

FROM THE

Head of School

Dear Members of the Pingry Community,



Whether it's a cover story in *The Atlantic* arguing that the age of reading is over, or related discussions about the "dismantling" of Harvard's writing center, there is currently no shortage of media coverage on the threats posed to human learning by AI and other technologies. Some of the most

basic elements of education (reading deeply, writing authentically, thinking independently, and doing one's own work) are seemingly under assault on multiple fronts. If he were writing today, Charles Dickens might simply go with "It was the worst of times."

There is perhaps no bigger threat to our Honor Code — and more specifically to "working for the common good rather than solely for personal advantage" — than the rapid rise of AI. Working for the common good can seem quaint (at best) in a world shouting at every turn that individual achievement and gaining an edge on our perceived competition (classmates, teammates, colleagues, and peers) should be our primary goal.

Despite the upheaval now surrounding us, our community can rest assured that Pingry's priorities have not changed. While many schools are questioning their direction, wondering not just where they are going but how equipped they are to handle the challenges of the journey, Pingry's direction is clear. We intend to remain a school grounded in people and relationships rather than algorithms and screens.

While we refuse to cede control to AI, we also have no plans to bury our heads in the sand and simply hope for the best. Guided by our Strategic Plan, we are instead choosing to consider and balance emerging technologies alongside the enduring values that govern our actions. This approach will help ensure our responsible use of AI, one that reflects our collective commitment to ethical innovation, meaningful connection, and the human-centered pursuit of excellence. To cite *The New Yorker* article on Anthropic written

by Gideon Lewis-Kraus '98 back in February, there is a way to avoid imitating either the AI "fanboys who man the hype wires" or the "curmudgeons who claim that there's no *there there*" by accepting "that it is OK to not know" what the present means (or what the future holds). This is our goal at Pingry: to explore complex, sometimes uncharted territory together, and to ask critical and ethical questions along the way.

As educators, we must develop in students the curiosity to question technology as well as bring it into the classroom, ensuring that they are lifelong learners, not merely lifelong consumers. The world is rarely binary, despite what today's AI champions and doomers would have us believe. Instead of choosing between AI and anti-AI, we must find the middle path where we learn with and alongside technology without becoming overly dependent on it. Pingry students will always need protected opportunities to think, write, and create independently, as well as guided opportunities to learn how to use AI responsibly and effectively. The central question may be less about whether AI is permitted or prohibited and more about whether its use supports or substitutes for the intended learning.

Jane Rosenzweig, the longtime director of Harvard's writing center, believes "students are not products to be moved down a frictionless assembly line, and the hard work of reading, writing, and thinking is not a problem to be solved." We completely agree. In fact, our Strategic Plan requires us to balance technology and progress with arguably our highest and our most essential ambition: preparing students to be good people. We indeed remain sharply focused on community and connection, teachers and students, and curiosity and growth. This is the magic of Pingry, and we're going to continue prioritizing *that* magic over the tech wizardry now dominating the headlines.

As David Brooks has previously written, "In the age of AI, major in being human."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim Lear".

Tim Lear