

HOMECOMING

Yang Yang
NEWS EDITOR

On Sept. 6, Aragon held its annual homecoming dance, with the theme "Carnival Lights," from 7-10 p.m.

This year, the venue was changed from Pinstripes to Devil's Canyon eventhouse, which was the venue for last year's winter formal.

"At first, I said that Pinstripes was better because there's more stuff to do, [and] I liked playing bocce ball," said senior John Liu. "But then, as I was here longer, I think that this place is better because it's a lot bigger. There's more space and the mosh pit is also just as good as in Pinstripes."

Students danced and formed conga lines in the middle of the dance floor. Several administrators monitored the dance floor from the D.J. stage to prevent dangerous acts like crowd surfing.

"I like the little dance circle," said junior Scarlett Choy. "[The dance floor] was a little bland at the beginning. It had no

singing [and] it was really basic and sad, so no one was in it, and everyone was in the food room and outside. But then one hour in, everyone was singing. It's because they played 'Carnival,' so it got everyone hyped up. Then a lot of people were really sweaty, and that's how you know it's a good dance circle."

A section outside that was locked up last year opened up this year for students to enjoy. There was a shack where Devil's Canyon Brewery employees served more food and drinks. Several benches and booths were available for students to rest and talk on.

"I like that they opened up that new area with the extra snacks and extra tables ... because last time it felt a little crowded, [and] there wasn't a lot of space to do anything," said senior Jayden Leo. "The [extra] area gives you a good place to relax and talk in between going in and out. It's a nice place to take pictures [because] it has nice lighting. It's [also] nice and cool, which contrasts with the inside [which] is super hot."

Self-serve hotdogs, mini-hotdogs, pretzels, lemonade, cookies and popcorn were provided for students in the cafeteria and outside section. There were also various activities available to play like foosball, pool table, photo machines, scrabble and chess.

"[Something important about homecoming is] inclusivity," Choy said "If it's only directed towards singing and dancing, it's basic. [This dance was] good because it has pho-

to booths, it has food, it has games, it has dancing, and it has little areas [where] you can sit with your friends. That's pretty important."

Even so, there were some parts of this year's homecoming that didn't hit the mark for some students.

"I expected them to play better music, I feel like they always play the same songs at every [homecoming], and it just makes it boring," said sophomore Bella Victor. "I feel like the food is bad. The hot dogs for the hot dog stand were cold, and so is the bread, and it's just not good."

Other students reflected on their experience at the dance.

"I liked the dancing in the middle," said sophomore Basel Younes. "It was fun. The songs were good and everyone had a lot of energy ... I didn't expect much, because it's a brewery, and I thought it'd be really boring and dull, but they made it really fun with all the decorations, so I liked it."

Now, leadership will start preparing for this year's winter formal, currently scheduled for Feb. 7.

By discretion of Leadership adviser Lindsay Bussey, Dance Commission declined to comment about the earlier dance scheduling this year compared to previous years. When asked for an explanation, assistant principal Clarisse Mesa cited the fact that dance scheduling requires the right timing and venue, which varies year to year.

