

**MIDTERM REVIEW  
VISITING COMMITTEE REPORT**

**WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES**

**FOR**

**PALO ALTO SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL**

**50 Embarcadero Road  
Palo Alto, CA 94301**

**Palo Alto Unified School District**

**Original Visit  
March 9 – March 11, 2009  
Midterm Visit  
March 15, 2012**

**Review Committee Members**

**Rory Bled, Chairperson**  
Assistant Principal, retired  
Berkeley Unified School District  
Margaret Rowland  
Retired Teacher  
Berkeley Unified School District

## Introduction

### Include the following:

- **General comments about the school and its setting.**
- **Significant changes or developments that have affected the school since the last visit.**
- **Description of the follow-up process, including a description of the committee that has been responsible for overseeing the progress of the school's action plan and preparing the visit.**

Palo Alto Senior High School (Paly), established in 1894, is one of two comprehensive high schools serving grades 9 through 12 in the Palo Alto Unified School District. The present enrollment is 1916 and is expected to increase to 2200 within the next few years. The student body reflects the community's socio-economic status and educational level. The student population is 27.7% Asian, 4.6% African-American, 58.3% Caucasian, 8.1% Latino, and 1.3% Other.

Located in the heart of Silicon Valley, the City of Palo Alto includes a dynamic mix of business and residential development. Hewlett-Packard and Stanford University and Hospitals are the City's largest employers. Palo Alto's population is approximately 60,000; the mean household income is \$90,377; the median home price is \$1,103,000; 74% of adults hold a four-year college degree; and 43% of adults over 25 have at least one graduate degree. PAUSD is a basic aid district and does not receive state funding base on Average Daily Attendance.

Students who attend Paly typically live in the City's northern and central neighborhoods. Recent demographic shifts in northern Santa Clara County have brought new families and increased ethnic and linguistic diversity within Asian, East Indian and Middle Eastern populations. In addition, the Voluntary Transfer Program (VTP), also referred to as the Tinsley Program, brings students from Ravenswood School District to PAUSD, with Paly as the program's designated high school. The current composition of the Paly student body is 59.9% White, 7.4% Latino, 21.6% Asian, 5.9% African-American, .6% Pacific Islander, .9% Filipino, and .5% Native American. Over the last fifteen years, the student body at Paly has become more ethnically and linguistically diverse. The white student population has decreased from over 80% in 1993 to less than 60% in 2008. The largest percent increase in the last fifteen years has been in the Asian population, which has increased from 15% to over 20% since 1993.

Enrollments				
	2009-10		2010-11	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Asian	416	23 %	430	24 %
White, not Hispanic	1115	62 %	1119	61 %
African American	91	5 %	81	4 %
Hispanic/Latino	144	8 %	155	8 %
Other	33	2 %	42	2 %
Total	1799		1827	
Socio-Economically Disadvantaged (SED)	114	6 %	149	8 %
Students with Disabilities	165	9 %	180	10 %
English-Language Learner (EL)	27	2 %	27	1 %

Source: IC, September 2011

Algebra I Completion by End of 9th Grade						
	2008-09		2009-10		2010-11	
	Total 9th Grade	Percent of 9th Grade	Total 9th Grade	Percent of 9th Grade	Total 9th Grade	Percent of 9th Grade
All Ethnic Groups	489	89	476	94		
Asian	99	97	113	99		
White, not Hispanic	290	93	290	98		
African American	35	57	22	55		
Hispanic/Latino	36	67	39	74		

Source: SASI as of June, 2010. Percent of 9th grade completing Algebra I by end of school year is compared to the total number of 9th grade students in each of the sub-populations as of the end of school year.

