



September 15, 2025

Dear Lawrenceville Community,

We have launched the new school year, and our students are diving into life at Lawrenceville with their usual energy and joy – they never cease to amaze me! We set the stage with our [orientation program](#), which is carefully crafted to bring the student body together and to introduce students to a range of community norms and important topics, including academic expectations, AI issues, online media consumption, and wellness resources. It also provides important time for House and community bonding, which was on full display on September 6 at [House Olympics](#). Even the downpour could not dampen spirits – it was one of the most upbeat, wonderfully uproarious competitions I have witnessed during my time as head of school!

### **Convocation Ceremony and Core Values**

Our [Convocation Ceremony](#) on September 7 marked the official start to the academic year. Our ceremony opened with a march of the House flags by the students and faculty who were selected last year by their peers as those who best exemplify our core values: commitment, courage, enthusiasm, friendship, honesty, initiative, kindness, leadership, loyalty, perseverance, responsibility, and thoughtfulness. As I said to our students, “Central to our enduring purpose and core to our Mission as a school is the notion that we challenge promising young people to lead lives of learning, integrity, and high purpose. Leading a life of integrity and high purpose means you are guided by these essential values.”

My Convocation address was titled “[On Laughter](#),” and encouraged students to think about the power of laughter – how it can bring us together in wonderful ways, but how it also can inflict tremendous harm when it thoughtlessly, sometimes cruelly, comes at the expense of someone else.

I shared references from the 19th-century novel *Madame Bovary* and *Shakespeare’s King Lear*, along with instances of teasing that I observed as a child, to illustrate the negative, hurtful side of laughter, challenging students to think twice before finding humor in someone’s misfortune or mistake. I also shared examples of the healing power of laughter and my hope that we each take an active interest, and each play a part, in shaping the community in which we wish to live. As I noted in my address (echoing at the very end our new Student Council’s tagline for the coming year!): “We all know that laughter can have a potentially negative, armor-piercing impact, and I believe it is so important that we all be keenly aware of that, to know in advance when there is the potential for a joke or sarcastic remark, or worse, a social media post to sting, to hurt someone, to divide us. And yet, just as important, we also know that when it’s the right kind of jest, when a warm chuckle comes from a place of deep caring and love, laughter may well be just about the ‘best medicine’ to strengthen and reinforce the community we aspire to be – it could in fact be the best possible way to *welcome everyone to our House*.”

## Looking Ahead

As we embrace the enthusiasm and potential of the coming year, we will continue to support student wellbeing in alignment with [our strategic plan](#), advance [Harkness teaching and learning](#) to help students engage critically in their academics and thoughtfully with one another, and to help our students grow as scholars and as citizens.

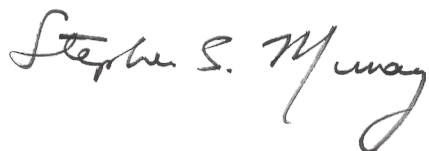
The dedication of those within the Lawrenceville community to our school and to our students to help us achieve these aims is inspiring and exemplary. In addition to the work in our classrooms, performance halls, and fields and courts, we are fortunate to have the support and engagement of parents, alumni, and friends to help us both preserve the strongest elements of Lawrenceville's legacy and to innovate and adapt to serve our students well into the future.

Lawrenceville's Board of Trustees is one particular group that is integral to these efforts, and after four years of outstanding leadership by **Jon Weiss '75**, I am delighted to announce that **Celeste Mellet '94 P'27** (former vice president of the board) has been named our new board president, with **Bob Zochowski Jr. '82 P'13** serving as vice president. We welcome Celeste in this historic appointment and thank Jon for his many significant contributions as board president. You will hear more about our board leadership in the coming months, and can see a list of trustees on the [Leadership page of our website](#).

## In Closing

We are a community of students from 34 countries and 39 U.S. states - all with unique experiences and perspectives that will undoubtedly enrich the conversations at the Harkness table, elevate the experience in our Houses, and contribute to the Heart of this community. In the spirit of this year's Student Council, we "Welcome to Our House" a broad range of beliefs and backgrounds, and this is what makes us one Lawrenceville!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen S. Murray". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped "y" at the end.

Stephen S. Murray H'54 '55 '63 '65 '16 P'16 '21  
The Shelby Cullom Davis '26 Head of School