



# The ARAGON OUTLOOK

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900 Alameda de las Pulgas, San Mateo, CA 94402

Aragon High School

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## Aragon community on Affirmative Action

Grace Tao  
NEWS EDITOR

On June 29, the Supreme Court ruled 6-3 in *Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA) v. Harvard* and *SFFA v. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill* that race-based affirmative action in college admissions is a violation of the 14th Amendment's Equal Protection Clause. Affirmative action is the deliberate allocation of employment or educational opportunities to disadvantaged groups.

Initially established in the 1960s, affirmative action sought to bring equitable opportunities to college admissions.

"I think affirmative action serves to level the playing field when it comes to college admissions," said senior Abigail Lee. "So I think admissions officers tend to be more lenient towards students who are of a race that is underprivileged in America."

For some, the Supreme Court decision left a negative impression.

"I was really upset," Lee said. "I felt the same way I did when they overturned *Roe v. Wade* — like

we were going back in time. I understand that affirmative action wasn't perfect, and a lot of people had problems with it, but it ... was progress [in] the right direction."

However, others agreed with the ruling.

"I don't think race should be a consideration," said junior Steven Dominguez. "It's not fair if you've spent your whole high school career working hard for a college, only for them to say that you won't be [admitted] since you aren't a certain skin color. I think you should be [judged] on what you've accomplished, rather than what the color of your skin is."

Senior Varsha Jawadi reflected on her initial reaction.

"I have to admit, I was a little bit relieved because [as] an Asian American myself ... I felt like I could understand where [the plaintiff] was coming from," Jawadi said. "[I'm] someone who also tries really hard academically and puts in a lot of effort to get into prestigious colleges. So I was happy in that sense."

Some have seen their opinion evolve. Jawadi elaborated on how

she changed her stance after additional consideration.

"Once I did more research on it, I decided to take a neutral stance on it," Jawadi said. "I do feel for a lot of the people that are negatively affected by [it, but] it's true that [certain] racial groups in America don't get the same educational opportunities, and it's helpful to have [affirmative action] ... because otherwise it's just not fair to them."

Dominguez's understanding has also shifted.

"I used to see it [in a] black-and-white [way]; that it's bad," Dominguez said. "Now, I can see why colleges sometimes do it... Especially when segregation was still legal, it helped... minorities... It was an attempt to right a wrong. I think nowadays though, there's a lot more equality, and... everyone has a pretty equal opportunity, assuming you put in the work."

Lee elaborates on how her opinion has evolved, especially as an Asian American.

"When I was younger, all people told me was that [affirmative action] made it harder for Asian students to

get into college," Lee said. "So that being all I knew, I was like, 'Okay, well that sucks.' But once I learned more about it, I realized that there was a very good reason that [affirmative action] was in place; there are systemic injustices built into American society, and there isn't a lot we can do [to fix it] quickly."

However, Lee sees affirmative action as a remedy to this issue.

"[Affirmative action] helps people who are born in underprivileged neighborhoods and don't have access to good education — which tends to correlate with race, whether people like to admit it or not," Lee said.

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ALLYSON CHAN

## Admin Assistant Becky Foster retires

Aakanksha Sinha  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

After serving as Aragon's Administrative Assistant for 26 years, Becky Foster spent her last day on campus on Aug. 22 before heading into retirement. During her time at Aragon, she worked with four

principals: former principals Ann Rarden, Kirk Black and Patricia Kurtz, and current principal Valerie Arbizu.

"I have very much enjoyed working for this school district," Foster said. "I'm mainly looking [back] on the friendships that I've made with fellow teachers and classified staff,

and seeing how the school has improved in the way of technology, facilities and in opportunities for students."

As the Administrative Assistant, Foster was responsible for several tasks like communicating with the district office, directing traffic and maintaining important records.

"I think about [Foster as] someone who was on the front-line ... of our school," said athletic director Steve Sell. "[She] ... was such a huge part of the fabric of this school."

A major aspect of Foster's role was to assist the principal. When current Deputy Superintendent Black served as Aragon's principal in 2002, he often relied on Foster for guidance and support.

"[Foster] wasn't my boss ... but I felt like she was because she ran the school," Black said. "She kept me on schedule, and reminded me of things I would forget. She had high expectations ... and she never wavered in her performance. I don't remember her ever being sick to the point where she couldn't come to work."

During her time at Aragon, Foster worked with Black to initiate and lead the annual staff hall of fame from 2007 to 2011 to honor and celebrate retired Aragon teachers and staff.

"She was really into the [hall of fame]," Black said. "She helped me with the presentations and ... [helped] find people

who had retired, and [invited] them to this big event. [Foster] would always get these great awards for them too."

Having worked at Aragon for over two decades, Foster built a reputation for her reliable and approachable nature.

"It always amazed me how well she could keep track of everybody," said Site Accounting Technician Luci Tolfa. "She ... made people feel welcome. She is a great role model for anyone working in a position where you're interacting with the public ... professional yet kind."

Outside of her routine responsibilities, Foster frequently interacted with students, though usually only briefly.

"I wish I could [have connected] with students more," Foster said. "Other than just helping students that came by, I [only] saw the students on our switchboard on a daily basis. So even though I saw lots of students going by, I didn't have an opportunity to really get to know them."

However, Foster aimed to help guide and prepare students when she had the opportunity.

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Becky Foster at her retirement party

ANNA HE

[AFFIRMATIVE ACTION CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1]

Some believe that the concept of affirmative action should extend beyond race.

“We should transition to [an] economic-based affirmative action [system],” said junior Andrew Huang. “We should, no matter what race, help the people [from] the lowest socioeconomic statuses. That’s what I believe.”

