

***WASC: Guidance Department
Areas of Strength/Areas for Growth***

Guidance Counseling and College and Career Center

Areas of Strength

- Ongoing on-track for graduation monitoring
- Review post-high school plans for all students
- One-to-one meetings – 4 year plan for graduation and post high school options
- Sophomore Tour to the College and Career Center
- Careers Month College Fair in conjunction with Palo Alto High School
- 6 Full-time counselors engaged in ongoing problem-solving and support academic, social, emotional
- Open door policy for students
- All requests to be seen are honored in a timely fashion
- All communication answered
- Yearly attendance at college information meetings, open house, workshops, professional associations, mental health conferences, information sessions
- Attentive to student health: physical and emotional
- Parent nights: Gunn Guidance Program, 4 Pathways to College, Financial Aid Presentation, Summer Opportunities, Stanford Admissions representative
- Parent Nights: open to Paly parents and students
- Support special services: Special Education, Individual Education Plan Team meeting, 504 Plan, College Pathways Program
- Support general education teachers
- Expert support of out of country students & parents.
- Use of technology to support students
- College packet handling – number and quality of individualized letters
- Crisis intervention
- Students feel welcomed in Guidance Office
- Set-up of College & Career Center
- Collaboration within department
- Registrar service
- Interesting/innovative solution for student problems
- Concerted effort to keep students at Gunn
- Supporting each other
- Good Guidance Assistant Principal support
- Some alternative placement options
- Available – CCC
- Adolescent Counseling Services available to students on campus
- ACS service: Adolescent Substance Abuse Treatment available for referral.
- 3 free session referral to mental health provider
- Camp Everytown continues to provide diversity awareness and an opportunity for students to further develop empathy, compassion and a sense of community.

Areas of Growth

1. Facilities

- a. Reconfigure the College and Career Center to make it more inviting and more user friendly.
- b. Replace existing bookcases; purchase dividers; computer tables
- c. Explore expansion of CCC computer mini-lab.

- d. Reorganize and visually improve the Guidance Conference Room

2. Communication

- a. Put a Guidance button on the homepage of the Gunn website for easier access to information.
- b. Publicize the role of high school guidance counselor. List responsibilities and what the guidance counselor can do to assist families (and what they cannot do). There is a real need to educate parents and the community about their roles, only part of which is college counseling.
- c. Hold a senior assembly in the fall. Evaluate effectiveness and adjust as needed.
- d. Make presentations to PTSA, Site Council, ELL Parent Advisory and SEC about the roles of guidance counselors and the services we can offer.
- e. Improve advertisement of events and services: Use EdConnect, Naviance, Guidance website, Gunn Connection, Gunn Master Calendar, Spotlight, Gunn Daily Bulletin, InClass & Guidance easel to publicize parent and student information events and activities.
- f. Improve the Gunn Guidance Department website: navigation, add content, advertise and describe events, description of services and roles
- g. Improve College and Career Center website: navigation, content, description of services and events

3. Service Delivery

- a. Leverage more time so that more support can be provided students who are earning a D or F in two or more classes; have a chronic illness
- b. Launch Naviance, a very effective web-based tool for assisting students and parents in beginning and refining the college search process and for career searches. Roll out for 12th graders in the fall, 11th graders in late fall and early winter, and 10th graders in March '09. This will entail training counselors and the classified support staff in the Guidance Office so that they can assist families.
- c. Increase computer access in the College and Career Center to encourage student use of Naviance.
- d. Reach out to students by holding Brown Bag lunches in the fall that cover various aspects of the college search and admissions process.
- e. Invite UC and CSU reps to conduct application workshops for these systems in the fall before application deadlines.
- f. Find ways to deliver information to 9th grade students more efficiently in order to gain time with seniors and juniors at critical times of the year.
- g. Reach out to the parent community to gather input and opinions regarding the nature of guidance services. Conduct a parent survey about services offered and desired.
- h. By allowing flexible working schedules for counselors at certain times, offer parents who find it impossible to take time off work to come to school during the school day, the opportunity to meet with counselors late in the afternoon or in the early evening.
- i. Hold more parent meetings on specific college and career related topics, open to both Gunn and Palo Alto High School.
- j. Hold meetings with targeted groups so that language barriers (we will get translators for these groups) or lack familiarity with the US system do not get in the way of student's progress or post high school goals
- k. Offer opportunities for parents to come to open forums to get their questions answered.
- l. Encourage local community colleges to come to Gunn to provide information about their certificate and career training programs.
- m. Explore with the District the possibility of funding a community counselor who can take some of the work related to the social/emotional needs of students and families off the counselors' plates and allow them more time to "hand-hold" during the college admissions process.
- n. Continue to explore the possibilities of introducing a weekly advisory period for 9th graders to ease their transition to high school, ensure their familiarity with graduation and

- college admissions requirements, conduct career interest inventories, introduce them to Naviance and provide close contact with a caring adult who can mentor them
- o. Introduce ACT Plan program for 10th graders:
 - i. Pilot with free, volunteer administration of the Plan test in winter of 2009.
 - ii. Administration to all 10th graders in fall of 2009.
- p. Work with the PAUSD feeder middle schools, to better articulate guidance services and transition to high school.

