

8-9  
Winter  
Recipes



3  
News  
social media giants sued for youth addictions

12  
Features  
record keeping: thoughts on older albums

14  
Sports  
competitive cheer preview

Eat up the online edition!



# The ARAGON OUTLOOK

Thursday | December 14, 2023 | Volume 64, Issue 4

900 Alameda de las Pulgas, San Mateo, CA 94402

Aragon High School

## Hooked II: alcohol

Charlotte Gregory & Naomi Kotani

FEATURES AND NEWS WRITERS

*\*Source names have been changed to protect source privacy.*

"There's this teenage need to feel older, so a lot of people romanticize college life and college drinking," said source. "[Teenagers] see their parents drink all the time and they feel like it makes them feel older and more mature, even if it makes them more immature when they are drunk."

Teenagers are particularly vulnerable to alcohol abuse and addiction due to the prevalence of drinking and partying

culture. According to the California Healthy Kids Survey, binge drinking, defined by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism as having more than four or five drinks containing 14 grams of alcohol in two hours, among Aragon seniors increased from 12% in 2019 to 14% in 2020, before decreasing to 9% in 2022.

"The more [teenagers] drink, the more they forget about their problems," said senior \*Ernie. "They get addicted to it, especially if they have difficult things in their life or [things] that they want to forget about."

Stress from schoolwork can make drinking particularly appealing to high schoolers, as it offers an escape.

"Students look forward to having weekends free and letting loose and having fun," said senior \*Rebecca. "[They want] to forget about the school day and be able to have

those moments of not being completely sober and aware of the responsibilities they have when they return to school."

But while alcohol can provide an escape from reality, it also wields potential dangers and long-term consequences.

"After [someone] sexually harasses or assaults you, they'll use being drunk as an excuse," Rebecca said. "[Once, someone] tried to make passive remarks and wanted me to do things with him even after I continued saying no. He basically said, '... we're at a party, it's fun.' But it wasn't fun for me."

Alcohol also can impair decision-making.

"People can make mistakes because they're not really themselves," Ernie said. "They also take a lot more risks. Someone I knew cheated on their boyfriend when they were drunk. It's something that they definitely regretted and it ruined a very good relationship."

Senior \*Finnigan recounted conflicts escalated by alcohol.

"At this party, me and another person were fighting over who could get the last drink of whiskey," Finnigan said.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



ALLYSON CHIAN



VICTORIA SANTANA

## Steve Sell retires from coaching

Quinn Shirley  
SPORTS WRITER

Growing up with a love for sports and being surrounded by them, athletic director Steve Sell knew coaching would influence his direction in life from a young age. After over 35 years of being an Aragon football coach and earning much success along the way, Sell announced his retirement from coaching following the team's latest Central Coast Section playoff game on Nov. 10.

Throughout his 24 seasons as head coach, Sell accumulated many achievements, including seven Peninsula Athletic League Bay division titles, a CCS Division V championship in 2021 and recently set the all-time wins record for an Aragon coach this season with 162 wins.

Sell's path to becoming a coach wasn't entirely straightforward, as he started off his career in a different field.

"I took a job out of college as a salesman and quickly pivoted and went to a high school football game," Sell said. "I was standing on the sidelines and I made up my mind right there. So I went back to school to get my credentials to coach."

What landed him at football, of all sports, was the high level of involvement he felt in the games.

"I've been calling plays for 35 years for this team," Sell said. "I've coached a variety of other sports ... and

you're involved in those sports also, but football is ... closest to playing because you're calling plays and have a real impact on the outcome of the game."

He admits though that this can be both a positive and negative aspect of the job, as it can be emotionally taxing at times.

"There's a lot of excitement that comes with that and a lot of pride that comes with that," Sell said. "But also a lot of disappointment and a lot of regret and feeling guilty for not doing everything right."

However, through these highs and lows, assistant head coach and defensive coordinator Ashley Parham credits Sell for doing a good job in keeping the team together.

"He always keeps things in perspective when you think everything's falling apart," Parham said. "He's seen better and he's been through worse, ... so [it's nice] just having that experience amongst the coaching staff."

He often hyped up the team through his motivational pre-game speeches.

Senior wide receiver Joey Mazzola said that before every game, Sell would tell the team "you're playing a nameless, faceless opponent," to encourage the players to go into each game with a high level of intensity no matter the opponent.

Over time, his enjoyment shifted away from the strategy of the game to the bond he formed with his players.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 13

## Band Winter Concert

Yang Yang  
NEWS WRITER

On Dec. 8, Aragon's bands hosted their Winter Concert in the theater from 7-9 p.m.

The bands played a variety of songs, from holiday favorites like "Sleigh Ride" to cinema classics such as "Pirates of the Caribbean," "How To Train Your Dragon" and "Guardians of the Galaxy."

"[My favorite was] 'Sleigh Ride' because there was a snow machine that came down, and it snowed all over us," said sophomore and Wind Ensemble member Midori Saito. "It was really beautiful, as if [it] captured all of us playing in [a] snowy night outside."

This year, Director of Bands Kevin Gallagher allowed students in Symphonic Band to vote for the songs they wanted to perform.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Bands play winter music.

DARRA MCLINTOCK

# Alcohol usage at Aragon

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"I poured the glass [for myself], he took it from me, and I ended up pushing him and then he passed out because he was too drunk."

Teenagers' developing brains and bodies put them especially at risk.

"Their prefrontal cortexes aren't fully developed, so [teenagers are] already going to have a hard time [thinking through] the consequences of their decisions in the moment," said health teacher Barbara Beaumont. "Somebody using [alcohol] might make impulsive decisions while they're drunk."

A specific risk of impaired decision-making is drunk driving.

"I was at a party and one of my friends thought he was sober enough to drive home, but [another] friend and I had noticed he was not even aware and couldn't get home safely," Rebecca said. "[We drove him] home because we didn't want him to get in any trouble and we didn't want anyone else to be in danger [because] of his driving habits."

Some students recognize that, after a certain point, alcohol usage can cross a line.

"I feel like people who [over-use alcohol] should probably be more educated on alcohol and the effects it has on their bodies," said senior \*Mary. "Just being self-aware and knowing your body is really important. [There are] people who drink too much or get to the point where

they're unconscious. At that point, you're hurting yourself."

With all its potential consequences, why is drinking still so appealing to teenagers?

"Teens' [brains] are really wired for the thrill [from dopamine, which alcohol increases]," Beaumont said. "[If someone continually uses alcohol], the dopamine has a harder time firing up on its own. [The brain] is now wired to get the alcohol instead of making its own dopamine."

Students describe the effect of alcohol as euphoria.

"Everything slows down," Ernie said. "Sometimes you get motion blur; it is a depressant, and it slows down your system."

Ernie feels that drinking in moderation can be an enjoyable experience.

"It's called living while you're young," Ernie said. "I'm actually thankful that my friends sort of pressured me to do it because it enhances my life."

Alcohol can be easily accessible, with students stealing from their parents, stores or asking others to get it for them.

"A lot of people either access alcohol through older siblings, [someone who] has a fake ID or is of age," Bridges said.

On the other hand, some students stay as far away from alcohol as possible.

"[In my family], we've always been taught to stay away from alcohol until we're [of the legal drinking] age - then we can make our own decisions," said freshman Aveah Pok. "Right

now, we're still young, and we're still learning things and we're still developing."

Others attempt to strike a middle ground. Finnigan balances his frequent drinking with athletic responsibilities.

"Alcohol is something I think about daily," Finnigan said. "But I make sure that it doesn't interfere with the sports that I'm playing because I know that it can [have] a really big effect on how I perform. But, I do see a significant difference [in my] heart rate."

Finnigan recognizes the flaws of his lifestyle, but chooses to continue it.

"Yes, I have an alcohol addiction," Finnigan said. "Do I want to stop it? No, I do not."

Mary offered her perspective on preventing dangerous alcohol usage in students.

"I'm not saying that parents have to be okay with their kids drinking," Mary said. "But, I think that a lot of the times kids get so drunk because they have such strict parents, [that] when they're away from them, they make crazy decisions. They don't know how to act. If parents have open, honest conversations about [alcohol] with their kids, [they] are less likely to abuse [alcohol] once they have access to it."

Many students find it important to exercise caution with their alcohol usage.

"[In my opinion], it's okay if you go to a party and try alcohol just once, as long as it's not a habit," Pok said. "Our brains are still developing and it's unhealthy to always be under the influence of alcohol [since] you don't know how you're going to react."



Student plays the French horn.

DARRA MCLINTOCK

## Band Winter Concert

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"This is the first year we were allowed to choose the songs and vote on them," said senior and Symphonic Band member Urjaswee Debnath. "Sometimes Mr. Gallagher picks the pieces based on technical skill level."

Students spent a lot of time rehearsing for this concert.

"We spend time from when we get our music all the way up until the concert rehearsing and preparing, fixing all [the] stuff that we need to work on," said sophomore and Symphonic Band member Jude Bautista. "We do a lot of assignments that help improve our playing and we look back on what we could do better."


Musicians offered their reflections on their performance.

"I think I did really well on overcoming the fear that crowded my brain before the first performance," Saito said. "That was the biggest step I took and I'm really proud of that."

Audience members like junior Thomas Williams enjoyed the performance.


"[The concert] was very bombastic with less focus on dynamics, and more focus on being fun for the audience to listen to," Williams said. "There was one part [in] a song that had a lovely 'calm-down' point [which] gave the audience time to breathe, and I would like more songs like that."

Aragon jazz bands perform on Dec. 15, concluding the Winter Concert series.




**BYRD'S FILLING STATION**  
219 South San Mateo Dr., San Mateo CA 94401

Don't be a GRINCH,  
**GO GREEN**



5% discount on your first purchase of \$20 or more!

**Come check out our Zero Waste Grocery Store for more clean and sustainable products!**




**Schwab Learning Center**


*School is so much easier with **SLC at CHC on your side!***


**Students with ADHD, dyslexia, and other learning differences...**

Our experts will help you discover your strengths, build lifelong skills, and create habits to support you now and in the future.

**When working 1:1 with a Learning Specialist you will:**


 **Train** on technology designed for reading, writing, time management and productivity

 **Sharpen** your skills on test preparation and post-exam review

 **Improve** your executive function techniques, like breaking down projects and chunking into manageable tasks


*And more!*


**REGISTER OR LEARN MORE!**



chconline.org/slc  
slc@chconline.org  
650.617.3800

**PARENTS**—check out our new classes to empower your teen living with learning and attention differences!







**Plasti-Print, Inc.**

Custom Screen Printing  
Digital Printing  
Apparel Design  
Embroidery

**SPIRIT AND ATHLETIC WEAR**

[www.plasti-print.com](http://www.plasti-print.com)

# Meta sued for addictive, harmful algorithm

Chase Rokala  
NEWS WRITER

"I keep saying to myself, 'just one more,'" said freshman Mark Gonzalez. "Even though I know it's addictive, I just can't stop."

While this rhetoric is usually associated with substance abuse — marijuana dependence, alcohol addiction — it's become synonymous with students' social media usage.

Social media has been a big part of youth culture for almost two decades, and has cemented itself as an integral part of people's lives. But now, California Attorney General Rob Bonta has formed a coalition of 33 attorneys general to pump the brakes on the multi-billion dollar company for allegedly targeting kids. Meta, which owns and operates Facebook and Instagram, is being sued by 41 states for its addictive features and violation of state consumer protection laws.

The lawsuit claims that Meta knowingly uses strategies to hook users and maximize profit, which causes in turn the growing mental health crisis among children.

"They know what they're doing," said health teacher Barba-

ued to reassure parents and the public that their platforms are safe for children. In a statement, Meta said it shares "the Attorney General's commitment to providing teens with safe, positive experiences online, and [has] already introduced over 30 tools to support teens and their families."

However, there is still a stigma around social media from students and parents. Four out of five students said that they know social media is addictive, but that it doesn't change their usage of it.

"Meta has preyed on the vulnerability of young users seeking validation and approval from peers," said Pennsylvania Attorney General Michelle Henry. According to an analysis of Meta's Q2 data, ad revenue was up 11% compared to the same period last year, reaching \$31.5 billion — that's \$31.5 billion that Meta made at the expense of children's health across America.

Additionally, the lawsuit accuses Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Meta, of ignoring warnings from Instagram's then-Head of Policy about the negative impacts their platforms could have on children's mental health.



ra Beaumont. "Are they making money off it? Absolutely. Can they change it? Absolutely, but they want the money."

Strategies like infinite scrolling and constant alerts are designed to capture students' attention and keep them coming back for more. The lawsuit cites research showing that young people's use of social media is related to anxiety, depression, and insomnia. However, despite concerns and allegations, Meta has contin-

Specifically, it focuses on the effects a plastic surgery filter could have on young girls. When the former Policy Head pleaded with Zuckerberg in an email, writing, "We're talking about actively encouraging young girls into body dysmorphia," Zuckerberg dismissed these claims and disregarded the company's own internal research that displayed the harmful, addictive nature of the platforms.

Amidst the disconnect between youth mental health statistics and Zuckerberg's actions, some propose solutions.

"I think the only way for social media to be positive and productive, without the negative and dangerous sides, would be to have it run by a non-profit organization that really focuses on the best interests of the users," said AP Psychology teacher Carlo Corti.

Many people are aware of the harmful effects social media has, but they still have difficulty stopping due

to societal pressures and the psychological strategies employed by Meta. However, recognizing that social media is addictive is the first step in managing your usage of it.

“When I’m using it I feel like I’m in a trance”

"I feel like with all your friends on it, you feel pressured to use it too," said senior Eshaan Thakral. "When I'm using it I feel like I'm in a trance."

Others echoed this sentiment.

"I'll start using it, then two hours later I'm in a trance, my mouth is open and I'm just strolling endlessly," Gonzalez said.

