Dear Parents:

The past weeks in our new distance learning environment have reminded me of the Bulldog way: Respect, Commitment, Toughness, and Spirit, qualities we have seen in abundance in our students, parents, and faculty. I could not be more grateful and appreciative for — or prouder of — our Academy community.

We should have been together these past couple of weeks, gathered in the “Pit” to enjoy the close of Field Day and that same evening at our Alumni Reunions. Our Class of 2020 should have been enjoying their Senior T-Shirt Day as a coda to the May 1 national reply date and of course looking forward to their graduation celebration originally scheduled for today. Faculty advisors visited our seniors at their homes, presenting them with special Class of 2020 signs to display in their yards. It is an extraordinary class whose senior profiles I urge you to read; these profiles capture their remarkable character and attributes, their gratitude for their teachers and coaches, and their college plans. These young men and women are in the vanguard of senior classes across the land.

While we continue to advance your child’s education in this alternative learning environment and move toward the close of the academic year, I want to update you on plans for the summer and next school year.

1. **Fall Re-Opening.** We have established a Re-opening Task Force, comprising, among others, top medical and health experts to help us chart the best course. It is our fervent hope and belief that the vast majority of the 2020-21 school year will be spent in classes, on campus, while paying close attention to best practices established by public health agencies. We are modeling different scenarios for the opening and operating of school, as well as for changes during the year that may alter our operating condition, but we must ultimately rely on, and be guided by, the Virginia Department of Health and the governor’s decisions. As we advance the work of internal planning teams whose collective and most important goal will be student health and safety, we will share occasional updates. If we find that we spend more time than expected in a distance-learning mode next year, we will do everything we can to reduce costs appropriately and pass budgetary savings on to you as warranted.

2. **Financial Aid and Support.** Just as you have assuredly placed your faith in the Academy, so do we commit to you that no family or child should have to forgo the Academy experience because of financial crisis or reset. Tuned to the economic toll this pandemic is taking on our local and regional as well as national economy and markets, we do not want any child or family to be denied an Academy education because of sudden economic hardship. With that in mind, and with the support of our Board of Trustees, we have marshalled our finite resources to establish a COVID-19 Emergency Financial Aid Reserve that is designed with one purpose in mind: to make sure no Bulldog is left behind. If you have questions or would like to inquire about emergency tuition support, please contact Mrs. Susan Gall in our Business Office.
3. **Faculty Support and Retention.** As you know, one of our challenges as a non-profit is that conventional business models do not align with, or directly overlay on, the financial model for Norfolk Academy. Our major expenditures, such as our educational program and the maintenance of our campus, are mostly fixed; our single largest expense, though, is compensation for our highly qualified faculty. Our primary goal once on the other side of this pandemic, as I hope it is yours, is to make sure our faculty is fully intact and able to continue to deliver our mission, building character in our children while delivering the highest quality education. It is a powerful affirmation of the faculty that retention of currently-enrolled students is at a historic high while new enrollment for next year remains as healthy as ever.

4. **Summer Planning and Distance Learning.** We have two major goals this summer as I have shared with the faculty: a) We will devote significant time to plan the re-opening of school, guided by our Re-opening Task Force and informed by CDC and Virginia Department of Health guidelines; b) With a primary focus on most effective instruction and student engagement these past couple of months, we have embarked upon a comprehensive review of distance learning schedules, learning management platforms, and curriculum; we will re-tool and upgrade our distance learning program and have it ready to deploy at any time. It will be a busy summer. School may look, feel, and function differently for some time, but we will be ready come August — and we will be excited to welcome the Class of 2032 and your children back to campus.

On Friday I was reminded of the aim and extraordinary end goal of an Academy education. We held our Senior Speech Finals, the 68th consecutive year of this competition. The three finalists — our Honor Council Chair, a Jefferson Scholar, and a Morehead-Cain Scholar — delivered their speeches via Zoom with the same passion and eloquence they would have had at the podium in our Johnson Theater. Afterward, several seniors accepted my invitation to share their thoughts, most of them reflecting with spontaneous, palpable emotion on the friendships they have forged and their appreciation for one another and for their teachers. If anything can show the power of our public speaking tradition, it was the juxtaposition of these two kinds of “speeches,” formal elocution and speaking from the heart.

We all continue forward in a spirit of hope and gratitude while finding as much meaning, purpose, and value as we can in what were unusual but now familiar routines. This prolonged isolation from children and colleagues has reminded me more vividly and clearly than ever of the profound and enduring value of the Academy experience — and that its greatest power and meaning derive from when we are all in it together, face to face, shoulder to shoulder. Please extend my warmest wishes and happiest greetings to the wellspring of all our hopes and all our optimism, your child!

Yours sincerely,

Dennis G. Manning
Headmaster