

Student mental health

How has a global pandemic affected the mental well-being of Aragon students?

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The ARAGON OUTLOOK

Thursday | February 11, 2021 | Volume 61, Issue 3

900 Alameda de las Pulgas, San Mateo, CA 94402

Aragon High School

Senior Dons reflect on sports season. Page 15

Aragon community's personal experiences with COVID-19

Carolyn Mish
NEWS WRITER

There have been over 35,235 COVID-19 cases in San Mateo County, as of Feb. 8. With the rise of the number of cases, many individuals have reported a wide variety of symptoms and long-term side effects, many of which vary depending on age, previous health conditions and severity of the case. Symptoms can range from mild to severe regardless of age group, and some people who test positive may display no symptoms at all.

English teacher James Daniel contracted COVID-19 in early December 2020, after a family member displayed mild cold-like symptoms.

"[I was surprised] that someone who obeyed all the rules to the best of his ability still could contract it," Daniel said. "[I was] staying home, always wearing a mask, [using] hand sanitizer, washing hands, only socializing within a constrained bubble."

While the rest of his household tested negative, Daniel quarantined for 10 days. He is continuing to follow the precautions he used before contracting the virus.

"I told people [that] you re-

ally have to obey all the rules all the time," Daniel said. "Vigilance is super key."

Similarly, Aragon parent Greg Thornhill contracted COVID-19 in late December 2020, and shortly after his son tested positive after feeling unwell.

"I'd call it flu-like symptoms," Thornhill said. "[I had] headaches, earaches, bad stomach aches. I lost my sense of smell like most people [and experienced] severe fatigue. [I] definitely had the mind fog. It was tough to concentrate."

During his quarantine, Thornhill experienced ups and downs in his recovery. With ICU capacity severely limited at the time, the dangers of worsening symptoms could not be more threatening, and with overfilled hospitals, many with COVID-19 are unable to receive proper care.

"Psychologically, you're constantly worried about ... going to the hospital, [and if it is going to] get really bad," Thornhill said. "[I was] freaking out ... [that I was going to] have long-term damage."

Before testing positive, Thornhill and his family abided by social distancing and health guidelines. Thornhill only left the house to walk his

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KAITLYN HA

More students are failing their online classes

Marlee Cherkas
NEWS WRITER

In the fall semester of 2020, 5.5% of all 1,639 all Aragon students failed at least one of their classes while online schooling. Additionally, an average 15% of all students in the San Mateo Union High School District have been regularly marked as "disengaged," meaning they are not actively contributing to or visually present during class.

Spanish teacher Alejandra Cheever instructs on Zoom and has noticed that the circumstances of distance learn-

ing have played a key role in declining grades.

"Obviously we all want students to get good grades," Cheever said. "But for some students, that's not even the priority right now because they have it so difficult at home."

When students are working from home, they are more prone to disruptions from siblings or internet issues and maybe have limited access to technology to complete their studies. With an influx of assignments clouding Canvas pages, keeping up with tasks is even more difficult, often resulting in

zeros or drops in grades.

"It can be overwhelming to look at the amount of stuff that you have to do on Canvas, and things sometimes slip through the cracks when you've got this long to-do list," Cheever said.

Asynchronous assignments allow students to create their own schedule, which is beneficial for some students because they are able to work at their own pace. However, for some students that need structure, the lack of live instruction can be difficult.

"The level of distraction definitely increased and the

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Sport tiers: what do they mean for reopening?

Pratham Valluri
SPORTS WRITER

The California Department of Public Health deployed COVID-19 health protocols on Dec. 14, which season one and season two sports have been operating under as they resume practices, and soon, competitions. These rules include sorting sports based on their risk as well as counties based on their test positivity and adjusted case rates into four categories. Coun-

ties are categorized as purple (widespread), red (substantial), orange (moderate) or yellow (minimal).

"We ... hope that somehow [our county] can get into the orange and play [orange tier sports]," said Aragon Athletic Director Steven Sell.

The decision about which sports could be played in which tier was based on two factors: if a sport is played inside or outside and the risk of contracting coronavirus

through playing. Currently, San Mateo County is still in the purple tier; to be in the purple tier, a sport must be outdoors and have low contact between athletes. Competition schedules for sports in other tiers have not been finalized yet. These sports, including tennis, golf, swimming and track and field, don't require close interactions between students, lessening the risk of infection.

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Isabella Jad swims laps at practice.

ALESSANDRO RIEDEL

NEWS

Virtual Lunches

Learn about leadership's effort to facilitate class bonding through online lunches.



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FEATURES

Online therapy

Read about how therapy is adapting and growing online.



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Gov. Newsom's reopening plan for schools



Kamron Ramelmeier
NEWS WRITER

On Dec. 30, California Gov. Gavin Newsom introduced the "Safe Schools For All" plan to help mainly elementary schools reopen starting in February. \$2 billion is being put into the plan, and thousands of elementary schools already have waivers allowing them to return to in-person learning, including those in the Hillsborough City School District.

"The three K-5 schools and the superintendent and our board of trustees filed and were granted a waiver [in October] to reopen our schools," said North Elementary School Principal Heidi Felt. "We each created a measured, sequential return to school, so rather than

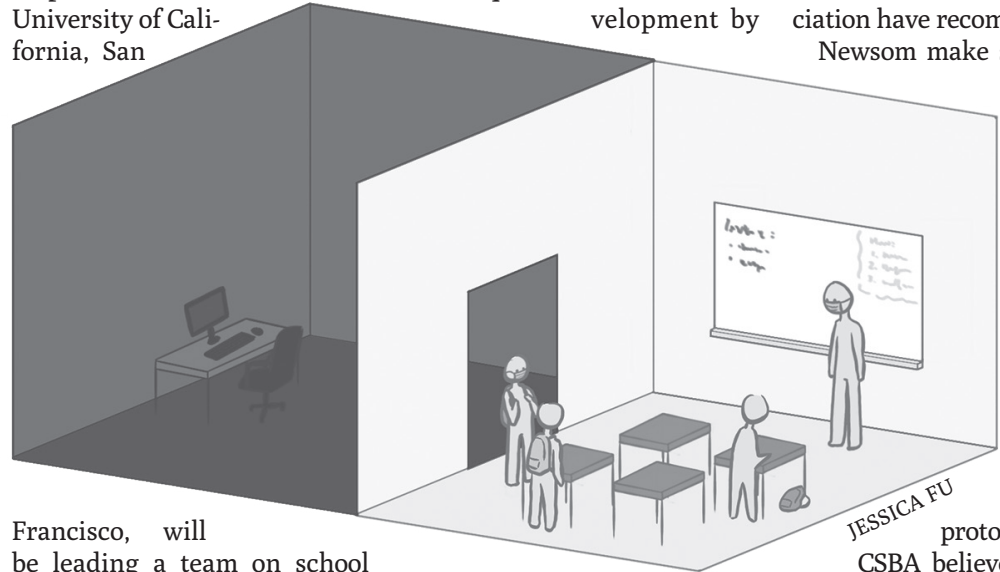
schools to reopen sooner.

"There are very few cases in Hillsborough in which our youngest K-5 students have given COVID-19 to anyone," Felt said. "It's most common for adults to transmit COVID-19 to each other, and that's really the biggest concern and risk. The great majority of students do better in in-person school than distance learning with their teachers, classmates and auxiliary staff. School is about developing the whole child and not just academics, so it's really important for children to learn social, emotional and physical skills."

Assessment data from NWEA, a Portland-based nonprofit, show test scores from about 4.4 million elementary and middle school students

and schools report cases to local health departments. Additionally, Dr. Naomi Bardach, a pediatrician at the University of California, San

Francisco, will be leading a team on school visits to educate students and teachers on preventing outbreaks. School districts returning to in-person instruction would also receive between \$450 and \$700 per student.



Francisco, will be leading a team on school visits to educate students and teachers on preventing outbreaks. School districts returning to in-person instruction would also receive between \$450 and \$700 per student.

For a public school to reopen, its respective county must be within the red tier classification, as defined by Newsom's "Blueprint for a Safer Economy." However, most counties across the state, including San Mateo, remain in the purple tier, which requires all schools without a waiver to remain closed.

Despite the possible benefits of reopening, some, including elementary school parent Brent Reynolds, have reservations about Newsom's plan.

"My 11-year-old is having trouble keeping focus and

is constantly missing assignments," Reynolds said. "[Students] are also missing out on quite a bit of social development by

being stuck at home [like] playing sports, attending dances and socializing with friends in person. [However] I don't believe reopening during the greatest surge of the virus to date is a good idea. The greatest drawback [of the plan] would be if there is a virus outbreak in the schools causing sickness and death throughout the community."

Regardless of the reopening concerns, the plan has run into other problems. Some school districts feel that the Feb. 1 deadline to apply for financial incentives for reopening was too early. Furthermore, the California State Legislature has not approved the \$2 billion that would be offered to schools following up

with Newsom's plan for meeting required conditions.

Some organizations like the California School Boards Association have recommended that Newsom make some modifications to

key components in his plan, such as requiring that the state pay for testing expenses and preventing labor unions from the final decision on safety protocols. The CSBA believes that these measures are crucial in order for the "Safe Schools for All" plan to be feasible.

Additionally, some school officials think that the dates of reopening following a surge in cases during the holidays are unrealistic given that January has been the deadliest month of the pandemic thus far for California with 14,940 people losing their lives and cases reaching a record of more than 40,000 cases per day. But Newsom, who has been criticized for strict stay-at-home orders and is facing calls for a recall election, thinks the plan is important to pursue.

As the spring semester continues, many schools remain undecided what their decision on reopening will be and the fate of Newsom's plan remains unclear.

"My 11-year-old is having trouble keeping focus and is constantly missing assignments"

having all kids back all at once, we [have] certain grades take turns to come on campus each week. We also have weekly COVID-19 testing of our staff and students, so that's been reassuring for our teachers who have felt anxious."

Newsom notes that learning virtually is much more difficult for younger students — a key reason why his plan will focus on them first. Felt also believes it's beneficial for elementary

reveal a nationwide drop in math performance. According to the Washington Post in October 2020, there also has been a 22% decrease in the amount of kindergartners meeting literary benchmarks in the District of Columbia, making it difficult for elementary schools to proceed with their virtual agenda.

Newsom's plan will require that all teachers and students get tested for COVID-19 weekly

Leadership hosts class virtual lunches using Rally

Cameron Leung
NEWS WRITER

Virtual Lunches were first introduced the week of Feb. 1, which utilized new virtual meeting software, Rally, and attempted to connect students. The Associated Student Body and class councils organized the lunch meetings after Director of Student Activities Melissa Perino and Assistant Principal Nicole Elenz-Martin proposed the event idea.

Before running the meeting software in Virtual Lunches, Leadership and Renaissance students piloted the platform during class.

"In the previous times we've tested it, we didn't really like it," said junior Renaissance student Rowan Cary-Clark. "People already have a schedule for what

they like to do during lunch. In this environment it's so hard to try and be like 'let's make it how [in-person school] used to be.' This is kind of the new normal."

Virtual Lunches were the newest effort in leadership's ongoing endeavor to foster connections among students as remote learning continues. The activity aimed to better the "new normal" by making room for student interaction, especially for newer students who have never had the chance to meet their classmates in person.

"It was really supposed to help us get to know new people because as freshmen, there are a lot of kids from different [middle] schools," said freshman Renaissance student Morgan Marburger.

Despite attempting to unite new students, the freshman meeting had the lowest turn-

out. About 30 students went to the first senior Virtual Lunch, 15 went to the sophomore and junior lunch and 5 went to the freshman lunch. Because they had the time to get to know their classmates better, upper

classmen may have been more enthusiastic were about seeing acquaintances than lower classmen about seeing students they didn't know.

After discovering Rally, Elenz-Martin and Perino were inspired to launch Virtual Lunches since its meeting interface is geared towards hosting activities. Rally is structured as an elaboration on Zoom breakout rooms, imitating different areas in a venue, with unique features like room-specific music, center pictures and names. For Virtual Lunches, ASB and class councils collaborated to recreate Aragon campus's main locations — Center Court, the theater, A Hall, B Hall, C Hall, D Hall and E Hall — as virtual Rally rooms.

"When we talked about it in Leadership and class council, [opinions on Rally were] somewhat divided," said sophomore Class President Christien

Wong. "Personally, I think it's kind of weird because one of the features of Rally is you get to listen to other people talking as background chatter."

However, the platform had additional safety problems. The

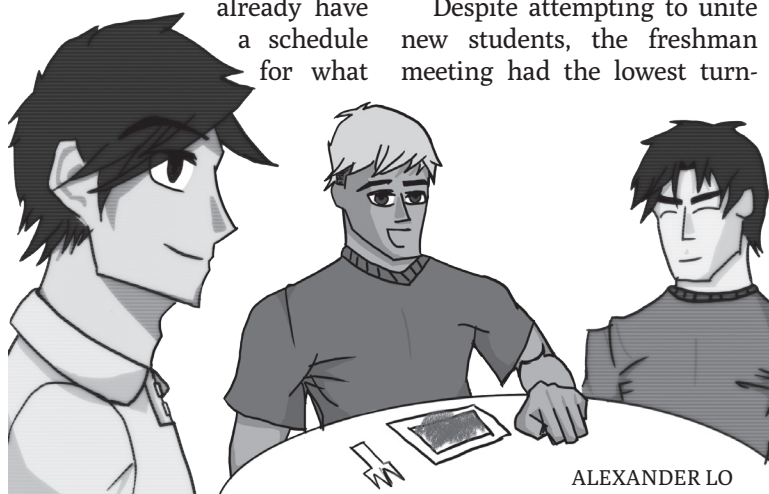
brainstorming how the software could host fairs, events and clubs although students' unwillingness or inability to attend optional online events may prevent Rally's future use at Aragon.

