

Dear Selection Committee:

It is with great enthusiasm that I recommend Darius Fields, who currently ranks #1 in his class and has distinguished himself as one of the most self-driven students at Lakeside High School. Darius has maxed out course rigor for Lakeside, and he has taken every AP class or concurrent enrollment college equivalent available to him. Darius has taken numerous college courses for academic exploration outside of school despite not being high school requirements and has received admissions to several top colleges including: Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Stanford Columbia, UC Berkeley, UC Los Angeles, and Rice.

While many students participate in existing activities, Darius is unique in his drive to create new opportunities. As an aspiring Materials Scientist, Darius did not wait for a school program to begin research; he completed independent research at UC Irvine to study the decomposition of benzoyl peroxide into carcinogens. He became the first student in our school's history to compete in the Science Fair, winning Gold at the county level and advancing to State. Darius expanded his success; he founded a program to mentor other students in research, giving access to STEM across Lakeside High. Moreover, he extended this initiative beyond Lakeside, mentoring and making resources available online for free for students around the world. His aptitude was then recognized by the University of Chicago, which awarded him a full scholarship to their Neubauer Phoenix Summer STEM program, choosing him from a highly competitive applicant pool (about 9% acceptance rate).

Darius is a leader across Lakeside. As President of the Mad Scientists Club, he guided Lakeside's robotics teams to their best competitive rankings in school history. As Vice President of the Trailblazers Club, he helped build the club with zero initial funds, eventually raising over \$1,400 to sponsor educational field trips. As the Executive Chef of our Culinary Arts Program, he manages our district's Student of the Month program, catering events for over 100 attendees. Besides academics, he also participates in cheer as Lakeside's one and only mascot and plays on the tennis team. Darius' participation across campus demonstrates his strong ability to help and connect with students from various walks of life.

Darius's achievements are even more impressive given his background. Coming from a low-income family and facing significant challenges, including his father's health complications, Darius has shown incredible tenacity. For example, he taught himself coding to build an environmental project that funded the planting of nearly 200,000 trees, turning his personal lack of access into a motivation to help others. He has also tutored students globally on research and mentored elementary students across Lake Elsinore in robotics.

In the future, Darius aspires to be a research professor who studies biointegrated materials while expanding access to disadvantaged communities; I have no doubt he will be extremely successful in these goals. Darius is a rare student who possesses both the high-level academic ability required for engineering and the empathy required for leadership.

Sincerely,

Ruben Lopez, MS, MFT, PPS, School Counselor Lakeside High School