

OFFICE OF THE HEADMASTER

“Just as Caesar seeks his image in your coin, so God seeks his image in your character. Give back to Caesar, he says, what belongs to Caesar. What does Caesar look for from you? His image. What does God look for from you? His image. But Caesar’s image is on a coin, God’s image is in you.”

~St. Augustine, Sermon 113A, 8

April 27, 2020

Dear Members of the Class of 2020,

When school closures were originally extended through early May, we all had hoped that we would be back on campus and looked forward to the familiarity of our daily routines at Austin Prep. When the closure was extended this past week through the end of the academic year, it felt like a gut punch. While there is nothing anyone can do to restore the traditional capstone activities that the Class of 2020 will not experience, there are some things that I hope will lessen some of the sting that you are feeling. With approval from your Student Government and Senior Class Officers, we are implementing the following plan.

Final Exams

First, I’ll start with some good news that every member of the senior class will universally appreciate – I have cancelled all final exams for the Class of 2020. You’ve worked hard. You have helped set an example for the underclass students. You have become living examples of Austin Prep’s mission. And final exams – given the difficulty of the last few weeks – will not make you any more ready than you already are for the next steps of your journey beyond the campus.

Baccalaureate Mass

Austin Prep will celebrate a virtual Baccalaureate Mass for the Class of 2020 on **Sunday, May 17, 2020 at 10:00 a.m.** from the Chapel of St. Augustine. Austin Prep’s Chaplain, Father Patrick Armano, will celebrate the mass and offer it for the Class of 2020. As the date draws near, you will receive a separate communication on how you and your family can virtually participate.

Valedictorian and Salutatorian

I'd like to announce the Valedictorian and the Salutatorian of Austin Prep's Class of 2020: Cat Bravo is the Valedictorian and Jenna Albanese is the Salutatorian – and only a thousandth of a point separates their GPA's! They have worked hard for this well-deserved honor and I encourage you to offer them your congratulations.

Graduation – The First Plan

Obviously, holding a commencement ceremony on the original date of Saturday, May 16 is not possible. Current social distancing rules prohibit gatherings of greater than 10 people and it seems they will not be altered for weeks or possibly months. In lieu of a traditional graduation ceremony, we have contracted with a video production company to produce a video keepsake for the Class of 2020 – and you all have the opportunity to be included.

Here are the high-level details (a separate communication will follow in about two weeks with instructions about how you can participate):

- Each member of the Class of 2020 will be shipped a graduation gown, cap, and tassel.
- After donning your cap and gown, you are welcome to film a 10-15 second video clip on your cell phone that you will send to the video production company. All members of the Class of 2020 will have their personal clips included in the video. The purpose of the clip is to record a message that will be part of a historical record for your class. You can be filmed alone or include your parents and siblings. You may want to include some personal effects that reflect your time at Austin Prep or areas of interest. Be thoughtful and be creative. (Again, more specific instructions and suggestions will follow soon.)
- In addition to your personalized videos, we will also include some aspects of a traditional graduation ceremony such as the speeches from the valedictorian and salutatorian and the announcement of graduation awards and medals.
- We plan to publish traditional graduation invitations and baccalaureate and commencement programs. There's going to be an asterisk on these keepsakes reflecting the uncertainty of the actual dates. I don't have a timeline on getting these to you given the challenges of business disruption.

Graduation – The Second Plan

I know that some schools have selected tentative dates to possibly hold graduation in person. We are not going to arbitrarily select a date. As of this writing, there is no indication of any date or time period from any public health or civic

official (of which we are aware) as to when social distancing rules and non-essential business restrictions will be lifted. To that end, picking any date is nothing more than a guess.

I have seen speculation in press accounts that summer is a possibility. I also have seen press accounts that the summer is not realistic. Because no one really knows, the best I can offer is that if a window of opportunity opens for the Class of 2020 to safely come together before you head off to college in mid or late August, I will mobilize the resources of the Austin Prep community to coordinate an in-person commencement ceremony for you (subject to what is safe and required by public health experts).

If it does become possible, there will likely be limitations that will impact the venue and how many people can attend. As an example, you may have seen the recent graduation ceremony of the United States Air Force Academy. Although it was in person, it was by no means usual and traditional.