For Modern World History teacher Scott BonDurant, affirmative action is only one aspect of a broader concern.

“The bigger issue before we even get to affirmative action in college admissions is: why is it even necessary?” BonDurant said. “Why does the United States in particular tend to hoard resources and advantages

in only a small handful of elite institutions? That is more problematic to me than anything else.”

He elaborates on the sociocultural element of competitive college admissions.

**“Why does the U.S. tend to hoard advantages in only a handful of elite institutions?”**

“We’ve created this social incentive [to go to prestigious institutions] ... [and] if [we] eliminated [it], then people wouldn’t be fighting each other,” BonDurant said. “We have bigger systemic issues around, organizations like the College Board, which are deeply problematic. There should be no such thing as a billion dollar nonprofit.”

This year’s college admissions cycle will mark the first since the 1960s without affirmative action.

[FOSTER RETIREMENT CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1]

“She was so nurturing and motherly,” said Office Assistant Lisa Stanton. “Sometimes she had to be firm, but that’s part of this job. She held students [accountable], because she considered them part of her family. She was authentic in her love and care for Aragon.”

Not only did Foster contribute to students’ personal growth, but she also worked diligently to create a friendly and trusting environment for the Aragon community.

“When there were special holidays, she would give me a little gift like a Starbucks gift card and some candles,” said senior Maya Pappas, who was Foster’s office aide in the 2022-2023 school year. “When it was [Arbizu’s] birthday last year, they had cake in the staff lounge, so she brought some extra for

me. She was really sweet [and] kind to everyone.”

Her constant effort to craft and maintain a strong sense of community with her colleagues enabled her to build lasting friendships.

“As a young athletic director in my early 30s, I was not very good at procedural paperwork,” Sell said. “I felt like I made [Foster’s] life more difficult, because I [forgot] to submit forms. So one day when we got our pictures back, because she had to tolerate me all the time, I [decided] to cut out a picture of me and give it to her as a ‘thank you for everything you do’ ... and she put it on her computer. So then every year, I got a picture and gave it to [her].”

Even after Foster leaves Aragon, many feel that her impact will remain for time to come.

“She taught me to let go of some things,” Stanton said.

“She was a good friend to me ... She would just give me sage advice, and she would always take the time to stop and listen because she [was a] mother figure to me, and I’m going to miss that.”

During retirement, Foster hopes to spend her free time on hobbies and her family.

“We’re planning to do a little more traveling,” Foster said. “I have four grandchildren that I’m going to be seeing more of, and [there are] a few more hobbies and little [art] projects that have been on the backburner that I’d like to work on.”

Leaving Aragon, Foster is ready to step into this new phase of her life.

“I think you get back quite a bit of what you give,” Foster said. “I think it’s important for you to always do your best, and it seems like good things will follow. It was a hard decision, but I knew that the timing was right.”

## Improv team hosts “Welcome Back” show

Darren Lo  
NEWS EDITOR

On Sept. 1, the Aragon Improv Team held their “Welcome Back” show in the Aragon theater featuring its returning members: seniors Leo Levitt and Phoenix SeEVERS, juniors Diego MarenCO and Macen Adams and sophomores Samantha Green and Oliver Levitt.

Improv is a theatrical art form where actors play off the audience’s dynamics.

“My favorite thing about improv is the [accepting] community and just the energy everywhere,” Adams said. “The audience definitely plays a large part [too]; they give us suggestions to use to make it [an] original show.”

Despite the impromptu nature of the show, the team members meticulously hone their skills with various exercises, attending practice twice a week.

“We start the year doing character work,” Green said.

“We’ve done a lot of character building exercises, ways that you can jump into a scene and support your scene partner, establish character and make a cohesive plot. Then we start being able to do longer and longer forms.”

These games and exercises often contribute to the structure of the show.

“There’s a game [we practiced last year] where someone says a monologue and everybody

has to act it out,” Adams said. “[We used it in] my favorite storyline, the kindergarten [skit]. There was a TV and then two of the improvisers acted out the scene behind us. I’m happy we could put [the game] into a show.”

The performance included a variety of games and stories, from Four Square, a game where eight different storylines switched off in a montage

style, to longer stories about a variety of interesting topics. Behind these engaging shows is a large amount of quick thinking.

“Improv is all about staying on your toes,” MarenCO said. “[There was a skit] where I broke the fourth wall and saw the crowd, [and] it became more of a story rather than a joke when [my teammates] realized what I was doing and they adapted.”

The audience had positive reactions and enjoyed the show.

“I really enjoyed the attention to detail in the callbacks,” said sophomore Owen Day. “The team has a very large commitment to bringing back recurring gags, making [sure] the audience [has] a really great time and making [us] feel special.”

Additionally, the improv team also asked audience members to volunteer during a Mad Libs style game. The team asked the audience to fill in the blanks to direct the plot of the skit, leading to some creative pieces, like one based on cheese wheels.

“I got to be on stage—not a lot of people [can] say that,” said junior Quincy Romero.

“When you get on the stage of an improv show, improv just embodies you. Nothing in my body said, ‘I’m gonna say ‘cheese wheel’ when I got out there. It just happened. I just said it.”

With audience participation, each improv show is guaranteed to be unique. Aragon’s improv team tries to also keep the shows refreshing by incorporating their own talents, such as MarenCO’s dancing.

“It’s not something that I normally do,” MarenCO said. “I’ve never seen it in practice before. But [my teammates gave] me the opportunity. The thing about [us] being really close teammates is that they know I’m a dancer.”

Students also felt this connection and had a great time at the show.

