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Friday | November 17, 2023 | Volume 64, Issue 3

The ARAGON OUTLOOK

900 Alameda de las Pulgas, San Mateo, CA 94402

Aragon High School

Hooked: students and marijuana

Hannah Li and Naomi Kotani
 FEATURES AND NEWS WRITER

*Names have been changed to protect source privacy.

After a year of staring at faceless names

and tiny digital whiteboards on Zoom, now-senior *Ava began using marijuana as a sophomore to cope with the stress of transitioning back to in-person learning. Since then, she has used marijuana, commonly referred to as weed, almost every day — sometimes several times per day.

“My mental health was really bad, so I used it as a way to distract myself from what was happening,”

Ava said. “I want it before I go to bed, when I’m bored out of my mind or I can’t get myself to start doing my homework. Sometimes I just take a hit to calm down and not worry as much.”

Ava is just one of many students who use marijuana. According to the 2021 National Survey on

Drug Use and Health, 1.5 million people aged 12 to 17 used marijuana that year, ranking as the third most commonly used substance among those aged 12 and older.

PROCESS

Benjamin Eiland, instructor of the addiction studies program at the College of San Mateo and director of three adolescent treatment programs, has

noted marijuana’s increasing prevalence among teens and young adults, with many beginning usage

during high school.

According to Eiland, while some may only be experimenting with marijuana,

those who become regularly dependent on it can face devastating, possibly irreversible consequences.

“You can be a cucumber [and] become a pickle,” Eiland said. “But once you’re a pickle, you can never become a cucumber again. Once a person has an addiction problem, there isn’t

any way that the person is going to be able to go back and use substances without consequences. Marijuana is a [motivation-reducing] drug, so [in student users], you start seeing declines in their grades, and a loss of interest in things that were important to them. They start changing peer groups, now finding a group that is more aligned with substances.”

The long-term psychological effects of marijuana dependencies can also often lead to serious consequences for adolescents.

“If [marijuana usage] starts during a period of time when the brain is very vulnerable to learning ways of coping, then neural pathways form,” said Mary Fullerton, College of San Mateo addiction studies instructor. “[They associate marijuana with] ‘this is how I cope with stress, this is how I cope with disappointment, this is how I cope with sadness.’ That pathway gets set early in life and then it’s harder to disentangle.”

USAGE

Senior *Elsa started using marijuana when she was in eighth grade, and has since noticed definite effects on her behavior and personality.

“I used to convince myself that [marijuana] was just helping me focus, helping me sleep, helping me eat, helping me do all this stuff,” Elsa said. “I was in my own world most of the time. You would say something to me and I’d disassociate from

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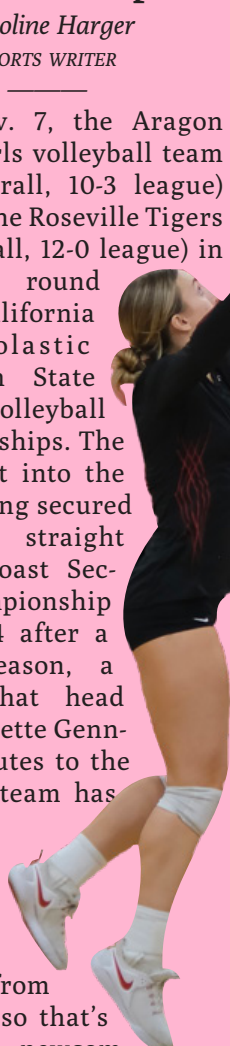
ALLYSON CHAN

CIF: Aragon girls volleyball spikes their way to a win

Caroline Harger
 SPORTS WRITER

On Nov. 7, the Aragon varsity girls volleyball team (24-13 overall, 10-3 league) defeated the Roseville Tigers (33-6 overall, 12-0 league) in the first round of the California Interscholastic Federation State Girls Volleyball Championships. The Dons went into the game having secured a second straight Central Coast Section championship on Nov. 4 after a 24-win season, a success that head coach Annette Gennaro attributes to the work the team has put in.

“We only had five returning players from last year, so that’s a lot of newcom-



ers coming up,” Gennaro said. “We spend a lot of time working and practicing to get everyone up to the speed of the game.”

This preseason and mid season work, however, is not the only thing that has contributed to the Dons’ success. The team’s chemistry, both on and off the court, plays a role in their winning record this season.

“We tend to have a lot of fun on the court,” said senior Kathleen Suayan. “Playing loose on the court and trusting each other is very crucial to winning those close points.”

Their ongoing chemistry and hard work at practice gave the Dons the edge they needed to defeat the Tigers in just three sets.

Aragon started the game serving, winning the first three points with help from junior Sophie Rubenstein’s

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Israel and Palestine

Darshan Bal
 NEWS WRITER

On the morning of Oct. 7, thousands of rockets were fired by Hamas, a military organization dedicated to replacing Israeli statehood with Palestinian statehood, towards parts of Israel. Armed members of Hamas began to fire on people near the borders of the Gaza Strip, and in many towns in the area. Israel retaliated with a series of deadly airstrikes and dispatching armed troops. According to the United Nations, the ensuing war has caused more than 1,400 deaths in Israel and 5,000 in Gaza as of Nov. 8. The number of Palestinian deaths is disputed with some estimates well over 10,000.

However, the conflict between Israel and Palestine is not recent. The Arab-Israeli War in 1948, which came as

the result of high tensions in the region, sparked a series of conflicts that include the Six-Day War, Yom Kippur War, the two Intifadas and the Gaza War. More recently, there have been several military conflicts between 2006 and the current war.



ZELDA REIF

This conflict had been deadly even before the recent events, with the United Nations reporting over 6,600 deaths from both sides from Feb. 1, 2008, to Aug. 31, 2023. Hundreds more continue to die as fighting con-

tinues, with reports of at least 100 killed at a hospital in Gaza City on Oct. 17. Many remain trapped in the Gaza Strip as airstrikes hit the region, worrying students who have loved ones living in the area.

“I talk to my best friend who lives [in Israel], and her life is just unimaginable to me,” said senior Galit Moff. “Just four years ago, we had very similar lives, and now I can’t even fathom what she’s living [through]. She has to run to a bomb shelter every night as missiles fall, and she can’t go to school or hang out with friends.”

Others like junior El-lie Rose have family in the area who have struggled to leave.

“My grandparents were visiting [Israel],” Rose said. “Instead of getting to hang out with their friends and see their family, they were stuck in bomb shelters and scared for their lives, unable to get a flight home.”

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Marijuana use

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“our whole conversation. I’d walk away and I wouldn’t remember it, or I wouldn’t care.”

Marijuana dependencies have led many students to feel dysfunctional without it, like senior *Alice.

“I feel like I’ve been [using marijuana] for so long that [sometimes] when I’m trying to do homework, I can’t focus without it,” Alice said. “So if I’m really trying to get a lot of homework done, it helps, especially with calming down stress levels.”

Some students have also decided to take breaks, in which they stop their marijuana usage for a short amount of time in order to lower their tolerance.

“I wanted to go on a [tolerance] break because I was doing it too much,” Ava said. “It almost felt like when I was smoking I wasn’t getting high because my tolerance was [so] high.”

Other students, however, feel that they have succeeded in creating a more cautious relationship with marijuana. Junior *Max was introduced to marijuana through his sister last summer, and since then, has been deliberate about his usage.

“I would say my relationship [with marijuana] is not one of abuse, and I think I’m safe, even though I accept that it’s not safe to do it in and of itself,” Max said. “[My sister] knew what she was doing, so I felt a lot safer because I started with her. I use weed every two to three weeks, and I plan beforehand every time. I’ve stayed at a friend’s house to make sure that I am not doing anything stupid. [Or, I’ll] get myself home through long walks to ‘walk it off’, which is definitely effective for calming down after.”

CULTURE

Often, students try using marijuana out of curiosity and its presence among their peer groups.

“I knew one of my friends [used marijuana] and we were hanging out,” Alice said. “They asked [if I wanted] to try it and [I was curious]. That’s when I started.”

The prevalence of substance use amongst peers can affect a student’s choice to continue using marijuana.

“I can see myself using [marijuana in the future],” Elsa said. “Everyone around me uses it. It’s fun to do with friends on occasion, to relax. I’m just around it all the time. It doesn’t really have a negative stigma in my life, so I don’t see why I would stop.”

Similarly, growing up around people who use marijuana can impact one’s usage.

“My dad actually is a substance abuser,” Max said. “My sister and I found his stash [of] weed, shrooms and molly. [Using marijuana] is almost a way of me being able to [tolerate his substance abuse]. It makes me feel less bad that I’m doing it if he is.”

EFFECTS

Students described marijuana’s effect as a sense of eu-

phoria or relaxation, usually accompanied by heightened sensory perception.

“Around 20 minutes after you take it, you feel everything in your body,” said junior *Tom. “[When] you smile, your cheeks will start hurting, and when you talk a lot, your jaw starts hurting, but it feels good when you’re doing it. When you touch somebody you feel like you can actually feel it, [even though] it’s the same as normal touching. A lot of times when I’m with friends, I’ll just start smiling for no reason, and everything becomes funnier, and everything feels more bright.”

For some students, marijuana can have a calming effect.

“Weed has the power to make me feel like nothing’s going wrong in life,” Max said. “I’ve just accepted it and then just tried to make me as happy as possible as I can in this situation, knowing it’s not going to change.”

On the other end of the spectrum, marijuana can also cause emotions such as anxiety and paranoia to feel more intense.

“When you get anxiety, and you’re high, [that feeling] becomes way worse,” Tom said. “When your heart sinks, it physically hurts, and you start thinking about all the outcomes that you wouldn’t be thinking of when you’re sober. Some things sound so stupid, but they sound realistic when you’re high. [You might think] a meteorite is going to come hit you. That’s obviously not going to happen, but you might think of that when you’re high.”

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According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, taking large doses of marijuana can also be correlated with short-term effects of acute psychosis, including hallucinations and delusions. Additionally, marijuana dependency, especially among those with other risk factors, such as family history or genetics, may also be associated with future long-term psychotic disorders, such as schizophrenia.

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ARAGONOUTLOOK.ORG

Israel and Palestine

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

“They recently got back, which I’m very grateful for, but it was really scary not knowing if they’d be able to come back.”

Unfortunately, many remain stuck amidst the conflict.

“My family members are in Gaza, and they’re being bombed a lot,” said sophomore Andrew Akkawi. “They have no power or water supply, because [Israel has] so much power over the area that they can just control all the water.”

Worried for their family, students seek and rely on support from peers to get through the tumultuous situation.

“I’ve definitely appreciated the allyship and the few friends, students and teachers who have checked in, expressed concern and asked questions,” Moff said. “It really makes me feel more at home and makes me feel heard when people who aren’t Jewish are asking questions, trying to understand how I feel and what the situation is like.”

However, the level of support received varies.

“I don’t think I’m really being supported,” Akkawi said. “A few of my friends understand, but at school people just make fun of [the war] or get in arguments, and I have to explain a bunch of stuff to them.”

Especially with news of the war taking social media by storm, many feel pressured to take a side.

“You can’t agree with everything a government does,” Rose said. “But I do believe Is-

rael has a right to defend itself. There [are] definitely things I wouldn’t do or don’t agree with, but in general, I think [Israel is] trying to save people.”

As a Palestinian, Akkawi sides with his homeland.

“I don’t respect a lot of the stuff [Israel] does,” Akkawi said. “I have a few Jewish friends, but as a country itself, I don’t respect it: they took our culture, they took our food, they took our cities, they took everything from us.”

Junior Fouad Krayem stresses the importance of differentiating Hamas and Palestine.

“[Hamas and Palestine] are definitely two separate things,” Krayem said. “And you can even see that in the separation between the two Palestinian territories. The West Bank and Gaza are run by two completely different people.”

Some have adopted an apolitical stance, instead prioritizing the innocent citizens endangered in the crossfire.

“I don’t support anyone’s side,” said junior Fatima Khalil. “I support the innocent civilians, and anyone that’s in harm’s way. I don’t support Hamas and I don’t condone anything the Israel Defense Forces do.”

Aragon administration, as well as the San Mateo Union High School district, has also chosen to stay neutral, condemning the violence without commenting on the actions of any specific parties.

“I understand [the school’s decision], but I think keeping a neutral stance on genocide is a questionable take,” Krayem said. “I try to talk to my teachers about it. And they kind of just point the conversation in different directions.”

After releasing a statement from the district about the conflict, Superintendent Randall Booker issued a correction following backlash for not specifically calling out the attacks on Israel.

With the world’s increasing reliance on social media, platforms like Instagram have become a source of information for many on the war, but it also remains a platform for discrimination.

“On social media, I see a lot of anti-semitic things and it’s hard to feel safe,” Rose said. “I’ve posted on Instagram in support of civilians that have died and in support of Israel, and I got a reply that was pretty direct and not very kind.”


Social media also allows people to see the conflict firsthand through live footage and near immediate updates.

“I’d wake up in the morning and the first thing on my feed was a building getting completely demolished, or a kid getting his head blown off,” Krayem said. “It just makes you sick to your stomach. And knowing that those are your people. It really does make you sick.”

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AP Environmental Science takes learning to the cemetery

Claire Dong
NEWS WRITER

On Oct. 31, Advanced Placement Environmental Science classes went on their first field trip of the year to St. John's Cemetery in San Mateo to study survivorship curves firsthand.

"Typically we've done it with cemetery data that's online," said APES teacher Greg Moretti. "This is the first year that we're going to try it in a real cemetery."

The goal of the trip was to collect data to calculate birth and death rates from before and after 1900 to graph survivorship curves. Students would then compare these rates and predict the causes of death.

