



February 6, 2015

Dear Titans,

I'm taking this opportunity to reach out to you because I care about you and want you to remember ... **we are all in this together.**

This has been a difficult time for our entire community and our deepest sympathies go out to Harry's family and friends. I know we are still mourning Harry's passing, but I wanted to share with you some of my thoughts and decisions by the Gunn staff that we hope you will find helpful as we all process and move forward together.

Support: I am so proud of the way each of you have been reaching out to one another and your teachers and counselors for help and support. Sticking together and helping one another process and grieve is extremely important. It is also important that we remember 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. If you or a loved one needs help – call now!

Another potential resource for students is the [SF Mental Health Peer Run Warm Line](#). Earlier in the week, NPR aired a [profile about the service](#), which may be useful in assisting students who are depressed, but not necessarily actively suicidal and in need of a "hotline".

Student Voice: Last Tuesday evening, I attended the [Board of Education \(BOE\) meeting](#). I was extremely proud of the many Gunn students who eloquently addressed the BOE sharing their thoughts, feelings and suggestions. The student speakers recognized that suicide is an extremely complex mental health issue and acknowledged "academic stress is a problem, but not *the* problem". Other students are sharing their Titan pride by creating a pictograph entitled "A Titan is..." <http://atitanis.tumblr.com/>, with photographs of Gunn students expressing what they feel makes our students and school special. Still another group is working with our administrative team to implement additional ways to support students.

Yesterday, our superintendent sent a newsletter ("Max Mail") home to your parents/guardians. 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.

At Gunn, 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 more opportunities for fun, family time and sleep. To this end, here are some items we are working on to better support all Gunn students now and in the future:

1. *We want students to have a homework-free break in February. 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. *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 to let him/her know you will require some additional time.*
3. *We will be discussing and developing a plan for a few homework-free nights in 2015-2016.*
4. *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. *We will develop a system to assure that students do not have multiple tests or projects due on the same day*
6. *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. Many of these ideas were in our WASC accreditation plan that the staff, some students, and community members have been working on for over a year. Student well-being has been at the center of our conversations and we are moving forward to help Gunn be an even better place to learn and grow. We are listening and we welcome your advice or feedback!

In closing, I just want to remind you how much the whole staff at Gunn cares for you and wants you to be happy and healthy. We are here to support you however we can. Through working together, we can make being a Titan an even more outstanding experience now and in the future.

With Titan Pride,

Denise Herrmann

Dr. Denise Herrmann, Principal