

HOOKED:

BY THE NUMBERS

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The ARAGON OUTLOOK

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900 Alameda de las Pulgas, San Mateo, CA 94402

Aragon High School



District hosts Pride Prom

Oscar Nicolson
NEWS WRITER

This year's annual Pride Prom took place on Feb. 23 at the College of San Mateo, meant to allow students of all sexualities to express themselves in a safe space.

"Pride Prom is really [about] having a safe space to really express your identity," said sophomore Sienna Shehadeh.

Superintendent Randall Booker praised the event in an interview for the San Mateo Daily Journal.

"I want our kids to go, 'oh my gosh, this is why I love living here, this is why I love my community,'" Booker said. "It's important that kids feel confident and comfortable and loved [in] their community."

Students from all over the San Mateo Union High School District were given the opportunity to gather and celebrate their identities in a safe space. The district worked to make sure all students knew about the event, and so that no one would miss out on the opportunity to go.

"SMUHSD took responsibility for making sure that all of the publicity, and [making sure our] marketing had a spectrum that was broad enough to blanket the interest in the county," said Holly Wade, Director of Special Education Support Services for SMUHSD.

"More people are aware of it this year due to the posters and the advertisements of it this year," Shehadeh said. "Last year I only [knew] because [one of my teachers] told me."

The additional advertising effort proved effective.

"We have over 100 kids more than we had last year," Wade said. "Which is awesome, and I think that speaks volumes: we had 175 last year, and this year we have 285."

Burlingame High School junior Violet Hansma, who was the only student involved in organizing the event, discussed her experiences.

"I'm pretty used to being the only student in the room," Hansma said. "But next year, the committee plans to have more students."

Wade expanded on this.

"We asked for student input on [main issues] that came up so [we don't place] all the responsibility on our one [student representative]," Wade said.

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Students at Pride Prom

COURTESY OF KOTA GARCIA

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EXTRA
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Aragon initiates free condom program: exploring sexual healthcare and education

Angela Nguyen
NEWS WRITER

In recent years, the San Mateo Union High School District has worked to improve student's accessibility to sexual health care and create a more inclusive health curriculum.

Most recently, in the spring of 2024, Aragon began providing free condoms in the health office.

"Other neighboring districts already had an [accessible condom] program," said District Health Coordinator and health teacher at Mills High School Justin Cottrell. "It was brought to my attention in 2022 [and] I talked to all the health teachers, [and they] were definitely on board with this. This was something that we should implement for students."

Although Aragon distributes external condoms, internal condoms are still inaccessible.

"Dental dams are hard to acquire in stores," said de-

partment chair and health teacher Barbara Beaumont. "We got our condom kits from Planned Parenthood, [which] are free [and include] information on how to use them."

Multiple teachers in the SMUHSD encouraged distributing condoms, including Aragon health teacher Melissa Perino, who continues to advocate for the accessibility of

dental dams.

"External condoms only protect people engaged in sexual intercourse with penises," Perino said. "If we were to include one external condom and one dental dam, then we'd prevent the transmission of diseases for all sexual activity."

At other schools, students are taking matters into their own hands. The Gender and Sexuality Alliance club at Mills High School fundraised money to buy dental dams to provide to students freely.

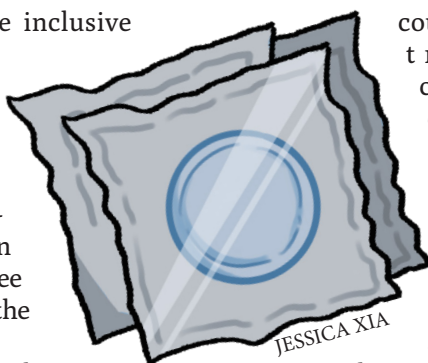
The district also partnered with a number of organizations, such as Planned Parenthood, to provide resources and support regarding sex education and healthcare. Because California allows 12-year-old minors or older to consent to medical services, Aragon students get a pass from the office to walk to Planned Parenthood. The office would mark the student absence in classes under "school field trip" and not disclose the information to parents for confidentiality.

"I had a new partner and we were having unprotected sex, so I thought I should get an STD test," the senior said. "It was really easy to get a pass. [At Planned Parenthood], I've had all female staff a few times who have been super sweet, not judgmental. They're just there to get you whatever you need done."

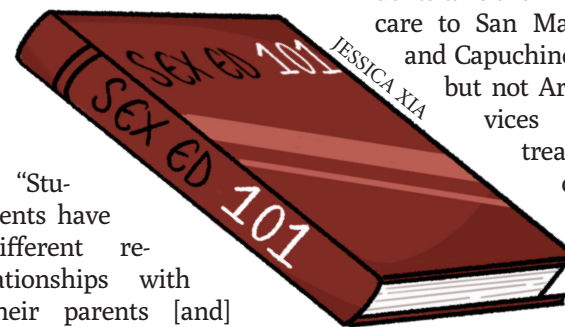
Even in the SMUHSD, resource inequality still exists among different schools. The Stanford Teen Mobile Health Van makes monthly rotations to provide free services for students who are in need of healthcare to San Mateo, Hillsdale, and Capuchino high schools, but not Aragon. The services include tests, treatments, and counseling for multiple diseases and illnesses.

"We don't have access to the teen health van, [but] the district has countered back to say 'no one at Aragon is signing up for that,'" Perino said. "But it's impossible to sign up for something that doesn't exist on your campus [and] creates an inequity at our school."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



JESSICA XIA



JESSICA XIA

"Students have different relationships with their parents [and] caregivers so [it's important] that we comply with all of the logistics related to the law [while] also supporting the students and their needs," said the District's Health Services Manager Sara Devaney.

An anonymous senior shared their experience at Planned Parenthood.

Sexual healthcare and education

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

At Aragon, health class is a mandatory course that students take in ninth grade for five credits, as a part of the graduation requirement. They educate students on good decision-making that affects their health and follows the California Health Education Standards. The class covers nutrition, physical exercise, suicide prevention, chronic diseases, sleep, tobacco, nicotine and other addictive substances.

"I learned [lots] of different stuff from there that you don't typically [learn] in a classroom," said freshman Lia Alves. "It's very different from other classes, just in terms of the content [that] you're learning."

Cottrell reflects on the newly updated curriculum in May 2021.

"We were looking for a curriculum that was more diverse and appealed to various learners," Cottrell said. "Compared with the previous update, this one is more inclusive [and] celebrates a lot of the population that we have. Our intent is [for] all students to feel seen, comfortable, [and] acknowledged."

Although the SMUHSD promotes LGBTQ+ concepts as required by California laws, only 10 states nationally mandate LGBTQ+ topics to be included in health curricula. Furthermore, only 39 states require sex education to be taught in school and 18 states require the information to be medically accurate.

While Governor Gavin Newsom vetoed Senate Bill 541 in 2023, which would have required all public high schools to provide free internal and external condoms to students, California still has one of the most extensive sex education programs in the nation. Back in 2016, the California Healthy Young Act was passed to mandate California school districts to provide students with

sex education and prevention at least once in high school and once in middle school.

However, in states such as Texas, schools are mandated to teach some sex education using the state curriculum, which is not regulated or checked for medical accuracy. According to the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, Texas' curriculum states "homosexuality is not an acceptable lifestyle to the general public and that it is a criminal offense under

where the health teachers use a local clinic to teach about sex education because they are not trained in the same way that our district's health teachers are."

Perino agrees.

"Aragon's in one of the wealthiest districts in the entire state," Perino said. "If you look at our per-head spending in this district, it's significantly more than what Oakland kids got when I taught there. [Aragon students] have access to lots of resources that kids statewide don't have access to."

However, some feel that more change is necessary.

"I'm still really pushing for both the Stanford health van and dental dams," Perino said.

"I think that it sends the wrong message when we're only offering external condoms because it makes it seem like you're only concerned about preventing pregnancy and not preventing disease. There's still more work that we can do."

The senior also stressed the importance of an open dialogue about sex.

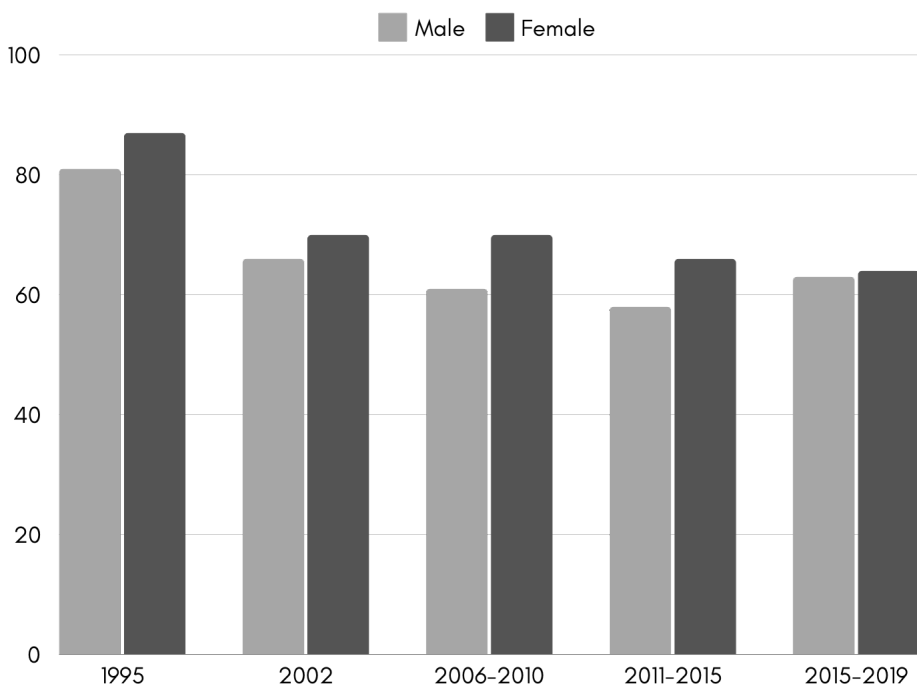
"We spend a lot of time at school so it has a lot of impact and influence on us," the senior said.

"The school needs to offer protection in a [more] comfortable manner and talk about Planned Parenthood's services. I found out that people don't know it, because our health education was in our freshman year [while] people often become sexually active when they're older. Talking about it every year [or] having conversations for older students in small groups would be awesome."



JESSICA XIA

Percent of Adolescents learning about birth control methods from formal sex education sources



FELIX MA

Source: The Guttmacher Institute

Pride Prom continued

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Hansma reflected on how the dance has changed.

"We had better lighting [and] we had better food," Hansma said. "[Last year] we were a little bit too ambitious with services we wanted to have for students and they ended up not being used. So this year, we honed in on things that kids actually wanted."

Part of this was attributed to an increase in funding. Pride Prom is free for all students in the district, in order to encourage people to go and prevent barriers for people attending. However, this means the dance is dependent on sponsorship and fundraising.

"This is a fully fundraised event. So last year, we raised about \$12,000. This year, we raised over \$19,000," Wade said. "A lot of people wanted to give to the event because they thought it was so

important, and we have over 60 volunteers."

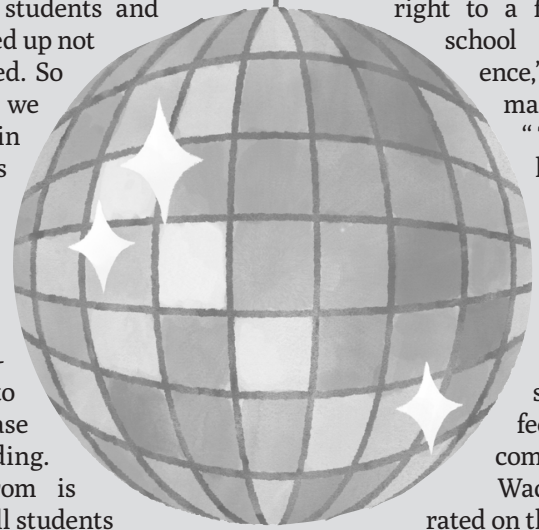
Ultimately the main goal of the dance was to give students a space to feel safe to express themselves.

"Every single student deserves the right to have a right to a fun high school experience," Hansma said.

"Things like Pride Prom provide a place for everyone to feel safe and feel welcome."

Wade elaborated on the broad impact of Pride Prom.

"My hope is that events like this will continue to promote a safe and welcoming inclusive environment and to raise awareness about why creating a space like this is important," Wade said. "When you have a real celebration of how we all move in the world differently and why that's okay."



ALLYSON CHAN

Aragon Improv Team upstages Hillsdale 60-55

Anushka Punjabi
NEWS WRITER

On Feb. 16, the curtains opened on the Improv Olympics, featuring Aragon and Hillsdale's improv teams from 7-9 p.m.. The event highlighted improvisers' quick thinking through a series of sketches. The performances were evaluated by assessing audience applause, resulting in Aragon's win with a final score of 60 to 55 against Hillsdale's team.

The ten-minute sketches covered themes ranging from mystery to humor.

Sophomore Samantha Green discussed the variability of the improv team.

"The joy of improv is that it can kind of be whatever you want it to be," Green said. "You learn how to adapt to different situations."

Hillsdale sophomore Jonah Immanuel elaborated on the benefits he found in improv.

"Improv is the place where I can go to for two hours and just put [everything] out on stage," Immanuel said. "I don't have to worry about life. I don't have to worry about my homework. I can just be there. It's such a fun, beautiful thing to do."

Junior Diego Marengo discussed the unifying nature of improv shows.

"It's really important that everyone has a shared goal," Marengo said. "It brings people together."

Participants demonstrated their ability to think on their feet by adapting fictional characters or playing real people.

"We did a scene at the end with everybody from both teams, which was definitely chaotic," Green said. "I got to be Taylor Swift."

Actors prepared for their improvisational pieces twice a week, from 6:30-9 p.m., consisting of working on how to build an improv scene and practicing games that may be used throughout the Olympics.

"We worked on how to build a setting so when we get on stage we know where to go, since we normally get suggestions from the audience," Green said.

In "Arms," a game Aragon initially played, two actors would stand behind fellow team members and replace their arms with their own during scenes. Players would then act as if their arms were hidden or non-existent, engaging in various actions initiated either by themselves or by volunteers from the audience.

Junior Macen Adams shared the challenges involved in improvisational performances.

"It's not really a competition, it's a fun way for teams to practice with a live audience," Adams said.

Throughout the evening, audience members were encouraged to participate by offering suggestions for the performers to incorporate into their scenes.

"I really enjoyed how random [and] surprising [improv is]," said freshman Charlotte White. "Someone will throw something in and it'll be like, 'Oh I didn't see that coming.'"

Additionally, Hillsdale's improv team, known as "HIT Squad" participated in "Freeze!" When a "freeze" was called, all performers halted in their current positions. To continue the scene, a new performer would sing their internal dialogue while in the same setting — in this case, working in a tax office. Audience members reflected on their performance.

"Hillsdale's 'taxes' game was kind of dry," White said. "It didn't really resonate [and] it was a bit of a drag. Hillsdale was very literal with how they did their plays."

Improv theater is characterized by its emphasis on quick thinking and collaboration among performers.

"Improv is extremely collaborative, no scene has one person in it," Immanuel said.

"It's always looking at your partners, at the group, seeing what everybody is trying to say. Then you know, you just go with the flow."

Without scripts or preparation, actors must rely on their instincts and creativity to navigate each scene.

"It was challenging performing with the newer actors [because] it's hard splitting up a role [and] stage time," Marengo said.

Rating the performances added to the spontaneity of the Improv Olympics, fostering a sense of community and shared experience.

"HIT Squad has such great energy, the audience is so positive and always so much fun," Green said. "It's an easy

environment to perform in because everyone's clearly there to have fun."

Hillsdale and Aragon have also started hosting joint practices, allowing teams to get a better feel for different improvisational styles.

"It's been really refreshing because we get to see how those different improvisers put their own spin on [games], especially not in a competitive environment or a show," Immanuel said. "Even though we want to win, there's an underlying respect for one another."

Wrapping up the Olympics for the school year, Aragon Drama prepares for "The Murder On the Orient Express" scheduled for March 21-24.