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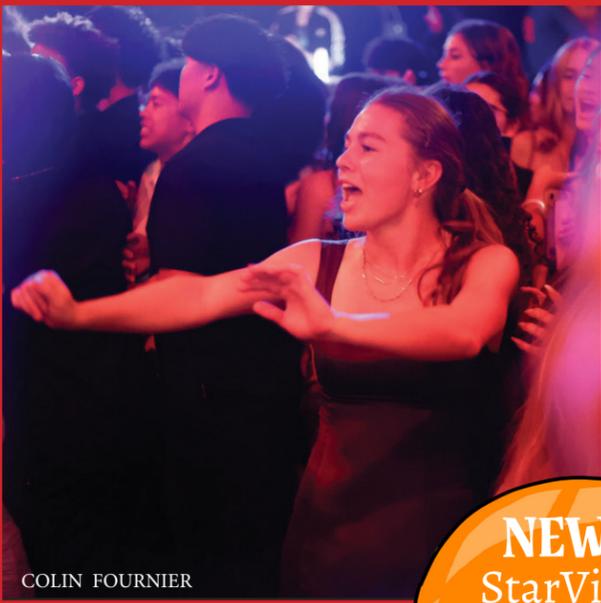
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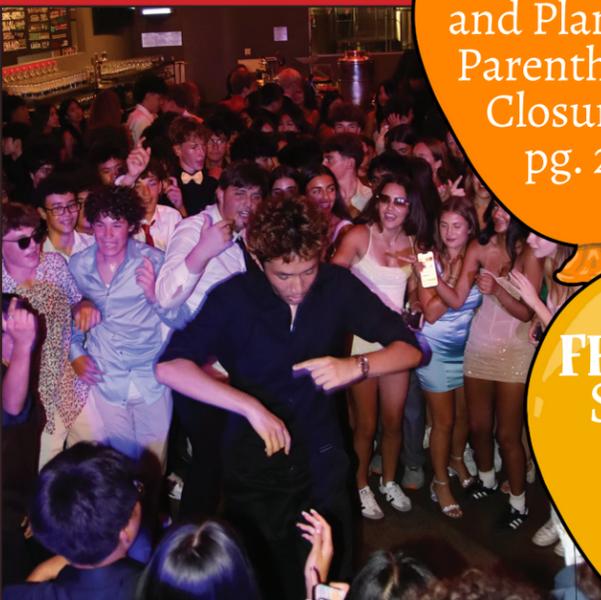
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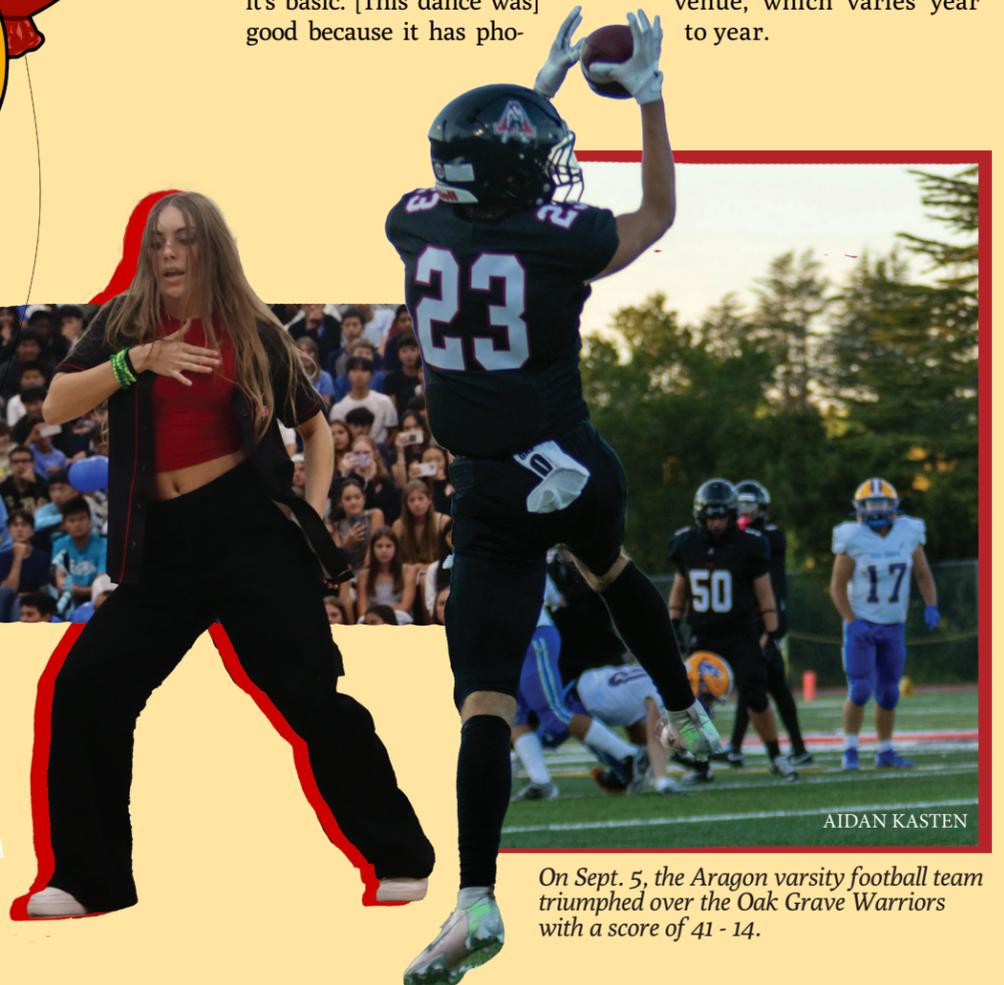
MADLINE ALLEN



COLIN FOURNIER



BACK 2 SCHOOL!



AIDAN KASTEN

On Sept. 5, the Aragon varsity football team triumphed over the Oak Grove Warriors with a score of 41 - 14.



The San Mateo County Pride Center is located on El Camino Real in San Mateo, CA.

Local teen health services closed

Helen McCloskey
NEWS EDITOR

In July, San Mateo's Planned Parenthood location, which provided abortion and other medical services, ceased operations. On Aug. 1, StarVista, a mental health services provider for San Mateo County, permanently closed. Two of StarVista's programs — their hotline, which is part of the national 988 crisis network, and the San Mateo Pride Center — will continue.

PLANNED PARENTHOOD

Planned Parenthood Mar Monte, an affiliate organization that manages Planned Parenthood clinics in California and Nevada, recently closed five clinics in the Bay Area and the Central Coast. This occurred after the One Big Beautiful Bill was legalized on July 4, which prohibits using Medicaid payments to pay for medical services from abortion providers. The majority of Planned Parenthood Mar Monte patients used Medicaid.

"The fact that the bill is directly targeting abortion clinics and removing funds, and in turn making it even harder for women to get abortions, is completely sexist, since people are trying to control women's bodies instead of them being in charge of themselves," said junior Ash Adams.