“The improv team this year [is] one of our best,” said junior Thomas Williams. “It was fun the entire way through, [both] consistently and in different ways.”

Looking forward to the new year, the improv team is eager to expand their team. The team held auditions on Sept. 11.

“I’m really excited to have a fresh team,” Green said. “It’s going to be interesting to see how a new team works together.”

The next improv show will take place on Oct. 27 in the Aragon theater with a full cast.



LIAN WANG

# Aragon welcomes new staff

Reporting by Ruhi Mudoj



**Shannon Lane**  
Assistant Principal

*Do you have any specific goals this school year?*  
I'm trying to figure out how we can get people feeling like schoolwork is approachable. So people can be confident in their workspace, [and] feel safe and ready for the next step.

*How did you know you wanted to get into education?*  
When I was little, I grew up in lots of different spaces, and one of those spaces was a farm in Montana. My uncle put a swing in this tree and I would read in this tree. And I knew that someday I would be a teacher.

*What is one accomplishment or project that you're particularly proud of?*

When I worked at the adult education program, it was at a school that was dying. I was trying to figure out how I could make that school thrive. There are services that support [high school] students. But at the adult level there were no services for them. So I helped open a food pantry and a clothing closet and a job system so students could go and get work and take care of their kids who are in school. It was helpful for those families, for their kids who were in the schools to still get support.



**Denise Morones**  
Math teacher

*What are some of your hobbies and interests?*  
I'm interested in almost everything. I run a fair amount. I'm going to do a half marathon this year. I like all outdoors stuff like camping, backpacking, hiking and traveling a lot. I went swimming with whale sharks and went white water rafting.

*Do you have any specific goals going into the school year?*  
To be an effective teacher and help people understand math more. [Being] able to do it might make some people start liking it more. I didn't like math until I hit algebra. There's always hope.

*How did you know that you wanted to teach Spanish?*  
I've always been fascinated by Spanish or Latin American culture so I wanted to share a little piece of my own identity through my classes. I wanted to make an impact on the world through my students. I know that they are going to make the change.

*If you could be anything besides a teacher what would it be?*  
An actress. In high school, I was a big part of the theater department and people would always say 'You did such a great job, you performed [the character] very well' I never pursued it.



**Elizabeth Benitez**  
Spanish teacher



**Anna Monette Aniel**  
Directed Studies

*Why Aragon?*

All of my visions are in San Mateo. All of the things I'm thinking of in my future are here. The ocean, the climate, the hills, the different cultures. When I'm walking, I can see different kinds of students.

*Do you have any specific goals going into the school year?*

My vision is to be more connected and engaged with the school. I'm trying to talk to different students in the hallway [and] get my students to be on track to graduate. I'm here to support them to get to whatever their goal is.



**Caroline Wisecarver**  
English teacher

*Why did you choose English?*

English, for me, was a place where you could express your own ideas without right or wrong answers. That's something I wanted to bring out of young people.

*Any accomplishments or projects that you're particularly proud of?*

What I was able to contribute and what I've learned from the students at Peninsula has been life changing. Peninsula has typically been an under-resourced and forgotten school of the district. Last year, I [brought back] its first leadership class just to give them more of the high school experience that they were removed from.



**Katherine Palomeque**  
Administrative Assistant

*What are some of your hobbies and interests?*

I like going out. I love sunsets. If I have a chance to go out and walk while the sun is setting, I love it.

*Can you tell me about your past professional experience?*  
I've been part of the district for five years. I was working as an instructional assistant for Specialized Education for the Bay Academy. That was my previous position. I really enjoyed working there. I learned a lot from my students. When I was in school, we didn't have this inclusion. It was such a new experience. It was wonderful and I'm so grateful that I was able to work with them.

*Do you have any specific goals going into the school year?*  
Right now everything is just new to me. I'm learning so much in this new position. My goal is to learn everything. I can't see too much in the future. I don't know what will come because I don't know all the things that this position carries. My thoughts right now are just to learn.

## The ARAGON OUTLOOK

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**53.7%\***  
of respondents  
consume  
caffeine

\* of 281 surveyed

## WHY CAFFEINE?

Junior Erika Moskewicz, who is diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, utilizes caffeine to help her focus.

"My parents [didn't] want to start me on medication right away, so they decided on tea," Moskewicz said. "Caffeine was a middle ground between a more serious stimulant and doing nothing."

Another appealing aspect is the experience of drinking caffeinated beverages.

"[During high school], if I had to stay up late to finish a paper, I would use caffeine to help keep me up," said biology teacher Cathryn Kliegel. "[Now], I buy a good Peet's Coffee ... in the morning to warm and wake me up."

Senior and Starbucks barista, Vaidehi Tenkale is influenced by her customers.

"I was making [many] caramel macchiatos [for customers], so I tried it myself and realized it tastes so good," Tenkale said.

Additionally, social media and pop culture can also factor into an individual's caffeine choices.

"I [watch] 'Gilmore Girls,' and a large part of that show is excessive caffeine drinking," said junior Mia Thurrell. "It influences fans [to drink caffeine too]."

Caffeinated foods and beverages will likely continue to be a staple in many lives, boosting energy, increasing alertness and sharpening focus.

Holly Estrada

"Over time, Pepsi or Diet Coke didn't give me the zap that I wanted, so I started trying energy drinks, and I was like 'oh my gosh, this really does give me wings!'"

Cathryn Kliegel

"I was staying in a tiny village [farm] up in the mountains in Switzerland. They milked the cows that morning, and that milk was in the coffee. It was the best cup of coffee I've ever had."