## The ARAGON OUTLOOK

aragonoutlook.org

Aakanksha Sinha  
Editor-in-Chief

Ruhi Mudoj  
Managing Editor

Scott Silton  
Faculty Adviser

**FEATURES**  
Lipika Goel\*  
Agastya Raghavan\*  
Liza McGilpin\*  
Ellen Li\*  
Chloe Chen  
Garret Chiu  
Matthew Grabow  
Charlotte Gregory  
Kyra Hsieh  
Oliver Levitt  
Hannah Li  
Meilin Rife  
Seona Srivastava  
Ashley Tsui  
Jonathan Wong  
Allinah Zhan

**SOCIAL MEDIA**  
Liza McGilpin\*  
Anna He\*  
Ruhi Mudoj\*

**BUSINESS**  
Allyson Chan\*  
Grace Tao\*

**TECHNOLOGY**  
Cheryl Lam\*

**NEWS**  
Eesha Gupta\*  
Grace Tao\*  
Darren Lo\*  
Darshan Bal  
Christine Choi  
Claire Dong  
Naomi Kotani  
Eric Li  
Helen McCloskey  
Angela Nguyen  
Oscar Nicolson  
Anushka Punjabi  
Chase Rokala  
Emma Shen  
Yang Yang

**SPORTS**  
Leah Hawkins\*  
Andrew Dong\*  
Quinn Shirley  
Phoebe Harger  
Sora Mizutani  
Matthew Gregory  
Caroline Harger  
Jack He  
Charlie Henderson  
Antonio Mangano

**PHOTO**  
Anna He\*  
Ava Sims  
Victoria Santana  
Julia Del Mundo  
Aila Liu  
Nailah Blake  
Darra McLintock  
Jorell Sakamoto  
Lian Wang

**GRAPHICS**  
Allyson Chan\*  
Lillian Huang  
Melody Liu  
Zelda Reif  
Eva Ludwig  
Jessica Xia  
Alexa Sterry  
Amanda Zhu

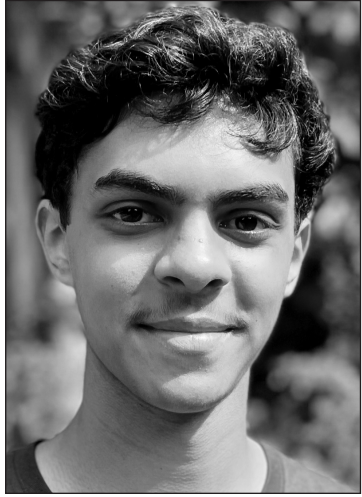
**CENTERSPREAD**  
Felix Ma\*

**EDITORIAL**  
Eesha Gupta\*

\*denotes editors

# Editorial: long-term sub policy needs reformation

REPORTING BY DARREN LO



Satvik Reddy (12)

The problem is, in the case of someone like [Steve] Ratto, there [are] already so few physics teachers. There's nobody qualified to be subbing for AP Physics C, for example. In the Venn diagram of substitute teachers and people who know enough physics and calculus to teach these kids, [few fall in both categories]. It's a very tough situation, but Mr. Ratto probably got closest to what the correct solution is, which is video lectures and Zoom calls as much as you can, but that's not always possible.

When people asked for help, [one sub] would only be able to work through rudimentary concepts — most of the time, they knew almost as much as we did, because they hadn't studied a lot of [the specific subject]. A lot of it came down to having to self-teach and Google things and email [our teacher] a lot.

[One sub] did try to lecture us a lot. I recall people being pretty much unengaged for the vast majority of the time, [because] the work wasn't very hard, nor was it worth that many points. So people did not have much incentive to work. A lot of us were working on other stuff. We would just speed through the daily tasks that they would give us, which tended to not be all that much.

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

From paternal leave to extended illness, Aragon often employs long-term substitutes to cover classes amidst teacher absences. The combined teacher and sub shortage has led to adverse effects on the availability of long-term subs for Aragon classes. This predicament is particularly pronounced in higher-level classes, where a lack of educators with specified credentials or experience results in reduced educational opportunities; i.e. Advanced Placement-specific teachers can teach students specific strategies for the AP test. The editors of the Aragon Outlook believe that Aragon, the San Mateo Union High School District and the Californian educational requirements surrounding long-term substitute teacher policies should be reformed to better support students.

To be a substitute teacher for California, one must meet educational requirements and pass a background check. Specifically, subs must have a bachelor's degree in any subject, score above a 500 on the SAT in either English or Math, score a 3 or greater on the College Board AP English exam and AP Calculus or AP Statistics, pass the California Basic Educational Skills Test, and pass Commission on Teacher Credentialing Live Scan fingerprinting (Form 41-LS). However, the majority of teachers in the district have Emergency 30-Day Substitute Permits, rather than credentials, which last for a year and are renewable.

Long-term subs are supposed to have degrees in the specific subjects they're

teaching, but due to shortages, this is rarely the case. During the pandemic, Calif. Governor Gavin Newsom signed an executive order extending the time that a long-term substitute without a specific degree in the subject can teach a classroom, allowing up to 60 days. The order was extended in a trailer bill in Sept, but remains insufficient. While the law is intended to encourage districts to find credentialed experts to fill positions, districts often resort to employing a second, or even third sub without credentials to fill the time. Therefore, not only are students further disadvantaged by substitutes unfamiliar with the coursework, but also, they also have to adjust to a new teacher, often with different grading, testing and classroom policies. This policy should be modified to avoid such loopholes.

Individuals with the necessary credentials usually choose to serve as full-time teachers, leaving sub positions empty. Unlike teachers, substitutes are not offered benefits, receive significantly lower pay, operate without contracts, lack union protections and can be pressured into stressful situations — teaching two classes at once, covering extra periods, and more. However, long-term substitutes are only paid more after 25 days. The most effective method to truly increase the number of substitute teachers to fulfill the demand is increasing their pay and providing baseline benefits. These benefits have already been offered to subs in the past — for example, to incentivize teachers to work as subs after retiring, the district offers them health benefits.

Aragon teachers are more

familiar with the school rules, how to use Canvas, and students in general, and most importantly, can provide a better education to students, and thus are preferable to outside substitutes. When Aragon teachers cover others' periods, they're paid more than outside subs, which at face value appears to be a strong incentive, but the district discourages Aragon teachers from subbing as a way to save money — at the cost of a student's education.

Aragon teachers are the school's greatest asset. Last year, when computer science and math teacher Kris Reiss took eight weeks off to recover from surgery, math teachers Carly DeMarchena and Cheri Dartnell, and AP computer science and math teacher Lisa Kossiver subbed. When AP Psychology and Modern World History teacher Jessica Hardy was out on maternity leave, AP Psychology teacher Carlo Corti was able to help out. As his prep periods overlapped with Hardy's AP Psychology classes, he taught her class how to answer Free Response Questions for the AP test, something an outside substitute teacher would lack the insight to help with, and opened up his Flex to her students as well.

Alternatively, another possible solution would be to offer long-term substitute opportunities to student teachers in training, allowing them to teach as a long-term substitute in order to complete the qualifications for a full teaching degree. As they could obtain an Emergency 30-Day Substitute Permit and have a background in teaching already, they would serve as more qualified applicants.



Vishal Dandamudi (12)

Our subs didn't really know what to emphasize, they just presented all the material as equally important. Actual teachers [say], 'hey, this is the important part, pay attention.' They also go beyond the slides [and discuss content] around them.

If we're with a sub, teaching is the same as self-studying at that point. We should just be allowed to do things on our own, like, go through the presentation on our own, or even go further than that. Find our own videos to learn like that. It was kind of a waste of time listening to the presentation, when all that's happening is [students] slowly reading off the slides and copy pasting.

For [one sub], iwt was more that they didn't know how to grade things quickly. So they were perpetually overwhelmed, and our assignments would get graded three weeks later. Then they'd tell us like they're really, really behind. And we're like, 'Oh, no,' [but, it's not] their fault, but they didn't know the material at all.

## 2022-2023 state test scores decrease

Angela Nguyen  
NEWS WRITER

On Sep. 18, the California Department of Education released the annual California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress test scores. Data released has revealed that Aragon's scores have decreased comparatively to the previous years'.

"We're dealing with the most difficult period of education since World War II," said U.S. History teacher Jayson Estassi. "[It's a] combination of the pandemic and changing factors in our society [that] have led to learning loss in our students and put other pressures on them and on teachers as well."

CAASPP, also known as the Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment, is used to track students' performances and prepare them for college level work. The results give schools a better grasp on a student's strengths and what to be improved upon. Schools will tailor curriculums and techniques to student needs. Students from third through eighth grade and 11th grade take the test annually.

In 2023, the percentage of Aragon juniors who did not meet standards for English Language Arts rose from 14.1% in 2022 to 17%. In addition, the percentage of standards not met for math from 2023 was 39%, which was a two percent increase compared to the percentage of standards not met in 2022, 37%. Some find these results unexpected.

"[Aragon test scores decreasing] recently has come to surprise me, especially because of how competitive schools are getting every year," said junior Sam Pirzadeh.

During the two weeks of testing, Aragon uses a different time schedule that allows students to take the tests for an hour and a half twice a week. As a result, many students and teachers find the CAASPP stressful and time-consuming.

"I don't like the loss of instructional time," Estassi said. "I don't think it's a particularly valuable [process] for students."

Senior Trish Clemente offers her take on testing.

"It's challenging because sometimes you're not in the right mindset to take tests [which makes it] difficult to concentrate," Clemente said.

Scores for the CAASPP are sorted into four levels: Standard Exceeded, Standard Met, Standard Nearly Met and Standard Not Met. Scores are released in the fall.

"I definitely look at it, but it [doesn't] affect [me] too much since it's just a state test," said sophomore Sydney Miller.

Others believe test results can be useful.

"I don't find [the scores] useless," Clemente said. "I find it as a way to challenge myself even more on my work habits and work ethic."

There are achievement gaps between race and income. In 2022-23, only 19.6% of economically disadvantaged students met or exceeded standard mathematics.

"Income [can affect some students' test scores because] some people can pay for tu-

tors, but other people can't," Miller said.

Furthermore, according to the California School Board of Learning, the Latino race has had the lowest rate of standards met across all subjects.

"The data shows that our young men of color struggle the most," said Assistant Principal David Moore.

During the 2022-23 school year, 74% of Aragon's Latino students did not meet math standards, which was a 3.4% increase from 2022.

"As a [Latino person], we have more difficulties because our families do a bunch of things and then us as children, we try to help our parents as much as we can," Clemente said.

"Sometimes they get out really late from work, and then we focus on helping our family out."

Aragon has worked to support student academics through Flex time, tutor.com and a tutoring center after school where students can get help. After the pandemic, the school worked to support anticipated learning loss.

"Our teachers have radically changed their pedagogy, their instruction [and] their assessment post COVID," Moore said. "The biggest implementation we [have is the] compassionate grading. A lot of our teachers allow test retakes for a certain amount of grade [and] acceptance of late work."

Besides those changes, Aragon will also implement more support for students in the spring.

"We're looking into getting an offsite mentorship program to come on campus called 'Friends for Youth,'" Moore said. "They work with high school students to help academics, social, emotional [and] mental well being who hope to start that in the spring."

In 2023, the percentage of all California students who met standards for ELA and Math was 47% and 35% respectively.

As a result of a drop of test scores, California created a new math framework and spent millions on the new literacy plan with the hope of improving the scores. To provide extra help, the state has also invested eight billion for tutoring and support classes.

# Internet opens world of self-diagnosing

Kyra Hsieh  
FEATURES WRITER

*\*Names have been changed to protect source privacy.*

In recent years, mental health has become less stigmatized with growing mental health content becoming readily accessible on social media platforms. However, the growing access to some content has led some people to self-diagnose themselves based on what they see online.

"Therapists can have platforms [online]," said wellness counselor Jillian Ma. "If that reduces stigma and opens up conversation, that's great."

Ma comments that although statements by professionals may be accurate, they may not apply to the particular viewer.

"We tend to cherry pick," Ma said. "We're like, 'I like that so I want to apply that to myself,' because we're trying to search for answers."

\*Eva, a sophomore, self-diagnosed herself with obsessive-compulsive disorder when she was nine years old. Not only did she notice common symptoms of OCD, but she also knew her family had a history of it.

"I was talking to my mom, and I [asked her], 'When I tap my fingers, why do I have to keep them in a certain rhythm?'" Eva said. "If I don't, then I can't continue with certain [tasks]. [My mom] said, 'I have it too. It's OCD.'"

\*Violet spoke to her friends on the autism spectrum about their experiences after seeing content about it on social media.

"More people started getting diagnosed with autism, especially now because of the widespread knowledge on social media," Violet said. "Seeing how [autism] presents itself in girls, [I thought I might have it]."

Misophonia is another disorder Violet diagnosed herself with, in which people are emotionally disturbed by common sounds and can have a fight-or-flight reaction.

"Common sounds are physically revolting to me," Violet said. "[For example,] when people are [using] knives and they scrape a plate. It's been an issue with me and the rest of my family."

People feel a variety of emotions when they self-diagnose. \*Pearl, a freshman, felt more secure after self-diagnosing herself with autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, depression and anxiety.

"It made me want to get [professionally] diagnosed," Pearl said. "It made me understand myself a little bit more."

Violet also felt that self-diagnosing made a positive impact on her mental health, as she had been confused and searching for answers before.

"It had been eating away at me for a while, just not really knowing what was going on," Violet said.

Many people have different opinions on whether or not to seek a professional diagnosis. Some, like Eva, don't find a need to seek a professional diagnosis at all.

"It wouldn't do much [because] it's not [that extreme] where I'd need medication for it," Eva said. "It's also not something I'd need an Individualized Education Program for extra time on tests."

