

# PALO ALTO HIGH SCHOOL



## WASC Report 2015

### CHAPTER III

Students and Community Profile  
Overall Summary from  
Analysis of Profile Data and Progress



# CHAPTER III – STUDENT/COMMUNITY PROFILE - OVERALL SUMMARY FROM ANALYSIS OF PROFILE DATA AND PROGRESS

## PART 1 – OVERALL SUMMARY OF THE DATA

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Palo Alto High School has a tradition of academic excellence. Our staff and community are well educated and the great majority of our graduates continue their studies in higher education. Our district and community support Paly with a vast array of resources, so our students have access to programs and experiences not often found in public comprehensive high schools. Though we're proud of these achievements, a review of Paly data shows that we still have much room for improvement.

### API

- Paly's **overall** three-year weighted average (2011-2013) is **903**.
- **African American** students have a three-year weighted average of **650**.
- **Asian** students have a three-year weighted average of **966**.
- **Latino** students have a three-year weighted average of **714**.
- **White** students have a three-year weighted average of **921**.
- **Socio-Economically Disadvantaged** students have a three-year weighted average of **688**.
- **English Learners** have a three-year weighted average of **708**.
- **Students With Disabilities** have a three-year weighted average of **627**.

### AYP

Paly did not meet our AYP target in the 2012-2013 school year because our African American and Socio-Economically Disadvantaged students did not meet their target graduation rate goals.

### Advanced Placement Courses

The ethnic makeup of our AP courses does not currently reflect the larger school demographic. Asian and White students make up the vast majority of AP students, while African American and Latino students are underrepresented.

### CST

- Overall, Paly students score well in all areas of the CST.
- Asian and White students consistently outperform other significant student subgroups.

### Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO)

- On the ELA tests in the last five years:
  - **94.1%** or more of Asian and White students scored at proficient or above.
  - **25.0% - 53.3%** of African American students scored at or above proficiency.
  - **41.5% - 71.4%** of Latino students scored at or above proficiency.

- 40.0% - 60.5% of Socio-Economically Disadvantaged students scored at or above proficiency.
- 35.9% - 51.0% of Students With Disabilities scored at or above proficiency.
- 21.7% - 64.5% of English Learner students scored at or above proficiency.
- On the Mathematics test in the last five years:
  - 95.7% - 97.9% of Asian students scored at or above proficiency.
  - 90.9% - 95.2% of White students scored at or above proficiency.
  - 33.3% - 60.0% of African American students scored at or above proficiency.
  - 41.9% - 60.0% of Latino students scored at or above proficiency.
  - 37.5% - 57.9% of Socio-Economically Disadvantaged students scored at or above proficiency.
  - 33.3% - 49.1% of Students With Disabilities scored at or above proficiency.
  - 30.4% - 64.0% of English Learner students scored at or above proficiency.

## CAHSEE

Well over 95% of Paly students passed the CAHSEE on the first attempt during the last four years. The percentages of Latino and African American students who pass the CAHSEE on the first attempt are lower than those of Asian and White students, though the actual numbers are still small.

## CSU/UC Eligibility

After a statistical analysis of UC “a-g” eligibility in three specific student sub-populations -- ethnicity, Special Education, and Socio-Economically Disadvantaged -- we have found that students in these subpopulations meet “a-g” eligibility less often than other student groups at Paly.

### *Question 1: Is student ethnicity associated with “a-g” status at Paly? (Senior classes of 2011-2013)*

- Analysis: Chi-Square Two-Way Test
- Assumptions Met: Cell counts are 5 or more in 80% of cells (for tables larger than 2-by-2)
- Ho: Student race is independent of their “a-g” status
- Ha: Student race is not independent of their “a-g” status
- P-values
  - 2012:  $p = 7.526 \times 10^{-12}$
  - 2013:  $p = 4.522 \times 10^{-7}$
  - 2014:  $p = 1.040 \times 10^{-8}$
- Conclusion: A chi-square test of independence indicates a statistically significant relationship between ethnicity and “a-g” status.

