

PTSA Tiger Paws Newsletter

Principal's Message

February 28, 2018

Throughout our school year, I often hear, "This must be your busiest time of year." As a matter of fact, every time is our busiest time of year, if that is even possible. With nearly 1,500 students and about a tenth as many adults on campus, there are always many things to do. Anyone who wants to be a part of high school life just needs to accept that before one event or action finishes, several others begin. That, my friends, is the beauty of working in a dynamic environment with a multitude of personal dynamics at play at any one time.

Take last night, for example. I'm sure there were numerous fundraisers, spring sports teams were having pre-season meets and practices, the RACC College Night was on campus with workshops and a college fair, and in Garden Grove, our girls varsity soccer team was pulling off a 4-0 victory to take them to the CIF Championship playoffs. There were things to be learned at each event. At the soccer game, I learned that a committed group could come together on a very cold night as an unselfish team and persevere while maintaining fair play and sportsmanship. I also learned that the team could do justice to our alma mater with a spontaneous rendition. At RACC Night, people learned that there really is a college for every student and that looking beyond five to ten "name" colleges might really serve them very well. They learned what colleges are really looking for in the applications and from their potential students.

An "aha moment" at RACC Night for some people was that college admissions officers are looking for a growth in a student's program rigor over the four years of high school. If a student feels the need to max out on Advanced Placement classes in the sophomore year, the demonstration of increasing rigor will be harder to maintain. Taking a few honors or AP classes in the sophomore year is enough of an entry point, as in the junior year, there is still room to incrementally increase their work load, as there will also be in the senior year. While we consider the health and balance of our students, as well, this is important to keep in mind. There is no real comeback to the reality that college is expensive, and families can save some money if some college classes are accomplished before students actually enroll at a university or college. The other reality is that our students are in high school, and there is no true magic coming from skipping straight from middle school to a full college course load. High school provides many other age-appropriate growth and learning opportunities through participation in clubs, activities, athletics, and outreach.

With increasing reports of depression and anxiety among high school-aged students, our PTSA invited several District representatives to help parents understand, recognize, and navigate those mental health issues. There is not a one-size-fits-all solution, but knowing what to look for and how to support our teens is key. I am very appreciative of the PTSA volunteers who planned the night and for the families that attended and contributed with their good questions and thoughts. As our students work with me to launch a "Seize the Awkward" campaign to help students know how to talk to their peers when they may be suffering (see SeizetheAwkward.org), we hope to further demystify the signs and feelings surrounding threats to mental health.

Our Peer Mediation Club's mission, in addition to actual peer mediation, has largely been outreach around fostering mental health. They have frequent lunchtime events to draw the student body into activities that center on self-esteem, positive connections, stress-relief methods, and more. This last Saturday, the Club sponsored its third TEDx salon in which speakers shared their thoughts and the audience had the opportunity to expand their own thinking through small-group discussion. I have attended all three TEDx salons, and each leaves me feeling like I've had an emotional spa day. The theme last weekend was, "Embracing and Breaking Stereotypes," and the professional presentations by

our students, followed by the small mixed-group discussions, were moving and powerful. There will be one more salon this year, and I encourage your participation.

By now, you have had an opportunity to read Dr. Yantz's school safety letters. Of course, in the last two weeks, we have implemented a few new facility improvements for safety at SPHS. Staff has been asked to convey a sense of calm, positive, and stalwart leadership when working with young people. Following is an excerpt of a P.A. announcement I made last week to students: "I know that in the wake of the school tragedy last week in Florida, many of your personal concerns have been rekindled. You need to remember that the physical and emotional safety of all is our primary concern. Every effort is made to ensure that when you come to South Pasadena High School, measures have been taken to maintain a safe environment. You may take some comfort by reviewing the safety video that you will find under the student section of the school website. If you continue to feel apprehensive, please see an adult on campus who can assist you or direct you to assistance. If we all know that if we see something disturbing we all share the responsibility of reporting it, and then we are assured that everyone is looking out for one another. Again, we are doing all we can to support you within a safe and loving environment and want you to continue to learn and have fun each day at school."

Please know, parents and guardians, that working with your children is our life mission and our joy. We are here to help grow our young people into capable, secure, and resilient adults. We are committed to working with you toward that end. As always, I can be reached at janderson@spusd.net.