring three-and-a-half weeks ahead for your child.

As students return from their first extended break of the year, they are expected to hit the ground running academically. You will notice that your student's gradebook has been recorded in the permanent record section of your Web site, and the real-time section of the gradebook is empty. Some time has passed since the gradebooks have been empty, so this will begin the period of grade extremes. You will find that at the beginning of each trimester, as the grades are progressively entered, the grades will represent the grading methodology of each class. The class averages will heavily represent the first grades entered into each class. What is potentially disconcerting is the finality of the material covered in this short time frame and its effect on the grades. There is no other time of the year that a four-week grading period is separated from another by as long a break as the Christmas holiday. We find that classes only have time for a test or two in this time period, and they normally fall late in the grading period. We will be focusing on consistent effort and attention to detail as we examine each student's gradebook. Due to this special time of year, it is important that homework and class work is complete and on time.

This is also the time that many students will be changing from one after-school activity to another. We know that there is a direct correlation between students being actively involved in out of class activities and their happiness and feeling of well-being at Darlington. Your child's advisor or head of house is a great resource for him or her to consult if he or she is having trouble selecting a new after-school activity. It is very important that your child

find a team or group to connect with at Darlington; this can be a club, a fine arts group, an athletic team or a servant leadership group. Our students find great challenge and reward in their classwork and education; however, their joy will normally come from the connections they are able to make with others around them.

A scheduled fire drill will take place Tuesday night. We will sound the alarm a little after 9 p.m. After evacuating the buildings and verifying the safety of all students, we will gather in the chapel for some fun and games themed around fire safety. In any given year, there are more people killed in house fires than in all the natural disasters in the United States. Our primary goal is your child's safety. It is a priority for us to ensure that the students understand what to do in case of a fire here on campus. Furthermore, we seek to educate them about fire safety so that they can maintain a level of knowledge that will keep them safe outside the gates of Darlington. Preparing for this meeting has reminded me to ensure my smoke detectors are functioning properly and that my children are aware of what to do in case of a fire. Several of our students have younger siblings, and our best weapon against fire is knowledge and preparation.

I will be traveling to Boston this Thursday to spend some time with our brother and sister schools at The Association of Boarding Schools conference. I am excited to share the wonderful things we are seeing at Darlington and learn from my peers in other schools. Our director of spiritual life will be presenting in one of the sessions, and we are all looking forward to learning about best practices and innovative programs that we could implement to improve your child's experience.

I hope that everyone able to have their child come home over break enjoyed the time together. I look forward to hearing about the trips home from the students as they return. There are always great stories to tell.

If any concerns have arisen over the break, be sure to share them with your head of house. You are always welcome to discuss them with me as well. I have had the great pleasure of seeing hundreds of students pass through the houses of Darlington. I have seen many things and will do my best to act on, advise or comfort you in any concerns you may have.

Thank you again for partnering with us to make your child's experience the best it can be.

Yours,

**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*

15

Week

- **Your school has to grow as well.**
- **Helping your child deal with the cultural differences between school and home**

It is hard to believe that December has arrived. The weather has finally turned consistently colder, and the signs of winter are all around us. Winter at Darlington is usually mild. The coldest temperatures are slightly below freezing, and it usually heats up considerably during the day. January and February are typically the coldest months for us, so if your children say they are cold during this December term you may want to invest in some warmer gear for them over the upcoming break.

The conference we attended this past weekend was extremely beneficial. One of the principles that we hold close to our strategic planning in the residential program at Darlington is to “know who you are and who you are not.” Collaborating and learning from other schools and their programs offers great insight into our own programs. It gives us something with which to compare our own successes and challenges, while keeping a healthy perspective of how we are unique. I am pleased to say that I deeply believe we have an exceptional and appropriate program that unwraps the gifts in each child.

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**“I’m sure you find that your child speaks to you differently than she would her friends; her actions follow the same pattern as her words. This is code switching in a simple form.”**

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I spoke to you before the break about your son or daughter’s potential difficulty in transitioning back home. We call this ability to make the appropriate decisions about behaviors between settings “code switching.” This is a skill in which we all must gain proficiency. Many of our students have to learn to build a bridge between their two worlds, home and Darlington. I’m sure you find that your child speaks to you differently than she would her friends; her actions follow the same pattern as her words. This is code switching in a simple form. In its more complex forms, it deals with socioeconomic classes, race, nationalities, gender differences and biases. Students who do this poorly always have a hard time adjusting back and forth from home and in diverse settings. You may have heard some of this from your students this past week as they returned back to Darlington from home. I have found that if the

child can anticipate the need to code switch, they will rise to the occasion and assign priority to it. As a child builds confidence in himself and solidifies his identity, the code switching will become natural and in some cases unnecessary. This is a process we all go through as we unwrap our own identities, gifts and potential. It is sometimes painful, but necessary for growth and wisdom.

This upcoming week and weekend will be a healthy balance of hard work and fun. Many students will face their first sizable quiz or test of the trimester this week. These particular grades will weigh heavily on their average due to the limited number of grades entered so far. We will continue to push for consistency in the classroom and in study hall at night. This weekend will bring our first Friday night home basketball game. Following the game will be a huge dodgeball tournament hosted by the D-Club. Over the past two years, these tournaments have been a major success, and the teams have brought a lot of spirit and humor to a game hardly ever played by high school students. Most of the crowd from the basketball game stays to cheer on the teams as they compete for the Dodgeball Champion title. The annual Christmas Dance will take place Saturday night at Georgia Highlands College. The Parents Association does a phenomenal job of decorating and hosting a wonderful dining experience for the students, followed by music, dancing and fun.

Each house has its own holiday traditions. In Cooper House, we had a great time last week decorating for the season. Each morning on my wake up rounds, I tuck a little something into the girls’ stockings for a daily treat. I’ve already been reprimanded by one of my girls for giving too much candy. I suppose I’ll be tucking some grapes or oranges in her stocking from now on. This time of the year typically brings out the best in our students. The spirit of joy, forgiveness and charity always warms the bonds that the students have been building at Darlington.

Thank you again for sharing your wonderful children with us as we encourage them to achieve their best each and every day.

Yours,

**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*

16

Week

- **The busyness of this time of year**
- **Make sure your child is having fun.**
- **Solidify and communicate leave plans.**
- **Be sure you are ready for your child to be home – physically and emotionally.**

It feels more like late summer on campus today than the middle of winter. Our last full week of school this calendar year will bring us temperatures in the 70s. We have passed the halfway point in our brief time between the breaks, and it is as busy as ever. The highlight of the weekend was when the Middle School dodgeball team defeated an opposing team heavily comprised of our high school baseball team. The Christmas Dance was a lot of fun as well. We had roughly 200 students take the short trip down the road to Georgia Highlands College to enjoy dinner and dancing with their friends. Last night was our annual Lessons and Carols service, which was attended by all resident students. The service ends with carols around Silver Lake and the lighting of the tree below the Home-on-the-Hill.

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**There will always be struggles, and we will always grapple with the challenges that teenagers wrestle with. However, it is through this struggle that we are able to realize the full potential of our mission ...**

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Today, we celebrated Darlington Christmas with children from the surrounding community. Teams of students have been shopping and wrapping gifts, readying themselves for this event that warms their hearts each year. Various holiday traditions will be celebrated in each house. Each night, our Jewish students meet with one of our Jewish faculty members in the lobby of Cooper House to light the Menorah in observance of Chanukah. Holiday parties for the houses will take place Sunday night. These parties are typically held off campus with both day and resident students in attendance – just one of many unique opportunities for day and resident housemates to bond throughout the year.

The last school day before Christmas Break is next Wednesday, Dec. 19. We will have an abbreviated schedule that day, so all of the students will be out of their last class by noon. The residential houses will close for the break as its last student departs. Many students turned their information for Thanksgiving Break in late. Therefore, we will

have an all-resident meeting on Wednesday night, before which all travel plans must be in place. If you would like us to arrange transportation to and from the airport, please contact the transportation coordinator in the Student Life Office as soon as possible. If you have yet to make flight arrangements, we suggest you make the departure flight no earlier than 4 p.m. to ensure that the students may complete their classes for the day and reach the airport in plenty of time. Further suggestions about flight arrangements are available in the Transportation/Travel Arrangements section on pages 114-116 your *Tiger Way* handbook.

This break is our longest of the year, and will end on Sunday, Jan. 6. The houses will open at 2 p.m. on that day, and we ask that everyone is back on campus by 8 p.m., if at all possible. If your travel arrangements will cause your child to miss any classes, you will need to e-mail your head of house as soon as possible in order to approve the leave properly.

Before the previous breaks, I prepared you for the challenges that your children may face when they return home. Remember that it is challenging to switch back and forth from their two homes – their hometown and Darlington. I feel that you are prepared with the information; all it will take now is a tender attention to the signals he or she is sending.

As the first half of the school year comes to a close, I am overjoyed with the progress our students have made since their first days at Darlington. I have seen deeper and more meaningful participation and connections this year than in all my years at Darlington. There will always be struggles, and we will always grapple with the challenges that teenagers wrestle with. However, it is through this struggle that we are able to realize the full potential of our mission – to work toward our goals together.

Yours,

**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*

# 17 Week

- **Don't get sloppy at the end. You will pay for it when you get back from break.**
- **Make plans with your child about the break.**
- **It know it's early, but it is time to get a feel for next year.**

This short week brings us to a much-anticipated break. Even though we are still a few school weeks shy of the true middle of the school year, Christmas Break serves as the halfway point to many students. When we return in January, we will have a five-week span before the Winter Break long weekend. (This will be our first year to have this break during the January/February term.) I must say that it is one of the best placed breaks of the year. As the students return in January, they will find the coldest temperatures that they will ever see at Darlington. The coldness, the bareness of the trees and the restriction to indoor activities cause many students to become a little uncomfortable during this time. We have a great answer to this problem; its name is Rumpus.

Rumpus is defined as a “noisy clamor” or “setting something in motion.” Both of these definitions are perfect. Rumpus is our annual winter games. It spans an entire weekend, involving most of the students and faculty in one way or another. The games are patterned after popular reality TV shows that the students enjoy watching, like “Fear Factor,” “Iron Chef,” “The Amazing Race,” etc. I have not been given permission by the Rumpus leaders to divulge any more information right now, so I’ll have to wait until my next letter to you in January to share the details of the games and the fun to be had. Part of the fun of Rumpus is the mystery. Let’s just say that I will be shopping for a velvet suit complete with hat and matching shoes for my part of the weekend.

In the last few weeks, I have explained how difficult it can be for the students to switch back and forth between their two homes. To help with the transition back, we have planned a lock-in weekend when we return. The first weekend back, we will be restricting leaves overnight and closing the campus during certain times for the Rumpus activities. It is important that we have the students back and participating to reorient them. We will also host a great number of day students both during the day and overnight in the houses.

As your child returns home for the break, remember to sit down with him or her and discuss each of your expectations for the break. Protect yourself and your child from hurt feelings and turmoil by letting each other know what you need. Most families have traditions built into the holiday season, so that will be something the students are looking forward to. Try to encourage them to get

plenty of sleep toward the end of the holiday. They will be returning on Sunday night, followed quickly in the morning by classes. Teachers will dispense time for holiday stories, but will get moving on new material in short order. Being well rested will be important for each student as they jump into a full week of classes.