### *Question 2: Is Special Education classification associated with “a-g” status at Paly? (Senior classes of 2011-2013)*

- Analysis: Chi-Square Two-Way Test
- Assumptions Met: All cell counts are 5 or more in a 2-by-2 table
- Ho: SPED classification is independent of “a-g” status
- Ha: SPED classification is not independent of “a-g” status
- P-values
  - 2012:  $p = 1.410 \times 10^{-15}$
  - 2013:  $p = 1.405 \times 10^{-17}$
  - 2014:  $p = 6.874 \times 10^{-14}$

- Conclusion: A chi-square test of independence indicates a statistically significant relationship between Special Education classification and “a-g” Status.

### ***Question 3: Is socio-economic status associated with “a-g” status at Paly? (Senior classes of 2011-2013)***

- Analysis: Chi-Square Two-Way Test
- Assumptions Met: All cell counts are 5 or more in a 2-by-2 table
- Ho: Socio-economic status is independent of “a-g” status
- Ha: Socio-economic status is not independent of “a-g” status
- P-values
  - 2012:  $p = 1.429 \times 10^{-6}$
  - 2013:  $p = 6.228 \times 10^{-5}$
  - 2014:  $p = 1.929 \times 10^{-12}$
- Conclusion: A chi-square test of independence indicates a statistically significant relationship between socio-economic status and “a-g” Status.

## **Attendance**

Absenteeism is a major issue at Paly. When full-day absences are analyzed, Paly’s truancy rate for students missing three or more days has moved from **3.1%** in 2011-2012 to **9.9%** in 2013-2014. However, during the 2012-2013 school year, students with three or more unexcused period absences yielded a truancy rate of **55.80%**. Students at Paly miss a great deal of class time, in many cases missing specific periods, which is otherwise known as “strategic cutting.”

## **Perception Data**

Because many Paly students perform well by various metrics, we need to look at perception data to understand our core issues. Ideas and concerns expressed by our stakeholder groups often overlap. Here are some of the key issues brought up in surveys and interviews.

### **Perception Data: Students**

- **81%** like being a Paly student.
- Many students describe Palo Alto as a stressful environment and say they feel intense pressure to succeed.
- Most students say they would like to see inconsistent grading practices addressed. They cite grade “deflation” and differences among teachers within the same course.
- Most students say teachers are not consistent within departments in terms of curriculum, assessments and grading.

### **Perception Data: Staff**

- Most staff report that we need to develop resiliency in our students.
- Most staff say we need to continue our efforts to support our struggling students and eliminate the achievement gap.
- **43%** of teachers and **47%** of administrators/classified say they “strongly agree” or “agree” that curriculum and instruction are consistent across teachers and courses.
- **47%** of teachers and **50%** of administrators/classified say they “strongly agree” or “agree” that grading at Paly is fair across teachers and courses.
- Staff in Home and Focus Groups say it’s urgent that we use more data analysis to drive decision-making on campus.

## Perception Data: Parents

- Parents say that Paly is a big school; some students do well and others struggle.
- “B” students sometimes don’t feel good about themselves.
- Parents report that not all students use the support that is available to them.
- Grading policies are an area of concern.
- Parents report that teacher autonomy leads to a lack of awareness of what is happening in other classes or at school (i.e., a sense that their class is the only class that is important).
- College competition negatively influences Paly’s definition of success.
- There is a fear of failure among students at Paly.
- Paly is a “pressure cooker” that leads to student stress. The school must identify sources of stress and develop a plan to reduce stress.
- Parents say that Paly needs to look at what other educational institutions are doing around the world to make sure our students are ready for a global environment.
- Vertical and horizontal alignment is an issue; the school needs to develop a plan of action for teachers specific to their departments.
- The achievement gap remains an issue. Paly must implement methods and procedures designed to reduce the gap.
- **36%** of parents “strongly agree” or “agree” that curriculum and instruction are consistent across teachers and courses.
- **43%** of parents say that individualized teaching and learning at Paly is “very effective” or “somewhat effective” for each student.
- **49%** of parents “strongly agree” or “agree” that grading at Paly is fair across teachers and courses.
- **29%** of parents “strongly agree” or “agree” that underperforming students at Paly are well supported to improve academically.

## PART 2 – IMPLICATIONS OF DATA

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To understand the implications of Paly’s data, we asked ourselves a number of questions during this WASC cycle.