Benjamin Ricket, 12

"In terms of portability and ease of use, roasted coffee beans can just be eaten straight. I do have that for lunch sometimes."

A cup of green tea:  
**25 - 45mg**



A bottle of Coca-Cola:  
**53 mg**

A shot of espresso:  
**64 mg**



A cup of coffee:  
**95 mg**



A can of Monster:  
**160 mg**

A can of PRIME:  
**200 mg**



## CAFFEINE'S CONSEQUENCES

Many rely on caffeine to stay focused and alert throughout the day. For high school students, caffeine can boost their energy levels and concentration in class.

"[I drink] coffee because I get less sleep," said sophomore Seona Srivastava. "The caffeine gives [me] a sense of rush that makes me more productive."

Senior and Starbucks barista Giuliana Mendez noticed that caffeine seemed to affect the mood of her customers.

"When I work the morning shifts, [customers] can be really rude," Mendez said. "Then once they have coffee, all of a sudden, they're really nice. It's like [not having caffeine] almost gives them an excuse to be mean."

Beyond the immediate effects, some caffeine consumers end up developing a reliance on caffeine to get through the day.

"I've come to the point where I get withdrawal symptoms if I don't drink [coffee] for a day," said senior Daigo Hayashi.

Despite the downsides, many students and faculty alike find the habit a difficult one to break.

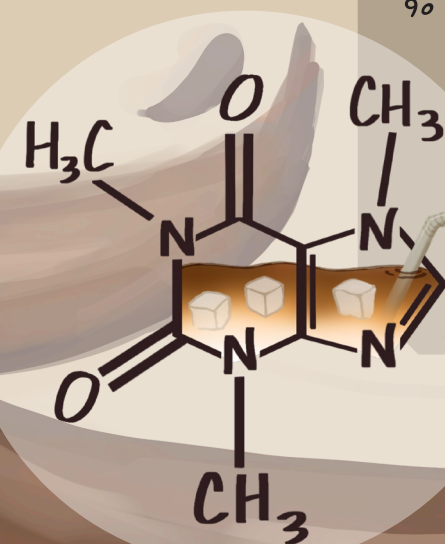
"How am I possibly going to get through the morning without [caffeine] to give me that little boost?" said English teacher Holly Estrada. "It's a bit ridiculous. I think we emotionally rely on that drink."

## CHEMICALLY CAFFEINATED

All the effects of caffeine can be linked to its chemical properties. Caffeine is a stimulant naturally found in many plants, and functions by repressing a neurotransmitter responsible for sleep and relaxation. This interference leads to caffeine's effects, including heightened alertness, quickened heartbeat and reduced drowsiness.

A study published in 2020 by psychiatrist and psychotherapist Dimitris Repantis et al, observed that participants who received a 200-milligram dose of caffeine 90 minutes before a cognitive test were able to remember roughly six percent more words in an immediate memory test, and up to 30% more words 24 hours after the first test. However, the same study also suggested that the sustained attention of participants under the influence of caffeine exhibited a roughly three percent decrease as opposed to those who had not consumed caffeine.

While this one study alone is incapable of painting the whole picture of the various effects of caffeine, it does illustrate the complexity of the subject.



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# A look into local concerts

Agastya Raghavan  
FEATURES EDITOR

With the recent excitement surrounding multi-year stadium tours like Beyoncé's Renaissance tour and Taylor Swift's Eras tour, concerts are commonly associated with extravagant light shows in massive arenas. However, small shows in basements or clubs have long been a way to showcase up-and-coming artists in an intimate setting.

"I've been to big shows and smaller shows, [and] I feel like, at smaller shows, the artists are more connected to the audience," said senior Nathan Yin. "There's a sense of community in this region, [since] a lot of these small bands are from ... San Mateo county."

Fans of smaller, more intimate shows also emphasize how larger concerts can feel less lively and connected.

"The atmosphere isn't something you can replicate in larger venues," Yin said. "At hardcore gigs, you see stage diving, moshing and crowd-surfing. In stadiums, most of the time you're sitting in

a seat far from the band. It's just a different experience."

Those who enjoy local shows also emphasize their communal nature.

"It's definitely a select group of people you meet there, but the people are really nice and all want to make friends," said junior Audrey Yanez. "I went to a jazz concert with my friends, and I thought it would just be ... jazz, but everyone was super friendly and talkative, and looking to meet new people. I went to one on Halloween ... everyone wore costumes."

Attendees of smaller concerts also value a more personal connection to the performer, due to the less chaotic and overwhelming nature of smaller crowds.

"Definitely at smaller shows the artists are a lot more aware that you're there," said junior Sarah Klein. "When you're one in a crowd versus one in twenty, the smaller one ends up being a lot more personal."

From the perspective of performers, smaller shows can also be impactful as they

allow for an opportunity to connect to a small group of people while still seeing appreciation for their music.

"Personally, I don't go to too many local shows, unless it's something I'm a part of," said senior Dane Kenyon. "I have performed at some small concerts through a program I'm in. I think at those you can interact with the crowd more and it's a lot cooler."

The people found at smaller shows are often brought there by connections; since these shows are not at a scale where they can be mass-advertised, attendees find them through word-of-mouth from friends in the scene.

"I think most people get into concerts because they know someone else," Yanez said. "The most recent one I went to, I only got in because I knew someone there. I also went to one because my friend knew people in [the performers] band and he got invited through connections he made."

However, many in the music scene find relying on connection to be a roadblock.



ZELDA REIF

"If you don't have connections it's not gonna work," said senior Chance Hubbard. "[To find shows], you have to network and put yourself out there and be vulnerable, there's no other way."

Shows can reach outside of San Mateo, and span genres.

