

Remarks

Julie Anderson P'19, '23
Head of School

Greetings from Cheshire Academy.

I'm here today in the historic Bowden Hall, getting ready for campus to close for Thanksgiving break. First semester classes resume on Dec. 1 for all of our students, who will attend CA remotely until Dec. 19, when we take an extended break to enjoy the winter holidays.

Three months ago, we implemented our “Coming Back Strong & Looking Forward” plan for starting the new school year. We set out to ensure a safe and organized reopening of campus for our new and returning students, following our guiding principles of: being inclusive, flexible, and student centered, while staying open to ideas and change, and communicating continuously throughout the term.

At that time, about 25 percent of the student body decided to attend from home or were forced to attend remotely due to travel restrictions. Students, faculty, and staff on campus were required to have completed a PCR test prior to arrival. We later followed up with campuswide testing—done here at school—when the semester began.

Looking back, there was some anxiety and trepidation about the return to school amid significant uncertainties related to the pandemic and its infinite reach. Since then, we have seen firsthand the success of our strategies. Most important, everyone on and off campus has remained healthy. The semester moved along much better than expected.

The experience of the past three months has taught us a lot: most pointedly, Cheshire Academy is resilient, flexible, compassionate, careful, and above all, committed to the good of our community.

We faced the challenges head on, together, and stepped up to try and make the best of an awfully complex, arduous, and uncertain situation. We supported and looked out for each other and, through individual and collective actions, stopped the spread and limited the impact of the coronavirus.

It hasn't been easy. We're not out of the woods yet, but we can breathe a sigh of relief and celebrate this significant milestone.

I realize that so many families have faced hardship, serious disruption, and even loss. And while the pandemic has brought tremendous pain and adversity to so many people and places, it has also brought out, and shown a bright light on, the good and wonderful spirit of humanity among citizens of the world, the country, and our small home in Cheshire, Connecticut.

What we experienced during the school year so far has been very different, yet, in some ways, familiar and comforting:

- Classes have been held on a consistent schedule for 12 weeks
- Student-athletes were able to compete in more than 40 games and matches against other schools
- All-school meetings were held virtually with student musical performances
- We discovered new ways of staying connected while physically distant
- Extra-help sessions, college counseling meetings, advisory and club meetings; fine and performing arts classes; library support, and even math club all took place in their new formats
- Students led a Black Lives Matter rally
- We continued our tradition of community service through countless student projects, schoolwide events and, most recently, the traditional Lights of Hope

Now, as we in the United States prepare to celebrate a season of Thanksgiving, I can think of no better time to express my gratitude and to share my appreciation of others around me.

First and foremost, thank you to our students. Last November, no one could have imagined a school year like the one we've experienced so far. But no matter the circumstances, you persevered. When doing what was easiest or more fun was an option, you chose to do the right thing, from participating in online classes at inconvenient hours, to overcoming issues with technology, to following health and safety guidelines, and even to wearing masks for a majority of your day. I know it hasn't been easy. Your teachers, dorm parents, advisors, coaches, and I are very grateful for your involvement, your attitude, and your determination as you navigated through the semester.

I want to thank my fellow faculty and staff members who support and guide our students every day, and keep the wheels turning behind the scenes.

I also appreciate my colleagues from other schools, whose camaraderie, collaboration, and generosity make us all better.

And I wish to thank the members of our Board of Trustees and the leadership team for helping to guide, direct, develop, and implement the big-picture strategies and the daily operations that are equally critical to keeping us strong and productive.

Thank you also to our parents, alumni, and friends—those of you who have been supporting Cheshire Academy through it all, in ways large and small, through acts of kindness and generosity, and in your words and actions. It all truly makes a difference.

While some uncertainty and obstacles undoubtedly lay before us, I am confident the Cheshire Academy community will continue to flourish in this unique and extraordinary environment.

Humbly, I believe that the Cheshire Academy of tomorrow will owe a small debt of gratitude for all that we—individually and collectively—have done to ensure we remain safe, healthy, and productive, committed to the values and mission of the school, and always looking forward. Years and decades from now, those who come after us, will look back on these times and upon us with a sense of awe, admiration, and appreciation for the job we've done and the spirit in which we did it. Let's live up to that reputation and continue the good work.

In the weeks and months ahead, time will begin to feel as though it is slowing down. The days will be getting shorter, the temperatures will drop in the United States, we will be confined to the indoors more often, and fatigue may get to us. Let's not give in. Keep up the effort, wear your mask, follow the health and safety protocols, and look after others around us.

And even though this is a very personal and heartfelt message, I believe I speak for all of us at Cheshire Academy when I say thank you for your ongoing support, trust, and faith in the good work of our school.

I wish you a very Happy Thanksgiving, whether you're celebrating the holiday or just appreciating those around you. May you and your family have good health and contentment during this season of gratitude and in the weeks ahead as 2020 comes to a close.

Remain strong, always look forward, and be safe.