"I don't like the idea of it in the long run because it's just another screen or something else that we have to do," Cary-Clark said.

There's a constant contradiction as students advocate for interaction, but do not always participate in it.

"It's a situation Leadership has been thinking about for a long time because you don't want to force people to connect with each other," Wong said. "I think interacting with other students besides people in your class would help [with connectedness], but school shouldn't mandate it outside of school hours because that defeats the purpose."

In February, Virtual Lunches will continue to provide a place where many can chat and play games with peers outside of the classroom. In the first week, some that joined the meets enjoyed it, but most didn't deem it a necessary lunchtime staple. Perino and Elenz-Martin are currently deciding if and how Aragon will purchase Rally for future use.



Editorial: teachers should teach and grade with empathy

This editorial represents the opinion of 11 of the 14 Outlook editors.

Since the transition to on-line school, students have reported significant increases in fatigue and stress. In a study conducted by Texas A&M University, 71% of 195 interviewed college students indicated spikes in anxiety due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The culmination of this stress reflects in academic performance — over 9.6% of Aragon students had a combination

motivation to absorb content and ultimately keep up their good grades.

In some classes, teachers do not accept late work a minute after the set deadline, and in others, students are subject to weekly assessments despite decreased learning quality and instructional minutes. Some quizzes and tests have become even more difficult to take online, as students are prone to family distractions, Zoom fatigue, unstable Wi-Fi and technical issues. Despite these added challenges, some

with wellness counselors, decreasing the quality of mental health care. Without in-person interaction, teachers may be unable to notice symptoms of mental illness in students in the same way that they would if the school were in person, as these symptoms may manifest themselves through students' body language, facial expressions or eye contact, all of which are difficult to discern through a screen, according to the High Focus Center. While resources are available, students may be reluctant to seek help due to the stigma surrounding mental health and the emotional burden placed on students to reach out to online counselors.

Limited social interaction, prolonged loneliness and uncertainty about the

future make it difficult for adolescents to feel motivated and complete everyday tasks. According to a 2019 study of middle schoolers, students who had positive interactions with classmates and felt cared for by teachers were more likely to engage in learning, felt confident about their academic abilities and were a lot more interested in completing their assignments. Online classes lack crucial facilitation of conversation and pos-

itive interaction between classmates and teachers; group work is difficult and awkward over Zoom, and some students may choose to not participate at all.

Aragon students experience a culture of perfectionism and academic rigor, which leads to stress and oftentimes burnout. It is essential that teachers make strides to reassure students that their mental health and overall well-being, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, takes precedence over any examination or assignment.

“With reduced quality of education, It is unreasonable to hold [students] to in-person standards”

of three or more D's and F's for the fall 2020 semester. The editors of the Outlook believe that Aragon teachers should adopt empathetic teaching and grading practices while taking into consideration challenging circumstances due to the pandemic.

With the reduced quality of education, it is unreasonable to hold students to in-person standards. Decreased instructional hours have led many teachers to pack class periods with content-heavy lectures, sparing little time for collaborative work or other supplemental educational tools.

The issue of strict grading appears more significant in AP classes where teachers prepare students to grasp rigorous college content. Some AP teachers believe that their students should not be able to receive credit for late work or perform test corrections as they are taking a college level course and should be held to the same standards as college students. However, this would be unrealistic, as high school students' circumstances vary greatly from college students'. Apart from the similarity in the content

teachers have increased the grade weight of tests, causing students to experience significant grade changes from a single test.

We propose that teachers accept late work for some amount of credit for students experiencing rapid pacing of assignments and declining mental health and well-being. Because teachers may not be privy to each student's circumstances, they should cast a larger net for a late-work grading policy. By accepting late work for partial credit at the least, teachers would do away with the unnecessary stress of strict deadlines.

We believe that a student's change in comprehension is the best metric for their academic engagement and leniency through some form of mandatory test makeup would grant them an opportunity to fill content gaps. In our experience, classes that offer revised makeup tests succeed at reinforcing a long-term grasp of content while easing students' stress. With only brief feedback in Canvas comments to shape students' understanding of the content before and after assessments,

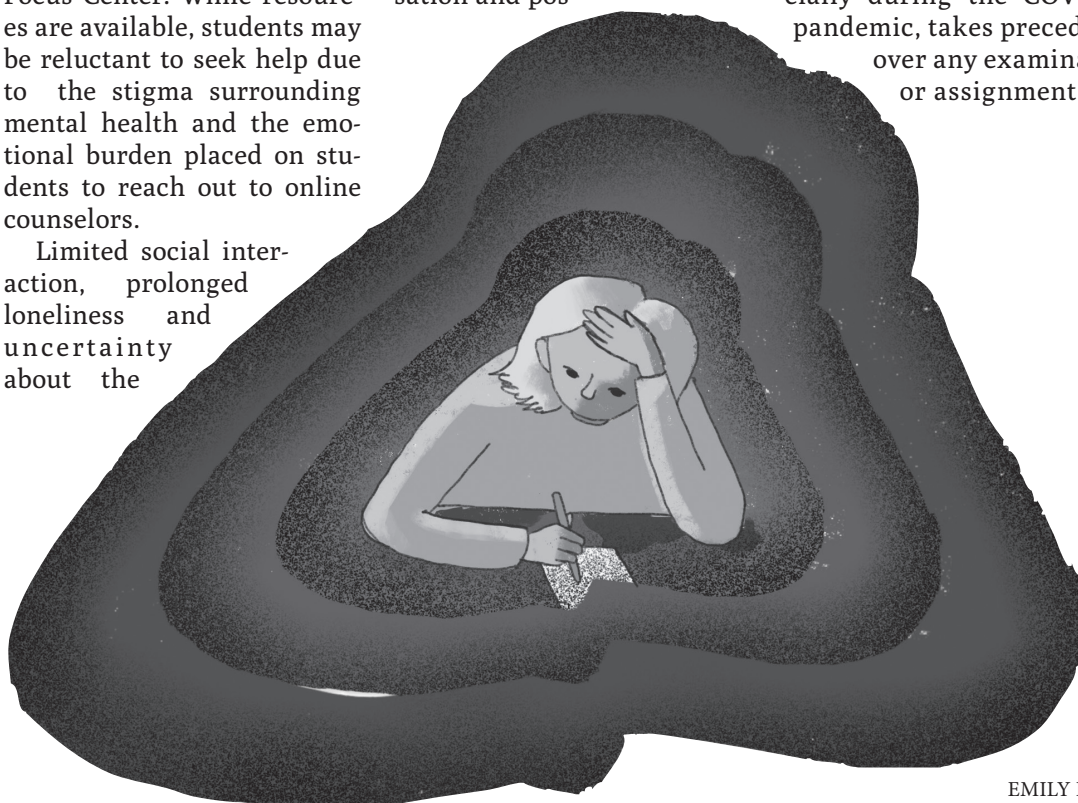
“Over 9.6% of Aragon students had three or more D's and F's for the fall 2020 semester”

being taught, high school students take more classes than college students, spend more lecture time in front of the screen and most do not yet have the mental and emotional maturity of adults. The online format of this year necessitates teaching college content with high school grading practices like accepting late work and allowing students to prove mastery through retakes.

While it is challenging to ensure that students are provided with the necessary material for tests, AP exams and future coursework, the lack of interaction between students and teachers has led to an overall decrease in

learning in an online format becomes a monumental task. While providing more individualized feedback may be a time-consuming feat, these comments are central to student growth and motivation and should not be overlooked.

Special circumstances have arisen in the online world that warrant more empathetic grading and teaching measures. According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 35% of teenagers who were receiving mental health services between 2012 to 2015 did so exclusively through school. Online learning strips students of the opportunity to have face-to-face discussions



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Aragon students struggle to pass remote classes

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[amount of] things that could distract us at home [have] increased," said junior Christos Makropoulos. "The disorganization of [synchronous] classes is way better than the disorganization of [asynchronous] classes."

U.S. history, physical education, English, ethnic studies, biological science and modern world history.

For some students, learning from home has been a better way to take in the curriculum. Outside factors such as classmates causing distractions or

"The hardest thing [about distance learning] is working independently, because [when] you're on campus there [are] less distractions"

Sophomore Maider Gonzalez notes that her study habits have changed now that learning is completely online. When classes are distanced, the resources available to students seeking help are limited. Students cannot go up to a teacher at lunch with questions or turn to a partner in class to collaborate.

"The hardest thing [about distance learning] is working independently because [when] you're on campus there [are] less distractions [when] you're working with your group," Gonzalez said. "It's more hands-on, but since you're online, you [have to] figure out how to do your stuff and be organized."

Because classes are virtual, the possible distractions are endless when switching computer tabs and completely disconnecting from class is so easy. For the 15% of students who are considered distance learning disengaged, the failure rates are greater than the passing rates in world languages,

other disruptions during class are decreased because of the learning platform.

Senior Tayler Vaita has noticed that distance learning has had a positive impact on her grades and well-being.

"My grades have improved so much [because] I get distracted easily [during in-person school]," Vaita said. "By being at home and in my own space, I zone out distractions because it's quiet[er] around me."

The increase in failing students across the district has made teachers and students question the way curriculum is being taught remotely. While students have demonstrated resilience in adapting to online learning, the difficult circumstances make it challenging for many to meet the rigid course requirements. For some students, asynchronous classes are best because they allow more flexibility for work time, and for others, the structure and organization of synchronous classes are what keep students engaged.



COVID-19 hits the Aragon community

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1
dog and go grocery shopping, and does not know how his household was exposed.

"I took precautions, and I caught [COVID-19]," Thornhill said. "It staggers me that there [are] so many people that still just don't think [COVID-19] is real. My recommendation to people is take it seriously ... [and] have a plan [to] quarantine if you're a multi-member household."

Aragon alumna Genesis Loaiza has worked throughout the pandemic as an essential patient care coordinator in San Mateo. She believes she contracted COVID-19 from her workplace, despite not having been in contact with the confirmed positive patient and her colleagues testing negative. At the time, Loaiza's husband, who is a first responder, was also exposed to COVID-19. He tested positive shortly before Loaiza did, and they self-isolated.

"I left work right away," Loaiza said. "I got home, and I just sat outside because I didn't want to touch anything in my house."

After testing positive, both began displaying symptoms.

for months now and experiences trouble breathing.

Despite presenting a series of medical implications,

clining, it is still imperative to abide by guidelines set by the county and the Centers for Disease Control and Pre-

"I'm one of those people that goes off of smell, and I can't do that anymore"

the long-lasting effects have begun to impact her life far beyond just physical health.

"My smell has definitely changed," Loaiza said. "I love to cook, and I'm one of those people that does not follow the recipe [and] goes off of smell, and I can't do that anymore. Things smell different. I can't smell certain things."

Loaiza and her husband live with their family, and they isolated in their bedroom for 10 days to avoid infecting the rest of their family. Their household tested negative.

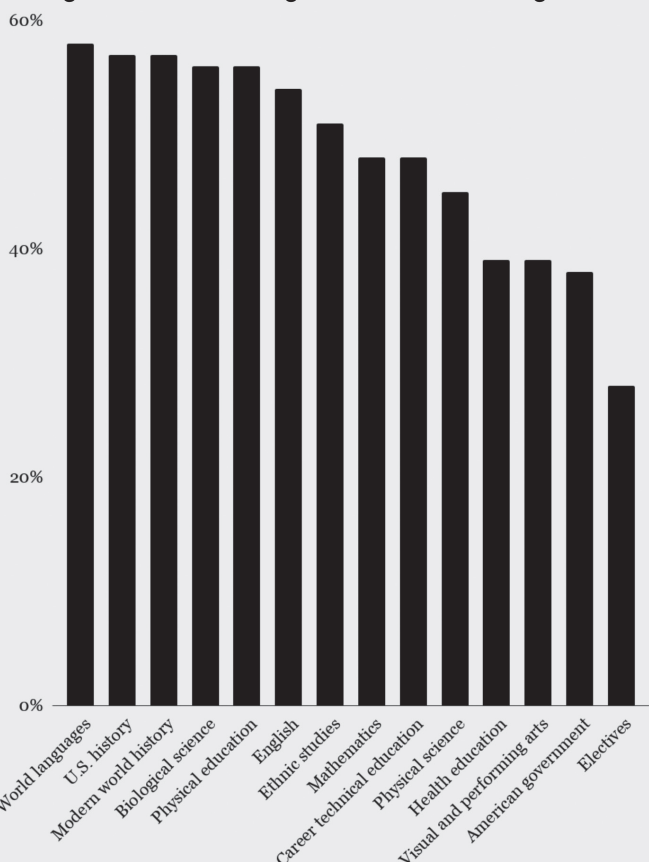
"It [goes] to show that masks work, just wear your mask," Loaiza said. "Practice washing your hands as much as you can, don't touch your face."

During isolation, Loaiza's support system helped them re-

vention for the safety of all San Mateo residents. If sick or exposed to anyone with COVID-19, quarantining is critical in mitigating the spread of the coronavirus and keeping others safe.

PERCENTAGES OF DISENGAGED STUDENTS IN THE SMUHSD WHO ARE FAILING CORE SUBJECTS

Note: the San Mateo Union High School District defined failing as having a "D" or "F" letter grade for the following statistics.



Statistics from the SMUHSD academic achievement update published on Jan. 21.

