



The Taft School

April 1, 2020

Dear Parents and Students:

As we begin our spring term as a remote campus, we thought it might be helpful to have a sense of what we are striving for and what we anticipate.

Above all, even as we recognize that nothing can replicate what happens on our campus—in classrooms, hallways, offices, dorms, stage, and field—when school is in normal session, we still aspire to meet our mission: the education of the whole student. Taft will look and feel different for the next eight weeks, but we will strive to offer a first-rate academic education in a close and caring community.

With these goals in mind, here are a few things the school has done or is doing:

- The school sent out a comprehensive survey asking students about challenges and concerns they have as the school begins remote operation. Some 290 students responded, sharing valuable information, questions, and concerns. We are working through the responses and following up on student concerns including everything from emotional, psychological, physical, and spiritual support to academic and technical support.
- Teaching faculty have done extensive work in planning and preparing for remote learning. Our goal is to provide an education that includes structured and student-driven engagement. Teachers have begun their work and anticipate regular and ongoing contact with students across diverse platforms: text, email, call, Zoom, and PowerSchool. We anticipate a range of pedagogical approaches in lessons, classes, and tutorials, some synchronous and some asynchronous. We plan on sending a more detailed explanation shortly that outlines in greater detail our engagement model for teachers and students.
- Class deans will function in the same capacity as when we are on campus: they will oversee the whole of the deaneer's life at Taft. They will be working closely with faculty to identify and support students who may be struggling; they will continue to meet remotely, in weekly meetings with the school counselors and physician and in weekly meetings with the deans' group; and they will continue our committee meetings in which they review student progress.
- Student advisors will continue to serve in the same supportive role. The advisor/advisee relationship is a critical one and, as always, advisors will fashion that relationship in ways that work best for their advisee. We anticipate a term-long ongoing connection across email, text, call, Zoom, Facetime, Skype, and other platforms.
- Dean of Academic Affairs Jennifer Kenerson has sent a letter to all students on expectations during remote learning and will continue her work in course registration for

returning students. Dean of Faculty Edie Traina has worked with faculty, supporting them in all their work around remote learning.

- In the dean of students office, Mark Traina and Lindsay Leal are committed to ensuring creative and effective ways the unique spirit and culture of Taft students are affirmed and deepened even as we are scattered across the globe. Today, for instance, we held our first Virtual Assembly. The deans have already partnered with students, and students are leading in an inspiring way. Instagram accounts called “Dispatches from the Deans Office” and “Life at Taft” have already been launched. We envision a variety of other ways we can remain connected, from School Meetings, senior speeches, to coffee house concerts.
- Student Activity Director Courtney Smyth intends to work with students to encourage, support, and empower them. For instance, we think that Taft’s vibrant student club program is one we will continue—there is a terrific opportunity for student leadership—and we envision other student-led activities. Having said that, we also want to be careful not to overwhelm students or try to do too much.
- Student affinity groups will continue to serve their important role. Affinity group facilitators have already met with Dean of Multicultural Education Andrew Prince and will be communicating this week to schedule synchronous gatherings and create asynchronous forums to help foster community.
- Kerry Bracco, who leads the I-Block class for all Lower Mids and new Mids, will be offering a curriculum that supports students in their unique challenges today.

In short, while the next few weeks will be new, we will still be doing the work of Taft. Faculty will have their normal meetings, including the Deans Group, Academic Department Chairs, Academic Departments, Full Faculty, Senior Administrative Team. They will still be engaging with classes, assessing student work, offering extra help—and supporting advisees, hosting affinity groups, and helping clubs. Students will still be learning new material, taking assessments, and completing homework. Community will still thrive, with School Meetings and Assemblies, concerts and activities.

And, here are some important reminders and announcements:

- Students should check their email and PowerSchool several times a day.
- Students should communicate with their teachers as often as necessary.
- Contact your student’s class dean and advisor if you have any concerns.
- PowerSchool (Taft’s learning management system) and Zoom will be the primary platforms used by teachers and supported by our IT department (PowerSchool is adjusting to the high volume, so please be patient.) We encourage you to read about these platforms and their privacy policies on the [PowerSchool](#) and [Zoom](#) websites.

- Some Zoom sessions will be recorded and your student will be asked permission to be recorded.
- We are working on systems to gather academic habits marks frequently and how to gather groups of students for synchronous experiences, such as advisee meetings, morning meetings, affinity groups, and more.
- More scheduled community events, like Assembly, are forthcoming.
- Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont's "stay-at-home" order means the campus is closed. We are working on a solution to reunite students and their belongings as soon as it is safe to do so, but until further notice, no students or parents should come to Taft's campus.

This is a time of great challenge, as students and faculty will be teaching and learning even as they carry new burdens and stresses. Of this we have to be very conscious and empathic. But we are committed to our mission, we have energy and optimism, and we are excited about the opportunities.

Your feedback is critical to us as we continually evaluate how we help our students to learn. Please let me know about your and your child's experience. Our mutual success is dependent on our working effectively together and is central to our collaborative work. If you need anything or have a suggestion, please email me.

I close by wishing you the best and with hopes that you are all safe and well.

Sincerely,

D. Jeremy LaCasse
Assistant Headmaster