"I used to be really into the punk scene, because the

scene in the East Bay is huge," Hubbard said. "I also go to lots of shoegaze shows, which are also really big in Berkeley, Oakland ... all over the bay."

For Aragon students, small concerts offer unique opportunities to make new friends and join communities they may not have otherwise been exposed to.



GEFFEN RECORDS

## "Bewitched"

Lipika Goel  
FEATURES EDITOR

Icelandic-Chinese singer-songwriter Laufey's sophomore album "Bewitched," released on Sept. 8, displays powerful songwriting skills accompanied with soothing vocals and instrumentals. The album contains fourteen unique tracks, and comes a year after Laufey's debut album "Everything I Know About Love." Whereas her debut album depicted wide-eyed fantasies about young love, "Bewitched" illustrates a mature, pensive woman reflecting on her lived experiences with heartbreak and longing.

Laufey has described her desire to create modern jazz that is accessible and appealing to a young audience, and the first track "Dreamer," one of the catchiest songs on the album, is reminiscent of the lively vocals of jazz icons Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday. "No boy's gonna kill the dreamer in me," she declares, revealing her experienced yet hopeful outlook toward love and setting the tone for her sophomore album.

In contrast, the next two tracks, "Second Best" and "Haunted," exemplify Laufey's classic slow, introspective approach, with "Haunted" adding sensuality through her evocative lyrics. She picks up the pace

slightly on "Must Be Love," with a powerful, echoing chorus that crescendoes each time it is repeated. Both "Must Be Love" and the following track, "While You Were Sleeping," reveal her sappy romantic side, with Laufey admitting, "I don't recognize myself / I'm dancing down streets / Smiling to strangers / Idiotic things" in the latter. However, they still fit in with the overall theme of reflecting on lived experiences, a contrast to prior songs like "Beautiful Stranger," and "Dear Soulmate," which depict hypothetical scenarios.

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## "GUTS"

Allyson Chan  
GRAPHICS EDITOR &  
BUSINESS MANAGER

On Sept. 8, pop phenomenon Olivia Rodrigo released twelve songs in her sophomore album "GUTS." The young singer-songwriter gets vulnerable in her album as she crafts an angsty and heartfelt tracklist that tackles the struggles of growing up as a young woman in today's society, reminiscent of an early 2000s coming-of-age movie.

Although it has been two years since she released her first album, "SOUR," she keeps the iconic energetic, pop-punk production of her songs that topped the charts in 2021. In her first

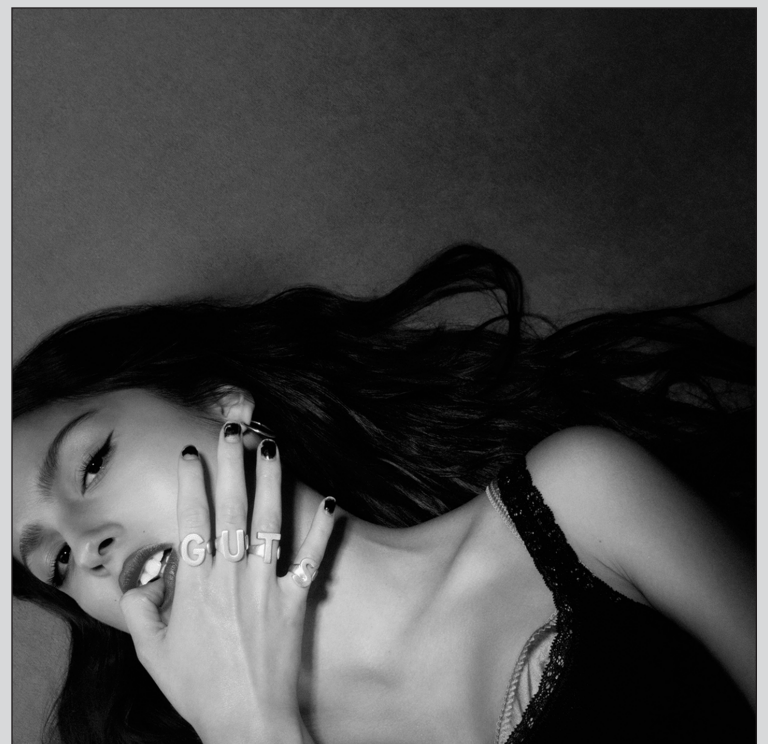
track, "all-american bitch," she juxtaposes angelic vocals and soft acoustic guitar in her verses with a more percussion-driven and distorted guitar chorus and bridge to build aggression and tension in the song. As she sings with grace in the verses, representative of the grace women are expected to always have, she breaks the softness with crescendoing screams and electric guitar shreds in the chorus and bridge to demonstrate her own growing frustration with the expectations society has burdened young women with.

Like her track "jealousy, jealousy" on her debut album, Rodrigo continues to express her frustration at the unattainable beauty standards the media pushes onto youth in her 2000s pop-based song "pretty isn't pretty" but this time with more maturity. In contrast to "jealousy,

jealousy," Rodrigo focuses on her newfound understanding of how subjective and unattainable being considered "beautiful" is, instead of her frustration toward other women she perceives to be successful and beautiful, reflective of her growth over time. Though the lyrics depict constant frustration, the production of the song showcases the ironically happy tone of the album, offering softer vocals and a more upbeat melody in contrast to the rigid aggression of "jealousy, jealousy," depicting how she is forced to belittle her insecurities about her looks.

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WARNER CHAPPELL MUSIC

# Diversity beyond checkboxes



Eesha Gupta  
NEWS EDITOR

Art transports us to different worlds: we laugh, cry and love, as art offers us an escape into universes fundamentally unlike our own.