University of California Requirements Completion (A-G)						
	2008-09		2009-10		2010-11	
	Total Graduates	Percent of Eligible	Total Graduates	Percent of Eligible	Total Graduates	Percent of Eligible
All Ethnic Groups	404	77	428	80	393	77
Asian	89	89	107	91	83	91
White, not Hispanic	254	80	266	83	250	80
African American	24	33	19	47	13	15
Hispanic/Latino	27	30	28	36	36	44

Source: Percent of graduating students having fulfilled university A-G requirements is compared to the total number of graduating students in each of the above sub-populations as of the end of the school year.

Standardized Testing and Reporting Results by Student Group - Most Recent Year

Group	Percent of Students Scoring at Proficient or Advanced			
	English-Language Arts	Mathematics	Science	History-Social Science
All Students in the LEA	85	83	88	82
All Student at the School	82	76	81	83
Male	81	79	81	87
Female	83	73	80	79
Black or African American	36	22	22	56
American Indian or Alaska Native	*	*	*	*
Asian	93	91	91	94
Filipino	67	*	*	*
Hispanic or Latino	39	38	39	33
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	*	*	*	*
White	87	78	86	87
Two or More Races	*	*	*	*
Socioeconomically Disadvantaged	36	33	32	36
English Learners	38	47	*	*
Students with Disabilities	34	26	29	32
Students Receiving Migrant Education Services	*	*	*	*

Palo Alto High School's guidance program provides academic planning, personal counseling, and college and career advising for its students. At the core of the guidance department is the Teacher Advisor (TA) Program. The primary delivery of guidance materials and instruction is through the teacher advisors in the Thursday advisory periods. The teacher advisors write counselor recommendations and/or school reports for students.

Over 22% of the students at Paly speak a language other than English at home. The percentage of English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) students has increased by 100% in the last five years. As Paly does not have a formal English Development Program for English Language Learners, students who test as Limited English Proficient at the high school level in PAUSD attend Gunn High School, Paly's sister school in the district. To remain at Paly, LEP students must waive their access to a formal ELD program.

In 2009, Paly received a six-year accreditation from the WASC Review Committee, with a midterm review.

Since the WASC 2009 visit, the school administration has undergone significant changes. Starting in the 2010-2011 school year, a new principal, assistant principal, and student activities director were hired, and a dean's position was added to the administrative team.

In addition to the administrative changes, the school's Educational Council, the larger leadership group, has almost all new members, and Paly has hired more than 20 new staff members throughout campus. According to staff, student and parent feedback, there is a rejuvenated sense of community, deeper collaboration among staff, students, parents and administration, and greater reflection around the work at Paly.

The District Office leadership has seen turnover, as well. Along with changes to District Office personnel, the District and Paly have withstood sharp decreases in budget allocations that have caused the school to reevaluate how it uses our resources. Furthermore, Paly has continued to see growth in enrollment and has had to adjust to fewer resources by innovative planning.

The principal and the Ed Council oversaw the progress of the school’s action plan: each member of the Ed Council wrote a three-year update for the pertinent part of the plan, and the principal added the overall school update. The resulting SPSA was then presented to the School Site Council (comprised of 4 students, 8 elected staff members, and 4 elected parents), the PTSA, and the Ed Council in January of 2012, and then to the School Board.

**WASC Participants  
March 15, 2012**

<b>Parents</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Ed Council</b>
Haly Gans	Uma Veerappan	Phil Winston
Louise Valente	Maya Samet	Kathie Laurence
Lavonna Floreal	Aubrey Dawkins	Jerry Berkson
Pat Markevich	Kevin Lavelle	Susan Shultz
Mary Louise Ebinger	Paul Arias	Pat O’Hara
Susan Usman	Jesse Martinez	Rachel Kellerman
Anne Anderson	Gustavo Isalas	Letitia Burton
Edie Miller	Ally valencia	Shirley Tokheim
Rebecca Fox	Ursula Ku	Jaclyn Edwards
Barb Clark	Div Dillahunty	Radu Toma
	Armani Johnson	Michelle Steingart
		Peter Diepenbrock
		Michael Najjar
		Kevin Duffy
		Matt Hall
		Kindel Launer

Paly identified three goals during its 2009 self-study:

**GOAL 1:** Horizontal and Vertical Curricular Alignment – Teachers will work together in the best interest of each and every student at Paly.