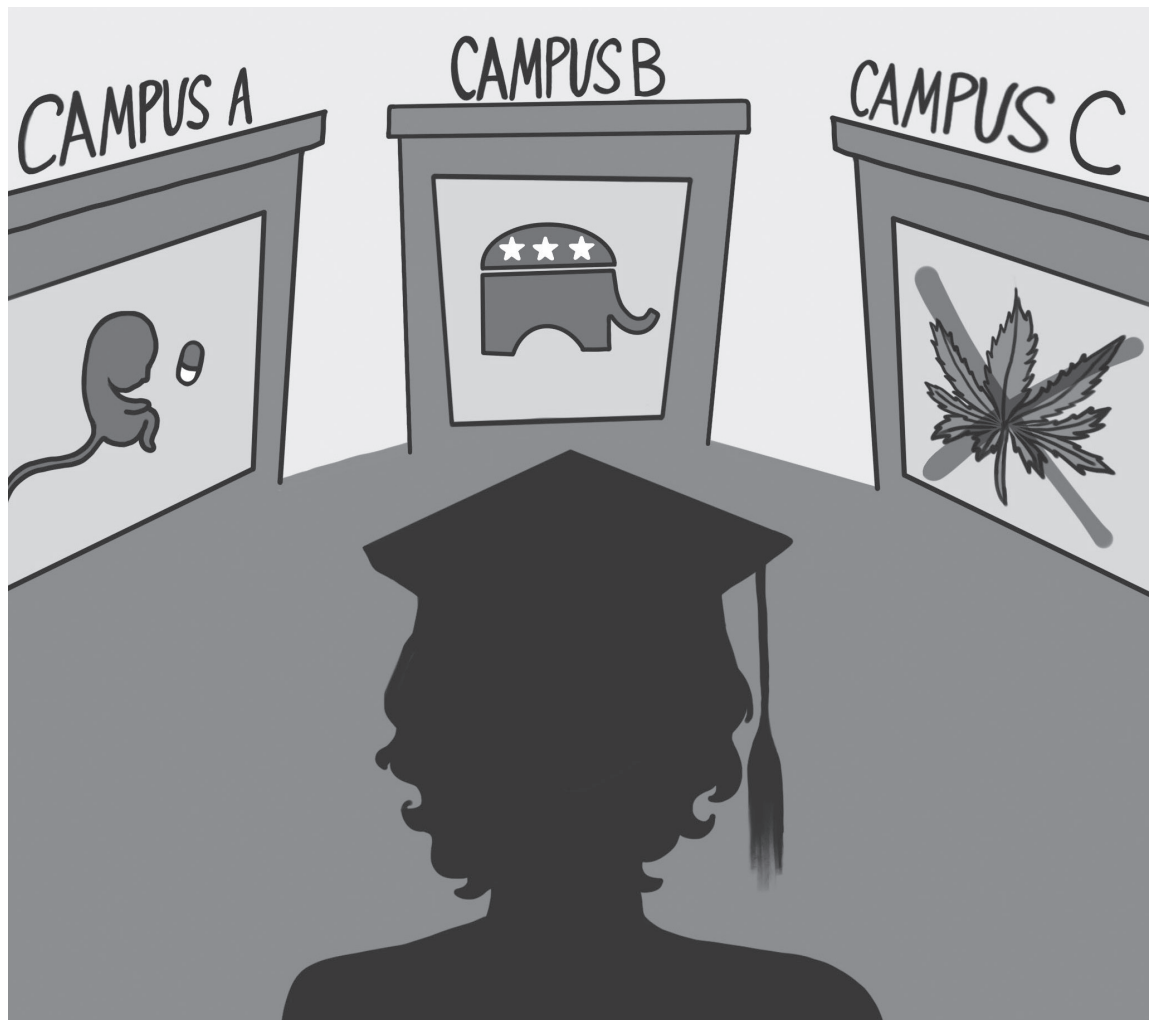
Another reason for not getting professionally diagnosed is feeling uncomfortable talking about one's mental health.

"We don't feel the [same] shame of having allergies that we do to having some sort of mental health need" Ma said. "It's all things and our brain is just a part of our body."

In the wellness office, Ma appreciates those who focus on behavior over labels.

"Asking questions [and] showing a level of self-awareness is really great," Ma said.

Ultimately, the internet increases visibility around mental health, allowing students to recognize similar behavior and make personal decisions based on this widespread information.



ALEXA STERRY

# Political climates influence student college decisions

Oliver Levitt  
FEATURES WRITER

For seniors pursuing college, the application process can weigh heavily on their minds in these next few months. With hundreds of possible options, there are countless factors to consider, like a school's location, education and culture. As teenagers become politically active, some give importance to the political climate and laws around their schools of interest.

"There have definitely been schools that I originally wanted to go to but decided not to based on the laws that govern that area, such as laws protecting gun rights or revoking reproductive rights," said senior Arden Salotti.

The political values of the Bay Area can influence student's values, and therefore, their application process.

"I feel that I've been brought up in an environment that really values equality for all," said senior Devika Mehra. "I've really [become] used to it. If I were to be thrown into an environment where hate is readily enforced and normalized by society, I would not be able to properly accept that ... Especially being Indian, if I were to experience discrimination to a point where I hadn't before, that would definitely throw me off my game and make it so I could not properly flourish as a student and focus on what I need to focus on."

For Salotti, a lack of restrictive gun policy is a serious concern for an area of potential schooling.

"I've always been really aware of that," Salotti said. "[I have] immigrant parents, I've seen how other countries work and it's very intense. I don't want to be [in] a place that I don't feel safe in."

Mehra sometimes considered the political climate of a college above its education.

"Some of the schools that are really good for my major, I don't even consider just because of their location," Mehra said. "For example, the University of Florida and Florida State University [are] both really strong schools for my major, but I believe that the state they're in is not really aligned with my values [since] I'm left leaning. I am trying to stray from these schools [even if they] could benefit me, just because I feel that I wouldn't be able to thrive properly if I lived in that environment."

In addition to the political views of the school, the racial demographic is another factor to consider.

"I've traveled to a bunch of places across the country and politics have a big influence on representation and the amount of minorities I've noticed," said senior Emma Samayoa. "For example, I passed through the central states like Iowa, and noticed there's not as much diversity. [So] I'm not applying to any schools there."

Some students have also taken into account the beliefs of future peers.

"I was looking at some of the states down in the deep south," Salotti said. "I do have [the] privilege [that] if I do get into any trouble, I am just one phone call and a flight ticket away to a state where I can get help. It's not really about the laws that are there as much as it is about the mentality. I want to be around like-minded people where I can feel safe and work together with them."

Given the wish to study in an environment where they feel safe, comfortable and adequately represented, some students have chosen to apply primarily to schools within California.

"I'm trying to stay in-state with my applications right now," said senior Kelsey Mallard. "I want to stay near my family as well, but also the cultural norms are something that I'm used to and something that I know I'll probably thrive better in. I want to advocate for different issues and join clubs that are [going to] have the same interests as me."

While family is an aspect that many consider, the climate of the location remains a key factor in choosing the right fit.

"I have family in Alabama, so I was considering looking at some schools like Auburn University [or] University of Alabama in Birmingham," Mehra said. "Both those schools are really strong and what turned me away was just the political climate of Alabama as a whole, [being] just radically conservative. I know if I were to be put in that environment, I would not flourish. I know that I would not be able to resonate with those around me and my community."

The mentality of fellow students is something Salotti believes students should consider. There seems to be a consensus that campus climate is as important as the academic component.

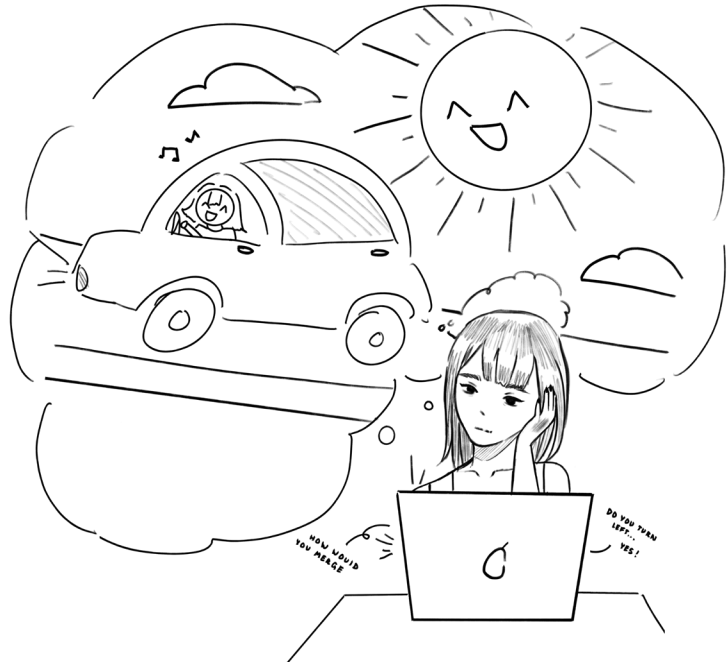
"I think that people should have an open mind [about] where they want to go," Salotti said. "But also, always consider the facts. It's great if you get into a great school that can teach you well and you can get that start into your career, but at the end of the day, who you're surrounded by is also an insane factor. You don't want to be around people that are going to treat you unwell or are going to say things that you don't agree with."

Overall, as students look forward to their next chapter, they must make decisions on what community they wish to be a part of.



JESSICA XIA

# Students delay getting licenses, choosing alternatives



Liza McGilpin  
FEATURES EDITOR

ALLYSON CHAN

For decades, popular media has deemed sixteen a landmark age. It's the age of prom, junior year and most importantly, driving. When thinking about how teen driving is portrayed in movies, images of characters accidentally driving onto the highway or bumping into mailboxes leap to mind, all in pursuit of one great boon: a driver's license.

However, in recent years, teenagers have been less in-

clined to pursue this once popular accomplishment. According to the Federal Highway Administration, 41% of teenagers between the ages of 16-19 had their licenses in 2021, a notable decline from 1995, when 64% were able to legally drive.

Over the years, the process of getting a license has become more complex. In 1997, California passed the Graduated Driver License law in an effort to limit the number of accidents amongst new drivers. The law implemented a three-step program to get a

full license, where the driver must first hold a permit for six months, take the driving test then operate under a provisional license, limiting the passengers and hours that a person may drive.

"[The six-month wait] definitely better prepares people that take it seriously," said senior Lauren Molloy. "But there's also people that don't drive during that time, so I have mixed feelings about it." While students understand the importance of driving restrictions for safety reasons, many who are trying to get their license find the length of the process frustrating.

"I feel like it's a little overkill," Molloy said. "First you have to do the online course. The one I did had a timer [where] you have to do three hours in total. So even though I was already done with the course, and I already passed all the exams, I still had to wait the three hours before I could print out the certification. Then you have to [wait] six months, and you have to do [driving] hours with the instructor and hours with your parents, which I get [but] it's just been way too long."

Other teenagers trying to get their licenses struggle with getting appointments and navigating the Department of Motor Vehicles.

"I've definitely been trying to get my license and my permit for quite a while now, and I've noticed that it's not the most straightforward process," said senior Arden Salotti. "I've been having to ask a lot of questions, [and] I feel like if it [had] been a lot easier, I would have had it by now. Especially with the appointments and just trying to find a date, it's always busy, and going to the DMV in general is such a stress fest."

Many find alternate methods of transportation. Modern technology has led to increased accessibility to transportation, with the rise of rideshare apps such as Uber and Lyft. Public transport agencies such as SamTrans are also common alternatives to driving.

"I come from a European family that grew up in countries that use a lot of public transportation," Salotti said. "So I don't have parents that are pushing me to get [my license]. Another thing is that I value public transportation in the sense that it's not emitting as much [carbon dioxide], it's more eco-friendly and better for the environment."

Others have found that the COVID-19 pandemic changed transportation for them. As of 2022, 34% of Americans can be found working from

home on an average day, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. From this, with many working parents being closer to home, 47% of parents working from home transport kids to activities during their work day, according to USA Today.

"[Some students without licenses] either have a parent that is working from home because of COVID or a stay-at-home parent," said senior Nuria Lopez Adorno. "So they have the freedom of asking their parents to drive them somewhere, or sometimes their friends [will] take initiative and drive them."

With other pressures taking priority, many students have put the license process on a back burner.

"I'm definitely getting my license later than I should [be]," said junior Luuk Nicholas. "I was busy and I just didn't think it was a big thing for me to drive. But now while I'm in the process and waiting, I wish I'd done it earlier."

Though driving is still an important part of life for students, the long process and access to alternative transportation lessens the urgency of attaining a driver's license, with some students choosing to prioritize their time elsewhere.