ELIZABETH VAN BLOMMESTEIN

"Just being there for your friends and your colleagues and people that you know [makes all the difference]"

"I lost my sense of smell and my sense of taste," Loaiza said. "I was really congested for a few days. I had a lot of headaches [and] a low grade fever. I felt sleepy. Luckily [my] symptoms started going away [instead of] getting worse as time went on."

While at first Loaiza only experienced mild symptoms, the long-term effects of contracting COVID-19 have lingered, as she has had a cough

cover and maintain distancing.

"The biggest thing for me is just being there for each other and checking in and doing your part" Loaiza said. "I'm so lucky that I have my family here, but not everybody has family nearby. Just being there for your friends and your colleagues and people that you know [makes all the difference]."

With COVID-19 cases in San Mateo County slowly de-

COVID-19 IN SAN MATEO COUNTY

37,058

As of Feb. 8, there has been a total of 37,058 coronavirus cases in San Mateo County.

7,059

Those between 20 and 29 years of age have been infected the most so far with a total of 7,059 positive cases.

436

436 people have died from a coronavirus infection in San Mateo County.

133

The age group with the largest amount of deaths due to the coronavirus is 80 to 89 year olds. So far, 133 people in this age group have died from coronavirus infections.

0.80

The average person in San Mateo County with the coronavirus is currently spreading it to about 0.8 other people.

Information from the San Mateo County Health website updated on Feb. 8.

ELIZABETH VAN BLOMMESTEIN

Biden promises climate change action

Alexandra Ding
NEWS WRITER

In the past four years, former President Donald Trump left the Paris Agreement, leased 10.3 million acres of land and water to oil and natural gas companies and rolled back over 100 pieces of climate change legislation. Global temperatures are currently over 1 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels and could reach 2 degrees Celsius if no action is taken. President Joe Biden has a \$2 trillion plan to change this, making American electricity sources clean by 2035 and America completely carbon-free by 2050.

Biden plans to invest \$400 billion in clean energy research, expand established forms of renewable energy and reverse environmentally harmful Trump administration actions. Biden's plan is expected to create 10 million new jobs while also providing economic help to workers in fossil fuel industries.

"He's giving enough money to allow a leeway towards oil and gas workers, maybe five years, to allow them to transition [industries]," said senior Kelly Chan, vice president of Aragon's Eco Action club. "They're also ... making new jobs, ... [so] even if you lose your job in oil and gas, five years is a lot of time to recover yourself or enter a different field."

However, there's resistance. Fossil fuel workers often lack the training or aren't in the right place geographically to access new jobs and thus are wary of change.

"There's always a grinding of the economy," said economics teacher Michael Gibbons. "It's easy to talk about it when it's not your job. If you're the person in Texas who's going to lose your job, [and] can't feed your kids, it's very serious."

On Jan. 19, Gov. Gavin Newsom asked Biden to allow California to raise its tailpipe emission standards, an ability Trump's administration revoked. If Biden agrees, tailpipe emissions, a major greenhouse gas source, will be lowered nationwide — California has one of America's largest auto markets, so a large number of cars will be produced to fit its new standards.

In the first month of his presidency, Biden has made environmental justice a priority. Climate change disproportionately affects historically disadvantaged groups: nearly half of Latinxs live in areas with ozone levels above the Environmental Protection Agen-

cy's safe standards, compared to one-fourth of Americans overall, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Biden pledged to target these communities with 40% of his investments.

"We need to pay more attention to minorities in terms

investment is] a good idea."

Because global cooperation on climate change is crucial — one polluter anywhere means rising temperatures everywhere — Biden plans to weave climate change into foreign policy. On his first day as president, he signed an executive order to rejoin the Paris Agreement, an international treaty to limit global warming to under 2 degrees Celsius. In the future, he plans to call for a worldwide ban on fossil fuel subsidies.

However, America is lagging behind; major emitters, such as the European Union, have already committed to being carbon neutral by 2050 and taken action to slow pollution. Four years of "America first" foreign policy, coupled with Biden's lack of definitive short-term goals, make other nations unsure if he can follow through on his ambitious plans.

"You need to [make] a more comprehensive plan than 'I will do good things if you [will]," said freshman Agastya Raghavan. "I think [Biden's

plan] ... would be a better plan than we [had under Trump]. I don't think it's the best one."

Biden faces other hurdles. While the Democrats hold a trifecta, with control of the executive branch and a majority in the House and Senate, some representatives may not support legislation if it harms their constituents, and executive orders are limited. However, with four years of delayed action under Trump, some, like Chan, see Biden's plan as a flawed but necessary step toward the right direction.

"[Biden's plan will cost] a lot of money, ... but climate change is an issue that we have been putting off for a long, long time," Chan said. "We have a lot of catching up to do, but it's optimistic because I think most people are realizing now that climate change is not a political thing. It's a fact, and it's nice to see that there's some sort of bipartisanship working towards more relief."

2020 saw 4.2 million acres of California in flames, while the East Coast was battered by a record-breaking hurricane season, offering a glimpse of what may come. In light of this, some believe Biden is doing too little — or too much — while others view his plan with hope. For now, it's still a sketch, and it will take time for the plan to be developed in full. But, the clock is ticking.



YUE YU

of climate change," said sophomore Lucas Imboden. "That also goes with social justice and fixing systemic racism. Those two ... are intertwined. I think that we need to work on both of them, so [Biden's

Crime remains an issue amidst pandemic

Kiara Lopez
NEWS WRITER

While nationwide violent crime rates spiked last year, the rates for most other crimes have fallen, with the notable exception of those involving motor vehicle theft and break-ins. In California, property crime has fallen by 22% compared to early 2020, but motor vehicle theft has spiked by the same percentage according to the Public Policy Institute of California.

The San Francisco Chronicle reports that car thefts increased by 33% in San Francisco alone from 2019 to 2020.

Besides implementing safety protocols at country jails to reduce the spread of COVID-19 cases, some nonviolent felons were given court dates, so they are no longer detained. In addition, other felons were released early to minimize jail populations and reduce the risk of transmitting the coronavirus. In San Mateo County, 135 inmates were released.

"These people are committing crimes with a ticket in their hand," said Michael Haobsh, public information officer for the San Mateo Police Department. "They're still out there committing

"They're still out there committing crimes ... because we're prohibited from booking them into jail"

crimes and victimizing innocent community members ... because we're prohibited from booking them into jail."

In November, while on a shopping trip at Trader Joe's, San Mateo County resident Tracey Syme came back to the parking lot and found her rental car broken into. After realizing her laptop was missing, a witness informed her that a thief had been peering into car windows, scouting for one to break into. Syme has not been able to recover her stolen valuables.

"I had a lot of other [personal items] in my bag connected to my work, and I'm [never] going to ... get it back," Syme said. "It was just really upsetting that this happened."

Five similar crimes in San Mateo County occurred around the same time Syme was robbed. A lack of security and the right precautions in public places could be another factor. Haobsh

recommends keeping fences locked and windows closed at home. Shrubbery and trees could be trimmed to lower heights in order to avoid giving criminals chances to ambush residents. Valuables and personal information should be carried instead of left in vehicles to lessen

"[The police realized] they were wasting time. There was no way they could track this down"

risks of being targeted.

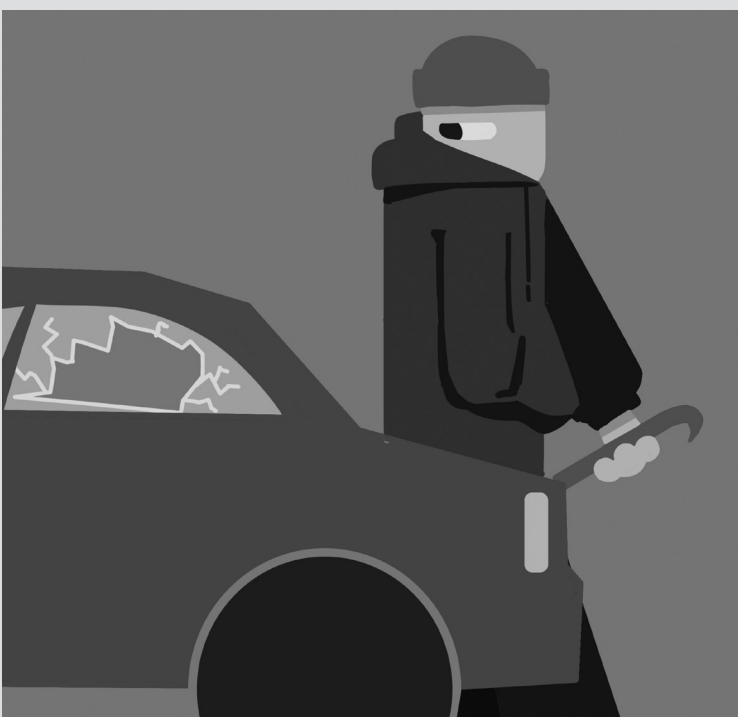
Recently, San Mateo resident Guillermo San Miguel found his car door handle broken and suspected that someone had attempted to steal his tools. A few days later, his door lock was

loose again after he had already fixed the damage. San Miguel called the police and set up security cameras to take further precaution. In another incident, San Miguel had his work van broken into and over \$500 worth of equipment stolen.

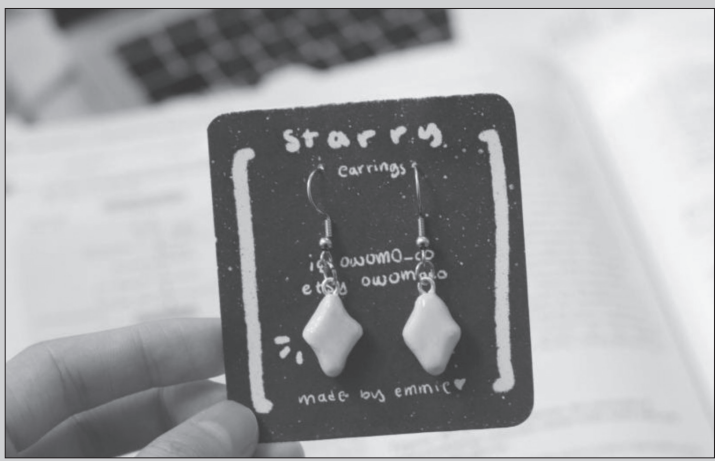
"I called the police, but they didn't have someone who could come," San Miguel said. "Their question is always, 'is the burglar still there? Did you see it [happen]?' I did not see anything, ... [so the police realized] they were wasting time. There was no way they could track this down."

Only about 13.5% of burglary cases are solved due to the typical lack of evidence and witnesses in the case.

While crime rates have lowered in San Mateo County, they have not entirely vanished. Taking advice from local law enforcement and reading about experiences from other San Mateo residents can help prevent burglaries.



AVA GAWEL



A pair of earrings from Emily Du's shop. COURTESY OF EMILY DU

Students run online shops

Audrey Smietana
FEATURES WRITER

For young entrepreneurs, artists and creatives the internet is a goldmine. Having opened the floodgates for small businesses to flourish, the internet allows anybody to set up an online shop in a matter of a couple of hours.

With most locked away in their homes, the online marketplace has gone from being a useful tool to a crucial element in reaching consumers.

"We're in a pandemic, and ... it's hard for [people] to share their ideas with the world and produce things with their own creativity," said junior Frances Chua, who sells stickers using e-commerce site Redbubble. "But we have the internet, which is ... such a great platform that connects us to our friends, to our neighbors, to literally people from across the entire world."

The circumstances of the coronavirus pandemic have also opened up some students' schedules and likewise, opportunities for hobbies. So while the boredom caused by days spent at home is a feeling all too familiar to Aragon students, some have utilized this free time, channeling their creativity and restlessness into something productive.

Chua began her sticker shop a few months after strict health regulations were put in place.

"Quarantine definitely played a role in me starting my shop due to my sheer amount of boredom," Chua said. "I had enough time to create things on the computer and messing around with Photoshop was pretty fun."

Junior Emily Du, who runs a clay pin shop on Etsy, had a similar experience.

"I started my Etsy shop in May or June of 2020 because I was really bored, and I realized I should start a project," Du said. "The only reason I had the time to set it up and the energy to do all the research was because I had so much free time."

Du was first inspired and taught by the online art community to make her pins.

"There were a lot of videos on YouTube of people making these really cute clay pins, so I saw those and thought, 'Oh, I want to make my own,'" Du said. "I take a hunk of clay, and I shape it. Then I bake it and cure it with resin."

Internet trends and memes

have also played an invaluable role in what shop owners like Chua and Du decide to sell. Du's shop sells pins depicting everything from fruits to frogs and she has used trends to her advantage.

"I think I really capitalized off ... this whole phase in the online art community when everybody was obsessed with the [video game] Animal Crossing," Du said. "I made pins that would fit that aesthetic."

Chua has similarly used internet trends in her shop. One of her most popular stickers depicts controversial social media star Tana Mongeau. Another popular sticker features a coronavirus pun.

"The COVID-19 sticker says 'Lil Rona' as a joke," Chua said. "It's supposed to be what [the] coronavirus would look like as a rapper ... with a little coronavirus doodle in the middle."

Online shops, while not always the most profitable, do have the potential to generate impressive earnings.

"To set up the shop, I spent around \$100 to \$150, and I've made in total anywhere from \$500 to \$600," Du said. "I think I've sold around 50 to 60 pins and also around 10 to 20 stickers."

Redbubble takes 20% commission on every sticker Chua sells. Even so, she decided to keep her prices significantly lower than those of her competitors.

"I try my best to keep my prices very low so that everyone can have a chance to buy my stickers," Chua said. "Instead of pricing them at \$5 and making \$3 in commission, my stickers cost around \$1 to \$1.50, so I end up making around 20 cents per sticker."

