

On 16<sup>th</sup> of this month, we had the 73<sup>rd</sup> commencement of our school. We celebrated 313 of our new graduates, with their guardians, my fellow teachers, and school staff. They had been forced to give up their March school trip, the Sports Day in June, and the Gaiensai Festival in August, just as you have been. I'm truly sorry, both for them and for you.

Of the 73<sup>rd</sup> graduates, more than 100 students passed entrance exams for national or municipal universities, including three who were accepted to the University of Tokyo, eleven to Hitotsubashi University, seven to the Tokyo Institute of Technology, one to the School of Medicine of the University of Shinshu, and 16 to the Universities of Hokkaido, Tohoku, and Osaka. Further, other students were accepted to private universities known to be highly selective, including Waseda University, Keio University, Sophia University, and Tokyo University of Science. They did a great job. But it is not so important for you just to succeed in passing entrance examinations for highly selective universities. You are expected to come to make important contributions to our society in the future, and you should have a strong will to study further, in your future education, what interests you most. I would like you all to aim high.

I would like to talk about two things today at the end of the 2020 school year.

First, we have gone through the state of emergency two times since March of 2020. Everything has changed a lot. We have been struggling to restore the lives that we had been living before. That seems, however, quite difficult now. Some medical experts say that it will take a year or longer before this pandemic will cease. But many of you may wonder if we will actually be able to win this fight against COVID-19 or not. So far it seems that we have learned many things about the notorious infectious disease, but there are still many questions left unanswered. We hope that vaccines will protect us from infection, or at least make our bodies robust against the virus. Making the situation even more complex, however, is the fact that a number of mutant strains have originated in such countries as the U.K., South Africa, and Brazil. They have been reported to have spread around the world, and it is still uncertain as to how effectively the vaccines can be expected to work against all the various strains. During the past 13 months since February of 2020, all we have been able to do to protect ourselves from COVID-19 has been washing our hands, wearing a surgical face mask, and observing social-distancing. Some of you may insist that we should try to maintain our educational activities as normally as possible, while others may caution that we should 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. As you know, we are in the third outbreak of COVID-19, more than nearly 9,000 Japanese have died,

the spread has not been kept under control, and the current situation could still lead to “over-shooting,” a fourth nationwide explosive surge in infections. Under such conditions, we need to protect ourselves medically. 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. We don’t have time to spend complaining about the age that we live in. Everything that surrounds us is in constant transition. We ought to be able to enjoy changes in our society. Take on as many new challenges as you can. If you can’t adapt yourselves to changes, you will never be happy. And you should be lifelong learners, so as to be able to adapt yourselves to changes in our society.

Second, not a few good people are sometimes burdened with diseases, handicaps, or other misfortunes. But every human being hopes to be happy, and everyone has the right to be happy. Let’s think about people, including children, who are handicapped or who have serious diseases. Things must be very difficult for them. They must have experienced a lot of suffering. Think about them. They are part of our society. We need to consider how we treat one another — and to remember that we should be considerate toward others in our communities. Everyone deserves respect. That’s why here at our school diversity among students should be respected. You all have quite different backgrounds, living environments, and personalities. You should respect your friends and people around you. Prejudice comes from ignorance. And I believe it is important to have personal contact with others who are different from you. This will help liberate you from the chains of ignorance. I hope our society might become one in which everyone is respected and has the opportunity to try to do what he or she wants to do for his or her own personal purposes. Let’s work together to help make our society better.

Today I have told you two things: first, that you should be lifelong learners and, second, that you should respect one another.

In closing, you may sometimes feel in low spirits, and if it is hard striving to solve your problems all by yourselves, please talk to your friends, family, teachers, the School Counselor, or me. We will always try our best to give you useful advice, and we will always be at your side.

I would also like to offer you all my best wishes. I look forward to seeing you on the first day of new school year this coming April.

Thank you very much.            974 words