Aragon Improv Team photo

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Hooked III: student nicotine use and abuse

Allinah Zhan and Emma Shen
FEATURES AND NEWS WRITER

*Source names have been changed to protect source privacy.

The Annual National Youth Tobacco survey revealed that in 2023, 12.6% of high schoolers reported using a tobacco product, including e-cigarettes, cigars, nicotine pouches and gum. With social normalization and so many options wrapped in flashy, enticing packaging, teenagers' curiosities are piqued.

USAGE

Senior *Glenn has experimented with Zyns — a brand of nicotine pouch placed between the lip and gum for nicotine to be absorbed into the bloodstream — and describes the experience as enlightening.

"[The buzz is] like a tingly feeling in your brain," Glenn said. "It's like when you run three miles, come back and you have that runner's euphoria."

On the other hand, senior *Gia describes it as a light-headed feeling and smokes mainly out of habit or to de-stress.

"You just get a little dizzy, like when you stand up too fast," Gia said. "I think the reason I actively consume it, even though I know the negatives, is because there's a ritual to it. After a long day, if I feel like I need to clear my head, I go on a walk and I smoke. It's a comfort thing or a coping mechanism."

However, some of the euphoric effects of nicotine may diminish with regular use.

"[Nicotine] is a stimulant, so it can make people feel focused and give them a head rush," said Dr. Jessamy Cadigan, Tobacco Use Prevention Education mental health therapist. "But the head rush [disappears] fairly quickly if you're using it all the time. Then you need more and more to get the high, or the high goes away and you just need it to feel normal."

For freshman *Clara, it only took a few months after she first started vaping for the effects to fade.

"Now I don't feel anything from [vaping]," Clara said. "I just get a little headache. [But I continue since] I just get bored without it. I don't

have a lot of friends, so I mainly just stay at home and I don't have much to do."

Having used nicotine daily for nearly two years, Clara reported withdrawal symptoms when going too long without it, usually kicking in within one to two days.

"If I realize that I haven't been [vaping], I get this weird feeling," Clara said. "It's like when you're watching something that makes you [physically uncomfortable]; you just feel like you're cringing forever. I get angry, I get quiet, and if someone says the slightest thing to me, I go off on them. And I don't mean to."

Junior *Tori has witnessed others go to extreme measures for nicotine, especially frequent users.

"My friends who are into it, they're crazy, like they fiend for it," Tori said. "They almost got into a car crash once because they were fighting over who could smoke [the vape pen], right while they were driving."

Many have observed similarly negative effects, which have discouraged them from ever trying nicotine.

"My dad has been smoking since high school and still does, even though he's had many health problems [because of] it," said sophomore *Lily. "He had to go to the hospital multiple times because he had trouble breathing. This just makes me never want to try it, seeing how much he's addicted to it and how he can't quit even though it's been affecting our family. He [spends] a lot of money on it."

Past unpleasant experiences with nicotine also deter some.

"You would breathe in, and your throat would burn, and then you breathe out and you're like 'Oh, it tastes like mango juice,'" said junior *Taylor. "[I wouldn't want to try vaping again] because I don't want to risk getting an addiction [when]

I don't feel any enjoyment from it. I had a friend who was addicted to nicotine and she would tell me all about her withdrawal symptoms, like how she had headaches, felt sick all the time and was nauseous. She just felt kind of empty, and I wouldn't ever want to go through that."

INFLUENCE

Despite this, several people continue to use or try nicotine because of peer pressure.

"My friends [vape], so it's just awkward when you're not doing it," said junior *Erika. "I personally don't see the appeal but I usually just do it because it's kind of in the moment, and you're not going to get lung cancer from doing it once. It's fine in moderation, but definitely not a good habit."

Family member's smoking habits can influence one to begin as well. According to a 2015 study by the American Journal of Public Health, adolescents were nearly three times as likely to smoke if their parents were dependent on nicotine.

"My sister [saw our dad smoke, so] she tried it," Lily said. "[Although] she said she'd never get addicted, she continued with it, and she is quite addicted now. She uses vaping as a way to get out of eating because [it has] so many different flavors."

In addition to peer pressure and family influence, another factor prompting nicotine use among adolescents is its glamorization in the media.

"You'll see it [used] so casually and you don't think much of it because it's something that so many people do," Erika said. "I can see how it can be influential when celebrities do it because people are like, 'Oh, well they do it, and they're fine. So why not?'"

Nicotine, usually in the form of smoking or vaping, often appears in television shows and movies.

"One show that comes up, especially with teen use, is 'Skins,'" Gia said. "It's very 2000s, grunge kind of vibe, and the kids are always with a cigarette in their mouths."

Especially with the prevalence of

would ask them why, and they're like 'Oh, I'm curious because of TikTok.'"

MARKETING

With thousands of flavors from strawberry watermelon to cool mint, vapes are designed to captivate a young audience. Moreover, tobacco companies craft these devices into inconspicuous and portable shapes like pens and sun-screen-shaped pods to appeal to teenagers.

"The tobacco companies are targeting our teens and making devices that might be fun for you to slip in your pocket," said health teacher and department head Barbara Beaumont. "[This way], they can feel sneaky and [like they're] hiding it."

Their sleek shapes and fruity scents have made vapes seem like a relatively safe and user-friendly option, even though they still contain high levels of nicotine.

"[With] vaping coming out, it has re-hooked our kids on nicotine, which was kind of going passe," Cadigan said. "[What] they've done is they've made it look cool, taste good and smell good, and it doesn't hurt your throat as much. They've taken a lot of the barriers away from cigarette smoking and other nicotine delivery devices."

EFFECTS

Adolescents are one of the most susceptible groups to the harmful effects of nicotine, with their brain development, learning, memory, and attention all being impacted. Beaumont believes nicotine has no benefits and can be linked to increased anxiety and depression, although some individuals may use it as treatment.

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"It's a comfort thing, or a coping mechanism"

social media, adolescents are constantly exposed to content promoting and romanticizing nicotine use.

One prominent figure contributing to this is Lana Del Rey, a singer-songwriter known for her vintage, Americana aesthetic inspired by the '70s — an era where smoking was more widely accepted. In the past, she has often been depicted holding a cigarette, evoking a sense of glamor and allure. More recently, she has switched to vaping, and fans have remarked on her dependence as she carries it everywhere, even using it during performances.

"I feel like [the depiction of smoking] in social media recently has been strangely positive," Gia said. "There's a lot of romanticizing this bad girl, Lana Del Rey aesthetic. It's really interesting because some people that I never thought would ask me for a cigarette would be like 'Can I have one?' And I

Popular E-Cigarettes

Elf Bar

Hyde

Flum Float

Lost Mary

Editorial: expand anti-addiction support

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

For the past four issues, the Aragon Outlook has covered student substance abuse and addiction, including marijuana, alcohol and nicotine in the “Hooked” series, as well as psychedelics. With 154 student referrals from the district this year to substance abuse interventions, it’s abundantly clear that substance use has become an inherent part of Aragon culture and society at large. Some students battle peer and familial pressure to use substances, or turn to them as coping mechanisms — casual usage turning into a dependency or, in some cases, addiction.

In light of the stories we’ve uncovered, sources we’ve spoken to and ever-growing statistics featured in the centerspread on page 8-9, the editors of The Aragon Outlook believe that Aragon should expand upon its existing support for students battling addictions and focus on preventative education.

When students are caught with substances on campus, punishments vary situationally and seldom involve the police.

The San Mateo Union High School District uses Alternative to Suspension programs, which are one-on-one or group therapy sessions. They emphasize increasing student awareness about the risks of substance abuse rather than punitive punishment. One such example is a two-week-long group session on Monday evenings for students who are caught using or possessing nicotine.

However, these support resources should be available to students who reach out wanting

to quit — not just those who are caught with substances.

Though students learn about substance abuse in freshman health classes, The Outlook believes that further education is necessary. Those in ATS work with outside therapists and community partners, learning from experts about substance abuse. This should be incorporated into the health curriculum itself, in the form of guest speakers, panel discussions, Q&A sessions or a lecture series. Instead of educating students correctly, more efforts should be made preventatively.

“These are 14 to 18-year-olds who are curious,” said former Aragon health teacher Malcom Davis. “If you’re making that decision to try something, you need to know the consequences of that decision as well. Not just the effects of the drug, but also [what] can happen to you. As teachers and staff, we can’t control what you do outside of school, but we can hopefully educate you and make sure that you understand the possibilities of danger that you’re putting yourself in.”

Health classes offer an important introduction, but have to cover a significant amount of material in a single semester including nutrition, physical exercise, suicide prevention, chronic diseases and addictive substances. Consequently, there isn’t enough time to fully educate students on each topic.

Moreover, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, substance abuse increases between freshman and senior year of high school, with 31.2% of American twelfth graders

reporting substance use in comparison to 19.8% of tenth graders. This, combined with the fact that substance abuse education is always changing, means that more education is necessary after freshman year.

“We target the freshmen, and we hope that this 14 or 15 year old remembers this until they’re 18,” Davis said. “But our target emphasis should be on continually teaching the sophomores, the juniors and the seniors about addiction, [not] just the freshmen.”

This could be in the form of assemblies or a mandatory refresher course for upperclassmen to emphasize the content of previous health classes.

Furthermore, Aragon must destigmatize reaching out for

support around drug use. If students could access help without feeling as if they’d get in trouble, or be judged by adults and peers, we can combat substance abuse before it grows into a harmful addiction.

“I don’t think you get anywhere by making teenagers feel judged, like they’re ‘bad’ for what they did, or that they’re just being dismissed as doing ‘what teenagers do’ and that they’ve ‘got to get it together’ and all that stuff,” said Wellness Counselor Jillian Ma. “There’s legal parameters we have to follow, [like] we have to let parents know, but within those parameters it’s really important to be curious and to move towards repair as opposed to punishment.”

Dialogue, specifically, is key to breaking down the stigma around addiction.

“It’s extremely common in general to experiment as a teenager - I smoke and drink on the weekends with my friends, and I know a lot of my classmates do as well,” said an anonymous senior. “I don’t hear a lot of open conversation between teachers and students about it, and I wish I did because some of my friends have become so dependent. Having dialogue around it would make students more likely to reach out for help because they wouldn’t feel so alone, and learn that there is help for them if they need it.”



ALEXA STERRY

San Mateo County declares loneliness epidemic

Chase Rokala
NEWS WRITER

San Mateo has become the first county in America to officially recognize loneliness as a public health emergency. The declaration, introduced by County Board Supervisor David Canepa, also proposed county-wide resolutions meant to spur further action.

“This is a problem that has been building for decades,” said United States Surgeon General Vivek Murthy to Axios. “[The COVID-19 pandemic] certainly worsened it, and poured fuel on the fire.”

During the pandemic students experienced loneliness for a variety of reasons.

“I was moving from Connecticut to California,” said freshman Benjamin Marshall. “So I didn’t really have any friends.”

Combating loneliness can be difficult, as it is shown to increase stress and affects physical health as well as mental, according to the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention. However, focusing on hobbies or sports can help people improve their loneliness and spread a

sense of community. Canepa’s resolution and the declaration of a loneliness epidemic are meant to improve the wellbeing of the public, especially those who suffer from loneliness.

According to Canepa, around 45% of people suffer from loneliness. A study by the CDC shows that loneliness and social isolation have been linked to an increased risk of many diseases, and a meta-analysis of 90 studies



examining the link between loneliness, social isolation and premature death showed that social isolation increases the chance of premature death by 32%. The study also states that loneliness increases a person’s chances of an early death by 14%, which is why the World

Health Organization has labeled it as a pressing global threat. The CDC reports it costs the U.S. economy an estimated \$406 billion per year as lonely workers allegedly cost their employers on average \$4,200 due to lowered productivity.

In a letter to California Governor Gavin Newsom, Canepa’s office proposed creating a Minister of Loneliness modeled after similar positions in the United Kingdom and Japan, in the state government, who would work toward combating the loneliness epidemic by introducing more social events, fighting for policies like the Addressing Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults Act and generally strengthening social infrastructure.

“There needs to be awareness in families, friend groups and communities so that people know they aren’t the only ones feeling lonely, and I think that having a Minister of Loneliness position would definitely spread awareness,” said health teacher Barbara Beaumont.

While social media was useful during the pandemic, there was a strong correla-

tion between it and the loneliness epidemic, especially as it can have negative effects as a form of entertainment.

“People put the best parts of their life on social media, so when you feel lonely, and you see other people having a good time, you want to have a good time too, which can make you feel more disconnected from the

people around you,” Beaumont said.



According to a study from the National Institutes of Health, more time spent on social media was associated with higher levels of loneliness, es-

pecially for people who used social media as the sole means for maintaining relationships, which was extremely common during the pandemic.

Despite this, social media can be a helpful resource when used in positive ways, which is why spreading awareness about harmful effects can help mitigate the loneliness epidemic.

“I stayed in touch with my friends during COVID though Messenger and Discord, but I didn’t really feel lonely,” said sophomore Henry Rezende.

Aragon offers free mental health counseling and requires students to take a semester of health class to graduate. In this class, students meet guest speakers, are taught habits to live a healthy life and are provided with hotlines.

Although San Mateo County is the first to address the loneliness epidemic in America, receiving national coverage, Japan and the United Kingdom have also recognized the same issues in their countries, and are taking steps to improve. By spreading awareness and directing funding towards combating loneliness, the government is working to minimize the loneliness epidemic.



Aragon's guitarist Leo Telfer-Mantouvalos, pianist Melody Chen, and Hillsdale's saxophone player Olivia Murray perform.

JORELL SAKAMOTO

Aragon and Hillsdale jazz dazzle in Double Exposure

Naomi Kotani
NEWS WRITER

On March 1, Aragon's Jazz Band and Ensemble performed their sixteenth annual Double Exposure concert alongside Hillsdale's Jazz Ensemble from 7-9 p.m. at Aragon's theater. The two schools alternate hosting the concert every year.

Each band played five songs. Aragon's Jazz Band opened the concert, followed by Hillsdale's Jazz Ensemble, and Aragon's Jazz Ensemble closed. Two of the songs featured vocalists – "Still Alive" performed by Hillsdale, and "On the Street Where You Live" performed by Aragon's jazz ensembles.

"[There is a] community aspect [of] playing with our musician cousins," said Aragon Director of Bands Kevin Gallagher. "In sports, Hillsdale would be considered our rival, but in music, they're more like a family that we want to be able to share the stage with."

Hillsdale's Director of Bands, Mike Galea reiterated the idea of family.

"This is something really fun that we're doing and [the students] should be excited to share this with people," Galea

said. "There's no competition. There's no animosity and there's no rivalry. It is family; it is us sharing music."

The shared performance between the two schools encourages collaboration.

"[Sometimes] our band members may have heard something that Hillsdale played, and they'll say, 'Hey, can we play that one too? That was a cool song,' or vice versa," Gallagher said. "I think that it's important to build that camaraderie between the students and make sure that they're having a good time."

Gallagher shared his hopes for the concert.

"The main goals that we have for any performances are that students do their best and sound their best and [that] they're proud of the music that they create," Gallagher said. "Also, being able to take what we've learned from rehearsal and apply it to the concert [is key as well]."

To Hillsdale junior and Jazz Ensemble member Matthew Moyer, performing with his fellow musicians is an exciting experience to look forward to.

"When the whole band is having fun, it shows to the au-

dience," Moyer said. "It brings a lot of energy and we play better when we're having fun."

Aside from practicing during class periods, students also worked on their own in the weeks leading up to the concert. Aragon freshman Lizzie Yuan implemented some practicing techniques to ensure she was ready.

"Playing sections that I struggled with over and over again and listening to recordings helped," Yuan said. "[It was helpful to] play along with [the recordings] to know where your part fits in."

Some mentioned the lack of rehearsal time for the concert.

"We've been pretty busy recently," Moyer said. "We had three to five songs that we've been sticking to for festivals, and this is the first time that we've turned away from those. We didn't have a ton of time to work on [the new songs]."

One of the songs that Aragon's Jazz Band played was a rendition of the

song "Africa." Yuan commented on a challenge with practicing the song.

"It's hard when you play a song that you already know because the composer might have written it differently than the original," Yuan said. "In your mind, you have the original so it's different to understand that the rhythms are not the same."