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**“I have also discovered that the uncertainty of the following year’s enrollment has a negative effect on a child’s outlook and progress at the school.”**

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If you have not confirmed your child’s travel plans with your head of house, please do so immediately. We take great care in tracking your child’s travel arrangements, and want to ensure their safety and travel preparation. The break will end on Jan. 6. The houses will open at 2 p.m., and we ask that all students be back in the houses by 8 p.m.

If your child is an underclassman, I’m giving you an assignment for the break. I need you to begin a conversation while your child is home. By the time the next break rolls around, it will be too late to begin a deliberate conversation about next year. I’d like you to begin talking with your child about their next year at Darlington. Re-enrollment contracts are released around early February, and for many families it is a stressful decision that takes time to make. The contract will have a return date on it, and you may not have a chance to see your child face-to-face between receiving it and the due date. I have found over the years that being prepared for this decision takes a great deal of stress off of the child. I have also discovered that the uncertainty of the following year’s enrollment has a negative effect on a child’s outlook and progress at the school. If there are issues that arise from these discussions, please bring them to your head of house’s attention so that we can work with you on them.

Thank you for your continued support, kind words of encouragement and helpful feedback. Together we can make a stronger and better experience for your child at Darlington than we could ever do alone.

Yours,  
**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*

- Time to get back up to speed
- Get a feel for the second half of the year.
- Dealing with the winter blues
- Stay in touch with your child's residential team

I hope this letter finds everyone well-rested and holding strong to your new year's resolutions. As the new calendar year begins, we also enter a fresh and important period of time for each child at Darlington. It is a time that the cold environment around us opposes our determination to keep moving in a consistent, positive spirit. We are beginning a five-week stretch before a long weekend break. This time period is extremely influential in setting the tone for the remainder of the year. I will touch on a few important ideas that I need you to keep in mind so you can support your child most effectively in the weeks ahead. These ideas are: the winter environment, revisiting code switching and the true relationship between failure and success.

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**“We must train each child to find and study the traits of success that are dormant or underdeveloped within him or herself. In the study and strive for successful practices, they will inevitably approach, understand and live successfully.”**

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We do not have it as bad as our sister schools to the North; however, the shorter days and colder temperatures do have an influence on our students. Over the past few decades, there have been many studies on the winter blues. Many of these point to lack of sunlight, vitamin deficiencies and a lack of fresh air (due to individuals retreating indoors) as contributing factors to a person's “blah” mood during these coldest winter months. Every school calls it something different, but it is a real battle that each student faces. In a time when their bodies and minds are changing so rapidly, they are faced with environmental factors that may upset the fine balance they have found. In the past, we have not had the winter break in early February, so I am excited to use this as a tool against these winter blues that come each year. These feelings, like any other, are not the same for all students. Some don't even notice them, and some have a very difficult time with their relative “happiness.” Expect a little

bit of this in your child as we progress through the next six weeks. Your head of house should be your first call if you are concerned that your child is showing the sad signs that the cold brings with it. Advice to give your child would be to get outside at least 30 minutes a day, exercise daily and to make sure he or she is receiving proper nutrition. Many students take multi-vitamins daily; this may be an option if you do not feel your child is effectively managing his or her diet.

After the last break, I discussed the challenge of code switching that all of our students face as they travel back and forth from home on these longer breaks. Please refer back to my letter from Week #15 for more detailed information on this. Depending on how your child navigates these transitions, he or she may experience some anxiety upon returning to Darlington. Your child may define this feeling as home sickness, the winter blues or they may have trouble describing it all. Again, your head of house will be of great assistance to you if you are seeing trouble in this area. A head of house is usually the one who first notices extreme cases of this as someone with poor code switching usually stands out of the crowd. We anticipate this trouble, and we are able to easily remedy it by offering some encouraging words and helping the student develop a plan for success with education and accountability.

In many students' minds, there is a direct correlation between failure and success. It is either one or the other; they are seen as opposites. If a student finds him or herself in a position of failure, it tends to be difficult for that student to see the path to success. There is an immediate assumption that opposites cannot be bridged – that there is no way to reach one from the other. We need to understand that success is not the opposite of failure, nor can we find the path to flourishing success by only concerning ourselves with escaping failure. Conversely, to make our children successful, we must focus our and their gaze on the traits that are inherent in success. We cannot learn how to be successful by simply trying not to fail.

If a student spends all of his or her time simply trying to not be a failure in a class by correcting weaknesses, he or she will only learn how to not fail. In an academic setting, this means that they really only care about making a 70 in a class. We must train each child to find and study the traits of success that are dormant or underdeveloped within him or herself. In the study and strive for successful practices, they will inevitably approach, understand and live successfully. Success is different for each of us. It is in the understanding of our own strengths that we can find the success that is right for us – success that excites, fulfills and enriches.

Now is the time of year that each child must choose to initiate motion, build momentum and sustain it. Whether he or she started this August or three years ago, it is time for the students to push toward the fulfilling of the year. Seniors are naturally concerned about college choices and their

Darlington legacy. Juniors are thinking about their SAT preparation, performing well in their classes and balancing a flourishing social life. Freshmen and sophomores are gaining grip and ground on how it works at Darlington as well as how they can find their success and leave their individual and unique mark on this place.

Transitional troubles aside, each student should be in a place of security and on a firm foundation. Whether they are only budding or have been flourishing for years at Darlington, students undergo the most rapid and substantial growth during the second half of the year. We expect this and so should you. Push your child to new involvement, to new expectations, to new heights, and we will all watch them thrive.

This will be a busy five weeks around campus. Winter sports are in the heart of their seasons, and we increase student activities to battle the seasonal blues. This weekend is the long awaited return of Rumpus. Check the Web for pictures and information about this exceptional event.

I hope that your discussions with your child about next year at Darlington were fruitful. If there were any concerns that arose from these conversations, please contact us so that we may address them appropriately.

We will not be holding classes on Jan. 21 in observance of the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday. The residential houses will remain open. We will simply extend our weekend schedule an extra day. Students will be allowed to take leave over the break; we do ask that all students return on Monday before 6 p.m. As during any normal weekend, there will be homework assigned, so we will have study hall Monday night.

Thank you again for trusting us with your children. It is our honor and privilege to partner with you in developing these young lives.

Yours,

**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*

- **Reconnecting after the break**
- **The importance of having fun**
- **Keep the school informed of changes at home.**

I'm currently sitting at my desk recovering from participating in The Gauntlet – the final event in the Rumpus games this weekend. Hundreds of students participated in one way or another. The head prefects in each house work for over a month planning and generating spirit for Rumpus. I will not go into great detail about each of the events, but I will try to touch on each one so you know the general outline of the weekend. Please check the Web site for photos!

The weekend started with a dodgeball game in the Huffman Center. Each house was allowed a team of six to compete. This was followed by a lip sync competition. If nothing else had happened over the weekend, the laughter from this single event made it all worth it. The kids did a great job, and I was proud that over half of the participants were first year students. We followed this with a social in The Grill, and finished out the night with some dancing and fun.

Saturday started with the Iron Chef competition. This competition involved everyone from each house. It was a creative cereal challenge. Each team had to present a themed creation that included all the items at their station. This also turned into a cheer off, complete with trumpet, conch shell horn, air horns and cow bells. Then, we progressed to the flag-decorating competition, another event in which entire houses competed. Students took 5 x 7-foot flags and painted them to represent their house theme and all members in their house. Following a short pizza break, the trivia challenge consisted of a mixture of brainteasers, general knowledge questions and charades.

After a few hours off, each house arrived at the basketball game to cheer on the Tigers. The houses performed their cheers in full theme dress and spent a little dance time on the floor at halftime. Once the basketball game was over, everyone began preparing their minds and stomachs for Fear Factor. Each house was allowed to enter six team members; each had to eat the food item at his or her station before the next team member could begin. If a member could not eat his or her item, the team was held for a minute. Then, any member of the team could finish the dish. Needless to say, there was nothing that you would find in the Darlington cafeteria there. Several of the items were purchased overseas and brought back during the last break. The star of the show was a last-minute addition to the Thornwood House team. When their adult member could not participate, one of the girls called her dad and he came through in a big way. An alumnus and trustee, he now holds the reign as king of Fear Factor. I believe he ended up eating three of the

six possible items in the end. We checked on him Sunday morning, and he was unfazed – now that is Tiger spirit. After that performance, he may end up being the Thornwood House mascot!

Sunday's water balloon launching session began after lunch. Our headmaster, associate headmaster, dean of students, head of Moser House and I sat shoulder-to-shoulder on the 50-yard line of the football field as each team fired 10 water balloons at us. There were six hits, and two of those were direct hits on the head of Moser House. My hair was grazed once, so we gave them points for that one even though I did not get wet. The Gauntlet began soon after and was an excellent, culminating event. It involved relays and mind games that included code deciphering, knowledge of flags from around the world, geometry and simple persistence and willpower.

In the end, Moser House was a repeat winner of the Rumpus games. They brought the spirit that Moser House is known for, and their victory was well deserved. We were all pleased with the participation and success of the girls' houses and especially the first-year houses. It is tough to get teenagers unified to do anything that is exhausting and that cuts into their personal time. I'm extremely proud of our student leaders, my heads of house and all the students and faculty who participated and cheered on their friends.

It is always interesting to me to see the students who enjoy being back from a long break, but have to feel their way through reconnecting. I believe after this weekend, most of the students will be comfortable back in their Darlington routine. They will be facing the first wave of tests this week in many of their classes. So, this is an important week for the students to make sure that they are focusing on their academic habits.

We have had many great conversations with the students about their plans for next year. Please be sure that you and your son or daughter are of a like mind in terms of your plans for next year. If there are remaining questions in your mind, please contact your head of house. We have had many of these conversations, and we can help you in organizing a process to go through for making this decision.

I have spoken before on the effect that uncertainty has on a child's outlook and success at the school. If there are events or situations at home that could be adversely affecting your child, please let your head of house know. Many times, the added support and understanding of their head of house here at school can make the burden easier for them to bear.

Thank you again for your support and partnership. If you have any concerns or feedback, please contact us so we can ensure excellence at Darlington.

Yours,

**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*

20

Week

- **Building on your child's strengths through small groups**
- **Academics after the break**
- **Balancing trips home and time at school**

The greatest vision of this past week happened around 5 p.m. on Wednesday afternoon. As snow began to fall, I could hear the screams coming from all around the girls' houses as many were running outside to experience their first snowfall. To see the youthful joy and exuberance in their faces and to hear the pure sounds of childhood laughter did us all a certain measure of good. It was only a minor dusting, not even enough to hide the green grass. However, in true boy fashion the guys were doing their best to sled down any incline available.

The first two weeks of this new year have been very positive. By my count, we have officially reached the halfway mark in the school year. We are halfway through the middle trimester, so that satisfies the halfway definition for me. As I look back over my years at Darlington, I am always struck by how fast the time goes by. The holiday season always brings recent alumni back to campus to visit old friends and family. Students who seem to have only graduated a few months earlier are graduating from their colleges and moving into their careers. It is always encouraging to see these familiar faces and hear their stories of success that will one day mirror those of your child.

The residential community is working on a new and exciting project. One area of my responsibility is to search and develop a residential curriculum for our resident students. Our goal is to teach them the things that they will not learn in the classroom that will prepare them for college life and their pathways after. We are rolling out a test project in each house that includes a strengths-based study. Thirty-five students and adults are working collaboratively on this project. It involves an intensive look at an individual's talent themes and deliberately carries that participant through a journey of self-discovery that shows the areas of greatest potential growth and fulfillment. It focuses on reaching healthy relationship dynamics and applying what the individual student learns about his or her own strengths to his or her academic achievement.