Regardless, both Chua and Du value the personal fulfillment they receive from running their shops above all else.

"Every time I see someone have one of my stickers on their water bottle, it's just the best feeling," Chua said. "You get so much joy from seeing someone else enjoy your artwork."

Du shares this sentiment.

"[This experience] taught me that you can do anything that you set your mind to, as cheesy as it sounds," Du said. "Running the shop has just given me so much serotonin. ... Every time I get one of those little comments requesting the facial features of their frog, they're super sweet."

A look into India's Farm Bills

Wreetom Dutta
NEWS WRITER

Since the tail end of November 2020, a recent encampment of over 300,000 lower to middle-class farmers sprawled across the Delhi-Meerut Expressway in Ghazipur, India. The farmers are protesting three new laws known as the 2020 Indian agriculture acts passed in September by the current ruling party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, in an attempt to modernize the agriculture industry and deregulate farming markets and transactions to bolster economic growth.

Frustrated with the lack of progress, protests in India's capital, New Delhi, have become more violent with protesters brandishing long swords, pitchforks and using tractors to dismantle police barricades. Sometimes met with baton beatings, the violence shows no sign of stopping, with neither side backing down. The BJP continues condemning the protests day after day, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi especially denouncing the protests and calling the storming of a historic fort in Delhi "an insult to the [Indian flag]."

In actuality, these laws ended up exacerbating the struggles of poor farmers by abandoning the established market system in favor of a deregulated market space where corporations can easily trap farmers into unfair and restrictive contracts and business deals.

India's agriculture system is split into three main parts: markets, auctions and

Within the current system, farmers have been struggling financially for years, with about 52% of all farmers in debt. This debt crisis has led to a sharp uptick in suicide among farmers, with over 20,000 deaths in the last two years alone. Due to the increasingly terrible conditions in the agriculture industry, farmers have been demanding reforms for years.

In response, the BJP passed the 2020 Indian agriculture acts, instead of helping struggling farmers who need reforms the most, deregulated the agriculture market, allowing large cor-

only that, but farmers can be easily attracted to trading outside the market as more and more traders leave the mandis for trade spaces with less oversight, leading farmers to fall victim to the second act.

The second law creates a framework for deals and contracts between farmers and traders and leaves business agreements strictly between farmers and traders, with little oversight. This gives farmers fewer options to back out or fight bad deals and leaves them in the hands of large corporate players. If traders leave the agriculture market

"This new law leaves farmers without government assistance to fall back on"

porations and rich traders to take control of the supply chain. The three laws deregulate different aspects of the market, leaving farmers with less leverage in bad deals and removing the already meager economic safety net the MSP provided.

The first bill creates free, unregulated trade spaces outside of and immune to the laws of the market system. In these spaces, farmers and traders do business directly instead of via the mandis. Trade outside the system was not uncommon before these acts, but they were still regulated by the MSP acting like a benchmark. However, outside the system, this new law leaves farmers without government assistance to fall back

system, the mandis will collapse as they see less and less market activity. If the mandis collapse, the only choice farmers have would be to become dependent on big corporations, leaving them trapped in unfair contracts, or booted from the industry altogether and left without income.

The third act, while not directly affecting the market system or business deals, still does nothing to help struggling farmers while giving corporations even more power over the industry. The third law removes the storage limits previously set by the government, so now traders can store as much as the goods they buy as they want, where previously there was a limit to how much they can store before they must sell their goods off. Now, anyone with enough money can stock up on crops, and, without any oversight, can begin to dictate the prices of the goods when they reach the market.

All together, these three laws do not help struggling farmers and only serve to fragment the existing market system, leaving more room for corporate players to take control over the farmers and the agriculture industry.

"This debt crisis has led to a sharp uptick in suicide among farmers, with over 20,000 deaths in the last two years alone."

consumer purchasing. The process begins with the farmers, who grow cash crops and bring them to wholesale markets, or "mandis." Next, from these mandis, the farmers' crops are sold off in relatively transparent auctions with clear prices to traders, who can then decide whether to transfer the crops to secondary markets like grocery stores or store the crops away for future sale. In addition to the markets, the government also sets a minimum support price at which the government will purchase crops if farmers wish to sell to them. Even though a small percentage of crops in the market are bought by the government, the MSP still serves as a benchmark price through the industry and gives farmers some leverage against unfair trade deals.

on, meaning large corporations can restrict and control farmers with unfair contracts and deals. Not





Aragon staff direct Don Distribution Days to supply students with materials such as textbooks, Wi-Fi hotspots, Chromebooks and ID cards for their spring semester classes. Students remained in their cars to minimize the amount of contact as cases spiked in January. ALESSANDRO RIEDEL

Teachers and staff: essential workers of Aragon

Sophia Zhou
FEATURES WRITER

As the coronavirus continues plaguing the world, essential workers have emerged as heroes. While the umbrella of essential workers spans far, all of their jobs are critical to infrastructural operations. Aragon staff and faculty, as educators, are part of this group, working through unpredictable circumstances to ensure that students are supported. Although their responsibilities differ, changes brought about by the coronavirus have presented various challenges to tackle.

English teacher Victoria Daniel's regular tasks include planning lessons, grading and interacting with students and meeting with her professional learning community, teachers who instruct the same course as her. Teaching brings her immense joy, from English itself to the connections she has established.

"I adore students," Daniel said. "I love literature, books, but more than that I love teenagers. I enjoy my colleagues and teaching at Aragon."

Aragon instructional assistant Veronica Giessner supports students academically, by attending classes and working with students. She also helps during Don Distribution Days, where students pick up supplies, to ensure that materials are prepared and distributed efficiently. Giessner feels connecting with students and aiding them in reaching their academic goals is the most rewarding part of her job.

"My job consists of going to class just like the kids, taking notes, Zooming and helping

certain students one on one," Giessner said.

Academic adviser Heather Stretch helps set academic schedules, create post-

was always making decisions [and] thinking; it kept me mentally and physically engaged."

Giessner's daily work life has stayed the same, minus

Connecting with students virtually has presented itself as a tumultuous obstacle. Communication is different with virtual interactions because

"Phone calls are fine, but face-to-face interactions are best," Stretch said. "Though it's not exactly the same, Zoom allows us to do that, and I'm grateful."

Assessing student performance, an essential task for teachers, is a struggle. Daniel assigns assessments to track progress, whereas with in-person learning, she could do so from observation. Similarly, Giessner finds it harder to ask questions, an obstacle in determining whether a student understands curriculum.

"It leaves me wondering sometimes ... if they really understand what they need to be doing, or if they have more questions," Giessner said.

Daniel strives to create an engaging classroom culture through collaboration, a task easier said than done over Zoom. Cultivating a community amongst students is nearly impossible, especially when they aren't familiar with peers.

Portions of the school day outside of the classroom have been replaced by Zoom alternatives, such as the meeting of clubs or other extracurricular activities.

"There's been an increase in work and decrease in joy ... [which comes from] personal interactions and seeing students in the hallway and going to the rallies and watching their clubs," Daniel said.

Aragon staff emphasizes the importance of kindness during these times, as COVID-19 has forced everyone to adjust to a new way of living. As they continue to navigate virtual instruction, the district hopes that students and staff will be able to return to school, while prioritizing health and safety.



KAITLYN HA

secondary school, discuss motivation and success strategies and support academic progress. She often works with guidance counselor Lea Sanguinetti.

Aragon staff and faculty have faced significant changes in the structure of their professions, including fewer in-person interactions, reduced physical activity and difficulty staying engaged.

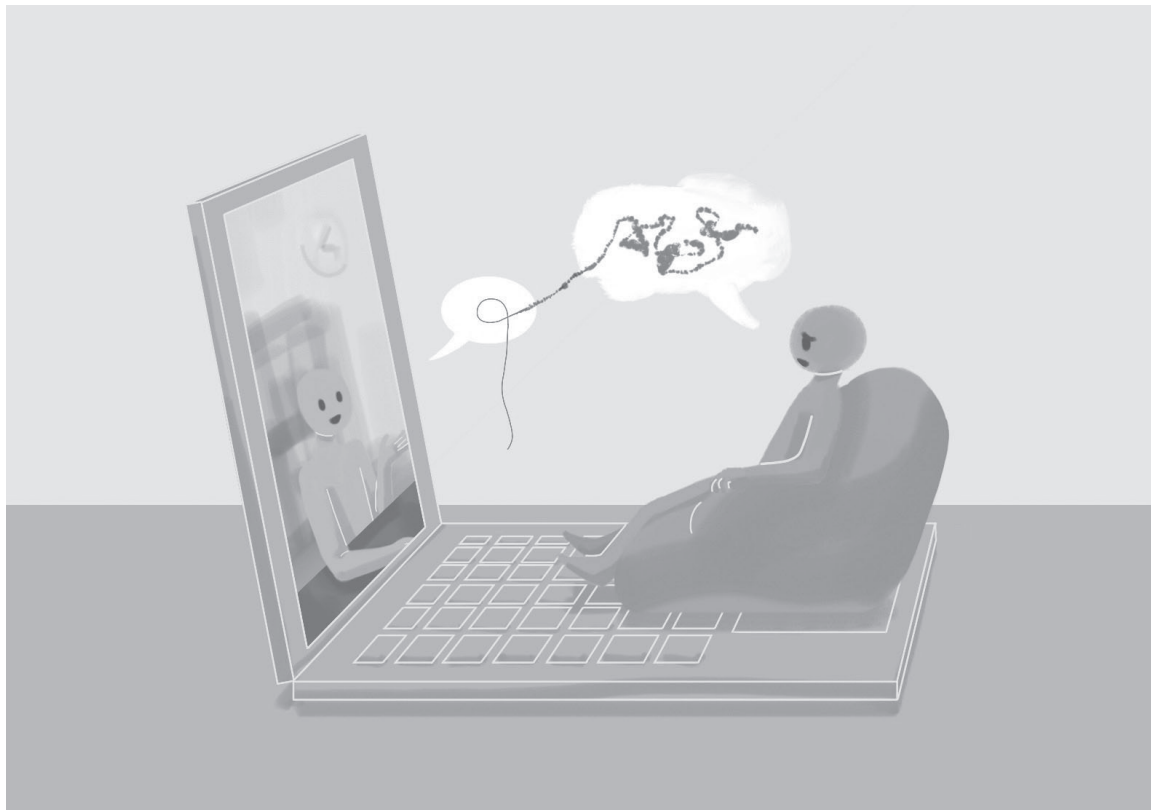
"Pre-COVID times, my job was very active," Daniel said. "I

the school environment. She works the same hours but now uses Zoom to communicate. On the other hand, Stretch works longer hours than her traditional 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. schedule, starting earlier or ending later to reach out to students. Before the stay-at-home order in December, she worked on campus two days a week, but she now works at home daily.

they lack the authenticity that face-to-face conversations offer.

"Everything is very muted," Daniel said. "You miss a lot of the subtleties [of a classroom]. There's not as much laughter."

Similarly, the decrease in interaction with her colleagues and students has taken on a toll on Stretch. Previously, students could stop by her desk, or she would catch them between classes. She cites the difficulty of communication, which is the basis of her job.



JESSICA FU

Therapy in the digital age

Catherine Wang
FEATURES WRITER

Therapy is commonly viewed as a patient lying on a gray, tufted couch while through their problems next to a professional. In contrast, an online alternative is becoming increasingly common, especially given the demand for mental health services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Online or not, therapy's general purpose is to help clients identify and address stressors in their lives and progress toward positive change. However, as licensed marriage and family therapist Alison Swisher shares, the opposing environments of online and in-person therapy have a significant impact on sessions.

"I see [more of a] shift when it's family therapy ... [or] couples therapy than I do for the one-on-one sessions," Swisher said. "[This] ... is because the body language between the [clients] is something that's definitely lost when not in the room. The communication ... between their expressions and even the way that they're sitting on the couch, is really different than how it shows up [in person]."

Senior Hunter Black, who has done online therapy since last November, notes another challenge.

"When I'm [calling from home], my family members might pop [up somewhere]," Black said. "That's a big reason as to why I may not open up about everything."

Aragon sophomore Mia* revealed that the lack of privacy at home is a major reason they wouldn't do online therapy during these times.

"I'm not comfortable talking ... with my parents around," Mia said. "They didn't react very well [to my therapy needs]. My mom ... thought I was 'just stressed.'"

Despite these obstacles, online therapists performing virtual sessions can take advan-

tage of online resources to help educate their clients. Lauren Kettmann, a doctor of psychology, gives an example.

"To inform my client about [a topic], I could share [information on] my screen," Kettmann said. "[In person], I might bring information to the next session instead because I have to print something out."

Black also noted the flexibility that comes with online therapy, as well as its laid-back atmosphere.

"[My therapist uses a platform that] ... models a FaceTime call," Black said. "Then we discuss [what's going on] through a casual discussion."

Some independent platforms efficiently connect clients with therapists. Founded in 2015, Lyra offers therapy services to businesses like Starbucks and Facebook through employee benefits. Lyra's full-time staff navigates a client's needs and connects them with a compatible therapist, breaking down the barriers to accessing care. Swisher has been working with Lyra for 3 1/2 years.

"It's a fantastic resource for employees of the companies who have these benefits, [just like with] medical benefits or dental benefits," Swisher said. "The statement that these companies are making is that overall health incorporates mental health care into the picture."

The benefits encourage participation in online therapy by giving people the opportunity to partake in mental health care.

"I have a lot of people reaching out for the first time and saying 'I've never done this ... but it's offered to me through my company,'" Kettmann said. "[Such efforts] ... to highlight the importance of mental health ... have given people permission to prioritize it."