The stress from performing can cause students to play differently than they did when practicing.

"The only way to prevent [that] is to perform more and get used to that stress and performing in front of people," Gallagher said. "The performance itself is the practice."

During the concert, in the middle of Aragon's Jazz Ensemble performance, the power went out on stage due to a storm. Senior and

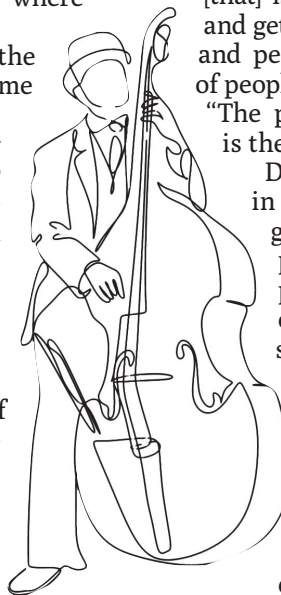
Jazz Ensemble member Evan Hwang reflected on the musicians' response to the power outage and the concert overall.

"I was surprised by the lights going off – that was not scripted," Hwang said. "[But when the lights] turned off, we kept on playing. We could have worked on our intonation a little bit more, but given the hand that we were dealt, it was probably one of the best outcomes we could have had. I've had performances before where we made a mistake and we've stopped. I really respect the entire band, especially the rhythm section, for keeping on going at it, keeping in time and not rushing or dragging due to panic or fear."

Audience members commented on the performance.

"The variety [of songs] was nice," said Aragon freshman Megan Hugo. "I recognized a few of them like 'Take Five' and 'Africa' because those songs I listen to, and I've heard of them before. It's nice to see songs people can recognize [as well as] songs people probably haven't heard of before."

Aragon's Jazz Ensemble will play at the Santa Cruz Jazz Festival on March 15 and the music department will host their next event, the Symphonic Pops Concert, on March 29.



Sophomores snag win at annual winter rally

Darshan Bal
NEWS WRITER

On Feb. 23, Leadership held Aragon's annual indoor winter rally of the year in the North Gym.

"There's a lot of fun and pride in representing [your class]," said Leadership adviser Heather Stretch. "It's [also] a great way for us to highlight lots of different groups. Whether they are athletes or performers, they get a chance to sign up and come out and represent the school."

Leadership's Rally Commission comes up with ideas for the event, including the many activities and decorations at rallies.

"We brainstorm everything ourselves, create a plan of each rally and then send it to Ms. Stretch, who looks over it," said Rally Commission Co-Head Chin-Yi Kong. "If she A-OK's everything, [we] send it over to administration [for] feedback. Once we get approval, then we can actually start finding participants and reaching out to people."

This preparation begins months in advance, as Leadership must go through current inventory, order supplies and get approval from school ad-

ministration. On the day of the rally, they start decorating the gym as early as 8:30 a.m.

As students entered the gym for the rally, they were greeted by Aragon cheerleaders and enthusiastic pop music. The energy continued as the rally kicked off with a performance from the cheer team. Then the class mascots came out – freshman's green dinosaur, sophomores' pink shark and juniors' and seniors' respective blue and purple inflatables – amid cheers from their respective classes.

Soon after, the dance team stepped out from their positions in the bleachers, and began their performance in the center of the gym.

"It took us about two months to really get an idea of how we were going to do this routine and choreography," said dance team coach Isabella MatalSol. "The [dancers] have to go home and practice on their own, but they really are devoted and they're passionate about what they do and it shows out there when they perform."

Then, the Hamster Ball Bombastic Battle began. Freshmen were put against sophomores, and juniors against

seniors in the sumo-like competition, where class representatives attempted to push each other out of a circle on the gym floor while inside of an inflatable ball.

The freshman lost to sophomores in both rounds, while seniors won their first round, but tied in the second round with the juniors. Due to this, the hamster ball game ended early, and the parameters for the game may be reworked for the future.

The girls and boys basketball teams went to the gym floor for a dance performance that was followed by the Super-Sized Soccer game, which counselor Javier Magaña took part in. The game was tough for both students and teachers, but it kept the energy up. After ending in a tie, the game went to penalty kicks, where the teachers won 2-1.

"It was fun just playing [and] doing something that's not work related with my colleagues and being a little competitive with the kids in a different way," Magaña said.

Afterwards, the class anthem competition began. Leadership students brought out the newly created Sing-O-Meter to judge how loud and spirited students

could get. Freshmen started slow as they sang OneRepublic's "Counting Stars," but juniors and seniors were able to bring up the energy, singing "Baby" by Justin Bieber and "Goosebumps" by Travis Scott. Ultimately, sophomores won the competition, singing Keyshia Cole's "Love," while waving a pink Ice Spice flag, a twist to the usual win for the seniors.

"I do think that many times the rally has been awarded to the seniors when other classes

should've won," said sophomore Charlie Harger. "The sophomores did really well. We showed a lot of spirit and I think it was a well-deserved win."

The high energy sustained until the end of the 45-minute rally, before students went to lunch, but Leadership's cleanup had just begun. Their hard work and dedication is what allows students to enjoy these energetic rallies, which will return for the annual spring rally.



Sophomores sing class anthem.

MARTIN ZHENG

College counselors: private or public?

Meilin Rife
FEATURES WRITER

According to the Education Data Initiative, the number of college students in the United States has increased from 7.4 million in 1970 (3.6% of the population) to 19.0 million in 2020 (5.8% of the population). This boom has expanded the secondary education industry, extending access to private college counseling for high school students who seek that specialized outside support.

"[I got a private counselor] so I wouldn't be stressed out in junior year [about] not knowing what kind of college I want to go to," said junior Sophia Hsu. "She's also helped with [extracurricular] activities I could do to show my interest [in a subject] outside of school."

However, private counseling, like any other tool, is not a guaranteed method to build students into the "perfect" applicant. Instead, counselors seek to enhance what is already there.

"[College counseling] is a supportive role," said independent private college counselor Helena Prigal. "[A] guide can be helpful with different parts of the process. It's helping the student bring out their stories [to write about in essays]. I try not to bring in too many new ideas. I try to be more of a sounding board because it's the student's process, not my process."

At the same time, some discourage the use of private counselors, citing the need to learn independence.

"I definitely have heard [stories of private] counselors where they guide them into doing certain types of activities or adjusting their resume to not [fit] the student's needs and interests," said career and Career Technical Education coordinator Queenie Hua. "Students should be able to step back and not only rely on the research of the private counselor, and they can double-check with school counselors [as well]."

However, many students still desire the benefits of a private counselor.

"It's [not] necessarily unfair because if you [can] access it, [you should] totally take advantage of it," said senior Maylani Fiel-Mata. "I just think that it was unfortunate that I was unable to have that kind of help. I think I would have challenged myself more academically if I had a college counselor because I feel like they would [have set] certain requirements that I needed in order to get into the college I wanted to get into. I didn't even apply to my dream college because I didn't think I was qualified."

On the other side of the spectrum is the Aragon college counseling team, accessible to all students. Some of their expertise involves aiding students in exploring college options, editing essays and providing information for career-specific activities, such as internships. Hua believes that using school resources can impart knowledge that serves students beyond college applications.

"If you are relying solely on a private college counselor, [it] may hinder [you] from developing essential skills such as decision-making, problem-solving and self-advocating," Hua said. "It is important for students to take an active role in the college application process and develop the necessary skills for success instead of just having someone guide them every single step."

A more guided alternative Aragon provides is the Advancement Via Individual Determination program. The class targets students who want to attend a four-year college, but may not have the information or resources to plan for that independently. As well as being more financially accessible than private counseling, AVID seeks to impart skills students will use for a lifetime.

"We focus on skills and strategies for success in high school, college and their chosen career path," said AVID teacher Tiffany Chiaro. "[For example], organization is not just writing in your planner. It's organizing your four-year plan. What's your end goal? What are you going to do to get there? What habits do you need to develop? What habits do you need to drop?"

While many students who use private college counselors only begin planning for college as upperclassmen, AVID begins the process from ninth grade.

"In freshman year, you start writing your University of California prompt," said senior Caitlyn Solares. "[AVID] helps you as far as financial [deadlines], the applications [and] scholarships. It breaks down everything for you. There's not one thing that [gets] left out."

Students aiming to attend college seek help from different areas, each with benefits and disadvantages.



Teens experience predatory behavior

Charlotte Gregory
FEATURES WRITER

When she was 16, senior *Inez visited a foreign country on vacation. There, she found herself at a party which, while fun at first, quickly turned sour.

"There was this one guy who was around 23 years old," Inez said. "He was talking to me and I didn't want to be rude, so we kept talking. All of a sudden, he came closer and tried to kiss me, and I moved back and I pushed him away. I told him, 'I'm only 16,' and he goes, 'Age doesn't matter.'"

Unfortunately, frightening predatory encounters like Inez's are all too common for teenagers. These instances, where predators, most commonly adults, manipulate, deceive and prey on teenagers, can occur anywhere, resulting in teenagers feeling uncomfortably alert and fearful of receiving unwanted sexual advances.

According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 56% of girls and 40% of boys between grades 7-12 have reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment. The emotional impacts of such harassment can be severe.

"It gave me goosebumps," Inez said. "I just walked away and felt like I needed to throw up. I wanted to shed my skin and rid myself of that man. Creepy old guys coming at young women are disgusting."

Senior Gaby Wang had a more local experience when she was harassed on the Caltrain.

"I was just walking on the train on my phone, behind some guy," Wang said. "He sat down and turned around, and he was like, 'Hey, want to keep me company?' I said, 'No thanks,' and he said, 'Aw, sad face,' ... in this whiny, make-you-feel-bad tone."

Predators often try to make their victims feel guilty for rejecting their advances so that they do not have to feel accountable for their victims' discomfort.

"The assumption is that, of course, if he wants you to sit with him, you're gonna sit with him," Wang said. "If you don't, [you] should feel ashamed because [you] just hurt this nice guy's feelings, and now he's all sad."

There is a common misconception that predatory behavior occurs solely in public settings and from older men toward young women. But predation can happen to any gender, exist in any setting and can even come from one's peers. Sometimes, jokes and playfulness from peers can be misconstrued as predation.

Predatory behavior can also occur online, where predators are able to easily lie about their identities to teenagers.

"People can put fake profiles and pretend to be a teenage girl to meet friends, and then it's a creepy old guy," Inez said. "It's easy because you don't know what they look like until you FaceTime them or see them in person."

Rejecting predators or criticizing their behavior, for teenage girls in particular, can be incredibly dangerous, due to the possibility of violent retaliation.

"If you've jilted a dude, romantically [or] sexually, you could get killed," Wang said. "That's [something] that happens scarily often. Sometimes it feels like the easier thing to do is to smile and be nice and put up with it because ... what he might do in retaliation if you say no might be worse. ... So you're always having to do the mental calculus and do the trade-off in your head, which is just a terrible thing to have to be doing all the time."

Another danger of predation is the unbalanced power dynamic that can exist between the victim and the predator, who might be an older figure of authority.

"In my [former] school, there was this really creepy teacher who looked down girls' shirts and would touch girls in weird

places," said sophomore *Rachel. "[I signed] a petition [in which some] girls spoke up about similar experiences."

When dynamics like these exist, it can be challenging and painful for victims to make their voices heard, out of fear of not being believed.

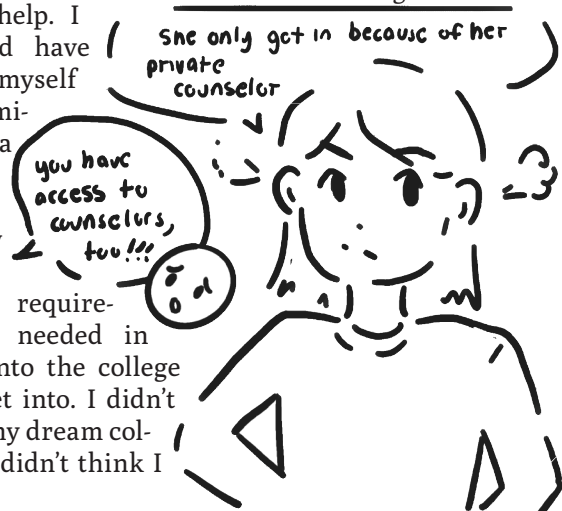
"It was very upsetting at the time for me," Rachel said. "It's still upsetting now. I always believe that you should believe the victim until proven otherwise."