I personally like this program because it is accomplished in small group settings where the head of house can be an advocate and guide for each student. I am encouraged by the initial energy that the students are showing toward this program. I am further encouraged by the way it complements our school's mission statement, "Together we ... develop strengths and talents." The program is built on extensive research in the area of positive psychology. I have found that it is easy for a student to identify what they believe they lack or wish they had. The media and society today keep a constant

message of inadequacy focused on our youth. My desire is to unearth the dormant and hidden potential in each child. I want each of my students to understand that they don't have to become someone else to be successful. That is the pathway to an unfulfilled life. Students must realize that they have everything they need within themselves to be extraordinary. We will help them find these traits, give them knowledge and skill to build on these talents that they already have, and enable them to develop the strengths they have within – strengths that no one can take away or recreate.

When we start classes on Tuesday morning, we will begin the three-week stretch until Winter Break. The last week in January will also mark the end of a four-week grading period. If you recall, these are simply grade reporting times in the trimester that we use to assess progress and gain a snapshot of how the students are doing in their classes. Students should be expecting at least one major test grade in each class in the remaining nine academic days before we reach the end of the grading period. In the houses, we will be focused on maintaining proper decorum during study hall as well as accountability with grades so that the students are not letting them slip needlessly.

Starting next week, we will work with students to finalize their Winter Break plans. The school will remain open for students to stay over the long weekend if you would like them to do so. Campus events during the break will be very basic, while remaining sensitive to the students' down time. We will normally take a trip to an international market in Atlanta and take daily trips into town each day. Most of the students prefer to simply rest and relax. The heads of the Moser and Neville Houses as well as a couple of resident faculty members will be on duty during the break. Students will be allowed in their own houses during the day, but all girls will sleep in Cooper House and all boys will sleep in Neville House overnight. Typically, 35-40 students remain on campus during these short breaks.

Life is in constant motion, so as conflicts or issues arise please feel free to contact your head of house or me with any questions or concerns you may have. If you will, grant me one last request. If your child spent the long holiday break at home and came home again this long weekend, I would suggest that they spend their next two weekends with us on campus. The continual switching back and forth can sometimes take them off guard and hamper their connections at Darlington. There are two weekends between now and Winter Break; if it is possible for them to stay with us and participate here, I believe it would be beneficial to them.

Thank you for your continued support and partnership.

Yours,

**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*

21

Week

- **Normal academic ups and downs**
- **What is your child learning outside the classroom?**
- **Big productions and the importance of doing school-wide events together**
- **Continue communicating with the school.**

The first wave of senioritis has arrived on campus. Several of the seniors have their college acceptances in, and they are enjoying the liberating feeling of having this hurdle behind them. There are still vital decisions to be made for these seniors and the others who are still waiting to hear from their schools. Each senior is in a different stage of the process, but there is excitement in it for all of them.

Many of our students are involved in the production of “The Music Man” this upcoming weekend. I am amazed each time our fine arts team produces these marvelous shows. The students and adults work for months on the production, and it is always a spectacular performance. The students involved in this particular show have been working through their normal academic load on top of an increasingly demanding rehearsal schedule. This week will be a tough one for those involved in the performance and the support crew. Their practices will take them off campus into the evenings, so anticipate some drop off in calls from your child because they will be practicing, studying or sleeping over the next week. If they do find time to call home, you will probably hear a tired child.

I am observing that many of the students find themselves struggling with old habits they had overcome before the large break. Jumping right back into the academic rigor of Darlington challenges each student to assign the proper amount of attention to his or her academic responsibilities. We have talked about the winter slump in terms of emotions, but we also notice that across the board there is a predictable decrease in the averages from the first four-week mark in the second trimester (grades over the long Winter Break) and the upcoming four-week grading marks. This is, of course, an observation and not a rule for all students. However, the differing grading periods will affect each child differently.

The previous grading period that ended in December is a short one that has a clear ending to the material due to the imminent three-week break. Some students tend to perform better in this tightly packed grading period. As they return in the new year, the class material is not so tightly packed, nor is there a clear break in the material. This open-ended material compounded by the transition back from the long break typically heralds a slight decline in grades. This should be self-correcting, and rest assured that we are watching this phenomenon. We

will be continuing our focus on positive study habits at night as we focus on removing the distractions as they become apparent.

Our residential strengths-based study focus group is progressing well. We are meeting in small groups and discussing our primary strength themes and their shadows. One of the principles that we teach early on is that our disabilities are many times determined by our abilities. As each one of us refines our skill sets and knowledge base, we are driven to certain performance standards or themes that generate our strengths. The unique themes we live by make us successful when used properly. However, when mismanaged, these themes can cause negative outcomes if we are not aware of this potential. Students are meeting with their peer group and their choice of adults to answer the question of how their five most dominant themes make them stronger. Furthermore, each student is also examining the shadows of these themes and how each manifests itself within him or herself personally. This exercise provides general guidelines; in the future, we will look specifically at academic implications and, following that process, we will explore how these themes influence our relationships.

We anticipate that all students will be staying with us this upcoming weekend before the Winter Break. We have not closed the weekend, but I strongly encourage students to be here this weekend to experience “The Music Man” and enjoy the house activities we have planned. We will be asking the students for their Winter Break plans this week, so please be sure to confirm any departure plans with your head of house before Sunday evening. The break will begin on Thursday, Feb. 7, at 1 p.m. Classes will meet Thursday morning and should not be missed. All students should return to their houses on Monday, Feb. 11, by 8 p.m. Classes will resume on Tuesday, Feb. 12.

Thank you for your continued support and feedback. It is extremely helpful when you notify us of struggles or signs of academic difficulty that you see your child having. Even with our structure, tracking and close contact with your child, there is an intuition that you have about your son or daughter that we can never replace or reproduce. If a concern ever arises, please do not hesitate to give your head of house a call.

Yours,

**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*

- **When you share successes and excellence, everyone wins.**
- **Checking in on grades**
- **Leadership and plans for next year**

This past weekend was one of the biggest of the year, and it was busy for everyone. All who were able to attend the winter production of “The Music Man” at the Rome City Auditorium were treated to a wonderful night of entertainment. The cast and crew endured months of preparation and late-night rehearsals all week long, but it was a beautiful production and everyone could see the passion and hard work that went into it. One of our senior residential students, who has participated in many of our performances, was lamenting how Saturday night would be his last opening night at Darlington. This particular student has already auditioned and been accepted into his school of choice, so he will have many opening nights ahead of him.

This week will be unseasonably warm for us. It has already picked up the spirits of many of the students. Yesterday there was a pickup game of football out on The Quad. It is not quite warm enough for them to wear shorts, but it was clear, bright and a perfect day to get some fresh air. We have made it through the first part of the cold months at Darlington. We still have several weeks to go until the weather turns consistently warmer, but the break coming up will do wonders for many of the students.

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**“We are always looking for positive ways that each student can get involved and contribute to the school community so that he or she can be part of making Darlington the special place that it is.”**

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The grading period has ended, and we have a little over four weeks until the second trimester exams. Next week, we will begin talking about these exams in the houses and focusing on refining study habits and time management skills. In February, we deal more with the negative effects of the weather and temperature and the way it makes the students feel. As the temperatures rise in the spring trimester, we deal with the opposite effects. The students would rather be outside enjoying the weather and playing with each other than inside

studying. So we focus on being more effective in study hall rather than being more efficient. This way, the students are conditioned to do a good job, not a fast one.

Winter Break is three short days away. Thursday will be a half day of school, with the school officially closing at 1 p.m. We will get our official count this week as all plans are confirmed, but we anticipate approximately 35 students staying with us over the long weekend break. If your child’s plans change during the break and they need to return early, you will need to contact one of the duty teachers in charge. Your head of house will be available to you over break, but several of us will be on trips so our response time will be longer than normal.

Many of the first-year students are beginning to talk about which house they will choose for next year. My advice to each of the students when they ask me is to continue thinking about it, but not in a context of which house. They need to be thinking about the choice in terms of themselves and what they need or would like. The dynamics of the upper houses change from year to year. These houses are generally made up of at least half seniors, who are typically the leaders of the house. With those seniors leaving, new upperclassmen being admitted, and 45 boys and girls moving up to the upper houses, there is a change of personality in each house. I tell the students that it may be smart to wait until you know who the leaders are in each house and who in your house may be moving up before you start deciding where you want to go. Each first-year student has the opportunity to move into one of the upper houses or apply for a leadership position in any house. The first-year houses offer several one-year positions. These choices are not made until late March or early April, so students still have time to put this decision off. I’m encouraging them to think about what they would want their ideal house to be, and then choose in May when the time is right and their perfect house reveals itself.

I do, however, instruct students to go ahead and be thinking about any leadership positions for which they may want to apply. One of the unique things I love about Darlington is the number of opportunities for leadership a student can find. We are always looking for positive ways that each student can get involved and contribute to the school community so that he or she can be part of making Darlington the special place that it is. I will give you more detail about leadership positions as we get closer to the season. The first leadership positions to be selected are the prefects, the top positions in the House System. Applications will be released before Spring Break and will be due after the break.

Our seniors are starting to feel the first twinges of nostalgia as they work on selecting a speaker for Baccalaureate and Commencement. Along with

college choices, graduation invitations and summer plans, many are already thinking about how much they will miss their friends and their Darlington family once they move on to the next level. Some have been dealing with this for a few weeks now, and others may not start having these feelings until the week of graduation. Be aware that, for your senior son or daughter, these feelings do carry a great deal of weight. It helps them to talk about it to someone they will not be losing, namely you. In times of transition, we all seek those things in our lives that are constant and steady. It is of little worth to tell them they should not feel this way. It is best to be a good listener and reassure them that it will be OK; their friends will always be close enough to

touch if they reach for them, and no one can take the memories they have.

Please continue to let us know how your son or daughter is doing. This is the time of the year that things seem to speed up. We want to make sure that we are supporting and challenging each student to the appropriate measure. Your expert advice and counsel about your child is invaluable.

Yours,

**James Milford**

*Director of Residential Life*

- Relationships between teacher and student
- Encourage involvement and being active on campus and with the school.
- The beginning of spring sports and the loss of free time
- Choice of school for next year

As I type this letter to you, I am flying back from Salt Lake City, Utah, accompanied by 17 of our wonderful students. I was one of the lucky chaperones on the skiing trip over Winter Break; with three children of my own, hobbies are few and far between. Having a chance to go skiing was a treat for which I am very thankful. All of the students report that they had a wonderful time. The resort has experienced their best snowfall in a decade, according to locals. Our three days in the mountains were absolutely beautiful. The day we arrived, there had been 11 inches of snowfall and 150 inches over the past two months. The skies cleared that night, and we enjoyed sunny days and perfect weather the entire trip. On the side of each road and sidewalk were walls of snow that had been cleared off of the roads, creating great conditions for snowball fights every time we waited for the bus. The snow was perfect to pack and throw, and the guys even carved a snow cave beside their condo. They had no interest in sleeping there overnight, though!

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**“Continue to encourage your child to stay focused and stay active. We still have several weeks of cold weather, so we must stay vigilant with our battling back of the winter blues.”**

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Trips like these allow us to experience the students in an environment that is different than we are used to. I cannot say enough about how well our kids handled themselves on the trip. Chaperones always have a healthy amount of stress present on any trip; however, this was an easy one because our students understand the meaning of civility. Our group represented a great cross-section of the school, and I’m extremely proud of how they represented themselves and Darlington.