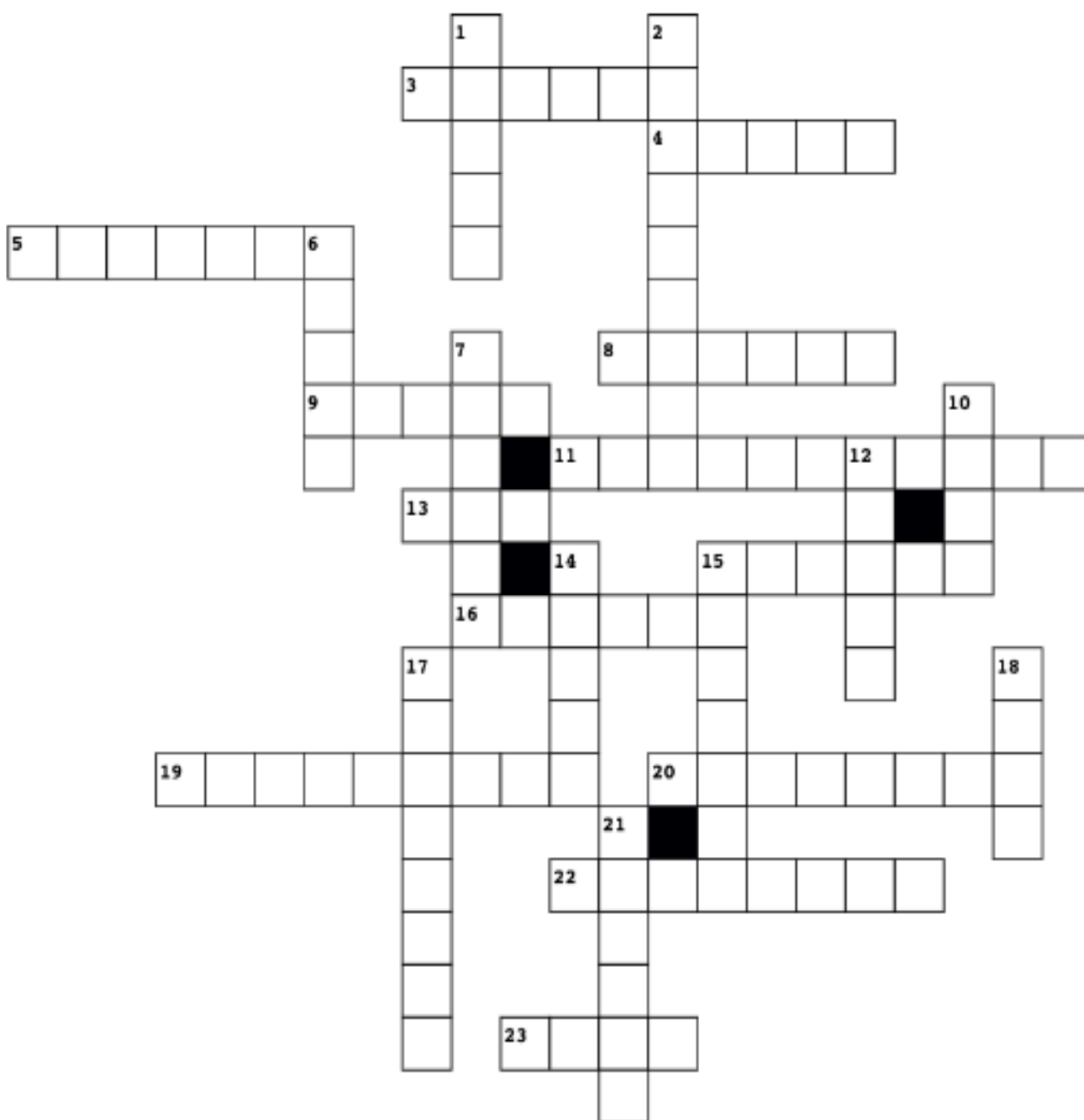
## DOWN

1. Kayak, backwards
2. Length of winter break
6. Seen on mountains and in math
7. Time's person of the year (first name)
10. Stress \_\_\_ week
12. Hue of winter leaves
14. Oppenheimer director (last name)
15. Aragon elders
17. Dolly Parton album (11/17)
18. Happy new \_\_\_!
21. Chinese zodiac of 2024

## ACROSS

3. Gerwig's 2023 hit
4. Second planet from sun
5. Spotify's top song of 2023
8. Snow that isn't lemon flavored
9. Cozy spirit day (abbr.)
11. Spicy winter bread
13. Opposite of none
15. Aragon teacher who wrote a book
16. Aragon's pup
19. Dec. 22 - Jan. 19 zodiac
20. Chocolate winter beverage (abbr.)
22. Aragon babies

aragonoutlook.org/  
section/crossword/



# The journey after Aragon: alumni on staff

Reporting by Chloe Chen & Garret Chiu

## Michael Wu, class of 2006, strength-conditioning & assistant football coach

In high school, football played an important part in the life of Michael Wu, Aragon strength-conditioning and assistant football coach.

"My father passed away the day I made the football team as a freshman," Wu said. "Our two coaches ... were my male role models. Because of that tremendous positive

impact that they had on me, it inspired me to reciprocate that to future students."

Wu originally intended to pursue a pre-medical pathway in college but soon discovered he wasn't passionate about it. He decided not to apply for medical school after graduating, instead exploring his interests through

a variety of jobs, such as researching prostate cancer and being a bouncer at clubs before deciding teaching was meant for him. Along with being a coach, he teaches math and chemistry at Burlingame High School.

Wu believes hard work and perseverance are key to one's success.

"All things negative are opportunities for me to rise," Wu said. "So much of the time we see adversity, we see little bumps in the road as negative, but if you can shift your perspective ... it's really a chance for [you] to improve."



ANNA HE

## Jennifer Seif, class of 2001, social science teacher

Jennifer Seif, who has been teaching social science classes at Aragon for about 15 years, credits her love for the subject to an interest in current events.

"[It] organically became [my] passion to help other people appreciate world events in context," Seif said.

Throughout her years of teaching, she has gotten to see her lessons influence the lives of her students.

"One student, after studying the Israel-Palestine conflict [in class], spent some time in the Middle East," Seif said. "[She] actually wrote me a letter from

her travels in the Middle East [about] how much the context and the historical analysis that we [did] in class had made her experience more rich."

Participating in the performing arts as a student is one of Seif's favorite memories from Aragon.

"I loved participating in musical theater at Aragon and seeing ... [the] music [department's support] and seeing all the tech theater kids coming," Seif said. "It [was and still is] really neat to see the school come together during the plays."



LIPKA GOEL

## Kristie Hala'ufia, class of 2005, instructional aide for the math department

Kristie Hala'ufia was a student athlete who played basketball and volleyball throughout her time at Aragon. She returned in 2011 as a volleyball and basketball coach and is an instructional aide for the math department this year.

"I liked the idea of helping develop players on and off the

court," Hala'ufia said. "I thought that coming back to teach would be a good way to help people grow."

Support from teachers and peers inspired Hala'ufia to pursue her passions.

"Some of my colleagues were also my teachers when I attended here as a student," Hala'ufia

said. "Those same teachers that are now my colleagues as well as the entire math department have encouraged me to achieve my credential."

Hala'ufia has advice to share with students.

"Live life to the fullest," Hala'ufia said. "Life's too short. Spend time with people that

you love and do your best with. For me, teaching, being with my students and supporting them as much as I can, [is really important]."

Hala'ufia is currently in the last semester of her credential program at San Francisco State University and hopes to teach full-time by the fall of 2024.



ANNA HE

## Steve Ratto, class of 2002, physics teacher

Steve Ratto returned to teach at Aragon at the age of 22 after finishing observation work for his teacher credential program. His own experience at Aragon and the community it gave him brought Ratto back to teach.

"I had such a great experience here as a student that I knew it was a great place to be," Ratto said. "There were a lot of

teachers that I had, who [are] still here now, so it was [very comfortable for me]."

Teaching physics classes at Aragon is a significant role for Ratto and he enjoys the responsibility he has.

"I take a lot of pride in being the physics teacher here as well," Ratto said. "It means a lot to me. The people I work with are really great. The students

really try hard and are willing to learn, and that's a big deal."

Four years of high school and 15 years of teaching at Aragon have also had a great impact on Ratto himself.

"[Being a teacher has] made me more compassionate," Ratto said. "I've definitely grown from the knowledge that I've gained from the people that work [with]."

His own positive experience as a student at Aragon gave Ratto inspiration for what he wanted to do in the future.

"Seeing [my teachers] work hard, seeing them care, see[ing] their class] matter definitely inspired me," Ratto said. "[This job] is something that I can wake up every day and enjoy doing and actually feel good about."



LIAN WANG

## Jessica Hardy, class of 2011, social science teacher

Jessica Hardy graduated in 2011 and returned to teach in 2020. However, this was during the pandemic and returning to Aragon as a teacher was a completely new experience.

"I remember asking Ms. Estrada [where the bathrooms were,] and she laughed and had to show me around," Hardy said. "I needed to figure

out where things were that I didn't need as a student."

Hardy recalls her fond memories of her time as a student and the connections she made.

"My husband and I met and started dating at Borel Middle School, and continued dating throughout our time here at Aragon," Hardy said. "I'm still friends with a lot of the friends that I had [at Aragon]."

Hardy has also brought fun into the classroom, especially during her prank wars with Advanced Placement United States History teacher Will Colglazier.

"My favorite [prank] was when I got his high school yearbook picture, and I made a meme out of it that said, 'Hey seniors, want a letter of [recommendation?] Come to my room,'" Hardy said. "Then I

had my teacher aides put posters all over campus. People actually thought it was real and serious, so then he got even more people asking him for letters of [recommendation]."

Along with teaching AP Psychology and modern world history, she now has a three month-old baby and is a top 1% Swiftie according to her Spotify Wrapped.



COURTESY OF JESSICA HARDY

Read about more returning alumni at [aragonoutlook.org](http://aragonoutlook.org)

ALLYSON CHAN

# Winter Recipes

## Cider

Courtesy of Tyler Hamilton, 11

"It's cozy and nice. [I had it at] my cousin's house ... they live in Canada. [The first time I had it] I was seeing my aunt and my cousins for the first time in a while, so [the cider] reminds me of that."

### Instructions

- Mix the following ingredients in a large container:
- 1 liter of apple juice
- 2 cloves
- 3 cinnamon sticks
- A handful of cranberries
- 1 cut up orange
- Heat on low for 2-3 hours



The editors of the Aragon Outlook surveyed students and faculty for their favorite holiday recipes. Then, after ensuring each recipe was authentic and original, we chose six of the most unique and memorable ones to share with our community!

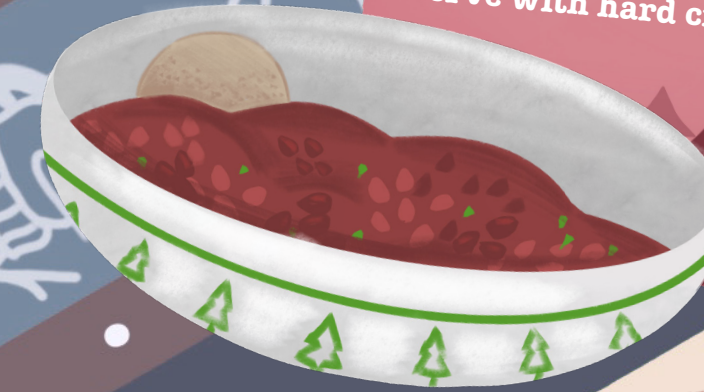
## Cranberry Salsa

Courtesy of Carlo Corti, teacher

"There's something nice about having this bright red food around the holiday season. There's a strong fruity and sweet taste to it that just makes you feel like you're in a good festive mood. Cranberries [especially] as a winter ingredient are just much better than they are at other times of year."

### Instructions

- Blend one bag of cranberries with sugar, jalapeno peppers, a yellow onion and orange slices.
- Mix and measure your own amounts of each ingredient based on what you like.
- Blend ingredients together and put it on top of a block of cream cheese.
- Serve with hard crackers.



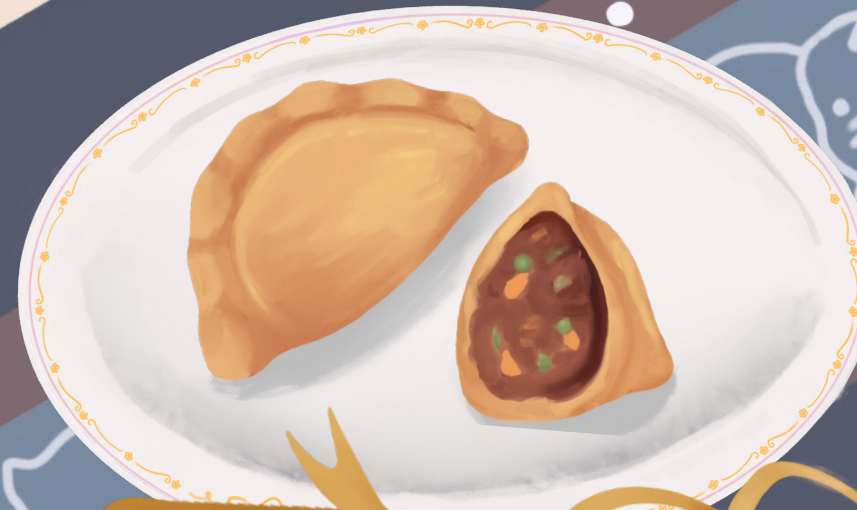
## Kofta Kebabs

Courtesy of Alex McGuigan, 11

"I remember eating this food when I was a kid and having it again and again every year [it] really reminds me of my childhood memories. One of my family members in Armenia makes it every year, so whenever I eat it, it makes me think of them and all the good memories that we have even though we're continents away."

### Instructions

- Preheat grill to medium heat. If using wooden skewers, soak in water prior to grilling.
- Blend onion and parsley in a food processor until it is a paste.
- Thoroughly mix the onion and parsley mixture with ground beef, tomato paste, red wine and spices in a mixing bowl.
- Divide the mixtures into 8 oblong meatballs roughly 3 inches long each.
- Pat each meatball around the skewer so it holds together around it and set them aside.
- Repeat with each meatball until every skewer is prepared.
- Place skewers over direct heat across oiled grill grates and close the lid. Sear for about 4-5 minutes before flipping.
- Skewers should easily release from the grill grates when they are ready to be flipped.
- When ready, flip skewers and continue to sear for 4-5 minutes.
- Remove the kofta kebabs from the grill and serve them with pita, tzatziki, salad or pilaf.



## Peppermint Bark

Courtesy of Samantha Crellin, 12

"We make it every Christmas, and it's something I look forward to every time. [We] like to switch out the peppermint for petite mints because it's less crunchy, but [the recipe] works with both."

### Instructions

- Cover a flat rectangular tray or plate with foil.
- Melt a metal bowl of white chocolate over barely simmering water, then pour 2/3 cup of it onto the tray.
- Spread the chocolate with a spatula, then cover with crushed peppermints liberally.
- Chill for 15 minutes or until set.
- Heat bittersweet chocolate, cream and peppermint extract in a heavy medium saucepan until smooth.
- Cool for 5 minutes, then pour over white chocolate layer and spread.
- Chill for about 25 minutes, until very cold and firm.
- Rewarm remaining white chocolate over simmering water and pour over bittersweet chocolate layer.
- Spread white chocolate, then immediately cover with remaining mints.
- Chill for 20 min or until firm.
- Lift bark off foil and cut into triangles or crack at random.
- Leave at room temperature for 15 minutes before serving.



