



THE LAURENCE LETTER  
SPRING 2023







## HEAD OF SCHOOL

Dear Laurence Community,

It's springtime, and it's hard to believe June is already in sight. Laurence School has truly blossomed this year as we've celebrated a return to normalcy, as well as our anniversary – "70 Years of Making a Difference." As I reflect on Laurence's legacy, what stands out to me most is our founders' commitment to ensuring that the children who walk through our doors feel safe, seen, heard, and respected. When children can learn in this kind of environment, not only do they thrive and achieve, but they can also develop empathy for others. With that sense of empathy at their core, Laurence students become people who work to make the world a better place, creating hope and optimism for our future.

In my role as Head of School, I am honored to shepherd this legacy forward. This year, we have seen the many ways each of us makes a difference in our immediate and larger communities. Students are engaged in service work, both on and off campus. Our parent volunteers are truly "all in," showing up in so many ways to enrich the daily life of our students, deepen their connections with each other, and support Laurence. I can also see the significant impact each member of our faculty, staff, and administration has on the lives of Laurence students. This impact is evidenced by the smiles on our students' faces as they walk onto campus each morning and in the enthusiasm with which they embrace every aspect of their academic and extracurricular pursuits.

Our chess and debate clubs are competing throughout the city, students were back on stage during WinterFest and *High School Musical*, and our Lightning athletes are having an incredible year. In technology classes, our students focus on being responsible digital citizens and learn how to use technology to solve real world problems.

We are also continuing our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion ("DEI") journey, focusing on applying a DEI lens to our curricular programs, celebrations, and events, and expanding on opportunities for students to see their own backgrounds and culture in our curriculum, while expanding their understanding of others. This work has further strengthened our community, and will continue to deepen the sense of belonging and respect amongst every member of the Laurence family.

Seventy years after our founding, Laurence is stronger than ever – learning and evolving, growing our programs, and innovating to ensure that the "Total Child" educational philosophy continues to prepare our students for success in a joyful, engaging, and supportive learning environment. Thank you for your partnership this school year!

Gratefully yours,  
Laurie Wolke

### BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Dear Laurence Community,

We are now well into the second half of the school year. The days are getting longer, and spring is in the air at Laurence. Spring is always a time for growth, especially at Laurence. Students are being academically challenged and socially, athletically, and artistically enriched, and the school is firing on all cylinders.

We are proud to be celebrating Laurence’s 70th year, and we have so much to celebrate and acknowledge, particularly the visionary leadership of the school’s founders, Marvin and Lynn Jacobson, and Laurie Wolke’s inspirational 35 years at the school.

But at Laurence, we are never content to rest on our laurels. The Board and Administration continue to plan for the future, including the next iteration of the school’s Strategic Plan. Now more than ever, we are confident that the future is bright at Laurence. We are always looking ahead, ensuring that the school retains its character, educates the “Total Child” for the 21st Century, and thrives well into the future.

We hope that you have a great remainder of the year, and as always we appreciate your partnership in making this amazing school what it is. Thank you for your continued support and participation in our inclusive, joyful, and supportive community.

Sincerely,  
Michael Lifrak  
Chair, Board of Trustees



### PARENT ASSOCIATION

To Our Laurence Community,

We cannot believe that the end of the 2022-2023 year is near! It was an amazing whirlwind of student performances, parent gatherings, and community activities celebrating Laurence’s 70th year. With grace and kindness, our community came roaring back on campus, excited and eager to participate in all aspects of life at Laurence, and for that, we are so grateful!

This year, we saw the return of many volunteering opportunities for and with students, parents, teachers, and staff. The Parent Association committees and their Chairs organized countless events and activities to support school programs. We welcomed a new lunch program, and developed healthier snack options. We had numerous drives to support the greater community, while educating our children on being strong role models. We celebrated cultural holidays, and learned about traditions, foods, and various perspectives. Leading educational speakers joined us to share their thoughts and findings on learning and parenting in today’s world. We raised funds to keep our classrooms up to date with the latest technology, to advance the development of our teachers, and to improve our campus facilities — all while having fun and strengthening relationships.