**GOAL 2:** College Readiness and Post-secondary Planning – Paly will prepare each and every student for college and each and every student will graduate from Paly with a robust and individual plan for his or her education after high school.

**GOAL 3:** Support for All Students – Each and every student will be supported in his or her personal and academic work.

In addition to reviewing the school goals, the WASC visiting committee identified schoolwide critical areas for follow-up, based on their visit, an understanding of the self-study, and discussions with the Paly community:

1. More support is needed for the collaboration time necessary to analyze data, using it to close the achievement gap, and to develop shared assessment practices.
2. A better-defined process should be developed to identify appropriate professional development based on the results of data analyses.
3. All Paly courses should be open to all students, and more students should complete the A-G requirements; there is a significant gap between Asian and white students on the one hand and Latino and African-American students on the other.
4. There needs to be more vertical and horizontal alignment of courses and alignment to state standards.
5. Early intervention strategies for struggling students need to be expanded, both during the regular school day as well as after school and summer. Student support should be a major category for Paly action plans, and the school needs to explore additional ways to support all students, not only in their academic work, but in their social/emotional development as well.
6. Paly needs to devise a more effective and consistent system to communicate data to parents and students and to make them aware of support systems that are available to them.

Since the 2009 WASC visit, Paly's work has revolved around its schoolwide goals and the areas of critical follow-up identified by the visiting committee. As a first step, in 2009, the school took a comprehensive approach to addressing its goals and areas of follow-up:

1. Departments developed objectives and action plans for each school improvement goal.
2. Working in interdisciplinary teams and cross-departmentally, cross-curricular Action Teams, or professional learning communities came together to address school improvement goals, being especially mindful of critical areas for follow-up.

In the spring of 2009, the Administrative Team and Ed Council decided Paly would focus its efforts on the structure of the school day. The team felt this approach would provide the best opportunity to address school improvement goals and critical areas for

follow-up. This Action Team focused its conversations and thinking around the bell schedule, implementing a block schedule on Tuesdays through Fridays, and moving the daily start time from 7:50 to 8:15 a.m.

**GOAL 1:** Horizontal and Vertical Curricular Alignment – Teachers will work together in the best interest of each and every student at Paly.

***Accomplishment of this goal also addresses – in part - two of the Visiting Committee’s Critical Areas of Need:***

***More support is needed for the collaboration time necessary to analyze data, using it to close the achievement gap, and to develop shared assessment practices.***

***There needs to be more vertical and horizontal alignment of courses and alignment to state standards.***

Paly’s English department has begun the process of aligning writing articulation horizontally, from class to class at the same grade level. It has used professional development (PD) time to collaborate.

“Laning,” however, still plays a significant part in the Paly culture and The history/social science department is working on vertical alignment with Paly’s feeder middle schools and has used PD time to collaborate with other Paly teachers.

The math department continues its collaboration with Paly’s sister school, Gunn High School, using PD time to refine math sequences.

The science department continues to work with courses that are aligned both vertically and horizontally, reviewing standards, refining curriculum, and restructuring sequences during PD time.

The world languages department continues to reflect on the effectiveness of its alignment and make necessary refinements to benefit students.

The visual and performing arts department has refined alignment between courses in film, choir, music, theater, fine art, and video/film, as a result of student input, cross-District collaboration, and post-secondary feedback.

The guidance department has worked on aligning advisory curriculum for the Teacher Advisors (TAs) and has piloted its first formal lesson plan aimed at juniors starting the college application process.

**GOAL 2:** College Readiness and Post-secondary Planning – Paly will prepare each and every student for college and each and every student will graduate from Paly with a robust and individual plan for his or her education after high school.

