

We Were Built For This: Remote Learning at HCA

A Message From the HCA Board of Directors | May 1, 2020

We wrote to our community supporters back in December that we were investing time and resources throughout the academic year to focus on **personal responsibility** and **resilience**. We ask students and ourselves: What do we have control over? How can we persevere when the deck is seemingly stacked against us? In short, how can we take control of circumstances and change our world for the better?

Obviously, none of us knew what was on the horizon, but personal responsibility and resilience are exactly the qualities necessary for a student, or anyone, to succeed in light of major world disruptions like COVID-19. HCA was not intended to thrive exclusively through remote learning. However, we did establish a learning system that was adaptable to any number of circumstances. We have leveraged this challenging situation to **strengthen our community** and **strengthen our students' academic engagement**.

"We are here to support our students and their families, and the best way to do that right now is to not miss a beat and get our students right back onto a rigorous academic schedule, even if that is happening from their breakfast tables or bedrooms." — Scott Barksdale, Head of School

HARPSWELL COASTAL ACADEMY'S MISSION is to educate and develop creative thinkers, compassionate leaders, and effective problem solvers who are actively engaged in their communities and the broader world. We want our students to be **Responsible, Resilient, Entrepreneurial**. When the time came to shutter the buildings, we modeled this behavior for our students and demonstrated exactly what it means to be a member of our learning community.

How are we living our mission during this global crisis?

We are responsible: HCA shows we are all in this together, and learning will continue as normally as possible.

HCA transitioned to remote learning immediately. Students already had Anywhere Anytime learning plans, so they wrapped up their existing coursework for Trimester #2. Teachers and staff members swiftly designed the delivery not only of core instruction but also of food services, special education, and social services. On Tuesday, March 24, crews (home rooms) started their first daily 9:00 am online meetings. By Thursday, all were ready for the start of online classes for the new trimester. We didn't miss a day.

A team of faculty and staff developed, printed, and mailed educational care packets for all students, so there were no barriers to immediate remote learning. Our school nutrition team implemented a comprehensive pick-up program of school supplies, library books and healthy meals. To date we have distributed over 150 meal packages, containing a week's worth of base supplies for a family of four. These are free to anyone in need.

HCA parents commented:

*“I appreciate that you are still making tremendous effort for our children to attend classes.”
“...Connecting with kiddos, continuing meaningful education.” “I love the parking lot meetings to drop off and get stuff.” “Your care and concern. The packet that was sent was very informative.” “The online learning... has been great for my child.” “I am very appreciative for all the efforts to keep things as normal as possible, the willingness to make workloads a little easier, and the acknowledgement that everyone needs time to unplug. Thank you!”*

We are resilient: HCA has adjusted procedures to support students and families.

Our Special Education team is making sure students can continue their specialized programs with as little interruption as possible. Our social worker and guidance teams offer support groups and one-on-one teleconference services. Faculty and staff have regular meetings. We honor all contracts at full pay regardless of personal circumstances with no furloughs or lay-offs. HCA counts volunteering and community service hours in lieu of school tasks during any time of self-isolation or school closure. We have worked hard with the Mid-Coast Hunger Prevention Program and Full Plates, Full Potential to acquire much-needed support and supplies for our food distribution program.

HCA parents said:

*“HCA has been flexible with students and we greatly appreciate the huge undertaking of making this remote learning possible and engaging.” “Emails and phone calls have been great!”
“Although my family does not need food assistance, I think it's great kids who need meals are getting them.” “Thanks to all of you for your hard work. Many of you have families of your own who need you at this time.” “The kids are on the same schedule as though they were still at school.” “HCA was quick with their decision to shut down. Everyone has done a great job on keeping us informed and making the students and parents still feel like they are part of a community and family. I also love the structure of online classes. Thanks for all HCA has done!”*

We are entrepreneurial: HCA is using best practices to ensure student engagement as well as emotional well-being.

HCA leaders met with experts on remote learning techniques that are tested and reliable. Evidence strongly suggests that set, routine live classrooms drive better engagement. Teachers hold three live video classes daily, supplemented by offline work packets for students who must work asynchronously. Students are asked to engage and complete their work to the extent they are able. Our 23 seniors are on track to graduate in June.

Faculty and staff hit the phones, email, and social media to talk with every student personally. Students who are not “present” receive a call home; staff members work to ameliorate obstacles to learning remotely. For those without internet connection, HCA made calls directly to internet service providers and connected families with free services customized to their home needs. We worked with providers to boost WIFI signals. We connected families to hotspots in their region. We purchased and donated WIFI-enabled devices for anyone without access to other options.

HCA parents told us:

“I think you did a wonderful job with communication etc... Perfect, actually!” “Good communication! Staff are in good spirits and refreshing to connect with.” “...Fast video conferencing so my child feels less isolated.” “...Checking in on the kids beyond just academics.” “The regular schedule has been so helpful to allow my students to keep in touch with their friends, complete their work and be social.”

The transition into comprehensive, rigorous remote learning is just one example of what makes HCA such a special place. We are incredibly proud of the way our community has handled this adversity. We thank everyone who has been a part of the HCA community, from Annual Fund and in-kind donors to volunteers, event supporters, local businesses and organizations. Without you, it would not be possible to continue our vital work.

This is a very difficult time for all of us, but there are ways we can stay connected. We encourage you to get involved with HCA. If you have a resource you would like to share, we'd love to hear it. If you would like to learn a bit more about our approach to learning, check out some free resources we have created for 3rd, 4th and 5th Graders [HERE](#). If you need assistance for your student or family that goes beyond traditional classwork support, a faculty member assembled a local guide [HERE](#) that may help. Do you know of a student looking for a fresh start in the Fall? Please consider sending this message to their family. We would be happy to have a phone conversation (207-833-3229) or video chat with anyone interested in enrollment information.

On behalf of our Board, staff, and students, we thank you for your past support and hope you will continue to help HCA fulfill its mission. We know that these are difficult times, but please consider giving to the Annual Fund online [HERE](#). In particular, we are committed to providing healthy meals to all our families and plan to do so indefinitely. Your donation will replace the revenue we have lost from school lunches and allow us to continue our remote pick-up service of meals, school supplies, library books, and other items in high demand.

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Connect with HCA:

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Harpswell Coastal Academy is a free public charter school with a mission to create a community of creative thinkers, compassionate leaders, and effective problem solvers. At HCA, project-based and place-based experiences ground learners in the natural and human worlds and cultivate curiosity, integrity, and civic-mindedness. We envision HCA students and alumni as champions of social justice, economic opportunity, and sustainability in our towns, state, country, and world.

All Maine students are eligible to apply for enrollment at this free public charter school for entrepreneurship and social change. Enrollment for Fall 2020 is now open. Please visit www.harpswellcoastalacademy.org for more information.

Division I (serving grades 5-8) is located at the Harpswell School at 9 Ash Point Road. Division II & III (serving grades 9-12) is located on Brunswick Landing at 8 Leavitt Drive.

“HCA – Change Your World!”

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