Dear Parents:

At Kalamazoo College we are busily getting ready for the arrival of new students in the fall. As parents and loved ones, you are in the midst of important preparations of your own. These days are exciting and anxiety producing, full of anticipation and nostalgia. If you sometimes feel like you are on a rollercoaster, you are in good company with other families.

We hope you will be able to join us on opening day, Wednesday, September 9. You’ll have a chance to meet your son or daughter’s First-Year Seminar professor and academic advisor, attend a parents-only session, and help us open the academic year at Convocation, a meaningful welcoming ceremony that prefigures graduation four short years from now.

That same day is new student move-in. As part of our first-year program, we house first-year students together in three residence halls. Students whose last names begin with A-M will check into their halls from 8-9:30am, those with names N-Z from 9:30-11am. If you are in the latter group, it is wise to arrive a bit earlier for ID pictures. In mid-July we will post detailed, step-by-step instructions on the parents’ website (https://reason.kzoo.edu/parents/), which already contains much helpful information on a variety of topics. We encourage you to check the parent’s website frequently as information will change over time.

Your student recently received a mailing--“Your Adventure Begins”--that includes information about key resources and important deadlines. It is essential that deadlines are met. Students with incomplete medical records will not be issued a key to their residence hall or permitted to move into their room, or participate in LandSea or athletics. Do not plan to complete medical records the day you arrive on campus. The number of students and the busy-ness of the day make such a plan impractical. Instead please ensure that medical records are complete and submitted no later than August 1, 2015 so that September 9 is a smooth and exciting day rather than a day of frustration.

The transition to K College may be the single biggest step toward independence your student has undertaken. Talk candidly with your son or daughter about the things that concern you: for example, the importance of attending class and keeping up with academic work, the intricacies of negotiating life with a new roommate, the value of managing personal finances, and the process of making decisions about everything from social activities to exercise. We encourage you to help them practice the skills they’ll need once they’re on campus—doing laundry and banking, shopping for personal items, managing their time, asking their own questions, and making their own phone calls for assistance. You and your values will remain very influential during the course of your college student’s experience. Now is the time to begin some of these important conversations, if you have not already done so.
This is also likely to be a significant transition for you. How will you feel about “leaving” your student on campus and driving away? How much contact will you want or need, compared to what s/he will want or need? What support will you have? Growth and learning can be uncomfortable at times. What will you do in these moments when your child may feel discomfort? When your child calls, upset about something that happened in class or in the residence hall, how will you respond? What are ways to support your daughter or son while trusting their ability to function independently? How will you help your child work through the inevitable challenges of college life and develop their own problem-solving skills? These are big, important questions, and we encourage you to think carefully and honestly about your own feelings related to this transition. One of the biggest challenges for parents is resisting the urge to “fix” things for their son or daughter in this new environment. Rather than fixing, what will you do? We recommend good listening and keeping the lines of communication open.

We are here at K, whether as teachers, administrators, or staff members, because we genuinely like college students, we are very good at working with them, and we are committed to the transformative power of education. These values, along with a strong sense of confidence in our students, undergird everything we do.

If you have questions along the way, contact either one of us. We look forward to welcoming you and your son or daughter to Kalamazoo College on September 9.

Warmly,

Sarah B. Westfall, Ph.D.
Vice President for Student Development
and Dean of Students

Zaide Pixley, Ph.D.
Dean of the First Year and Advising