



Dear Friends,

Whether 2020-21 should be seen as an *anno horribilis* or a finest hour for the Williston Northampton School I'll leave to future historians to determine. But for now, all indicators certainly point to the latter. Williston is in its final week of in-person classes and activities for 2020, a remarkable achievement given the uncertainties of operating schools during a pandemic. Students will depart campus at week's end and will continue activity remotely after Thanksgiving. Our plan, subject to public health guidelines, is to resume classes in-person in January.

Last spring, we pivoted to a completely online model and, this fall, to a hybrid one, with a mix of in-person and virtual classes (more than 90 percent of students have been on-campus). Both have required effort and problem solving, but the bottom line is that our students are getting as rich an academic experience as is possible under the circumstances. I believe strongly that our faculty and students have made the very best of this unusual situation.

While face coverings, social distancing, and plexiglass have certainly interfered with the typical traditions and personal interactions that define a Williston education, the true essence of the school has continued to flourish over the last few months. We have held classes in the basketball courts, the wrestling room, dance studio, chapel, and theatre; we've found ways to put on plays and hold concerts; we've modified sports so we can scrimmage safely. Almost every facet of how we operate around campus and in the dormitories has been impacted by new expectations and procedures in this pandemic environment. Despite all of this, our students were thrilled to be back together this fall and have united to create a dynamic and engaging atmosphere. **To say that I am proud of them is an understatement.**

In June, as we were deeply involved in decisions necessary for the school's financial well-being (preserving cash, forgoing salary increases for the senior administrative team, cutting employee retirement benefits by half, to name the most prominent), Williston also confronted the other crisis roiling the nation. As I outlined in my communication to all alumni, parents, and friends earlier this fall, Williston remains committed to becoming an anti-racist institution. How our Black and Brown students and my adult colleagues experience life at Williston and feel about their experiences will not be changed overnight; rather, we are on a journey to building a more

respectful and supportive culture for all. That will take time, persistence, and resources, but the Board of Trustees and I are fully committed to this important work.

In turn, Williston completed extensive anti-bias training this fall for all faculty, students, and trustees. We also recently conducted a campus-wide assessment of campus multiculturalism and inclusivity that will provide an important information baseline for future work. Williston's Anti-Racist Coalition has also been meeting steadily since late summer. This group of alumni, faculty, trustees, and Head's Visiting Council members is charged with developing an institutional five-year strategic plan for diversity, equity, and inclusion. We look forward to sharing a board-approved plan with everyone this spring.

This year, through our request for support of the Williston Northampton Fund, we have asked you to help us [Meet the Moment](#). This appeal asks for an increased level of financial support to offset the extraordinary expenses (presently more than \$2.1 million in direct costs and \$1.4 million in reduced revenue) associated with running the school during the coronavirus pandemic. But it also calls out the need for a new mindset, one in which everyone— faculty, staff, students, families, trustees, and alumni—must adjust to the realities of the world in which we live. The disruption to calendar and daily lives, job descriptions and responsibilities, existing plans and future goals, has combined to create an environment unlike anything we have ever seen before. Williston students are showing their resilience: staging dance performances on the Quad, taking to the athletic fields in masks, filming *Antigone* for a remote audience. Now, all of us are called upon to meet the moment, as uncertainty persists throughout this year.

Even as we have skillfully navigated the turbulent waters of the school opening and fall term, we cannot lose sight of the challenges that need to be met for the fall of 2021. It will take our collective work, spirit, and commitment to ensure that Williston emerges successfully from the effects of the massive disruptions facing all educational institutions. We have been effective thus far, thanks to the board's support, the senior administrative team's leadership, and the faculty and staff's willingness to meet the moment—and I am confident that we will once again prevail. With a nod to Thanksgiving and the sense of gratitude that will be felt around the Hill family table, I offer sincere thanks to all who have already stepped forward to help the school meet this moment.

With gratitude,



Robert W. Hill III P'15, '19

Head of School