Dear MIT students,

Earlier this week, we were all shocked and deeply saddened to hear of the passing of one of our community, the second death of a student on campus this academic year. Such losses stun us as a community; they are unexpected, they are hard to understand, and they remind us that our community depends not only on our academic endeavors, but above all on the people within it and the connections between us.

At times like this, our first thoughts must be with the grieving families, to offer them care, respect and support in such a difficult moment. As a longtime member of the MIT faculty and as a parent myself, I am also keenly aware that the loss of Nicolas Del Castillo and Satto Tonegawa has touched our entire community, including those who may not have known them directly. I want to extend my own personal wish that each of you takes a bit of time away from your academic routine to reflect on your connections to our community and on your sense of personal well-being. Take the time to reach out to your own circle of friends, peers and neighbors – a dormmate who looks distracted, a friend who seems stressed. All of us, at every age, go through periods of doubt, of stress, of feeling alone. But these feelings can be more overwhelming when you’re young and away from home. If you feel this way, please reach out – to a friend, to your housemaster, to a member of the student support staff, to a mentor, to one of the Deans. If you need guidance, support or just a sympathetic ear, MIT faculty and staff are here to help. Remember that you can find links to a wide range of resources at http://web.mit.edu/student/personal_support.html.

At MIT, supporting our students is of tremendous importance. In recent years, we have supported that commitment by strengthening a wide range of services: in mental health and other wellness services, in student support services, in residential life, in dining, in advising and mentoring and in student activities, among others. We have incredibly devoted staff members, who provide exemplary service both day to day and in times of crisis. However, strengthening MIT also means reflecting on how we provide support services and processes for our students and how we evaluate those services. To this end, I am bringing together a team of advisors to examine all of our current support systems and to think freely about new ways of providing community support, in keeping with the wonderful culture that has always defined the MIT community. I hope that this process will produce some constructive steps forward; in support of this effort, I welcome input from any of you, our students, by sending email to whatsonyourmind@mit.edu.

I hope this will be a time when we join in strengthening our MIT community: by reaching out to peers, colleagues, friends, and mentors to renew our sense of connection; by taking advantage of MIT resources for help in dealing with the emotional challenges brought on by these events; and by reflecting on our goals and aspirations, individually and together.

Sincerely,
Eric Grimson