### Important Questions from Analysis of Performance Data

- What steps are we taking to reduce the achievement gap? What must we do in the future to do more?
- Are we prepared to meet all students’ needs in fulfilling “a-g” requirements?
- How willing are we to learn more about research-based instructional strategies?
- How can data from standardized testing (SBAC, SAT, PSAT, SAT, ERB and AP) help guide our ongoing curriculum refinement?
- How well are we incorporating research-based instructional strategies in our classrooms to support student-centered learning and to increase engagement? Examples include AVID’s WICOR (Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization, Reading) and the Bay Area Writing Project.
- How can we share best instructional practices within departments and across disciplines?
- Are we developing lesson plans that adequately align with CCSS and/or NGSS?
- To what extent have we mapped the new CCSS and/or NGSS standards with our current curriculum in our department?

## Important Questions from Analysis of Demographic Data

- Are we able to differentiate instruction and personalize learning in our classrooms to meet the needs and diversity of *all* students?
- How much do we understand Response to Intervention and how Tier 1 strategies can be used in our classrooms to support struggling students?
- How do we improve our students' tardiness, unexcused absences and truancy?

## Important Questions from Analysis of Perception Data

- For teachers: to what extent...
  - ...is the syllabus for my course different from those of my colleagues who teach the same course?
  - ...is my assigned homework different (in complexity and amount) from my colleagues' who teach the same course?
  - ...have I discussed syllabi, homework and grading with my colleagues who teach the same course?
  - ...do I use student data, such as formative assessments, to adjust instruction in my class?
  - ...do we use data from assessments in alike courses to discuss learner outcomes or share best practices?
  - ...do my students have opportunities to collaborate in my class?
  - ...do my students have opportunities to demonstrate creativity in my class?
  - ...do students have choice and voice in my classroom when it comes to their learning?
  - ...have I integrated technology in my classes to deepen student learning?
  - ...have I developed opportunities in my classroom to prepare students for their future in our rapidly challenging world?
  - ...do I listen to my students and make adjustments in my classroom to support them?
  - ...am I able to admit my mistakes or ask for forgiveness?
  - ...am I able to differentiate my instruction and personalize learning in my classroom to meet the needs of all students?
  - ...do I understand the referral process (SST) for struggling students who need additional support?
- Do we foster global competencies in our classrooms and elsewhere at Paly?
  - Global competencies include: initiative, enthusiasm, inquisitiveness, interest in continuous learning, courage, self-reliance, self-confidence, self-control, a positive outlook in adversity, independence, appreciation of diversity, perseverance, flexibility, comfort with uncertainty, open-mindedness, language and communication skills, assertiveness and a sense of humor.
- What steps can we take to reduce student stress?
- How well do we know if students are engaged in our classes?
- How well do we understand what is happening with Paly students outside of our classrooms? Do we know the details of projects, co-curriculars, SAT/ACT testing schedules, important events, social activities and family issues?
- How actively do we try to reduce and prevent traditional bullying and cyber-bullying on campus?
- Do our students feel that it's all right for them to make mistakes as part of the learning process?
- How can we promote personal integrity and respect schoolwide?

Asking these questions and reviewing the data helped us identify three critical learner needs at Paly.

**First**, perception data shows that stress still exists at Paly, and that it's due in part to a lack of consistency within many of our major systems, including individual courses, academic departments and schoolwide policies. This issue has continued at Paly since our last WASC report in 2009 and we feel a collective sense of urgency to address it.

**Second**, performance and demographic data show a significant relationship between some student subgroups at Paly not meeting traditional measures of success, such as standardized test scores, CSU/UC "a-g" course completion rates, and underrepresentation of African-American and Latino students in honors and AP course participation. This shows Paly's ongoing struggle to close the achievement gap, which has also been an area of concern since our last WASC report. Paly staff and parents expressed great concern about the achievement gap in our recent Home and Focus Group meetings. There has been much discussion about how to meet the needs of all students on campus, including "B" students and others who may feel that Paly's current culture, with its emphasis on superior academic achievement, doesn't meet their needs.

**Third**, Paly's continued problems with student absenteeism lead us to ask if we are engaging and meeting the needs of our 21<sup>st</sup>-century learners. We must look at our school culture through the lens of changing global realities. Education must provide the skills students need to succeed in a modern society; we can't fulfill their needs with a 19<sup>th</sup>-century model. Engaged students who see a connection between authentic learning and future preparedness will also see the importance of being in every class period.

