

## Reflecting and Looking Forward

I have learned, played, and lived in residential schools long enough to fully appreciate the contagious aspects of emotions and energy in these settings. The start of the school year is thrilling enough to fuel a small city. The fatigue and ennui of late February—when many of us have had enough of short, gray, and cold days—is palpable. The joy of the approaching celebrations of the senior class in May provides nearly all of us with an extra bounce in our step. Since March 2020, we have collectively experienced disruption, stress, loss, and isolation, negatively impacting our motivation, mental health, performance, and sense of connection.

As we prepare for the year ahead amid a wave of rising numbers of COVID-19 cases and Delta variant headlines, to buoy my sense of optimism and enthusiasm I keep coming back to Dr. Adam Grant's July *NYT* article, "[There's a Specific Kind of Joy We've Been Missing](#)." Grant described the tolls of the pandemic, as too many experienced painful losses of loved ones and jobs, succumbed to Zoom fatigue, and endured ceaseless waves of panic. He added that even the introverts who initially joked about their delight in not needing to interact in social settings experienced increased rates of depression. Borrowing Émile Durkheim's 20th-century term, Grant also asserted that "We find our greatest bliss in moments of [collective effervescence](#)," highlighting "the sense of energy and harmony people feel when they come together in a group around a shared purpose. Collective effervescence is the synchrony you feel when you slide into rhythm with strangers on a dance floor, colleagues in a brainstorming session, cousins at a religious service, or teammates on a soccer field. And during this pandemic, it's been largely absent from our lives."

Grant celebrated the powerful impact of humans interacting directly with humans. With this lens, as I look to the months ahead, even accepting the necessary masking that will mark at least the opening weeks of the school year, I daydream about All-School Meetings in Cochran Chapel, athletic contests with cheering fans, theatre performances with live in-person audiences, and animated classroom debates. I feel more encouraged when I remember the jolts of positive energy I experience when students greet me on the walkway, stop by my office in George Washington Hall, and bustle into my classroom. I think back to the vibrant, electric energy of the dance floor last spring at the senior prom, and I cannot help but begin the countdown to the start of school. Grant included, "Research has [found](#) that people laugh five times as often when they're with others as when they're alone. Even exchanging pleasantries with a stranger on a train is [enough](#) to spark joy." And his final line captured the central message I hope to convey to our Andover community this August: **"Joy shared is joy sustained."**

In the months ahead, we will continue to face challenges, uncertainty, and loss. We will engage in hard conversations that interrogate painful truths and highlight massive needs. We will work for progress and change. We will make mistakes, and we will stumble. We will embrace daily habits to keep each other safe and healthy. And we will find strength, motivation, and joy in supporting each other throughout.

## Prioritize Building Connections and Relationships

I regularly tell students and families that I think the greatest gift of an Andover experience is the relationships you get to build with cherished loved ones. The friends and mentors you find at Andover are for life. I urge us to redouble our efforts to initiate and nurture these connections as we

begin a new year. This prioritization requires deliberate care, effort, and time. Sparking a conversation with a new peer, sharing your story vulnerably with a trusted adult, and showing up reliably for a friend requires time, courage, and intention.

Students, be brave, have faith, lean into support, and love fiercely. Seek ways to love your assigned reading, your roommate's quirky habits, and your afternoon activity. Shift your language from "I have to \_\_\_\_" to "I get to \_\_\_\_." Articulate your gratitude and demonstrate your affection. Embrace small, ordinary ways to spread kindness and fuel connection. Leave a handwritten sticky note of encouragement on your peer's notebook in the Garver Room, attend your friend's recital in Graves Hall, look up from your phone and say hello with a smile as you pass on the path. Pronounce your classmate's name correctly, hold the door for your instructor, and make room at your lunch table for a younger student. Delight in moments when we can all be together. Know that the adults on this campus care about you tremendously and are rooting for you at every turn. Building relationships with your peers and the adults in your lives will be key to your success and well-being at Andover.