"We're going to talk about what kind of socioeconomic factors might have affected the difference in survivorship between people born before 1900 and of the people born after," Moretti said. "For example, we might see the impact the discovery of antibiotics had on survivorship. [Like if] people weren't dying from infections because they could be treated with antibiotics, we might see a higher percentage of survivorship."

Each class period took a 10-minute walk to the cemetery and spent approximately

an hour recording the information they needed for their experiment from the graves to make their predictions.

"Our teacher [split us into] groups of two and he gave us each a clipboard with two different tables—pre-1900, or post-1900—to fill out," said senior and APES student Laura Lipton. "[We also recorded] the sex of the person, the year they were born, the year they died and how old they were when they died."

After coming back to class and analyzing the data, the students noticed some unusual percentages from the data they had gathered.

"Our data wasn't what we would normally expect," said junior and APES student Dominic Kudzia. "You normally expect people born before 1900 to die earlier in life because of all the different factors, but it was the exact opposite. We had a lot of people who were born after 1900 dying a lot earlier."

Students then took their analysis to the next level: trying to predict the causes of the unusual data.

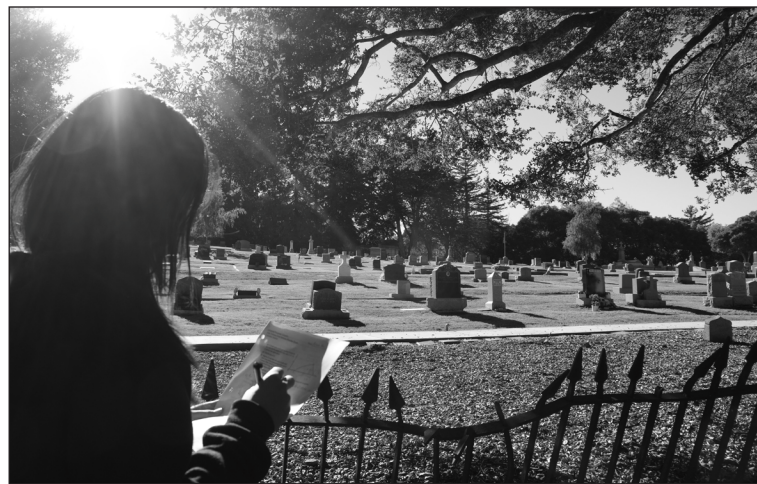
"[The trip] helped us learn about the history of San Mateo," said junior and APES student Adrienne Nguyen. "We realized it was because the origins of San Mateo come from a lot of rich people. So

people had all those resources in the 1800s that [most] people wouldn't usually have [then]. It made the survivorship curves pretty similar to how they are right now."

Additionally, the trip being held on Halloween was a strategic choice.

"Our third unit, which covers populations, happens right around Halloween every year," Moretti said. "And so that's why I wanted to coordinate the field trip on Halloween day because the timing works out perfectly."

Lipton felt that the timing of the field trip only added to the experience, adding to the Halloween mood.



Students record data at St. John's Cemetery.

JACK HE

"It was 100% a 10 out of 10 experience," Lipton said. "[The graves] make it more spooky."

Moretti reflects on the field trip and the students' response to their experience with a more interactive lab.

"I'm sure we'll be doing it again next year," Moretti said. "It's a lot better than sitting in

a classroom and doing the internet version of this lab. The students had a lot of fun going up there, we got a little exercise, we got to walk around a beautiful cemetery and we got to collect data."

The field trip to St. John's Cemetery is likely to become a tradition for APES classes.



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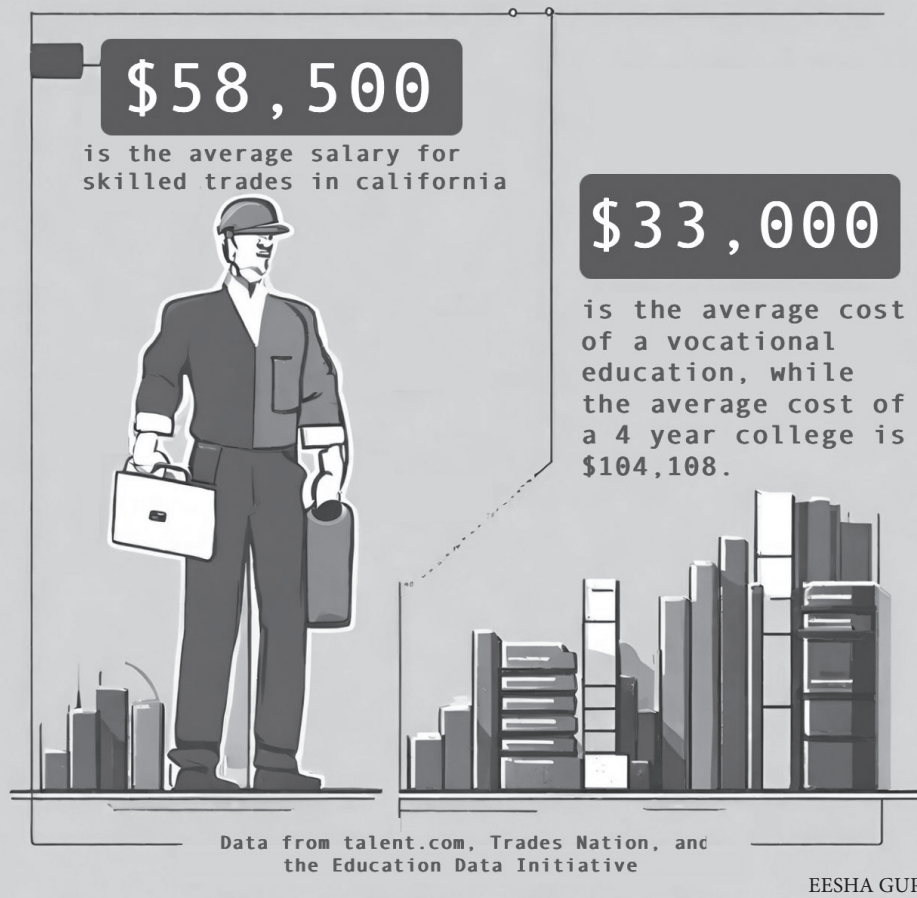
Nestor Sandoval (10)

“Trade school is a really good [way to save] money. You show up to school, get paid and just learn. It’s better than college in my opinion, because you have to pay [for college] and can go into debt. I’m interested in being an engineer, and you could take the path [of] trade school and still become an engineer in life. I’ve been encouraged by my family [to pursue trades] and told that trade school is a good option. My family friend used to be in trades, who told me all the benefits, ups and downs and it got me hooked. I’m just really prepared for trades. Currently, I’m just relaxing but during my junior year [and] through senior year, I’ll definitely start looking into it more.”



Omar Gomez (10)

“[To prepare for trade school], my counselors have been telling me a lot about classes like 3D printing. [I wish I could take] an architectural class talking more about blueprints, how to make them and how to read them. [I would like to] focus more on how to make a business: not how to work for someone, but how to work for yourself. I go to meetings [to learn about] business, [and] it develops how I organize everything — there’s a book that we have with everything organized and categorized in alphabetical order, with everything we’re trading and everything.”



Making trades more visible on campus

This editorial represents the unanimous opinion of all 15 Outlook editors.

Approximately 40% of Aragon students do not go to four-year colleges, according to academic counselor Lea Sanguinetti, instead choosing paths such as community college or going straight into the workforce. One alternate option is growing more popular — trades. According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, a growing number of people are enrolling in trade school, with construction enrollment increasing by 19.3% and culinary by 12.7% in 2021-2022. Despite the significant number of students who pursue trades, Aragon’s resources are disproportionately focused on those pursuing four-year colleges. The editors of the Aragon Outlook believe that Aragon should better support students entering trades.

Currently, Aragon only offers three Career and Technological Education classes focused on trades: Foods and Nutrition, Culinary Arts and Engineering Technology. While these CTEs help prepare students for later careers in those fields — students in Foods and Nutrition have the opportunity to earn their Food Handlers Certificate, and those in Engineering Technology can learn welding and metalwork — Aragon should offer additional courses to support a wider variety of career paths. For instance, Mills High School, also in the San Mateo Union High School District, currently offers a class in woodworking to teach students carpentry, cabinetry and other construction skills.

Infrastructure, in terms of physical workshops, does play a key role. In the past, Aragon had an auto shop, electronics shop and architectural drafting studio, according to chemistry and physics teacher Kevin Doyle, which were abandoned when then California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger cut funding for trades in 2003. However, schools in similar situations have successfully saved their programs. When the woodshop at Sequoia High School was condemned in 2006, the school built a new building and purchased new, industry-standard equipment and launched classes in collaboration with the county Regional Occupation Program.

While constructing a new building at Aragon would be ideal, the cost of doing so and lack of space likely render it unfeasible. Instead, The Outlook suggests dual-purposing existing spaces: for example, using the Technical Theater workshop to also teach woodworking classes. Other CTEs supporting career paths like hairdressers, estheticians, surgical technologists, medical assistants and pharmacy technicians would not need workshop-style spaces, further reducing costs.

To further skirt facility and funding issues, Aragon should also offer more trade-focused dual enrollment courses with the College of San Mateo, as no existing courses are about trade paths. For instance, both Mills and San Mateo high schools currently offer courses on Hospitality and Tourism Management in partnership with Skyline College, in which students can get their ServSafe certification. Aragon should work with CSM to give stu-

dents opportunities working in fields like cosmetology, as they already have the facilities.

At the same time, Aragon should reform existing CTE courses to teach real world skills. Some courses already have students learn to create résumés, LinkedIn pages and cover letters, but this should become a baseline requirement for all classes to best provide students with real-life skills and prepare them for success in the workforce.

Additionally, students need to be more aware of existing resources at Aragon. While the counseling staff presents information about career paths, they should be made more frequently to all grades and focus more on trades. Career and CTE Coordinator Queenie Hua’s monthly newsletter about job and volunteering opportunities, as well as other informative resources, should also be more widely publicized.

The vast majority of trades-centric resources seem to be made available only to students in Engineering Technology classes. Guest speakers, such as the Trade Introduction Program instructor and program manager, spoke in those classes, and students were able to attend field trips to Local Union 467 Trades/Apprenticeship Training Center in Burlingame and the Tesla manufacturing factory in Fremont. These opportunities should be available to more students, not only those in the Engineering Technology classes.

As more and more students develop an interest in entering the trades, the district and Aragon need to support students, both in terms of additional classes and outside opportunities, in pursuing this pathway.



Noel Padilla (10)

“We need a lot more trade programs [at] school. When my parents were growing up, they used to have automotive classes or woodshops. They were super interesting classes for me and I wish I could take them now, but sadly I can’t because schools got rid of them. Trades are pretty secure jobs. For the most part, you can’t really get replaced by artificial intelligence, and if you’re good at it, you can also get paid very well. Electricians [are] pretty cool because it’s how a majority of things work — lights, TVs and very common household things. For welding, you’re working with metal a lot, and you’re working with a bunch of different things [like] amusement parks, sports stadiums.”



Cassey Yokoo (9)

“Getting [paid] while learning is something that would motivate me to actually learn something new. I’m interested [in] the money and what you can learn about trade school. I’ve never really heard of it before and I didn’t know about it until [recently]. It would be nice if [Aragon] told us more about trades. My dad said more people should learn about it because it’s not really taught anymore.”

TO HEAR MORE STUDENT PERSPECTIVES, VISIT ARAGONOUTLOOK.ORG

Lack of representation for Pacific Islanders

Emma Shen
NEWS WRITER

"I didn't have many other Polynesians in my area growing up, so I wasn't as motivated to push myself," said sophomore and Poly Club president Shana Vick. "I didn't have that sense of community, [or] feel as supported."

Constituting a mere 45 out of 1,757 Aragon students, Pacific Islanders are one of the smallest ethnic groups, which gives rise to potential feelings of alienation among members and often leads to a lack of academic interest.

This manifests itself in state test scores; while Aragon students most commonly place above standards in both English and Math for the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Test, the majority of Pacific Islanders are at or near standards for English and below standards for Math.

However, given their small population, changes in percentages seem even more dramatic since one person accounts for around 2.2% of the entire group.

"The fact that [it hasn't been] fixed implies that underrepresentation is a complex issue," said chemistry and Advancement Via Individual Determination

teacher Max Von Euw. "We're in one of the best funded school districts in the Bay Area, but the statistics clearly [show] there are groups of students who are not being served. When I look at my D and F rates for my chemistry classes and I see particular groups of students that are appearing, it's like, 'what can I do and how do I work with that particular group or those particular students?' It weighs on a lot of our teachers."

There are a variety of theories that try to account for the achievement gap between demographic groups, including mental health.

"In general, feeling underrepresented can create feelings of isolation and affect self esteem," said wellness counselor Jillian Ma. "It doesn't necessarily happen to every person, but it can affect some people's emotional health. Not having a sense of belonging can feel very isolating. [Underrepresentation] is a real issue — but you're not alone in your experience."

As the Pacific Islander population continues to drop, the challenge of finding a sense of belonging only becomes more difficult.

"Community is very big in Polynesian culture," Vick said.

"As more and more of our brothers and sisters leave and graduate, it can impact us as a student body. We'll think, 'well, my brothers and sisters have already left so what's the point in me even trying? Who's here to push me to continue to try and do better?'"

Pacific Islander enrollment rates have dropped to half of what they were in 2017 and graduation rates have decreased from 100% to 83.3%. In 2022, only one graduate of Pacific Islander origins met A-G requirements, a drastic drop from 11 the year prior. There have also been multiple fluctuations in absentee rates since 2018-19, ranging from 23.9% to 10.6% to 41.3%.

However, some still are motivated by family ties.

"Polynesians at Aragon right now are more focused on graduating not only for themselves, but for their parents and families," said freshman Lupeuluiva Manuma. "And it's what our parents really worked for, so we can give back to them."