We are entering into our last few weeks of the second trimester. If my count is correct, we have three weeks of class followed by an exam week. This period of time is usually tough on the students because, in the past, we have not experienced a

Winter Break. I anticipate that the students’ spirits will be higher thanks to the additional downtime and the approaching Spring Break.

Earlier in the year, I discussed the rapid development of the teenage brain and the young person’s ever-changing ability to perform on his or her trimester exams. After a few exams, they tend to get a feel for how they perform in relation to their effort and preparation. We have already started talking about these exams in the houses and the importance of making these next four weeks strong and consistent. As the exams grow closer, we will be working with the students to make sure they are organized and ready for their exams.

Many of the spring sports have begun their practices. This athletic season at Darlington is extremely busy with a wide variety of sports that last until May, on top of our many year-long activities. The winter musical may be over, but there are still many opportunities to be a part of the fine arts program. Don’t forget this vibrant and fulfilling part of our school. I have spoken before about the importance of getting involved. If your child is not already involved in some way at Darlington, please encourage him or her to participate in something or let your head of house be a partner in finding a place for your child to have a deeper or broader experience at Darlington.

Re-enrollment contracts will be released Feb. 15. Please be looking for yours in the mail. If you do not receive your contract by Feb. 25, please contact our director of admission to check on the status of your contract. The due date, March 7, is printed on the contract. I hope that you have already discussed your plans for next year with your child. If not, please open the discussion with them. Students talk amongst themselves about their plans for next year, and any uncertainty proves to be a difficult burden for a teenager to sort through or resolve alone.

Experience has taught me that the students want their parents to make this decision for them. They most definitely want a say in the decision, but it is an enormous decision to leave up to a teenager to decide alone. I have found that they would rather delay the decision as long as possible if it is left exclusively in their hands. This begins a cycle of questions and stress that strips them of much of the fulfillment that they could receive in the last trimester of the year.

I have seen it many times in the past – a student who is not sure of their return to Darlington will withdraw from making new connections and will guard against the strengthening of existing ones. The best option is to know one way or the other. If you are not in a position to make the decision at this time, I need you to contact your head of house so we can plan how to support your child through the process. Ensuring stability and certainty in your child’s experience at Darlington is extremely important, and we will partner with you in fashioning a strategy to make certain of it.

Spring Break will begin on Thursday, March 13. The last exam will be held that Thursday morning. Even though the calendar states that the school remains open until Friday, March 14, most residential students will be free to leave at 11 a.m. on Thursday. We remain open until Friday to accommodate late exams due to illness or scheduling conflicts. As you make departure plans for the break, your son or daughter will want to leave on Thursday. All students should return to campus on Monday, March 24. The residential houses close along with the school for Spring Break. If you are having trouble arranging transportation or a host family for the break, please let your head of house know.

Continue to encourage your child to stay focused and stay active. We still have several weeks of cold

weather, so we must stay vigilant with our battling back of the winter blues. Remember to encourage your child to concentrate on healthy nutrition, proper rest, exercise and some time outside for fresh air.

Thank you for your continued support and partnership. Please let us know if there are ways that we can make the Darlington experience better and more fulfilling for you and your family.

Yours,

**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*

- Utilizing academic support options
- You mean I have to schedule free time?
- Meeting with teachers: When is the best time?

This time at Darlington is one of transition. The students in the winter musical have completed “The Music Man,” and are now either transitioning to their spring sport or the spring production. We still have some students competing at the state level in athletics, while others are scrimmaging or playing their first games in their spring sport. Others have not missed a beat in their year-long activities. Regardless of the activity your child is participating in, there is an intensifying amount of pressure on their academic performance as we get closer to exams. While their other activities do not determine their classroom performance, they do influence it.

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**“Encourage your child to seek out help and direction. If you see that he or she is not receiving the support necessary, please let us know.”**

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Academic demands are on the top of everyone’s minds these days around campus. I wanted to cover several options that are available to the students and give some advice on where you can turn if you feel your child may need a little help. First of all, the most important partnership that exists is the one between the teacher and student. A positive and open communication pathway must exist between these two to ensure proper support for each student. Many of the following support options build specifically on this premise, and others are designed to build foundational or organizational skills to support general performance in a class.

Boarding students are typically scheduled from the time they get up to the time they go to bed. We have worked over the past few years to ensure that each student has enough free time during the day to support the social and emotional needs that he or she has. Even with these efforts, many students still find their free time to be limited. This exacerbates the academic support issue, because many don’t want to give up this precious free time to seek out extra academic support. This is the first hurdle to overcome. If a student is set on seeking help, he or she will find it – and find it in abundance – at Darlington.

The first suggestion that you typically hear about academic support is coach class. Coach Class is

a morning period four days a week during which students can find teachers in their classrooms for extra help. These classes are usually very popular on mornings of tests or a quiz, but not overpopulated on the other days. Students are expected to come with questions, not simply be spectators to the action. On one of the test days, it is difficult for any teacher to address each student’s questions when there are so many there to ask. Some students report that it is beneficial for them to simply listen to the questions asked and the explanations given. With this passive strategy, the time can pass and the weakest areas of any given student may not be addressed.

If Coach Class is not found to be the best method for a particular student, the next step would be to simply e-mail or call the teacher or stay after class to ask a question or set up a time to meet. Many students report that if it is a simple question or the need for clarification about an assignment, an e-mail to the teacher will garner a timely and satisfactory response. All of this really depends on the type of question that needs to be asked. Basic questions can oftentimes be answered by peers in his or her class, and most students are much more comfortable asking a peer. More involved questions that revolve around an individual student’s performance in a class should not be handled over e-mail, and must take place in a meeting between teacher and student.

It is not uncommon for a student to meet with his or her teacher outside of a class period for assistance. Each teacher at Darlington has a different schedule, so it is difficult to have standard times for all teachers to be accessible to the students. However, there are general times that students should be able to connect with their teachers. Besides the standard Coach Classes, there are free periods that both teachers and students have during the day. Students report that many teachers are available in their classrooms or offices during the day when they are not teaching. If the student’s study hall, free period or lunch period coincide with these times, there is an easy meeting time that can be arranged. Another great time to meet with teachers is at night during study hall. At Darlington, more than 40 teachers serve as duty teachers in the houses on a rotating schedule at night. We encourage teachers not to have formal, class-wide review sessions when they are on duty so that they can perform the expectations of house duty effectively. However, they are available to the students for help. All a student needs to do to access his or her teacher is arrange the meeting and receive a pass from the duty teacher.

Several different levels of support are offered at night during study hall. The three main levels begin with the academic leaders or peer tutors within the houses. These students work closely with their head of house or the Learning Center to offer peer-based support for students in need. Secondly, house duty teachers are available and monitor grades and

assignments on a nightly basis. The third level of support is the learning specialist who visits the houses twice per week. These specialists meet with any student who requests a meeting or who is identified by the head of house as one who may need direction.

After school is a good time to meet with teachers who do not have after-school responsibilities. A great example of this is our math department chairman, who offers after-school assistance to any and all math students on a daily basis. The days are designated by courses, but this is an excellent time for any student to receive extraordinary help.

This is not a complete list of the times or ways that are available, but I hope that this outlines the general spirit of academic support at Darlington. I have not touched on other options that are more individualized and specific; these can be discussed in detail with your advisor or teacher. Many students who come from different schools habitually do not ask for help. It is imperative at Darlington that students take ownership of their education and seek the help needed. This is, of course, the desired result at the end of a process that we work with each student to attain. Beyond the teachers, there are two individuals at the school who are partners in this process – your child’s advisor and head of house. Encourage your child to seek out this help and direction. If you see that he or she is not

receiving the support necessary, please let us know. There may be a minor breakdown in the system that we can easily remedy.

This is a much more technical letter than I normally send, but I wanted to make sure you understood what was offered and what you needed to do to receive what was needed.

This Friday will be Career Day at Darlington. We are very lucky to have active alumni who return to campus to share their experiences with our juniors and seniors; these students have sessions throughout the morning to attend. Freshmen and sophomores will have sessions in the morning with the college advisers to get an early start on college admission. Our College Guidance Office will be leading this session to begin introducing our younger students to the process they will face sooner than they think.

Thank you for your continued support and understanding as we work with your child. I appreciate the open and candid conversations I have with many of you each week. Please let me know if I can help in any way.

Yours,

**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*

25

Week

- Exam support: Knowing where and when to find it
- Leadership opportunities and process
- Continue to encourage and support.

I know that spring is near when I look around the campus and the trees are already budding. North Georgia weather is very fickle, and these buds may see some freezing temperatures before the spring time weather is here in full force; however, I will gladly enjoy the rich colors on the trees while they last. The students are not excited about exams, but they are excited about Spring Break. There are only two weekends between now and the break. These two weekends will have a distinct personality as we try to minimize distractions and enable the students to begin preparing in earnest for their exams.

This coming weekend, we will have our standard activities on campus and trips into town. In addition, the Learning Center will host a notebook organization workshop on Sunday afternoon. We can always count on the Learning Center staff to bring creative, timely and effective programs to our students. Over the course of a trimester, every student collects countless handouts, sheets of notes, returned quizzes and tests that most do not file and keep organized. However, each student is accountable for the information on these exam question rich documents. This Super Sunday program will help the students organize their information, identify what they are missing and set them on a course to collect it. In my experience, this process is the hurdle that many students cite as the reason they fail to start studying early for exams; they dread the gathering and organization of their materials. This will be an excellent first step for many of our students.

I have had many more students than I expected coming through my door asking about leadership positions for next year. Since they are inquiring, I wanted to give you an overview of how the process works and how I will be communicating it to you. First of all, I want to express to you how important leadership positions are at Darlington. I have spoken to you before about how I wish each student at Darlington would believe in and claim his or her voice at the school. The faculty and administration are eager for student input, ideas and partnership. I have seen a trend year after year; the students who seek and attain personally meaningful leadership positions here are generally happier, more successful and feel more fulfilled in their experience at Darlington. Leadership can take many forms; it can be on the field, on the set, in the houses or in a more traditional organizational role. The leadership positions I will cover with you will be primarily in the houses and student life organizations.

There are two ways that a student attains a leadership position. Some are appointed, and others

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**“I have seen a trend year after year; the students who seek and attain personally meaningful leadership positions at Darlington are generally happier, more successful and feel more fulfilled in their experience here.”**

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are elected by either school-wide or class-specific vote. The organizations have different functions and traditions. There are bodies that have been around since the beginning of the school itself, while others have only been around the last decade.

Twelve head prefects are appointed each school year; these are the highest appointed offices held by any student. There are six resident and six day head prefects who are assigned in resident/day pairs to a house. The application process for head prefect is a rigorous and holistic one; the 12 most appropriate students are chosen without regard to their current house assignment. Four of the head prefects are chosen for the first-year houses; the other eight are designated for the upper houses. Needless to say, these different house designations demand a very different type of leadership style and personality from their head prefects. The prefect applications are released before Spring Break and due the week after the break. A student whose application is accepted will be invited to interview with three heads of house. After deliberation and an online, confidential, school-wide confidence vote of all applicants, the new head prefects are announced in assembly the following Monday. The 12 head prefects are chosen by the six heads of house in the spirit of building a cohesive and synergistic team of leaders who are appropriate for the following year's vision and goals.

