



# PALO ALTO SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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Kimberly Diorio  
*Principal*

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Dear Vikings,

I'm taking this opportunity to reach out to you because...**you matter**.

Last week's news of another tragedy at Gunn High School weighs heavy on all of our hearts. This has been a difficult time for our entire community and our deepest sympathies go out to the victim's family and friends.

Feelings that often lead to suicide are highly treatable. Get help for yourself or your loved ones. Help is available. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available 24 hours a day at [800-273-8255](tel:800-273-8255). If you or a loved one needs help – call now!

Our superintendent is sending a newsletter ("Max Mail") home to your parents/guardians very soon. In the newsletter, Dr. McGee states, "as a **collective community** we each must do our part to support our students. While academic stress has **not** been a contributing factor to recent deaths, I think it is wise for our district to **listen to students**, faculty, and parents who have asked us to take measures to align students' workload with established district policies and administrative regulations, assure consistency in curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices, and identify ways to improve our already considerable amount of social-emotional wellness and mental health supports. Immediate actions are also needed, especially since students may continue to be troubled by the recent sad events." I couldn't agree more.

Last Tuesday evening, I attended the [Board of Education \(BOE\) meeting](#). I was impressed listening to the many Gunn students eloquently address the BOE sharing their thoughts, feelings and suggestions. The Titans are amazing! As I sat in the audience, I kept thinking about students at Paly, and how much we want to talk and connect with each of you. We're so interested in your thoughts, your feelings and your suggestions for making our school a better place. Yet with almost 2,000 students, I considered, how can we do this? How can we have a conversation and work together? How can we best support and advocate for you?

The next day, I met with our student leadership class, ASB. I welcomed listening to what our student leaders shared about their teachers, their classes, their peers, their parents and life as a Paly student. Recognizing that suicide is an extremely complex mental health issue, together we acknowledged that academic "stress is a problem, but not *the* problem," as described by a student at the BOE meeting. My time listening to ASB was *the best* 90 minutes this entire semester. ASB rocks!

At Paly, there are many people who believe we have the power to take small steps to reduce academic stress and create opportunities for our students to take a well-deserved break from the daily grind. To this end, here are some items we are working on to better support our students now and in the future:

1. *As a staff, we want students to have a homework-free break in February because "playtime, down time, and family time (PDF)" are important. We've encouraged teachers to refrain from assigning any homework over the break and for there to be no tests or major projects due the Tuesday (2/17) or Wednesday (2/18) following the President's weekend break.*
2. *As a staff, we've asked teachers to show flexibility and give students options for completing work late without penalty and/or rescheduling tests if students are too distracted or saddened to focus. Please*

*Speak directly with your teacher, teacher advisor and/or counselor to let him/her know you will require some additional time.*

3. *As a staff, we will be discussing and developing a plan for a few homework free nights in 2015-2016.*
4. *As a staff, we will be reviewing the homework policy and administrative regulations with all teachers and stressing the need for it to be followed with fidelity*
5. *As a staff, we will develop a calendar or system to assure that students do not have multiple tests or projects due on the same day (which includes giving considerable attention to improving "C" days).*
6. *As a staff, we are asking teachers to review their current practices on grading, test retakes and make-up work to assure they are consistent with evidence-based practices.*

I hope these steps are helpful to you and in the short-term will give you time to relax and unwind. Please feel free to fill out the following form if you'd like to share any words of wisdom and thoughts regarding our school. We are listening. And we welcome your advice or feedback! <http://goo.gl/AzyDmF>

In closing, let me say this...we care about you. We care about Paly. And although I might not yet have had the chance to meet you all of you personally, please know that I want to help make Paly a better school. We want high school to be fun for you. We want high school to be a place where you learn and grow. We want high school to be a place where you make new friends and try new things. We want high school to be a place where you feel your teachers and our entire staff care about you. We want you to know that you matter, and you have a voice. Don't ever be afraid to speak up and use it.

With Viking Pride,

*Kim Diorio*

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Principal