Some minorities will fail to find their culture taught both at home and in school, which can lead to indifference towards their studies.

"All of our parents are hard-working and most were immigrants still trying to achieve the American dream," said sophomore and Poly Club secretary Iris Hoeft. "Since they're always busy with work, we never get to actually learn about

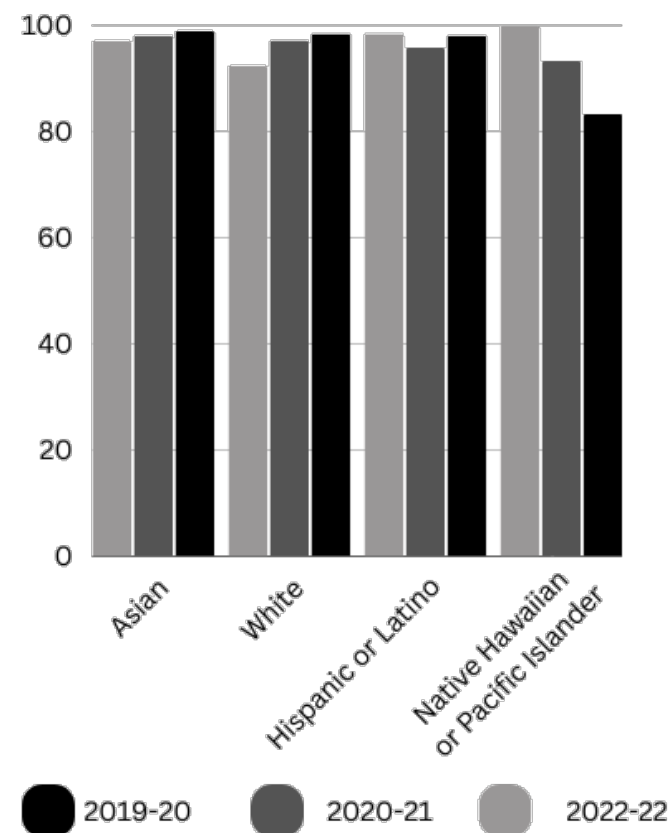
our culture [at home] and when we come to school, we're not really taught here either. When I took ethnic studies last year, we barely learned about my culture, and in some cultural studies classes in eighth grade,

the closest we would ever get would be Native Hawaiian culture. So we'd become uninterested and I think that [could] be evidence for some dropouts."

READ MORE ON ARAGONOUTLOOK.ORG

We barely learned about my culture

Graduation rates by race at Aragon



Data from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges

EESHA GUPTA

TikTokification: the rise of short form content

Helen McCloskey
NEWS WRITER

In the past few years, TikTok has risen to popularity through its short form content lasting typically between 15-30 seconds, tailored to the user's interests through an algorithm.

Freshman Amelia Draffen comments on the benefits of brevity in TikTok videos.

"I can watch a bunch of different types of videos in a shorter amount of time," Draffen said. "I don't have to sit down and watch an hour or two [for a] longer movie, or a 20 minute video."

TikTok became popular in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic, and reached its highest number of downloads per quarter during early 2021, according to the data platform Statista. It was during this time that senior Arianna Koop began using TikTok.

"I started using [TikTok] a lot more [after] COVID because we were at home a lot," Koop said. "I got used to scrolling."

She believes that the isolation and resulting boredom during the lockdown was what drew many people to TikTok.

Since its success, TikTok's short form content has been replicated by other media platforms. In Aug. 2020, Instagram launched Reels, and in September, YouTube launched YouTube

Shorts. The following November, Snapchat released its short video channel, "Spotlight," and Facebook introduced its own "Reels" feature for users in the United States in Sept. 2021.

Adding short form video features boosted the revenue of these companies. In July, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg announced that Meta is projected to make \$10 billion from Instagram and Facebook Reels in 2023. TikTok itself, which earned \$9.9 billion in 2022, is forecasted to haul in \$13.2 billion this year.

However, some students prefer watching long form content.

"[Short form videos] go into a topic without really explaining anything," said sophomore Bradley Lum, who

avoids watching short form content. "They repeat themselves over and over again."

Senior Evan Wang also acknowledges that long form content can be more informative.

"Short form content [can] be a little more enter-

taining," Wang said. "[However], you can learn more with long [form] content."

Short form content is often regarded as more addictive. Draffen often gets pulled into watching too many TikToks.

"[When videos are longer,] it's easier to stop," Draffen said. "But with TikTok you can ... scroll, and keep on watching."

On one occasion, this has impacted her academics.

"I kept on scrolling when I was supposed to do homework," Draffen said. "[So] I didn't get a good grade on an assignment."

Senior Adele Hsu, who prefers long form content, sees how short form content is formatted as dangerous.

"The act of scrolling itself is addictive," Hsu said.

Watching short form content can also reduce viewers' attention spans. Freshman Isaac Cheung, an avid consumer of YouTube Shorts has also noticed this.

"My attention span used to be longer [but] now, I cannot focus on anything," Cheung said.

Hsu discussed experiencing similar side effects.

creators have had to adjust to the shift as well.

"I have seen a lot of videos go from [being] longer [to being] compressed into short videos because [people's attention spans] are [currently] really low," Cheung said.

Koop believes that the spread of short form content have had a negative impact.

"I think it's good to have distractions, but I think there is a point where it gets to be too much," Koop said.

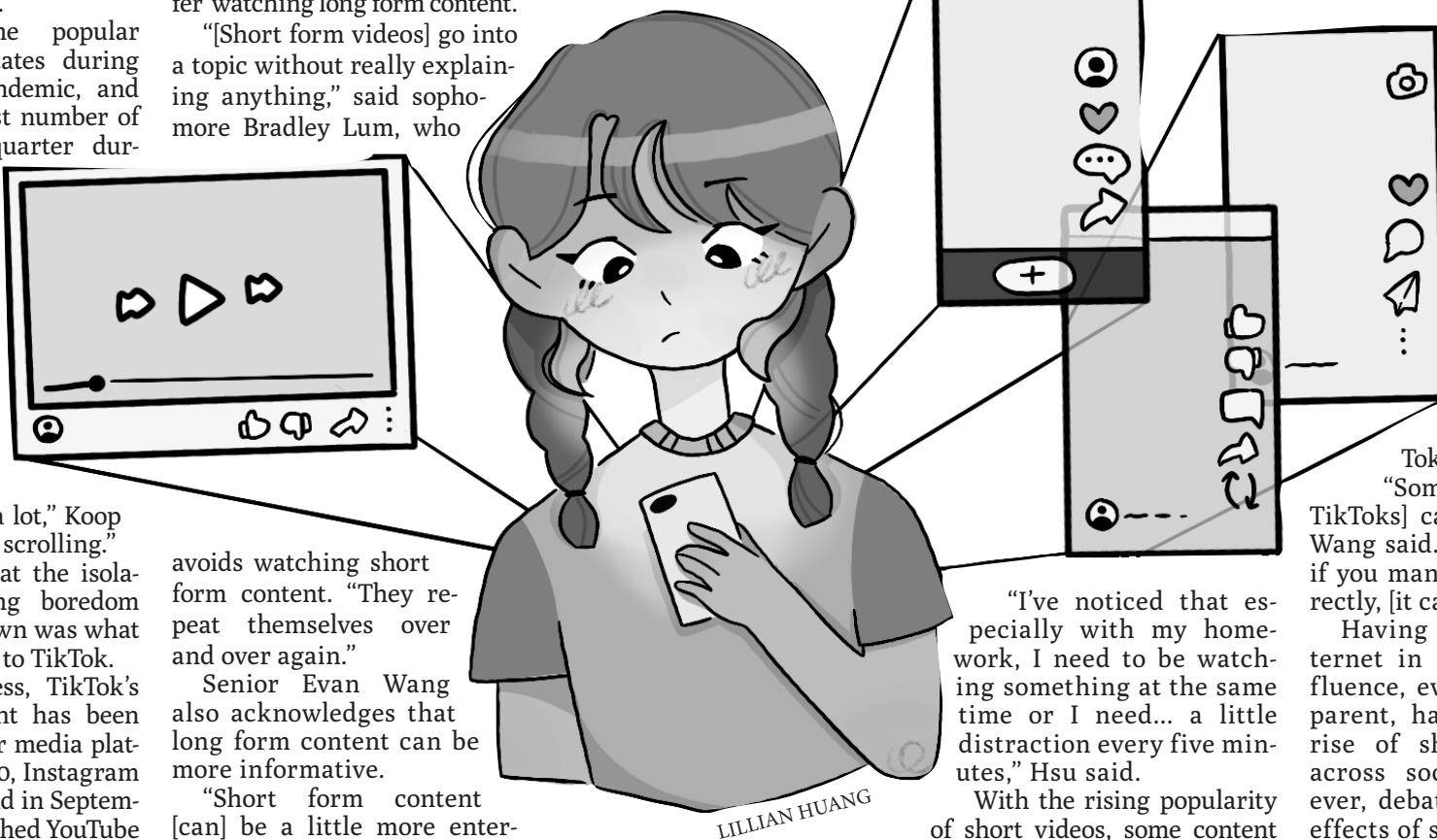
However, some see advantages to consuming short form content.

"I've had a lot of fun learning the dances on TikTok," said junior Hanna Quanbeck. "And with my friends, it's a fun thing to do."

Regardless of the effects, many people still enjoy short form content. Wang, who prefers longer YouTube videos, also watches TikToks to alleviate stress.

"Sometimes [watching TikToks] can be distracting," Wang said. "But I think [that] if you manage your time correctly, [it can be beneficial]."

Having captured the internet in 2018, TikTok's influence, even in 2023, is apparent, having spurred the rise of short-form content across social media. However, debate remains on the effects of such a change.



LILLIAN HUANG

Music, mascots and more: Leadership hosts indoor rally

Chase Rokala
NEWS WRITER

On Nov. 3, Aragon Leadership held the first indoor rally of the year in the North Gym in anticipation of the annual football game against rival Hillsdale High School, which Aragon won 34-7. The rally included a teachers versus students basketball game, performances from the cheer, dance and football teams and spirit competitions.

On rally day, each class showed off their spirit by dressing in their respective class colors. The freshman class showed up in crowds of green, with an inflatable dinosaur as their mascot. The sophomores, who are currently in the lead with the most spirit points, were a mass of pink.

To the left of the sophomores was a sea of juniors in vibrant blue. Finally, the seniors, across the gym, dressed in purple, racking up the most points in the spirit competitions.

During the spirit competitions, each class competed by singing their class anthems and participating in various challenges. The freshman class sang "Firework" by Katy Perry, the sophomores chanted "God's Plan"

by Drake and the juniors belted out "Can't Hold Us" by Macklemore and Ryan Lewis. In the end, the seniors won the sought-after Don Baton with their performance of Nicki Minaj's "Starships." The class then sent a representative to crack open a piñata.

The highlight of the rally was an action-packed teachers versus students basketball game, ending in a close win for the teachers, with a final score of 8-7.

"Just to be clear, the teachers won," said Advanced Placement United States History teacher Will Colglazier, who participated in the game.

Rallies are a longstanding Aragon tradition, meant to boost morale and strengthen the community.

"The purpose of rallies is to spread school spirit and to increase student involvement," said freshman and leadership student Kara Hwang. "Most [rallies] are a part of our school days so that they do not take away from our time after school. This way, it is easier for students to participate and be more involved at Aragon."

Rallies also allow students to relax and get outside of the classroom.

"It's a nice break from school, especially for people who have lots of tests and early college admissions," Hwang said. "Early decision college applications are gen-

erally due on Nov. 1, so having a rally during school helps relieve stress and allows people to enjoy high school."

The friendly competition between classes can encourage people to show spirit and engage with the community as a whole.

"[The rally] definitely surpassed my expectations," freshman Benjamin Torrelio said.

"I feel more competitive." Colglazier offered his thoughts on the rally commission's efforts.

"I think it's just impressive," Colglazier said. "I know the amount of time that goes into planning a lesson, and

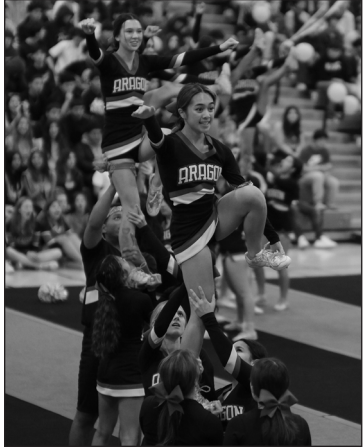
I know that each hour takes five hours of preparation. [Rallies] build a culture and sense of community. I think the leadership has been

doing a great job the last two or three years to make those post-COVID rallies really fun."

To Leadership, organizing rallies go beyond seeing the final event come to life.

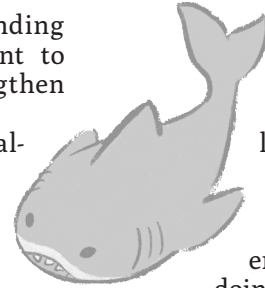
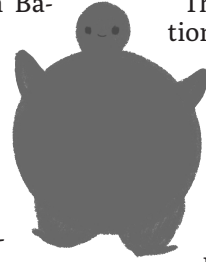
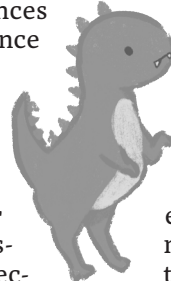
"Rallies are the heart and soul of leadership," said senior and Rally Commission co-head Cody Chen. "It's an 'all hands on deck' experience, and everyone contributes."

Leadership will continue to plan rallies for the rest of the academic year, continuing Aragon's long-withstanding tradition.



Students show spirit

JORELL SAKAMOTO, DARRA MCLINTOCK



ALLISON CHAN

Aragon hosts Expo Night for prospective students

Christine Choi
NEWS WRITER

On Oct. 25, Aragon hosted its annual Expo Night, starting in the theater and later in the North Gym to showcase Aragon's academics, athletics, the arts and more to prospective students.

