

At the end of the first trimester, 2020

First of all, I would like to express my sympathy to the families and the loved ones of those who died or are still missing because of the floods caused by the heavy rain on Kyushu island two weeks ago. They had had the heavy rains for almost ten days. The floods took more than 70 lives, for whom each we mourn. Looking back on the past few decades, we have been suffering from countless natural disasters. I know it is impossible for us to prevent them from occurring. However, I want to believe that it will be possible to reduce the damage which they produce.

We were sailing along smoothly until the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. We were forced to lockdown our school for nearly three months, starting from the beginning of last March. We have had to cancel or postpone our March school trip, the Sports Day in June, and the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Ceremony in November. You had also been looking forward to seeing Olympic track-and-field events at the New National Stadium. We also have to reform the Gaien-sai Festival in August. Using a totally different style, and definitely with creative use of ICT. These unfortunate reversals have been especially disappointing to you, your guardians, and my fellow teachers.

Protecting you and teachers from the COVID-19 infection while maintaining educational activities will certainly be far from easy. The threat of the virus has, however, provided an important impetus toward improving our ICT capacity and instituting online teaching, and the efforts of our highly motivated teachers, along with volunteer work by alumni and alumnae, have made it possible to accomplish much in this area.

At the beginning of the first trimester, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April, I told the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders about the news I had heard. That is more than 1,100,000 people have been infected with the virus, and more than 60,000 people have died from it. I told you that I was afraid the spreading may soon become much more serious in Africa, and Central and South America. Now, more than 17 million people have been infected worldwide, and 700 thousand people have died from it. The outbreak of this virus has been spreading enormously in North and South America, and who knows how serious it has been in Africa.

Until the spread of the new Coronavirus has ceased, we might be forced to give up many things that we could do before the virus

had spread. I'm not sure when or how the spread might cease, but will take a year or more for a vaccine to be developed. It seems almost an impossible hope that you will all have as fulfilling student lives here at Aoyama High School as we would wish. I have to tell you again that this is still an emergency situation. We must be patient, wise, and strong enough to win this fight against another surge of COVID-19.

I know how uncomfortable and inconvenient this will be for you. I know it must seem unfair that you have to experience this horrible nationwide and worldwide infectious disease outbreak. Despite all the difficulties which must surely still lie ahead, I believe it will be possible to maintain the high Aoyama High School standards while creating valuable new traditions for the future, and it is my most fervent hope that we do just that.

One more thing—I hope all of you will be gentle and kind with one another, not ignoring your friends or speaking ill of them. Every student deserves respect. As I often tell you, diversity among students is very important. Any school without diversity would be unable to offer sufficient stimulation to students' curiosity. It is essential for you to spend your school lives in friendly rivalry with others who are better than you in certain fields.

Thank you very much.

645 words

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