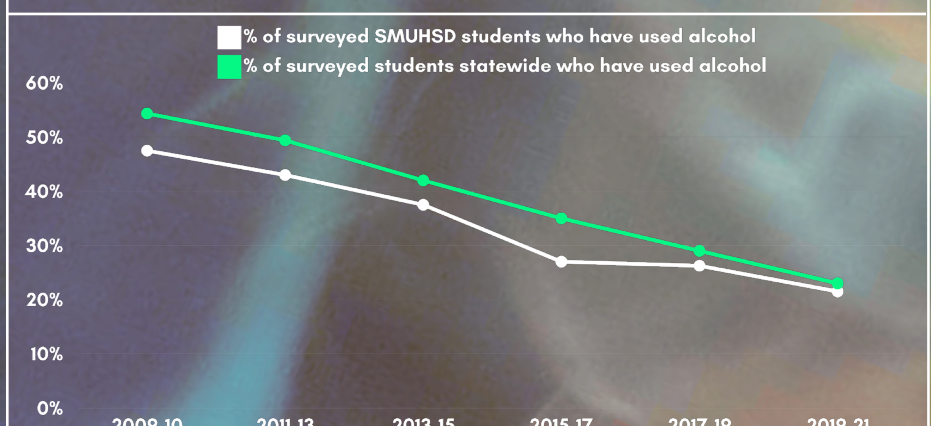
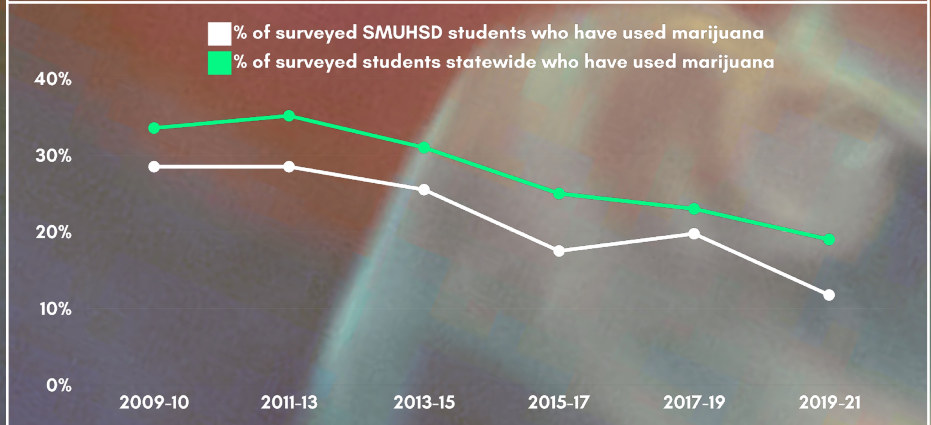
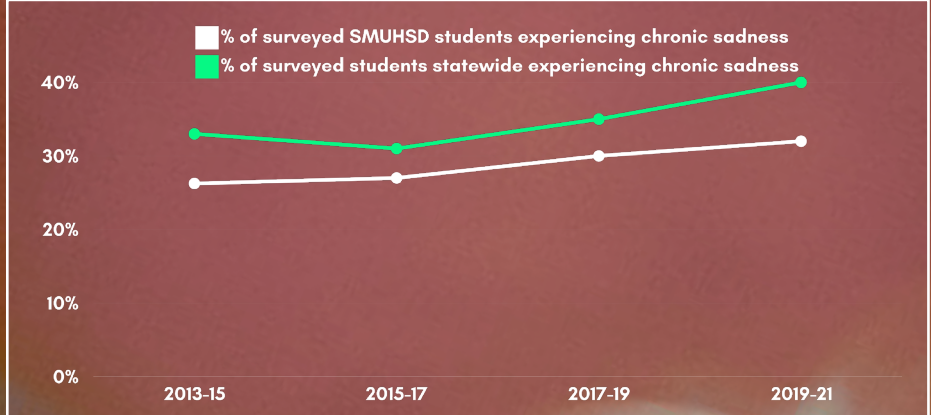
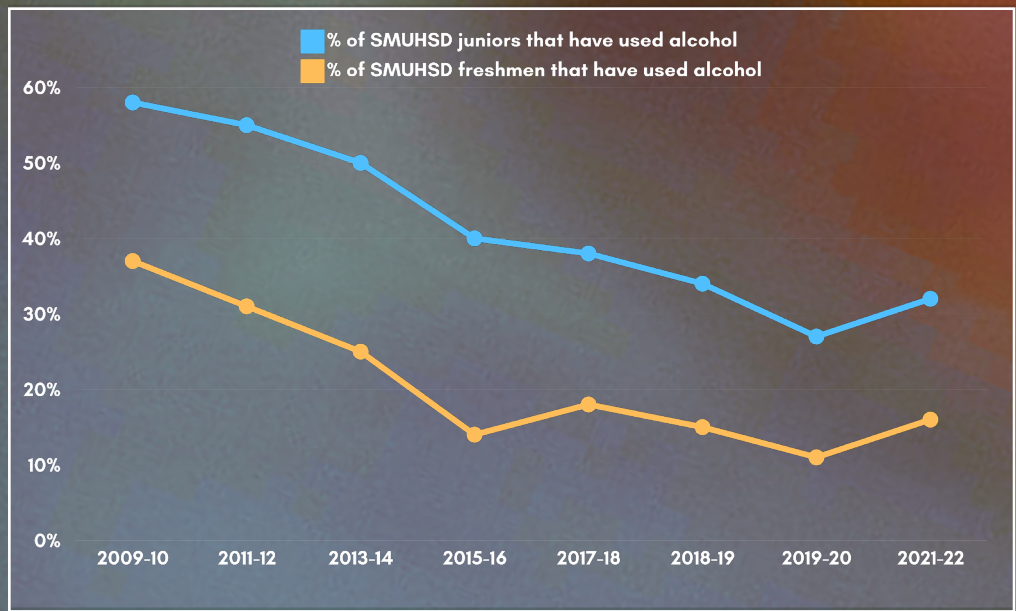
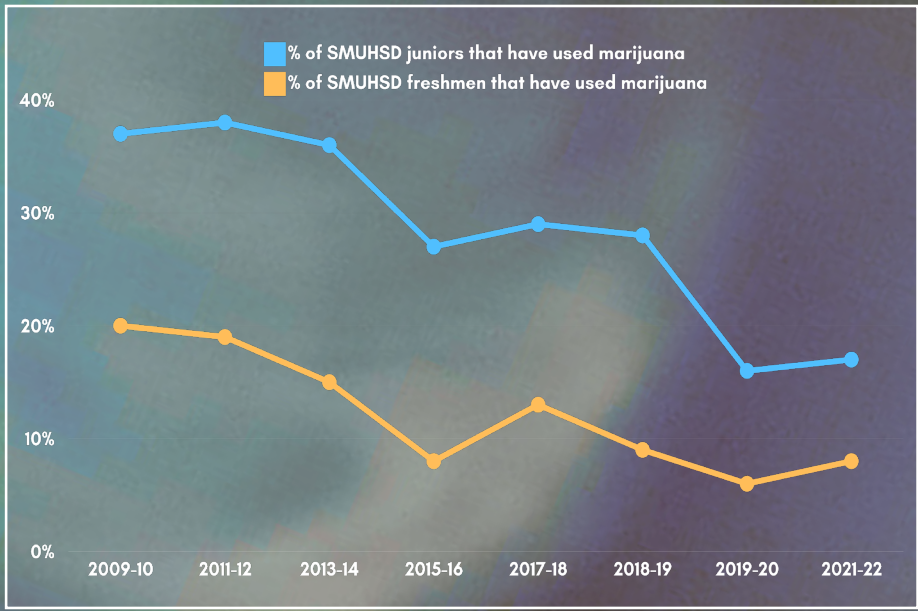
This raises the question: How can schools, and communities in general, make victims of sexual harassment and predation feel safe, seen and respected?

"I think having a club that's aware of [sexual harassment] or having an assembly where people speak out about their stories and people can listen to them ... would allow for students to be able to connect with each other," said junior Katya Kleinhenz. "If someone starts talking about a difficult topic, it can inspire other people to also talk about it. ... I always just get caught up in my own head like, 'Well, I'm the only person who struggles with this, no one else is dealing with this.' And when you hear other people it's like, 'Wow, we can help each other through this and get really angry about it together.' It definitely makes me feel less alone."

Although sexual harassment is a severe issue amongst teens, many believe that if open conversations and education continue, more will be comfortable coming forth about their experiences, and predators will be held accountable for their actions.

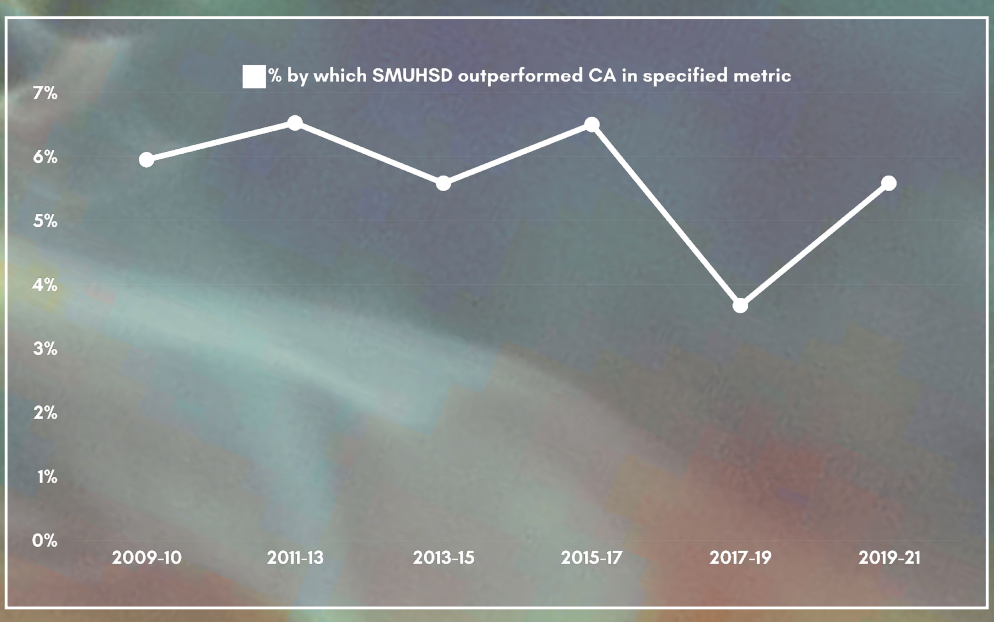
"I think the issue will get better because I feel like the younger generations are learning more about equality and just being kinder in general," Inez said. "There are more resources available for people who experience sexual harassment, and predators' behavior is no longer tolerated in modern-day society. We have a long way to go, but I do see things getting better."





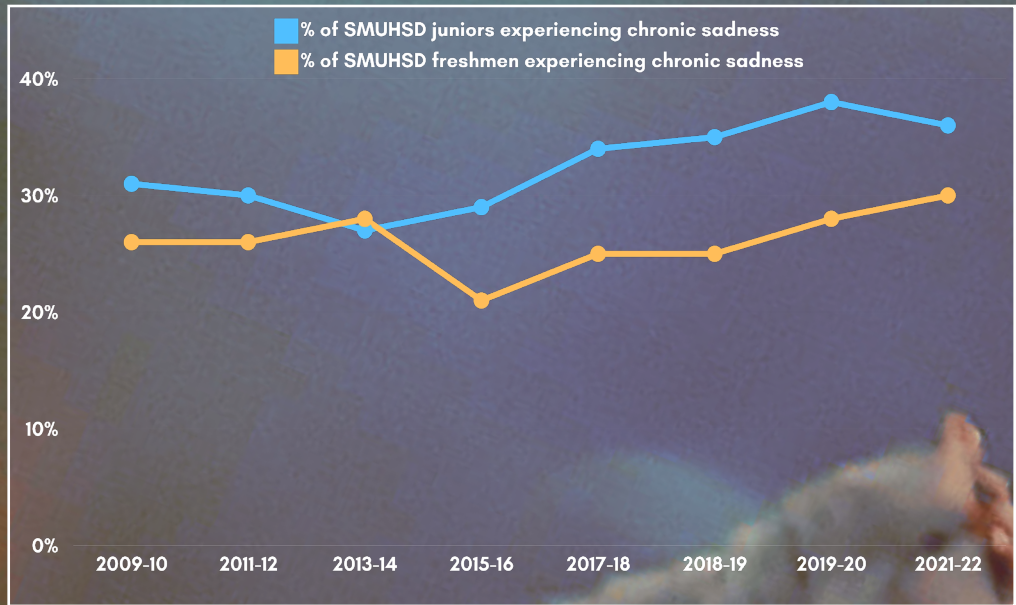
SMUHSD VS. CALIFORNIA

We weighed the San Mateo Union High School District's results from the California Healthy Kids Survey against the California's biennial statewide report, which compiles similar data from districts across the state. Looking again at the three indicative markers of chronic sadness, alcohol usage and marijuana usage, we observed that on average, SMUHSD has recorded drug and alcohol usage rates around 5% below statewide averages over the past 15 years.



THE CALIFORNIA HEALTHY KIDS SURVEY

The California Healthy Kids Survey is a biennial survey administered to students in Californian schools in fifth, seventh, ninth and eleventh grades. It is an anonymous and voluntary survey, and its results constitute some of the most closely-watched indicators of student safety, behavior and success at school and in life. We picked three metrics: chronic sadness, alcohol usage and marijuana usage, to help illustrate common trends across the board, but they are not holistic.



35%

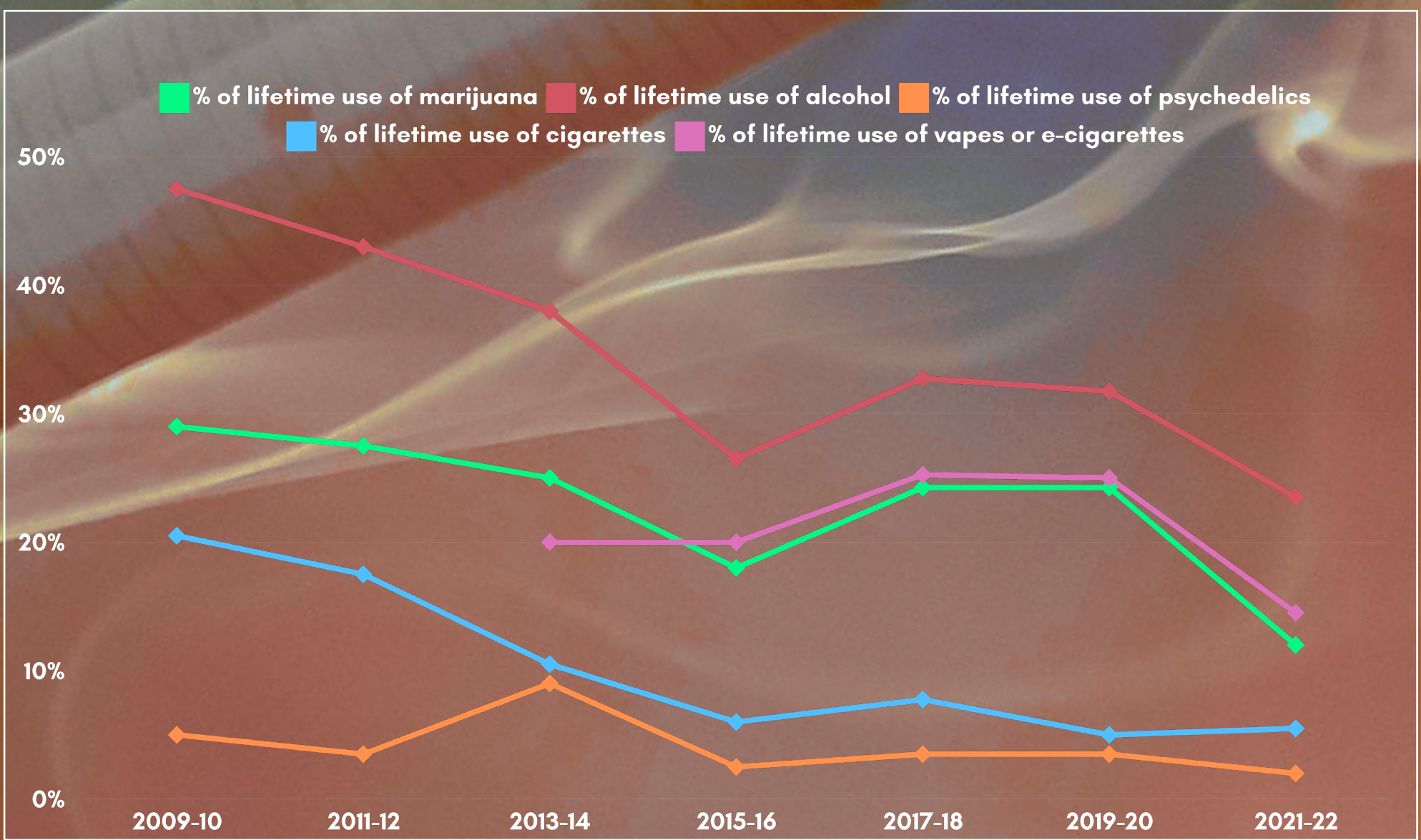
of 1,933 SMUHSD juniors have used illicit alcohol and drugs to get high

HOOKED: BY THE NUMBERS

of SMUHSD juniors say they currently use illicit alcohol and drugs

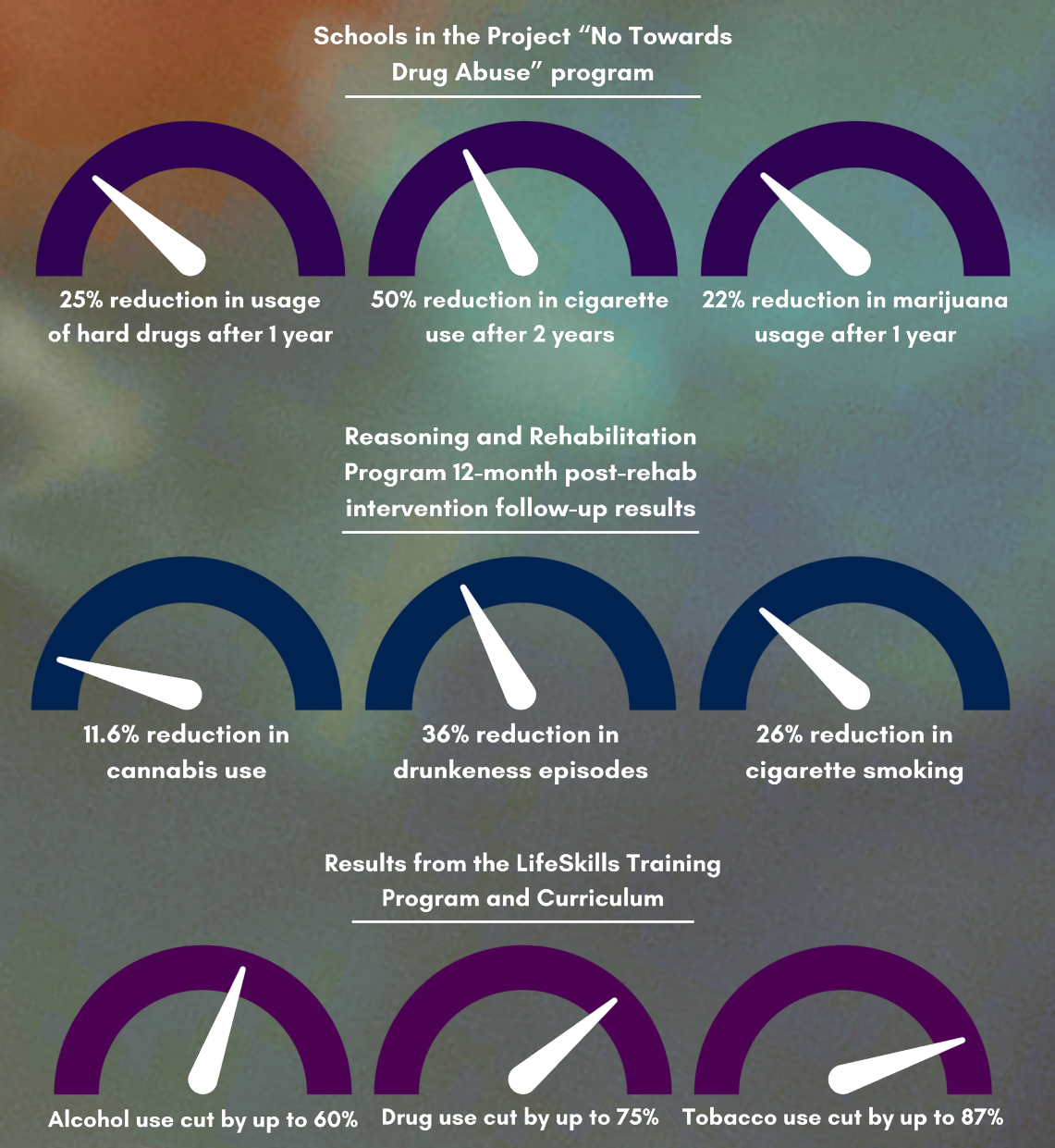
18%

SMUHSD LIFETIME USAGE RATES FOR VARIOUS SUBSTANCES



PREVENTION AND RECOVERY

In line with the Editorial on pg.3 of this issue, numerous studies across the nation and the world have shown the benefit of approaching adolescent drug use with involved restorative and construction approaches. We looked at a wide array of programs that sought to test implementation of these values on students, groups of students and schools around the world. Project "No Towards Drug Abuse" involved randomized trials across multiple schools, while the Reasoning and Rehabilitation program was tested on smaller groups of high school students. Meanwhile, the LifeSkills training program has been implemented in numerous settings across the nation. The results of all these studies and more point towards a larger trend elevating the importance of recognizing the root causes behind adolescent substance abuse. Further sources can be found online.