Online therapy has become even more necessary during these unpredictable, isolating times.

"[I've seen] for myself ... the increase in the outreach of peo-

ple trying to get connected to care," Swisher said. "It was tremendous at the end of last year, even continuing. It's a communal mourning around the loss of normalcy."

The pandemic has halted the development of adolescents, who naturally form their identity by interacting with peers, contributing to the increasing need for therapy to help them cope.

"It was hard being [isolated] for a long time and not really having anyone to really come in contact with," Black said. "[The need for social interaction] ... [was] amplified by the pandemic."

With easier accessibility to care and isolation, the stigma surrounding therapy has lessened.

"My hope is that the ... acceptance of participation in therapy will remain as high as it has been during this pandemic," Swisher said.

While progress has been made, Black has personally experienced the stigma around therapy.

"[Although my] ... family was relatively open about therapy, they [had stigma] against me using medicine that the psychologist would prescribe," Black said.

Online therapy's sustainability post-pandemic varies depending on a client's needs.

"For someone who has severe social anxiety who couldn't get out of their house, half of the work would be getting to a therapy appointment in person," Swisher said. "[This is when] ... meeting in person would be necessary as a part of the treatment plan."

Although it is unlikely that online therapy will ever surpass traditional therapy in quality, its convenience and flexibility drive the industry to make major strides towards connecting more people to care.

*Student's name has been changed to protect their privacy.

Skin care: is it effective or a scam?

Sarah Yu
FEATURES WRITER

Instead of reaching for tea tree oil, sophomore Sarah Kaplan now grabs products from Bubble, a skin care company specifically for teens. Kaplan has always been interested in skin care. She began paying closer attention to the products that work best for her combination skin type because of recent breakouts.

"I had to switch it up ... because you want your skin to feel and look good," Kaplan said. "Appearance is everything nowadays."

Many teens have also taken interest in skin care because of TikTok, a social media app home to influencers like Hiram Yarbrow, known as Skin Care by Hiram, who help people discover products and ingredients that may work for their skin type and concerns.

"I was watching Hiram videos, and he showed this website that shows different products [that] target ... one of the problems of my skin," said sophomore Anna Sofia Abelgas. "It showed the list of products that could cause acne, or maybe just for my particular skin [type] weren't great."

However, social media can also be used as a marketing tool for companies that do not have their consumers' best interests at heart. Many companies see teens



as easily influenced consumers and prey on their insecurities

to make a profit. The global skin care industry was worth \$135 billion in 2018 according to CNN Business and continues to grow as teens spend more on skin care. In fact, in a survey conducted by Vogue Business in 2018, 38% of teen girls reported spending more on skin care than the year before.

"As teenagers and especially women, the people that you see in magazines really impact what you think of your skin," Kaplan said. "Some companies just make products for the sake of it. ... There are so many different products that you're not supposed to have in skincare ... that people ... have."

In some cases, companies offer to pay influencers to promote these products, and many agree to it for compensation, even if they do not actually use them regularly. Many beauty and skin care bloggers have been accused of endorsing harmful products and have been called "sell outs" for doing so. This is particularly

alarming considering how many people look to social media to discover new products. In fact, according to Vogue Business, 76% of teen girls stated that they find new skin care brands from online influencers.

"There are a lot of scams, and it's honestly kind of sad," said sophomore Ava Yanez. "Teens just want to look good, but it's so hard because there are so many bad things [on social media]."

Still, social media's positives may outweigh the negatives so long as consumers are cautious of who they follow.

"I ... think that [social media is] doing a lot of positive things because it's giving teens an outlet to take control of their skin, rather than not know what to do and just be frustrated with it," said junior Gabriella Oaks. "It's a problem when influencers promote products just because they can make money off of it, but I honestly really like Skin Care by Hiram because ... he promotes products that he believes are helpful. ... I think it depends on which influencer you listen to."

Affordability is also key for students as luxury products can cost up to hundreds of dollars which simply is not realistic for teens. Brands such as CeraVe and The Ordinary have grown in popularity with the help of recommendations from influencers and many of their products cost only \$5 to \$20.

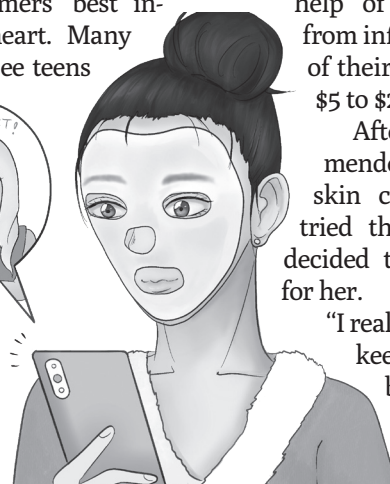
After Oaks was recommended products by her skin care specialist, she tried them but ultimately decided that they were not for her.

"I realized that I [couldn't] keep affording this brand, so I started looking at the ingredients that were in those products and looking for similarities ... in other products that were cheaper," Oaks said.

She now uses some products from The Ordinary, which offer most serums for under \$10, a more accessible price for some. Senior Jessica Chen is also a fan of these affordable products.

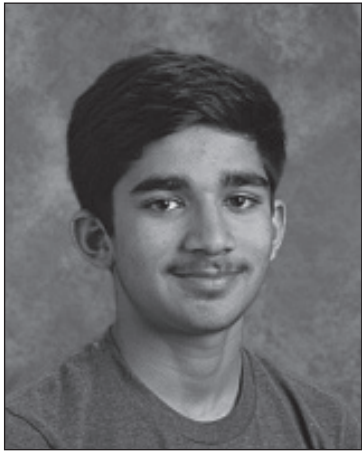
"I used to have a job, but ... I don't have a job anymore," Chen said. "So it's definitely good to not spend too much on skin care. [It's] is not my first priority right now. After I got into skin care, I thought that the more expensive things are better, but ... I found out that [price] really doesn't matter. ... You don't need some sort of luxury skin care product to take care of your skin."

All in all, social media has helped teens discover the world of skin care and find affordable products, but they should still be wary of advertising and who they follow.



CHRISTINA WU

How the First Amendment applies to Big Tech



Vedant Guar
FEATURES WRITER

Two days after the violent insurrection in the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, Twitter made the sensible decision to permanently suspend former President Donald Trump, who was, at the time, still in office. The company stated that the tweets went against their “glorification of violence” policy.

Twitter’s actions can hardly be labeled as violations of the First Amendment’s guarantee of free speech. Although Twitter is a public forum, allowing users to communicate within its terms of agreement, it ultimately is a private enterprise. The company is not subjected to the rules that the federal government must follow. Companies such as Facebook, Google and Twitter are oftentimes labeled as public only because their shares — a percentage of ownership of a company’s capital — are pub-

licly accessible on the stock market, not because they are a government organization.

Even though millions of people use the platforms each day, they technically aren’t public spaces, meaning that the First Amendment guarantee of free speech doesn’t necessarily apply to the sites. Unless the company is owned by the government, it is protected as a private entity, and enforcing its terms of service is within Twitter’s reach. That being said, the expansion of corporate power may seem far too great considering the impact that world leaders can have through social media outlets. Twitter’s own CEO Jack Dorsey previously claimed that the suspension of accounts detracted from the ethicality of the sites.

To tackle the problem of



CHRISTINA WU

defining the parameters for ethical censorship, an objective consortium of both private entities and public spheres could convene in order to inspect various discrepancies

and provide a more objective solution as a sort of public-private altruism.

Many conservatives argue that the suspension of the various accounts linked to Trump outline a form of suppression that technology companies can exploit. While a company’s power to ban whoever they want, whenever they want, is frightening, it does bring up legal consideration when approaching the controversy.

At this point, there aren’t really any loopholes that Twitter or other large companies have been exploiting. Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, established in 1996, protects these large companies from legal ramifications. The section states that a company is not responsible for the language of its users. Many Republican lawmakers are openly

claiming that it gives too much protection and leeway to Big Tech companies. However, if the section gets repealed, it will inevitably cause nothing more than the restriction of speech on such platforms. Because of the possibility of facing legal action concerning a user’s remarks, Twitter, Facebook and other social media compa-

nies would have to crack down harder on what is allowed, making their terms of service more robust than the limits people are already claiming are a restriction of free speech.

Twitter’s banning of 70,000 right-wing extremists was also seen as an act of suppression, but the rea-

force and can remove those who may violate these regulations. Trump was banned as a preventative measure against the incitement of violence, not because he holds conservative viewpoints. The same goes for the extremist accounts that were suspended for spreading misinforma-

“Guidelines exist for a reason — to provide a secure space for users to interact with each other”

son for the bans seems to be fairly clear. False information, as we saw on Jan. 6, can fester to the point of causing violence. Banning QAnon supporters did exactly this; their removal suppressed not the truth, but harmful conspiracy theories. Because of confirmation bias — the idea that people will only look for data that they agree with — stopping misinformation is extremely pertinent.

Others may argue that Trump’s ban from various social media sites was a massive suppression of speech, although it seemed much less like a coordinated political attack and much more like a realization of the potential violence that accounts like Trump’s could trigger.

Regardless, companies like Twitter have their own set of guidelines which they have the discretion to en-

tion, a completely justifiable initiative on Twitter and other major networking sites’ end. Even though Trump and other leaders use Twitter as a platform to reach their base, there is no reason that they have to be held at a higher standard than the conventional user. If they do cross the line, which is what occurred when Trump incited violence at the Capitol riot, they should face the appropriate consequences.

The power that Big Tech companies hold may truthfully be too extensive, but as we stand now the status quo is the best option. Guidelines exist for a reason — to provide a secure space for users to interact with each other. Hate speech and the spread of unreliable or untruthful statements are only a breeding ground for misinformation and unwarranted chaos.

Kamala Harris shakes up the role of vice president



Caitlin Kaliski
FEATURES WRITER

Between the day that the electoral college declared Kamala Harris vice president-elect to inauguration day, my social media was filled with coverage of the milestone. One video transitioned portraits of vice presidents from without to with color ink. Despite the

Nation and Herbert Hoover’s vice president.

The lack of diversity amongst these men reduces them to an indistinguishable figment of the past. Because Harris is a woman of color, she is expanding the vice president’s sphere of influence.

According to a National Geographic article, the role and responsibilities of vice presidents have been relatively vague compared to the other high elected positions. The Constitution has always stated that a vice president will take over if the president dies or is impeached. The 25th Amendment dictates that the vice president will assume the office of president if the president becomes disabled. Otherwise, the vice president presides over Senate,

of Harris as his running mate “offers a counter to his age, gender and race.” Biden, one of the several older white men who ran for president in 2020, is now the oldest president to assume office in American history. Harris directly juxtaposes this image as a fresher political figure.

Before assuming the vice presidency, Harris was a senator and former district attorney of California. Besides her federal platform to communicate with the public, Harris takes to social media platforms. Harris already had the @kamalaharris Instagram account, but now she also carries the @vp account, used to inform the public of actions in office.

Harris vocalizes her stance on issues such as the right to abortion and Biden’s health care plan. Currently, she encourages people to get the COVID-19 vaccine when available to them and posts about swearing in new officials like Pete Buttigieg as secretary of transportation.

In the Bay Area, inclusivity has been more normalized than in other U.S. areas. From 1993 to January 2021, California had two female senators, which is not the case for other states. Harris

was the third woman to run for vice president of a major party and is now only the second non-white vice president, widening the opportunities for women and people of color in the future. Harris’s own words were: “while I may be the first woman in this office, I will not be the last.”

Harris being the first vice president to wear a dress to her inauguration doesn’t mean America is

guaranteed more diverse elected officials across the country or that having diverse leaders will solve America’s problems. An elected official’s policy and behavior judges their success. However, for a start to evolving what one of the highest elected officials of America looks like and their role as a leader, Madam Vice President Kamala Harris is an excellent continuation for America’s progress.

“Because Kamala is a woman of color, she expanding the vice president’s sphere of influence”

progression of time, one thing remained constant: prior to Harris’ election, there was an obvious trend that the office holder was a white man, with the exception of Charles Curtis, a member of the Naw

offering a tiebreaking vote. Over time, the choice of a president’s running mate has become important for their campaign’s media strategy.

A BBC article states that President Joe Biden’s choice



YUE YU



Shoppers look at merchandise in thrift and vintage stores in San Francisco.

PURVI SINGHANIA

Mainstreaming of thrifting

Carole Darve
FEATURES WRITER

Two centuries ago, each piece of clothing was indispensable. People crafted clothing to be long-lasting and durable. But following the mass production of clothing in the 20th century, new ways to efficiently produce clothing in large quantities led to more accessible, affordable and short-lived clothing.

"The more affordable it became to buy new clothes, the more people thought of clothes as disposable," wrote Olivia Waxman in *Time*.

Manufacturing new clothes uses up resources and energy while polluting the environment. According to the World Resource Institute, making a new pair of jeans adds as many greenhouse gases to the atmosphere as driving a car over 80 miles. In 2018, 17 million tons of textile waste went into the landfills, reported the Environmental Protection Agency. This represented 5.8% of the waste added to landfills that year.

However in recent years, thrifting has become more mainstream and people have taken to shopping at stores which offer second-hand clothing. Shoppers who've taken advantage of this environmentally friendly alternative have dubbed the activity "thrifting."

"The thing I like about thrifting is the feeling that I am not creating waste by buying new clothes," said junior Sofia Callol, an avid thrifter.

Its recent rise in popularity is greatly due to social media. Senior Ella Bartlett describes what motivated her to start purchasing more secondhand clothing.

"When I was younger, I didn't thrift as much," Bartlett

said. "Social media had a huge impact on getting people out to go thrift. You see videos on TikTok [of people showing] 'what [they] got today thrifting.' ... Just seeing people on social media [thrifting] more ... inspired me to do it."