As the students come in and ask me about the timing of the elections, there is typically only a slight pause before the question of whether or not I feel they should go for a given position. I try to be very careful to not do anything but encourage them to go for the position they want. Each position and group carries a very different set of needs and expectations. I direct them to study the mission of the organization, and if they want to be a part in helping fulfill that mission, then they should go for it. Some positions are elected and some appointed, but the traits that will get them in a leadership position are desire and hard work. As we go through the leadership season, I will explain each of the leadership bodies to you and encourage you to talk to your child about participating in these, where appropriate.

You should have received your re-enrollment contract in the mail by today or an alternate communication about any delay in its release. Please make every effort to turn these forms around quickly. With leadership season approaching fast, it is important that the students know where they stand for next year. If you have any questions about the re-enrollment process, please contact our director of admission.

Senior parents, if you are attending Commencement in May, you should already have your hotel reservations. Visit our Web site to see a list of places to stay in Rome. The hotels always sell out for the weekend, so you are encouraged to make

reservations early. Also, please refer to last week's Upper School newsletter for information about servant leadership hour requirements and post-graduation trips.

Continue to encourage your child to work hard and seek help if he or she needs it. Your loving words give them the confidence and strength to face the trials that adolescence brings.

Yours,

*James Milford*  
*Director of Residential Life*

- **Service opportunities**
- **Encouragement, love and support – the three essential messages from home**
- **Get ready for spring – it’s packed with activities.**

As we end a beautiful weekend, it is fitting that Spring Break is just around the corner. We are now in the last two weeks of the trimester, and the campus has settled into academic preparation. Many classes will finish up their material with a test this week and either begin or continue reviewing material for the exams.

Super Sunday was a huge success; I don’t think I’ve ever seen so much loose paper in my life. There is no doubt that each student who attended is much better prepared for exam week than before. This program, like so many other offerings, is only as good as the student allows it to be. No one wants to give up their Sunday afternoon to do work, but in their hearts they know it is the right thing to do. When I told my house that I wanted all first-year students to attend, there was great grumbling and gnashing of teeth. I then asked for a show of hands of those who would like their grades to be higher. Predictably, every hand in the room went up. I explained that improvement of any kind will not be realized by doing the same thing you have always done. I reasoned with them that their desire to raise their grades could be aided by using the individuals we have on campus who specialize in academic support; all they had to contribute was time and effort. Everyone had a better attitude after our little discussion, or at least they knew they would not win so they gave up.

Our new Servant Leadership Program is flourishing under the guidance of the head of Summerbell House/director of servant leadership. The focus of this year’s program is “service with your hands.” Last year, Darlington sponsored a Habitat for Humanity house, and all service efforts were directed toward raising the \$50,000 required to build a home in Rome for a family in need. This year, the vision shifted from raising money to physically doing the work. Our director of servant leadership has done an excellent job of keeping the vision ever present before us, and is vigilant in communicating internally with our students and externally with our community to bring the two together for good work. We expect each student to fulfill a 15-hour service requirement each year. The second line of our motto, “Service beyond Self,” speaks to how important this program is to us. This is a mission-driven activity that is at the core of who each of us must be as citizens of Darlington. At the start of last week, the students had logged 4,294 hours total. That is an average of 9.2 hours per student; on average we are right on track for our 15-hour challenge. On a personal level, I have found the students’ eagerness to serve others

in our community refreshing. It builds great pride in our school and our mission to experience this great work done by your children.

As the trimester comes to an end, we will be working to try and minimize any social turmoil in each child’s life. Teenage minds are much more susceptible to the allure of social activities and events than academic affairs. Students have to consciously make the choice to study; our hope is to stabilize as much of their social life as we can for the next two weeks. Hopefully, this will make it easier for them to choose studying during study hall instead of spending their valuable energy on non-academic distractions. You can help with this by attempting to do the same from home. Continue your messages of encouragement and love to your child. The factor that has the largest stabilizing influence in your child’s life is the message of your consistent and unfailing love for them. Continue this, and it will make a huge impact on what we are trying to accomplish this week and beyond.

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**“I have found the students’ eagerness to serve others in our community refreshing. It builds great pride in our school and our mission to experience this great work done by your children.”**

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This trimester’s exams will be different from the first because of the amount of material and the extended amount of time covered this trimester. Most exams are comprehensive, holding students accountable for all material covered from the beginning of the year. So in relation to last trimester’s exams, this has the potential to be double the amount of material. This can be intimidating to students unaccustomed to these types of exams. That is one of the main reasons we start preparing early and each teacher ensures that they are available to students during the weeks leading up to the exams. With the long Christmas Break and Winter Break, this trimester is longer than any other. This compounds the complexity of studying for this exam due to the extended amount of time away from school in the middle of the trimester. Many students cite how this trimester is difficult to study for due to the length and fragmented nature of the school calendar. Even though these are different challenges, the method of dealing with and overcoming them is the same – studying.

This coming weekend will be closed for weekend leaves unless there is a special circumstance that needs to be accommodated. It is very important that the students have time to settle down and study. We

will be focused on allowing time for study, rest and exercise. One of the biggest mistakes that I have seen students make over the years is not taking care of their sleep cycles and their nutrition during exam week. We will cover this with the students this week, and will be relying on some systems over exam week to help them with these choices.

This Friday is the deadline for contracts that were released on the original mailing date. If you have not received your contract by now, I hope you have contacted the Admission Office. If there will be a delay in the receipt of your contract and/or deposit, please let us know so that we may plan accordingly.

We will begin collecting forms and permission for Spring Break travel arrangements this week. Please contact your head of house as soon as possible with your child's plans. If your child is not returning home, we still need your permission as well as that of the host adult in charge at their destination.

I want to take one more opportunity to thank you for your communication and partnership with us. The residential team is constantly searching

for ways to serve you better. We know you expect a great education and personal care for your child, but we still want to do more. We want to be the best at those things that are most important to you. Toward the latter part of the year I will ask for your feedback on the things that specifically you need from us – things that you are receiving currently and things you wish you did. In the spirit of our mission and with our children's futures on the line, we should expect no less from each other.

Continue your loving guidance to your child. They see the budding trees and can feel the end of the year approaching. Spring is a beautiful time at Darlington. I look forward to experiencing it with them and sharing it with you. Please let me or your head of house know how we may help.

Yours,

**James Milford**

*Director of Residential Life*

- Exams and leave plans
- Reconnecting with your child at home
- Understanding the senior mindset

It is always nice to finally start exams. There is a lot of stress and work leading up to this week, and even though exams are hard, there is a certain sense of release when they finally arrive. Your children have been working very hard over the past few weeks and especially this weekend to prepare. Exam week began this morning with the science exam. There was also an exam this afternoon. Tuesday and Wednesday follow the same schedule. On Thursday, there will be only one exam remaining, the world language exam. Most students will complete this exam by 11 a.m., and will then be able to leave for their Spring Break. The school and houses will remain open through Friday afternoon for any students needing to take an exam due to illness during the week or for those who were unable to secure transportation on Thursday. The houses will officially close at 2 p.m. on Friday.

The houses will reopen on March 24 at 2 p.m., ready to receive your children as they return to begin the third trimester. Please have your child back to school before 8 p.m., if possible. This allows them to be off the road before it gets too late and to reconnect with their friends before the academic day arrives.

This break will be the last extended break of the school year. I have spoken with you in previous letters about the importance of preparing for when your child returns home. After the extended amount of time living at Darlington and the emotional and physical changes that your child has undergone here, there will be potential for expectation differences between you and him or her. As was suggested during previous breaks, take some time now over the phone or when they arrive home to talk about and come to a compromise on what the 10 days should look and feel like. Your child is coming to you with plans of what they anticipate from the break, and you have your own expectations. Rarely are the two identical. This difference in expectations is the source of a great deal of turmoil if you do not address it early. So set aside some time in the next few days to ask what they want to do. Your child will typically be more open to a compromise if you allow him or her to suggest the first activities rather than you listing what they are going to do before they have a chance for input.

Everyone will have different plans over the break, but I encourage you to force some meaningful time with your child. Coming from the environment he or she is currently in, your child may need a few days to readjust to being home. However, your time and attention is what he or she needs the most. There is a clear and strong relationship between how adolescents view their relationship

with their parents and their own feelings of self worth, their ability to make positive decisions and their general achievement. If you do not have anything planned over the break, or even if you do, your homework assignment is to purposefully strengthen the bond between you and your child. Your child has many stories that he or she would probably love to tell you if you will listen without being judgmental. Likewise, your child has many questions to ask if he or she thinks it is safe to do so. In a teen's journey to becoming an adult, he or she will make poor choices; no one will be able to stop that. However, it is important that every young person is guided and given expectations to keep him or her safe and healthy. There is no one that your child needs approval from more than you. Make sure your child knows this upon his return to us on the March 24, and he or she will have a firm start on the 10-week stretch to the end of school and beyond.

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**“In a teen’s journey to becoming an adult, he or she will make poor choices; no one will be able to stop that. However, it is important that every young person is guided and given expectations to keep him or her safe and healthy.”**

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On Wednesday, we welcomed Bob Anastas, founder and former executive director of Students Against Driving Drunk (SADD) to Darlington. He spoke to a joint assembly of our Middle and Upper School students and faculty. He connected very well with the students; his love for the kids and passion for saving lives was vividly evident. He talked about having the right attitude about life and how making the correct choices could open doors of opportunity that will not open otherwise. He spoke to your children directly and told them how lucky they were to be living and learning in an environment that did not have metal detectors and barbed wire around the school. He pleaded with them not to squander the blessings that they have been given by taking drugs and alcohol into their bodies because they weaken you. He spoke directly to the seniors with specific examples of choices they would be faced with in the near future, and shared with them the right path, the safe path, the best path. I encourage you to ask your children about his talk and what it meant to them. It may take some digging, but it is a subject that you need to discuss together. This is an easy way to initiate the conversation about alcohol and drug use and the decisions surrounding them.

Tuesday was historic for Darlington as the school

kicked off its Second Century Campaign. The Advancement Office staff and countless numbers of alumni and volunteers have been working feverishly for over a year to lay the groundwork for a campaign that will further establish Darlington in its proper place as an educational institution of excellence that has stood proudly for over 100 years. We have raised \$51 million of our \$90 million goal, and together we will be able to enjoy new programs and facilities that will be provided through the generosity of the Darlington Community.

Senior parents, in just over two months your child will be leaving us for a new challenge and a new opportunity. As your child enters his or her last trimester at Darlington, there will be great excitement in his or her heart about the ending of high school. As Commencement approaches, there will also be an awakening to the relationships and nuances that they will be leaving at Darlington. Your child experienced this to a certain degree when he or she became a boarding student and left home and friends for the first time. Comfort came in knowing that they could come home, family and friends would still be there, and there would be relatively little change. They leave Darlington knowing that it will never be the same. They leave knowing that when they return they may

see familiar faculty faces, but much of what they have experienced over their time at Darlington will be gone. This is tough for many students, and each will handle it in his or her own way.

I am often asked by my seniors if I am sad at graduation. I tell them that we will always be together; they will never be so far away that they cannot reach back and find us. I tell them that their time as a student is complete; now they must go and make me and Darlington proud. I only ask that they remember us, because we will never forget them. Faces and names will always change at Darlington. What I impress on them is that they are now a part of the Darlington that never fades; they are now a part of a brother and sisterhood that they will never lose and that will never die.

Thank you all for your continued support through this year. Your kind words, thoughtful feedback and encouragement are greatly appreciated, as always. Enjoy your children while they are home.