Throughout all of this, our community answered every call for help with a smile and asked us what more they could do. As we reflect on this past year, the common theme that continues to appear is pure gratefulness for the generosity of our parent community. We applaud everyone for their commitment to Laurence and its mission. Many times, we have been asked if we have felt overwhelmed with this leadership position within the Parent Association. Simply put, it has been a great honor and joy to work with such positive and considerate people! Thank you all for every minute of time you have spent furthering your children’s growth as students, individuals, and future leaders. We cannot wait for what’s ahead!

Best,  
Sylvia Friedel & Tina Khalatian  
Parent Association Co-Presidents







**DEBATE**

After a magical first season, the Laurence School Debate Team is back for another exciting year of verbal combat! Our 27-student team is in the midst of a great season, researching and debating topics as wide-ranging as the pros and cons of homework, a ban on the sale of gas-powered cars, and student loan forgiveness. Our young squad grows better with each passing week, and we are thrilled by the enthusiasm each of our debaters brings.

Laurence took part in its first ever in-person debate tournament in December, competing against 5th and 6th graders from six other L.A. private schools. As the youngest team in the league, our students performed remarkably! All five of our tournament teams won rounds! In February, students competed in their second tournament, where one of our 6th graders took second place!

**STUDENT ACHIEVEMENTS**

*By Gary Stern, Chief Operating Officer and Director of Grades 3 - 6*

We are proud of Laurence students' engagement and dedication to extracurricular activities. Brain function, concentration, and managing time effectively improve when students pursue activities they are passionate about. Research indicates that students who engage in the arts and athletics outside the classroom benefit from stronger psychosocial development. When students take risks and participate in activities outside their comfort zone, they unlock passions they never knew existed. By diversifying both their experiences and the people they interact with, students broaden their world view and their appreciation and understanding of multiple perspectives. Please join us in recognizing and celebrating all the exceptional contributions and achievements Laurence students have made in their extracurricular pursuits.

**PUBLISHED POETS**

We are proud to announce that 15 Laurence 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th graders became published poets in the recently released Summer 2022 edition of *A Celebration of Poets Anthology*, K-6 edition. Panels of educators viewed entries from thousands of students from the West Coast to select the top submissions for publication in this anthology. Additionally, two Laurence 5th graders are published poets in the 2022 edition of the *Pine Tree Poetry Collection*.