Junior Arissa Low first heard about thrifting from internet personality Emma Chamberlain on YouTube. In several of her videos, Chamberlain displays the uniqueness and diversity thrifting brought to her wardrobe.

"Because her [clothing] style was so unique back when her videos first started coming out, I think that a lot of people started wanting to thrift as well," Low said.

Since she first learned about thrifting, Bartlett estimates that half of her wardrobe is secondhand.

"Now that I've started thrifting, [the] outfits that I put together are a lot more unique and a lot more true to my personal style because I can pick out of all of these more-unique clothes that may not be in typical stores," Bartlett said.

"I make it an effort to donate my clothes, go through my wardrobe once every couple months and give back to these thrift stores so that [the] cycle can continue," Bartlett said.

However, increased demand raises the question of affordability. More people have begun buying items from thrift stores and reselling them on online shopping platforms, such as eBay or Depop, at marked up prices.

"[Reselling clothes from thrift stores] definitely needs to change," Bartlett said. "I go on Depop a lot, and I see all of these clothes that ... I know [were bought] from the kid's section at the thrift store. [For example, I'll see a] 'baby tee [selling for] \$30.' ... I know that was \$3 at a thrift store."

The practice of reselling thrifted items at higher prices harms socioeconomically disadvantaged people, who depend on thrift stores for affordable clothing.

"[Thrift stores] are starting to raise their prices in order to compete with

"The thing I like about thrifting is the feeling that I am not creating waste by buying new clothes"

Low found her favorite piece of clothing while thrifting.

"I have this one sweater. I got it for \$4, and it's one of my favorite sweaters now," Low said. "I usually wear a lot of sweaters and sweatshirts, and this one is really unique in the sense that it is a windbreaker on the top half and knitted on the bottom half. It looked really cool, and I really liked the design."

Due to the popularization of thrifting via social media, the demand for secondhand clothing has risen.

the online market," Callol said. "This is where I have a problem: lower income households ... might not be able to find the deal that thrift stores once provided for them."

Thrifting for clothing is a step towards repurposing items, reducing waste and providing a more sustainable way of living for the future. It encourages people to step out of their comfort zone, try unique styles of clothing and be more mindful of their waste.

Opinion: altering gender norms in art and fashion



Aakanksha Sinha
FEATURES WRITER

British singer-songwriter and actor Harry Styles made history as the first man to appear solo on the cover of *Vogue* magazine in the December 2020 issue — sporting a stylish Gucci-designed, lace-trimmed periwinkle gown paired with a black tuxedo jacket.

"There is no society that can survive without strong men," said conservative commentator Candace Owens in a tweet responding to his revolutionary *Vogue* cover. "The East knows this. In the west, the steady feminization of our men at the same time that Marxism is being taught to our children is not a coincidence. It is an outright attack. Bring back manly men."

Owens believes in rigid walls that segregate masculinity and femininity. She does not accept the blurring of the two worlds, placing her behind the evolving culture of acceptance in society.

Men cross-dressing in the music industry began trending in the 1970s with prominent artists like Iggy Pop, David Bowie and Prince. In fact, all over the world, men in history, including medieval kings, have worn forms of dresses, yet, they weren't impeded in their "manly" participation in wars and ruling of entire kingdoms. So why should men in any industry wearing more feminine clothing initiate the need to "bring back manly men"?

Today, men in the music industry are breaking barriers and testing what masculinity means by wearing dresses, applying makeup and expressing themselves through their appearance, but these ideologies are far from universally accepted.

Owens' tweet raises her own hypocrisy too; despite identifying as a woman, Owens often wears suits, which were once considered clothes only for men, blurring the gender lines she fights so hard to maintain.

Unfortunately, there are more people who consider Styles' epicene fashion choices an attack on masculinity. Under *Vogue*'s original tweet with the cover, there are several others who responded about Styles "humiliating himself" with his "disgusting" fashion sense. All this is over a piece of fabric.

In decades past, the outward display of flamboyance

from today's K-pop stars would be considered so offensive that audiences would boo at any performance that fused gender norms. Fast forward almost three decades and South Korea is now an epicenter of beauty trends. It isn't unusual today to see male K-pop stars with rosy lips and smoky eyes.

Male K-pop performers' makeup embodies their art. Boy bands like BTS, EXO and GOT7 incorporate makeup as a part of their visuals. Like Styles, K-pop stars shouldn't be criticized for being themselves or have to justify their fashion choices.

If today's society can accept women voting or wearing suits then we should be able to accept men wearing dresses too.

Gender refers to socially constructed views of men and women that have long stereotyped people in detrimental ways. Because it's a social construct, it's bound to vary as society evolves. Regulations that tell people how to act and look promote closed minds and stereotypes. The more we understand this the closer we get to accepting gender as a flexible idea rather than a rigid rule.

The music industry is centered around how performers present themselves, whether it be through their music or their aesthetics. Music itself has no gender, and in the end, how the music makes the audience feel is what should really count.

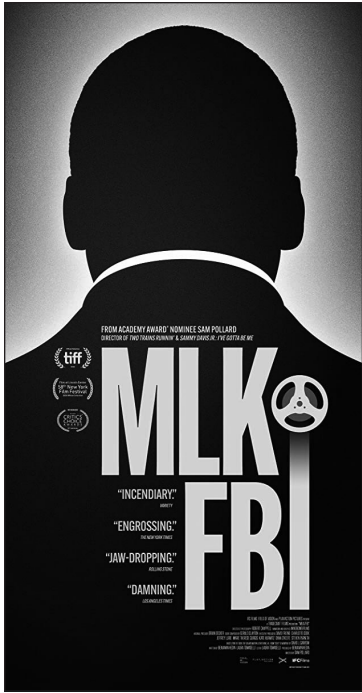


VOGUE

We should not only accept the changes that are happening everywhere in the world, but also redefine gender entirely — including masculinity, femininity and everything in between.

Freedom in art is crucial. Artists inspire change and growth through their work and actions. When suppressed from rightfully acting against today's rigid gender norms, the reach of their messages is limited, preventing society from progressing to its full potential. Normalizing blurred gender lines will create room for fair treatment of all genders, and allow people to feel confident about themselves. Blurred lines and open minds will help remove orthodox thoughts and beliefs related to gender, allowing more opportunities for everyone and helping us progress not only as a country, but as human beings.

'MLK/FBI': a unique perspective on an iconic figure



IMDB

Lipika Goel
FEATURES WRITER

The recently released documentary "MLK/FBI" opens on a crowd amassed in front of the Lincoln Memorial, waiting excitedly as "the moral leader of our nation" is announced, and Martin Luther King Jr. emerges on the steps. King's legacy is introduced over footage of historic moments from his life, deceiving the viewer into thinking that they are settling in for a historical documentary highlighting the feats of King during the civil rights movement, released in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

OUR OUTLOOK



Rather than telling his life story through the typical lens of a historic icon who was honest and forthcoming, the documentary intends to portray him through the eyes of the FBI, who thought of him as dangerous and secretive. They feared how he had enough power, charisma and influence to bring real change to American society.

Based on the 1981 book "The FBI and Martin Luther King Jr." by David Garrow, the documentary premiered at the 2020 Toronto International Film Festival and was released in theaters and on demand on Jan. 15. The movie was directed by Sam Pollard, who has won four Emmy awards for his past works, many of which also focus on the civil rights movement. Producer Benjamin Hedin has worked with Pollard in the past on "Two Trains Runnin'," which is based on the "Freedom Summer" of 1964 in Mississippi.

The film has been well-received by critics, earning a 99% score on Rotten Tomatoes. Rather than being a reenactment of events, it uses footage from interviews, speeches and King's personal

life to achieve authenticity.

King's cheery image is juxtaposed against the sinister one of the FBI, presented as a mysterious organization. This connotation is upheld through the use of iconic symbols of espionage in pop culture — partially-censored documents, wiretapping and even clips from other movies. Scenes from films "The FBI Story," "Walk a Crooked Mile"

clearly developed its complex narrative of the FBI through contrasting the FBI's findings and King's professional achievements. When the FBI's investigation of King's marriage troubles is narrated, footage of King and his family peacefully enjoying a meal together emphasizes the tension between the FBI's efforts to mar King's perfect public image.

of text on the screen inform the viewer about additional FBI tapes on King that will be released in 2027. Each of the experts gives their opinion on these tapes — what should be done with them, whether they should be released and what their impact will be. The diversity of answers fits the theme of the movie, that there is not one right way to feel about the events described in "MLK/FBI," but like any other person, King was a complex person, not inherently good or evil.

What the film makes up for with an intriguing plot it lacks in emotional appeal. The documentary primarily focuses on showing a sequence of facts with little focus on showing the emotional impact of the conflict. There are many parts of the movie where suspense would make the events described seem more dramatic, such as when the FBI's findings on King are revealed.

Because of the way this movie was able to present a unique angle in an impactful way, I would rate this movie 4.5 out of 5 stars. It loses half a star due to the excessive detail about some events and lack of emotion shown in others but is overall a worthwhile watch that will give the viewer a deeper, more nuanced understanding of Martin Luther King Jr. as a human being.

"[The FBI] feared how [King] had enough power, charisma and influence to bring real change"

and "Big Jim McLain" make an appearance, emphasizing the portrayal of the FBI in modern day media.

The movie presents the story in a chronological order and switches between King's professional life to the FBI's response. However, while the movie discusses King's feats at length, this time could have been used to further demonstrate the conflict between FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover and King. For instance, when the movie illustrates the Vietnam War tension, rather than detailing how King's view on the war develops, the time would be better spent showing why it was received poorly from the president and FBI.

Despite this, the movie

Although it has a different focus than most historical documentaries, "MLK/FBI" still retains an informative tone by using various narrations from experts and people related to the conflict, such as a retired FBI special agent and King's speechwriter and adviser. The filmmakers do a good job selecting a variety of people related to the story, adding to the overall message of showing all sides of the conflict between King and the FBI.

The main conflict of the movie is reached when King is assassinated, as he is no longer a direct threat to the federal government. Afterwards, the impact of the interviews is more noticeable. A few lines

Opinion: Marvel movies spread military propaganda



Peyton De Winter
FEATURES WRITER

The U.S. Armed Forces are well known across the globe for being the one of the most well-funded portions of the government, spending about \$718 billion in 2019, according to the Department of Defense. The DOD has been endorsing

its equipment only depict the military in a positive light. While recruiting for the military through movies may not be objectively bad in all forms, doing so through a skewed perspective is definitely condemnable. It creates a glorified version of what being in the military is like, which makes people want to enlist and sets up false expectations.

By 2016, the number of Pentagon-sponsored movies had grown to around 410, according to Spy Culture. Some popular ones include the 1986 film "Top Gun," as well as "Captain Marvel" from 2019 and "Wonder Woman 1984," in 2020.

"Captain Marvel" was one of the most recent manifestations of military involvement in the Marvel Cinematic Uni-



AMAZON



IMDB

verse; this association began in 2003, when the Pentagon gave the producers access to military bases, as well as equipment for the filming of "Hulk," in return for changes to the script. All of these changes were made to portray the military in a better light than it would have been previously, with the removal of references to military experi-

ments and the transformation of the laboratory from a military operation to a civilian building, to name a couple. These changes, though seemingly small, vastly change the way we may have considered

the military after viewing the movie. The Pentagon's support of massively popular films allows them to control the public's view of the armed forces.

port and boost recruitment. The Pentagon's decision to promote movies such as "Captain Marvel" is propaganda. The DOD is essentially us-

"It's almost like the Pentagon is using taxpayer money to pay for propaganda"

Despite their cooperation on a number of films, there was still a falling out between Marvel and the Pentagon in 2012, in the middle of the filming for "The Avengers." The DOD couldn't come to terms with the idea of an international organization, as represented by the fictional S.H.I.E.L.D. and decided to back out of production.

Since then, there has been minimal involvement from the Pentagon in Marvel movies, until the arrival of "Captain Marvel." This movie was the first time that a Marvel movie had full support from the U.S. Air Force since the "Iron Man" films. The Air Force advertised the movie through social media posts before Marvel had even begun production of the film. "Captain Marvel" was being viewed as an ingenious recruitment tool by the DOD, and the Air Force was eager to capitalize on Carol Danvers, a female superhero, to gain sup-

ing taxpayer money that was delegated to the military to abridge free speech of the producers of the movie and put forth their own message in its place. While it is being put forward for recruitment, which is a valid use of taxpayer money, the way its being achieved is immoral. It's almost like the Pentagon is using taxpayer money to pay for propaganda, painting a more positive narrative of the military than the reality of it.

While Marvel movies may be in the spotlight due to their vast popularity, they are certainly not the first films to be sponsored by the Pentagon and will most likely not be the last. The ability of the Pentagon to influence how the military is portrayed by controlling what we see of it in film is a frightening prospect to accept, especially knowing how impressionable we, as a society, have become to what is shown to us in our modern day entertainment.

"By 2016, the number of Pentagon-sponsored movies had grown to around 410"

and supporting movies that use military equipment since the 1920s, and in turn, they require that movies that use military equipment in film have their script vetted by the DOD. As a result, the government can dictate the direction a movie may take in portraying the military. Essentially, the DOD can ensure that movies involving the military and

Opinion: doping in sports

Colin Johnson
SPORTS WRITER

Athletes taking athletic performance enhancing drugs in sports, otherwise known as doping, has long been a hard issue to tackle. With the recent accusations against Chinese swimmer Sun Yang, a question remains: "how do we prevent athletes from using these drugs in the first place?"