But too often, we reach for the worlds closest to us. We turn the pages of books listed as ‘best-sellers’ and bop along to the tunes of top-100 hits. We consume the media recommended to us—the media of the masses. In doing so, we rob art of its power to shatter the bubbles we live in. The question then becomes: how do we diversify the media we consume in a purposeful manner that celebrates the merit of a work and avoids the red flag label of ‘tokenism?’

Tokenism is making a superficial effort to highlight underrepresented groups to create a false appearance of equality by choosing a small number of minorities. In practice, tokenism means choosing diverse works to ‘check a box’ because of their diverse nature, not because of their merit.

“Tokenism, in terms of connotation, is super loaded,” said writer and English teacher Genevieve Schwartz. “As a teacher,

I never want to feel like I’m choosing a writer simply because they are an African American writer, an Asian American writer or a queer writer. That, to me, is an incredibly shallow philosophy about how we choose what to read.”

Instead, we should redefine how we understand our selection of media.

“It’s not tokenism, it’s broadening our perspectives,” said English and AVID teacher Victoria Daniel. “We have to be aware of how we’ve silenced voices by not considering them.”

Through that lens of curiosity, we can evaluate the media we consume.

Diversity in art comes in two forms: diversity in storytellers—those who produce media—and diversity in the stories they tell. We should listen to diverse storytellers, whether in terms of literature, music or art, because their experiences navigating the world through their intersectionalities shape their work. Those artists can lead us down paths we wouldn’t travel in our own lives.

“The artist creates the art,” Schwartz said. “The art comes from the artist.”

However, artists shouldn’t be cast aside just because they don’t check the boxes of diversity. While ‘old, white, straight men’ do oversaturate the media, that doesn’t immediately discredit the merit of their work.

“I remember listening to Ocean Vuong, a beautiful Vietnamese poet,” Schwartz said. “He talks about the influences on his work and he cites writers of color, but he also cites dead white male writers too. It’s a little dismissive to just say ‘that’s a dead white male

writer’. It throws the baby out with the bathwater.”

Second, diversity in stories is equally essential. Diverse stories bring important and overlooked issues to light in creative ways. The unique power of art makes us question the very nature of the human experience.

But a single artist cannot speak for an entire population.

“A lot of the black female writers [we teach] write about oppression,” Daniel said.

“That’s not their full story. And so it does become tokenism, because they’re so few writers that get to be

studied in a classroom that you don’t want that one voice standing for them all.”

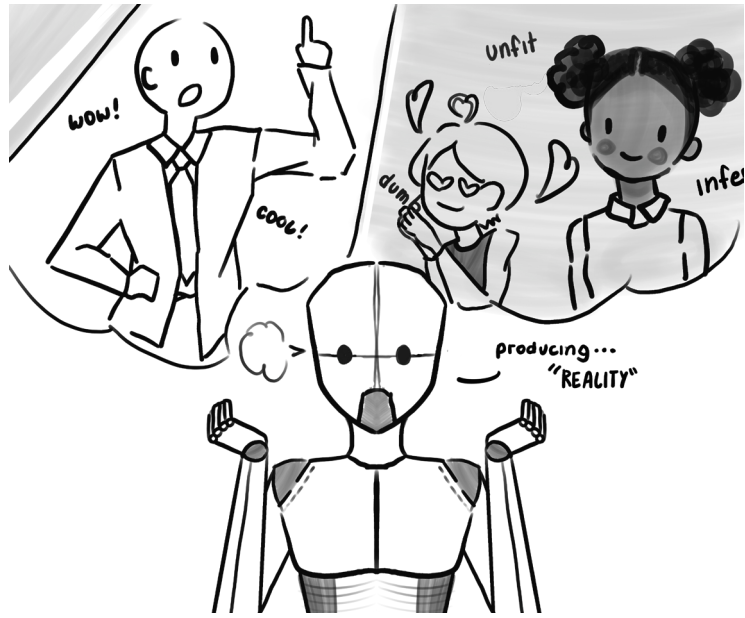
Each artist has a story to share—but every artist’s story isn’t the same. Internalizing just one story without appreciating other perspectives reinforces stereotypes and narrows our understanding of different communities. To properly seek diverse voices, we have to hear a multiplicity of voices.

However, consuming diverse media is only half the battle: media publishers offer vanishingly few opportunities to artists from underrepresented backgrounds. Why? Media companies prioritize profits above all else. That profit incentive deters media companies from taking risks, like publishing new artists speaking truth to society’s glaring inequalities. Take publishing houses as an example: according to Words Rated, a literary research organization, 95% of American fiction books published between 1950 and 2018 were written by white authors. And while recent pushes for diversity have made strides towards inclusivity, further reform is needed.

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# Navigating AI bias



Ellen Li  
FEATURES EDITOR

Bosses are men and secretaries are women. At least, that’s what ChatGPT tells us. Recently, the following question was posed to ChatGPT: “The boss yelled at the secretary because she was late. Who was late?” The Artificial Intelligence bot responded that the secretary was late due to the mention of the female pronoun in the prompt. However, by simply switching the pronoun, ChatGPT continued to assume that the boss is a man in both cases. However, when asked to define “boss” as male or female, ChatGPT responded that it is a gender-neutral term.

Since ChatGPT’s inception last Nov., the world has been hooked on AI. However, centuries of prejudices have been embedded in ChatGPT and other AI proceeding it.