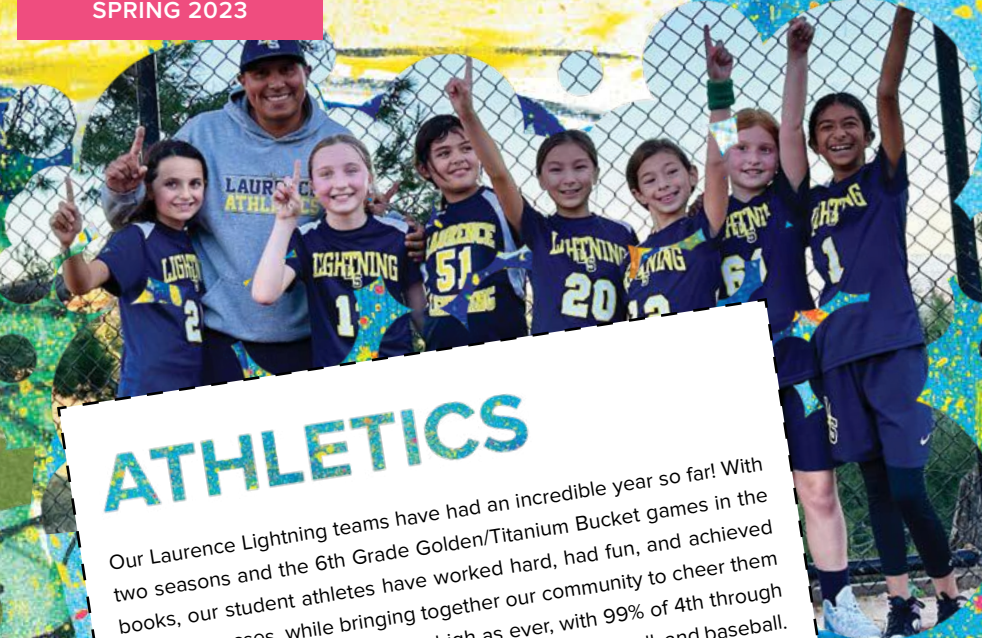
**CHESS CLUB**

The Laurence Chess Program continues to grow with more than 80 students participating! Students have been learning concepts both fundamental and advanced. While the Monday Chess Club group works in their White Belt Puzzle Packs or earns stickers in their Chess Passports, the Friday Chess group plays practice games with notation and clocks while simultaneously completing lessons in the Yellow, Orange, Green, Purple and Blue Belt levels!

Advanced players have also competed in the City Championships (Glendale), State Championships (Santa Clarita), and the National Championships (Baltimore)! All of our chess students are learning critical thinking skills that they will apply to decision-making for the rest of their lives.







# ATHLETICS

Our Laurence Lightning teams have had an incredible year so far! With two seasons and the 6th Grade Golden/Titanium Bucket games in the books, our student athletes have worked hard, had fun, and achieved many successes, while bringing together our community to cheer them on. This year's participation is as high as ever, with 99% of 4th through 6th graders playing basketball, football, soccer, volleyball, and baseball.

## 6TH

### GRADE SPOTLIGHT

Our athletes in the Class of 2023 had incredible fall and winter seasons! Go Lightning!

## Winter

- Season Championships: 6th Grade Blue Girls Soccer Team; 6th Grade Yellow and Blue Boys Basketball Teams
- 2nd Place: 6th Grade Yellow Girls Soccer



## Fall

- Season Champions: 6th Grade Blue and Yellow Girls Basketball Teams
- 2nd Place: 6th Grade Blue Football Team
- Bucket Winners: Our 6th grade boys and girls teams kept possession of the Golden and Titanium Buckets at our 16th Annual Game Under the Lights.



# DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

## Tomorrow's Essential Skill



*By Liz Beck, Director of Technology*

There is no question that technology plays a significant role in our daily lives, making it an essential part of teaching and learning today. Its ubiquitous use has given rise to the concept of Digital Citizenship – a broad-reaching term to describe the practical and soft skills needed for students to succeed in our evolving 21st-century world. It's a new form of character education that integrates the real-life self with the online self, an extension of Laurence's Total Child philosophy. If this sounds like a complex undertaking, you're right – it is! Let's dive in to see the various facets of this important program.



### MEDIA BALANCE AND INTERNET SAFETY

Our guiding principles come from Common Sense Media's Digital Citizenship Curriculum, which is a seminal resource for educators. Each grade level is introduced to a new digital citizenship concept and lesson one to two times per trimester in their weekly tech classes.

With our youngest students, we begin by learning that having parent/teacher permission is critical before using devices or going online. As they get older, we focus on developing their inner compass to recognize the potential for unhealthy habits, as well as the gray areas where they should seek adult guidance.

We challenge our students to consider:

What does it look like to have a healthy balance of staying active, having hobbies, getting enough sleep, and using screens? What are the danger signs that screens are affecting you in a negative way? Is it ever okay to share personal information about yourself online? Why is it important not to share your passwords? What are the privacy concerns around creating social media accounts? Why do some apps ask you to confirm that you're over 13 to sign up?

### DIGITAL LITERACY

Understanding how technology works is another crucial aspect of a K-6 digital citizenship curriculum. Using the *Hello Ruby* book series, our youngest students are taught the basics of how computers, the internet, and other digital devices operate. As our students progress, we collaborate







with our librarian to teach about copyright, creative commons, and how to use databases for research. Most recently, with the creation of AI tools, which are showing up in the educational apps we use, we have been engaging our oldest students in discussions about artificial intelligence, including how AI is trained and what ethical questions and privacy concerns are emerging from this new technology.