COPY: FELIX MA, ANDREW DONG, LIPIKA GOEL, GRADE TAO, AGASTYA RAGHAVAN
LAYOUT: FELIX MA

ALL SAN MATED UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT DATA COLLECTED FROM PAST SMUHSD CALIFORNIA HEALTHY KIDS SURVEY REPORTS
STATE DATA COLLECTED FROM PAST CALIFORNIA STATEWIDE HEALTHY KIDS SURVEY REPORTS

Reporting by Kyra Hsieh, Seona Srivastava, and Ellen Li

Eden Kwan (10)



LIAN WANG

Our Missing Hearts
Celeste Ng

“I feel like the ending really undermines the entire story. It’s anticlimactic. It has a lot of themes of racial politics, but it isn’t specific enough to the races that it’s investigating for it to be meaningful in that way. It oversimplifies politics and racial relations into almost a caricature of those kinds of interpersonal relationships. It uses it to create melodramatic scenarios, which I don’t think is a good way to handle those topics. It’s framed as a dystopia, but there’s nothing really interesting about the world-building. So there’s a lot of history that we never get to see. And we never get to really understand the character’s motivations.”

ALLYSON CHAN

Mia Spencer (11)



JULIA DEL MUNDO

Patron Saints of Nothing
Randy Ribay

“It was one of the first books I just wanted to keep reading. A lot of the books we [previously] read were old books and they were for adults, but the way this book was written was way easier for teenagers to understand. I think this book is being taught because people want to hide their race because they are afraid or they don’t feel like they fit in. I think this is important to read because everyone is who they are and that is important to know: everyone is different.”

Mikaela George (12)



JORELL SAKAMOTO

Their Eyes Were Watching God
Zora Neale Hurston

“I think it’s an important read especially for women of color and I’d say women in general. ... It is a story about a woman who goes through these relationships in her life and how she grows from each one. It’s a coming of age story. A lot of the time people don’t appreciate how the main character is very driven by a desire to fall in love, to get married. But I think that’s really the essence of the feminist aspect of it; it’s that she chooses to do those things. It’s not exactly a super happy ending, but it’s definitely a triumphant one for her because at the very end of the story, we see that she’s lived a life that she will remember fondly and that she doesn’t quite have any regrets.”

Oliver Pacquet (12)



ANNA HE

The Things They Carried
Tim O’Brien

“It’s one of the books that we read that I actually wanted to continue reading because it had a different angle than most books. It changed my view on how books should be written because it [follows a] nonlinear [timeline]. In the book, he tells stories [of American soldiers fighting in the Vietnam War], but these stories are exaggerated. He does it to make you feel more like how he felt in the moment, and not just from an outside view.”

READ MORE AT
ARAGONOUTLOOK.ORG



ALEXA STERRY

English curriculum evolves

Chloe Chen
FEATURES WRITER

From “hard work pays off” in “Three Little Pigs” to “don’t talk to strangers” from “Little Red Riding Hood,” teachers have relied on simple folktales to share such messages with kids as early as elementary, or even preschool. Books can approach important themes and lessons. Although it might seem rudimentary, the same idea applies in high school as well.

Over the years, the English curriculum at Aragon has evolved to reflect the diversity within the student body. In 2010, California established a new set of standards in language arts with higher standards aiming to ensure every student was college and career-ready and placed more emphasis on understanding identity. In 2018, the courses of study were revised to reflect the new standards.

“There [are] themes that have to do with self [identity], understanding others and empathy,” said Brian Simmons, Director of Curriculum and Assessments for the San Mateo Union High School District. “We want to make sure students are learning about [these] in the context of ... academic skills around reading and writing and being able to make arguments.”

When choosing books for the school year, the district provides teachers with a San Mateo School District Board-pre-approved list of novels. New board policies such as the Racial Equity Board Policy affect changes in the book choices.

“In our recent past, teachers have been asked to examine the texts that we teach in our classroom with an equity lens,” said English 4 teacher Vince Bravo. “The district has guided some of that conversation, but as with all things in the world of education, making those sorts of changes goes slowly and there is a financial cost attached to mak[ing] any sort of changes.”

Adopting a new text requires teachers to rewrite all curricula to meet state standards and fit with the schedule.

“There is a huge time investment for teachers to develop daily lessons,” Bravo said. “Oftentimes, an English class is with a novel for five to six weeks, [which] means that every single one of those days needs to be revised. That makes a piloting program very difficult because then you are committing to creating an entire unit that may not be used in the future. However, of course, when you find a good novel to teach and that works, it’s great.”

There are many factors to consider when choosing books for a specific English class, including vertical plan-

ning, which creates a framework to prepare students for future grades.

“[In Advanced Placement English Language,] we only have time to read two fiction books, since it’s a nonfiction-based curriculum, [so] I want to choose literature that is challenging syntactically, rich in subject matter and are books that students haven’t read on their own,” said AP English Language teacher Victoria Daniel.

“That also could be used on the [AP English Literature] exam because I’m also part of a vertical [planning] team that [works] to prepare ... students for that.”

The district has aimed to make changes rooted in increased representation of students.

“We’re trying to reflect the anti-racist journey that we’re on in the district,” Simmons said. “To really try to make sure that students are both reflected in the literature that they’re reading [and] learning about the experiences of other people through literature that’s more reflective of a more contemporary diverse population of people.”

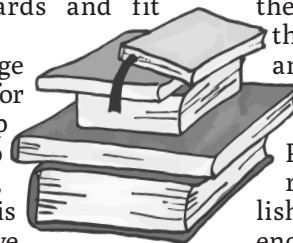
Through literature, students can take away important values taught through a diverse set of books.

“We’ve definitely diversified our choice of literature,” Daniel said. “There are [many] more writers of color in our curriculum ... [which is motivated by the] changing student body and awareness or really a desire to expose students to a wider variety of subjects and authors.”

Many of the chosen books are considered “classics,” with themes applicable to readers today despite being of a different era, such as “Lord of The Flies” and “Frankenstein,” written by authors William Golding and Mary Shelley. Students have also noticed other trends in stories taught throughout the years.

“I noticed [the] books [we read] expose high school students to other cultures and societies, especially if there is an aspect of currentness to them,” said junior Yael Boaz. “For example, while reading ‘Patron Saints of Nothing’ [in English 10AS] we learned about real issues that the Philippines were facing and while reading ‘There There’ [in AP English Language] the novel would reference landmarks in Oakland and the Bay Area that we would recognize, along with historical events we had learned about.”

Over the years, the English curriculum has undergone many changes to promote variation and adapt to the growing diversity in the student body. Although changes take time and constant adjustment, these changes are intended to benefit students developing their values and worldview.



Strings and things: Hartig's musical endeavors

Ashley Tsui
FEAUTRES WRITER

Imagine falling back through time to 17th-century Europe. Music was defined by classical pieces, often played on instruments such as the lute or harpsichord. These instruments, though once popular and played by musicians and composers all over the world, are now mostly artifacts of a past time. But to some, like assistant principal Andrew Hartig, old instruments are too valuable to be lost to time. In his spare time, Hartig enjoys restoring and bringing these items back to their former glory.

Originally a string musician proficient with the lute, lyre, mandore, guitar and more, Hartig ended up spending a lot on purchasing instruments, which led to him deciding to build and later repair them for others. Through this, his interest in antique instrument restoration started.

Hartig's first restoration was an antique guitar around four years ago, which held sentimental value as it was his introduction to vintage instruments.

"What was really cool about [the instrument] was just the age of it [and] the materials," Hartig said. "[There was] a lot of mother of pearl and ivory and actual tortoise shell. A lot of those materials [we] can't work

with anymore because of endangered animals and protection. But the ability to be able to handle that and to just see that up close has been really cool."

Additionally, he works with uniquely crafted items.

"I'm working on a guitar right now that's probably from the late 19th century," Hartig said. "It's a Russian guitar with seven strings. ... It's just such a different construction from so many modern guitars. One of the neat features about it is [that] the neck is completely removable, which is unusual for an acoustic instrument."

There is also sentimental value associated with these instruments that have lasted for so many years and still function today.

"There's something to be said about playing on an instrument that's over a few hundred years old," said Director of Bands Kevin Gallagher. "Imagine the story that that instrument could tell. ... Who knows where it's been played? ... One of the instruments Mr. Hartig repaired was originally an Italian instrument ... [it] has traveled all over Europe, I'm sure. It's a story in itself, just having that older instrument."

The difficulty and time needed to repair an instrument differs based on the type of item and the condition it is in.



Hartig's restored instruments

LIAN WANG

"[The process] really depends on whether you are trying to conserve the instrument in its exact state or if you're trying to bring it back to a state where it can be played," Hartig said. "My own interest is in bringing instruments back to life—keeping them out of museums and keeping them in the hands of players."

The process is dependent on evidence of the instrument's original structure.

"[I do] a lot of documentation; [take] a lot of photographs, [make] a lot of notes, [look] very closely at what the original builder may have been intending," Hartig said. "Sometimes one can even find old pencil lines that marked out where things were supposed to go. Then, it's a very, very slow process of carefully undoing things, cleaning them and re-gluing them, or if necessary, replacing parts that are broken and cannot be re-glued."

Since it's difficult to predict how long an instrument's restoration process will take, Hartig typically saves the hobby for summer break.

"Depending on the condition, it could take 50 or 60 hours to repair and restore," Hartig said. "A lot of it just depends on what needs to be done."

Hartig's abilities connect musicians with the past by making what could have been a lost instrument playable once more.

Twelvemonth brings tasty vegan fare to Burlingame

Oliver Levitt
FEATURES WRITER

With the growing popularity of veganism, a new restaurant, Twelvemonth, has taken on the challenge of providing high-quality food that is purely vegan. But does Twelvemonth live up to the vision?

Since its recent opening in March 2023, Twelvemonth has been running its bakery, bar and dining room in Burlingame. I visited the restaurant for lunch along with my mom and brother, ordering a variety of lunch menu dishes. I spoke to restaurant owner Bob Trahan, who shared his personal story of choosing veganism.

"My wife is my muse and an animal lover big-time," Trahan said. "Many moons ago, for Mother's Day, I had to give her something, and I decided to go vegan for the month."

What started as a one-month gift became his new business direction, helping

others learn the benefits and possibilities of a plant-based diet. Trahan's professional background in technology and experience in culinary school helped him understand how the food industry could improve, eventually inspiring Twelvemonth.

"I've always been passionate about efficiency," Trahan said. "I used to be a tech guy, and I'd help people be more effective in their work ... Over time, you start learning about how the planet works, and [I realized] the food system is inefficient. [For example,] we feed cows soybeans, [and] then eat the cow, [when] we could just eat the soybeans."

The idea of the restaurant is fascinating and revolutionary, but does the reality of the restaurant live up to it? Absolutely yes!

The environment felt both fancy and inviting. From the bustling dining room to the indoor vegetation to the open-to-view kitchen, the transparency of the restaurant added to the welcoming ambiance. In addition, the restaurant was eye-catching, with candles, suede

booths and massive skylights. The staff was very professional and respectful, checking on our satisfaction and giving extra plates to split meals. The Saturday I visited was busy, but was still well-staffed and reservable with a few days' notice.

For appetizers, we shared the Soup of the Season (a sunchoke bisque), and two non-alcoholic drinks: a cucumber soda and a "windfall"—a matcha, ginger, lemon and celery soda mocktail. All the appetizers tasted great and were plentiful to share amongst the three of us. The soup was smooth, creamy and thick in texture, with a slightly sweet artichoke flavor. The cucumber soda was unique and refreshing and really did taste exactly like its name. The windfall had many strong, complex flavors, starting very sweet and ending with a more acidic aftertaste.

For the entree itself, the Twelvemonth Burger was fantastic — my favorite of the items we shared — made even better with the sweet flavor of the red onion jam. If I hadn't known already, I never would've guessed the meat and cheese were vegan. It was a well-made, sweet burger that just happened to be vegan, and the same goes for the gyro (of vegan lamb) and the spaghetti. The gyro had a rich flavor, using the acidic vegetables to complement the more fatty taste of lamb. The spaghetti was very complex, with a creamy but spicy taste. If you like a little spice, I would highly recommend the spaghetti.



EESHA GUPTA

My brother and I shared soft-serve ice cream, which I am mentioning because we didn't even remember until halfway through that it was also vegan! I was blown away by how tasty, fancy and well-made the meals were.

The price range is on the medium to high end, with appetizers ranging from \$10-20 and entrees from around \$20-25. I think the quality of the food, environment and service are worth the cost. One entree or appetizer could, depending on the customer, be shared among more than one person.

My recommendation would be two items for three people, but my family and I don't have particularly large appetites.

From its environment to food, if you are looking for high-quality, healthier and environmentally-friendly food, I would highly recommend Twelvemonth: the future of vegan dining that deserves five out of five stars.



OLIVER LEVITT

OUR OUTLOOK
★★★★★

“Madame Web” fails to trap viewers

Matthew Grabow
FEATURES WRITER

Released on Feb. 14, the movie “Madame Web” took the internet by storm for the complete flop of its debut, performing worse than the infamous “Morbius,” and bringing in only \$6.1 million on release day.

With a measly Rotten Tomatoes score of 13%, the burning question on everyone’s mind is: does “Madame Web” deserve all of the criticism and hate it has solicited, or are people setting unrealistic standards for a movie with a budget of only \$80 million? After all, superhero movies usually have a budget of around \$250 million to \$495 million.

“Madame Web” was produced by Sony Pictures Studios based on the comic “The Amazing Spider-Man #210.” Set in New York City, protagonist Cassandra Webb (Dakota Johnson) is tasked to use her newfound psychic powers to save three young girls from a terrible end at the hands of a mysterious person in a spider suit.

In the Spider-Man comics, Webb was born blind and diagnosed with myasthenia gravis, a chronic autoimmune disorder causing muscle weakness and double vision. However, these inhibitions are a double-edged sword, as they grant her powerful psychic abilities. In the movie, Webb starts off able-bodied and ends up going blind following head trauma, which comes off as a rather shallow interpretation of her background. Webb from the comics was a demonstration that people with disabilities can still achieve great heights, however, in the movie,

Webb is stripped of her nonconformist superhero status and remodeled into a conventional superhero.