"Expo Night [presents] the different opportunities that we have at Aragon, including all of our departments, the curriculum that is offered here and our parent organizations," said Alejandra Cheever, Spanish teacher and co-chair of the world language department.

The Expo was hosted in two sessions, with the first session spanning from 6:30-7:15 p.m., and the second from 7:30-8:15 p.m. Both sessions started with a presentation from assistant principal Andrew Hartig, covering important qualities of Aragon, such as the CARES values. Next, attendees watched a video featuring all departments at Aragon and their co-chairs, which showcased classes and other programs like music, art and athletics at Aragon.

In addition, many of Aragon's performing groups were featured in the presentation. With an opening word from John Chen, director of orchestras and choirs, Aragon Cham-

ber Singers performed "White Winter Hymnal" by the a cappella group Pentatonix. The cast of Aragon's winter musical "Grease the Musical" then performed the song "We Go Together" as a small teaser for the upcoming show.

Afterward, potential students and families gathered in the North Gym. Each department had its own table, with the co-chairs present to answer any questions. Some of the most-visited tables included the math and world language departments.

"The question we get asked the most is what language level the student should sign up for coming into ninth as an eighth grader, and so we have different information about the courses we offer," Cheever said. "We have a lot of conversations with the student's parents about their experience with one of our languages and determine what might be the best fit for them."

Many of the tables also provided copies of textbooks to flip through and flyers to take home as further resources for the rising freshmen.

Programs such as Advancement Via Individual Determination were also present at the Expo.

"[We're here] to promote the program and provide more

information to parents who wouldn't normally get this information," said AVID and English teacher Tiffany Chiaro. "Because AVID is not at every middle school, for some, this is their first time hearing about the program."

Parent and booster groups were represented as well, including the Aragon Tri-M Music Honor Society.

"We're trying to promote our music program," said senior and Tri-M president Mia

Weinberger. "We have some students here to talk to parents and incoming students to help them get a feel of what the program is like."

Aragon's academic and music departments weren't the only ones exhibited on Expo Night. Prospective students and families also has the opportunity to interact with other student groups like Aragon Robotics.

"[Expo Night] is one of our ways of being able to meet

new eighth graders or incoming freshmen early, [and] give them an idea of what Aragon Robotics is like," said junior and Aragon Robotics member Anish Dara. "For those who have never heard about it before, this is like a first glimpse to showcase all our different teams, to showcase our robots and get new members interested."

Aragon is planning on hosting Expo Night again next year.



Aragon Robotics presents their robot at Expo Night.

COURTESY OF ETHAN TAWN

The journey after Aragon: successful alumni

Reporting by Allinah Zhan



DIANA BOWEN



ALLYSON CHAN

Linda Bilmes, class of 1976, Harvard professor and economist

Linda Bilmes has had an interest in public policy for as long as she could remember. During high school, Bilmes was the student body president and involved herself in the California Junior State and Amigos de las Americas programs.

After high school, she obtained a bachelor's and master's degree in business administration from Harvard University and its business school. She also earned a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Oxford.

Currently, Bilmes teaches public policy and public finance at Harvard. From 1998 to 2001, Bilmes served as Assistant Secretary and Chief

Financial Officer of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

"I was very fortunate to have the position, but it was a very steep learning curve," Bilmes said. "I went from managing seven people to 850,000 people. Learning how to steer a big ship and how to motivate and connect with a large number of people ... was a big challenge for me."

In this position, she was in charge of the budget of the Department of Commerce. A lot of Bilmes's work revolved around ensuring that Congress sufficiently funded various organizations.

"One of our big accomplishments was that [it was] the only

time during the last 60 years that we actually achieved a balanced budget and paid off some of the national debt," Bilmes said.

Bilmes has also authored many books and papers. Among these are "The Three Trillion Dollar War" and "The People Factor."

"The People Factor,' is about managing the public workforce," Bilmes said. "The government workforce works every day ... [but] they don't have a lot of the perks and benefits of some in the private sector. So ensuring that we hired high-quality people, gave them training, motivated and retained talent, all of those is-

ues were also things I spent a lot of my time working on."

Bilmes has a final message to the students of Aragon.

"Life is long, and there are many different ways to achieve your goals," Bilmes said. "There's no one single way. And so it's important to try your best to make a difference ... It's not always that easy to figure it out, so allow yourself to experiment. It doesn't matter if not everything works out the way you want it to, or the way you think it should, because sometimes that's just helping lead you to the right thing. And for things that you really want, you have to be willing to keep at it."

AJ Cole, class of 2002, compensation operations consultant

AJ Cole attended Auburn University and got a bachelor's degree in business logistics. Then, he earned his master's degree in business administration from the University of Phoenix.

Originally, Cole was going to pursue a management career in a distribution center. However, right after graduating from college and obtaining a motorcycle, Cole moved back

to the Bay Area and faced serious injuries due to a car accident forcing him to switch career plans.

"I [couldn't] really work in a distribution center and dodge forklifts anymore," Cole said. "It's just sort of a random niche field that I was paying attention to some job postings and saw."

Cole was first introduced to the world of business at Aragon. He joined the Future Business Leaders of America Club and learned about fundraising.

Cole's job as a compensation operations consultant requires a lot of research and foresight. He has to set the pay rates for different jobs in organizations and plan out raises and equity. Cole's team spends each day

looking at and sorting through confidential information.

"[It] can be a little bit isolating in that regard," Cole said. "It's highly precision and accuracy-oriented. People know their own pay, so you can't make a mistake there. There's a lot of checking your work."

Cole is currently working as the principal Pacific Compensation Advisors, LLC.



COURTESY OF AJ COLE



COURTESY OF SAM ALAVI-IRVINE

Sam Alavi-Irvine, class of 2013, activist and higher education administrator

From an early age, Sam Alavi-Irvine has been an activist, striving to make the world a better place.

"If you see a problem in the world, do something about it," Alavi-Irvine said. "One thing that I think is really important is young people being able to see injustices and then feeling like they have the tools to do something about it, whether it is advocating for change on a small level or a big level."

During her time at Aragon, Alavi-Irvine became the president of the Gender and Sexuality Alliance Club, a writer and

photographer for The Outlook, a theater crew member and a photographer for Yearbook.

Additionally, Alavi-Irvine and a few other students founded a nonprofit organization called Bay Area Youth Summit, focusing on teaching others how to advocate for themselves, particularly surrounding LGBTQ+ issues. They even brought some famous activists, leaders and actors to campus.

Through BAYS's success, Alavi-Irvine got the opportunity to work with the White House on issues surrounding

safety for LGBTQ+ students.

"Since then, I've got to work with a lot of politicians on every level, passing laws and policies that help make our schools more inclusive and safe," Alavi-Irvine said. "That started at Aragon but has continued even to my job today. I [teach] future healthcare workers how to work with diverse students ... like LGBTQ+ populations [and] populations of color."

After high school, Alavi-Irvine earned her undergraduate degree in sociology and education at the University of

California, Davis. She continued on to get her master's degree in education and policy at Stanford University.

Alavi-Irvine is currently the director of the Center for Community Engagement at Samuel Merritt University, promoting community engagement and health equity. She helps write grants and oversees health equality projects, the maternal health equity initiative, the human trafficking initiative, and the heart health initiative. She also plans to pursue a doctorate program in education.

Gary Tobin, class of 1963, journalist & marketing consultant

Gary Tobin is a 1963 graduate and former sports writer for The Outlook, known at the time as The Aragon Aristocrat. After graduating from Aragon's first graduating class, Tobin majored in history and minored in journalism at San Francisco State University.

During college, Tobin worked at the San Francisco Chronicle initially as a copyboy and later a sports writer — the youngest for a long time.

Tobin was first introduced to journalism in his freshman year at San Mateo High School before transferring to Aragon when it opened in 1961.

"When I was a freshman at San Mateo, we took a course called Freshman Guidance," Tobin said. "In the course, we had to pick an occupation that we wanted to become ultimately. I picked journalism and public relations ... I had no idea when I was 14 years

old that if I said I was going to do something, ... 64 years later ... I [would] still do it."

Now, Tobin runs his own consulting business, TOBIN & Associates. Through his work and life experience, he has garnered a wealth of experience and wisdom, shaping his core beliefs.

"You can't do something you say no to," Tobin said. "[I've] made a career [of], when a client or potential cli-

ent says, 'Can you do that?,' saying 'yes.' Then, if I don't know how to do it, I figure out how to do it quickly. [If] I do know how to do it, I take advantage of it."

Tobin continues to run his business today, serving a wide range of clients with public and media relations, brand and corporate positioning and marketing communications.



COURTESY OF GARY TOBIN

Throughout high school, the District collects information from students and guardians, but the true extent of the data collected and the accessibility of each student's profile can be obscure. This information is passed down from state-level education offices by necessity.

Teachers' access to student data is mostly limited to their current students. Beyond basic information including addresses, phone numbers and current grades, they also possess critical health notices and information in 504s and IEPs.

All of a student's provided medical information is overseen and stored by the health office. The athletic department and coaches use this information and student grades to determine student-athlete eligibility.

The district's annual statement on parent and guardian rights states that the district can collect any data from a student's social media if it relates to school or student safety. Students and their parents or guardians may request the removal or correction of this information.

Unless a parent or guardian opts a student out at the beginning of every school year, the district, by law, provides the U.S. Military students' address and contact information, among other details, for recruiting purposes.

Data Debrief

Directory information, according to the district, is not "harmful or an invasion of privacy if released," and can be disclosed without a guardian's prior written consent unless requested otherwise.

The information includes:

- Names
- Addresses
- Phone Numbers
- Email Addresses
- Dates of Birth
- Participation in activities
- Heights and weights of athletes
- Awards received
- Most recent previous schools
- Dates of attendance

CUMULATIVE FILES

The school administration maintains cumulative files containing records from a student's years in school - from kindergarten to graduation. These files travel with students throughout their compulsory school years, even when they switch schools or transfer districts.

Cumulative files often contain:

- Proofs of residency or registration documents
- Old academic transcripts
- Teacher write-ups
- Standardized test results
- Old school photos

Once in high school, these files usually stop being updated, but remain available as a potential resource for teachers and administrators to better help students. A student can view their cumulative file at any time upon request, and these files are kept for seven years after a student graduates high school, after which they are shredded and discarded.

Confidential-
to what degree?

Data Declassified

Navigating Student Statistics

Data in
action

Circumstance sometimes necessitates privacy to be bumped to a lower priority. Teachers are required by law to fully understand their students' 504 and IEP plans, which contain extensive personal information.

Furthermore, any wellness and administrative interventions require guardians to be subsequently briefed, regardless of the student's wishes.

"The rule I follow is that the fewest people get to hear the smallest amount of information required to maintain safety. The line we try to walk [leans] as much into confidentiality as we can."

Max Bernstein,
Wellness Counselor

"Right now, [for students], it doesn't seem like all that big of a deal. But down the line ... there's lots of [people] combing through [your] paper trail to get as much information as they can on the person."

Cheri Dartnell,
Math Teacher

Caution and awareness emerge as valuable traits in a world where what is and is not confidential becomes increasingly blurred.

"There definitely needs to be safeguards of privacy. There [is] ... a balance that has to be struck, and there has to be transparency. The important thing is disclosure."

Craig Sipple,
Math Teacher

Even though the information that the district collects is used to ensure student safety and success, **some still see data collection, or at least some forms of it, as an invasion of privacy.**

"The data that counselors receive from talking to students [is called] street data. It's not something that you're going to find on paper. For example, [we get] street data of how students feel on this campus. [We also get] street data of our school being really academic ... and there's this hidden 'trying to one-up one another' competition ...

There's always chatter out there and we hear those things- counselors are known as the eyes and ears of the school. **[We know that] this is the word on the street. This is what we've been hearing on campus. This is like students were saying, and that data is super helpful.**

- Lea Sanguinetti, Counselor

How ATV stays classy

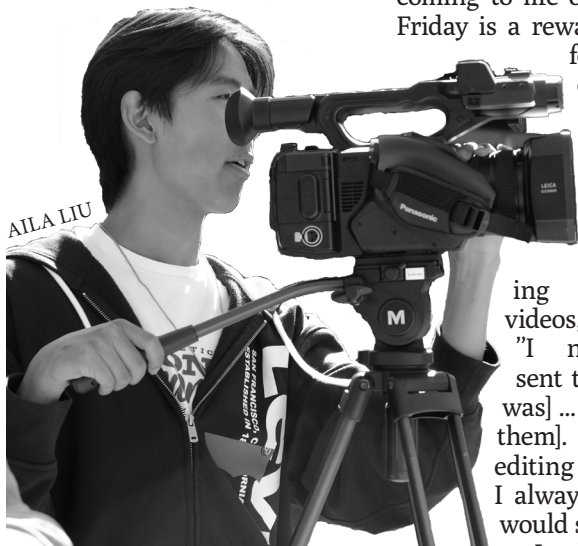
Garret Chiu
FEATURES WRITER

Every Friday, students and teachers watch video announcements during fourth-period. Though most only see short video segments, producing these announcements takes weeks of preparation.

"It takes a lot of effort to even put [30 seconds] of the production [together]," said sophomore and video production student Mason Ellis Layug. "I feel like people don't realize how much effort is put in into even a little clip."

The class is split into groups, with each one producing one video, with three segments and school announcements, every six weeks. The first step is getting ideas and finding people with stories willing to talk on camera.

"[The] initial two weeks are mainly just to brainstorm who we're going to [interview and] what we're going to do," said senior and video production group leader Tara Sardana. "[It] takes time [and] effort to find something interesting to share with the rest of the school."



After preparation, the team begins gathering interviews and producing the video itself.

