

Three years have passed since you began your studies at this highly selective and historically important Metropolitan high school. There must be countless things that have concerned and interested you during these years.

Three years ago, all of you were still junior high school students. And now you are already soon-to-be adults who have, to some extent, gained intellectual strength, judgment, and powers of expression. That makes me very happy.

Two months ago, at the starting point of the third trimester, I told you that the Civil Code is to be amended by the end of the year 2022, and 18 will become the legal age for adulthood. Persons 18 years old or older will, for the first time, be able to do a number of things without their guardians' permission. You will be young adults soon, and that means you will have to show individual responsibility. I do hope you become highly responsible adults whose moderate behavior will be an excellent model for others. And I do hope you will come to make important contributions to our society.

There were many things that seemed especially noteworthy during these past three years.

In 2016, huge earthquakes hit Kumamoto, resulting in many deaths, injuries to many people, and damage to a large number of buildings, including such important cultural properties as Kumamoto Castle. Barack Obama visited Hiroshima for the first time as President of the United States. Yoshinori Ohsumi was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for his discoveries of the mechanisms for autophagy.

In 2017, not a few of your Sempai had a chance to vote in the Metropolitan Assembly election and in the Parliamentary election. And Sōta Fujii, a professional shogi player, won 29 matches in a row. He was a *chūgakusei* at that time. The sprinter Yoshihide Kiryū became the first Japanese ever to run 100 meters in under 10 seconds. His record time was 9 point 98 seconds.

And in 2018, we suffered from many natural disasters, including the heavy rains on Kyushu Island and in the Chugoku district, and the huge earthquake in Hokkaido. People there still are striving to restore the lives that they had been living before. We also witnessed a good thing too, however. At the Winter Olympic Games held in Pyeong Chang, Japan won 13 medals in all. What most impressed me was the women's 500-meter speed skating event. After her victory, Nao Kodaira, responding to cheers from the stands, joined with South Korea's Lee Sang-Hwa, the runner-up in the race, in raising the Japanese and Korean flags together. "Sports can make the world one ... It's simple." We feel proud of these athletes not only because they won medals but also because they are honest and respect one another.

We also witnessed other good things, one of which was that Professor Tasuku Honjo, of the University of Kyoto, won the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. He discovered a substance, PD-1, which apparently is a protein that operates as a brake on the immune system, and this has opened a way for cancer immunotherapy. He said that immunotherapy faces many challenges but would be able to help conquer cancer by the end of the 21st century. That is wonderful news for the human race.

Some of you will begin studies at a university and others will prepare for another try for admission next year. And some of you may have to live in different places. You may feel depressed to discover that people you meet are better than you in certain fields. It may take you a long time to accept living in friendly rivalry with others. However, as Yuval Noah Harari writes, "... our unique language evolved as a means of sharing information about the world." "... Homo sapiens is primarily a social animal. Social cooperation is our key for survival and reproduction." Communicating with others who are better than you in certain fields will help you mature and make you stronger and wiser. Working together makes strength.

I ask you a question. Why do we keep on learning? I think we learn because we want to be happier. And to stop learning means to stop becoming happier. If you stop learning, you will not be able to adapt yourself to new realities, to changes in our society. If you can't be happy yourself, you won't be able to make your family happy, or your friends happy, and you won't be able to make our society better. I hope you agree with me on this point.

We have been facing a labor shortage and an aging workforce, and, to compensate for that, the government has decided to try to increase the use foreign labor. More workers from other countries may be employed in Japan in the near future. And some economists say automation could permanently displace human workers on a large scale. Others say two-thirds of human jobs will be replaced by IoT and AI. It is hard to imagine how our society might change in the next five years. However, as I often tell you, in this age of uncertainty, you should rather remember that there are many more chances to leave your marks, to make achievements that will change our society for the better.

We have to keep on learning. We should never stop learning. We should never stop trying to be happy. Japan has little in the way of natural resources. Our nation's greatest treasure is its citizenry. You, boys and girls, are part of that great treasure. Each of you is irreplaceable. Believe in yourselves. The possibilities for you are infinite. Aim high, boys and girls!