

## **What if the world worked like PVPHS?**

There are numerous examples that our school is a microcosm of a world run well.

As in the greater world, Peninsula has a diverse population. Our diversity is an unspoken strength. I say unspoken, because Peninsula students interact daily - studying, playing, and competing together while ignoring cultural and racial backgrounds and recognizing each other's individual contributions.

The adult world may be surprised that the students at Peninsula predominately define themselves by their personal strengths and characteristics. This was particularly evident following the Columbine tragedy. A Time Magazine reporter called our school and wanted to do a phone interview with one of our students. The press at that time was building a case that US high schools are petri dishes for breeding intolerance and this intolerance marginalizes students and increases the possibility of campus violence.

The morning the reporter called for the interview I handed the phone to a female student who had just walked into the activities office. I could tell from her responses that the reporter was not getting the story he wanted and Peninsula would not be featured in the next issue of Time. The student shared that her campus did have a wide variety of cultural and special interest groups. She said, yes, she and her friends felt comfortable interacting with all of these students and in fact could join any of the groups if they wished. The reporter that morning did not get the desired Columbine follow-up piece. If he had asked the right questions, however, he would have gotten the Peninsula High School story. He had no idea the student he was interviewing, who felt so very comfortable with her school, was a minority black student who was a cheerleader and senior class president.

Peninsula students are not blind to cultural and ethnic differences. Other qualities simply count more. For example the student ASB president, elected by the entire student body, emerges each year due to his or her unique leadership qualities. It is telling to look over the past 9 years and see that our ASB presidents have been Indian, Persian, Jewish, Mormon, Caucasian, Korean, Japanese, and Chinese. In addition, the 20-25 elected class officers who work with these presidents, also represent our diverse student body. The homecoming elections produce a similar outcome. At the homecoming game students and fans open the game program to the different colors and cultures of the smiling faces of their elected homecoming court.

There are special occasions, however, when the student body, faculty and staff specifically recognize and celebrate our campus diversity. On these occasions it's all about food! We have two carnivals a year when the student culture clubs spread large containers of their unique cuisine on tables throughout the amphitheater. Lunch bags are left at home, campus food providers don't bother to compete, and if you forgot your lunch money, you borrow! At lunch time the whole school swarms the food tables to enjoy this international gastronomic affair.

The Peninsula world works because the students share a common value system that recognizes the importance of family, education, and hard work. As an extension of this value system, Peninsula students share exceptional character qualities. These qualities foster a brand of tolerance for others that include genuine acceptance and appreciation. Off-campus visitors and vendors frequently comment about the respectful and polite nature of the students. Our students also show respect and affection for the special students on campus with developmental and physical challenges. They demonstrate daily their kindness to these students and regularly welcome their inclusion in campus activities.

Philanthropy also comes naturally to Peninsula students. The students are givers. Yearly, with energy and enthusiasm, they organize major events designed to reach out and support the community. Peninsula students, wearing student-designed t-shirts, walk to raise money for breast cancer research. In December six busloads of students travel to Willenburg School to provide a lively holiday party with performances and presents for every child at the school. Peninsula, in turn, hosts Willenburg here on our campus. They share lunch with the Willenburg students and then fill the gym cheering on these profoundly disabled children as they perform their holiday show for us.

Two additional December philanthropic events include an all-campus canned food drive and the Teens for Teens program. During the ten-day canned food drive students donate hundreds of bags of food. Their donations fill a truck to the brim. This food is then delivered to needy South Bay families. The Teens for Teens collection is dedicated to providing practical and fun holiday gifts for the frequently neglected teen population living in group homes and shelters. The year of philanthropy concludes in the spring with a blood drive where students 17 and older donate invaluable pints of life-giving blood.

Peninsula students' joy in giving does not stop with these planned annual events. Where there is a need, it is the students who routinely step forward. They have asked to lead the way to organize support for victims of Katrina, Darfur, California wild fires, the Haiti earthquake and the 2008 "Save Our Teachers Now" campaign. Helping others in need engages more students than any other campus activity.

Words such as tolerance, acceptance, respect, generosity, and tenacity are not typically associated with teens. Our Peninsula students demonstrate these qualities in abundance. Yearly, with confidence and pride, we send Peninsula High graduates into the world possessing a multitude of positive personal qualities. As they progress beyond high school and share their gifts, there is a brighter future for all. Our graduates know the world **can** work like Peninsula and they will settle for no less. The future is in good hands.

by  
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