The Prom

Should that window of opportunity open where we can safely host commencement, the ability to host a prom could fall in the same period. If this emerges as a possibility, we would have to move quickly and our most expedient option would be to host something at Austin Prep. The hotel and restaurant industry is currently shuttered and when the time comes for it to open again, it will likely take weeks for the industry to get up and running. At Austin Prep, we have the greatest control coordinating the event if we utilize our own facilities, equipment, and resources. If a realistic opportunity presents itself to hold the prom at an offsite venue, we can certainly explore that possibility, as well.

Your Diplomas

The Board of Trustees has officially authorized me to confer Austin Prep diplomas for the Class of 2020! I haven't signed your diplomas yet, but I'm looking forward to proudly making them official. If we are unable to hold a graduation ceremony in person at some point this summer, we will develop an alternate plan to distribute your diplomas in a way that complies with whatever social distancing guidelines are in place. I want to mark the occasion with grace and dignity just as much as you do.

Your Transcripts

Official transcripts cannot be generated until the 2019-2020 academic year concludes after final grades are posted for all students. This is standard operating

procedure every year. Your transcripts will be transmitted electronically to your respective colleges in the usual timeline of June and July.

The Yearbook

The production of the yearbook is delayed. In light of the cancellation of the final weeks of school, we are not able to include any photographs of spring athletics, art events, or extracurricular activities. Should an in-person graduation and prom occur, we will include photographs from those events before the yearbook goes to final production. (As a point of reference, capstone senior class activities are never included in the yearbook because it ordinarily goes to press in April). We would distribute the yearbooks in person in the fall when the Class of 2020 gathers for the first time as alumni.

A Pancake Breakfast for the Class of 2020...in November

Thanksgiving is traditionally a popular weekend for Austin Prep alumni to return to campus. The Thanksgiving football game on Wednesday night or Thursday morning is often a focal point of coming together. We're going to host a pancake breakfast for the Class of 2020 in the dining hall at the start of the Thanksgiving weekend. **I'm asking you to save the date now – Wednesday morning, November 25 – and God-willing, we'll be able to gather at that time.**

We will plan to distribute the 2020 yearbooks at the breakfast so there will be an opportunity for you to sign each other's books.

A Time Capsule for the Class of 2020

Construction on the lower fields is in its final stages. The new tennis courts and the new turf baseball field are nearly finished. Before the contractor completes the paving and landscaping, I'd like to seize the opportunity to bury a time capsule for the Class of 2020 in the new complex. Perhaps for your 10-year high school reunion or your 25-year high school reunion – we have plenty of time to decide – we can open the time capsule and walk down memory lane.

Here's what you need to do:

- Write yourself a hand-written personalized letter that you won't open for at least 10 years. You will be around 28 years old and, by then, you will have graduated from college, you could be in graduate school, your career will be underway, and you might even be married with children. You might want to include your thoughts and perspective on the pandemic and how it has impacted your life or tell yourself what you plan to do with your life. When

the contents of the time capsule are revealed some day, you'll know if you took your own advice.

- Select two photographs to include with your letter.
- Put the letter and the photos in a sealed envelope and mark the envelope with your name and "Class of 2020."
- Put the envelope in a Ziploc bag.
- **By Friday, May 29, 2020 mail the letter and photos in the Ziploc bag to:**

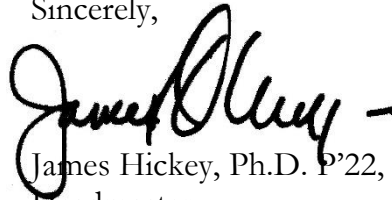
Austin Prep Class of 2020
Time Capsule
101 Willow Street
Reading, MA 01867

We're going to bury the time capsule in an undisclosed location on the lower field. (In addition to a couple of witnesses, we'll record the location of the time capsule in the school's archives so the location doesn't get lost over time.) Lastly, we are planning to include the URL, username, and password to access a video tribute to the Class of 2020 that won't be watched until the time capsule is opened. (We're going to burn the video to a disc and bury that in the time capsule, too, but I suspect CD's will become like 8-track tapes so the URL is there as a backup).

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I know this is hard and difficult to process and I struggle alongside you. You may recall that I told you Austin Prep's Class of 2020 is among my all-time favorite graduating classes in my entire career. There's lots of reasons for that, but probably the top reason is that your class is full of personality, energy, optimism, and spirit. You live and breathe Austin Prep. I have watched you grow into remarkable young men and women and you've made me very proud. You have made Austin Prep very proud.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Hickey -". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line at the end.

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