## Sambousek

Courtesy of Dounia Kardosh, Staff Secretary

"I grew up in the Middle East in Lebanon and Syria, and one of my aunts was really a good cook. She would bring the family together every holiday and there [would be] a huge table of all these goodies and special dishes. [Sambousek] was my favorite ... they take a long time to prepare, and they're something special you make when you go out of your way for the holidays."

### Instructions

- Meat filling:**
- Toast pine nuts in a pan until golden brown, then remove.
  - Sauté olive oil and onions in pan for 3-5 minutes.
  - Add ground beef, salt & black pepper. Sauté until beef is brown.
  - Add spices and taste for salt.
  - Add toasted pine nuts and mix well.
- Dough:**
- Mix 4 cups flour, 2 tbsp. ghee, 1 tsp. salt, 2 tbsp. corn starch, ½ tsp. baking powder and 1 ½ cup water.
  - Let rest for 30 minutes.
  - Divide dough in half and roll out each portion 1/8 inch thick.
  - Cut into round shapes and fill each with meat mixture and fry.



## Latkes

Courtesy of Amit Shilon, 12

"Growing up, whenever I went to my grandma's house, she would always make these latkes ... [they] just give me a feeling of home ... My grandma learned the recipe from her mother, and her mother immigrated to Israel right before World War II, from Czechoslovakia. I was always aware that my family had lived through the Holocaust, and it's really interesting to see how a recipe can survive so much time."

### Instructions

- Grate 6 potatoes on the smallest holes in a box grater and discard the fluids.
- Beat 4 eggs, then add to the mixture.
- Add 1 tsp of salt.
- Mix well and fry. Oil not too deep, should reach to about half the height of the latke.
- Latkes are about 0.5" tall and about 3" in diameter.





# Pawsitive impact: meet Allison Adle and Rookie



Officer Adle and Rookie at the Halloween Rally VICTORIA SANTANA

Matthew Grabow  
FEATURES WRITER

In 2021, Allison Adle, a Youth Services Officer for the San Mateo Police Department, furthered her career by adopting the 10-week-old golden-doodle puppy that would soon become the SMPD's K9 therapy dog Rookie.

The duo's day generally entails scheduled visits to San Mateo and Foster City elemen-

tary, middle and high schools to comfort students. On top of this, Adle is also an on-duty Youth Service Officer, requiring her to respond to any school-related calls regarding threats, student safety and more. Upholding this dual role adds some complexity to Adle's work life.

"Being a therapy canine handler is a career highlight," Adle said. "I think I'm super lucky [and] super for-

tunate. I absolutely love it. Sometimes it can be exhausting, but I wouldn't change it for anything."

While Rookie and Adle's job involves mostly school-related calls, there are occasions where Rookie may be called out to comfort an adolescent in a forensic interview — a means of gathering information to utilize in legal settings like court.

"[The interview] is done in a really warm, comforting space," Adle said. "It's to allow the victim to share their story and sometimes those can be deep and hard interviews. Rookie [goes] in the room with the victim, he's able to support that person ... I've watched interviews where they have been emotional, crying and laid out on the ground with him."

To integrate Rookie into the district community, Adle collaborated with the wellness staff of every school to establish Rookie's Room, a place for Rookie to interact with students for scheduled meetings. When schools are available, the wellness center will reach out to schedule a day for Rookie to visit.

"Rookie's role here [is] ... to help [students] self-regulate," said wellness counselor Peter Green. "They come in and they spend time with Rookie. ... Sitting down next to him [and] petting him ... gives all these signals to our brain [telling us] it's okay."

A typical session in Rookie's Room includes playing and interacting with Rookie in groups of two or three, while Adle watches over them and takes the time to converse with students.

"It is informal [in] Rookie's room," Adle said. "It's about students being able to connect with Rookie, but me also being able to connect with them. Sometimes people see a uniform and they might assume things or have a perception based on their own interactions, which is okay. But for me, it's really just to talk to people, to have them get to know me as a person ... a little bit beyond just the badge."

Despite not being at Aragon for long, the positive effect of Rookie's presence has shown a beneficial impact on the mood of students.

"Knowing that there's a therapy dog on campus that you can go to if you're stressed lightens up the mood for everyone in our community," said junior Yuna Irokawa.

For students and staff, interacting with Rookie has been an outlet for alleviating school, work or external stress.

"Every day I always hear students say 'Oh, Rookie, I need to do so much,' 'I miss you' [or] 'I was having such a hard day, I'm so glad you're here,'" Adle said. "Seeing the support he's able to provide for students is my favorite thing."

Aragon Wellness plans to continue scheduling visits to Rookie's Room with Adle in order to help aid students and build connections.

I wouldn't change [my job] for anything



# A deep dive into Eric Simons' upcoming book

Ashley Tsui  
FEATURES WRITER

The unknown mysteries that lie in the depths of the waters inspired Algebra I and Geometry teacher Eric Simons and scientist Dr. Tessa Hill, recipient of the Rachel Carson Lecture award, to write their upcoming book, "At Every Depth," an eight-year project discussing the changing ocean and its relationship to humans.

Before becoming a teacher at Aragon, Simons worked as a magazine journalist for 20

years. Recently, however, he realized he wanted a change from writing and began transitioning into teaching. Throughout this transition, though, he continued working on his book and collaborating with Hill.

The co-authors met several years ago when Simons interviewed Hill for a documentary called "Sea of Troubles." They immediately connected over humanity's relationship with the ocean and the future of the planet.

While working as a journalist, Simons was intrigued by the

state of the ocean. As a result, he started to learn more and realized the astounding diversity in the sea.

"The book was this attempt to say [the ocean] is this remarkable, complex place," Simons said. "Look at all the different ways people engage with it and study it and see it, and all the ways it's changing now."

For Hill, inspiration stemmed from how difficult it is for people to understand what happens in the water.

"When a wildfire or a drought takes place on land, we see it and feel it," Hill said. "But what about the same kind of processes underwater? We wondered what it would be like to collect stories and work on building an even stronger connection to the ocean."

The book includes oceanic research spanning several years and interviews with scientists, Indigenous community members, coastal communities and fishermen all over the world about their relationship with the sea, and the impact of climate change.

The book was a learning experience for both authors, as this is Hill's first book, and Simons' first co-written book, having previously published two other books. Despite the new environment, they collaborated well and helped each other grow as writers.

While the book was in development, the pandemic hit, altering their plans. Instead of traveling, they had to use Zoom or Facetime to conduct their interviews. But ultimately, these virtual interviews helped them add more perspective and dimension to their writing.

"We saw a lot of [places] virtually, but I think [it]

kind of worked out," Simons said. "It really forced us to have people tell us about these places and how they see them in their own way."

Though the issue of traveling was quickly resolved, another problem quickly arose. Both Simons and Hill were faced with the challenge of balancing work and family during a trying time.

"Both of us are parents and I spent 2020 ... helping [my daughter] do kindergarten on Zoom and also working," Simons said. "This book has always been something we work on when we can and part of the reason it took so long is because we had so many other commitments."

Another difficulty they faced was handling challenging topics and sensitive interviews.

"The ocean is changing very fast, at a pace that we can't really keep up with," Hill said. "People who care deeply about the ocean are grappling with a lot of change and an uncertain future. Those conversations were often sad and vulnerable, but often had equal parts of hope and optimism."

Though there were many obstacles, the whole process was a valuable learning experience, and both writers

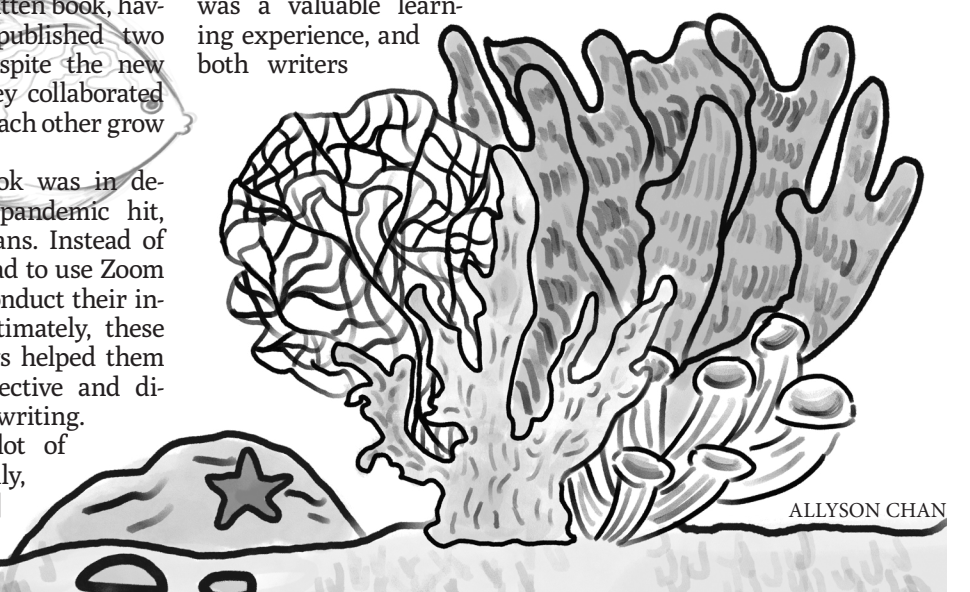
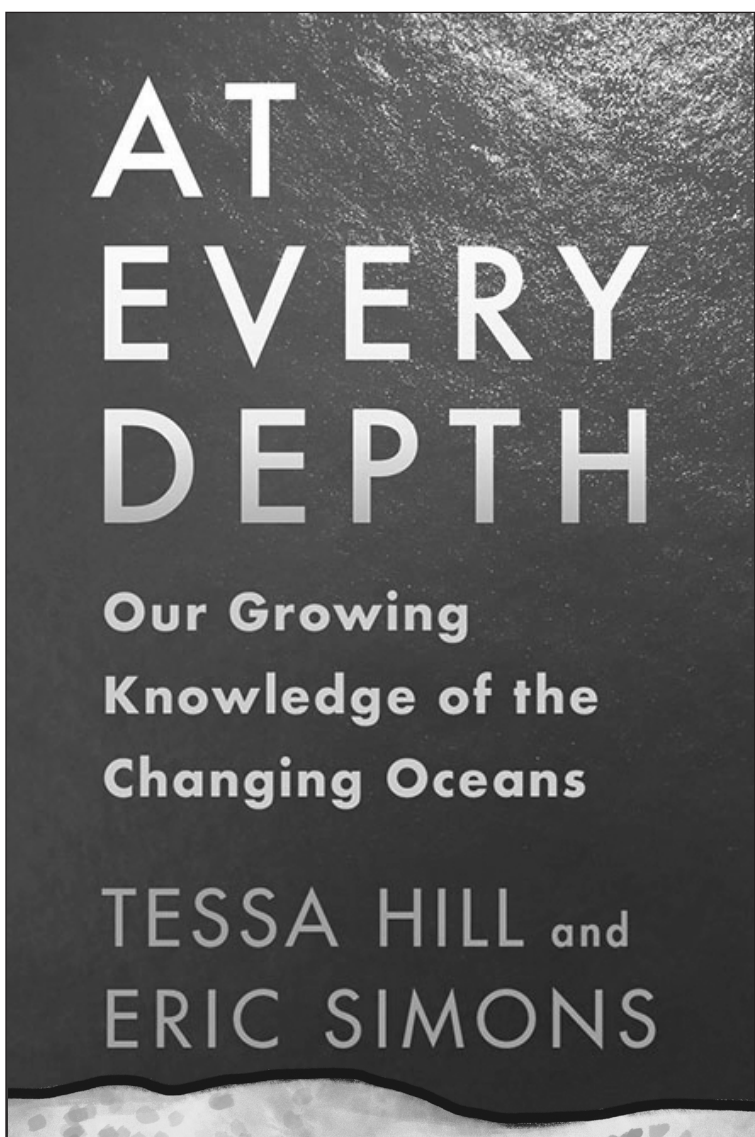


VICTORIA SANTANA

walked away feeling content and optimistic.

"A key takeaway for me is that many of the people we interviewed are overwhelmed by the global challenges that we face, but they are choosing to work at a local, community level to make the world a better place," Hill said. "People are partnering in new and exciting ways with members of their community to restore and protect coastal habitats."

The book is set to be released on Feb. 6, 2024. Simons plans to focus on teaching and has no current plans to publish any other work.

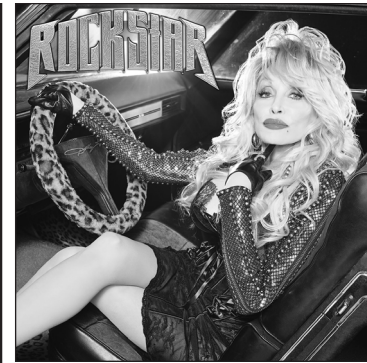


ALLYSON CHAN

# Put your records on: older albums

Reporting by Meilin Rife and Jonathan Wong

Spotify has descended, blessing its listeners with the neon glow of Spotify Wrapped, a tailored summary of each user's music habits. While for many, these summaries end up as a treasured snapshot of the new music they've discovered that year, for others, Spotify Wrapped is a list of music popular decades prior. While music commentary is usually focused on newly released albums, it is also worth revisiting classic ones.



BIG MACHINE RECORDS

## Dolly Parton rocks on

Allinah Zhan  
FEATURES WRITER

On Nov. 5, 2022, people everywhere watched with bated breath as country singer-songwriter Dolly Parton was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. After a speech expressing her gratitude, Parton sang her 1973 hit "Jolene."

Despite her induction, Parton hadn't actually released a rock album and felt the need to earn the honor. A year later, on Nov. 17, 2023, Dolly Parton released her 49th album "Rockstar." The album contains a splendid mix of nine original songs and 21 covers of rock classics. Despite the genre shift, Parton's soprano vocals stay true to her iconic slightly gritty tones and melodious vibrato.

