

## Starting Point of the 2021 Academic Year

Everyone, we are going to have our 76th Entrance Ceremony, and all of you must have been looking forward to seeing the new freshmen. And many of you have been planning to try to induce them to join in your club activities. There must be a lot of good things that you want to pass on to them. I hope you will tell them a lot about our school and its proud traditions.

At the starting point of the 2021 academic year, I would like to talk about two things.

First, as you know, the government may declare a state of emergency again, or at least, sooner or later, a state of prevention of infectious diseases. In such a case, the Metropolitan Board of Education might decide to restrain the educational activities of Metropolitan high schools. We have to be prepared for that. We have to create new ways of doing our curricular and extracurricular activities, ways in which will be possible for us to do them well even under emergency conditions.

The fundamental role of a high school is to give students a curriculum from which they will be able to learn things necessary to make themselves wiser and stronger. I know it will be hard for you, being restrained from doing various activities as you would have done them under the original curriculum, but we don't have time to spend complaining about the age that we live in.

There may also again be no training camps for club activities in the summer. And if the spread of the new coronavirus has not ceased by then, we might be forced to have the Gaien-sai in a new way: we might be forced to perform plays without audiences, or to create movie clips as we did last year. I'm not sure when or how the spread might cease, but it may take a year or more for all of us to be fully vaccinated. It seems almost an impossible hope that you will all have the fulfilling student lives at Aoyama High School that 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 a fight against any new surge of COVID-19.

As you know, humanity has been fighting against countless infectious diseases throughout its history, and that will surely continue. This outbreak of COVID-19 might just be a wake-up call. We are in the midst of a crisis. It's a good time for us to consider what

we think about our response to disease outbreaks. A disease in a remote part of the world can be in anyone's backyard tomorrow. Think about the SARS outbreak a few years ago. Think about the Ebola outbreak. The magazine *Newsweek* has said, "Speed is of the essence. Speed of detection, of reporting, and of response are all crucial, so that the global community can be as prepared as possible to address the threat and limit or prevent spread." We will be able to win this fight, and maybe the next one, if we can share information on unusual clusters of illnesses in any place in the world, from local to global.

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. But I do hope you will understand the situation and will follow the rules that I have made.

Second, and last, many citizens in Myanmar have been killed in the conflict with their military that has continued since the coup d'état. I'm afraid we have been given only limited information about what has been happening in this East Asian country, which is much closer to our own country than European nations are. I hope they will be able to peacefully build a democratic nation. But it seems that, as in other Asian nations, they have been struggling to do that for many, many years. We should be concerned about that country and its people. We should think what we can do to help them develop their country and to help them achieve greater happiness. I hope many of you will be interested in what has been happening there.

Today I have told you two things: first, that we must be patient, wise, and strong enough to win a fight against any new surge of COVID-19 and, second, that we should think what we can do to help people in Myanmar develop their country and to help them achieve greater happiness.

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. *Ad alta!* Aim high, everyone!

Thank you very much. 851 words