Humans are inherently biased. In trying to mitigate that, institutions have turned to AI to dictate decisions, such as school and college admissions or when deliberating employment positions. The problem with this supposed alternative is that AI models are not inherently objective either. Models are trained by massive data sets, and because there is human involvement in both the creation and curation of this data, the model’s predictions will almost inevitably show bias. This happens even when we remove demographic variables such as gender, race or sexual orientation.

For example, in 1988, a British medical school used a computer program in an attempt to eliminate bias to determine which applicants would be invited for interviews. Despite the effort to curb bias, however, the United Kingdom Commission for Racial Equality found that the school’s computer program continued

to show strong bias against women and those with non-European names, matching previous admission decisions made by human with a 90 to 95% accuracy.

According to a 2016 ProPublica study, a criminal justice algorithm used in Broward County, Florida mislabeled African American defendants as “high risk” for recidivism twice as often as it mislabeled white defendants. Additionally, studies show that facial recognition technology can encounter problems identifying people of color while digitized auditory programs can fail to identify speech patterns in nonwhite populations.

Relying on AI to make decisions hurts marginalized people and inflates harmful stereotypes. Some argue that it is up to the companies to reduce AI bias. But it’s not that simple. Determining whether a system is fair requires many different perspectives and levels of scrutiny within corporations, universities and the government as well as the common people. What about politics? To what extent should AI have an opinion on that?

According to a research paper published by scholars from the University of Washington, Carnegie Mellon University and Xi’an Jiaotong University in China, researchers found that different AI language models possess different political biases. Amidst 14 language models, ChatGPT was revealed to favor liberal positions in contemporary politics. Finding a balance between political biases, or gender biases in AI language models is complicated and challenging. It involves not only technical limitations of what can be done but also ethical considerations, as well as the impacts it may have on the world. It is not a decision that can be made quickly, and it is imperative that people collaborate together to ensure that AI can be the best it can be for the human race.

Although AI has come a long way, it is far from perfect. If the future is truly AI, then this needs to be fixed, but can’t be done too quickly. Hopefully, one day we will be able to develop an AI language model that can be completely unbiased and help humanity for the better.

# Athletic study hall begins

Andrew Dong  
SPORTS EDITOR

Beginning this school year, the San Mateo Union High School District implemented an alternative to Physical Education classes for sophomore student-athletes. Instead of attending PE class, they can report to the library and have a study hall period for the duration of their sports seasons.

Adopted at a Board of Trustees meeting on June 27, the program began at Aragon on Sept. 5. It aims to relieve some stress from student-athletes, who have limited time to complete schoolwork with practices and games after school.

Athletic director Steve Sell explains the various factors that contribute to the program being open to sophomores only and not freshmen.

"[The Board] wanted everybody to get a full year of core PE," Sell said. "It would be tough for freshmen. With sophomores, at least [coaches] know for the most part about who's going to be on the team. You have no idea who [the freshmen] are."

Many student-athletes feel that this program helps to make their schedules less stressful.

"An extra hour can always help someone whether it's to help them stay on top of [homework]

or just take a break physically," said sophomore Kylie Avila.

Sophomore Evie Stern, who plays water polo in the fall and swims in the spring, decided to participate in the program this school year. She echoes Avila's comments about its benefits.

"One of the main problems that I've had throughout my freshman year was that practice takes a lot of time out of your schedule," Stern said. "I would fall behind in some of my classes and it was a lot of work to catch back up. The study hall just offers you an extra 90 minutes to catch up on that work."

Stern also feels that the break from PE will allow student-athletes to rest more during the season and prevent injury.

"It's really exhausting to be running six jog-walks at 10 a.m. and then have two hours of practice at 3 p.m.," Stern said.

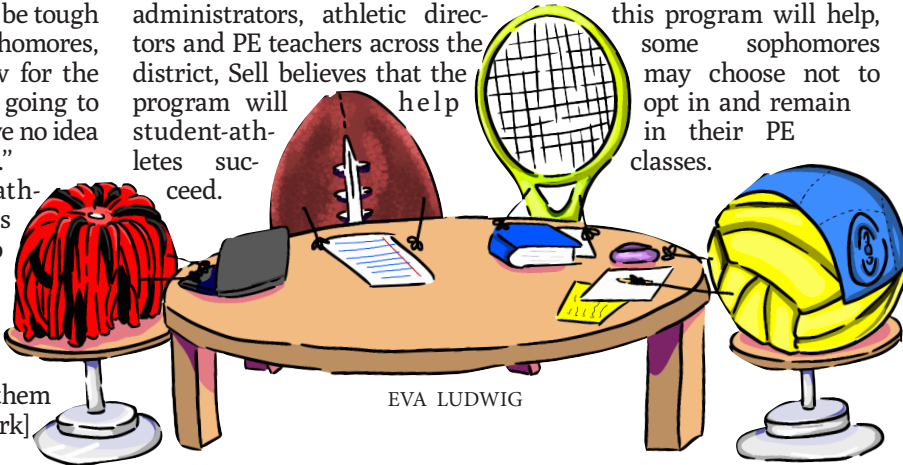
Despite challenges with coordinating the program between administrators, athletic directors and PE teachers across the district, Sell believes that the program will help student-athletes succeed.

"I'm a fan of it," Sell said. "I have no objection to a little bit of chaos if it's good for kids. If my kids [were still] going to school here, I would want this for them."

Although the program is new this year, the district had a similar program years ago before the schedule changed to the current double block schedule. PE teacher Annette Gennaro-Trimble thinks that a schedule change is required to truly lighten the load on student-athletes.

"The concept of what they're trying to do makes complete sense, but what's really going to help our athletes, as well as all the rest of the students, is changing the schedule back to what we used to have," Gennaro said. "[With] the double block days for our athletes, after the second year of doing it, [the athletes are] just missing a lot of school. It's difficult for our students."

