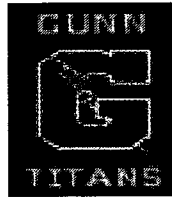


Sent 10/22/15
to parents



Principal's Update Gunn High School Quarter 1, October 2014

Dear Parents:

I intended to write and send this message last week to coincide with the end of the first quarter. However, our response to the tragic death by suicide of a former Gunn High School student took precedent. I am extremely proud of the way our crisis response team used current research and clear protocols to navigate this emotionally charged situation. The crisis response team designed a check in process where counselors contacted individual students (vulnerable and at-risk) to assess their well being daily. The team also coordinated communication with Gunn staff to honor the privacy of the family while sharing as much information as possible, especially with teachers who taught the young man in his/her class. While monitoring and attending to the student and staff need for emotional support is our top priority, we will also be continuing with several other important efforts on campus. Below is a brief update to these areas.

Use of Schoology at Gunn HS

Over the past several weeks, many parents have expressed concern about the amount of homework assigned to students at our school. The parents also expressed concern about the inconsistent use of Schoology by Gunn teachers and shared how this limits students' ability to develop time management skills and inhibits parent collaboration with homework completion.

Although the PAEA contract does not specifically require teachers to use Schoology, it does require teachers to post assignments and grades regularly. At our October staff meeting, I shared my expectation that all teachers post assignments using the calendar feature on Schoology and include an estimate of the time required for a proficient student to complete the task. For example, an assignment that requires students to read an article and write a summary could be posted as "Article Read + Summary (45 min)". The time estimate will also enable us to gather data on how much homework is being assigned per week and if we are aligned with the PAUSD homework policy.

I am appealing to the 'spirit of the law', not the 'letter of the law.' I presented this expectation as a challenge – not a directive. Just as hospitals use a consistent medical electronic record system to improve patient care, I believe schools need to use a consistent learning management system to improve student learning. Electronic medical records allow any medical professional in the hospital (doctors, specialists, nurses, CNAs, etc) to access real-time information about the patient and coordinate care. Electronic learning management systems allow any education professional in the school (teachers, special education teachers, counselors, administrators, etc.) to access real-time

information about the student's assignment to coordinate assignments across departments.

Our technology team will offer many training sessions for staff between now and January. However, some teachers may need assistance entering assignments into the calendar as this process can be a bit 'clunky' and time consuming. If you are interested in volunteering to help teachers in this way, please contact Norma Hesterman, our volunteer coordinator.
Nhesterman@pausd.org

Response to Math Parent Group

At the end of the last school year, a group of parents brought their concerns forward regarding the quality and quantity of feedback provided to students. In early September, our math department discussed action steps for improving the quality and timeliness of feedback provided to students during each unit. Here is a summary of the action steps teacher are taking:

1. All classes do/will post **worked solutions to homework**, except for:
 - Algebra 1 and Algebra 1A because teachers feel students benefit from in class review.
 - Analysis Honors because many of the problems have multiple solutions. Students collaborate on the course Facebook page to help each other with different approaches to the problems.
 - For the same reason, AP Stat does not post solutions to all questions because there are multiple correct solutions for many of the writing questions.
2. All classes will either **post a recent old exam** or use an old exam as a review sheet. Teachers will communicate that it is not cheating for students to use old exams to study and that it is ok for students to post old exams on course Facebook pages. This will hopefully clarify Academic Honesty expectations.
3. Although the teachers feel the course **lessons, homework, review sheets and tests are aligned**, we acknowledge the common perception of students and parents that a gap exists. To help address this gap we will . . .
 - Communicate with students about which homework/class problems were used as basis for test questions (back map)
 - Teach students to more effectively self-assess their work and use solution guides more effectively
 - Acknowledge the difference between doing homework at home with notes and help vs. answering a similar question in a testing environment
 - Use more formative assessment in a test-like environment. (currently most formative assessment is more collaborative)
4. Update the Math Department **web page** (quarter 2)
5. Complete a **student survey** (November)

Items that have broadened to school wide initiatives and will be addressed through the WASC school improvement process:

- Develop a common policy on grading homework for each course/department
- Continue to develop project-based assignments and assessments

The parent group requested that students have access to mathematics textbooks over the summer, but we are reluctant to do so out of concern of escalating the level of self-teaching or tutor-sponsored learning over the summer. We want to encourage all students to use the summer months to engage in activities and projects that help them relax and explore areas of interest.

Wellness Center Re-Design

The Central Building Project at Gunn HS will include a comprehensive wellness center for students. The original design was limited in scope and did not honor the recommendations of the Guidance Advisory Committee. Therefore, we paused the project to allow for significant re-design of the structure/function of the space. The current design brings the following services together under one roof:

- Nurse (physical health)
- ACS (mental health)
- School Psychologist (academic and mental health)
- Guidance Counselor (social-emotional health)
- Stress-reduction skills (meditation, quiet rooms)
- Nutrition counseling
- Health educator (personal health and decision making)

The new plans will be presented to the school board in November/December.

As you can see there are many student-centered discussions and projects progressing at Gunn. I hope you will consider ways to be involved and share with me your ideas as we see each other over the coming weeks. I invite each of you to our Homecoming Week activities (October 27-31) to see for yourself the fun, healthy ways students are interacting with one another as they build school spirit and display pride in being a Gunn Titan.

Sincerely,

Denise Herrmann

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