



# FORTITUDE & JOY

NAVIGATING COVID-19 AS A COMMUNITY

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CHURCH HILL ACADEMY'S  
CLASS OF 2020



# BEYOND OUR WALLS

While we never could have foreseen what shape the 2019–2020 school year would take, the last few months showed what a special community Church Hill Academy is.

With the closure of Virginia schools in March, the Academy transitioned essentially overnight to remote education. And while most of life came to a screeching halt around our city and nation, Academy students and teachers forged ahead.

Over the following weeks, students demonstrated their incredible ability to adapt and rise to new challenges. Some actually excelled in previously difficult subjects, and others developed their independent learning skills. And while circumstances and outcomes looked different for each student, their collective perseverance in the midst of so much uncertainty inspired us all.

As our tight-knit school made the



abrupt change to a new model of education, Academy life took on new forms:

- Students continued classes and coursework through online instruction and daily, graded assignments using school-issued laptops.

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## CLASS OF 2020 STATS

- 11 GRADUATES
- 5 ADVANCED STUDIES DIPLOMAS
- \$1,500,000+ IN GRANT & SCHOLARSHIP OFFERS



JONATHAN CHAN

## NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In the midst of tremendous upheaval, I'm amazed at all our students and staff accomplished in these past three months, even as we were physically apart in so many ways. It's nothing short of miraculous. While the challenges of COVID-19 aren't over, we want to pause and celebrate what God has done and thank you for being part of it. I know these have been trying times for you as well—so your partnership and friendship mean all the more. As we prepare for the uncertainty of the coming school year, we're encouraged by this incredible community of support that surrounds us.

In case you missed it, I want to draw your attention to some key news we shared recently. First, after months of deliberation and discernment, we made the tough decision to bring Tiny Tykes, our early childhood program, to a close. You can read more about this decision at [chatrichmond.org/tiny-tykes-closure](http://chatrichmond.org/tiny-tykes-closure). And second, in response to the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, I and our board of directors released statements on how the challenges of systemic racism impact our work and our students ([chatrichmond.org/lament-and-action](http://chatrichmond.org/lament-and-action)).

As you read, I hope this newsletter reminds you of our core conviction: that each of our students bears God's image and thus holds inestimable value. We honor and celebrate their extraordinary lives.

# TOGETHER FOR OUR NEIGHBORS

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When COVID-19 suddenly forced us to suspend regular programming, the After School Program team didn't hesitate to jump in where community support was needed most. As Richmond Public Schools (RPS) immediately shifted from day-to-day operations to crisis relief mode—organizing free, city-wide meal distribution for students—the After School Program team was on site from day one.

Within the first three weeks, After School Program Director Willis Weber took on a leadership role as Lead Volunteer Coordinator. He worked closely with RPS staff and For Richmond (a local network of churches), organizing the 30 lead volunteers who managed 100+ daily rotating volunteers across each school site and mobile delivery route.

Over the following months, our city rallied around students and families in remarkable ways. Volunteers—including CHAT staff from every program area—prepared and distributed thousands of meals Monday-Friday. Dozens of individuals and organizations donated thousands of PPE items, hygiene products, diapers, books, and other supplies. RPS staff and Nutrition Services worked tirelessly to facilitate unprecedented meal production and distribute learning packets and technology to students.

Willis considers CHAT's support of this effort a direct continuation of our mission. "We serve many students and families who've been



**4,000+ VOLUNTEERS**  
**14,000+ HOURS**  
**1,000,000+ MEALS**

(AS OF JUNE 22)

disproportionately impacted by the challenges of COVID-19," he shares. "This work was a natural extension of fostering equitable access to excellent resources—a driving value of the After School Program."

This support for families was vital. The pandemic exacerbated the struggles caused by poverty and systemic injustice that many of Richmond's residents of color face on a daily basis, particularly in the East End. So it was essential to find practical solutions to meet needs—for instance, 10+ daily bus routes delivering food *into* neighborhoods in order that families with limited transportation could access it.

"Our students and families deserve the best," says Willis. "The most challenging aspect of this role was having to do the best with what we had at any given moment. I'm grateful for the school nutrition staff and lead volunteers who are the real heroes of this work. Their steadfast presence and willing adaptability modeled loving our city like Jesus."

Willis reflects on how he's seen the fruit of collaboration across our city. "Partnership produces trust and outcomes we can't achieve on our own. This opportunity to serve together has strengthened CHAT's relationship with RPS and local organizations, congregations, and community leaders. I've been 'at the table' for a number of strategic decisions made by RPS over the course of this relief effort."

He's hopeful as he looks to the future. "Before COVID-19's impact, one of the After School Program's goals was to become more connected with RPS—with the express purpose of data sharing and better understanding our students' school day experience," he says. "Working together during this crisis has cemented our relationship. We've rolled up our sleeves together, and our mutual sense of trust is strong as a result."

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**WILLIS WEBER,  
AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM DIRECTOR**





# BEYOND OUR WALLS

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## LEGACY FARM GOODS

We just launched the Workforce Development program's Legacy Farm website! We're excited to use this new space to share more about

our work of tending the earth and loving our neighbors here in the East End. The "Store" button in the site menu will take you to our online market, where you can purchase fresh produce from our gardens (and an exclusive t-shirt [above], designed by our own On Point Prints team).

**VISIT [legacyfarmrva.org](http://legacyfarmrva.org) TO LEARN MORE & SHOP OUR SUMMER PRODUCE!**

## COVID-19 RESPONSE FUND UPDATE

Following a strong start to our COVID-19 Response fundraising on GivingTuesdayNow (May 5), we've continued to be amazed by the generosity of our community. So far, we've raised \$83,000 toward our \$100,000 goal!

If you've been a part of this effort, thank you! We appreciate your support more than ever in the midst of this economically challenging time. These gifts enabled us to provide essential services to East End students and families throughout the spring and will help us prepare for a safe school year.

**HELP US MAKE IT TO THE \$100,000 FINISH LINE BY GIVING ONLINE AT [bit.ly/chat-donate](http://bit.ly/chat-donate) OR BY CHECK USING THE ENCLOSED ENVELOPE.**

- Faculty created new lesson plans with interactive digital learning platforms and met virtually with students.
- Staff and volunteers prepared and delivered 2,000 nutritious meals to the homes of students and families in need.
- CHA's school counselor held virtual office hours for one-on-one counseling sessions.
- All 11 seniors completed requirements for graduation and received more than \$1.5M in scholarship and grant offers. Five students earned advanced studies diplomas.
- On June 12, we gathered with our seniors and their families, faculty, staff, and special guests for a "drive-in" graduation ceremony in Carlisle Avenue Baptist Church's parking lot.

We've never been more proud of our students or more convinced of their capacity to succeed, despite the obstacles they face. While questions persist about what the fall will look like, we're trusting God will strengthen and equip our school body for the days ahead.

If there was ever any doubt, we're certain now the community that's thriving at the Academy transcends its walls.

