This fall marked the beginning of an era as Peter Becker ’95 began his tenure as Taft’s sixth head of school. Though there is no typical week in the life of a head of school, the following pages give a glimpse of life for Becker as we entered the 2023–24 academic year.

Sunday

NOON
Brunch in the dining hall

1–4 PM
Super Sunday
A community-building activity. Super Sunday is always a student favorite. Students enjoy the Cruso slide, tug-of-war, egg races, three-legged races, and more. It’s a great way to make new friends at the start of the new school year.

5–7 PM
Review the week’s schedule
Prepare for the week ahead

Monday

8 AM
Breakfast in the dining hall

9–10 AM
Meeting with Edie Traina, Assistant Head of School for Faculty and Academics, and Jeremy LaCasse, Assistant Head of School for Student Life

10:15 AM
Phone call with alumnus

10:45 AM–NOON
Respond to emails
Work on ongoing projects

5–7 PM
Family time

7 PM
Review the week’s schedule
Prepare for the week ahead
### Monday

- **8 AM**
  - Meet with the Advancement Working Group
  - Members of the advancement, admissions, and communications offices meet regularly with Becker. This week, they discussed upcoming alumni and parent receptions and Fall Family Weekend.

- **9:30-10 AM**
  - Morning Meeting
  - Twice each week, Tafties gather in Bingham Auditorium for Morning Meeting, where speakers from across the aisle and across the globe grant exposure to new or unique perspectives and offer deeper, broader insights into the world.

- **10-10:30 AM**
  - Weekly meeting with Kaitlin Orfitelli, Director of Marketing and Communications

- **11 AM**
  - Meet with the Advancement Working Group

- **11:45 AM**
  - Development phone call
  - Gifts to Taft are essential to the school. Becker spends a substantial amount of time working with the Advancement Office to cultivate gifts that help make Taft stronger.

- **11:15 AM**
  - TABS Board Meeting via Zoom
  - Becker is a leader of national stature in the independent school landscape, attending and presenting at professional conferences, serving on the boards of The Association of Boarding Schools (TABS) and the Connecticut Association of Independent Schools, and as a member of the Heads and Principals Association.

- **12 PM**
  - Lunch with colleagues

- **1:30-2:30 PM**
  - Meeting with Thomas Allen, Dean for Community, Justice, and Belonging

- **2:45 PM**
  - Deans Meeting
  - This weekly meeting brings all of the school’s deans together to discuss ongoing issues and strategic planning for the year ahead.

- **3:15-3:45 PM**
  - Meet with Andy Dunn, Director of Athletics and Afternoon Program

- **4 PM**
  - TABS Board Meeting via Zoom

- **4-5 PM**
  - Meet with Mons

- **5:30 PM**
  - Meet with Executive Assistant Heidi Shemms

### Tuesday

- **7:30 AM**
  - Drive daughters Penny and Marilee to school

- **7:30-8:30 PM**
  - Meet with Mons

- **8:45-9:15 AM**
  - Meet with Alison Almasian ’87, Director of College Counseling

- **9:20-9:50 AM**
  - Assembly

- **9:50 AM**
  - Meet with Executive Assistant Heidi Shemms

- **10 AM**
  - Meet with Executive Assistant Heidi Shemms

- **10:30-11 AM**
  - Meet with Executive Assistant Heidi Shemms

- **11 AM**
  - Meet with the Advancement Working Group

- **11 AM**
  - Meet with the Advancement Working Group

- **12:30 PM**
  - Working lunch with Lauren Crimmins, Chief Advancement Officer

- **12:30 PM**
  - Meet and greet with Watertown Police Chief

- **2:45 PM**
  - Deans Meeting

- **4 PM**
  - Enterprise risk management meeting with CFO Jake Odden ’86 and Chair of Audit & Risk Committee Jonathan Albert ’79

- **6:30-7:30 PM**
  - Sit-down dinner

### Wednesday

- **8:45-9:15 AM**
  - Meet with Alison Almasian ’87, Director of College Counseling

- **9:20-9:50 AM**
  - Assembly

- **10 AM**
  - Meet with Executive Assistant Heidi Shemms

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Peter Becker ’95 began his tenure as Taft’s sixth Head of School on July 1, 2023.

