FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Positivity Takes Over El Camino High School Through Student Leadership Initiative

A class at El Camino High School in Oceanside made a special effort to uplift their peers and promote inclusion in support of Suicide Prevention Week along with the anniversary of the attacks on Sept. 11, 2001. A student entering the front gates at the start of their school day immediately comes across posters, large messages in chalk on the sidewalk and even friends wearing post-it notes with kind words like, “You Are Beautiful”, “You Are Awesome”, and “You Can Do It!”

“You look up or down while you’re walking, and you see something really positive,” said Amani Ahmad, a senior at ECHS and president of the Peer Assistant Leadership class coordinating the initiative.

Ahmad said some of the key goals of the program, which started last year, are to “improve student culture” and provide a safe space on campus, including somewhere to sit at lunch with a PAL.

Devin Demerjian, who teaches the PAL class with Teresa Vallete, said one component of the course being developed this year is training PALs to become peer counselors. With this in place, students seeking support could have the chance to talk with a fellow student in addition to the school counselor.

“The students who are in the class change throughout the year. They become more confident in themselves and become better leaders,” Demerjian said.

Vallete, who also teaches special education, said the course also provides leadership opportunities for students with special needs and gives an outlet for them to participate in school activities.

In addition to writing their own messages of support, the PAL class gave their peers a chance to share thanks for loved ones who have served in the military. Students wrote these names on a poster that will be presented at their football season’s opening game Sept. 13 in a moment honoring servicemen and first responders.

Ahmad and her teachers said projects PAL’s recent kindness week have received positive feedback from students.

“It kind of starts in the classroom and then it spreads through the school,” Demerjian said.

To see the kindness in action, watch our OSIDE Week in One Minute video.