Similar to the development of Webb’s backstory, the cinematography of “Madame Web” is rushed and sloppy: whenever the movie hits an action scene, the shots get shorter and harder to follow, even occasionally cutting off characters’ lines. The constant changes in the scenes are seemingly an attempt to grab viewers’ attention; however, they only leave the audience in confusion as they struggle to grasp what is happening through the chaos of flashed scenes.

Even the story follows a similar trend, with several plot holes and unexplainable occurrences. For example, near the end of the film, Webb receives an explanation for her visions, which are actually psychic powers; Webb leaves with the advice that if she is able to master her psychic powers she will be a powerful force to be reckoned with. When Webb returns to New York to confront the antagonist, she has somehow managed to master all aspects of her psychic abilities in only one day. Many movies have whole sections dedicated to illustrating the slow training and refinement of a character’s power, yet Webb somehow skips this entire arch, leaving out a crucial part for the audience to resonate with Webb’s struggles.

The major plot holes throughout “Madame Web” include the antagonist Ezekiel Sims (Tahar Rahim) as well. Despite Sims’ being the antagonist, he is never fully showcased and the audience is left with a lot of ambiguity about his background.

Sims’ villainous motivation is to protect what he has gained from the main characters, however, throughout the film we are barely introduced to any of his possessions besides his apartment and his spider, leaving the viewer wondering what he is protecting so vigorously. Furthermore, Sims’ script was executed extremely poorly, typically consisting of one to two short and vague sentences. He speaks in a deep raspy voice in an attempt to paint him as an ominous and dangerous character, which ended up sounding like a Saturday Night Live character used to make fun of the DC superhero Batman.

Similarly, the three other characters, Anya Corazon (Isabela Merced), Mattie Franklin (Celeste O’Connor) and Julia Cornwall (Sydney Sweeney) follow the overarching trend of poor character writing. Despite going through extremely traumatic near-death experiences, the characters are first introduced as the classic impulsive teenagers who can’t abide by rules or take a situation seriously. As each character progresses through the film, experiencing events most people will never go through, the only valuable lessons the three take away are the importance of friendship and the newfound understanding to not make rash decisions. Each character had a unique backstory that was just begging to be explored or expanded upon in a character development arch, however “Madame Web” depicts only the infamous power of friendship, something already explored in a much more entertaining way in kids’ cartoons like “My Little Pony.”



SONY PICTURES STUDIOS

While “Madame Web” didn’t have a big budget to ensure its success, the main reason it flopped in box offices was due to an overall poor execution. The movie was sloppy, rushed and consequently full of plot holes. The story of the superhero “Madame Web” had lots of great potential to be expanded upon in the theaters. Unfortunately, the screenwriters were unable to properly portray this, which

inevitably was a main contributor to the film’s downfall. Accompanied by poor directing, there aren’t many redeeming qualities of “Madame Web”, earning the film an overall 1.5 stars out of five.

OUR OUTLOOK



Avatar live action loses original’s core elements

Hannah Li
FEATURES WRITER

Since its 2005 release on Nickelodeon, “Avatar: The Last Airbender” has cap-

tured hearts worldwide, and on Feb. 22, fans were once again able to witness their favorite animated childhood show, this time in the form of a live-action

television series on Netflix. Consisting of eight episodes, the live-action had big shoes to fill, and left viewers with much to be desired.

The series is set in a world where “benders” can manipulate the elements of water, air, fire and earth, and Aang (Gordon Cormier), a loveable and perpetually lost 12-year-old airbender, embarks on a quest to rescue the world. Accompanied by his trusty sidekicks, waterbender Katara (Kiawentiio Tarbell) and her brother Sokka (Ian Ousley), Aang must master all the elements and fulfill his destiny of becoming the Avatar—the only being capable of defeating the oppressive Fire Nation and ending a 100-year war. Along the way they meet a diverse cast of characters, all while being closely hunted by Zuko (Dallas Liu), a brooding Fire Nation prince with a nasty scar and even nastier daddy issues. It’s a tale of friendship, epic battles and self-discovery, and explores surprisingly complex moral dilemmas and characters while maintaining its wittiness and cartoonish charm fit for any age.

While a previous attempt had been made to turn the animated series into a live-action film, the movie’s egregious whitewashing and complete butchering of the source material earned it a dismal 5% on Rotten Tomatoes, along with outraged viewers apprehensive about another adaptation of the beloved cartoon. Although the new adaptation is undeniably better than the movie (not that it had much of a standard to surpass in the first place), it’s evident why the original creators of the cartoon, Michael Dante DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko, left the adaptation in 2020, and most of the ATLA fanbase is right behind them.

Fortunately, some lessons were learned from the atrocious 2010 live-action. Executive producer and showrunner Albert Kim is clearly aiming for a more faithful representation of the original series, and this motivation shines through in his casting choices. Asian and Indigenous actors take the spotlight and bring authenticity to the ethnic identities of the original characters (excluding Ousley, who lied about his Cherokee heritage).

“Aang is perfect,” said senior Z Carracedo. “Cormier is so perfect for the role, and it furthers my Filipino pride that he’s also Filipino. I’m so proud of him and what he can do.”

Kim has also gone all out in reproducing the iconic scenery and worldbuilding from the original series, made possible by the new version’s jaw-dropping \$120 million budget.

“I really liked the fight scenes,” said sophomore Benjamin Lee. “I feel like they made it as lifelike as possible without making it too weird.”

Even so, bringing animated elements to life has proven a challenge perhaps too large to conquer. The original show’s mesmerizing bending scenes, animated with gorgeous blue water and literal white air, can’t translate directly to real life, and the special effects still fall short of audience expectations, disrupting the seamless immersion the creators worked so hard for.

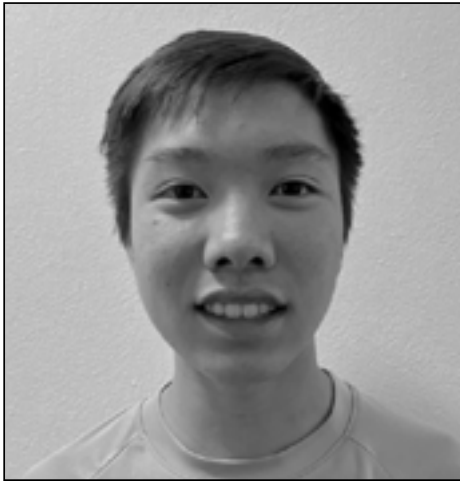
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OUR OUTLOOK



NETFLIX

A tale of two subjects: *humanities* or STEM?



Garret Chiu
FEATURES WRITER

Occasionally, when reading an addictive book, I'll lose awareness of my surroundings and become absorbed in the world of the characters — as if I am right there with them. It's remarkable that these vivid worlds and lifelike characters, who feel almost like close friends, are written to life by the imaginations of people who have had completely different lives from mine. The creativity of these authors is just one important skill taught in humanities classes, classes where students dive deeper into the expression of human nature.

At Aragon, every student is required to take English for four years and social sciences for 3.5, with other elective and arts classes also falling under the branch of humanities. Many students may want to skip these necessary classes because they want to use that time to pursue their hobbies or specialize their class selection to one major. However, humanities classes go beyond teaching students knowledge of history, language and writing, but prepare them with skills that will be necessary no matter what career they pursue in the future.

"[Science, Technology, Engineering and Math] provide the skills that are needed for specific high-level tasks, and that's important because specialization is good," said junior Stefan Baldini. "But humanities is more of a broad, all-encompassing skill set that is mainly just focused on humans, like ... [human] interaction [and] human language."

The four years of English in high school along with required English classes in college build reading and writing skills that can last a lifetime. No matter what profession one might have in the future, reading, writing and having clear communication skills will be necessary. English classes not only teach the language, but prepare students for public speaking and increase comprehension on day-to-day topics. History also prepares students for the world they will go into in the future by teaching them how to analyze current and past events. This critical analysis of human actions is not, and cannot be taught through numbers and calculations. Human nature is unpredictable, which is what makes the humanities so interesting.

"Outside of the box [thinking] and human creativity [are] what makes everyone different," Baldini said. "How you interpret your creative output is amazing, and it's special for everyone."

While STEM studies the world around us, the humanities look inside each person and bring out what they have to offer. Whether it be creativity through writing and art, ideas through philosophy, or analysis of past events through history, human actions and personalities are one of the most intricate and complex topics to understand.

While creativity is needed in the STEM field, it pales in comparison to the creativity found in individuals with talents in the humanities. Writers are able to come up with whole worlds, characters and creatures beyond the imaginations of many people. Artists are able to paint extraordinary images with only their hands and their minds. Philosophers create ideas that revolutionize the way people act and come up with new forms of government. Even in STEM fields, having this creativity, a skill that stems from humanities, is what allows people to innovate ideas the world can benefit from. This creativity is fostered through exploring the concepts of other great

When I was four years old, I remember getting in my dad's car after daycare and asking him a question almost every day. I typically asked silly questions, like why I couldn't have a pet hamster, or why I wasn't able to fly. But one day, I asked my dad how his day at work was. Working at Genentech, he explained something complex about biotechnology. I didn't understand anything he said, but I was



Jonathan Wong
FEATURES WRITER

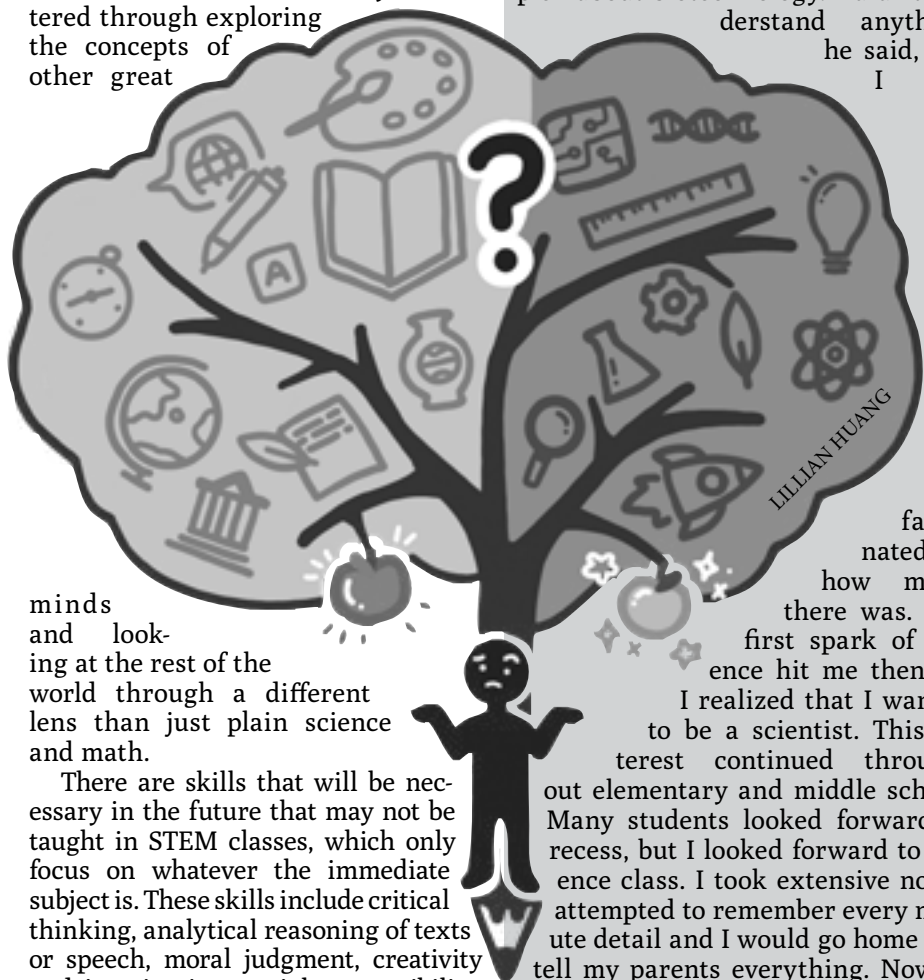
fascinated by how much there was. The first spark of science hit me then, as I realized that I wanted to be a scientist. This interest continued throughout elementary and middle school. Many students looked forward to recess, but I looked forward to science class. I took extensive notes, attempted to remember every minute detail and I would go home and tell my parents everything. Now in high school, taking a myriad of STEM classes has solidified my desire to pursue a STEM field in the future.

When entering high school and learning about the many credits needed to graduate, it becomes obvious that the credit system favors humanities more than STEM. Social science and English classes are required for all four years of high school, while there are only two and three mandatory years of science and math, respectively. The high humanities class requirements cause many students to skip out on STEM elective courses where they may be able to find an interest. Classes such as engineering, statis-

tics, physics and many others are not mandatory to graduate. This causes students who may be unsure about their future interests to only be able to test out either a humanities or STEM elective rather than both, especially for less competitive students looking to take fewer classes. STEM classes teach vital skills such as problem-solving and thinking outside the box, which not only help in a STEM environment, but also in daily life. One example of this was during Advanced Placement Chemistry, in which I had to figure out a lab procedure and then execute the lab afterward. This taught me not just chemistry techniques, but also problem-solving skills as I learned how to work out the procedure in order to produce a proper lab. Although not all students will want to pursue STEM, learning these skills can be beneficial in future experiences, whether that be in STEM or not. Having fewer mandatory classes of STEM takes away from learning these skills that can be applicable at any time.

A degree in STEM can be beneficial to multiple different jobs. According to the College Board, people with a degree in chemistry are not only able to apply for jobs as chemists but also environmental scientists, forensic scientists and even data scientists. The vast range of jobs that are available after graduating is what makes a STEM degree so valuable. Once STEM graduates enter the workforce, many people stereotypically see STEM as crunching numbers on a computer or continuous lab work, but there are so many more STEM jobs due to new discoveries continuously being made in the world of science. New innovations require new jobs, jobs that are constantly different from one another, creating a diverse workforce in STEM. Especially with the world evolving with advancements such as artificial intelligence, new jobs that are dedicated to studying artificial intelligence will be created, widening and diversifying the jobs that STEM can hold.