As a Taft graduate, Becker knows, loves, and values Taft’s mission and culture. His career has always been about students. As a teacher, coach, advisor, dorm head, department chair, and head of school, he has worked with empathy and caring to help students feel valued so they can grow and succeed. As a head, he has shown a tremendous ability to administer and lead, inspiring others with a strategic vision and working collaboratively to improve and transform the school.

Becker’s educational career reflects a leader who has devoted his life to independent secondary education. He is a distinguished scholar, receiving a B.A. with Distinction in Religious Studies from the University of Virginia and an M.A. in History from Yale University. He was awarded a Fulbright Grant to study classical history, architecture, and archeology at the American Academy in Rome, Italy. After working briefly as an investment banking analyst for Morgan Stanley, he entered graduate school, obtaining a Ph.D. in near Eastern studies, majoring in Islamic Studies. Becker worked with independent school students while on the staff of FOCUS (the Fellowship of Christians in Universities and Schools). He taught history and interdisciplinary studies at Lawrenceville School and co-founded and led Kennedy House, served on and ran multiple committees, and coached squash and tennis. At Lawrenceville, he worked across the school’s academic departments to lead the redesign of the Interdisciplinary Studies Department curriculum.

In 2012, Becker was appointed an assistant head of school at The Frederick Gunn School, where he led the redesign of the Interdisciplinary Studies Department curriculum. In 2016, he was named head of school of the school, where he led the redesign of the school’s curricular offerings; fostered a global community marked by caring and empathy. During Becker’s tenure, Gunn created a new Center for Citizenship & Just Democracy; a soon-to-be launched Center for Entrepreneurship; and the school’s IDEAS Program in engineering, robotics, and computer science.

With his team, he oversaw more than $60 million in campus building and improvement projects; prioritized the hiring of a diverse and talented faculty; deepened and broadened the school’s curricular offerings; and fostered a global community marked by caring and empathy. During Becker’s tenure, Gunn created a new Center for Citizenship & Just Democracy; a soon-to-be launched Center for Entrepreneurship; and the school’s IDEAS Program in engineering, robotics, and computer science.
As we start the year I want to talk about three shifts that we hope every student at Taft will make during your time here. First, the shift from xenophobia to philoxenia. Second, the shift from serving ourselves to serving others. And third, the shift from drive to healthy drive.

This summer we all read Maria Hinojosa’s memoir Once I Was You. It is the story of a woman who immigrated to the United States from Mexico with her family when she was young. You’ll recall that her story is about perseverance and entrepreneurship in the face of constant challenges.

One of the book’s main themes is xenophobia: the experience that countless immigrants to the U.S. have and continue to have—of bigotry in all its forms. Xenophobia is comprised of two words: xeno, the word for “strange” or “foreign,” and phobia, the word for “fear.” So xenophobia is fear of the stranger.

In fact, at Taft we aspire to the opposite of xenophobia. A few years ago, Mrs. Becker introduced me to the word for this. The opposite of xenophobia is philoxenia: phi=friend + xeno=foreign + a=someone. Our aspiration at Taft is that we learn to respond to other humans who don’t appear to be like us as friends rather than as enemies, despite the fact that our evolutionary wiring prompts us to do the opposite. So we want everyone in our community—adults and students—to make this shift from xenophobia to philoxenia despite the fact that that isn’t necessarily our first human instinct.

How do we do this? What can friendship to strangers look like? It can take the form of responding to a new person or situation with curiosity rather than with the fight/flight/freeze instinct. The differences we will encounter here are of every kind, not only geographic and linguistic—the difference could be racial, socioeconomic, gender or sexuality, religious, political, approaches to learning, or even interests in music or sports. Regardless, asking a question about someone rather than operating on assumptions—where are you from? What is it like there? What do you do for fun? What are your favorite foods? Music? And go a bit deeper—not just what do you believe, but how did you come to enjoy that music or to take that position on an issue?

Bear in mind that you may be talking to someone who is one of the only people at Taft from their country—and imagine what that would be like. You may be talking to someone whose country is at war or to someone who has not been able to go home since they got to Taft. (One of my favorite writers, C.S. Lewis, says that there are no ordinary humans—we are all these beautifully complex creatures, and there is power in treating each other with a certain degree of awe and wonder.) So we can practice curiosity toward one another and toward new ideas as one of the most powerful ways to overcome the fight/flight/freeze instinct, and to connect with the common humanity of the person we are speaking to.

So one shift we are committed to at Taft is the shift from xenophobia to philoxenia.