### **SOCIAL EMOTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Our students begin considering the complex landscape of digital communication when they gain access to the Google Education Suite in 3rd grade. We explore the social emotional side of our technology use with the help of classroom teachers, School Counselor, Rachel Kavanaugh, and Director of DEI and Curriculum, Christina Rios. Essential questions include – What is email etiquette? Should our communication style differ when using email versus engaging in a discussion through Google Classroom? What is spamming? When is it best to have a face-to-face conversation instead of using written words?

### **TECH FOR GOOD**

With all the potential pitfalls, it's easy to forget that technology can improve our lives as well. We explore this important idea through our STEAM curriculum. Often multidisciplinary, our technology teachers collaborate with other specialists and classroom teachers to integrate the both generative and iterative processes of Design Thinking. One of the tenets of this process is to learn about real world problems and brainstorm solutions, which are brought to life through a tangible project such as a presentation or 3D artifact.

### **PARENT EDUCATION**

Laurence supports parents in understanding the technology landscape and how it applies to family dynamics, safety, and well-being through our Parent Education events. Each year, cybersecurity expert, Lori Getz, speaks with our students in grades 3 through 6 to reinforce the concepts they're learning in class. We sometimes opt for parents to join these talks so Lori can guide them on how to start productive conversations with their children about security, safety, and media balance in their homes. During years when parents don't join their children directly, Lori speaks with our community separately to provide practical advice for 21st-century parenting. Additionally, many of our other Parent Ed speakers discuss topics that overlap with digital citizenship concepts. We also regularly invite our parents to join Common Sense Media Parent Ed webinars and post the archived videos to our Parent Portal so they can be reviewed at any time.

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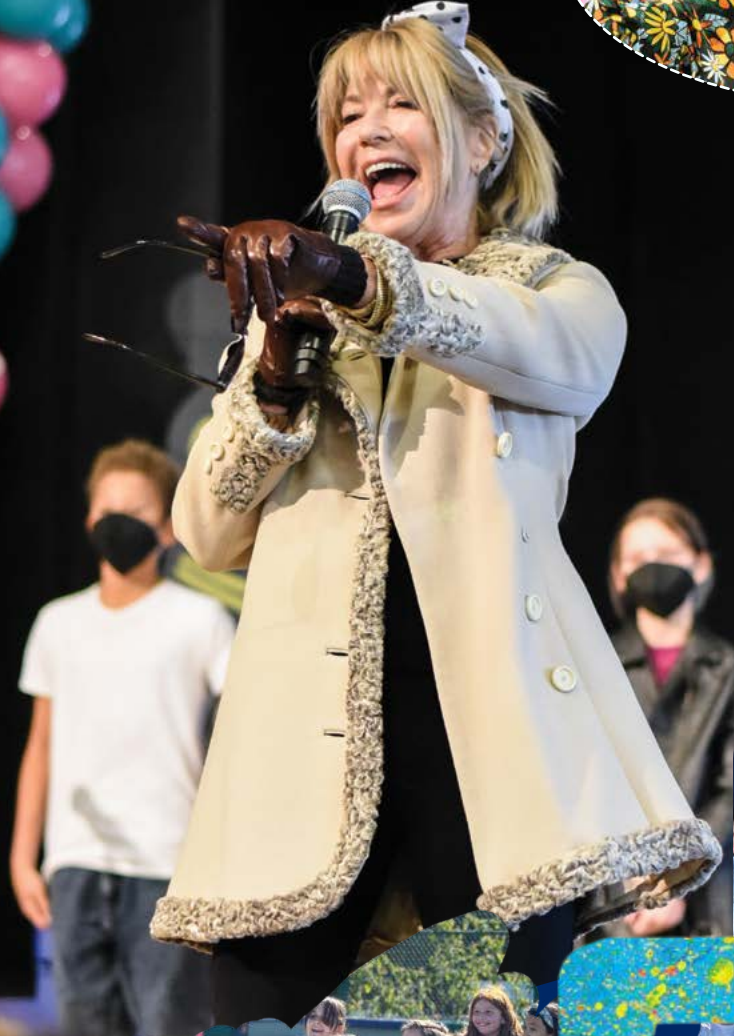
Laurence's Digital Citizenship program is multifaceted and relies on everyone in our community to contribute to student learning. Our goal is to support the development of the "Total Child" so they're ready to successfully enter the next phase of their academic career with strong technology and interpersonal skills.