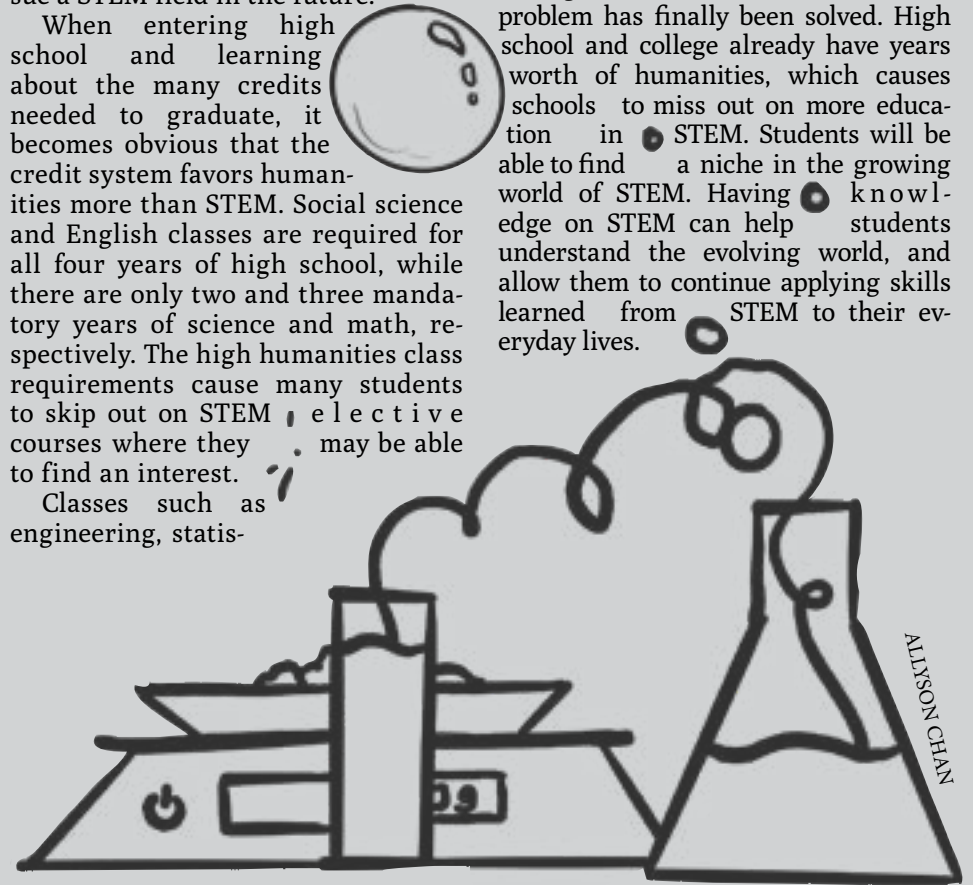
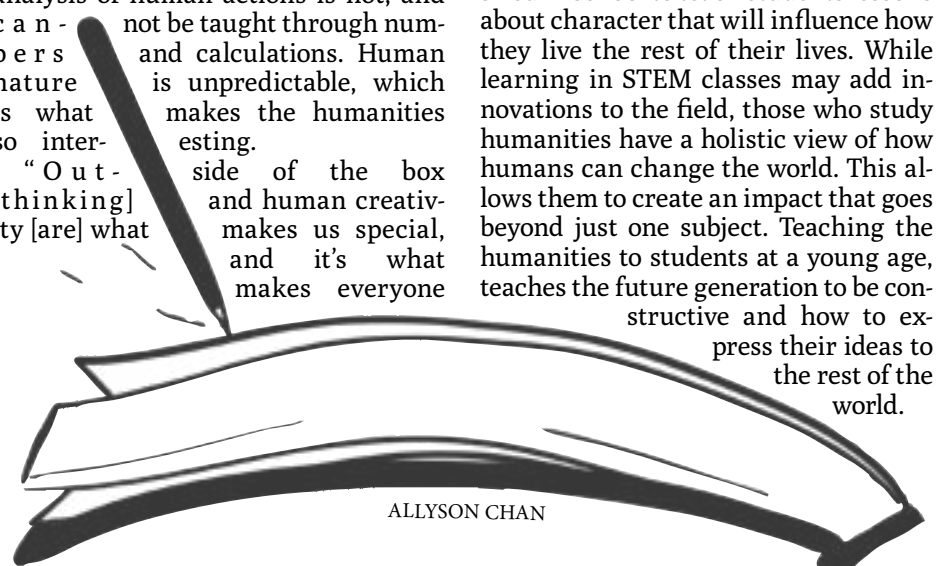
In all, STEM should be prioritized when it comes to school, as it will set one up with a strong foundation for the future. There are many benefits to taking STEM courses such as learning problem-solving skills that are applicable in and out of STEM, being able to acquire a job that is stable, yet well-paying and feeling a sense of satisfaction when the problem has finally been solved. High school and college already have years worth of humanities, which causes schools to miss out on more education in STEM. Students will be able to find a niche in the growing world of STEM. Having knowledge on STEM can help students understand the evolving world, and allow them to continue applying skills learned from STEM to their everyday lives.



minds and looking at the rest of the world through a different lens than just plain science and math.

There are skills that will be necessary in the future that may not be taught in STEM classes, which only focus on whatever the immediate subject is. These skills include critical thinking, analytical reasoning of texts or speech, moral judgment, creativity and imagination, social responsibility, societal structures and an appreciation for the arts. When two people have the same knowledge on a particular topic, being proficient at these skills marks the difference between a productive and liked employee against one that is only able to do independent busy work. Their abilities to understand and work with people allow them to solve issues quickly and communicate well with other employees.

Humanities classes must be emphasized in school to teach students lessons about character that will influence how they live the rest of their lives. While learning in STEM classes may add innovations to the field, those who study humanities have a holistic view of how humans can change the world. This allows them to create an impact that goes beyond just one subject. Teaching the humanities to students at a young age, teaches the future generation to be constructive and how to express their ideas to the rest of the world.



SPRING SPORT PREVIEW

BOYS TENNIS

Quinn Shirley
SPORTS WRITER

After an extremely strong showing last year and a 15-year legacy of Central Coast Section playoff qualifications to uphold, the boys tennis team hopes to build on their success going 5-1 overall this season and 4-0 in Peninsula Athletic League.

The starting lineup has won 37 of their 42 matches this season, sweeping 7-0 in every single league game without dropping a set. This streak includes wins against top teams like Carlmont and Burlingame.

Losing only a few seniors from last year, junior Thomas Nie feels optimistic about the upcoming season as new talent joins the team.

"I think we have really good potential, especially because [nobody left] our starting lineup," Nie said. "We can continue to improve and we don't have to replace [players] as much. We also gained a new number one."

With the players in singles being ranked from one to four, gaining a new top

player in junior Akbar Beg to compete at the highest level is a valuable asset. In addition to individual talent, Nie feels the high number of returning players is beneficial to the team dynamic.

"I think we're gonna do better this year, our players are growing older and they're getting more experienced at the game," Nie said. "Our bond is also getting closer because no one really left, so we've all known each other for at least a year."

Despite being a highly individual sport, freshman MJ Ke really values this tight dynamic and the support he feels from his teammates.

"Everyone's really supportive and helps each other out when we make mistakes," Ke said. "We help each other improve because ... we want to all do better."

In a typical practice, the team starts off with some dynamic stretching and other warm-ups, before transitioning to match play. The team focuses on one main goal during practice.

"I want to try and get into the individual CCS, and try to have a perfect record," said sophomore Veraaz Khan. "As a team, we also want to get into CCS as we did last year, and try to advance into the quarterfinals."

The team will play their next match at home against Hillsdale High School on March 21 at 4 p.m.

BASEBALL

Phoebe Harger
SPORTS WRITER

The baseball field has been under construction since the beginning of the school year, after school administrators decided to change the traditional dirt infield and grass outfield to artificial turf. Although the field was scheduled to be completed before the start of the baseball season, construction is still underway, meaning that the baseball team has no choice but to practice, and play their home games at Mills and San Mateo High Schools.

"It's definitely frustrating because they told us it'd be done before the season started," said senior Nolan Rivera. "And then as time progressed they kept moving it back and moving it back. So as of right now, it's supposed to be done at the beginning of May."

Despite not having a home field, the team continues to work hard in hopes of having a more successful season than the last.

After ending last year's season with a league record of 4-10, the team was moved from the Bay

division to the Ocean division. With the incentive to move back up to the Bay, the team is more motivated than ever to win.

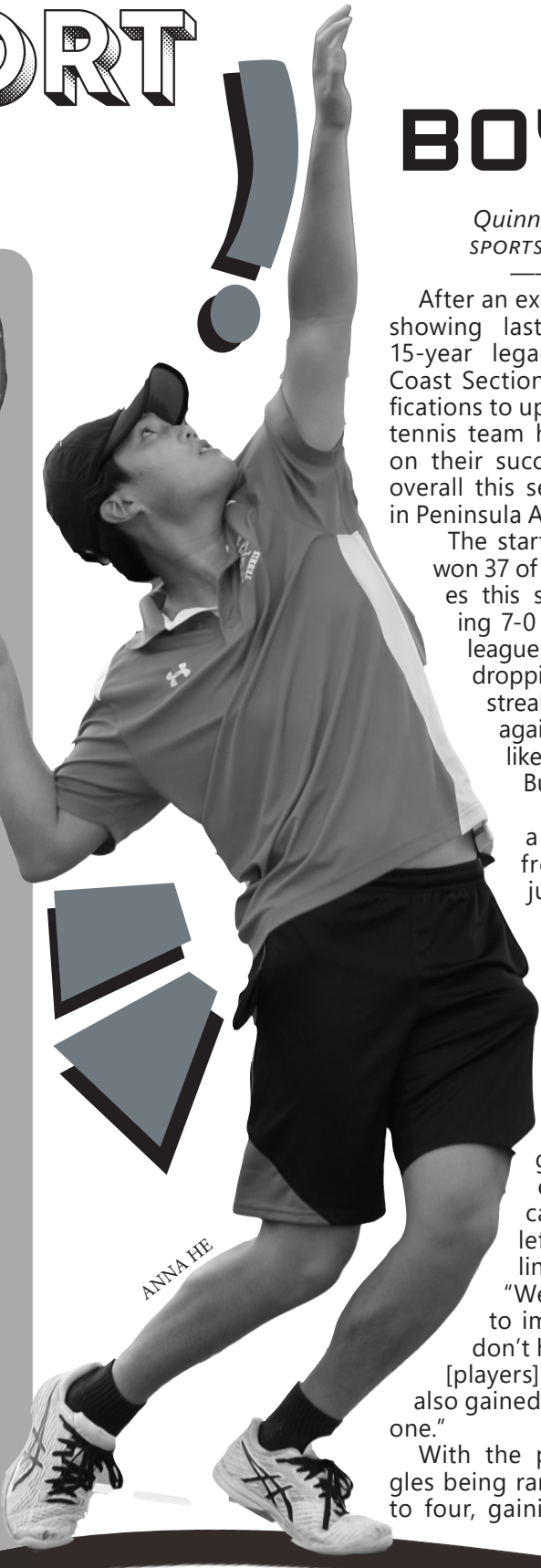
"Coming off of an unsuccessful season last year, we're really focused on getting back into the swing of things," Rivera said. "Getting wins under our belt, and getting everybody energized for the games."

Luckily, head coach Don Hahn says that he is confident in his team's ability to win their league, as he has already noticed an improvement in the team's dynamic.

"I think the seniors this year are much more in the leadership role than last year seniors," Hahn said. "We have a lot of veterans on the team and even a couple of juniors [who] are starting to take the role of a leader. So I'm very confident in the direction that we're headed".

As the season gets underway, the team is hopeful that they will end their season at the top of the Bay division, and be able to play their last few home games at Aragon on their newly renovated field.

Their next game is at Branham high school March 15 at 4 p.m.



ANNA HE

SOFTBALL

The JV team is not the only change to Aragon's softball program, as the varsity squad begins their season without their star pitcher Brooke Tran, who currently plays at the University of New Mexico after graduating last spring.

"I think Brooke really brought the team together last year," said sophomore Madison Ketcham. "The season definitely feels kind of weird not having her on the team because she was a good team leader."

Despite losing their pitcher, the varsity team hopes that as the program grows bigger, they will grow stronger as well. After finishing fifth out of eight last season with a 5-9 record in the Bay division, the team aims for more success in 2024.

However, staying at the top of their league will not be easy, as the team is working to overcome challenges.

"Our focus right now is on remaining focused throughout all seven innings," said senior Aré Makropoulos. "We always start off so strong and so focused, and then we just lose that completely through the end of the game".

Luckily, the team knows what they need to work on going into the start of the regular season.

"We need to stay more focused in practice, but also during our games. We just need to have the right mindset," Makropoulos said.

Makropoulos, who returned to softball this season after not playing for several years, is now one of the team's two pitchers, and has been more than willing to step into the role despite having big shoes to fill.

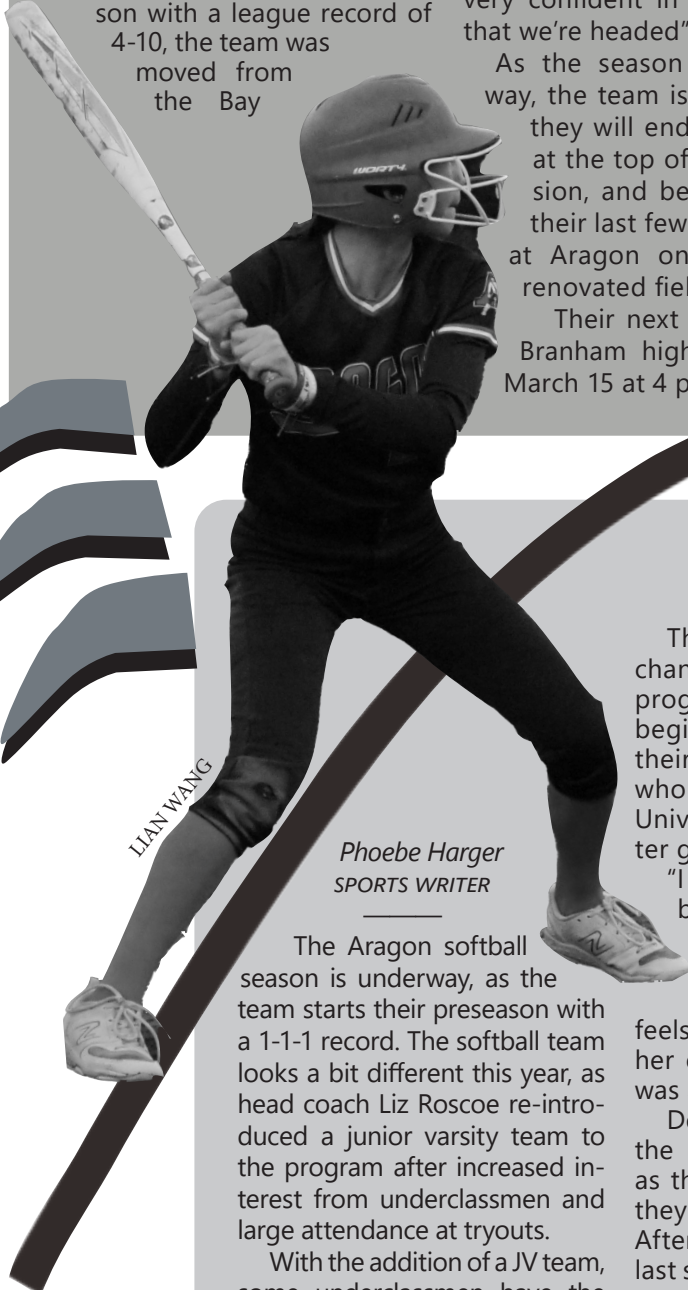
Despite working hard at practice, the team still manages to have fun during training and at games.

"My favorite part about the team is definitely the community that we've created," Ketcham said. "Practices are always a lot of fun and there's always so much energy. Before games we always have music playing and everyone gets super hyped up."

The girls also give credit to their coaches for the supportive environment, as they push their athletes to be the best players they can be.

"The coaches really love the game and I think they provide a really nice, warm, supportive atmosphere for the girls to really thrive," Makropoulos said. "I think they create a safe space for everyone to do their best and really get after it because that's what we're here to do."

With their season just beginning, the Dons have over twenty games left to play, and hope to end with a winning record and at the top of the Bay division.



LIAN WANG

Phoebe Harger
SPORTS WRITER

The Aragon softball season is underway, as the team starts their preseason with a 1-1-1 record. The softball team looks a bit different this year, as head coach Liz Roscoe re-introduced a junior varsity team to the program after increased interest from underclassmen and large attendance at tryouts.

With the addition of a JV team, some underclassmen have the opportunity to play with both teams, allowing players more playing time, as well as developing young athletes to replace the current upperclassmen.



BOYS GOLF

Antonio Mangano
SPORTS WRITER

After a strong season last year, Aragon's boys varsity golf team prepares for a championship contention in the 2024 season.

Last year, the team finished second in the Peninsula Athletic League with a record of 11-2-1, and senior Sam Higaki took home PAL's individual championship.

Now that Higaki has graduated, head coach Guy Oling looks for a potential replacement to fill his spot;

"We have a lot of experienced golfers," Oling said. "We have three to five guys who lead the team and I'm looking at a couple of new golfers that can potentially jump into the starting lineup."

Oling mentioned a couple players who will take the step up to lead the team. One of those is senior Leo Bartlett. Bartlett had a strong season last year and has proven himself to be a player that can lead the team.

"This year will be fun. We have a lot of good players, a lot of seniors," Bartlett said. "[Sam Higaki] was a core member of our team from last year and playing without him will definitely be difficult."

To prepare for the upcoming season, Oling highlights the three different practice styles that will be put into full effect for the 2024 season.

"We are [doing] three sections of practice," Oling said. "Which include practice on the golf course, working on strategy and technique, and what we call course management."