## **PART 3 – PALY'S 2015-2021 WASC GOALS TO ADDRESS CRITICAL LEARNER NEEDS**

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After much discussion of the data collected and analyzed during this WASC cycle, the Leadership Team identified three overarching goals for Palo Alto High School. These goals also parallel our Schoolwide Learner Outcomes and our district's recently adopted Strategic Plan.

**Goal 1 - Systemic alignment for greater consistency around learning outcomes to reduce undue stress.** We need systems that better support governance, curriculum and instruction, data collection and analysis, professional development, and student/parent outreach to ensure future readiness.

### **Rationale**

- We must work to align core curricular elements and best instructional practices with the new Common Core State Standards and Next Generation Science Standards.
- We must use data to guide decision making. We will need training and ongoing professional development to achieve this goal.
- We must continue to support strategic staff professional development.
- Many stakeholder groups are concerned about the lack of consistency among similar courses and the lack of clear schoolwide classroom policies and expectations.
- Staff and teacher stress is caused by misaligned and inconsistent school systems, including the policies for attendance, homework and academic integrity.

### **Relationship to SLOs**

- All SLOs will be helped by improved alignment of major school systems.

## Relationship to District Strategic Plan

- **Area A2:** To ensure post-secondary preparation for students, implement the Common Core State Standards, improve feedback for students, and increase consistency in curriculum, grading, and homework across all sites and courses.
- **Area B2:** Ensure a safe and positive school environment for students through partnerships, student engagement and improved procedures.
- **Area E1:** Engender community trust through frequent, varied and transparent communication.
- **Area E2:** Provide a coherent district approach to align sites on key areas (e.g., curriculum, course consistency, safety protocols, impact measurement, special needs support) while continuing to support site innovation.

**Goal 2 - Research-based instructional practices that increase engagement for ALL students.** Our instructional staff should use research-based strategies and 21<sup>st</sup>-century tools to prepare our students for the future. Given our achievement gap and the implementation of CCSS and NGSS, our work will focus on writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization and reading throughout the school.

## Rationale

- The use of modern educational research to find the best instructional methodologies will help staff professional development and support learning for *all* Paly students.
- Use of best instructional practices will support our underperforming student subgroups and others who struggle at Paly.
- Best instructional practices will lead to more engaged students who love to learn.
- We must strategically implement and address ongoing developments for CCSS and NGSS.
- Student-centered and project-based instruction will help us differentiate instruction for all students, at all times, while supporting underperforming subgroups.
- Use of current research-based instructional practices will help prepare all students for the future.

## Relationship to SLOs

- All SLOs will be better supported when teachers use the best research-based instructional practices.

## Relationship to District Strategic Plan

- **Area A1:** Differentiate the educational experience to engage, challenge and ensure mastery for every student.
- **Area A3:** Raise the achievement of historically underserved students by ensuring equal preparation, access and support from Pre-K to 12th grade.
- **Area C1:** Foster a culture of effective professional growth among all staff to develop a community of learners.
- **Area C2:** Encourage teachers to innovate, improve and adapt teaching methods and deepen pedagogical knowledge.
- **Area D3:** Invest strategically in IT to support teaching and learning, promote staff efficiency and effectiveness, and build a robust infrastructure.
- **Area E4:** Build a culture that supports innovation and the use of effective educational strategies.

**Goal 3 - Innovative school culture promoting global competencies, creativity and empathy.** A shared system of beliefs and priorities should drive the thinking and actions of those in our school community. Everyone on campus should expect all students to graduate future-ready, including ready for college, with global competency skills.

### **Rationale**

- We must prepare students for their future in a rapidly changing global world.
- Helping students understand that the skills they learn in school are relevant to their future will increase engagement.
- Creating an innovative school culture that promotes global competencies, creativity and empathy will engage students and decrease absenteeism.
- Paly students will be better prepared for their future when they have a deeper understanding of global competencies like resiliency and can redefine success.

### **Relationship to SLOs**

- All SLOs will be helped by an innovative school culture.

### **Relationship to District Strategic Plan**

- **Area E4:** Promote a culture that innovates and adopts effective educational strategies.