LAURENCE SCHOOL 70 YEARS OF MAKING A DIFFERENCE

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### SEVEN DECADES STRONG

Throughout this year, we have been taking a look at our school and the world around us through the decades since our founding. At our fall Represent the "L" assembly, we looked at the history of our school and how it has grown. On Founders' Day, we opened up a time capsule from 2010 and created a new time capsule for future Laurence students to learn about who we are as a school today. Students in each class chose items ranging from poems to class constitutions to sister school projects to include.

Our celebrations have also included "decades dress-up" days, cupcakes, and an all-school dance party on the Lightning Field! In honor of our anniversary, each Laurence student's hopes and dreams will be included in the yearbook, so be sure to look for that this June.



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# ANNIVERSARY





THEN

NOW



In 1953, a young Marvin Jacobson founded Laurence School on a one-acre plot owned by his parents after completing his degree at UCLA's Graduate School of Education. He built a two-room school house, and opened the doors to 13 students, ages 5 through 10. His program was premised on the "Total Child" philosophy, focusing on children's academic, emotional, social and physical development. In 1955, Lynn Jacobson took a job as a teacher. Shortly after, they married, and worked together to grow the school.

In the 70 years since, Laurence and its programs have evolved, inspired by innovation, technological change, and cutting-edge research on how children learn. Our campus has grown to five acres and our student body to 350. The programs now include athletics, arts, STEAM, after-school enrichment, and more! Yet the heart of Laurence has remained constant – a commitment to developing lifelong learners, good human beings, and well-rounded individuals who will become tomorrow's inspired leaders. And that is truly something to celebrate!





# DIVERSITY EQUITY & INCLUSION



## A New Take on Black History Month

*By Christina Rios,  
Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and Curriculum*

As we continue our ongoing journey in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), we strive to provide opportunities for our students, families, faculty, and staff to proudly share their culture with our community. Each school year, we take a look at different pieces of our curriculum with fresh eyes to see how we can grow, evolve and improve the experience for our students and families through this lens.

This year, we explored new ways to look at curriculum for and celebrate Black History Month. Every grade level studies and celebrates Black History in their classrooms through various presentations, read-alouds, and lessons, as well as during specialists classes. The Performing Arts team collaborated with the 5th grade team to teach students a new unit about New Orleans' music and Black culture.

New Orleans, which is often referred to as “the birthplace of jazz,” provided the perfect incubator for African and Caribbean music, drumming, and dance to produce multiple musical offshoots on new soil. To this day, the music that grew up and took root is still entwined with street performance and outdoor celebratory rituals of birth, death, and sheer enjoyment. During the student-led Black History Month celebration, we were treated to a powerful performance demonstrating what students learned and their reflections. They performed “When the Saints Go Marching In,” inspired by the historical journey of the song.

New Orleans has also produced some of the world’s most notable musicians, beginning with Louis Armstrong, one of the most influential figures in Jazz. Fifth grade took a deeper dive in learning about a contemporary artist from New Orleans, Jon Batiste, and wrapped up with a dance to the song, “Freedom,” from his Grammy-winning album.

We also had a new parent-led Black History Month assembly celebration, which spotlighted Black Greek Letter fraternities and sororities. Numerous Laurence students who identify as Black or African American proudly spoke and taught everyone about Black Greek Letter Organizations (“BGLO’s”), which were founded over a century ago at Historically Black Colleges and Universities







(HBCU's) to empower Black students with community, scholarship, and a lifelong commitment to helping others. Many of the notable activists, athletes, and politicians who are members of BGLO's were recognized by our current students, including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Michael Jordan, and Kamala Harris.