4. Professional Development

- a. Provide financial support for (if possible) and encourage attendance at workshops and other professional development opportunities for counselors and classified support staff.
- b. Utilize Palo Alto Unified School District resources and professional development in-service opportunities as appropriate.
- c. Guidance counselors, College and Career Center Information Specialist and Guidance AP to attend Community College, California State University and University of California conferences and information sessions.
- d. Guidance counselors and Assistant Principal of Guidance to continue to increase knowledge around mental health, learning, and special education issues.

Opportunity Program

Areas of Strength

- Small, self-contained instructional setting
- Small group and individual instruction provided
- Program provides a personalized approach to instruction as needed; learning may be self-paced and adapted to individual needs.
- Flexibility of the program to meet student needs
- Emphasis on successful study and organizational skills
- Curricular program coincides with regular program
- Access to technology
- Introduction of Plato, an online curricular tool
- Support for students to transition back into general education classes.
- Teacher and instructional assistant collaborate with Focus on Success teachers
- Frequent contact with parents regarding attendance, behavior and academic achievement.
- Teacher meets weekly with guidance counselors and assistant principal

Areas for Growth

1. Introduction of Plato, an online curricular tool
 - a. Review effectiveness of use and make adjustments as needed
2. Develop project-based learning activities to meet Gunn course and California State Standards requirements
3. Examine assessment measures for all courses and improve as indicated.
4. Streamline communication with Parents
5. Written communication sent to parents in more languages for non-English or limited-English speaking parents.

Independent Study

Areas of Strength

- Most courses are UC approved
- “In-seat” independent study available: students can do work in the classroom and receive help
- Course offerings in English just expanded
- Close monitoring of attendance and progress

- Teacher: Weekly meeting with guidance counselors and assistant principal

Areas of Growth

1. Develop project-based learning activities to meet Gunn course and California State Standards requirements
2. Examine assessment measures for all courses and improve as indicated.

Health Office

Areas of Strength

- Full-time Health Technician coverage
- Experienced, compassionate staff
- Clear, set health protocols
- Health Tech work closely with school administrators, guidance counselors, and classified staff

Areas for Growth

1. Train new, 1 day per week Health Tech
2. Work with District Nurse, guidance counselors and assistant principal of Guidance Department to manage increased number of students with serious health issues to be sure support is adequate as numbers continue to climb.
3. Develop Gunn Health protocol and procedures manual; organize Health Office for most efficient use.
4. Improve student tracking electronic system: effective use and training needed.

Academic Center

Areas of Strength

1. Located next to the Library
2. Drop-in Mac Lab with over 30 computers
3. Expanded hours on two days
4. Friendly, helpful staff and volunteers
5. Services offered: tutoring, SAT prep class and mock test; ACT prep class and mock test
6. Textbooks available for checkout for all classes
7. High student usage

Areas for Growth

1. Increase usage of the Academic Center
 - a. Advertise times and services to students
 - i. E-mails to students
 - ii. Daily Announcements
 - iii. FOS Presentations
 - iv. Update Website
 - b. Increase amount of textbooks
 - c. Improve décor
2. Increase number of textbooks to meet student demand
 - a. Borrow extra copies from departments on campus
 - b. Order through general textbook fund
 - c. Purchase additional textbooks with AC funds
3. Improve décor of the Academic Center
 - a. Purchase new chairs (possibly desks as well) with Senior donation funds
 - b. Purchase artwork
4. Improve tutoring services

- a. Increase number of peer tutors
 - i. Advertise to students
 - ii. Contact previous tutors
 - iii. Contact students with prep periods
 - iv. Ask staff for recommendations
 - b. Increase number of paid tutors
 - i. Update website
 - ii. Ask tutors and volunteers for references
5. Improve accessibility of Academic Center for all students
 - a. Increase hours of AC
 - b. Research and buy computer software to assist students with special needs
6. Investigate other academic centers to compare services with an eye to bringing in new elements as appropriate.