"[We spend] most of the time [getting] our interviews [and the] clips that we're going to [use]," Layug said. "[Then,] we do the editing, [finalizing] what we already have ... and we film the anchors."

Each part of the process takes effort, and fitting the week's announcements require effective time management.

"[On] week six of ... [a team's] production, they really should be completely done and just tweaking things," said digital photography and video production teacher Nicholas Carrillo.



Video production students conduct an interview.

AILA LIU

"When it comes to producing a show or writing a paper, going longer is always easier than making it concise and fitting into a specific timeline."

While the steps seem simple, the process to create a good segment is much tougher.

"There [are] a lot of things that need to be done, and if we're falling a little bit behind ... we all get together and re-evaluate what we need to do," said senior and video production student Aaron Sanchez.

The team must work together to resolve issues efficiently to ensure the video releases on time.

"If a segment isn't produced right, or if a segment isn't polished, then it doesn't get put in," Carrillo said. "If there [are] multiple segments that aren't done, or if interviews [and B-rolls are] missing, then we have a real problem."

Sanchez credits a respectful team environment for their success.

"When people need help, we don't shame them," Sanchez said. "We embrace it, because we're a group."

Seeing weeks of hard work coming to life on screen every Friday is a rewarding moment for the students, even inspiring some to follow bigger dreams.

"When I was younger, I always used to like making cool YouTube videos," Sanchez said. "I never actually sent them out, but [I was] ... happy [making them]. I already had editing experience, so I always thought ATV would suit me."

In the future, ATV aims to increase students' exposure to broadcast journalism by attending the Student Television Network's annual convention in Long Beach, California.

"I think it'll be eye-opening for students to see other students work on a national level," Carrillo said. "Hopefully we'll up our program's game and get the [students] excited about a career or even a college course that they can take to further their interest in video production."

For now, the video production team will continue producing segments each Friday, informing students about Aragon happenings.



Stage crew members organize props between set changes.

LIAN WANG

"Grease"-ing the wheels: stage crew

Jonathan Wong
FEATURES WRITER

Up until the curtain rises on opening night, stage crew works behind the scenes of the annual musical, tightening the last loose screws and ensuring that set transitions are seamless. This year, stage crew's efforts will culminate from Nov. 16-19, when Aragon Drama will perform "Grease the Musical" as the first production of their 2023-24 season.

As the stage manager, junior Dani Drobot has many responsibilities such as calling cues and telling the backstage crew when to change sets. Supporting Drobot are assistant stage managers senior Kevin Vigil and junior Sarah Klein, who direct the crew.

"It's challenging to make sure you have everything under control," Drobot said. "There's a lot of moving parts and if one thing goes wrong, it can mess everything else up."

Stage crew starts the production process by building sets, planning transitions and creating props and costumes. During tech week, the week-and-a-half before opening night, stage crew runs through the whole show with the cast.

"Whatever act we're doing, or if we're doing the whole show, I [set all the props up] with my assistants," said junior and props master Chloe Levadoux. "It's a lot of trying to make sure that objects are in the right place at the right time ... In the months [leading] up to the show, I figure out what props we need to purchase, where they need to go and who uses them."

During the shows, stage crew is responsible for fixing any issues that arise. Vigil recalls a time when stage crew had to fix an on-stage accident.

"During the first show of 'Mamma Mia,' we were moving a piece and as we moved it, it broke in the middle," Vigil said. "One of the actors had a wedding veil and it dropped so we had to get it and cover that up in the middle of the show, which was stressful, but it ended up working."

Along with the cast and crew, the Aragon Drama Boosters, a group of volunteer parents, play a vital role in the production of the show.

"[We] hone in on the skills and capabilities of the parent volunteers," said Drama Boosters President Amy King. "We look at their interest level and willingness to help, and then [we] identify leaders within the parent organization who can take ownership of various committee roles."

Drama Boosters are also responsible for helping artistic director Shane Smuin and the drama students to match their ideas.

"The hairstyles in 'Grease' are period hairstyles, and we know that 35 cast members need professional hairdos," King said. "[Smuin] emailed us a video of what their hair would look like, so we're reaching out to [the College of San Mateo's] cosmetology school [and] local salons who can help us."

Stage crew caters to students who love theater but want to participate in ways other than acting. Senior and assistant props master Hailey La Monte believes that

being on stage crew is the perfect way to do so.

"I've never wanted to perform but I love theater, and I love [being] behind the scenes," La Monte said. "I wasn't really considering stage crew until the end of sophomore year. My friend is in [the technical] theater [class] and he invited me to hang out. I got to see the workshop and what the backstage looked like, and it seemed really special."

Although stage crew requires a lot of hard work, students still feel rewarded by the experience. Levadoux highlights the community as her favorite part of being in stage crew.

"I've met some of my best friends in theater," Levadoux said. "[It is] a very welcoming community full of creative and bright people. Every show and rehearsal is a

little different. The most interesting part is seeing all the different ways a show can look based on how the people on and off stage feel. If everybody's having a bad day, the show might be more emotionally driven, whereas if everybody's happy, it might just be really happy."

After months of work, stage crew is putting the final touches on "Grease the Musical" as they gear up to debut the show. Through the props, sets and transitions, Aragon students and families will be able to see the result of stage crew's work.

I've met some of my best friends in theater



Freshman Jonathan Freedman working the lightboard during a rehearsal

LIAN WANG

Blossoms to basil: students explore plant parenting

Chloe Chen
FEATURES WRITER

A small pot of succulents, a garden of vegetables, a bush of rosemary. For plant parents, their plants are more than leaves and flowers: they are as important as any family member, friend or pet. Plant parents spend time every day watering and nourishing the plants, keeping them healthy and happy.

"I take care of plants and value plants because they are an essential part of our natural world and the ecosystems that we live in," said biology teacher Richard Whitmarsh. "I've actually propagated plants. I've gone to state

parks and collected seeds and then brought those seeds home to plant."

Plant parents are often introduced to caring for plants through family or friends.

"Over the pandemic, I took care of my grandmother's greenhouse and I started growing basil," said junior Isabella Bianco. "It was so cool seeing them grow from seeds. When they had leaves, I was able to put the basil on top of my dad's pizza and we ate it, [which] was really rewarding."

Succulents may be the archetypal 'house plant,' but they can take a wide range of shapes and types.

"We cultivate food plants," Whitmarsh said. "We have sunflower plants that grew

this summer. We grow potatoes during the fall and garlic. Besides food plants, we have plants that are native to California, which encourages pollinating insects and predatory insects to keep the garden healthy."

Gardening is another hobby that overlaps with plant parenting, with gardeners also dedicating lots of time and energy to maintaining their crop.

"I don't put gardening in a category that's exclusively for food production," Whitmarsh said. "I consider gardening creating a healthy landscape and choosing the right plant for the right setting, but also choosing plants that are a natural part of the ecosystem to encourage those beneficial insects and organisms that should, by nature, be there."

Others believe gardeners and plant parents have distinct goals with their hobbies.

"I'm a plant parent because a gardener grows plants in order to harvest food from them, whereas a plant parent just has them for the joy of taking care of plants," said junior Adam Richter.

Plant parents can also develop personal connections and memories with their plants over time, furthering their sense of attachment.



COURTESY OF ISABELLA BIANCO

"[I remember when] my bamboo died because my cat ate it," Richter said. "Except the root [was not damaged], so then it grew back."

Plant parents also place value on the physical appearance of their plants, choosing to cultivate plants with attractive qualities.

"There's this plant called an inch plant and it grows like a weed and it looks pretty and lush," Bianco said. "I've [also] grown wildflowers before. I wasn't in the greenhouse for a while, and then I came back in and saw all these flowers blooming."

Plant parenting is not easy: it requires consistency, dedication and an understanding of each plant's needs in order to keep the plant healthy.

"You need to stop your cats from eating them," Richter said. "You also need to give them the right amount of water, it's really easy to give too much or too little."

Plant care takers have learned larger life lessons by caring for their plants.

"It has taught me responsibility," Richter said. "I have to remember to water them and [understand] the way each one needs a different amount of water."

Plant parents grow plants for many reasons, and despite the major commitment required to ensure the plant is healthy, they consistently give joy and satisfaction to the parent, offering them something to look forward to every day.



Game on: the joys and challenges of gaming

Oliver Levitt
FEATURES WRITER

Online gaming has changed significantly since the invention of the first digital game, "Tennis for Two," in 1958. Nowadays, there are millions of online gamers spanning the globe and thousands of games in existence. The diversity of the online gaming community has led to heightened discussion on the benefits and flaws of the gaming community.

"I don't think I would be quite as happy if I weren't to play video games," said junior Charlie Birkelund, president of Super Smash Bros Club. "During

school ... I'm not that excited to be here, but then I'll think ... 'I get to play a video game later' [and] it makes me excited about things."

Playing video games not only gives gamers something to be excited about but also helps to build deeper relationships with gaming as a common interest.

"I became friends with certain people at school through video games," said junior Anthony Lu. "I played with them a few times, and then I realized that they were really chill [people], and I met up with them in person, and we became friends in real life."

Along with establishing new relationships, gaming also helps in strengthening existing ones.

"One of my best friends ... moved to London [two years ago] and I

[thought] I'm not gonna be able to hang out with him anymore," Birkelund said. "But then I was able to hang out with him again through video games."

Social contact in a digital space also helps students feel more socially equipped for their social interactions in real life.

"It just helped me... talk to a lot more people [in person] because I talked to many people in games," said freshman Kai Green.

In the stressful world of high school, gaming can serve as an outlet for students in need of a break.

"It's something that ... I find really relieving," Lu said. "[Gaming] can remove some stress and it's something that I

can go and forget about all the issues I have in my daily life."

However, the gaming space has many flaws rooted in its community, the industry and the struggle to balance other responsibilities.

Computer science and math teacher Kris Reiss has seen how video games absorb his students' time — a challenge less prominent when he was a student playing video games.

"I think I was very disciplined as a kid compared to some kids that game a lot," Reiss said. "I'd just do all my homework, then I would do whatever else I wanted to do ... I certainly wouldn't be playing games at two in the morning. I've had some students that are kind of addicted to games."

Senior Emily Ren noticed firsthand that her gaming was interfering with her work habits.

"I kind of cut down on video games this year because ... as a senior you have a lot more responsibilities in terms of academics and grades," Ren said. "But last year I was very, very video game-heavy ... it affected my mental health in the sense that I would push everything to

the last minute, just to play games."

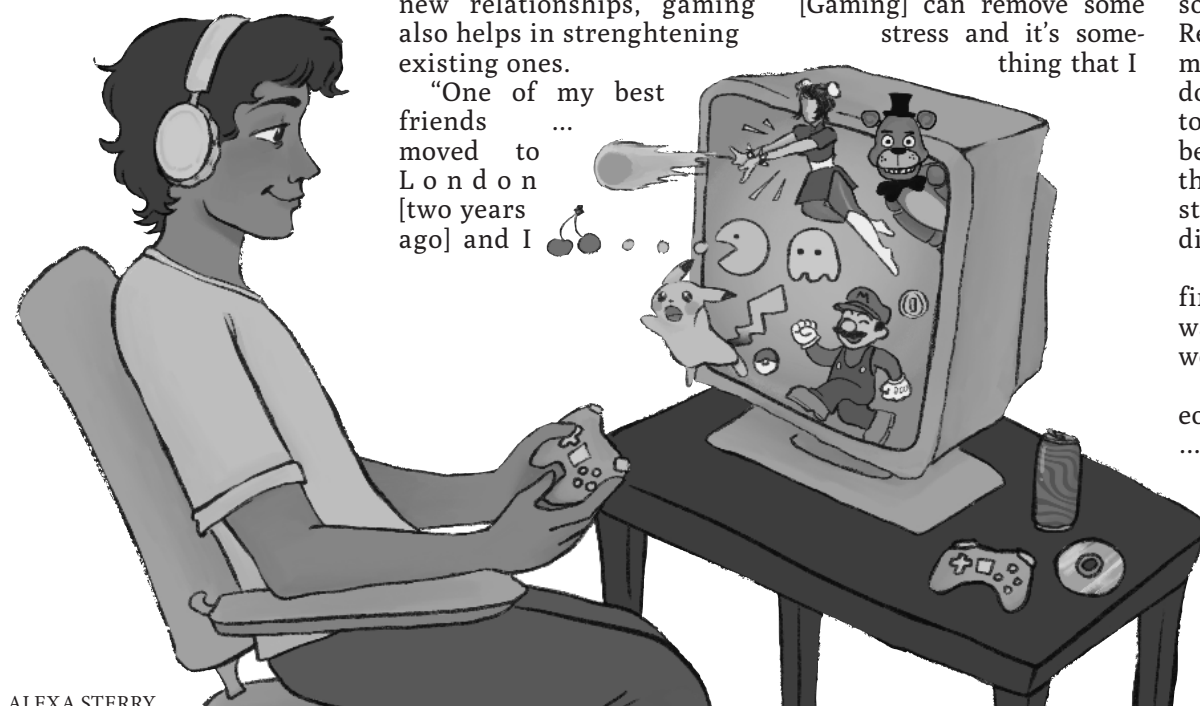
On top of personal challenges, players can experience toxicity from other players that can push them away from a game. In just third grade, Ren quit the video game League of Legends when she and her older brother were attacked by toxic players.

"We had definitely [had] some great troll people ... one of them started yelling, [and then] another player started yelling at me because I didn't know what I was doing," Ren said. "I was seven years old. I [had] no idea how to play League of Legends ... and I quit after that."

Since then, Ren has continued to experience and avoid toxicity, that isn't only aimed at her gaming skill but also her gender.

For some, gaming provides an activity to look forward to at the end of the day, an escape from the stresses of everyday life and a method for connecting with friends both new and old. For others, however, difficulty with balancing gaming and work, along with toxic behavior and communities in-game can make it more difficult for people to play games for their intended purpose — fun.

