

TIGER PAWS NEWSLETTER

Principal's Report
December 12, 2018

Winding up 2018, we have an opportunity to reflect and assess the year's moments, both big and small. For some of you, big moments may have been your child entering high school. For others, perhaps last spring brought your child's SPHS graduation. Those are significant rites of passage. Even the daily occurrences and casual interactions give us a chance to think about what went well and what might warrant a "do-over." I know that I learn a lot from these reflections, even the ones that may make me cringe before deciding to do things better the next time. The bottom line, for me, seems to always be about gratitude and not missing chances to be honest, to thank someone, to say "I love you," or to apologize when needed.

At SPHS, we have a lot for which to be grateful. Just stepping onto our campus, people can sense the pride we take in maintaining a safe and healthy environment. The students respond by helping to keep their school warm and welcoming. Aside from the occasional coming-of-teenage interactions that are less than mutually supportive, the overall message here is one of acceptance and kindness. Just yesterday, some friends who attended school here long ago were asking about the kids and how they react when their classmates perform at assemblies. I was proud to say that they are very appreciative and encouraging of their fellow students. Likewise, there is also a good rapport between students and staff.

Still, in this time of national and international discord, we do not want to take for granted the positive atmosphere we have created and maintained here. We want to equip our students and staff with the interaction skills and listening skills that will help them navigate through difficult situations of any kind. To that end, I have been contacting local agencies to see what they can provide in the way of workshops for students and staff in civil discourse, knowing that we will meet people with different perspectives, and we need to be able to make room for hearing diverse opinions whether or not we agree. Additionally, Mr. Shotwell and the student body officers are bringing a keynote speaker and workshop presenter in February who will address the students with "the goal to create a deeper understanding of the world beyond their classroom walls and become global citizens."

As part of our Challenge Success initiative through which we are trying to create a more balanced and healthy path for our students as they navigate high school and beyond, several teachers and counselors have partnered with specific students to have Shadow Days. The Shadow Days took place last spring and this fall with the intent to help adults understand more fully the student experience by spending an entire day living in a student's shoes. Just prior to Thanksgiving, I shadowed Hayley, a senior. It was a great glimpse into her experience. I can't say that I aced my A.P. Bio test that day, but I took comfort in believing that the topic was very difficult. Beyond the actual classwork, some of my observations were how busy Hayley was at every turn, including brunch and lunch. Any extra time she had was spent preparing for the next classes. I left my laptop and phone locked in my office, and I understood the reflexive need the students have to want to check their devices; I also found how freeing it was to be wholly present, something I wish for our kids. Many other adults who shadowed also mentioned the exhaustion they experienced being students. Our insights were shared with the staff at a meeting, and we are hoping that, based on our experiences, we can continue to make positive changes to support our students. One of those ongoing changes is in adjusting our homework expectations, and we are surveying the student body in January to get good data on how much time their homework actually takes.

This morning, as I was getting ready for school, I thought about how much I love the daily experiences of life at SPHS. Sure, there are some challenges, and there are many great things going on here for kids. We still stay in our cycle of continual improvement as we try to get ahead of life's predictable and unpredictable changes. How could that not be a wonderful adventure?!

Here's wishing all of our Tiger Families your own wonderful adventures as we wind up 2018 and head into the New Year! With finals over before the break, I hope your family together-time is rich and plentiful. My best to you all. As always, I can be reached at janderson@spusd.net.