The latest edition of Measuring Progress highlights the Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified School District’s commitment to working as a single team or ‘One Hill.’ While this will be measured publicly as the relationship between our comprehensive high schools evolves, we are making significant progress in developing a collaborative spirit among all our schools.

As we improve our academic program, creating a more consistent and coherent program allows our schools to identify best practices. This cohesion also allows PVPUSD to align human and financial resources to increase efficiency and provide services for our students in a more fiscally responsible way.

Joining us on this endeavor as a new member of the PVPUSD Board of Education is Linda Reid. Ms. Reid was selected as a provisional appointment on the board after Erin LaMonte resigned to move to Texas. Ms. Reid has provided valuable insight to board discussions.

To keep current with PVPUSD’s daily progress, I encourage community members to follow us on Twitter at @DonAustin_PVP and @PVPschools. Each school also has unique Twitter handles to update the community.

Donald B. Austin, Ed.D.,
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Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified School District Superintendent Don Austin believes that the vibrancy and health of the entire district depends on the example set by its two comprehensive high schools. Austin, who started in PVPUSD’s superintendent post last year, underscores the importance of creating stronger partnerships among the district’s 16 schools at every level.

“If working together and fostering stronger bonds across all of our schools, PVPUSD will become a world-class school district,” Austin said.

High Schools on the Hill
Retoil Their Rivalry

The principals and student leaders of Palos Verdes High School and Palos Verdes Peninsula High School are building a spirit of collaboration and cooperation between their two campuses.

It’s a departure of sorts for these two highly competitive schools. But Palos Verdes High School Principal Charles Park and Peninsula High School Principal Mitzi Cress believe that reimagining the relationship between the schools will benefit all students.

“We have two high schools, but we’re one hill and one community,” Cress emphasized.

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Student Spotlight

Rancho Vista Elementary School students in Ann Bybee’s kindergarten class proudly show off their astronaut helmets. The project marked the end of a multi-disciplinary unit on the solar system, which required kindergartners to research a planet and work collaboratively to create a poster about that planet. Students also authored a book and made a collage about the solar system.
While some might liken the heated competition between Palos Verdes and Peninsula to the historic Duke University-North Carolina University rivalry, Cress said she believes the two schools can set the standard for a new type of rivalry. “We’re Pen and PV,” Cress replied when asked if she thought schools that model the type of rivalry the PVPUSD schools want to embody. “We’re unique.”

For more than a year now, Cress and Park have been meeting on a regular basis to discuss education issues and upcoming events. They often turn heads by sitting with one another during district meetings. They also send encouraging emails and, yes, tweets (social media messages sent via Twitter) to support each other’s campus initiatives.

The principals have an easy rapport, which they say is based on mutual respect and trust. In fact, Cress and Park conducted the interview for this story together in Cress’ Peninsula High office.

“Members of both staffs are recognizing that when we put the brains of both schools together you get better results,” Park said. “We tell our students to collaborate. We need to model that kind of collaboration as well.”

For their part, student leaders on both campuses started to make inroads to change the face of students’ relationships as well. Palos Verdes High and Peninsula High school student government and booster club leaders met the day before the schools’ first boys’ basketball match-up this year.

Ian Sun, Peninsula High School’s Associated Student Body president, said although they attend different schools now, many of the high schools’ leaders went to intermediate school and elementary school together so they’re able to use those friendships to build healthier relationships. Sun said he hopes the schools’ future student leaders will be able to carry on the tradition of meeting prior to rivalry games.

Hannah Stapleton, Palos Verdes High School’s Associated Student Body president, said that during the meeting students from both schools agreed to cheer for their own teams rather than shout negative taunts about their opponents.

Before the game’s tip-off on Jan. 27, student leaders and booster clubs members from both schools met at center court and exchanged hugs, handshakes, and high-fives. They also made brief remarks, which they prepared together, to spectators emphasizing that they were united as students in the Palos Verdes community.

Stapleton said by starting off the game as friends, during the game there was less tension, but she added: “It’s still a rivalry. We want to beat them and they definitely want to beat us.”

Cress and Park don’t want to water down the level of competition between the two schools on the field either. Both proudly wear their school’s colors and talk with pride about their schools’ students. Rather, the principals say they hope to change the tenor of the competition between Palos Verdes and Peninsula.

Following the Jan. 27 boys’ basketball game between Palos Verdes and Peninsula high schools, Park said he was approached in the parking lot by Peninsula’s panther mascot. Since Palos Verdes High lost the game, Park said he was unsure what the student carrying the panther mascot head by his side might say.

“Dr. Park,” Peninsula High student Jarred Dahlerbruch said, “I just want to thank you for a great game.”

After sharing that story, Cress and Park nodded at one another and smiled. There were no losers following the game that night after all.

“While we have two high schools, but we’re one hill and one community.”

Mitzi Cress, Principal
Palos Verdes Peninsula High School