The first and title track "Rockstar" is an original, with Parton's slight vibrato pairing nicely with the funky guitar style. The powerful lyrics narrate the story of an ambitious individual who wants to become an extraordinary rockstar despite parental disapproval, inspiring listeners to not give up on their dreams. Despite having a simple melody, it does an excellent job of opening the album.

The next song, "World on Fire" has a different appeal, although just as powerful. It opens up with the repeated phrase, "Liar, liar the world's on fire / Whatcha gonna do when it all burns down?" She continues to press the main point of the song by describing "Greedy politicians, present and past." Parton has previously avoided political topics, so this blatant statement indicates a new era in her career.

"Every Breath You Take" featuring English artist Sting is the first cover on the album. It is pretty similar to the original by The Police, although the background music is pitched down. Parton's piercing voice contrasts with Sting's and produces a rich stacking effect. Near the end, Sting softly sings the song's well-known lyrics while Parton layers her energetic vocals over it. The voices generally mesh well, but occasionally create an awkward dissonance.

CONTINUED ON  
ARAGONOUTLOOK.ORG

### OUR OUTLOOK



### "Big Swing Face"

"[Because] it's a live recording, you get the audience reaction and the artist communicating with his band and counting off, [which are] things you don't experience in a mastered, totally produced album. I like that old texture where you could feel the musicianship and you could almost taste the performance."

KEVIN GALLAGHER, DIRECTOR OF BANDS

"Big Swing Face" (1967) is a unique live jazz album that takes place in the Chez Club in Los Angeles. From the ferocious drum solo of "Bugle Call Rag," to the sorrowful "Lament for Lester," to Rich's then 12-year-old daughter on the vocals for "The Beat Goes On," Rich provides a very intimate jazz experience that transports listeners into the Chez Club. The title of every piece reflects the emotion associated with the piece; "Machine" sounds almost robotic, with each note changing at the same time and dissonant chords that create an eerie, yet familiar sound. With "Loose," the piece flows freely, including solos that don't have a direction, yet feel fitting. The album is a time machine back into the 1960s, encapsulating the limitless expanse and chaos of jazz.



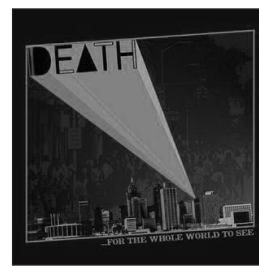
PACIFIC JAZZ RECORDS

### "For the Whole World to See"

"During quarantine, I [had] all these weird emotions [from] being alone and I found a lot of solace in heavy metal bands, [where you could scrape] your heart out [with] all your emotions. Older bands [especially] made me feel nice — like having nostalgia for a time I didn't even have [experience]."

EDDIE MARGOLIN, II

One of the earliest yet most undocumented punk rock albums, American band Death's "For the Whole World to See" (2009) explores the limits of rock and roll in its most primal form, switching between high-energy drums in "Rock and Roll Victim," low-vibrancy guitar in "Let the World Turn" and a frenzied beat in "Freakin' Out." In proper punk fashion, the Hackney brothers address societal issues head-on, and barely post-Vietnam War, they express disillusionment with propaganda-fed sentiments on "Politicians in My Eyes." If not for revived interest following a 2009 New York Times feature on Death, the album, recorded in the '70s, almost would not have been released. Given the popularity of punk rock today, the underwhelming reception of Death that led the brothers to retreat into gospel seems bizarre, but it is an artist's tale well told.



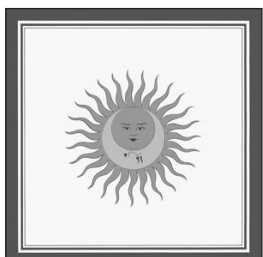
DRAG CITY RECORDS

### "Lark's Tongue in Aspic"

"I like exploring and playing music that maybe hasn't been heard in several hundred years, and bringing that to the light of day. In the same way that we might read old books to understand people ... [we try] to figure out what musicians [were] trying to say and what were the things that spoke to them."

ANDREW HARTIG, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

In the '70s, the avant-garde style of progressive rock ushered in an era of experimental albums like "Lark's Tongue in Aspic" (1973) by rock band King Crimson. The album announces itself as a clicking, cluttering, organized mishmash of any sound the band could get its hands on, from squelching mud in the sleazy "Easy Money" to whalesong in the ominous intro of "Exiles." Everything is threaded together by a mellow flute, violin or vocal melody. Following the 13-minute "Lark's Tongue in Aspic Part I" is as easy as predicting a dream, and just as entertaining. At one point, the rambunctious meetup of drum and guitar plummets into the sorrowful graze of a violin. The album transmits the musicians' thoughts into chords, representing the creativity that characterized progressive rock.



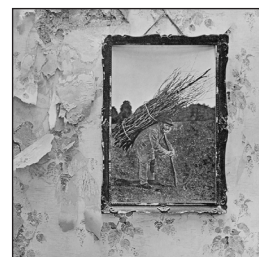
ATLANTIC RECORDS

### "Led Zeppelin IV"

"I realized I like older music after I started playing guitar, [and] it inspired me to look into rock music. I was always very into music as a kid. I liked making up songs and I liked messing with the guitar in the house. ... Old rock bands ... had [a] unique song structure and used a variety of techniques to get a really specific sound."

DJ DJINGUEZIAN, 12

"Led Zeppelin IV" (1971), the self-titled band's fourth studio album, experiments with the genre of rock. The album includes the famous "Stairway to Heaven," with arguably one of the most iconic guitar riffs ever composed. The song starts with a slow, heartfelt opening but picks up after four minutes, with the somber beginning turning brighter, and finally ends with heavy instrumentals and a growling voice. That and tracks such as "Going to California," a soft and mellow soundtrack to a drive down the countryside, contrast others in the album, such as "Black Dog" with strong drums and a traditional raspy rock voice. The album contrasts traditional rock songs with. The blend adds complexity to the album, creating a refreshing mix of familiar and new.



ATLANTIC RECORDS

Music constantly evolves to take on various forms of important cultural significance. Starting as a vessel for religious expression, the democratization of music creation has synthesized expression of all sorts of ideological joys and anguish. From the chapel-flooding masses of the Renaissance, to the innovative jazz that sprouted from the improvisational get-togethers of kindred artists, music, at its core, is a tool for connection.

# Shoppers need to be conscious when thrifting



Hannah Li  
FEATURES WRITER

The first time I told my mother I was off to Goodwill, she stared at me in confusion and bewilderment. Thrifting, for my mother, had always been synonymous with desperation, a last resort. But for me, living in the post-pandemic boom of thrift haul TikTok videos, shopping second-hand was simply a leisurely pursuit, a treasure hunt for the newest trend in vintage clothes.

In the age of fast fashion, thrifting may seem like a win-for-all situation: social media has sent hordes of teenagers to the cheap racks, in order to ‘reduce, reuse, recycle’ clothes. Yet, while its steadily increasing popularity encourages environmental awareness, it has also sparked much debate on the morality of second-hand shopping, fueling the emergence of “thrift store gentry-

fication.” As a neighborhood becomes gentrified, the increasing presence of middle and upper-class shoppers prompts thrift stores to increase their prices, pushing out low-income buyers and those who shop second-hand out of necessity.

There is no doubt that these are legitimate concerns. Goodwill’s 2020 Valuation Guides reveal up to tripled prices compared to their 2010 items (not accounting for inflation), and many other thrift stores follow a similar pattern. I myself have encountered more than one tattered children’s shirt outrageously priced around five dollars, likely marketed as “vintage” in the hopes of enticing wealthier, trend-following customers.

In reality, however, increasing consumers and constant reselling cannot be blamed as the most significant culprits in thrift store inflation. While it’s true that demand leads to higher prices, what many are overlooking is the staggering excess of clothing that is produced and then overloaded into thrift stores every year. Only around 20% of clothes that are donated to these stores are actually sold to consumers. The rest are discarded or sent into an international resale market, putting financial pressure on local textile industries, who are unable to compete with the low prices of this

clothing. Beyond that, general inflation, as well as increased operating costs like utilities, rent and wages, also contribute to rising thrift store prices.

Of course, some price jumps are so outrageous that they can’t be explained by America’s economy, which leads to fair criticism of such thrift stores. While companies like Goodwill are non-profit, they are not exempt from corporate greed. Up until the pandemic, Goodwill employed many disabled individuals, which seemed charitable, but only paid them around \$2.50 per hour until California banned disability subminimum wage programs. Today, thrift stores rack up revenue of around \$14.2 billion, and Goodwill organizations’ presidents are paid an average of \$600 thousand annually.

When discussing the ethics of thrifting, it’s important to realize that donating and shopping second-hand is not a good solution to America’s fast-fashion industry. Justifying the purchase of trendy new clothes by donating old ones simply reinforces the unsustainability of fast fashion, and treating thrift stores as a cheap and easy source of clothing only encourages overconsumption and the desire for an infinite closet.

However, shopping second-hand will always be better sustainability-wise than buying new, and although it’s not a perfect solution, increasing focus on thrifting can still help save the planet.

As the saying goes, “there’s no ethical consump-

tion under capitalism,” but that doesn’t mean thrifters and resellers can’t be mindful and well-researched in what they’re buying or selling. Rather than buying clothes in bulk, thrifters and resellers can be conscious of the items they purchase, especially in consideration of those essential for people thrifting out of necessity, including formal wear, heavy winter clothes and school uniforms. Shopping with in-

attention and discipline, while much harder than it seems, is crucial in avoiding the trap of low-cost clothing and escaping the cycle of overconsumption. For those who wish to go the extra mile, consider avoiding stores in low-income neighborhoods, and donating clothes to reputable and local organizations, whose profit will truly go to charity, and not into the pockets of an already wealthy business.

“Goodwill [is] not exempt from corporate greed”



AMANDA ZHU

# Social media discourages authentic self-expression



Seona Srivastava  
FEATURES WRITER

I’m curled up in bed when my phone dings, a Snapchat notification popping up on my screen. My best friend sent me a Snap, so I jolt out of bed, running a comb through my tangled hair, reapplying my mascara and lip gloss. I can’t leave her on delivered for too long — she’ll think I’m mad at her — but I can’t look bad and risk her screenshotting it.

I’m stuck in an impossible situation. Snapchat is described in their mission statement as a “way to communicate with your friends without pressure to be popular, pretty, or perfect.” Similarly, BeReal encourages users to post unfiltered, semi-spontaneous photos of them-

selves and their surroundings. In reality, neither app achieves its goal. Social media has perpetuated a constant need to look perfect, and be perfect, even to the people we are closest to on these “authentic” apps.

Influencers and content creators reinforce a set of conventional beauty standards. These ideals have been deeply ingrained in me from a young age, reminding me that I don’t have big eyes, full lips or a button nose. As well as low self-esteem, this also creates a general social pressure to conform to these impossible ideals. The consequences of deviating from these imposed norms are too intimidating. I want people to perceive me a certain way. It’s hard to pinpoint exactly where the desire to maintain that persona stems from. The number of likes and shares that I get on a post validate some internal void.

A study conducted by Baylor University found that those with more “likes” and followers have a higher perceived likability. This likability is often further reinforced by one’s conventional attractiveness. Yes, this external validation can provide a confidence boost, but the pursuit of it can also become a sole factor in how people present themselves online.

The fear of not sustaining my online persona is powerful and motivates me to only share specific aspects of my life. Despite the pretenses, the gap between my reality and my online identity is one that I would like to keep.

Despite social media’s push to foster legitimate and genuine relationships, it has done quite the opposite. We are all hyper-connected with each other—we share our locations and constantly update our statuses—but our digital relationships remain superficial. This was especially prominent during the pandemic when we had to adjust from interacting with our friends face-to-face to having conversations over text and social media.

What drives our urge to be hyperconnected and share every aspect of our lives with others? It’s the reality of how boring our lives truly are.

For some reason, we can’t cope with the actuality of our mundane lives, so we distract ourselves with attention from others: we have a constant craving for it, after all. What other better platform than social media to feed our compulsive need for attention? It’s undeniably addicting.

We’re in a constant cycle of this superficial hypercon-

nection and it is absolutely intentional. Algorithms are designed to maximize engagement amongst users based on preferences, previous interactions and online behavior. The personalized content feeds feel intimate and keep users stimulated despite its unhealthy nature. These apps, designed for genuine expression, ironically discourage authenticity in our online interactions.

Social media is distracting, toxic and addictive, and everybody knows it. So why do we keep using it? We have a collective dependency on it. In an increasingly digital world, social media is the sole platform for us to maintain connections. There are no alternatives and the future of social interaction depends on our ability to foster authenticity in an increasingly digital world.



ALLYSON CHAN

# STEVE SELL HEAD FOOTBALL COACH



**35** YEARS @ ARAGON  
**162** WINS  
**24** SEASONS AS HEAD COACH  
**7** PAL TITLES

LEAH HAWKINS

## Sell steps down

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

“What really became the part that I loved was just the relationships with the kids,” Sell said. “As I got older, that became more and more of my focus.”

Parham saw Sell’s passion for the player’s success and recognized the amount of time and effort he put into the players.

“He’s done so much for [the] kids that most people don’t know about,” Parham said. “I don’t know the extent of all the things he’s done ... just the things he’s done for kids who would not have had the opportunities they had because of him.”

For senior quarterback Sean Hickey, that help came through Sell’s knowledge and coaching expertise that allowed Hickey to succeed.

“He’s just been a great role model my four years playing,” Hickey said. “He taught me everything I know about [being a] quarterback and about football.”

As he took on various other roles, including president of CCS and serving on the California Interscholastic Federation Federated Council, being the head football coach became increasingly difficult due to the time it required.

“Over the years, more and more of my focus has shifted to really enjoying and loving the athletic director’s work,” Sell said. “Not only just being an athletic director here supporting the kids and coaches here, but [also] the government, being a part of making laws.”

In addition to new responsibilities, the emotional side of the game took a toll on Sell, who decided to step down so he could have more time for his family.

“It’s a lot of body blows,” Sell said. “Obviously, the wins are fantastic but the losses became increasingly hard.”

Sell will continue to be active as athletic director, but he will be deeply missed by the football team and coaching staff.