Yours,

**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*

- **Expectations for the rest of the year**
- **Keep communication strong between you and the school.**
- **Returning and reconnecting to school and the schedule**
- **Hints of homesickness**

I hope everyone had a wonderful Spring Break. We are very proud of how the students performed during exam week. They stayed on task and endured the week of seemingly endless studying very well. There were a handful of students who did not go home for the break, but for most of you it was hopefully a wonderful time with your child at home. Spring Break at Darlington was typical of Georgia weather in March – a large thunderstorm followed by beautiful weather. After a week of nice weather, your child is coming back to a cold campus with temperatures dipping below freezing at night. We will see a gradual warming in the next month, and by the time we reach mid-April, we should be through with much of the chilly weather and enjoying the colors, smells and warmth of springtime at Darlington.

As your child is settling back into classes this week, he or she will be starting the shortest trimester of the year and the longest stretch without a break that we have had. The effects of the long stretch will be balanced by the increased number of activities and possibilities around campus that come with the warming of the weather. As we dive into the first week of the trimester, we are able to look at the first and second trimester grades and know what our third trimester grade will need to be in order to attain our desired grade for a class. Your child's final grade in a class will be the average of the three trimester averages. By this time in the year, there should be no reason that any student is unclear about what is expected of him or her in a class. There may be some large projects in the last trimester that tie together all of the material from the year; the wise student will not wait until the last minute to begin a project like this. There is also the natural tendency for the material to accelerate or become more complex in the last trimester. The reviewing of prerequisite skills and knowledge has long since passed, and each class is well into the substance of the material. Everything the students are learning is new material, and, with no extended breaks to split the material up, it will all come steady and fast in this trimester. If you sense that your child is getting behind in a class, please let the teacher, advisor or head of house know immediately.

We were extremely pleased to receive over 50 applications for the 12 head prefect positions for next year. We narrowed the applicants to 30, and each was given application material to complete over the break. The head prefect position is the highest appointed position in the school, and has a broad but unique job description. They

automatically receive a seat in the House Senate, the head governing organization of the student body, and are the acting leaders of their respective houses. Each house has a resident and day head prefect, and these two students work together with the head of house and other house leaders to care for, cheer on and support all the student members in the house. We select the students who embody the ideals of Darlington, and who have a natural ability to connect with and mobilize their house members to connect with each other and move to action. This is not simply a process to find the best students; it is a process to find the right students for the specific needs of each house for the next year. These positions typically are assigned to upperclassmen, but are not restricted to seniors. In addition to 10 sitting head prefects this year, we have two junior head prefects in the Thornwood and Cooper Houses. After a review of the applications and interviews, we will announce the new head prefects in late March or early April. Immediately following this announcement, we will quickly move to fill the other resident house positions and begin elections for the other leadership organizations on campus.

If you are planning on attending graduation activities in May and are planning on staying in a hotel in Rome, you should already have your reservations. If you have relatives or family friends who may be coming as well, please instruct them to reserve their rooms. We have moved this year's Commencement ceremony for several reasons, but one of them was to avoid a weekend that was very active for the city of Rome.

Please continue to encourage your child to get involved and stay active in the school. There may be some hints of homesickness as your child returns to school after the break. Homesickness is typically a result of a mixture of events over the break at home and the current emotional state of a student. There are students whom we expect to have a little trouble readjusting back to Darlington. However, these are few, and we anticipate the feelings to quickly subside. We will be working this week and weekend to get them back into the routine and keeping a positive outlook. I will have a meeting with the resident students on Wednesday night for some residential matters and fun; I have a surprise that I hope they will enjoy.

Thank you, as always, for your steady support of the school and your loving support of your child. Your sustaining love is felt by your child; when he or she faces trials at the school, your love provides the power and confidence necessary to keep him or her going and succeed. I hope you had a wonderful time with your child while he or she was home. We are glad to have them back with us, and we look forward to the rest of the year together.

Yours,

**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*

- **Staying active**
- **Busyness of springtime**
- **Make sure you are letting your school know what is going well and what is not.**
- **Holding everyone accountable and finishing strong**

It was great to have everyone back this past week. The week contained only four days of classes, so the students enjoyed easing back into academics with a short week. On Wednesday night, we had a surprise egg hunt for the kids. We ended our resident meeting with about 20 minutes of daylight left, so the houses competed with each other to find the most eggs out of the 600 that were hidden. We saw a competitive side to some of the students we hardly ever see. They had a lot of fun, and Summerbell House was the victor with 120.5 eggs. I'm not sure where the other half of that last egg is, but I'm sure it will turn up.

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**“Continue to encourage your child to keep working hard and not try to ease out of the rest of the school year. The last months of school can lull anyone into a false sense of comfort.”**

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This past weekend brought warm weather with some rain. There was some time to get outside and enjoy the sun on Saturday, and the plants enjoyed some good rain that night. In addition to the normal weekend activities, we attended an Atlanta Braves game and saw the Rome Symphony perform a family concert. Next weekend, we will play some outdoor games and take a trip to one of the larger malls in Atlanta since many are getting ready for Prom. There will also be an Art History class trip to New York and a band trip to Atlanta this weekend.

If your child is involved in one of the spring sports, you may get calls home from a tired child. The spring athletic season is very demanding, and the time on the road to away games can prove challenging to the students as they try to get all of their homework completed. The coaches are very mindful of each student's need to study. If you feel that your child is not getting the amount of time studying that they need and they are citing their sport as the reason, please contact the coach and let them know. Your child will not be the only one doing homework on the bus. And don't believe it when they say, “No one does homework at away

games.” The fact is, our best students make sure that they are getting their work done – no matter what.

At Darlington voices are important, a student's voice, a teacher's voice and a parent's voice. As a resident parent, you don't have the ability to drop by campus when you would like to share something that is on your mind, so there is an extra hurdle that you have to cross over. One of the functions of this letter is to shrink that distance and make sure that you are able to feel what is going on at the school, and not simply know. Our primary method of sending information to you is the announcements. If you do not already check them periodically, I would highly suggest you doing so at least on a weekly basis. There are many one-day announcements about daily meetings, but there are also many announcements about programs and events at the school that will give you a better understanding of what happens at Darlington on a weekly basis. One of the announcements currently running is for the Parents' Choice Award. This announcement from the Parents Association is specific to all parents, so I wanted to make sure it was reaching you. The announcement reads as follows:

Attention Parents: The Parents Association recognizes one teacher each year who has made significant contributions in the classroom as chosen by parents. Nominations are being accepted until May 5. Parents wishing to nominate a teacher should send a short paragraph to the Parents Association describing why your nominee deserves to be chosen for this award. The selected teacher will receive a monetary award.

If you feel led to nominate a teacher that has made an impact in your son or daughter's life at the school, please do so. Your voice is important, and we need and want your input.

Any time there are changes in athletic seasons, grading periods and long-running activities, there are some students who, because of schedule or participation differences, get closer or further away from friends. As these schedules and friendships naturally change, it may cause some stress in a student who may feel left behind or left out. This is an effect that we see mainly with the younger students as they are not used to the ebbs and flows of the year, and they are still experiencing the new activities at Darlington. This is only one of the many things that affect the way a teenager feels and experiences his or her life. We must always remember that even though they believe they are ready for any situation, they are not. They are growing, developing and learning with each step. I believe that the Darlington education is a process with no end, an outlook on life that views learning as a continual process of growth and expansion. I believe we will never be able to end teenage angst or the drama that is created when they get together. What we can do is try to understand how to love and prepare them better for what is coming and for the paths that they will one day forge.

Continue to encourage your child to keep working hard and not try to ease out of the rest of the school year. The last months of school can lull anyone into a false sense of comfort. We are watching carefully for students who may want to coast until the end of the year. Be mindful of comments or actions that may imply that they want to lessen their effort in this last trimester. These last two months are just as important as any other time of the year; we all must continue working hard.

Seniors are starting to wind down, as they can almost taste the end of their high school career. It can be infectious to the other students, so we are keeping steady with holding all students

accountable while allowing seniors a measure of privilege that they have deserved.

Thank you for your support and communication with us. We will continually work to fulfill your expectations for your child's care and education. We appreciate the partnership we enjoy together with you.

Yours,

**James Milford**

*Director of Residential Life*

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Week

- A quick grade checkup
- Looking at classes for next year
- End-of-the-year celebrations and ceremonies

I've been very pleased this past week with our students' dedication to continue working hard and pay attention to academic detail. In this last trimester, it is extremely important that each student not let poor performance at the end of the year taint a year full of hard work and improvement. This is the last week of the first grading period of the trimester. As always, we are very interested in how each student is doing at the end of the grading period. The nature of our online gradebook is real time, thus always adjusting. At any given time, there are homework assignments, quizzes or tests in the process of being graded that are not yet reflected in the gradebook. As we move through the year, we account for this float as we work with each student. However, we pay special attention to the gradebook at the end of the grading period to view the most accurate snapshot of each student's true grade. The grading period officially ends on Monday, so by late morning your child's up-to-date grades should be reflected in the gradebook.

Another important reason for the students to be working hard is the pre-registration process that will happen later this week. On Thursday morning during advisee meetings, your son or daughter will receive his or her pre-registration sheet. This sheet contains the student's permanent academic record and an area for each teacher to enter and approve the appropriate courses for next year. Teachers will take into account students' past courses, their academic performance in current courses, and their desires and needs for next year's placement. You should plan on talking these selections over with your child on Thursday night. The forms are to be returned to each student's adviser on Friday morning so that the adviser can check and enter their choices into our system. If you have questions about a requirement, course selection or the reason your son or daughter received a particular class, you should contact the adviser or the teacher of the subject in question. For example, if your son was placed into a math honors course for next

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**“In this last trimester, it is extremely important that each student not let poor performance at the end of the year taint a year full of hard work and improvement.”**

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year and you have a question about the placement, you should direct the initial question to your son's current math teacher. Each department has guidelines for placement in honor or AP classes, and your child's teachers will be able to explain those in detail to you. Once the courses are entered by the advisers, each student's class selections will be examined by the Academic Office and any necessary adjustments will be made. Your child's pre-registration choices will be made available to you online no later than Monday, May 12.

This time of the year is very heavy with activities and trips. The Art History and Musical Theater classes returned yesterday from a field trip to New York. I was once again amazed by the musical talents of our students during a set of performances in the Morris Chapel this past Wednesday. Athletic teams are still playing multiple games and matches each week. Over the weekend, we took a large trip to Atlanta to visit an international market and the Mall of Georgia. For those who did not want to take that trip, there was also an opportunity for paintball in the drizzling rain. On Sunday, we were able to break out many of our springtime toys and enjoy a day outside on The Quad. There were more clouds than I would have liked, but the kids had great day of basketball, a huge inflatable slip and slide, and a picnic dinner outside while spending time with one another on campus.

With Prom just around the corner, I need to share some things with you that you may need to be doing to prepare for the night. Darlington's Prom is a junior/senior event. Any junior or senior may go, but for a sophomore or freshman to attend, he or she must be escorted by a junior or senior. The trend in the past has been for many students to either go as a group to a Rome family's home for dinner before the dance or go to dinner in town. We strongly discourage going out of town for dinner. The kickoff to Prom night is the Senior Lead Out, during which all seniors are introduced in front of the parents and other students. It is a wonderful tradition, but every year there are those who miss Lead Out or barely make it because they were not able to finish dinner in time and had too far to drive. There are also disturbing national statistics of increased automobile accidents on Prom nights. For these and many other reasons, we stress the importance of proper and smart planning for this special event. In the past, we have had an after party in one of the houses on campus for those who simply want to stay on campus and not go elsewhere for the night. As with any other weekend leave, your head of house will need your approval for any overnight leaves for Prom night. For students who are not attending Prom, the weekend will contain all the normal activities and some special activities just for them.

