

At the end of the third trimester, 2021.

On 15th of this month, we had the 74th commencement of our school. We celebrated 280 of our new graduates, with their guardians, my fellow teachers, and school staff. They had been forced to give up very many things, just as you have been, and about that I'm truly sorry, both for them and for you.

Of the 74th graduating class, more than 100 students passed entrance exams for national or municipal universities. Further, other students were accepted to private universities known to be highly selective. 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 2021 school year. First, we have gone through the state of emergency five times and extended quasi-emergency measures 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. Twenty-four months have already passed since the beginning. We have still been in a situation of the overshooting of this notorious infectious disease. Booster vaccinations have started, but a new mutant strain of the Omicron virus has been found even in our country. That makes the situation even more complex. I wish vaccines at least would be able to make our bodies robust against the virus.

I checked all the statements you and your guardians wrote in the latest School Evaluation Questionnaire Survey; some of them strongly insist that we should try to maintain our educational activities as normally as possible, while others may caution that we should increase online lessons or at least be able to choose between coming to school or taking online lessons at home. As you know, we are in the sixth surge of COVID-19, more than 20,000 Japanese have died in total, and the spread has not been kept under control. Under such conditions, we need to protect ourselves medically. It is very important for all of us 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, it is about a month since Russia has invaded Ukraine. I couldn't believe how President Putin would dare to begin war against

Ukraine. He calls this invasion a military operation, but it is apparent that Russia has invaded a neighboring country. It is illegal, irrational, and insane. What if your leader were to go insane? War is brought on by insanity and madness, hatred and anger, often by dictators who have political and military power. Putin says President Zelenskyy was attempting to join the EU and NATO, and that's why he began a military operation in Ukraine. They say Putin wants to install a puppet leader there and never let Ukraine join NATO. But who knows Putin's desire will not go beyond that? The U.S. and western allies began to impose severe sanctions on Russia's economy with the hope that those sanctions will loosen Putin's hold over his country. Actually, the deaths and injuries of Russian soldiers have been reported in newspapers, on TV, and on SNSs, which may make the people of Russia declare that they don't want war. That might be Putin's weakness since he says the "military operation" is limited to the eastern areas of Ukraine and will end in a short period. Our government has already declared that it has started economic sanctions against Russia as one of the G7 countries, and Prime Minister Kishida has agreed with the leaders of the U.S. and other developed countries to cooperate on supporting Ukrainian refugees. I don't think many of those refugees will decide to come to our country, but I do think our government's decision is a good one, not just paying money for the refugees. We should think what we can do for them. It might happen that the Asian Giant will decide to cross the channel and start a "limited military operation" in Taiwan. Then will we be able to accept refugees from Taiwan? Are you sure we are ready to do so? Let's think about what the refugees of Ukraine, the people of Ukraine, want and about what we can do for them, everyone.

Today I have told you two things: first, that you should be lifelong learners and, second, that you should think what you can do for the people of Ukraine.

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. 947 words