“We all gave a round of applause the day he announced his retirement,” Parham said. “I think we were all grateful for the time but also shocked ... and sad that he would not be there in the same capacity next year.”

Hickey will certainly miss the entertainment Sell consistently brought to the field.

“[I’ll miss] the casual conversations he had with me and the team,” Hickey said. “He’s always cracking jokes like he’s one of our friends.”

Even if not as head coach, Sell hopes to still be there for football players both on and off the field in the coming years.

“I’ve seen kids on our campus and people I’ve coached and known for four years and I don’t want to lose that,” Sell said. “I’m really going to try to stay involved ... Not calling plays or anything but supporting kids.”

Moving forward, he anticipates a successful season next year for the Dons in its first year without Sell leading the team.

“We have some good kids coming back, so next year’s head coach will have a chance to be good right away,” Sell said. “I thought that was important, for whoever took the job to have a chance to be good their first year.”

Aragon is currently in the process of reviewing potential head coaching candidates for the vacant position and completed its interview process on Dec. 8.

# Athletic funding

## How teams improve equipment and facilities

Jack He  
SPORTS WRITER

Sports funding plays a large role in providing for sport teams. From uniforms to equipment, umpires to assistant coaches, everything that makes up the team requires some form of funding. However, some sports get significantly more funds compared to others.

Money to support Aragon athletics comes through two different avenues: the district and the Aragon sports booster club.

“There’s a pot of money from the district that pays stipends,” said athletic director Steve Sell. “But the number of assistant coaches per sport is dependent on the [booster] union vote, and the union decides that in the union contract.”

In addition to covering the stipends for the assistant coaches, the district also pays for essential items of a sport, or items that

are absolutely necessary for a sport to function properly. For example, badminton cannot be played without birdies, so birdies are essential items for badminton and are therefore paid for by the district. However, the district does not pay for non-essential items like a softball pitching machine. Though helpful to the team, it is not absolutely vital for

the game to function properly. If a sport wants a non-essential item, the coach must submit an application to the sports booster club.

“You’d want to do your research on what product you want so that you’re getting a good product, and then you have to go to a booster club meeting,” said former badminton coach Linda Brown. “You should have two representatives that are there to help bolster your proposition for whatever equipment that you’re going to get. And then the booster club votes on whether or not they approve the use of the funds.”

The booster club also pays the salaries for the assistant coaches, which is different from the stipends covered by the district.

“The board votes for what it thinks is going to serve the most kids, so a big chunk of their budget is to pay for assistant coaches and a strength coach for all the sports,” Sell said.

With salaries rising dramatically over the years, the booster club must raise enough money to keep up.

Sportsmanship nights are mandatory meetings for parents of student athletes that take place at the start of the fall, winter and spring seasons to encourage families to donate to the sports booster club.

“Most of the money that the boosters club comes up with is done at the athletic sportsmanship nights,” Sell said. “We have three of those and that is almost all of the money that’s raised.”

Though the pool of money can be requested by all sports, some sports still get more than

others. When looking at the sport expenditures for every sport at Aragon, football stands out as the most expensive sport by a long shot with a budget of over \$60 thousand for the 2021-22 school year.

“Football is an expensive sport,” said junior tennis player Keiya Wada. “But I feel like the district can make more effort to improve [facilities for] our sport [too.]”

Sell addresses the concerns around football spending.

“I knew immediately that the fact that I coached football and was the athletic director, the assumption [would be] that I’m going to take all the money and guide it towards football at the expense of most sports,” Sell said. “Which is ... prejudicial and it’s ignorant. An athletic director doesn’t have final approval on any expenditure. The final stamp of approval comes from the principal and then from the district office.”

So this idea that I’m sitting behind this office, spending money the way I want to spend it, is a false narrative. Nobody prioritizes [certain] sports, whether it’s my office, the district office or the boosters club.”

The variation in the expenditures is due to a multitude of factors, such as team size, number of essential items, and officials and umpires.

“There’s some sports that aren’t expensive,” Sell said. “Tennis isn’t; they don’t have officials or use buses. They don’t ask for much, so we have to be creative [with] finding things that we could get for them.”

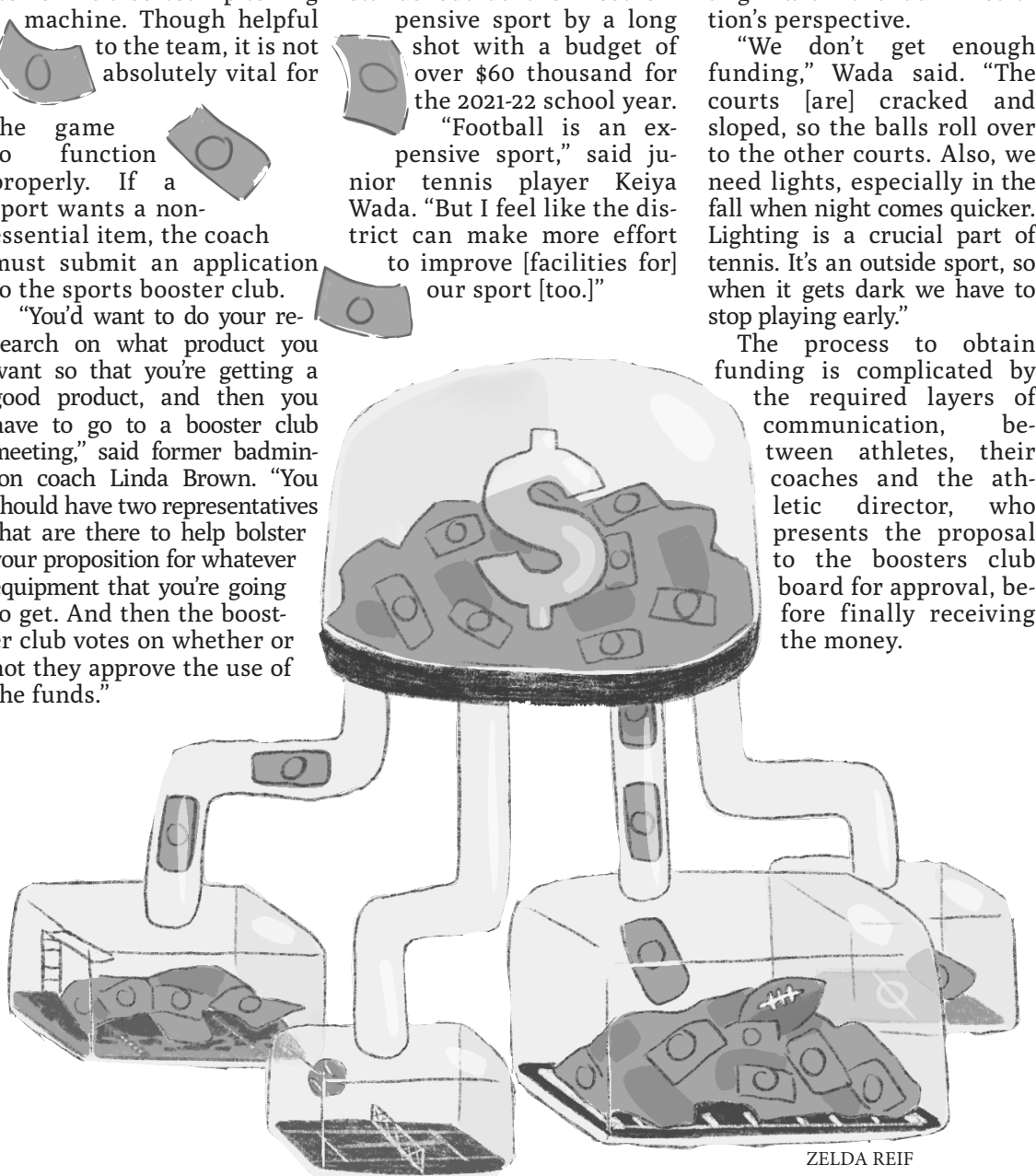
However, athletes’ experiences with the quality of their facilities don’t always align with the administration’s perspective.

“We don’t get enough funding,” Wada said. “The courts [are] cracked and sloped, so the balls roll over to the other courts. Also, we need lights, especially in the fall when night comes quicker. Lighting is a crucial part of tennis. It’s an outside sport, so when it gets dark we have to stop playing early.”

The process to obtain funding is complicated by the required layers of communication, between athletes, their coaches and the athletic director, who presents the proposal to the boosters club board for approval, before finally receiving the money.

“When it gets dark we have to stop playing early”

“Nobody prioritizes [certain] sports”



ZELDA REIF



Tristan Levadoux & Nikitas Telfer-Mantouvalos wrestle. LIAN WANG

# Aragon wrestling kicks off season

Matthew Gregory  
SPORTS WRITER

The Aragon wrestling team for the 2023-24 season looks promising, with new goals and strategies that will ensure their success.

Last year, the team ended their season with a final record of 3-3. According to sophomore Matthew Hagedorn, Aragon had to forfeit a lot of points in their matches last year due to a lack of players.

This year, however, the wrestling community is now a lot stronger with many new members from the freshman and sophomore classes.

"Last year, we had very little people, but we had a strong community," Hagedorn said. "And this year, we have a lot more people so the goal is to keep the strong community we had."

Sophomore Sanjit Roychowdhury expressed the challenges wrestling veterans are experiencing.

"Last year, it was easier because I was the one being mentored," Roychowdhury said. "But now this year it has changed, and I have to be the one mentoring new wrestlers."

According to Roychowdhury, wrestling is a very team-based sport because

you are relying on your teammates to score points.

"It's impossible to carry a wrestling team by yourself," Roychowdhury said. "Everyone on the team needs to contribute."

Head coach Angelo Goumenidis wants to push for consistent practice and efforts in his athletes especially given the frequent absences last year.

"Kids were not showing up [to practice] consistently," Goumenidis said. "So we didn't have a lot of kids to go to tournaments, which was pretty sad."

In order to improve, Goumenidis tries to instill core values in his wrestlers, such as responsibility.

"They have to be accountable," Goumenidis said. "If they want to get better at wrestling, it's on them to show up."

New wrestlers like sophomores Charlie Wells and Jacob Guzman have explained how a huge focus for them is getting stronger through working out.

"I realized that wrestling takes a lot of upper body strength," Wells said, "So I've been lifting heavy free weights and drinking protein shakes consistently in order to get stronger."

The wrestlers are also working individually to improve their strength in preparation for a new season.

"I want to set up a schedule to do more training," Guzman said. "I want to work on my back and chest for pushing and pulling."

Aragon wrestling seems ready for a new season, with more dedication and motivation than ever.

"I think we have lots of dedicated wrestlers this year," Wells said. "We've also got a very diverse array of body types which is good for a wrestling team."

The flood of new players to the wrestling team will make a huge difference in their chances to win.

"We lost just because we didn't have enough people, even though we were winning 90% of our matches," Roychowdhury said. "This year the numbers should help a lot, and we shouldn't lose because of a lack of players."

The next wrestling match will take place on Dec. 16 at 7 a.m. at Pinole Valley High School.

# Elevating spirits: following competitive cheer's success

Phoebe Harger  
SPORTS WRITER

Despite becoming a California Interscholastic Federation sport in 2015, competitive cheerleading is still one of the lesser known school sports at Aragon. Competitive cheerleading, better known as comp cheer, is when multiple cheer squads compete against each other at a competition. Teams typically perform a two-and-a-half minute routine to music, consisting of stunts, cheering, jumping and tumbling. Performances are judged by a panel of three to five judges who give scores based on execution, technique, difficulty of stunts, overall cheer impression among others.

This winter, the Aragon comp cheer team will be entering their ninth season, being led by coach Darrell Franzella for all nine years.

"I am very excited for this year," Franzella said. "My goal this year, like every year, is most importantly that the kids have fun, but also learn new skills and how to work together as a team. One cannot succeed without their teammates."

Franzella emphasized the importance of showing up and being a reliable member of the team.

"Competitive cheer is all about teamwork," Franzella said. "If someone gets injured or is absent from practice, then their whole stunt group can't progress. So the biggest challenge we face every year is making sure people are healthy and showing up to practice."

At the beginning of every season, the team learns a

routine that they work on for the next three months. The team hires one choreographer to create a stunt routine, and another to make the dance routine.

Every year, the team's biggest goal is to qualify and place well at USA National Championships. This season, the team has seven competitions before Nationals in Anaheim, California, which is the final event of the season. Last year, Aragon did not place at Nationals due to performing an illegal stunt that was above their division.

"It was pretty heartbreaking for a lot of us, especially the seniors last year after putting in the hard work as a season," said senior Cole Watson. "There were so many opportunities for the judges to tell us that our stunt was illegal but nobody said anything even though they were supposed to."

With the team's first competition coming up do we know when, many members agree that their biggest challenge is keeping a positive attitude.

"I think something we're constantly working towards is keeping the positive energy up and continuing to work hard without letting things outside of comp distract us from our goals," said senior Maya Rozenberg.

After a disappointing end to last year's season, the team hopes that this time, their months of hard work will finally pay off.

Thankfully, the season is looking promising with prac-

tices off to a strong start, as all athletes are excited for the first competition of the year.

"The team is a lot smaller this year so we're a lot more focused and dedicated and driven to succeed," Rozenberg said. "Our practices have been really efficient and we've been getting a lot done."

Junior Nalanie Davis agrees that the team has a great dynamic this year.

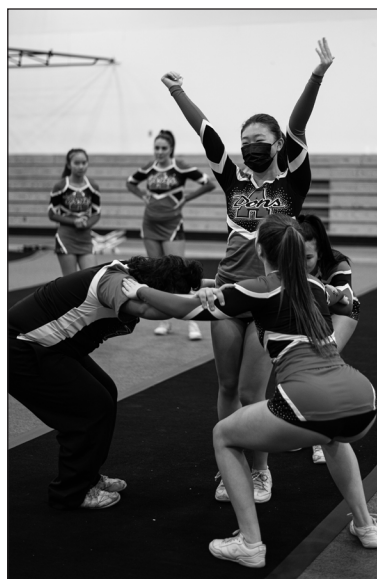
"My favorite aspect of the team has always been the

community we've built," Davis said. "Everyone has always been so welcoming. Even when someone's stunt doesn't hit or someone's feeling down, we always try our best to support each other and cheer everyone up."