***Accomplishment of this goal also addresses the Visiting Committee's Critical Area of Need:***

***There needs to be more vertical and horizontal alignment of courses and alignment to state standards.***

The English department has increased its focus on the writing process, working on aligning and refining the way it teaches the different styles of writing it is responsible to cover. It still has further work to do, including professional development on differentiated instruction and support of all students within one class, if it is to eliminate “laning” in grade 9 and then grade 10.

The history/social science department has taken a rejuvenated emphasis in the importance of reading and writing skills, analyzing bet practices and strategies to help students read, analyze, and respond to historical documents.

The world languages department encourages all Paly students to study languages during their four years at Paly. At this point, there is no data available to determine progress in meeting this goal, although more than 90% of all freshmen and sophomores are enrolled in world languages courses.

The math department continues its effort to increase the number of students taking math courses at Paly. During the 2011-2012 school year, 97.2% of Paly students are enrolled in math courses. During the 2010-2011 school year, 95.3% of juniors took at least one math course, and 83.16% of seniors took at least one math course. There is presently no data available about the number of students who repeat, but there is an indication that it is possible to change from one lane to another during the school year.

The science department has proposed offering conceptual physics in place of integrated science and foundations of science to help maximize the number of students meeting the UC/CSU *a-g* requirements. It is not yet “*d*” approved.

The special education department has moved away from self-contained SPED classes and gone in the direction of co-teaching courses and refocusing special day courses to become skill-building courses.

The CTE department has been working toward enhancing pathways for students and community. It is continuing its partnership with Foothill College and is working on adding additional classes such as nanotechnology.

The VAPA department has focused on enhancing the inclusion of all students into the

visual and performing arts.

The guidance department has developed Intentional Guidance plans and grade level guidance curriculum plans. It has also implemented College Awareness Day. Participation rates were at 99% for PSAT, PLAN and EXPLORE during the October 2011 administration. Play has just launched Mytonomy, a social information service where students go to get advice on every aspect of career and college planning from “near-peers.”

**GOAL 3:** Support for All Students – the goal that each and every student is supported in his or her personal and academic work.

***Accomplishment of this goal also addresses- in part – two of the Visiting Committee’s Critical Areas of Need:***

***Early intervention strategies for struggling students need to be expanded, both during the regular school day as well as after school and summer. Student support should be a major category for Paly action plans, and the school needs to explore additional ways to support all students, not only in their academic work, but in their social/emotional development as well.***

***Paly needs to devise a more effective and consistent system to communicate data to parents and students and to make them aware of support systems that are available to them.***

Since the last WASC visit, the Paly staff has adopted a new bell schedule: the Action Team met regularly during the fall and winter months of 2009-2010. In the spring of 2009-2010, staff and school leadership decided that the school would shift the structure of the school day to four block days, with ninety-minute periods, and a seven period day with forty-five minutes per class, on Monday.

This Action Team met regularly during the fall and winter months of 2009-2010. In the spring of 2009-2010, staff and school leadership decided that the school would shift the structure of the school day to four block days, with ninety-minute periods, and a seven period day with forty-five minutes per class, on Monday.

The core objectives for the pilot bell schedule were:

1. Regular weekly collaboration time for staff to work on schoolwide goals and critical areas of follow up:
2. Reduction of student stress by spreading out homework.
3. Student tutorial on Tuesday for 65 minutes.
4. 8:15 a.m. start time, 25 minutes later than the previous schedule.

Ninety-minute block-periods have challenged Paly staff in their practice, causing them to make fundamental refinements to their work with students.

Staff identified two key areas for focus: instructional strategies and integrating technology.

Elements of Instruction (EOI) – Enhancing the ability to differentiate, which includes anticipatory sets, monitoring for learning, checking for understanding, planning and timing of transitions, and closure.

Technology Resources include access to and development of greater expertise with available technology tools, and curricular planning in collaboration with other teachers to integrate technology into instruction.