Focus on Success

Areas of Strength

- Small classes (limit 15) allow each student to receive personal attention every day. Limited size allows careful attention to how our students learn, we often identify issues, such as learning disabilities, ADD, mental health issues, or drug use--that have previously slipped by undetected.
- Generally effective identification and intake process for students. The interview process assures important information is learned and “buy in” from both the students and the parents. Clearly defined sense of “the FOS student.” Our counseling team at the high school and the middle school can identify and recommend appropriate students.
- Students choose to be in the program and can be dropped if they are not able to fulfill the requirements of the class. there is a positive, productive atmosphere. Many students find a sense of family in the class and feel a sense of pride in the program.
- FOS able to fill in gaps for students, such a providing academic tutors; giving direct instruction in study skills and class behavior; and providing information about getting into college.
- School resources are used: we work closely with our counselors and invite Gunn speakers into our class, such as our school librarian, or registrar, our Academic Center coordinator, our assistant principals, and our College and Career Center coordinator.
- Students are helped to identify their interests and strengths and plan for their future. There is an emphasis on goal setting; we help students understand the connection between their daily choices and their long-term dreams.
- A rich and varied curriculum that includes: goal setting, study skills, stress management, self-advocacy training, social pragmatic skill development, self-monitoring skills, post-secondary readiness skills, post-secondary exploration.
- Homework time is offered every day, so students learn what it feels like to concentrate and study and the teachers get to observe their habits and strategies and help them refine them.
- Efficient, effective, clear, and consistent policies and procedures for tardies, attendance, grading, computer use, student jobs, use of class time, classroom behavior, binder and back pack checks, etc.
- FOS is a “first choice” teaching assignment, and all are professional, committed, and energetic; enjoy the students; and believe in the mission of the program.

- Community partnerships have been developed with volunteer tutors and local therapists and businesses. For our students of color, we partner with the Foundation for a College Education.
- Community and school-wide support for the class
- Our anonymous student survey shows an overwhelming majority of students believe that because of the class, their grades are higher, they have done more homework, they write down homework more often, they are more organized, they are more aware of what they do well and what they need to improve, they have set weekly goals, they have asked for help, and they are happy they took the class.
- Our anonymous parent survey shows over 80% of surveyed parents say their students feel better about themselves, are less stressed, feel more confident academically, are more organized, are more responsible, and are happy they took the class.
- Almost every FOS student plans to attend college.

Areas of Growth

1. We continue to be plagued with network difficulties, which have made internet access and the ability to print challenging.
2. Our tutors are variable and the students don't use them as effectively as they could.
3. Mixed grade levels in our classes are largely a blessing—the older students set the tone and mentor the younger students, but it does lead to some repetition of curriculum for some students and the inability to fully meet the needs of a particular group—such as provided thorough college counseling for our seniors.
4. Because our students have such different issues, it is difficult to give each student a thorough education in their particular area of growth. For example, some students need thorough instruction in reading strategies while others need to learn to organize and prioritize; work effectively with teachers; or develop effective organizational strategies. Therefore, we cover many topics briefly rather than a few deeply.
5. Regular feedback from teachers is problematic. We send out teacher feedback forms, but about a third of the teachers don't return them. Also, it is always difficult for the teachers to decide just how much support to provide students and how much to encourage them to take individual initiative.
6. Teachers say that because we are tracking all our students in all their classes, it is difficult to create effective systems to track all students' issues and needs.
7. Introduction and use of the work of Carol Dweck described in her book, Mindset. Infuse concept of "growth mindset" into curriculum and interactions with students.
8. Introduction of ACT Plan program to promote post-secondary readiness.

Living Skills

Areas of Strength

- Curriculum meets California State Standards in the areas of drug, alcohol and tobacco education, family/Sex education, HIV/AIDS education, First Aid and CPR.
- Course curriculum is varied: helps students develop the skills and knowledge to make informed and responsible decisions about issues that affect personal health and well-being.
- Covers a broad range of topics with the goal of helping our students become better prepared to handle adolescence and the transition to High School.
- The curriculum is very student centered.
- There are a broad range of guest speakers covering a variety of topics who visit our classes.
- As there is no textbook the teachers are constantly adding to the selection of readings to keep up with current issues.
- The curriculum covers a variety of important social issues like racism, sexism and peer pressure that are not addressed directly and in depth in any other course on campus.

Areas for Growth

1. Review effectiveness of curriculum, materials and instruction for 11th and 12th grade level course. The course is designed for sophomores, yet is being taught to younger and older students therefore there is a need for more curriculum development. Revise to reflect opinions and suggests of students, parents and Living Skills teachers as deemed appropriate by teachers.
2. Introduction and use of the work of Carol Dweck described in her book, Mindset. Infuse concept of “growth mindset” into curriculum and interactions with students.
3. There is no extra time or money for curriculum development.
4. There is no control over what is being taught in the summer.
5. There needs to be some way to get sophomores (or freshmen) to take the class and not take it early or later.
6. There is no time or money for training for teachers new to Living Skills.
7. Increase the use of technology.

College Pathways Program

Areas of Strength

- Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) one period release for monitoring and planning
- Single guidance counselor as support: close monitoring of social and emotional issues, and academic progress
- Teachers committed to using Identity Safety practices in their classroom for all students.
- Careful grouping of students into classes.
- Quarterly meetings with CPP staff to discuss student progress and develop strategies for support

Areas of Growth

1. Review effectiveness of pilot program, getting feedback from staff and students, and make adjustments or programmatic changes as deemed necessary for increased success.
2. Introduction of ACT Plan program to promote post-secondary readiness.
3. Execute field trips to colleges and college fairs
4. Increase attendance at events designed for parents