I can go and forget about all the issues I have



Jung-kook misses gold standard with “Golden”

Matthew Grabow
FEATURES WRITER

On Nov. 3, Korean pop singer Jung-kook released his first solo album “Golden.” According to Music Business Worldwide, over two million copies were sold that day, breaking the first-day K-pop album sales record.

The K-pop idol was a part of BTS, a K-pop and hip-hop band known for their global reach. Since their debut 10 years ago, the band has released 155 songs on nine chart-topping studio albums. However, in 2022, the members chose to take time off to pursue solo projects.

During BTS’s downtime, Jung-kook has solidified his superstar status, becoming the first Korean singer to perform the official FIFA World Cup anthem. He was also featured in American singer-songwriter Charlie Puth’s song “Left and Right,” obtaining a billion combined views and streams on YouTube and Spotify. Jung-kook’s recent releases “Seven” and “3D,” lead singles to “Golden,” infested the radio and hit number one on multiple charts.

Throughout the album, Jung-kook explores the darker, unacknowledged parts of relationships. The metaphorical representation of the songs resembling stages of relationships is a masterful design. However, I feel rather disappointed that he only explored the theme of relationships. While he did go into the deeper feelings and unexplored tropes of intimacy, it’s still the re-

“ [It] comes off as a thirst trap for his listeners

scripted trope of romance presented in a lot of pop culture, and this lack of originality is truly what lets me down. When they were with BTS, Jung-kook and the other members explored lesser mentioned young-adult issues such as self-love, perseverance and strength. However, Jung-kook’s album took on a textbook industry theme. With the album cover, music videos and songs like “3D” and “Seven” focusing on his sensual appeal, it devalues the already basic message of the album and instead comes off as a thirst trap for his listeners.

Similar to the generic theme, the instrumentals of Jung-kook’s songs were good yet forgettable. Nonetheless, I do believe he had a few hidden instrumental gems within his album. “Standing Next to You” was an amazing

change of style from the overall pop approach. The funk influence shook the album in the perfect way, solidifying it as my favorite of the album.

Another gem is the song “Somebody”: with its clever steady beat, I couldn’t help but find myself enjoying the song. These tracks had great instrumentals that added a necessary dash of personality to the album. However, I found the majority of the beats and instrumentals to be rather lackluster. While none were inherently bad, they had nothing special to them either.

Even though the theme and instrumentals were forgettable, “Golden” showcased moments of lyrical genius. One of my favorite verses of the album was from the song “Hate You,” stating, “I wish you went behind my back / And told me lies and stuff like that / I wish you kissed someone I know / And did the unforgivable / Hating you’s the only way it doesn’t hurt.”

Jung-kook’s exploration of hating someone to cope with breakups is phenomenal and adds thematic depth to the song. However, the poor verse structure and lack of variation hammer repetitive words onto the audience that overshadow the hard-hitting lines. I believe songs that display true lyrical depth have verses that cleverly build a story in succession. While “Golden” does build a story through its songs, it only displays a low-definition picture



BIG HIT MUSIC

while others gracefully paint a masterpiece.

I can’t help but feel disappointed to know that Jung-kook didn’t write or co-write any of the songs. While this is a common occurrence in K-pop, for a solo album I believe there is some obligation to deliver at least one or two solo or co-written songs. Regardless, I think where “Golden” fell short was the sheer lack of lyrics: the choruses were typically deep and meaningful, but the subsequent short bridge and repetition left me unsatisfied.

Despite my criticism, I do not believe this is a bad album, it’s

simply dull due to the lack of refinement. The absence of lyrical development and generic beats are truly what holds it back. However, considering this is Jung-kook’s first solo album, I believe he has a lot of untapped potential left to be explored. Yet he should tread this path carefully, because if he continues down the road of basic beats and mediocre lyrics there will be nothing separating him from the rest of the pretty boys who regurgitate ordinary music and call it a career. Overall, this album gets three out of five stars for its average beats and mediocre lyrics.

OUR OUTLOOK



“Five Nights at Freddy’s:” solid adaptation of a beloved game

Charlotte Gregory
FEATURES WRITER

Since the release of the original video game in 2014, “Five Nights at Freddy’s” has become

a pop culture phenomenon. In addition to an extensive video game series, the franchise is made up of books, toys and endless merchandise. The game follows a security guard who

must survive five nights in an abandoned pizza restaurant full of strange animatronics — life-like animal robots — that kill anyone they see. For years, the game’s massive fanbase has begged for a film adaptation, and this October, they finally got their wish.

The movie follows roughly the same storyline as the first game in the series, with a greater emphasis placed on characters. Viewers are introduced to Mike Schmidt (Josh Hutcherson): unemployed and down on his luck, Mike struggles to find work while caring for his younger sister Abby (Piper Rubio). When he is offered a job as a security guard at an abandoned pizza restaurant, Mike reluctantly accepts it, broke and desperate.

Mike’s fixation on the past and relentless pursuit of the truth made him a complex protagonist who, although flawed, viewers will undoubtedly root for. Additionally, his fierce love for and protection of his younger sister was both heartwarming and humanizing. Mike’s character development is one aspect of the film that the original game series lacks, even though it is played through his eyes. The impressive way it added complexity to a formerly dull video game avatar is one of the “FNAF” movie’s greatest strengths, and a way in which it takes the groundwork of the game and builds upon it.

But while Mike was a complex character, the introduction to his character could have been condensed. Too much time was spent estab-

lishing his unemployment and living situation with his sister, which isn’t relevant for the rest of the movie. This resulted in a very slow start, distracting from the movie’s main attraction: the creepy animatronics that come out at night.

When they were finally revealed, however, they were deeply unsettling. The animatronics were practically identical to the ones in the game — looming machines possessed by the souls of lost children. They triggered intense discomfort whenever they appeared on screen, and perfectly captured the creepy aesthetic of the game.

The animatronics are about as horrific as this film gets though. While marketed as horror, the movie is rather tame. Most gory moments happen off-screen, and although horror can be created without violence, the film is also lacking in suspense and psychological fear. There are no heart-racing jump scares, and since most fans are so familiar with the game, the largely predictable plot doesn’t add any of the anticipation and suspense that horror movies typically aim to create. However, it’s important to remember the target audience for this film is kids and younger teens. The “FNAF” movie would likely be a lot more scary to a 10-year-old than a grown adult.

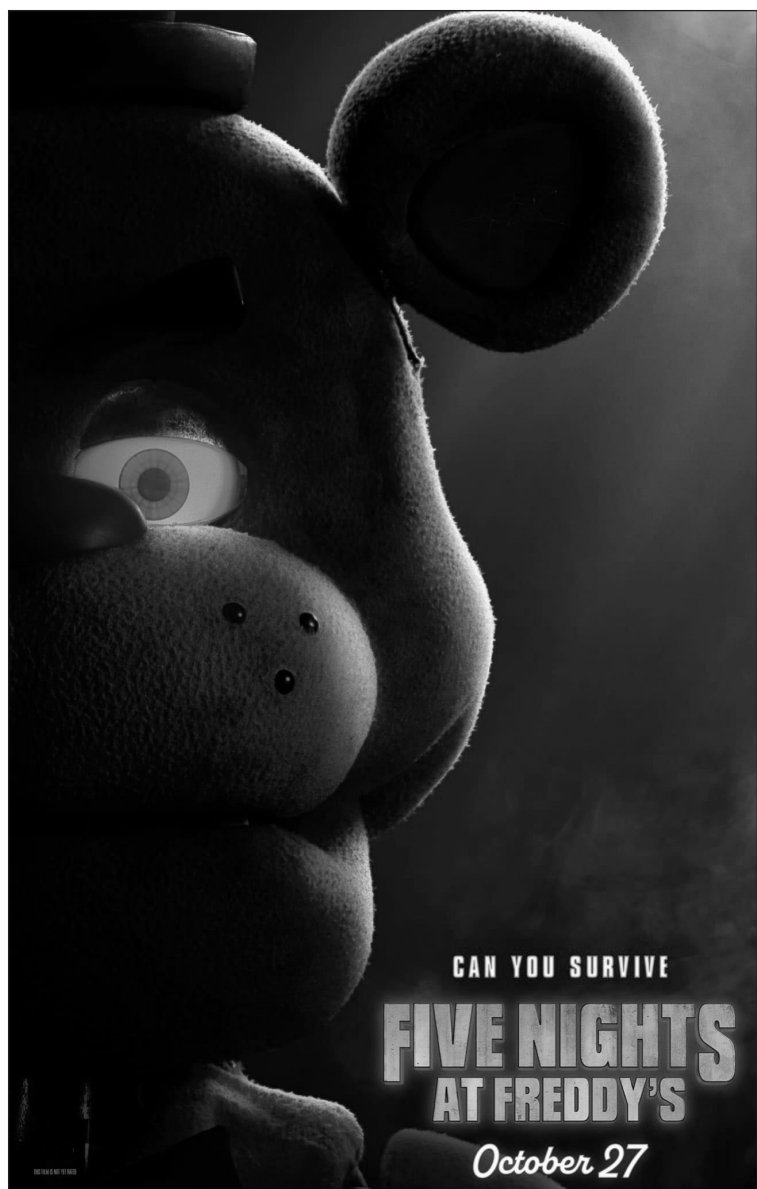
Because the “FNAF” franchise is so heavily reliant on its extensive lore, many fans worried that the film wouldn’t accurately adopt it. Fortunately, the film honors the game’s lore as best as it can within a brief two-hour time frame. While it’s unrealistic to expect that every event within the “FNAF”

universe will be covered, the movie references important moments and characters that fans of the game will be excited to recognize. For example, the infamous “Bite of ‘87” is referenced in a particularly unsettling scene when an animatronic chomps on and decapitates a victim.

It’s also important to note that there are plans for sequels, so it is likely that future films will explore characters and plot points that might have not been highlighted in the first movie.

All in all, the “Five Nights at Freddy’s” movie is a solid adaptation of a beloved game. While the film was lacking in suspense and fast pacing, it is bound to please fans who have waited so long to see its lore brought to life. I would rate the movie a three out of five stars.

“ [The film] added complexity to a formerly dull ... avatar



UNIVERSAL PICTURES

OUR OUTLOOK



The glorification of serial killers



Ashley Tsui
FEATURES WRITER

Recently, true crime documentaries such as “Dateline NBC” and “Unsolved Mysteries” have become popular amongst Gen Z viewers, with avid watchers having an average of 4.6 hours of consumption per week — higher than that of Gen X, Millennial and Baby Boomer consumers.

Known for depicting tragic reenactments of murderers and their victims through podcasts, television shows, and movies, true crime documentaries have recently gained rising traction in the media. Netflix’s “Dahmer,” a true crime anthology series, follows American serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer’s life and the murders he was convicted of. However, instead of being presented as a source of information, it is marketed as a drama for viewing enjoyment.

What could be the appeal of such gruesome content? According to Psychology Today, people generally enjoy watching these shows to feel the satisfaction of seeing dangerous criminals get locked away, to be reminded of their luxuries in life, to better prepare themselves in case such a situation arises in their own life or to fuel their desire to play ‘detective,’ inciting a sense of ‘guilty pleasure’ people might derive from consuming true crime.

What’s more is that by taking real-life horror stories and reconfiguring them into television shows, the media creates a dark indulgence that can take a toll on one’s mental health, especially in youth.

Though the psychological effects of consistently consuming these films can vary from person to person, it often leaves an individual with heightened fear, skewed perceptions of reality, paranoia, sleep deprivation, nightmares and stress.

Constantly being exposed to serial killers in the media can desensitize one to the reality of crime, as consumers are given an intimate look into the perspective and mindset of murderers. By understanding

the trauma that might be a cause of the criminals’ ac-



EVA LUDWIG

tions, viewers begin to believe that their deeds are justified in some twisted way. No amount of trauma will ever justify taking another’s life.

It doesn’t help that Hollywood casts conventionally handsome actors as offenders. Examples of this are Zac Efron as Ted Bundy in Netflix’s “Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile” and Ross Lynch as Jeffrey Dahmer in “My Friend Dahmer.” Doing this increases the already present glorification of serial killers and possibly hybristophilia — feeling attracted to criminals.

This also causes a conflict between admiring the actors’ work and recognizing the atrocity of crimes committed. Of course, fans want to praise actors for their performances, but to what extent? How much can one appreciate a role before they become blindsided to the crimes that were depicted?

Movies and television shows aren’t the only things fueling this interest in true crime. This genre is also found in podcasts and literature. Examples are the podcast “Serial,” which dives deeper into a real-life murder case and the novel “American Predator” by Maureen Callahan, which follows the story of Israel Keyes, a serial killer who committed several unsolved crimes. Both are highly rated and streamed, proving how intriguing true crime can be.

For the families of victims, these recreations can be re-traumatizing to read about or watch. The issue at hand is that personal tragedies are being used for commercial gain and treated like stories instead of true and devastating events.

The ultimate driver of true crime’s popularity is fear. Consumers tend to want to experience a scary scenario without having to feel the danger or trauma associated with it. The media makes it both easy and accessible for people to do this, given how many books, podcasts, shows and movies are available to the public.

Consuming true crime in moderation won’t have as large an effect on one’s mental health, but constantly doing so can add a sense of burden on consumers by adding to their stress and anxiety. Also, the media tricks audiences into rooting for a killer because they are played by charismatic artists. The

psychological effects of consuming true crime go beyond being curious about the subject, and the media’s deliberate, entertainment-based portrayal of sensitive topics can desensitize the audience.