Professional Development: working in collaboration with the School Site council, the principal offered every staff member, certificated and classified, five fully paid collaboration days. The staff had the choice to use those five days during the 2010-2011 school year or during the following summer.

In addition to revising the bell schedule, the administration has refined the master schedule to reduce the impact of potentially having three or four core classes on any block day, with greater priority given to 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students. For example, math and science classes are scheduled on alternate days of the week.

The Paly staff looked holistically at its weaknesses and strengths, as well as its goals, and worked to integrate them to maximize progress toward meeting all of them. As cited above, the guiding change was that of the new bell schedule, which has allowed for increased collaboration and professional development time; this time, in turn, as effected change in curricular and support systems, thus addressing the goals of college readiness and post-secondary planning, as well as support for all students.

Significant among the accomplishments of Paly High since the last WASC visit are:

- A. Campus collaboration, including weekly collaboration time and five additional days of collaboration.
- B. Responsiveness to student needs, including the new bell schedule, an additional guidance counselor, interventions for struggling students, added support classes, and extended library hours.
- C. Responsiveness to staff needs, including flexibility in PD activities and integration of technology into the curriculum.
- D. Responsiveness to the community, including enhanced communication with Infinite Campus, email, and the Paly website.
- E. Connectedness, with more visibility of the administration and the guidance department.

Paly has also continued to reflect on its strengths and weaknesses and has chosen the following as areas for continued growth:

- A. Continue to refine the use of Tutorial for struggling students.
- B. Expand support programs, including AVID and explore successful programs at other schools.
- C. Enhance the use of data to drive instruction, interventions, and refinements in our practice.
- D. Expand early interventions for struggling students.
- E. Continue to work toward all students meeting *a-g* requirements.
- f. Expand transition support for new students.
- g. Revitalize Career and Technical Education pathways.

The past three years have seen dramatic changes in the school, with the arrival of a new principal, along with other administrators and teaching staff. The school has implemented a new block schedule which, according to staff, students, and parents, is an unqualified success, reducing stress and allowing students to focus more deeply on subject material. Teacher collaboration within and across departments has increased, a successful co-teaching program placing SPED teachers in mainstream classes has been implemented, a tutorial to support all students has been introduced on Tuesdays, and teachers have been provided with additional PD time. The Paly community sees a more positive environment at the school, with both classified and credentialed staff providing invaluable support to students.

## Recommendations

- Write recommendations stating where additional attention is needed in the action plan regarding previous areas for improvement.
- Identify new concerns, if applicable.

Paly has made significant progress in accomplishing its goals, due, in large part, to a schoolwide commitment to the new block schedule designed to increase collaboration time and decrease student stress.

There is no evidence, however, of increased data analysis or use of aggregated and disaggregated data to guide curriculum or student intervention.

Furthermore, there is no evidence that all students have equal access to all classes, including AP classes. Nor is there any evidence provided that African-American and Latino students are equitably represented in AP classes. On the other hand, they are over-represented in lower lane classes. “Laning” continues to be a topic of controversy.

**Continued** areas of growth are:

1. All Paly courses should be open to all students, and more students should complete the *a-g* requirements; there is a significant gap between Asian and white students on the one hand and Latino and African-American students on the other.
2. The English department needs to continue its discussions of alignment and to use PD time to seek ways to differentiate instruction, with the goal of “de-laning” its classes in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades.
3. The achievement gap continues to be a troubling concern; although the Paly staff has created some external strategies to address this problem – the Tutorial for example – “laning” and the lack of differentiated instruction are still issues that exist within the classroom.
4. Resources should be devoted to lowering class size, especially at the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades.
5. Teachers should develop a variety of instructional strategies within each block period to keep students engaged.
6. District administration needs to evaluate technology to find an efficient way of communicating with all stakeholders; staff has shown an interest in using SchoolLoop.