As it was one of their weaknesses from last season, the team looks to improve their familiarity with each of the golf courses that they visit over the course of the season.

"Golf courses are varied in length and varied in terrain and difficulty so you really have to play the different courses," Oling said.

As much of a struggle as it is to learn a variety of golf courses, the players themselves have to deal with balancing school and golf. PAL plays at a variety of different courses, presenting other challenges. However, not all of the courses are local, so transportation for players can be a struggle at times.

"We sometimes play in Half Moon Bay, which we have to leave around lunch time just to make it there in time," said Bartlett, "but I'm normally leaving my sixth period about twenty to thirty minutes in."

With the finals cuts being made, Aragon's boys golf team looks forward to starting off their 2024 season strong.

Their next match is at Menlo-Atherton High School on March 14 at 4 p.m.

BOYS VOLLEYBALL

Charlie Henderson
SPORTS WRITER



The Dons ended with a 21-9 record but failed to make the CCS playoffs. They managed to achieve a great record in the thirty games they played, but the failure to make the playoffs left a blemish on the season and provided motivation for this year's squad.

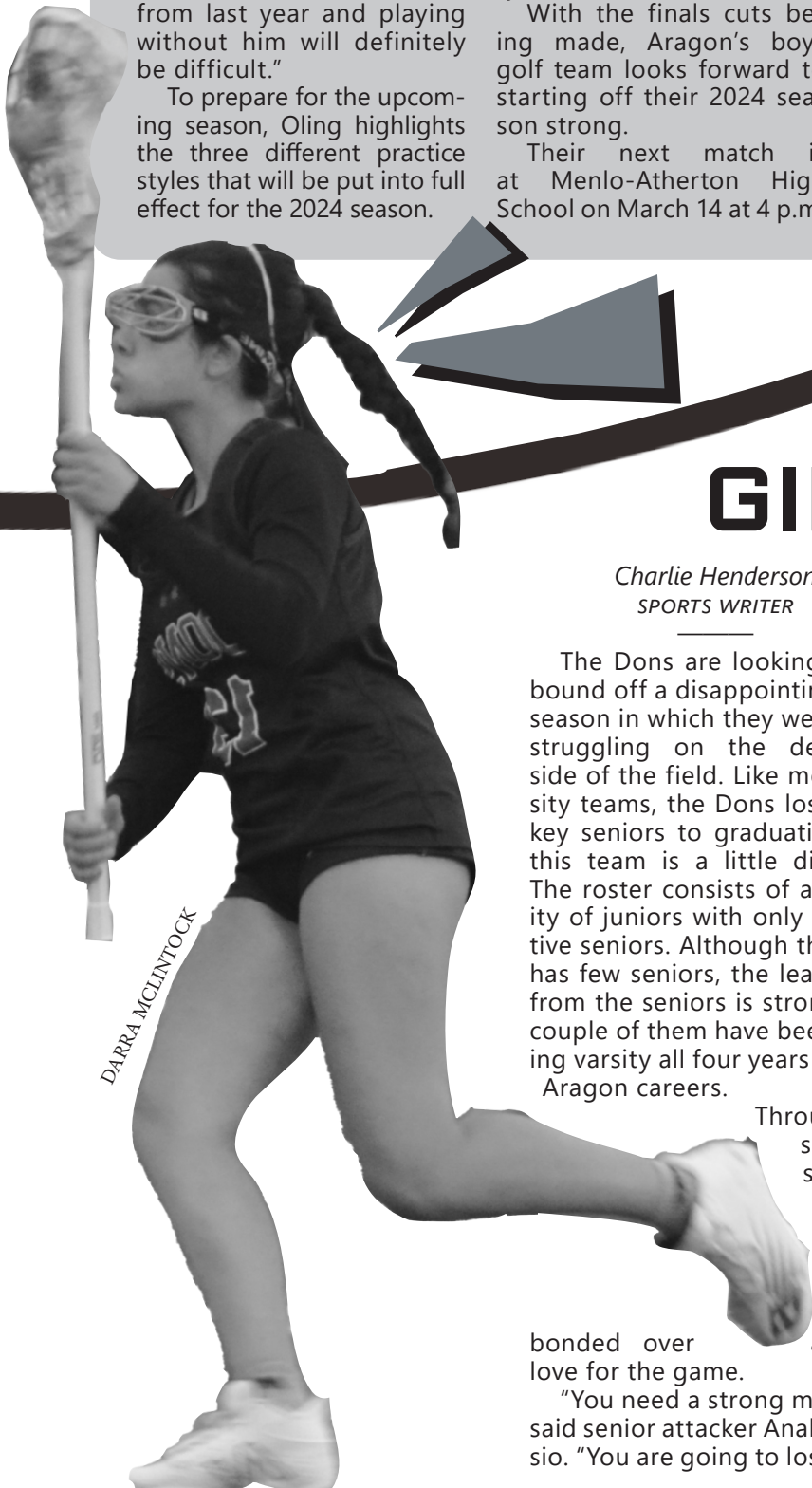
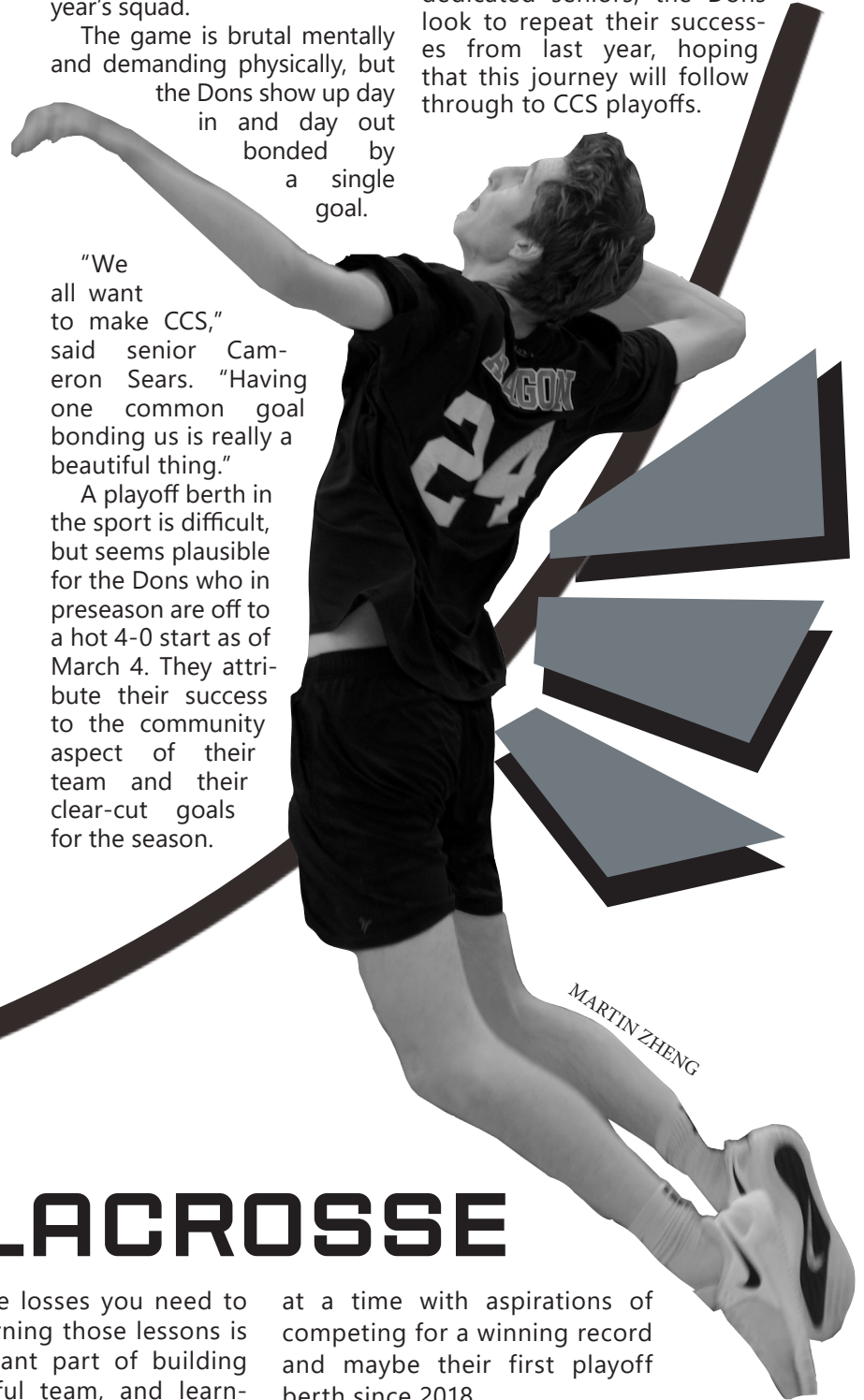
The game is brutal mentally and demanding physically, but the Dons show up day in and day out bonded by a single goal.

"We all want to make CCS," said senior Cameron Sears. "Having one common goal bonding us is really a beautiful thing."

A playoff berth in the sport is difficult, but seems plausible for the Dons who in preseason are off to a hot 4-0 start as of March 4. They attribute their success to the community aspect of their team and their clear-cut goals for the season.

"Our team is really close knit on and off the court," Sears said. "That sense of community has helped us bond off the court and thrive together on the court."

Whether a playoff appearance is in the cards for the Dons or not, the team looks primed for a successful season. Led by a core group of dedicated seniors, the Dons look to repeat their successes from last year, hoping that this journey will follow through to CCS playoffs.



GIRLS LACROSSE

Charlie Henderson
SPORTS WRITER

The Dons are looking to rebound off a disappointing 2023 season in which they went 1-18, struggling on the defensive side of the field. Like most varsity teams, the Dons lost a few key seniors to graduation, but this team is a little different. The roster consists of a majority of juniors with only five active seniors. Although the team has few seniors, the leadership from the seniors is strong, as a couple of them have been playing varsity all four years of their Aragon careers.

Through a shared struggle last season, the Dons are bonded over love for the game.

"You need a strong mindset," said senior attacker Analyssa Ossio. "You are going to lose. [But]

from those losses you need to learn. Learning those lessons is an important part of building a successful team, and learning together helped us build a bond on and off the field."

Through the Dons' defensive struggles last year they learned the necessity of communication on the field.

"In practices we try to talk a lot so we remember to talk in games," said junior midfielder Layla Adle.

The Dons believe that their close bond off the field will help them improve their communication on the field this year. The team is a close knit community, and most members of the team are friends away from the game.

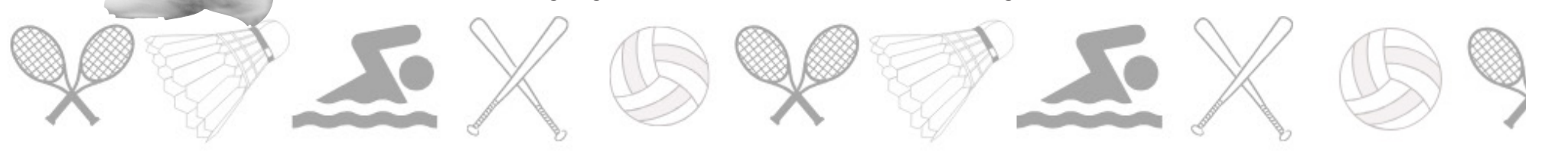
"We've built a very strong bond off of the field which translates to chemistry in the field," said Ossio.

The Dons expect to build off of their slow season last year, and with a few senior leaders and a strong junior class, they look to take this season one game

at a time with aspirations of competing for a winning record and maybe their first playoff berth since 2018.

Their next game is at Notre Dame High School on March 15 at 4:30 p.m.

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Students indulge in fantasy sports and betting

Caroline Harger
SPORTS WRITER

In 2022, voters across California voted against two bills that would have legalized all forms of sports betting in the state. That being said, betting culture and fantasy sports are still legal and certainly prevalent. It is not uncommon in the months between September and January to see a large part of the student population at Aragon participating in fantasy football leagues. Students often create these leagues with several of their friends, and play throughout the National Football League season.

"You pick players that you think are going to be good," said senior Max Thronson. "Then, based on how they've performed, that's how your team does."

Football is not the only sport that prompts fantasy leagues. Just about any televised sport, such as basketball and Formula One, can be subject to fantasy betting, but the process is the same. With all these fantasy leagues,

more often than not, comes a monetary prize for the league's winner, thus making it a form of sports betting. At the beginning of the season, those participating put in a certain amount of money into the pot. This money is then won by the participant that has the most wins at the end of the season. However, most would argue that the monetary prize is not what draws them to playing, but rather just an added bonus.

"Obviously there might be prizes like money on the line," said senior Paul Feghali. "But the satisfaction you get from beating your friends is so much more important."

Students at Aragon have been participating in fantasy sports for a multitude of reasons, one of them being that it can bring friend groups together by creating a sort of friendly competition. Groups will meet every year for a "draft," in which they will select their players, an event that ends up being something that participants look

forward to every season. Every week, there is the possibility of a new winner, which keeps things interesting amongst friends.

"Fantasy has made us really competitive, but it's all friendly," said senior Eden King. "It's just fun to tease your friends when you win. All of the jokes and trash talk make it fun and push us to keep playing."

Furthermore, for many fantasy players, watching the sport on TV is already part of their daily routine.

"I want to watch football anyway, so I might as well have some stake in it, [an] incentive to watch games you wouldn't otherwise watch," Thronson said. "And since I play football, I'm going [to] play football in college [and] I like watching [football]. It's almost like watching film."

Fantasy sports give some viewers a chance to take their love for sports even further, as they have the opportunity to look into the analytical side of sports. "You have

to check [statistics], analyze their play from game to game, and then basically make an educated guess about how they are going to do the following week," said senior Lequan Wang. "You definitely have to pay pretty close attention to the games every week."

However, despite the overall positive outlook amongst Aragon students on fantasy sports, betting culture does have a certain downside: addiction.

"There is a rush of adrenaline that comes from a win," Wang said. "But what you don't realize is that you really only hit one out of ten times ... But people love winning, so they ignore the nine losses."

The extent of sports betting and fantasy sports on Aragon's campus is finite. In most cases, students participate in fantasy within a regulated environment, so the risk of addiction is minimal. When played safely, fantasy sports can bring people together and create bonds over a shared passion for sports.



What motivates athletes?

Student-athletes share how they began playing their sport and what keeps them interested.

Fotumai'afe Taufa, football (11)

I started playing because of my friends, and I kind of got addicted to working out because of them. Also, my uncle told me to join because they thought it was going to be a good sport instead of playing basketball. So I just took their word...The reason why I still play



football is because of the physicality, the leadership that we have to put through, and just the bond that I used to have with all the seniors and underclassmen.



VICTORIA SANTANA

Reporting by
Sora Mizutani

Yuna Irokawa, cheer (11)

Once I started doing it, first of all it was fun, and because cheer is a team sport, being a part of the team and continuing for my team motivated me a lot. [Something special about cheer is] the friends that I made in



cheer, and all of my teammates. In cheer you have a special bond with the team, and outside of cheer too, I would say "Hi" to my teammates at school, so there's a bond.



JULIA DEL MUNDO

Anderson Wong, wrestling (12)

My second year I became one of the co-captains, and I felt that I owed it to my team to be a better more successful wrestler than I was at the moment because...I felt like I wanted to show Aragon this is where champions can be made. I wanted to show



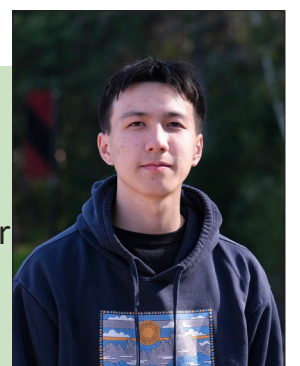
people that we can win. ... I try to be the captain that I never had. I try to be the teammate I never had, I try to be the training partner that I never had, I try to help them as much as I can, that's how I achieve it.



JORELL SAKAMOTO

Marcus Rife, hurdling (11)

I started originally because I heard that it was the hardest track event. And I was up for a challenge, and I was kind of dumb for it, but I had a good time. I like PRs, I'm a little addicted to it, so I [constantly] chase PRs.



ANNA HE