JESSICA XIA

Dirty origins: the current reality of electric vehicles



Meilin Rife
FEATURES WRITER

Underneath the shiny, futuristic exterior of a Tesla lies the queasy, dirty origin of the materials inside. California’s shift to 100% zero-emission vehicle sales by 2035 aligns with the projection that by 2030, electric vehicles will make up 40% of global vehicle sales. In a country where the transportation sector tops all others for the highest greenhouse gas emissions, this switch from combustion engines to battery-powered is a step in the right direction. But beyond carbon emissions, there are still many hidden environmental impacts of EVs that need to be considered.

Many problems stem from the materials in car batteries, specifically, lithium. Lithium-ion batteries are popular in EVs because of their high energy density, allowing cars to run for longer periods of time.

Conventional lithium mining operations pump out gallons of subterranean brine onto desert flats. Once evaporated, the previously unusable brine leaves behind lithium carbonate, which is then processed into lithium.

Much of this mining takes place in the aptly named Lithium Triangle, the salt flats between Bolivia, Chile and Argentina. According to the Chilean government, the fresh groundwater used in mining and processing lithium in this area has resulted in a 25-inch drop in underground aquifers.

The Atacameño indigenous population living in these areas have a spiritual connection

to the land, and have not consented to the land being abused by energy companies — not to mention the limited water for maintaining crops and livestock. These corporations are largely owned by international investors, who often cite the potential of new jobs for locals as a way of downplaying risks to the environment. Cobalt, another problematic element, is included in car batteries because of its high heat capacity properties, protecting batteries from exploding. When it was discovered in 2014 that

Kolwezi, Democratic Republic of the Congo had rich stores of cobalt, many saw it as a way out of poverty. It was like the California Gold Rush as the remote town’s population grew to half a million. With treasures right under their feet, everybody wanted in. Today, the DRC produces 70% of the world’s cobalt.

There are two types of cobalt mining, artisanal and large-scale mining. Some artisanal miners (one-fourth of cobalt mining in the Congo) opt to dig holes themselves into their own backyard. Some of these can reach deeper than 100 feet, many without any structural support, resulting in collapses. The most deadly collapse in 2020 took more than 50 lives. The problem here is not that there are miners working to make a living, it is that, without proper adherence to DRC’s mining codes, the amateur diggers have to put their lives at risk in order to do so.

Even large-scale mining, which uses open pits, has drawbacks to the local community. Cobalt is toxic to breathe and touch, so when the smallest gust of wind kicks up the dry dust from these expansive pits, it can create a poisonous atmosphere. The local rivers that flow into the wider Congo River are so contaminated with acid that it has taken a blank greenish tint, obscuring the lack of life below. From dust-filled

air to contaminated water, the people living in the region around Kolwezi, already living on \$2 a day, suffer from a disproportionate increase in birth defects and withered crops.

Is it reasonable that in a country so rich in natural resources, the people of Kolwezi have such a poor quality of life thanks to the pillaging of foreign companies?

The answer to our climate crisis is limiting consumption, of both fossil fuels and precious resources, not bandaging up the issue with electric vehicles, which is still indirectly

producing carbon dioxide by proxy of non-renewable energy plants. Is the shiny new Tesla or iPhone model really necessary to buy? Can the California government improve the public transit

system instead of installing 1.2 million charging stations?

There is a difference between innovation and the insatiable need for resources that are creating these exploitative relationships between EV manufacturers and the locals in the areas where these resources are mined. The rise in electric vehicles still has negative environmental impacts, but they have been forced onto unseen communities. Modifying activist Martin Luther King Jr.’s words, environmental injustice anywhere is environmental justice nowhere.

The answer is not bandaging up the issue with EVs

Have an idea you want us to cover?

Tell us through this form:



billy

Female athletes score a point for representation

Phoebe Harger
SPORTS WRITER

For years, there has been a substantial gap in boys and girls participation in athletics at Aragon and high schools around the nation. According to "Just Women's Sports," only 60% of girls are participating in school sports in the United States compared to 75% of boys. However, due to the recent addition of flag football in the San Mateo Union High School District, there are now more opportunities for girls to become involved in athletics.

Over the summer, the California Inter-scholastic

Federation officially added girls flag football to its list of sanctioned sports for the 2023-2024 school year.

"It was an absolute honor to be able to coach the inaugural season with this amazing group of girls," said flag football coach Barbara Beaumont. "I volunteered because I felt it was important for the team to have a female coach especially since it feels like the majority of coaches are men. I wanted there to be more female representation in not only sports but coaching as well."

For most, flag football has become an outlet for exercise and socialization for female athletes who otherwise would not have played a fall sport at Aragon. "Girls may be less inclined to try out for school sports because a lot of the teams are very competitive and there's quite a lot of experience needed from some of them," said sophomore and flag football player Madison Britt. "One thing

that made flag football so great was that it was new for everyone and so we all got to bond over learning a new sport. It was also cool knowing we were making history by playing in the first ever season."

Across the district, girls of all grades were eager to try out for the flag football team this fall. Over 70 girls filled Beaumont's classroom at the informational meeting on Aug. 18. With so many interested athletes, the team had two weeks of tryouts with two rounds of cuts before settling on a 26 player roster.

"I'm definitely going to try out for the team next year," said sophomore Amora Grover. "I heard how successful they were this season and it sounds like a really fun opportunity to bond with other girls at school. That and football has always looked really fun but I've never been able to play it."

Title IX contains a clause that prohibits gender-based discrimination within school athletic programs. It mandates that there be no barriers or differences in access

to sports for boys and girls. Despite the fact that girls and boys have statistically similar opportunities to play sports at Aragon, girls generally participate in school sports less than boys do.

"The numbers are that there are fewer females who participate in sports across the state and across the nation," said athletic director Steve Sell. "Part of that can be attributed to the fact that football tends to have higher numbers of players. Until flag football came along, there was nothing to counter that number."

However, while the football team made no cuts and has a combined roster of over 60 players from JV and varsity, flag football could not take more than 30 girls.

Sell believes that part of the gap may be credited towards the popularization of club sports. Instead of the former trend of playing a school

sport in every season, Sell claims that more girls are beginning to drop their other sports in order to focus on just one all year long.

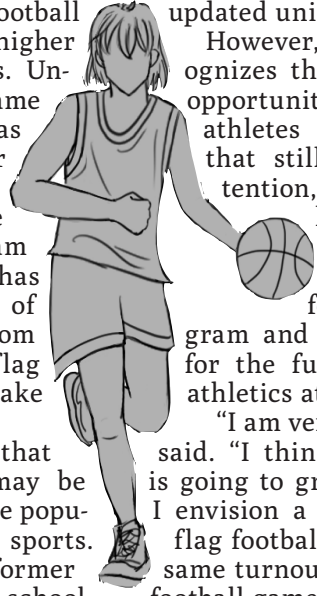
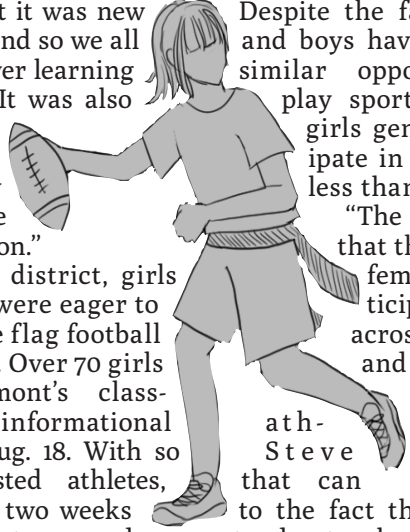
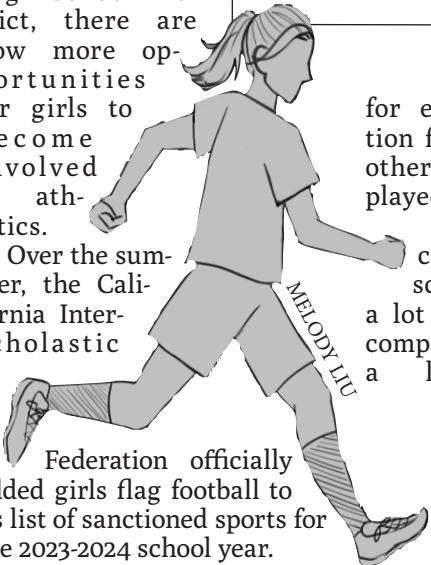
"We still have girls playing sports, but they are just not filling up the rosters like they used to and like we want them to," Sell said.

In order to ensure that female athletics do not get overshadowed by male sports, Sell says that the district makes it a priority to give both girls and boys sports equal funding, as well as field time, equipment and updated uniforms.

However, while Sell recognizes the difference in opportunities for female athletes as a problem that still requiring attention, he is very hopeful about the future of the girls flag football program and what it means for the future of female athletics at Aragon.

"I am very excited," Sell said. "I think the program is going to grow immensely. I envision a day where the flag football games get the same turnout as the varsity football games."

It's cool to know we were making history



Growing champions beyond the game

Charlie Henderson
SPORTS WRITER

Great teams and great players aren't built during the season. Great teams and players are built in the unseen hours and the work that they put in when no one is watching. These hours are the hidden foundation upon which success is constructed.

Athletic training can be grouped into three main categories: sport-specific training, conditioning and strength training. All three of these components are integral to performance in athletic contests.

Sport-specific training involves movements and drills that directly correlate to those carried out in athletic contests. This training focuses on developing techniques that are directly relevant to the sports. Whether it's dribbling a basketball, perfecting a golf swing or mastering the art of a soccer kick, athletes invest significant hours into honing these skills. Athletes meticulously study the nuances of their sport and perfect their craft. Sport-specific training is often performed solo, with the exception of some athletes who play competitive sports outside of school or have trainers who work with them on developing skills.

Conditioning is purely based on endurance, involving athletes pushing themselves to their cardiovascular limits. Conditioning prepares athletes for grueling competition, giving them an extra step when they hit a plateau in cardiovascular

and muscular efficiency while they compete.

Strength training is usually defined by progressively overloading certain muscle groups to improve athletes' overall strength over time and includes flexibility and range of motion. Strength training is important for developing proper range of motion, mobility, posture and overall athleticism.

Offseason training isn't just about training the body, as through these offseason workouts athletes learn to train their mind as well. Athletes train mentally by showing up day in and day out and doing the little things that amount to larger positive results. In this consistency, athletes develop discipline and intense focus, but developing this mindset is also extremely challenging.

"The time and effort that you put in doesn't pay off right away," said junior and track athlete Russell Yee. "Sometimes it's tough to

stay motivated and keep grinding."

It's not just the time investment that is burdensome for these dedicated athletes, it is also the toll on their bodies. In the offseason athletes have time to push themselves

physically without having to worry about in-game performance. This allows them to both train harder and recover for longer periods of time than they would in season.

Another important aspect of off-season training is the cohesion of a team through shared adversity and a solid foundation of sacrifice. Athletes push themselves to their physical and mental limits during the offseason, and having a teammate next to you to pick you up when you fall really means a lot in terms of team building.

"Athletes are bonded through a shared struggle," said strength and conditioning coach Mike Wu. "They see each other working and are motivated by each other's success." The sheer amount of time spent together focused on one common goal also contributes to this team bonding that is achieved through off-season training.

Training with teammates connects to one key aspect of athletic performance, competition. In competing with teammates, athletes are more likely to hold themselves accountable and push themselves to their own limits to try to match their peers' efforts.

"When I train with the team I can see other people outworking me, and that motivates me to outwork them," said senior baseball pitcher Ben Strickley.

The time commitment does not go unrewarded; Wu noted that he sees athletes improve greatly both physically and mentally.

"Once you get the idea of working for something harder than someone else, and out of

the mindset of making excuses for yourself, you really start to see your athletic performance take off," Wu said.

Athletes also notice that the time they put in during the offseason benefits them during the season.

"I put in one to three hours of work in six days a week, so seeing the time investment pay off is very rewarding," Strickley said. "Even week to week and day to day, seeing myself improve is truly a great feeling."

Offseason training is an integral part of athletic performance, and dedicated athletes at Aragon embrace the challenges of this rigorous training. Driven by a strong passion for their sport and competition with their peers, athletes push themselves in the offseason, planting the seeds of a fruitful tree. This tree, nurtured with their sweat and commitment, blossoms when the in-season competition arrives, casting a long shadow of their excellence and outstanding commitment to their craft.

Great players are built in the unseen hours



VARSITY SCOREBOARD

CCS CHAMPIONS

VOLLEYBALL

24-13 overall 10-14 league

TENNIS

9-7 league 10-13 overall

PAL QUALIFIED

CROSS COUNTRY

6th GIRLS 7th BOYS
at PAL Championships

CCS QUALIFIED

FLAG FOOTBALL

7-3 overall 7-2 league

FOOTBALL

8-2 overall 3-1 league

CCS QUALIFIED

GIRLS WATER POLO

3-6 overall 1-3 league

BOYS WATER POLO

2-13 overall 0-8 league

GIRLS GOLF

10-2

CCS QUALIFIED

*as of November 13

Girls tennis falls 3-4 in PAL playoffs

Antonio Mangano
SPORTS WRITER

On Oct. 25, Aragon's girls tennis team concluded their season with a 3-4 loss against Burlingame in the Peninsula Athletic League playoffs, failing to qualify for the Central Coast Section.

Aragon showed strength in their singles games, with their top seeds winning three out of the four matches. However, Aragon's weakness was in their doubles games where doubles one and two fell short in their third set super tiebreaker, ultimately allowing Burlingame to eke out a 4-3 win.

"We played very well," said head coach David Owdom. "It's unfortunate,

we had our chances and [Burlingame] pulled out a couple [wins]. We played well and so did they."

The Dons' search for victory began in the second singles match up where junior Anna He secured Aragon's first point with a decisive win of 6-1, 6-1. Shortly after, junior Lian Wang won the singles three match 6-1, 6-2, claiming the second point for the Dons.

