



Press Release

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Therapy Dogs Put College-Bound Students at Ease

Cal High students apply for college, learn importance of mental health

WHITTIER – Four-legged therapists were recently enlisted to bring some peace and calm to California High School students as the stressed-out scholars filled the College and Career Center to file their college applications ahead of the Nov. 30 deadline.

In partnership with Pet Partners, a national nonprofit focused on animal-assistant therapy, Cal High invited therapy dogs to three college application workshops held in the library for students filing Cal State University and University of California college applications.

During each four-hour session, college-bound students dropped in to work on applications, get questions answered by experts and de-stress with the help of friendly pets.

“We were shocked at the levels of stress our students were putting on themselves,” said Sean Reagan, who teaches AP Government/Economics and AP Human Geography. “We want students to know that there is always help and it is important to find it – and a hug from man’s best friend can offer comfort.”

Studies have shown that positive animal interactions improve the physical, emotional and psychological lives of those who are served. Pet Partners works with a variety of animals and populations, including veterans, seniors living with Alzheimer’s, students with literacy problems and patients in recovery.

The therapy dog visit was part of the school’s Wellness Program, which was assembled by a team of Advanced Placement teachers, counselors, interns from Cal High’s Serenity Center and a District Student Well-Being program liaison, who recognized the need for providing resources and information on how to deal with life’s pressures to the stressed-out students, particularly those enrolled in AP and honors classes.

“This program is very similar to others that have popped up across the country to help the high-achievers deal with the challenges of AP life,” said Reagan, who helped launch the program after surveying 250 AP students who indicated that their senior year was often the most demanding and challenging.

“We started to recognize that in juggling their rigorous schedule and numerous other activities, they’re getting very little sleep,” Reagan said. “We decided to find ways to help them create a balanced, healthy, successful life.”

Last year, Cal High held an assembly for more than 500 AP students, celebrating their accomplishments, but also making them aware of campus resources, the importance of mental health and preventative care strategies.

“Our hope is to help them continue to excel, but recognize when they need to work on balancing their priorities and commitments, and how to make healthy choices so they can excel in healthy, sustainable ways,” Reagan said. “It’s been awesome to see such a positive response from students and staff.”

Organizers hope to invite the canines back next semester during senior project days or Saturday school sessions for stressed-out AP sophomores, as well as inspire the program to expand across the District.

“Sean’s foresight to bring some much-needed levity to our overwhelmed students is an innovative way to ensure that they are not only great in their academics, but are taking care of their health to be productive leaders of the future,” Cal High Principal Bill Schloss said. “We hope to provide our students more opportunities like this and promote awareness to the importance of healthy living.”

PHOTO CAPTION:

121516_WUHSD_THERAPYDOGS: California High School students interact with therapy dogs brought to the campus to help alleviate stress among students who were filing college applications. During each four-hour session, college-bound students dropped in to work on applications, get questions answered by experts and de-stress with the help of friendly pets.

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