Performance enhancing substances have been used as far back as in ancient Greece where stimulants were used to boost athletic capabilities. It wasn't until the 1920s that doping in sports was considered a serious issue, and the International Association of Athletics Federations decided to ban it in 1928.

At the 1998 Tour de France, a major drug scandal involving many cyclists participating highlighted the importance of controlling the use of performance enhancing drugs. In 1999, the World Anti-Doping Agency was established.

Since then, numerous accusations of w doping have been brought forth. One of the most infamous cases was against Lance Armstrong, an American cyclist who admitted in an interview with

are banned or okay to use for medical cases need to be in place. In addition, communication between athletes and doping control officers need to be present so that athletes with health problems that need a regulated drug can be exempt from punishments for using that substance.

However, in 2018, Yang was under fire for multiple offences including breaking a vial of his blood sample with a hammer. At the

angry. There was a clear lack of communication and transparency on the part of the doping control officers. On multiple accounts, the officials lacked full profiles including missing photos on their contact information as well as insufficient identification. Had the doping control officials been properly authorized to investigate, they should have been able to prove that they were on the spot. In addition to that,

"Getting athletes into an anti-cheating mindset ... [and] teaching them the importance ... of hard work in athletics should be a top priority"

2019 World Championships, two competitors, Australian Mack Horton and British Duncan Scott, refused to stand on the podium with him after their race. Many other swimmers including British Adam Peaty and South African Chad le Clos also criticized Yang.

I agree with the intent of their protests, but at the time not much information was known regarding Yang's incident with the blood sample. Athletes have a duty to pro-

one of the doping control assistants who was tasked to watch him urinate was caught taking photos and videos of him which was unprofessional and a blatant intrusion of his privacy.

All of these factors combined highlight the importance of transparency between an athlete and doping control organizations. In Yang's case, the doping control officials should have planned testing for a later date and proved that they were authorized to take his tests. In the long run, agencies like WADA should send communications to athletes, no matter how experienced they are with drug testing, outlining who is going to be testing them and what they have to do.

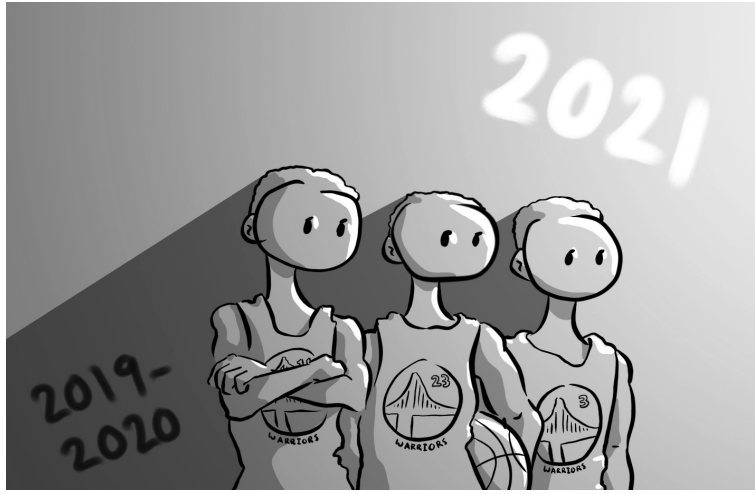
Educating athletes to adopt an anti-cheating mindset from a young age, as well as teaching them the importance and value of hard work in athletics, should be a top priority for sports federations and coaches around the world. Teaching all athletes about the consequences of doping is vital in its prevention.

Strict policies regarding the use of these substances also need to be in place in order to punish athletes who do cheat. Communication between all parties including the athletes, WADA, their sport and the government needs to be encouraged to avoid cases like Yang's in the future.

The U.S. Anti-Doping Agency and others already have resources available including a clear list of banned substances and guidelines regarding therapeutic use, as well as education regarding nutrition and other aspects of sports.

The fight against doping in sports is a challenging and complex issue to deal with, and it will require the efforts of everyone involved in order to make sports clean and fair.

KAITLYN HA



JESSICA FU

Warriors lineup

Cooper Wang
SPORTS WRITER

The 2020-21 NBA season is already looking promising for the Golden State Warriors. This season, the Warriors already have 12 wins in 24 games played as of Feb. 9, a much better start compared to last season.

The team placed almost dead last in the 2019-20 regular season with a devastatingly low record of 15-50. In the season prior, the team led the Western Conference in games won and made it to the Finals.

However, the Warriors experienced many unfortunate inju-

ries during the 2018-19 season. Klay Thompson, an All-Star for the Warriors, injured himself in the Finals that year. During a practice in late 2020, Thompson tore his right Achilles tendon, forcing him onto the bench this season. A few months after Thompson's first injury, Stephen Curry also suffered a broken left hand resulting in a 15-50 season for the Warriors.

to compete against the Los Angeles Lakers and Los Angeles Clippers to make the playoffs, which will be difficult considering that those teams are some of the best in the league. Last season, the Lakers won the finals against the Miami Heat. The two Los Angeles teams are already asserting their dominance this season, and have established themselves as two of the best teams in the Western Conference.

The Brooklyn Nets are also looking strong, as they traded for eight-time All-Star James Harden. This adds another amazing scorer to the team, leaving them with three superstars: 10-time All-Star Kevin Durant, eight-time All-Star James Harden and six-time All-Star Kyrie Irving.

In the Western Conference, the Clippers remain the biggest rival to the Lakers, with records of 17-8 and 18-6 respectively as of Feb. 8. The Clippers have star players Kawhi Leonard and Paul George in their lineup, who are capable of rivaling LeBron and the Lakers.

The Warriors are already looking better than last season, and they have the chance to make the playoffs. The other two California teams are tied for first in the league and will contend with each other for the number one spot in the Western Conference. With Thompson missing, Curry will have to step up and perform at his A-game if the Warriors want to make the playoffs. Hopefully, with Wiseman, the Warriors will have a promising future in the league.

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"One thing that could challenge the Warriors this season is the competition in their region"

"Clear rules about which substances are banned or okay to use for medical cases need to be in place"

Oprah Winfrey in 2013 to using Erythropoietin (EPO), blood transfusions and other banned substances. EPO increases the number of red blood cells in the body and greatly enhances aerobic function.

There are a wide range of athletic performance enhancing drugs. The most common are androgenic agents that increase muscle size and strength and aid in recovery. Other drugs include stimulants and growth hormones. Most, if not all, of these substances can have devastating side effects including high blood pressure, organ failure and may even lead to death.

The problem is many of these substances have legitimate medical uses, so finding out an athlete's reason for using a drug can be difficult.

In 2014, Yang tested positive for the use of stimulant trimetazidine, but claimed that he was using it for heart palpitations. He was issued a three month suspension for failing to report his usage of the substance. Yang went on to win one gold and one silver medal at the 2016 Rio Olympics.

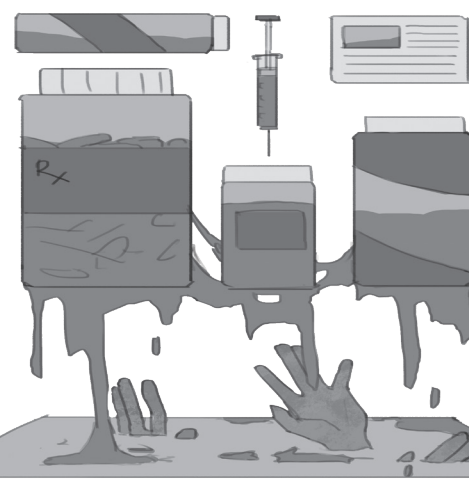
Clear rules about which substances

motivate clean sport, and they were rightfully outraged that Yang hadn't been punished for what he did.

On Feb. 28, 2020, the Court of Arbitration for Sport ruled that Yang would receive a career-ending eight-year ban, and Yang took to social media to express his outrage with the ruling. The ban seems quite harsh since there was no evidence that Yang was doping at the time and further investigation needed to be done before a ruling was made.

Yang appealed his case to the Swiss Federal Tribunal which overturned the CAS's decision in December of 2020. With Yang facing another trial against WADA, what could have been done to clear up this issue?

Yang had a reason to be



Seniors reflect on start of sports seasons

Emma Quanbeck
SPORTS WRITER

Some seniors at Aragon are beginning their final seasons of sports as school athletics have started, albeit with social distancing and mask-wearing guidelines. Beginning the week of Jan. 19, several Aragon sports including swim, cross country, football and tennis were able to begin practicing for the upcoming season, but some may not be able to compete depending on the tier the county is in. Plans for competitions vary according to sport, and competitions for girls tennis, girls golf, swimming and cross country and scheduled to begin in February.

Since Jan. 20, swim has started practicing three times a week in separate groups. Senior Alicia Gregory has been on Aragon's swim team since her freshman season. Reflecting back on her high school swim experience, Gregory has many fun memories from both the competitive aspect of the sport as well as end-of-season parties.

"I just like how [swim] can be an escape from everything else," Gregory said. "When I'm swimming, I'm not really thinking about my schoolwork or my other extracurriculars. [I'm] just thinking about this set."

With new changes in the way sports are being played, some athletes have decided to simply not play due to safety concerns. In Gregory's case, she is happy to participate in sports in person despite the changes brought on by COVID-19.

"It's not the same as the traditional team experience, but I'm just feeling appreciative that we can still swim even with everything that's going on," Gregory said.

Because San Mateo County is in the purple tier, the reopening of sports has faced a lot of criticism and obstacles. Several practice cohorts in November were cancelled due to growing concerns over the spread of COVID-19 and new California Interscholastic Federation regulations. However, sports practices were recently given the green light to resume. Due to more relaxed sports restrictions, namely larger groups of people being allowed in facilities, some families are still uncomfortable going back on campus and participating in group activities even with social distancing protocols in place. In survey data presented to the district board on Dec. 3, out of 3,837 San Mateo Union High School District family members and students, 39.5% preferred continuing distance learning compared to 45.8% who preferred to return.

"With the proper precautions, I think [practicing] is totally fine and acceptable as long as people are wearing masks during the appropriate times and trying to social distance as best they can," Gregory said.

Similarly, senior tri-athlete Blaine Reynolds, who has participated in basketball, cross country and track in his high school career, has enjoyed the competitive aspects of being a student-athlete.

"My favorite thing was getting to compete against other schools, especially [in] playoffs where [we] got to compete [against] schools across the state," Reynolds said.

Although there have been many challenges due to the pandemic, students have acknowledged the difficulties of reopening sports but have also stayed optimistic and grateful for the chance to participate despite these changing circumstances.

"It's definitely a tough experience because it's so abnormal [since] I'm used to seeing all the spectators,"

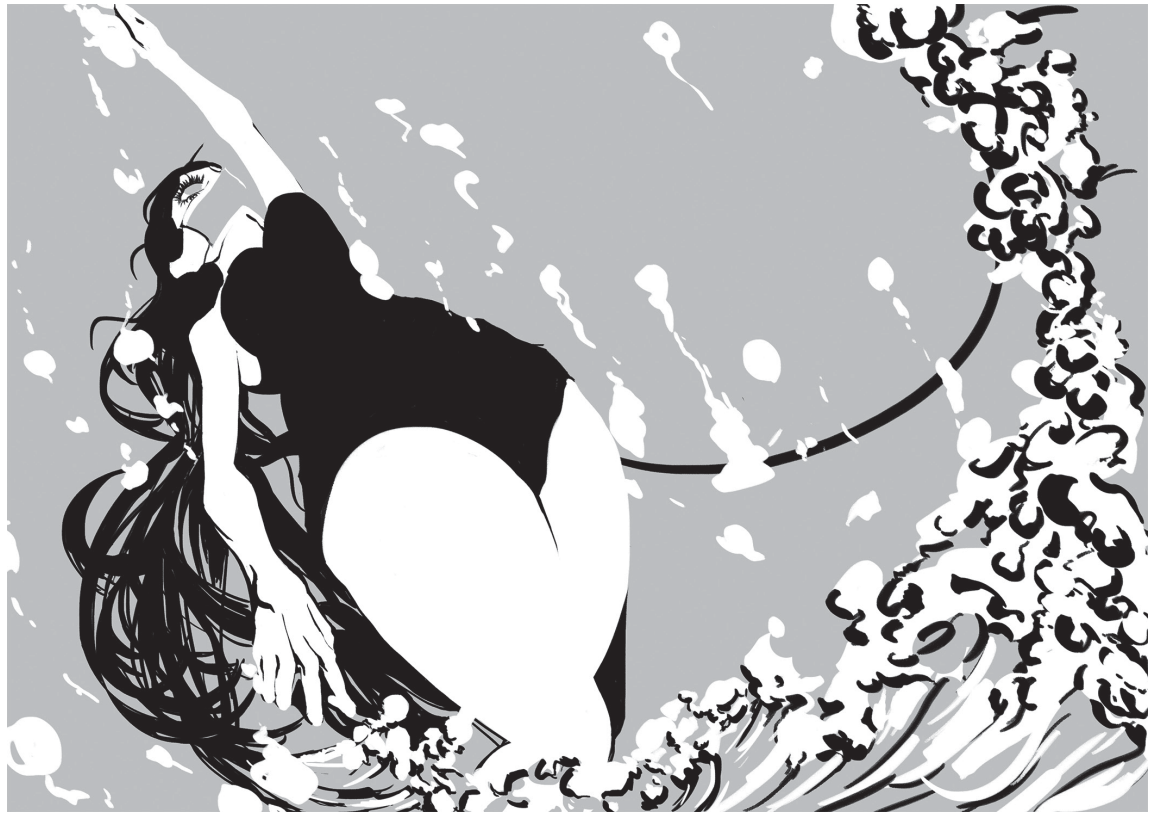
Reynolds said. "At least [we'll] be able to have a season because junior year we had no spring sports at all. It seems like we'll be able to at least compete against some other schools [and] go against other people aside from our own team. It'll be nice to at least have something to finish off my athletic career."