The most anticipated game of the day was the singles one match between senior Varsha Jawadi and Mila Mulready, ranked second and first in PAL respectively. In the first set, Mulready broke ahead to lead 5-4, but Jawadi managed to hold serve twice to tie the set at 6-6, ultimately winning 7-0 in the first set tiebreaker. In the second set, Jawadi lost 3-6 after her op-

ponent managed to break her momentum. The top two seeds in the league battled down to a

deciding ten-point super tiebreak, where Jawadi carried her momentum through, winning the match 7-6 (7-0), 3-6, 10-4 in a grueling two and a half-hour battle.

However, Aragon was unable to take home the win for their final singles game, with sophomore Taylor Lee losing both of her sets 0-6.

"My singles game was definitely a bit off," Lee said. "I don't think I got enough practice in and my opponent was very good."

At doubles one, freshman Jessa Williams and junior Kat Russell won the first set, fell in the second set and ultimately lost narrowly in the super tiebreaker with scores of 6-3, 2-6, 7-10. At doubles two, sophomore Meilin Rife and junior Melody Liu were unable to pull out

a win despite a hard-fought battle. After their opponents gained momentum in the second set, they were unable to break back in their super tiebreaker, once again missing the upset with the score of 6-3, 0-6, 7-10. When the two schools reached a tie at 3-3, doubles four pair junior Mana Ueno and freshman Maddie Fong were unable to clutch the deciding point, ultimately giving Burlingame the win.

After a solid season in the PAL championship, the Aragon's girls tennis team brought it down to the wire while trying to qualify for an automatic bid into CCS playoffs, the preliminary championship for states for which only the

top two teams from each league qualify.

Halfway through the season, the doubles players struggled with chemistry due to being switched around. However, their confidence with each other was on a rise since their first game together.

"I think [my doubles teammate and I] got closer compared to the first game," Ueno said. "We spend a lot of time with each other and we practice every single day and week so we had a lot of time to build connections and friendships."

The girls tennis team hasn't just seen improvement in team chemistry but also in how they play.

Throughout the season, Aragon was able to pull their success from their aggressive doubles players. However, following a number of close losses against top teams like Burlingame, the doubles duos look to improve their reliability for the upcoming season.

"Next year I think our spots will be more secure and

I think that [consistency] would help everybody improve in their respective roles," Lee said.

It's not just the players who maintain high hopes for next season, but their coach as well.

"We have a fairly young team," Owdom said. "We have a lot of juniors, sophomores and a little bit of freshman flavor so our team is made up of young players. There is a lot of hope in the future of Aragon."

On Monday Nov. 13, Jawadi, seeded fourth in CCS, successfully advanced to semifinals of CCS playoffs, dropping only one game in each of her matches. Semifinals played out on Nov. 15, after Outlook went to press.

We had a lot of time to build connections



ALEXA STERRY

Athletes juggle multiple sports

Sora Mizutani
SPORTS WRITER

High school often comes with the intimidating nature of balancing extracurriculars and academics. Getting through four years of high school itself is an honorable achievement, but some people also add a sport on top of academic work. Others even juggle multiple sports.

There are various ways in which athletes seek interest in other sports. Junior Veronica Kwok began with volleyball, but decided to try flag football after it was added to the Aragon sports department this year.

"I've never played outdoor sports that much, so that was definitely a really big change for me," Kwok said. "It was just fun being out in the sun or at night just getting to experience what other people who play soccer, for instance, experience."

Additionally, family members can contribute to interest in sports. Freshman Kurt Nguyen, who started off with exclusively basketball now plays water polo and swimming on top of a year-round commitment to basketball.

"[I started playing water polo] mainly because when I grew up, I [saw] my brother and sister ... play water polo, so I [had to] keep the family tradition," Nguyen said.

However, the motivation to play another sport doesn't always have to come from family. Freshman Hamilton Zhang focuses mainly on basketball, but also plays volleyball in the spring for a different reason.

"All my friends were doing [volleyball] so I thought it'd be fun if I actually tried it and right now I'm just playing [volleyball] for fun and [focused on] basketball," Zhang said. "[The benefits of playing both are that] you get to meet more people that have the same hobbies as you do. Also, you get to be in shape."

Sports like cross country and track and field can have a different kind of connection in which both help each other.

"With my sports, it's very connected," said junior Miles Rokala who runs cross country and track and field. "[There is] more muscle during the track season [because] you want to be more powerful. Less focus on distance, but we still need endurance. [When you] do [just] cross country, you could be good, but after doing track, you'll come back next season even better."

There are other cases where techniques and skill sets can be applied to seemingly different sports.

"You get to learn new techniques in both [soccer and flag football] that can be applied to many other sports," said junior Kaia Smith, who plays soccer and flag football. "Soccer definitely helps. It's a bridge between every sport. Running [and] ball technique applies to anything that you want to play."

Zhang also sees a similar connection between basketball and volleyball.

"When I practice basketball, that also translates to volleyball, a good amount, because, for example, if I have a good vertical in basketball that also helps in volleyball," Zhang said.

Some players struggle with the transition between two sports.

"It's going to be a tough transition [between water polo and basketball] because in the water, [it] is a lot slower than [in] basketball," Nguyen said.

Others play one sport all-year-round, preventing these transition issues.

"I play club [soccer] year round," Smith said. "After school, I went to flag practice and then I went straight to soccer practice after ... So, [time management] was definitely hard ... I only had flag for two months [and] it's been really busy. But now, since our last game is today, it will definitely die down with just playing soccer."

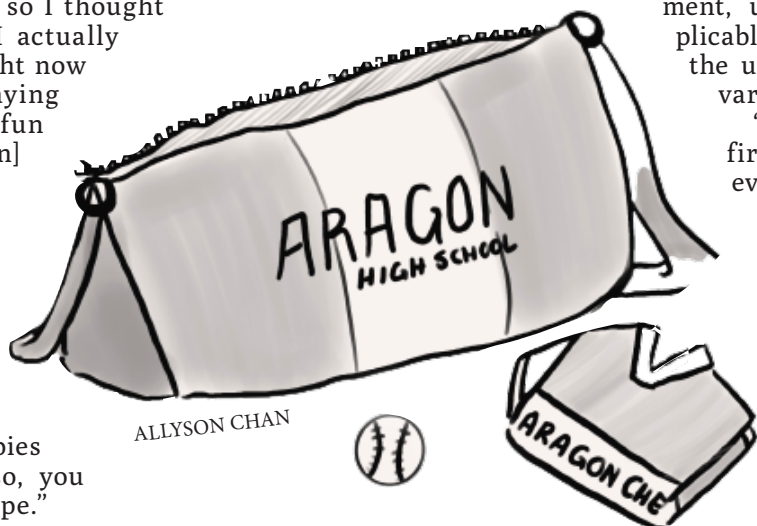
Sports can be seen as an additional obstacle to fit into one's schedule. However, it can also be a tool to develop better time management, and better discipline.

"[Playing multiple sports] puts you in a position where you have to step up your game with your academics," Rokala said. "[For example,] instead of having five hours to do homework, you'd have one or two hours, because you have to get proper rest and everything ... It does put a lot of limitations on your academics, but you can make it work."

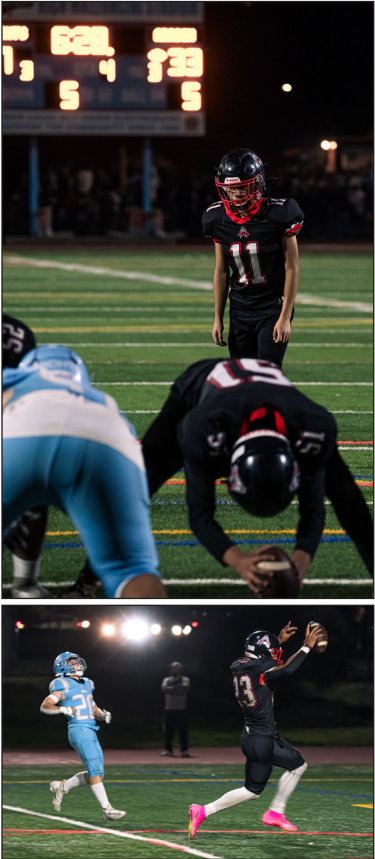
Students who take on this challenge, often find it a rewarding experience. Even though playing multiple sports is not always easy, it can be a valuable opportunity where students get to learn time management, universally applicable skill sets and the uniqueness of a variety of sports.

"This is the first time I have ever played two sports at once," Smith said. "It's definitely challenging but it's still rewarding and fun."

You get to learn new techniques in both [sports]



ALLYSON CHAN



Dons in action at Hillsdale in their annual rivalry game, the "Battle of the Fleas."

NAILAH BLAKE

Football routs Hillsdale for first rivalry win in six years

Caroline Harger
SPORTS WRITER

On Nov. 3, the Aragon varsity football team (8-2 overall, 3-1 Peninsula Athletic League) handily beat the Hillsdale Knights (7-3 overall, 3-2 PAL) 34-7. This rivalry, dating back to the '70s, has been coined the "Battle of the Fleas," in honor of both schools' residence on Alameda de Las Pulgas, meaning "Avenue of the Fleas" in Spanish. This highly anticipated game marked the 61st time the two teams faced off, Hillsdale having taken the trophy the last five years running. After the success of the season thus far, Aragon had



NAILAH BLAKE

high hopes going into this year's game.

"It's been a fantastic season," said head coach Steve Sell. "We're co-champions of our division and we've won seven games."

I've been doing this long enough to call that a good season."

Despite losing their most recent game to the Capuchino Mustangs last week, the team still went into its most anticipated game of the season with a winning percentage well over 75%. However, the team's goal was to not let their winning record impact their mindset heading into the game.

"We have the confidence from having a good record, but it's a clean slate going into the game, just like it's a clean slate going into every week," said senior tight end Max Thronson.

"We really try and take it each game at a time."

The Dons' defense started off strong, forcing the Knights to go three and out on their first possession. Hillsdale matched the Dons' clean defensive start by forcing a turnover on downs at the Hillsdale 25-yard line after a 40-yard pass from senior quarterback Sean Hickey to junior wide receiver Jalen Scroggins. The back-and-forth battle continued until the end of the first quarter, with both defenses remaining strong and keeping the game scoreless.

Aragon started the second quarter off 2nd and goal near the Hillsdale end zone. On the first play of the quarter, Hickey connected with Thronson for a 10-yard touchdown pass. With senior kicker Emiliano Guzman's successful extra point, the Dons took a 7-0 lead over the Knights, a score that remained unchanged through the end of the first half.

"Defense was unbelievable in the first half," Sell said.

"They held [Hillsdale] to just 40 yards of offense in the first two quarters, so that really kept us in the game while we kind of got stuff figured out offensively."

And figure it out offensively they did. On the first drive of the half, Aragon pushed their way downfield with a 25-yard completion by Scroggins. The Dons finished off the drive with a 16-yard touchdown pass from Hickey to senior tight end Willie Faamu, putting the Dons up 14-0 after a successful extra point.

"We worked a lot on our run game and our pass game this week," Scroggins said. "Everything just ended up falling into place tonight."

Despite the Dons' offensive success, the Knights responded with a 25-yard gain down to the one yard line, and capped it off with a one-yard quarterback sneak for the touchdown. This drive, which cut the Dons' lead to 14-7, would be the only scoring drive of the game for the Knights, as the Aragon defense successfully stopped them on the rest of their drives.

However, Aragon was not done scoring, as the Dons were able to cash in three more times in the second half. After two touchdowns from senior running back Ivan Nisa and one more by sophomore defensive lineman Aaron Pita, the Dons finished the game with a 34-7 blowout win over the Knights, their first win over Hillsdale since 2017.

The student section roared at the end of the game as the Dons reclaimed the "Battle of the Fleas" trophy. The team huddled in the middle of the field, chanting and celebrating a victory that gave them a confidence boost going into their CCS playoff run.

"We beat a good football team tonight," Sell said after the game. "And I haven't seen [the team] celebrate like this since the [2021 CCS] championship game ... So it's just a great day."

The third-seeded Dons concluded their season with a 21-33 loss to sixth-seeded Scotts Valley (9-1 overall) at home in the CCS quarterfinals on Nov. 10.

Volleyball defeats Roseville in state championships

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1
first kill of many, and an ace from senior Are Makropoulos. The next 15 plays were a back and forth battle, with kills from junior Cassandra McMillan, sophomore Gabriella Xiao and Rubenstein. After that, the Dons took over, scoring 11 points almost consecutively to win the set 25-9.

"The girls were really excited to have a home game," Gennaro said. "They came out serving well and our defense was very good."

The Dons did, in fact, come out serving well, with three aces in the first set alone. Their defense, led by Suayan, held the Tigers to just nine points in the first set and allowed for the momentum to carry them into their second set.

The second set was much more evenly matched on offense and defense, with both teams battling back and forth for points. The Tigers picked up their offensive game, scoring 10 times in the first 20 plays. Aragon however, thanks to strong offense by Rubenstein and freshman Kaitlyn Robertson, kept the game even, never letting the score differ by more than three points. The back-and-forth battle continued despite the Dons' good defense. The Dons ultimately won the set 25 to 21, a result of the combined 12 kills in the set and the relentless efforts by the back row to keep the ball up.

The third set followed much of the same back and forth between the teams.

This time, the Dons were down for the majority of the set, up until the last six plays, during which the Dons scored six unanswered points and claimed the set 25-21. The set's comeback win secured the quarterfinal victory for the Dons.

"They just had the drive and the push to play together as a team and get the win," Gennaro said afterwards.

The Dons lost the semifinals of the CIF playoffs on Nov. 9 at home against University High School (22-8 overall, 10-0 league) in straight sets, putting an end to a successful season.

Check out Jack He's coverage of volleyball's CCS playoff win on Oct. 31 at aragonoutlook.org



Players celebrate a point against Roseville.

JORELL SAKAMOTO