



March 20, 2020

Dear SYA students,

I was relieved to learn on Monday that all SYA students are now safely at home, and that many of you are currently learning online, or are getting ready to next week. I know the last few weeks and months have been challenging given the spread of the coronavirus, and I wanted to take a moment to reflect on where we've been and how we move forward.

First and foremost, I want to thank you for being so resilient during this time. You have had to exercise more patience and adaptability than most other SYA students in our 55-year history. While the circumstances have been unfortunate, I am very proud of this class and how you have handled this unexpected transition.

As many of you know, we have been tracking the coronavirus since the middle of January and attempted to anticipate early on its potential impact on our SYA China students. We had no clue at that time that it would come to a full evacuation of all four campuses. Our goal from the start was to keep everyone in country as long as possible in order to have you immersed in your classes, with the teachers, friends and host families with whom you have developed the deepest of bonds. But the rapid spread of the coronavirus, the closing of local schools, and the increasing difficulties of travel brought your experience to an abrupt end.

I am saddened, as I know you are, that you didn't get the type of closure that happens each May, in ways that take time and are more gradual—saying goodbye to your teachers, to your host families and to each other. Many of you were not ready to go home and are still making that transition, which I know is hard, and made harder still by quarantines and social distancing.

Through all of this, I have been lifted greatly by the stories of your intrepid nature and your creativity and collaboration in times when they were needed most. You displayed clearly that you have mastered those SYA competencies. And like generations of SYAers before you, you have learned challenging lessons about the world in real-time.

As you settle into a different type of learning, I ask you to do two things. Please work with your peers and your teachers to think creatively about maintaining your strong bonds with each other and those in your host country. They miss you as much as you miss them. And now that you are back in the U.S. where the virus is growing, think about ways to reach out to others in your communities who need your help. You have developed a key critical skill while at SYA — empathy — that you can put to immediate good use.

You remain in our hearts and minds. You are very special members of the SYA community, and I look forward to seeing how you adapt and thrive in these coming months.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Hassan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Tom Hassan
SYA President