

## **It's Great to Be a Viking**

Like all of you, there are certainly days where life turns upside down, and I find myself short on sleep or low on coffee. Yet everyday when I come to work, I get out of my car and head towards the tower building, I can't help but think to myself... "it's great to be a Viking."

Here are some of the reasons why.....

It's great to be a Viking because... **Our school climate is one built on trust and respect.**

We know our students, especially our seniors, are people of strong character. We value their individuality and as such, they enjoy a level of freedom not typically found in other public high schools. A robust journalism program where student voice is not censored. An open campus with unsupervised prep periods. And even student wireless that does not block YouTube. Believe it or not, these privileges are not typical or common in many high schools around the country, but we've found time and again that our students can handle the responsibilities and temptations that come with these freedoms. We trust and respect our students wholeheartedly.

It's great to be a Viking because... **Our school has tremendous spirit and pride.**

Two words. Spirit Week. Picture hundreds of seniors dressed in togas or neon colors for the spirited night rally. Visit the auto shop around midnight and you'll find a small army of students, parents and staff members who won't go home because they are engrossed in float building and determined to create a masterpiece. Or how about the way our seniors gather on the deck on their last day, throw the last of their papers into the air in a great cloud, cheer loudly.....*and then clean it all up.* In so many ways, it's evident that Paly spirit and pride encompasses all that we do and remains with us for a lifetime.

It's great to be a Viking because... **Our school has the most amazing parental support and involvement**

Our parents go above and beyond. Only in Palo Alto will a team of parent volunteers bring home-baked, nut-free cookies, brownies, and treats and to share with students at lunch, simply as a nice surprise when we host “Treats on the Quad.” Paly parents are always willing to travel the country to coach, mentor, chaperone and feed our award winning Robotics team, Speech and Debate team, concert band and athletic teams. And of course, they are capable of raising a small fortune to support the successful academic and athletic programs that wouldn’t exist without their efforts. We are so grateful to work side by side with a parent community that values great teaching and learning.

It’s great to be a Viking because... **Our school has amazing teachers and dedicated staff who truly care for students and inspire a love of learning that exudes beyond their classroom walls.**

Like the teacher who opens her classroom on three consecutive Saturdays and tells her students “come visit me if you want extra help or simply need to get some work done.”

Or the dozen or so teachers who help out in the library in the evenings the week before finals to help students prepare for their upcoming exams.

Every day, teachers and support staff sacrifice time with their own families to spend time chaperoning field trips, attending camp unity, coaching an athletic team or working late through another production cycle or concert. Our entire staff cares about our students, and shows it everyday..

But most importantly... it’s great to be a Viking because... **At Paly, we take care of each other.**

When we launched “Sources of Strength”, a peer-led suicide prevention program, we were blown away by the sheer volume of students who stepped forward to become peer leaders. In the end, 70 students became Peer Leaders, more than twice the recommended amount. These students have been empowered to spread messages of hope, help, strength and resilience throughout Paly.

Sources of Strength, along with clubs like Queer-Straight Alliance, Unity, Black Scholars United, Latinos Unidos, Best Buddies, and our popular Link Crew

program, are just a few examples of the many ways we take care of one another at our school.

Through both good times and bad, I'm always impressed with the ways in which students show compassion and support. Whether it's reaching out to a classmate in need, banding together to make a difference in other's lives, giving someone a hand up or a pat on the back, or simply cheering on classmates performing on the deck at lunchtime, our students fill me with pride. Above all, it's the small gestures of kindness and warmth I witness everyday that tell our story.

Put simply... ***at Paly, we've got your back.***

Our school is unique in so many ways and sometimes we take for granted just how fortunate we are to be a member of this caring and connected community. We're not perfect, and we've been through tough times, but when you consider how much stronger these challenges have made us, it's hard not to feel gratitude and love for the community that has made Palo Alto High School such a special place for us all.

So graduates, please remember just one last thing. It's great to be a Viking because **you will always have a second home, and it's called Paly**. And this home...our home...will always be here for you. The memories you've created with your friends, teachers, coaches, counselors, and the love that has brought you together as a class, will forever remain. And while this moment is officially your last event on our campus, we hope you understand that this home is not going anywhere....you are always welcome here....because you have touched us in so many ways and made us the great school that we are today.

Therefore, class of 2016... On behalf of the entire faculty and staff at Palo Alto High School, please know that we love you, we thank you, and we wish you all the best in your years to come.