After learning about the contributions and impact of HBCU's, we were treated to a "Steppin" performance, a form of dance heavily influenced by South African culture that is used to show pride and unity. Students had a chance to learn how to step after watching several unique styles of "Steppin" from different fraternities and sororities. As an avenue to continue the conversation in the classrooms, the parents donated *The ABC's of HBCU's* by Claudia Walker to each House library.

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The celebration of all cultures and identities is a priority to us at Laurence and essential to fulfilling our mission. We continue to focus on developing an environment where everyone is accepted for who they are. The sense of community and belonging remains strong here as we ensure that everyone sees themselves reflected in mirrors and learns about others through windows.





# COMMUNITY SERVICE

“Alone, we can do so little;  
together, we can do so much.”

Helen Keller

*By Liz Silverman, Director of Kindergarten - 2nd Grade*

Throughout our 70 years, giving back has always been a core value at Laurence School. It is important to us that our students understand the need to make a difference in the lives of others. In addition to building empathy, looking outside of themselves helps them connect to the larger community. This year, in addition to our continued partnership with the North Hollywood Food Pantry, Lowman School, and Children’s Hospital Los Angeles, we deepened our newer relationship with the Heart of Los Angeles (HOLA), which provides after school enrichment activities for underserved students.

Beginning with our youngest students, we support The Lowman Special Education and Career Transition Center with a toy drive for the holidays. Our kindergarteners learn about the needs of students at Lowman, and also use the service drive as a math lesson, counting the collected toys by 10s. This year, they collected well over 900 toys, and that’s a lot of 10’s! October brought SOCK-tober for our 2nd grade students. They learned that, besides food, socks are one of the most requested items at the food pantry. Our 4th graders reflected on the exciting experience of back-to-school shopping and the fact that not all students have the ability to shop for new supplies. They then led an important drive for our new friends at HOLA, collecting new school supplies from our Laurence community, which they packaged and donated. And these are just a few examples of this year’s service learning projects. Our students and community have once again showed an outpouring of support for others, truly embodying the spirit of Laurence.

As we continue to look for ways to reach out and give back to our community, we invite you to join us in “Making a Difference.”







# PARENTS MAKING A DIFFERENCE



From the unsung heroes of our Lost and Found to those who brave the cold to help with morning community service drives, parent volunteers are on campus every school day making a difference in the lives of students, faculty, staff and administrators. Whether helping out in the library, delivering lunches in the rain, throwing a teacher a baby or wedding shower, planning major fundraising and community events, serving as a Trustee, or taking on special projects to plan anniversary celebrations and help with the musical productions, our parents are integral to the life and success of Laurence School! Most importantly, they model for students what it means to make a difference.





# PERFORMING ARTS



## WinterFest

Students in Kindergarten through 3rd grade returned to the Laurence stage for WinterFest for the first time since 2019. In celebration of our anniversary, their performances included songs and dances from throughout the decades of Laurence's history. Songs included "Fly Me to the Moon," David Bowie's "Major Tom," and Madonna's "Lucky Star." It was wonderful to have parents, grandparents, and friends join us for these performances, and we are so proud of the hard work our students and performing arts team put into the shows!





### High School Musical, Jr.

Fourth through 6th grade students in our performing arts after school program wowed the Laurence community with their fantastic singing, dancing and acting in this year's upper division musical. Our stage crew elective students built sets, helped design costumes, and managed the stage during the performances. It was incredible to see their collaboration and preparation come to life on stage. Congratulations to all of our performers, crew, and performing arts specialists!



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#### MISSION

Laurence endeavors to develop the unique abilities and potential of each of its students in a diverse, inclusive, supportive, and equitable learning community, where rich traditions and an innovative curriculum foster educational excellence and joy in learning, pride in oneself, integrity, mutual respect and a commitment to the “Total Child.”