If you have not seen the news release earlier this week or have not heard from your child, our dean of students has accepted a position as upper school head at a prestigious day school in Missouri. He has been an excellent leader and partner with

me and the heads of house as we have worked to consistently improve the residential community at Darlington. With his departure, I will absorb oversight of his office and responsibilities while remaining dedicated to continuing the good work being done in the residential population and in the Student Life Office. With this new responsibility, I will be stepping down as head of Cooper House and will step out of the dorm to live in one of the homes by Silver Lake with my wife and our three boys. The most difficult conversations surrounding this decision were with the girls in my house. They have become part of my family, as I have become a part of theirs. I knew things would be OK when one of them looked at the others in the small group and said, "Guys, we just have to pull together for Cooper

House." Much of the personality and functioning of the houses are attributable to the head of house, but the heart and soul of each house are contained in these wonderful young leaders who truly care about this community and this school.

Thank you for your kind words of encouragement and partnership that you have shown us throughout the year. Please let us know how we can assist you if you need anything.

Yours,

**James Milford**

*Director of Residential Life*

- Leadership position transfer of power
- Expectations for Prom night
- It's never too late to communicate academic concerns.

As is typical of northwest Georgia, after two weeks of beautiful weather I woke up this morning to walk out to temperatures in the low 40s. I hope it does not dip down below freezing because the azaleas all over campus are flowering, and it would be a shame to cut their white, pink and crimson red blooming short. I have no control over the weather, but I did sit out many of my ferns this past week and jokingly said that there would probably be a freeze in about a week in response to my confidence in the warm weather. I was right, and I was also carrying all of the ferns back inside for a few days over the weekend. Thankfully, the temperatures have not slowed the kids down at all. This will probably be the last chance to wear any cold weather clothes this year, so everyone will be wearing their winter best for a few days. Forecasts do call for a gradual warming trend to begin around Tuesday, so we should be in good shape for the Prom.

Head prefects for next year's houses have been announced; you can check the daily announcement page for these outcomes. These choices are very difficult for the heads of house because of the high caliber of all candidates. We will open up the three additional leadership positions in each house during this next week. The three areas of leadership these positions represent are academic, house manager and international. The academic leader works with the house staff, students and the Learning Center to ensure that the house is following best practices during study hall and that the students needing and requesting academic help are supported. The house manager is in charge of the physical running and upkeep of the house, making sure the house pantry is stocked and partnering with the head prefect in managing inter-house social activities like birthday parties and house challenges. The international position is a new role created for next year. Under the guidance of the head of Neville House/director of international student programs, a renewed scope of support will be directed toward international students in the residential community. These house leaders will add yet another level of support for those students who are so very far from home.

We are also entering the election phase of leadership selection. The first three leadership bodies that the students will be running for are Honor Council, House Senate and Discipline Committee. Each one of these bodies has specific bylaws determining its membership. However, any student may submit his or her name for the vote. Voting is restricted by class; therefore, only juniors vote for junior representation, etc. These elections will flow in one-week cycles, so check the daily announcements for updates on the current

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**“By nature, we are all very trusting individuals, but it is important that a host mom or dad know how you would expect them to respond to situations that may arise with your own child.”**

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running election and the new representatives. There are approximately 90 non-club-related leadership positions at the school, so we encourage all students to find a group or area they are interested in and seek a way to plug into it and grow. In the same breath, we also tell them that leadership is not about the position, it is about action. Whether or not they are successful in attaining the position, true leadership rests in the hands of those who are making things happen. In this philosophy of leadership, we strive to teach service beyond self, even if a position is not attained.

When these elections reach their end, we will open up the four student committees. These committees are open admission to any who wish to join. Twelve individuals from these committees will be selected to be liaisons to represent and lead in the committee's mission. The four student committees at Darlington represent admissions, servant leadership, spiritual life and social activities. These committees are designed to provide opportunities for all students to find a way to participate in the Tiger Way.

Prom is always an extremely exciting time for the students, and we try to do what we can to make it both enjoyable and safe. In partnering with parent organizations and in collaboration with peer schools, we have developed guidelines to help our students remain safe and avoid the sorts of accidents that happen on Prom nights around the country. There are three specific behaviors that we require of our resident students who attend Prom and take an overnight leave afterward.

The first is curfew; we insist that all of our students arrive at their final destinations for the evening by midnight. There is a state curfew that will require most of them to be off the roads anyway; the number of impaired drivers on the road increases as it gets later. In light of this curfew, we ask that you help make sure that your students will not be driving that late. If this is impossible for some reason, you should arrange for a more experienced driver to get your students to their destination if it is an extended distance from the school.

The second area of concern we find ourselves watching out for is hotel gatherings. All residential students must have an adult host or parent that

he or she stays with in order to be granted any overnight leave. The general rule we follow is that no student will be granted permission to stay in a hotel overnight with anyone other than his or her parents. This policy is designed to protect the student and the parent from being overrun with a large group of teenagers wanting to stay in a setting where supervision is difficult, if not impossible.

The third area of concern is closely related to the second and is focused on supervision and communication. No different than what we expect on any other weekend leave, we require that you contact the host parents of the home where your child plans to spend the night out. It is important that you confirm with your student's hosts that they will be in the home and willing to take responsibility for enforcing your expectations for your child. By nature, we are all very trusting individuals, but it is important that a host mom or dad know how you would expect them to respond to situations that may arise with your own child.

All of these guidelines are intended to provide your children with the opportunities to make good and responsible choices, and to assist you in reinforcing the expectations that you have for a night like Prom night. Each year when we share these guidelines with our students, we do our best to explain that their safety is our main concern, and for this we are unapologetic.

We anticipate that all who attend will have an excellent night. Many of us will also be there enjoying the time and excitement right along with the students. Many parents come to the Senior Lead

Out portion of Prom to take pictures and see their child being announced. If you are coming, please arrive no later than 7:30 p.m. The main gate will close around 7 p.m., and there will be a shuttle you can ride over from the Huffman Center. The Prom is held under a tent about 200 yards past the main Darlington entrance gate. It is a few minutes' walk from the Huffman parking lot to the Prom site if you do not wish to wait on the shuttle.

The online gradebook should be up-to-date with all assignments and comments. Please take time to review and let your child's head of house or adviser know if you see any trends we may not currently be addressing. If you see something in a particular class that seems odd, please contact that teacher directly. There are only five weeks until graduation and six until underclassmen exams. It is important to communicate well in the last weeks to ensure a strong finish. We will continue to hold students accountable for poor performance, while never neglecting to take the time to recognize their excellent behavior.

Thank you again for your words of encouragement to the residential staff and for your partnership in demonstrating and supporting positive decision making with your children. Please contact me or your head of house if you have any concerns or questions.

Yours,

**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*

32

Week

- **Staying supportive as the end of the year approaches**
- **Learning how to deal with seniors and their emotions**
- **Summer plans**

It is hard to believe that graduation is less than one month away. The weather was beautiful last week, and the campus is in full bloom. Most athletic teams are ending their seasons with a flurry of matches and games that keep the students very busy. The warmth gives us a great opportunity for spring cleaning in the houses as the students say goodbye to their winter clothes. The end of the year is close, and the kids can definitely feel it. Underclassmen are doing their best to keep on task, as seniors are trying to take in every last bit of Darlington. In the next few weeks, many of the students will be formulating summer visits with friends from school or figuring out what exactly they will be doing for the summer. This week will be a very full one for seniors. They will leave today for an overnight retreat and close the week with Prom.

Recall that this is a very difficult time for many seniors as they feel the fulfillment of graduation approaching, while at the same time feel the comfort of Darlington leaving them. It is a transition that they have known about, but it is difficult for all to face. Be aware of your senior child's struggles in this area, and help them work through this when the time comes for them to deal with it. I know several of my students have been going through this over the past weeks. It may hit some kids all at once on graduation day, though. It is hard to tell when the feelings will overtake them. The important thing is to remain supportive and emotionally available to your child.

Likewise, all underclassmen returning home for the summer break will go through this to a certain degree. The knowledge that they are returning to Darlington will give some comfort, because they will have the added stability of knowing what is coming at the end of summer. In the last few weeks of the year, I'll prepare you for the switching behavior back to home life and what you may be dealing with the first few weeks of summer. If you are able to plan for it, I would suggest spending a good amount of time with your child the first few days he or she returns home. Your student will want to see friends and should, but setting an expectation for family time early will bring great dividends later in the summer. In the meantime, most of the students are simply excited to have summer approaching and to know that they have found success at Darlington.

Honor Council and Discipline Committee elections have taken place, and House Senate elections will be this week. Now that the house leadership positions have been filled, the members

of the Summerbell and Cooper Houses will have a more accurate view of the upper houses to make their decision of where to move to next year. If your child is having a tough time with the decision, please let his or her head of house know. When we discuss it with the students, we explain that they are looking for the best house for them. We try to explain that they should consider the leaders, the head of house, their friends who are in the upper houses, house reputation or spirit, and their friends who may be moving up when making their decision as to which house will support and challenge them best.

Senior parents, you should have received an e-mail last week outlining all of the senior events. If you have any questions about these, please let us know. It is tradition at Darlington for all residents to stay in their houses the night before they graduate. We have some activities with the graduating seniors in the house that night, and they also need to be up early for pictures the following morning. As you make your arrangements, please plan on your child spending his or her last night in the houses on Friday, May 16.

The last exam for underclassmen will be held on Friday, May 30, at 8 a.m. Please do not make travel arrangements that will interfere with this exam. Departure at the end of the year is not something to be rushed, so please make pickup and flight arrangements that will accommodate this morning exam and give your child time to move out of their room for the summer. Please contact your head of house if you have any questions about summer storage or move out. The houses will close Saturday, May 31, at 2 p.m.

Thank you all for a wonderful year at Darlington. Your support and hard work have been a vital part of your child's success this year. Continue to encourage him or her to keep working hard and finish strong. Your words of encouragement and consistent love hold more power than you know.

Yours,

**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*

- **End-of-the-year activities**
- **As final exams approach, stress comes with them.**

The beautiful weather continues at Darlington as graduation and the end of the year draw ever closer. Prom was an amazing event, as always. This year's theme was "Breakfast at Tiffany's," and the decorations were complete with jewelry display cases, a custom-made cable suspension bridge replica and landscaping that turned a humble field into a marvelous place to make memories. The students enjoyed dressing up and having a night of fun and celebration.

There will be three days this week that our seniors are assisting in the final touches at the new Boys & Girls Club of Rome, the construction of which is nearing completion about a mile from our campus. Through the Servant Leadership Program, our students have been working in the current Boys & Girls Club. With the new facility and its convenient location, we are looking forward to working closely with this organization for many years to come. On our Web site, you will find pictures of some of your children working with the kids at the Club. It is truly inspiring to see your children giving of themselves and making a difference in the lives of others who truly need it.

