

## OFFICE OF THE HEADMASTER

*“Trust the past to God’s mercy, the present to God’s love,  
and the future to God’s providence.”*

*~St. Augustine*

April 21, 2020

Dear Austin Prep Community,

**A**s a community, both locally and globally, we are being tested in ways that we probably have never imagined. In the span of only weeks, businesses and schools have been shuttered across the nation. The streets of towns and cities that were thriving centers of commerce are now mostly empty. In following the social distancing guidelines and quarantine recommendations from public health officials and civic leaders, we are all doing our part to contribute to the greater good to contain the pandemic.

Keeping our distance from each other is hard. We’re social beings who are accustomed to spending time in the close company of friends and family, but we’re also sentient beings who recognize that being patient, kind, cooperative, and selfless is as important as ever. These important virtues are working; the curve seems to be flattening and many of our government leaders have begun to indicate the spread of the virus is slowing.

By now, we all know someone who has been affected by the virus and the impact is more tangible than it was just a few short weeks ago. While we have been learning to cope with social distancing, the students, faculty, and staff of Austin Prep also have been adapting to new ways of teaching, learning, and working. As we adjust to these new means and methods, we have accomplished much together and have overcome some initial, but difficult hurdles.

Understandably, many in our community have turned their attention to what comes next. The one constant, however, in all the uncertainty is that the situation changes rapidly. What seems like a reasonable course of action in the morning becomes impractical in the evening because facts on the ground often change

dramatically in a short period of time. As we make plans to address next steps, the only certainty is that every decision we make for Austin Prep is subject to change.

Many in the Austin Prep family have been on the frontlines of the battle against COVID-19. Austin Prep parents, alumni, and alumni parents are serving the community as first responders, medical staff, and essential business personnel and are doing their part to help keep us safe and supported. Let's keep them – and all who serve and sacrifice – in our prayers.

### **Austin Prep's Financial Landscape**

No one can predict with any degree of certainty what the impact will be from this public health emergency on the economy. Forecasts and predictions are changing daily. While Austin Prep's financial health has been growing consistently during my tenure, Austin Prep is not immune from the wide-spread economic challenges that we see mounting or the unknown challenges that are yet to come.

We have instituted a number of measures to mitigate the financial impact to Austin Prep that includes a hiring freeze, eliminating all non-essential spending, and deferring all new capital projects (unless they are needed to support health and safety). As a result of the Governor's executive order, we are anticipating considerable loss of income. To wit, Austin Prep's annual golf outing held each May, which generates nearly \$100,000, is not happening anytime soon. For the foreseeable future, we expect to lose substantial ancillary income that we generate each year from rentals and summer programming. The pandemic will likely cause reductions in income from foundations, philanthropic support, and investments. And it's possible – though perhaps too early to tell – that enrollment at Austin Prep could be affected. Should enrollment decline, the fixed cost-per-pupil for many expenses will increase. Regardless of final enrollment for 2020-2021, for example, the total cost to heat campus facilities will remain the same.

While an Austin Prep education is without question a significant financial sacrifice that families make, Austin Prep's ancillary income *underwrites* the actual cost of tuition. Without the ancillary income we generate each year, the cost of tuition would be higher. As we always have done, we will continue to be wise financial stewards of Austin Prep's resources. Our overarching goal is always to invest in Austin Prep – in people, in programs, and in facilities – and enrich the life-changing formation our students receive. In recent years, that investment has manifested itself in facility upgrades like the dining hall, in the new evaluation and compensation program to reward teaching excellence, increased tuition assistance, and in expanding programs like college counseling.

While we don't know the full impact that the virus will have, we expect some difficult decisions in the weeks and months ahead. Many of you have been reaching out with important questions and, unfortunately, I'm unable to answer them, at least not completely.

### **Will there be a baccalaureate and graduation for the Class of 2020?**

As you know by now, the Governor has closed schools through the end of the academic year. My strong preference is to celebrate the Class of 2020 in person, at an actual ceremony. They have worked hard to reach this milestone in their lives but, unfortunately, we're unable to make any decision about that. As of right now, we are not permitted to gather in groups greater than 10 and there is no indication when that will be lifted. As soon as civic and public health officials offer some direction, we can make a decision about venue and timing. We just don't know what that will look like or when that can occur. Planning an event at some point during the summer seems reasonable at this point, but we are in a holding pattern pending further guidance from public officials. To prepare for the possibility that an in-person event will not be possible in the foreseeable future, we are also making plans to mark the moment with a virtual event. More information will follow about that in the coming weeks. Please be patient.

### **When will we be together on campus again?**

We are waiting for direction from public health experts and government officials. Schools are densely populated communities and when we ultimately return to campus, we may need to adopt new protocols, practices, and timelines to adhere to distancing guidelines. Given the emphasis from the public health officials on reducing densely populated gatherings, it seems likely that when we return to campus it will be a gradual or phased process.

### **How long will remote teaching and learning continue?**

Austin Prep's official last day of class is scheduled for Friday, June 5, 2020 and we are prepared to continue virtual learning through that date. Students are completing assessments, homework, and assignments and final grades will be issued.



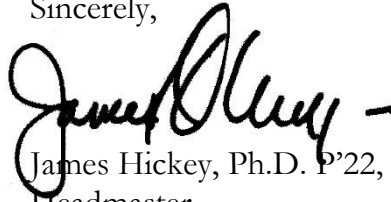
The senior leadership of Austin Prep is meeting several times a week (virtually, of course) to provide the careful oversight Austin Prep needs in this challenging time. Every crisis is different and this public health crisis is unlike any we have confronted in our lifetime. We're adapting to the frequent vicissitudes that we encounter, both internally and externally, and exercising our considered judgment to keep Austin Prep

in good stead so that our mission will remain a coveted and valued experience for many generations beyond ours.

One promise I can make is that we will remain steadfast in our commitment to mission. We faithfully use mission – *veritas, unitas, and caritas* – to guide our decision-making. As I have said countless times, mission is not another thing on the plate. It is the plate. And by putting mission first, we know we are acting in the best interest of the students we are privileged to serve. With mission as the compass and with the support of the Austin Prep community, we will safeguard our momentum to sustain our *Journey* to better days ahead.

As always, please be in touch with me directly if I can be helpful.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James Hickey -". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

James Hickey, Ph.D. P'22, '23, '24  
Headmaster