Reynolds has been a star of the boys cross country team, qualifying for state competitions individually in both his sophomore and junior years. As for the 2020-21 sports season, Reynolds and Gregory both agree that strict safety

modifications have changed the team environment.

"I think there's a limitation on what we can do with our team; there's no physical contact, high fives or anything like that," Reynolds said. "But overall, it's great having that team atmosphere because [practice] over the summer was tough, just training as an individual and being by myself nearly the whole time"

Although the 2020-21 seasons are not ideal, Aragon seniors have brought forth their best attitudes while stepping into their last sport season of their high school careers.



YUE YU

Athletic Boosters: continued support for Aragon athletes

Stephanie Lin
SPORTS WRITER

Parents and volunteers come together as the Aragon Athletic Boosters to help bring out the best of Aragon interscholastic sports. The parent organization raises money and provides financial management for teams through a variety of fundraising events and encourages student and family participation and involvement in the athletic community. Athletic Boosters is one of many parent groups such as Drama Boosters and Music Boosters, which help fund student activities. These groups help bolster different extracurriculars, aiming to raise money for supplies or equipment and enrich the experience of their respective activity.

Before being promoted to president last year, Christine Grant served as the Athletic Booster group's secretary for eight years.

"We try to fund all those things that are not considered necessary for play," Grant said. "For instance [we fund] our assistant coaches,

equipment, items they might need [like] jumpsuits or training videos."

The parent group buys equipment that is considered nonessential by the school district. For example, the group provided deck warmers for swim teams, motion detectors for basketball teams and new balls for volleyball teams. The group also saves for bigger purchases such as the new scoreboard for

"My first son graduated in 2016, so I've been here an awfully long time: eight to 10 years," Grant said. "I've always been part of the [Athletic] Boosters club, just wanting to help and be part of a great athletic tradition at Aragon. I facilitate fundraising and all the volunteers that help us out during the year and support them as much as they support the club."

As a proud mom of Aragon football graduates and a current student, Grant continues to contribute her time and effort by actively participating in Athletic Boosters to help improve and support athletic teams.

Outside of her work at a property management company and the group, Grant likes to take walks and listen to music. She enjoys watching TV shows such as "The Resident," "Good Doctor" and "Grey's Anatomy" and listening to country, old R&B and '90s hip-hop music.

As the president of the group, Grant meets with other parents on a regular basis. Due to COVID-19, meetings have either been cancelled or gone virtual. With the

cancellation of many in-person gatherings and sporting events, the club is unable to fundraise for sports teams as they normally would.

Before the coronavirus pandemic, the group hosted Sportsmanship Night three times a year where hundreds of athletes attended. These nights took place at the beginning of each athletic season and highlighted the importance of good sportsmanship and appropriate behaviors at games.

"At Sportsmanship Night, we give new information, we check parents that attended and we ask for a donation,"

"We have bought extra equipment for a variety of sports because people aren't allowed to share equipment like they were before [while] conditioning," said Treasurer Bridgit Hanshaw. "Extra mats, extra weights [and] extra medicine balls."

During the pandemic, sports and fundraising events may increase the risk of transmission. Thus, Athletic Boosters have been meeting virtually each month to keep everyone updated.

"We support them by letting the community know about the sports and how

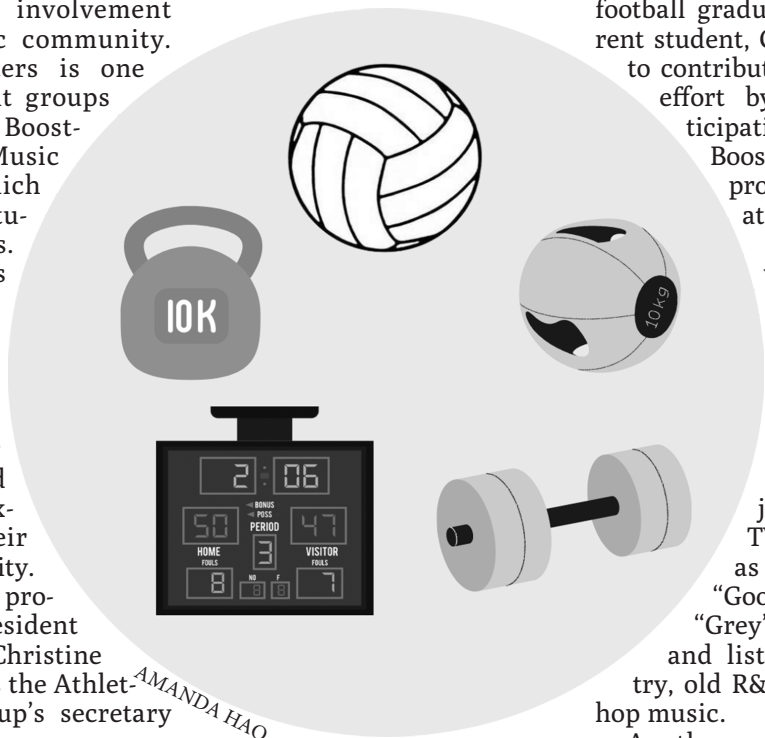
"We represent the sports at the club at different events, but for the most part, raising money to help"

said Vice President of Sportsmanship Steve Dixon. "It's a major fundraising event for the sports program."

But due to COVID-19 restrictions, large gatherings are prohibited and seasonal Sportsmanship Nights have been put on hold. Although sporting events have been limited, the group is preparing for when they eventually resume. In order to provide continued support during the pandemic, the group has purchased new equipment and supplies to help keep athletes safe.

it is beneficial to the students," said Vice President of Communications Shaynee Stevens. "We represent the sports at the club at different events, but for the most part, raising money to help support the things that aren't paid for by the district."

While COVID-19 has forced the Aragon Athletic Boosters group to adapt their fundraising events and group meetings to a virtual environment, the club has still found ways to maintain Aragon athletic traditions and support athletes.



“Purple tier” sports given the green light to compete

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To be in the red tier, a sport must be outside and have limited contact. Sports in the red tier include baseball, girls lacrosse and softball. To be in the orange tier, a sport must be outside with a lot of contact or inside with minimal contact. Badminton, football, boys lacrosse, soccer, volleyball and water polo have been sorted into the orange tier. To be in the yellow tier, a sport must be inside with a lot of contact. Yellow tier sports include basketball, competitive cheer and wrestling.

Another big change is the testing protocols put in place before matches. The district uses Curative SARS-Cov-2 oral

veys. The district is ramping up the volume of safety precautions being enforced for less obvious concerns as well.

“Everyone will bring their own water bottle, and the [equipment] will be cleaned and sanitized,” said Aragon Athletic Trainer Daniel Walker.

Athletes are now required to report a reason for any absences. They also have to fill out an Affirmation Survey on the app LiveSafe before every time they come to campus. The survey keeps track of COVID-19 symptoms and potential exposure in case contact tracing is necessary.

The district is anticipating that all of these preventative steps can help prevent infec-

San Mateo Union High School District. Another possibility is virtual meets.

“We [may] race over Zoom from our own schools, and then they’ll put everyone’s score up against each other to

down last year was a major hindrance to the ability to make strong plans for carrying out athletics in some format.

“Originally we thought we would be back in school after spring break and everything

changes and spikes in COVID-19 cases have made playing sports consistently nearly impossible to do. In addition, some students have opted out of athletics due to the risk of catching COVID-19.

“I guess it’s understandable, but it’s a bit frustrating and bewildering,” Sell said. “We’re getting told two different things. We’re being told that these kids are desperate to see each other, desperate to get on the field but then once the opportunity is there, some people are saying ‘thanks, but no thanks.’”

Despite the frustrating circumstances surrounding this season, some athletics are being played, and the hope is that the COVID-19 rates can get low enough for the sports in the less restrictive tiers to potentially begin competitions before the end of the school year.

“We [may] race over Zoom ... and then they’ll put everyone’s score up against each other to see who won”

swab tests to check if athletes presently are infected. The Food and Drug Administration has warned that this test has a risk for false negative results.

“Kids must be tested before they can play in contests but not before practicing,” Sell said.

Last year, testing was not mandatory and only precautionary measures were taken such as mandatory temperature checks and health sur-

tions. However, the cohort rule this semester has changed. Last semester, only 14 students were allowed per cohort and 50 people per facility. Now, the rules are a little looser and an entire team can train together.

In previous seasons, teams would travel to schools outside the district to play games. In order to keep athletes safe this season, the schedule is being set up only within the

“We ... hope that somehow we can get into the orange and play the contests for season [two] sports”

see who won,” said freshman swimmer Ryan Vattuone.

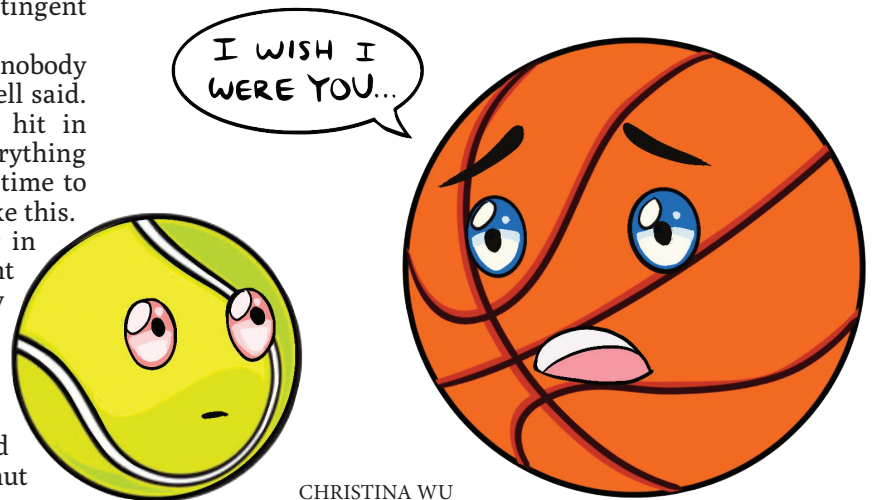
The start date for competition is sports such as girls golf, cross country, girls tennis and swimming is planned for the week of Feb. 15. Other sports, including boys golf, boys tennis and track and field are scheduled to begin competing the week of April 5, but the dates are contingent upon COVID-19 cases.

“[Early] last year, nobody had a plan in place,” Sell said. “When the pandemic hit in March, they shut everything down and didn’t have time to come up with a plan like this. If they had something in place like [the current plan], ... they probably could have kept playing boys golf, boys tennis and kept swimming and diving.”

Walker also agreed that the sudden shut

would be back to normal,” Walker said. “I don’t think there was enough time for everyone involved to make a decision last spring.”

As athletic director, Sell has had unique insight into how the district and state have been trying to get sports up and running smoothly. But the continuous rule



CHRISTINA WU



People shop at Sports Basement, and Ella Bartlett surfs in Pacifica.

MICHAEL SIPES, NAILAH BLAKE AND COURTESY OF ELLA BARTLETT

Staying active during the pandemic

Julia Renner
SPORTS WRITER

For a lot of people, participating in sports or exercising in general functions as a distraction from the stress of everyday life. The restriction of competitive sports and gym closures due to contact and exposure risks have added even more stress to people’s lives.

“While I’m in the water, all of my problems seem to just disappear”

Many have turned to new outdoor activities to get their daily dose of freedom and exercise in. Hiking, biking and skateboarding have been among the most popular to try during the pandemic.

“There are all sorts of places you can go up into the Marin Headlands,” said a Sports Basement employee. “There’s some biking up there and also Mt. Tamalpais, but you have to drive a little bit. The closest [are] Corte Madera and Water Dog [Lake].”

Junior Cassie Vass began hiking and biking more during the pandemic to get outdoors more and spend time with family and friends. She’s especially enjoyed exploring trails in her own neighborhood as well as hiking in Sugarloaf Park.

“There’s one [trail at Sugarloaf Park] that’s really steep, and it’s a really good workout,” Vass said. “The view

from up there is so pretty too. You can see all of Hillsborough and San Mateo, and it’s really nice. Being in nature is so beautiful, and I think during COVID right now, staying grounded in a way with nature is really important.”

Instead of participating in more popular activities like hiking and biking, senior Ella Bartlett decided to take to

the coastline and begin surfing. She had taken part in the sport before, but had forgotten about it until the pandemic put everything else in her life on pause.

“In May 2020, I didn’t have a lot to do, and it was taking a toll on me,” Bartlett said. “So, I

“During COVID right now, staying grounded in a way with nature is really important”

picked up one of my old boards and just went out to Pacifica.”

Not only is surfing an effective form of exercise for Bartlett, but it’s an escape from stress. When she wants to focus on something other than the happenings of her life, she simply hits the beach.

“Surfing has a really positive impact on my mental health,” Bartlett said. “While

I’m in the water, all of my problems seem to just disappear as I focus on the waves and being present. It makes me feel truly alive, and that kind of stimulation can be pretty hard to find these days.”

Vass has also noticed a positive shift in her emotional well-being since she started spending more time outdoors.

“Going outside definitely helps my mental health,” Vass said. “Being cooped up all day is not very good for your mental health because you’re stuck in your house with all of your problems. I feel like getting outside helps you escape the overthinking at home and being stuck in one place all the time.”

While it’s been very difficult to stay motivated during this pandemic, Bartlett, Vass and many other people have

Additional reporting by Michael Sipes and Elizabeth van Blommestein.