

Everyone, I would like to talk about two things at the end of the second trimester, 2020.

First, I would like to express my sympathies to the families and loved ones of those who have died due to COVID-19. The outbreak of the novel coronavirus has concerned all of us during these past ten months. We have seen very many people worldwide infected with COVID-19—and more than one and a half million deaths due to it. The number of the infections and deaths has continued to skyrocket. Fear of this pandemic has spread all over the world, negatively impacting global transportation and the economy. As you know, we are in the third outbreak of COVID-19, more than 3,000 Japanese have died, the spread has not been kept under control, and the current situation could still lead to “over-shooting,” a nationwide explosive surge in infections. Under such conditions, whether we should continue our educational activities normally or not is not clear anymore. It is unclear when and how the spread of this coronavirus will cease, and a certain newspaper says that it will be in April, of the year 2022, before most of us will have received vaccinations. We need to protect ourselves medically. Avoid the “three Cs” —closed spaces with poor ventilation, crowded places in which large numbers of people have congregated, and close-contact settings in which close-range conversations take place—where clusters of COVID-19 cases tend to arise. Wear a medical facemask when you come to school and go home, as well as at any other time that you use a train or bus. It is very important for all of us—you and your families, my fellow teachers and myself—not to get infected with COVID-19. It is also important for us to be wise enough to avoid discrimination and prejudice regarding the disease.

Second, on the 16th of January, 2020, I attended, by invitation, the *Utakai-hajime* (Annual New Year’s Poetry Reading) in the *Matsu-no-ma* (Pine Room) of the Imperial Palace. On the 28th of the same month, I was commended for contributions as a teacher by the Minister of Education and was granted, with others, an audience with Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako. This was only possible because I was the principal of Aoyama High School, and it gave me great happiness. The *Utakai-hajime* was broadcast nationwide, and the tip of my head was just visible on air for a very short period when a cameraman shot members of the Imperial family. Wow, great, isn’t it? I’m still basking in the afterglow of that event. Actually, we were sailing along smoothly this year until the end of January. We were supposed to have the 80th Anniversary Ceremony of our school in November. The year 2020 would have been a most wonderful year for all of us, you and your guardians, and my fellow teachers. Protecting you and teachers from COVID-19 infection while maintaining educational activities will certainly be far

from easy. The threat of the disease has, however, provided an important impetus toward improving our ICT capacity and instituting online teaching, and the efforts of our highly motivated teachers have made it possible to accomplish much in this area. During the first four days of the next trimester, you will have an opening ceremony and some lessons online. 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.

Today I have talked about two things; first, we have been suffering from the surges of COVID-19 and we have to protect ourselves, and, second, despite all the difficulties, I believe it will be possible to maintain the high Aoyama High School standards.

And one more thing, to twelfth graders, there are just 23 days to go before the New University Examination, and you need to concentrate on your studies more than ever. Do what you can do today for the sake of your own futures. After the Examination, your focus will shift to the secondary examinations for individual universities. You will have plenty of time, almost forty days, before taking them. Don't be afraid to set high goals for yourselves. I am sure that you will be able to make it. *Ad alta!* Aim high!

Now, to everyone, you may at times feel in low spirits. There will surely be hardships and, perhaps, bitter experiences, especially during this surge of the novel coronavirus. When it is hard striving to solve your problems all by yourselves, please don't hesitate to talk to your teachers, or to the School Counselor, or to me.

In closing my speech, I would like to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. I do hope the year 2021 will be a more peaceful one for people all over the world.

Thank you very much.

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