



The Taft School

March 20, 2020

To Students and Parents:

I am guessing that the purpose of this letter will not surprise you: to state formally that *we will continue remote learning through the remainder of the spring term.*

As someone who loves this school and the magic that happens every day on its campus, I find even writing those words painful and never dreamed I would one day utter them. But this we must do. Many factors brought us to this place: in particular the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommendation that no gathering of fifty or more people take place for eight weeks, coronavirus projections by leading health experts, and the need for clarity in order to aid in planning for all community members. I wish there was a different path forward, but I cannot see it. Strict social distancing and Taft community are mutually exclusive. Though it seems unlikely, should conditions change such that we could safely and feasibly return to campus, we would consider it.

A tremendous amount of planning and preparation for remote classes is already underway and will continue this week. Students will begin the spring term remotely on March 30. On that day, we will begin an extraordinary and unprecedented era at Taft. It will be a time of challenge and opportunity. The faculty are energized, optimistic, and eager. I have complete faith that teachers and students will continue to strive for excellence, that we will witness extraordinary achievement, and that we will learn new lessons about teaching and learning.

There will be many questions that we cannot answer at this time, and for those I ask your patience and understanding. Here are a few questions I can answer:

- We are still operating as a school, albeit a new one. With the exception of essential maintenance and security activities that require a physical presence, faculty and staff are working remotely from their residences. The school has committed to pay its faculty and staff their full salaries.
- We will postpone Alumni Weekend and plan to hold it the weekend of November 14th (Hotchkiss Day). We do not have any details yet, but we will

be working to create a way the class of 1970, other reunion classes, and all alumni have a chance to return to campus.

- As of today, we cannot envision holding Commencement (May 24) for the class of 2020, but we are already beginning to consider ways in which we can celebrate and honor this class. What this looks like I cannot say at this point, but I am determined that some day and some way, physically or virtually, we will recognize all these remarkable seniors have done and become.
- In order to keep campus safe, students may not return to campus for their belongings or for any other reason. Any student with a question should contact Mr. Traina or Ms. Leal in the deans' office. If a student has left a laptop and has no computer at home, we will ship it. We know that this is a real inconvenience—I do not in any way minimize it—but we simply cannot have hundreds of students on campus at this critical pandemic moment. As conditions change, we will work on a plan to ensure that students can safely retrieve their belongings. We know that many students have left books on campus; teachers are preparing their courses accordingly. For passport or I-20 holders who need their travel documents, please contact [Wendy Osborn](#).
- As we review the financial implications of the changes to our operations, both costs and savings, we will assess whether or not we would consider the possibility of a pro rata refund of boarding costs. As our focus now must be on campus operations and safety, on this question we ask that you be patient.
- We have already begun the work of creating community even as we are apart. Mark Traina and Lindsay Leal, deans of students, are working with faculty and student leaders to partner to create new ways for the community to celebrate and connect. Affinity group leaders will continue their work, albeit remotely. Edie Traina and Jake Odden will be working to find imaginative ways for faculty and staff to gather virtually and support each other, share stories, and bond together.
- The class deans will continue in their critical roles: meeting remotely with counselors, the Health Center, the deans office, and me; speaking with teachers to help support student performance; convening their respective class committees via Zoom to discuss student performance and support; and communicating with parents when concerns arise.

- Advisors, who can be so important to their advisees, will remain connected in ways that work best for them: emails, texts, phone calls, Skype, Zoom, and so on.

There are many questions we are working to answer. We have updated the FAQ section on our COVID-19 webpage and will continue to do so.

The decisions we have made have been difficult, but always they have been guided by our commitment to student health and safety, to our unique community and culture, and to our historic mission of the education of the whole student. In the past two weeks, I have heard messages of support from countless students, parents, alumni, faculty, and staff. I have found myself deeply moved and inspired. The strength, compassion, and faith of the Taft community are powerful. We will get through this. We are in this together.

The English teacher in me must end with some lines from one of my favorite poets, Emily Dickinson, from a poem a friend and former parent reminded me of:

*We never know how high we are
Till we are asked to rise
And then if we are true to plan
Our statures touch the skies —*

That's not a bad place to close, with the faith that we will in the weeks ahead find ourselves at some uncommon altitude.

I send my best wishes to all of you in these trying times.

Non Ut Sibi,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W. R. MacMullen", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

William R. MacMullen '78 P'14 P'16