The week of May 12 will be senior exam week. Seniors may exempt their exams if their trimester grades are B, B, A, respectively, per class. Many seniors will exempt their exams, and there are some policies you need to be aware of in anticipation of this. If a senior does not exempt a specific subject's exam, he or she will be required to be in the house the night before to prepare for that exam. If a senior does exempt an exam, he or she is allowed to take an extended leave, similar to a weekend leave, on the day before the exam. Therefore, if a senior would like to come home for a night or visit a senior friend overnight, we will follow the same leave procedures we normally do for an overnight leave. We require parental and host acknowledgement and permission. In the past, seniors who live within driving distance from home will typically pack up some of their room during the week and take a load home. Even if a student returns home for part of the week, he or she must return for the required senior events during the week.

After Commencement on May 17, underclassmen will continue with one week of classes followed by an exam week. Darlington observes the Memorial Day holiday, but it does complicate exam preparation. Our policy of having a closed weekend will still be in effect for this weekend before exams. If you are planning a Memorial Day family event and would like your son or daughter there, please let your head of house know and we will work out the details. Our greatest concern is that

each student receives the proper rest and academic preparation over this long weekend.

Exams will begin Tuesday morning and run through Friday morning. All students will have their final exam the morning of Friday, May 30. The houses will remain open until Saturday, May 31, 2 p.m. All students are expected to move out of their rooms and either store their belongings in storage provided on campus or take it home. There are camps throughout the summer that utilize the houses, so we must move out completely.

As the seniors are busy working on their senior project and finalizing their high school career, we are busy at work preparing the leaders of Darlington's future for next year. The Honor Council and Discipline Committee are in the final stages of their officer selection, and the House Senate will vote for their officers this week. "Y" Cabinet elections will be held at the end of this week, and the senior class president will soon follow. These leaders will be meeting over the next month to cast visions for what next year could be and what they want it to be. I will work with each group to push them not only to set a moral and ethical standard for the school, but also to continue the proactive leadership movement to bring Darlington to greater heights next year. We teach that the secret to greatness is not typically a single event, but the culmination of small, seemingly insignificant acts that work together to create extraordinary results from even the simplest servants who serve beyond themselves.

Thank you all for your words of encouragement and feedback on the challenges you and your son or daughter are facing. Your guidance with your child is our best resource in our partnership together. Please enjoy the rest of the year; it will pass by very quickly.

Yours,

**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*

- **Staying focused and having fun**
- **Last push for grades as final exams approach**
- **Familiarize yourself with end-of-the-year and move-out procedures.**

It is said that, “March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb.” That may be true for weather in the month of March, but at Darlington the month of May is this way in terms of activities. We are only five days into the month, and we have been bursting with activity each day. Friday was an abbreviated class day that flowed into our springtime festival we call Tigerfest. Tigerfest, sponsored by the House Senate, is a wonderful spring tradition at Darlington. The weather was beautiful for the event; it was sunny and in the mid 70s. We grilled BBQ chicken and burgers, topping it off with lemonade to drink. We also brought in inflatable games for the afternoon. One was a boxing ring with huge gloves, one was a mechanical surf board, and another was amusement park type bumper cars. There were student musicians and bands playing all day, and we all enjoyed funnel cakes and snow cones from local vendors. The night ended with an underclassmen only dance/social, which was of course raided by seniors wielding super soakers and water balloons.

Saturday started as a rainy day on campus, but by early afternoon the sun broke through the clouds and it remained a cool but beautiful day. The rain caused us to push our volleyball tournament back one day. So yesterday, around 50 kids had a great time competing on the volleyball sand courts. There were also two musical performances yesterday and, once again, the distinction of our fine arts students amazed us all. The first concert was given by the Concert Choir and Darlington Festival Singers. This was followed, at a separate event, by an instrumental performance. Our students’ talents absolutely shone. Even though I have not spent a great deal of time performing musically, I appreciate the power of music, and I am never moved so much as when I sit and experience a performance by our wonderfully talented musicians and vocalists.

This week will begin Advanced Placement (AP) exams for many of our students. The exams will run two per day for the next two weeks. Seniors not in AP classes will have their last classes this week and an exam week beginning May 12. If a senior has at least an 80 average in the first trimester and second trimester and ends this trimester with a 90 or better, he or she may exempt the final exam for the class. Needless to say, this is a great incentive for many of the seniors to keep working hard until the end.

Today is the end of another grading period, so grades will be up to date by late morning. AP classes are in exams, so the current grade will not change due to class work. Seniors who are not in an AP

class may see some changes in their current class grade, and may be subject to an exam depending on that final average in the class. Underclassmen are entering their final grading period for the year. There are three weeks of classes remaining, and an exam week the final week in May.

Graduation is two very short weeks away, and several of the seniors are starting to pack and ship items home already. It is a good thing that the yearbooks were distributed today. It will give these seniors plenty of time to sign their friends’ Jabberwock before their journey takes them away from Darlington.

I need to share and remind you of a few things. Senior parents, your child should plan to stay in the house the night before Commencement. Underclassmen parents, the last exam will take place on May 30; that Friday will be last day of school and the day that your child will want to leave. Please make flight and travel arrangements that will have them leaving campus no earlier than 11 a.m. If they are required to leave any earlier, it will place unnecessary pressure on them during the exam. Students typically do poorly on this last exam for various reasons. It would be a shame if time pressure from travel arrangements contributed to a poor exam grade. I shared shipping procedures with your children this last week. If you need something shipped home, we can help with that process and facilitate pickup at our campus post office.

As we enter the last month of school together and I look back on the year, I can’t help but be happy about what we have accomplished together. There is no doubt much left to be done, but your tireless support and volunteerism has been inspirational and appreciated. This month will speed up on campus before it slows down and will pass faster than you think.

Please let us know if we can do anything to help.

Yours,

**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*

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Week

- **Preparing for your child to return for the summer**
- **The effects of graduation and senior departure on the mood of the school**
- **What to do with all the “stuff” your child has accumulated over the year**

As I walked the campus yesterday on a very windy Sunday, it struck me that this will be my last letter to our graduating parents. The stage has been built facing the chapel lawn, and, in a few days, 1,800 chairs will be dropped off for their employment Saturday morning. The seniors participated in Commencement rehearsal this past Friday, and enjoyed a picnic on the Zelle Patio and a slide show prepared by one of their own. This week, some seniors will be taking exams to finish up their credits and will begin their final ceremonies on Friday. Seniors, as well as all students, will attend the Honors Day ceremony on Friday afternoon with Baccalaureate later that night. All resident seniors will spend Friday night in the house for the last time, and then report early for their Commencement ceremony the next morning. Commencement at Darlington is truly an experience. The seniors wait on the steps to the Home-on-the-Hill until the bagpiper begins to play. At that point, their cheers say it all – “We made it!”

For underclassmen, two weeks of classes remain before one week of exams. AP exams will continue through the end of this week. Any students who were enrolled in AP classes will have those as free periods for the remainder of the year. The end is near enough that many underclassmen are ready to go now, and their study habits are showing it. We are working hard to keep them focused on finishing strong and not getting caught up in the graduation energy and freedom the seniors are enjoying.

The return home for underclassmen is in 18 short days. I encourage you to progressively increase your communication with your child over the next three weeks. As you do this, it will begin to prepare them for the increased contact with you when they return home. The shock of leaving Darlington for the summer is a tough one for many students because they work all year to become comfortable here and then have to leave. It is the reverse of what happens in August on move-in weekend. The subtle and progressive increase in contact with your child will make this transition home easier. I also encourage you to start talking with him or her about what he or she wants to do over the summer or at least in the first few weeks of the summer. If you are planning a family vacation or just a simple day trip or activity, discuss details about the location, things to do, or work together on planning something special to do while you are there. Engaging your child in a discussion about these things will set his or her mind on something beyond simply going home, and also give you a great topic to explore together and enjoy together later.

I have received a few questions that I believe are not isolated, so I'll address them for all of you. There are storage areas on campus for your child's belongings over the summer. We will begin moving students toward packing and storing their belongings during the weekend leading up to exam week. Each student must check out with his or her head of house and leave his or her room clean and empty of personal belongings. Among other slight changes, we are adjusting two pieces of the registration process for next year in reaction to feedback that we received from you. There were two portions of the summer registration process that continually delayed completion due to scheduling and postal delays. We have contracted with Floyd Medical Center to provide physicals to all Upper School students before they leave for the summer. All underclassman will have the opportunity to receive their yearly physical beginning on the evening of May 19. There will be a small fee for the physical that will be billed to your parent account. We will return these completed physical forms to you with additional registration paperwork in a mailing later in May. If you DO NOT want your son or daughter to have his or her physical performed on campus next week, please e-mail me directly to let me know. Another difficult item for you to receive over the summer is the drug screen. To alleviate this need, we have arranged for all Upper School students to have their drug screens during the first week of classes this August. With these two items taken care of, you should be able to complete your child's online registration sooner and with less time in the clinic or doctor's office over the summer.

Commencement represents the end of one thing and the beginning of another. Our seniors have arrived at a time and place they have worked so many years to attain. At the closing of this week, they will join the ranks of thousands of others who have before them crossed the Darlington stage. They are a part of the family that will never end and a brother and sisterhood that will never fade. This time will be emotionally draining for all seniors. Continue to encourage your child and let him or her know how very proud you are.

Seniors typically move out on graduation day. Their rooms must be clean and empty of personal belongings upon departure. All seniors should take their belongings with them during this move out unless arrangements have been made with their head of house for shipment or storage.

My sincere thanks go out to each one of you for your loving kindness to your children and your support of Darlington. Graduating parents, know that we will never forget you; you will always be considered friends but more importantly – family.

Yours,

**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*

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Week

- Looking forward to next year
- Preparing for the home coming
- Stay in touch over the summer.
- Next year will sneak up on you!

It is hard to believe that nine months ago on a hot August day we were all starting this year at Darlington. It has been a year filled with laughter, fun, heartache, hard work and – most of all – growth. Through the year, we have enjoyed many times together and made many memories. We are all looking forward to a nice summer break and a time to recharge for another year. Friday will be the last exam day on campus for most students, so we are four days from the end of the 2007-08 school year.

There are only a few things I want to give you a heads up on, and then I'll leave you to your preparations for your child arriving home, or at least leaving Darlington. Registration is a two-step process. Within the next week, you will receive your registration paperwork for next year. The forms in the packet must be filled out, signed and returned before the online portion of your registration will be unlocked for you to complete. You have until late July to get all of the paperwork in, so there is plenty of time to get it done. Since your child took advantage of the on-site physical this past week, you should be able to complete most of the paperwork from the comfort of your home.

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**It has been a year filled with laughter, fun, heartache, hard work and – most of all – growth.**

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Keep an eye out for information about move-in weekend and orientation information over the summer. Head prefects and other house leaders are expected to return early for training and house preparation. Head prefects are to arrive Aug. 10 by 6 p.m., and the remaining house leaders are to arrive on Aug. 12 by 6 p.m. All new and returning international students are expected to arrive on Aug. 14. All other students will most likely move in on Aug. 16, unless otherwise instructed. Please be sure to send flight information so that we may arrange for airport shuttle transportation. Send travel arrangements to the transportation coordinator in the Student Life Office, and please add our director of international student programs to the e-mail if you are traveling from an international origin.

I hope that you truly enjoy the summer break with your child, and I look forward to the wonderful stories he or she will share with us upon returning to campus in August. If you have any questions this week or anytime over the summer, please do not hesitate to call your head of house or contact me at the school. All of the heads of house spend some time away from campus over the summer, so allow for a slower response time than you are accustomed to.

I thank you for your feedback, support and trust throughout the year. We will be working this summer to ensure that next year is even better than this one.

Yours,

**James Milford**  
*Director of Residential Life*