

I am not going to present my normal report tonight, because I don't find it at all appropriate at this time, nor do any of my fellow Vikings want me to present Paly as happy and carefree right now.

But I will say that yesterday was absolutely devastating. It is impossible to convey what it is like to see your classmates crying and holding each other because one of their friends is suddenly gone. It is impossible for me to express to you what it is like to see your teacher with bloodshot eyes because they have lost a student they care for so deeply. Having had the victim in one of my classes, his empty seat will forever be a reminder of what we've lost. The absolute silence in our room as we realized the victim was one of our classmates is indescribable.

The students, staff, and administration of Paly are in a state of shock and despair. I will say though, on a positive note, that the teachers at our school certainly did a better job responding to this tragedy than the previous ones this year. Most have been granting students extensions and allowing them to step out of class or do anything that they must in order to cope.

But I do have to add that I am truly sickened that these events keep happening. I do not believe it is appropriate to assign blame to any one factor in these cases, nor do I want to. This is an extremely personal issue that must be exclusively reserved for the victims' families.

However, I cannot help but notice that adolescents both as students and teenagers complain about the same problems in our schools and community, over and over again, to seemingly no avail.

My ultimate point is this: Let's actually get to work, both as a community and as a school district. There's no disagreement as to what major issues simply just exist on personal, family, social, school, and overall community levels. Let's stop trying to figure out what *exactly* is such a huge factor in these tragedies, but rather let's focus on how to make improvements in ALL of the different areas that we've acknowledged in the past few months. A lot of, arguably too much, lip service is paid to sympathizing with students and the community about the troubles that we all experience daily in our schools and town. And that's fine, sympathy is great, but now is the time to actually act upon it. At this point, our community discussions over what is wrong do no good. We will not make any improvements in our district nor improve the quality of life for our students unless we begin implementing changes. Right now is the time to act.

Why not create a committee to oversee the homework loads at Gunn and Paly? Why not spend more time talking to students about what they need out of a school counselor or therapist?

For the mental well-being of all of the students in our district who are all struggling on such an astonishing multitude of levels right now, I hope, as students, parents, community members, and board members that we can all agree and promise to do that.