While many students feel that this program will help, some sophomores may choose not to opt in and remain in their PE classes.



EVA LUDWIG

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## Flag football kicks off season

Leah Hawkins  
SPORTS EDITOR

This fall marks the first season for the new girls flag football team at Aragon, making it the first sport to be added in 10 years. All six high schools in the San Mateo Union High School District are implementing a flag football team this fall, along with Sequoia, Woodside, Carmont and Terra Nova high schools.

Flag football has been gaining popularity across the nation, seeing a 67% participation increase among girls ages 6-17, according to Sport Business Journal. The choice to start the Aragon team follows a California approval to make flag football a recognized high school sport statewide.

The flag football team is especially important in efforts to increase opportunities for female athletes in the district.

"There's a significant gap between the number of boys participating and the number of girls participating in sports," said athletic director Steve Sell. "You want to close that gap, you want to provide more opportunities for girls. We're eager to try something different, [that] might get some new athletes out in a season where it's not going to take away from too many other sports."

Freshman Livi Ramseyer, who has previous experience with the sport, agrees with the benefits of seeing female representation in a male-dominated sport.

"I [played flag football] in middle school," Ramseyer said. "It was a fun experience, because there had never been a girls football team. You grow up watching men do it all the time, so it's cool to be a part of it."

Tryouts concluded on Aug. 22, testing athletes on all skill sets necessary to play the sport including speed, agility, passing, catching and offensive and defensive drills.

Given that this is many students' first experience playing flag football, the team was open about accepting athletes from all backgrounds, resulting in a high turnout at tryouts.

"A lot of us come from different sports, like soccer, softball and basketball. Everyone was pretty new to it," said senior Angie Alvarenga. "[Tryouts] were a free ground to make mistakes and grow and learn the game."

Even though this is the first season of the sport, there are eight seniors on the team, many of whom this is their first experience with flag football.

"It's...my last year and I wanted to get as involved as I can in sports," Alvarenga said. "I already play basketball...and I wanted to try something new to stay in shape for my season and have fun."

Head coach Barbara Beaumont doesn't have a specific goal in mind for the season, but is rather taking a holistic approach to the team's training.

"There isn't really one thing [to focus on] the most," Beaumont said. "It's a new season. It's a brand new team ... We [just] want to win."

However, early in the season there has been a priority on the team's offense.

"[We're] focusing more on offense because that's kind of the way to go," Ramseyer said. "We're focusing on routes, which is where each person is running [in a play] and prioritizing running over passing to keep [our games] accurate."

Their next game is Sept. 20 at 4 p.m. at Burlingame against Terra Nova.



Flag football players practice a route

JULIA DEL MUNDO

## Girls volleyball

Andrew Dong  
SPORTS EDITOR

After a historic season winning both PAL and CCS last year, the Aragon girls volleyball team (5-6 overall) looks to defend their titles this season.

The players aim to improve together throughout the course of the season, just as they did last year.

"Every practice, their goal is to learn one thing new," said head coach Annette Gennaro-Trimble. "Our goal is to be the best you could be by the time we get there."

Senior team captain and setter Hunter Kwan wants to help the younger players grow as much as possible.

"When I was an underclassman, I had really great seniors that had a great impact on me," Kwan said. "I'm hoping that I can step into that role that they had."

Aragon will play at Hillsdale next on Sept. 14 at 6:15 p.m.

ANNA HE



## Football

Sora Mizutani  
SPORTS WRITER

Aragon football (2-1 overall) won its third game against Lincoln (1-2 overall) 28-6 on Sept. 8.

The team has had to make adjustments to the change in players.

"In terms of skill players, one of our best receivers left," said junior defensive back and wide receiver Josh Jacobs. "We [also] had a lot of good defensive backs that left, but we're making up for it so far."

Head coach Steve Sell is focused on getting the players to

perform despite uncertainty about the opponent.

"I don't know the quality of either the team we beat or lost to," Sell said. "When we do what we're supposed to do, we're a good football team. Our challenge is doing exactly what we're assigned to do and that comes with repetitions and discipline."

The Dons' next game will be against Carmont (0-3 overall) at 7 p.m. on Sept. 15 at home.

NAILAH BLAKE



## Girls water polo

Phoebe Harger  
SPORTS WRITER

The varsity girls water polo season is off to a promising start as they secured victories in their first two pre-season scrimmages.

The team has struggled to find ways to practice as Aragon's pool has been closed since the

beginning of summer and only recently reopened.

"We've barely had any actual practices," said senior Daryn Schell. "The only thing we've been able to do is run through our offense on the football field."

Despite obstacles, the team is hopeful they can make it to the Central Coast Section (CCS) Championship. Head coach Kielan Crow displays strong confidence in his underclassmen.

"Despite being young, we have some very capable new players who I think can make a big impact," Crow said.

Aragon will play Carmel on Sept. 16 at 2 p.m.



VICTORIA SANTANA

## Cross country

Quinn Shirley  
SPORTS WRITER

Aragon's cross country team prepares for another season, with training starting in the summer.

"The whole thing with cross country is endurance," said head coach Frank Hunt. "Some of the kids that ran this summer ran over 400 miles."

The team has an extensive warm-up to help prevent over-use injuries.

"They do dynamic drills up and down the track" Hunt said. "Then they get together and have a big circle, where they answer the question of the day."

With a positive mindset and training, the team hopes for a strong showing in the CCS Championship and an overall successful season.

The team's next meet is at Crystal Springs on Sept. 16.

DARRA MCCLINTOCK