Ultimately, Franzella is proud of her team no matter the outcome of their competitions.

"Some people don't think that cheer is a sport, but it one hundred percent is," Franzella said. "It's not just wearing a uniform and smiling and looking pretty in it. It takes a lot to be a cheerleader. You need to have self confidence. Performing in front of an audience takes a lot of guts, especially in front of your classmates ... so I am always proud of my cheerleaders no matter what."

Competitive cheer has grown immensely as a relatively new sport and the team is working hard to achieve their goals this season while also raising awareness about the sport.



Cheerleaders at practice.



NAILAH BLAKE

Varsity SCOREBOARD

BOYS B-BALL

1-2

preseason

GIRLS B-BALL

2-3

preseason

BOYS SOCCER

2-0-1

preseason

GIRLS SOCCER

2-1-0

preseason

\*as of December 7

LEAH HAWKINS



Boys soccer team huddles and strategizes during half-time.



JORELL SAKAMOTO Junior center midfielder Marvin Zheng fast-breaks down the field.

AILA LIU

## Boys soccer wins 5-0 in dominant pre-seasoner

Antonio Mangano  
SPORTS WRITER

On Dec. 6, Aragon's boys varsity soccer team (2-0-1 overall) played a tough, rainy game against Capuchino (1-2 overall), where they took home an impressive win with a score of 5-0.

Aragon played a dominant offensive game where the ball was in their possession for most of the game.

"We were quick on the ball, moving around the field nicely [and] keeping possession," said head coach Nick Carrara. "We were clinical in the front, [and] scored when we needed to."

Aragon's game started off strong when the first two goals were scored within just six minutes of the game starting. The first of which was scored only two minutes after the kick-off when junior midfielder and striker Damian Samano scored an impressive header after a corner kick.

"I know most high school teams aren't organized in the back, so going back post, ...

I was basically there by myself," Samano said.

At 34 minutes into the first half, junior midfielder Brian Cervantes made a run down the field, passing his defenders to score the second goal of the game.

As the rain picked up, both teams slowed their pace, unable to score for the rest of the first half. Furthermore, hints of weakness in Aragon's defense were evident after a couple close chances to score by Capuchino.

Carrara highlights what Aragon's defense needs to do for improvement in the future.

"[We need to] just challenge the ball in the air consistently, win the first ball and keep possession of it in the back," Carrara said.

As the second half began, Capuchino's defense started to ramp up, in hopes to prevent the Dons from making another goal. However, Samano was still hungry for some points and he scored another impressive goal from 25 yards away. Carrara

seemed to lose hope at this point with the score sitting at 3-0, subbing out a few of their best players to have the more inexperienced players have some time in the game. This only meant that Aragon was able to extend their lead. Samano took this opportunity and scored his third goal of the game after the wet ball slipped out of Capuchino's goalkeeper's hands. His third goal marked a hat-trick, something that rarely happens at this highly competitive level of soccer.

"Yeah, I mean that was definitely a one time thing," Samano said.

With only eight minutes left in the game, senior Yahir Villanueva scored an amazing goal to finish off the game, curving the ball into the goal from a corner kick.

This impressive game ended 5-0, further emphasizing the skill Aragon has to offer on their boys varsity soccer team and the high chances it has to come home with the championship for the second time in a row.

"I think if this team stays healthy and we keep working hard, we could definitely win the championship and who

knows how far we can go," said Carrara.

Looking back at last year's team, the team had a strong season winning the Peninsula Athletic League championship with a league record of 5-0-5 and a record of 10-4-7 throughout the entire season.

"The team was really good," said sophomore midfielder Andrew Alatta. "We all connected very well and we had a lot of key players on our team."

One of the team's strengths was in their offensive lineup where the team stacked up an impressive 35 goals throughout the season. The team also showed impressive defense where they were only scored on 18 times throughout the entire season, emphasizing the high level defense and goalkeeping of their players during games.

"The team's defense was very strong," Alatta said. "We kept a lot of clean sheets and our keeper was a key [player] in our league title."

A clean sheet is when a team manages to prevent be-

ing scored on throughout an entire match.

Aragon's players look forward to this upcoming season with high hopes of winning the PAL championship for the second time in a row. The team also looks forward to working with a new coach, hoping that they can quickly build chemistry before championship games.

"I think it's gonna be pretty easy [to build chemistry with our coach] because a lot of the players already know him and I've heard a lot of good things about him," Alatta said.

After a strong start to the season, Carrara and the team look forward to success in the future.

"[We're excited for] more wins, more goals, more clean sheets, playing good football and [facing] some good competition," Alatta said.

The next game Aragon soccer will be participating in is at San Mateo on Dec. 15, at 4:30 p.m.

“We look forward to more good competition”

## Girls basketball narrowly falls to Lincoln 44-51

Charlie Henderson  
SPORTS WRITER

The Aragon girls basketball team enters the 23-24 season with aspirations for an 11th consecutive playoff appearance. However, the initial phase of their campaign has been demanding. As of Dec. 4, the team holds a record of one win and three losses. Playing in games against strong Central Coast Section-contending teams, the Dons look to build their strength in the preseason.

The preseason has proven to be tough sledding, and in one of these games the Dons met the Lincoln Mustangs of San Francisco (3-1). In a game full of learning points, the Dons walked away with a tough seven point loss.

The Dons got off to an early 12-10 lead that bled into the second quarter. With momentum and a two point lead going into the second quarter the Dons looked poised to extend their lead, but costly turnovers and poor rotational and transition defense led to an inadequate second

quarter performance by the Dons. In the second quarter the Dons were outscored by nine points, giving Lincoln a seven point lead that proved to be the difference at the conclusion of the contest.

Head coach Sam Manu acknowledged some of the team's pitfalls.

"The ones that hurt are live turnovers," Manu said. "When you pass in, they steal it and now it's fast break the other way. That's been our Achilles' heel."

With turnovers leading to easy buckets for Lincoln the Dons fell behind by as much as 11 in the second half. But in the fourth quarter the Dons came out firing. Energized by a couple forced turnovers, the Dons cut their deficit down to four with under three minutes to play in the fourth.

The late gameplay by the Dons showcased their determination. Although down double digits, they cut their deficit by over half, putting pressure on Lincoln to score. Lincoln did score and their

lead ended at seven, which was slightly inflated by some late game free throws as the Dons were forced to foul.

This late game surge by the Dons uncovered the true DNA of their team this year, a team full of tough players who grind games out to the final minutes.

"The end score didn't turn out exactly how we wanted it to but we came in [and] we got from 11, 12 points all the way down to three or four points," said senior forward Maya Pappas. "I think that's what our team is all about. We're all about grit and grind and making those comebacks."

The Dons are finding their identity as the season progresses. They lean on the leadership of their eight seniors and the spark that the underclassmen bring to their team. One underclassman was freshman Jaelyn Ruttenberg who pitched in three three-pointers in their losing effort against Lincoln.

After her stellar shooting performance Ruttenberg at-

tributed her success to the leadership of the seniors.

"I love the seniors," Ruttenberg said. "They give me advice all the time, and I'm really grateful for learning from them."

With their remaining preseason schedule the Dons face a unique set of challenges as a hybrid team of old and young players. With strong player leadership the Dons are motivated to capture not just another CCS playoff qualification, but a couple playoff wins.

"I want to earn it," Manu said. "And so I don't know if we'll make CCS, but this group of girls are determined to work hard and it takes hard work to get there. We will make CCS, because that's what these girls are made of."

The Dons step into a new season filled with hope and high expectations through their own hard work. While showing flashes of these traits in their game versus Lincoln, the Dons look to focus on their turnovers for a

successful season. The hunt for eleven begins as Aragon girls basketball preseason comes to a close and league games begin.

The Dons will next host South San Francisco on Dec. 14 at 6:30 p.m.



Team drills with 3v3. ANNA HE

# Girls soccer falls to Sequoia 0-2 in redemption game



Junior Stela Pisaro tackles against Sequoia.

JULIA DEL MUNDO

Sora Mitzutani  
SPORTS WRITER

On Dec. 5, Aragon girls soccer (2-1-0 overall) fell short against Sequoia (2-0-1) with a score of 0-2.

The team had some expectations going into the game, as they lost to Sequoia last year during the Central Coast Section finals.

"They're a very strong team and all their starters [have returned]," said head coach Michael Flynn. "They have a very strong midfield but I think

that's probably our strongest part of our team as well ... [Also,] we made a mistake [last year.] We got caught flat on one side and they switched the ball very quickly on us, and they were able to score. So, if we can clean up our defensive mistakes, I think we'll have a better opportunity to begin with this time."

Aragon started strong by keeping possession of the ball on Sequoia's side of the field and had multiple goal-scoring attempts. However, the game quickly turned, as Sequoia got

the first goal from a corner kick with 26 minutes left in the first half.

Junior goalkeeper Luana Denniston came off the line and misjudged the ball, allowing the goal. She also felt like there were miscommunications in the defense.

"When there's no communication, it creates mistakes that give the other team opportunities," Denniston said. "It's about shutting down those opportunities for them, and doing our very best to limit those mistakes. And between our center backs ... I could do better about talking to them ... as a center of our defense."

Four minutes later, Sequoia scored with another goal from the right corner to the midfield.

"Their second goal was nice," Flynn said. "They had a nice build up on the right hand side. Had a good through ball. The girl had a really tight angle and she just fired a shot near the post. That was a really quality shot."

After the second goal, Aragon was able to push the ball across the field with multiple pass-throughs that gave opportunities for a shot, but could not quite score. Denniston and the defensive end kept a solid defense, stopping a few goal attempts by Sequoia.

In the second half, Aragon played persistently with close shots that did not go through.

"Especially the second half, we've got a lot of momentum and we were putting pressure on their backline and on their goalkeeper," Flynn said. "We just weren't able to really find any of that killer pass in the final third to go onto goal and beat their goalkeeper."

Although a tough game, the team sees it as an opportunity to make improvements, as they are still in preseason.

"A lot of their methods to get into the goal were on their crosses," Denniston said. "De-

fensively, we can work on shutting down those crosses ... We're a really strong team, we have a lot of energy and we put a lot of pressure on them. We're very good about getting on the ball ... Many of our players were so tired at the end of the game, which is a really good thing."

Last year, Aragon was moved down from the Bay to Ocean division despite not placing last, leaving the team disappointed but also full of motivation to challenge themselves and prove their worth.

"We set up a really hard preseason," Flynn said. "We're playing every team in the Bay division except Menlo-Atherton. I think Hillsdale is going to be a big game for us. They were the team that was in last place the last two years and they haven't gone down."

Motivation was one factor that contributed to the second place in the CCS championships, but the team itself had a strong connection.

"A very young squad that has been together as a group of six started as freshmen, and then they were sophomores last year and they are now going to be juniors," Flynn said. "So that was a big core group of girls that have been playing together for a while. That helped contribute to a deep run that we had [last year.]"

Not only did the team play together, but they had activities that helped them further develop their connection.

"Last year we did a tradition...[called] Secret Sisters," said junior striker Sierra Troy. "Before every game, you would get a little gift basket for [someone] you get assigned to. You give it to them on game day to give them motivation because there's a little card of motivating words in there too."

So far, during practice, the team mainly focuses on controlling the ball.

"We do a lot of possession [during practice] and we try to play one to two touches as much as possible," Flynn said. "The philosophy is that the ball doesn't get tired, so make the ball do the work. So the more we can get the ball moving quickly, it becomes more difficult to defend against us, and it makes the [other] team chase."

As the preseason continues, the team is still figuring out and testing new concepts to prepare for their league games later in the season. They head into the season with plenty on the line.

"We have unfinished business," Flynn said. "We got to the finals and we lost 1-0 to a team in the upper division, Sequoia. Our goal is to get back [and] win it all."



Freshman Tessa Matthews battles two Sequoia players.

JULIA DEL MUNDO

# Basketball opens season aiming for improvement

Caroline Harger  
SPORTS WRITER

Coming off of a winning season last winter (14-12 overall), the Aragon varsity boys basketball team has already begun preparing for the beginning of league play this season. With three preseason games under their belt, the team continues to ramp up for their league games.

The Dons concluded the 2022-23 season, finishing fifth in the Central Coast Section Peninsula South division

with seven league wins. Despite the team's winning record, their dynamic on the court wasn't as fluid as it could have been.

"We had a really good team [last year]," said junior guard Jasper Caffo. "But we didn't pass as much as we could have ... we just hogged the ball."

This type of individual playing is something the team is hoping to work on this season. Despite only having played three games thus far, the Dons have already begun to improve and work with more unity on the court. Something that has helped with this improvement is the off-season league that the majority of the team participated in during the summer and throughout the offseason.

"[The summer league] really helps getting to know everyone on the team," Caffo said. "We get to play games on the weekends together before the season even starts."

This extra time spent on the court together, however, is not the main factor behind the team's strong chemistry this season. Instead, it is their connections off the court that further the Dons' tight-knit team dynamic.

"All of us are friends off the court," said senior shooting guard Shadai Batsuuri. "If you're able to have fun hanging out with [your teammates] outside of practice, it makes it so much easier to fight for [them] on the court."

The Dons have high hopes for the upcoming season. After dropping down a league into the Peninsula Athletic League Ocean division, the team expects to once again put up a winning record and hopefully make a run in the CCS tournament. The team also has ex-

tra motivation to earn a spot in the higher division.

"This year the whole team has one set goal in mind," said senior center Ezekiel Goldman. "All we are focused

on is working towards CCS. I think that focus is going to make us really successful this season."

The Dons next play at Galileo on Dec. 15 at 6:30 p.m.



Junior Jasper Caffo defends during an alumni game.

JAMES DIAZ