In addition to abortion services, Planned Parenthood offers assistance with birth control, contraception, Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Sexually Transmitted Infection testing and treatment, gender-affirming care and mental health services. All other Planned Parenthood Mar Monte locations remain open, having cut prenatal and behavioral health services.

In response to the Trump administration's funding restriction on Medicaid medical services in the One Big Beautiful Bill, California has filed a lawsuit against the Trump administration with 22 other states. They argue that the restriction breaches Planned Parenthood's First Amendment rights. Planned Parenthood has also sued the Trump administration separately.

The Redwood City Health Center is now the only remaining Planned Parenthood clinic in San Mateo County.

STARVISTA

After struggling with finances, StarVista shut down its services. According to StarVista, the organization served tens of

thousands of people every year, with programs including housing for youth, counseling, outreach and crisis prevention.

"We had help, and [the closures are] taking it away," said junior Olivia Ren. "It's not a good feeling that your rights are taken away ... it shouldn't be all of a sudden, 'You're taking away our mental health.'"

Similarly to Planned Parenthood, StarVista also had a confidential policy, allowing teenagers to use their services without parental knowledge.

"It is very effective ... because you could reach out to [them] really easily," Ren said. "My friends have used StarVista and they say, you could text them [and] you could call them ... A lot of times, you don't want to talk to people around you because you feel like they might judge you. But if you could contact some [mental health service provider] online, then you feel less judged by other people, and you feel more open about talking. Safety [services are also] really important, because I would have regretted it if I died [because of mental health struggles]."

Some believe that StarVista's closure will impact how much help those struggling with their mental health will receive.

"For a lot of people, the road that they were going [on] to get help is now shut down, and there's no way to go back," said sophomore McKenna Lindberg. "A lot of people are gonna separate themselves more because they no longer have this space where they can talk about what they're feeling emotionally and not having those resources is going to stop a lot of people from reaching out to ask for help ... possibly life-saving help."

While StarVista has closed, other mental health service providers remain open. However, not all of these providers may be free of cost, as StarVista was.

"Many [other mental health providers] are very costly that I [have] encountered, and especially if you were to find a psychiatrist, it's very expensive," Ren said. "A lot of people might not have those resources. And it also takes super long for the [finding-a-therapist] process to work."

Although the San Mateo County Pride Center continues to operate under new ownership, services have been reduced and it has temporarily moved to being remote. The Pride Center also provides mental health services in partnership with Outlet, an Adolescent Counseling Services program.

Editorial: scheduling issues

This editorial represents the opinions of 14 out of 14 Outlook editors

When a new year starts at Aragon, students find themselves comparing schedules with their friends in a frenzied manner. The Outlook's concern is when that schedule fails to match with the classes a student requested the year prior.

It's not entirely fair to demand that all students should get admission to every single class they want to be in. Beyond preferences, counselors also have to account for factors such as the number of periods a class is taught, classes that are only available for one period out of the day and A-G requirements, among others. That being said, the sheer frequency of these scheduling errors — as well as the inability to fix them — causes unnecessary stress on students who choose classes with their future as their focus. With three months, a team of faculty members and the district's open enrollment policy in mind, one would think it possible to accommodate nearly all of the student body.

While availability is a concern for practically every class, the majority of these conflicts are concentrated into the sciences. As students apply for high-demand Advanced Placement science courses — such as AP Chemistry or Physics — concerns regarding overcrowded classrooms often lead to a handful of students being shuffled into another science class "adjacent" to their original pick. Though many students still enjoy the alternative class, spending 144 school hours on a subject that wasn't directly chosen doesn't align well with the concept of students' autonomy in course selection. There are four years of high school, and therefore multiple chances to re-apply to a course one wasn't admitted to the first time, but a missing class often throws a wrench into students' plans. Some even feel dissuaded from taking the course in the future.

"When I was going into sophomore year, I wanted to get Biotech 1 because I was really interested in [the subject] after learning about it

in Biology," said junior Lincoln Elliot. "I actually got Advanced Digital Photography ... [which] wasn't on my preference list ... I thought that taking Biotech junior year would have been a lot on my plate, so I didn't sign up for it again."

A-G requirements aren't exempt from availability-based concessions either. Some freshman students each year find their schedules to be lacking in any language course, placing them an entire year behind their peers and at a disadvantage in their attempts to complete the three years of a foreign language recommended by colleges.

"[Missing a language course freshman year] messed me up," said senior Shea Peni. "I was in Spanish 1 sophomore year and then Spanish 2 junior year, and I [felt] insecure because I was the only junior in Spanish 2. I also didn't do Spanish 3 because I didn't want to be a senior in [that class]."

Students seeking help from the office were often left just as confused as when they first saw their schedule.

"I was frustrated because I just felt like [the counselors] didn't really try that hard," Peni said. "I was just like 'can you help me?' And they're like 'oh, yeah, there's more seats' [without giving me the spot] ... I feel like they just [led me on]."

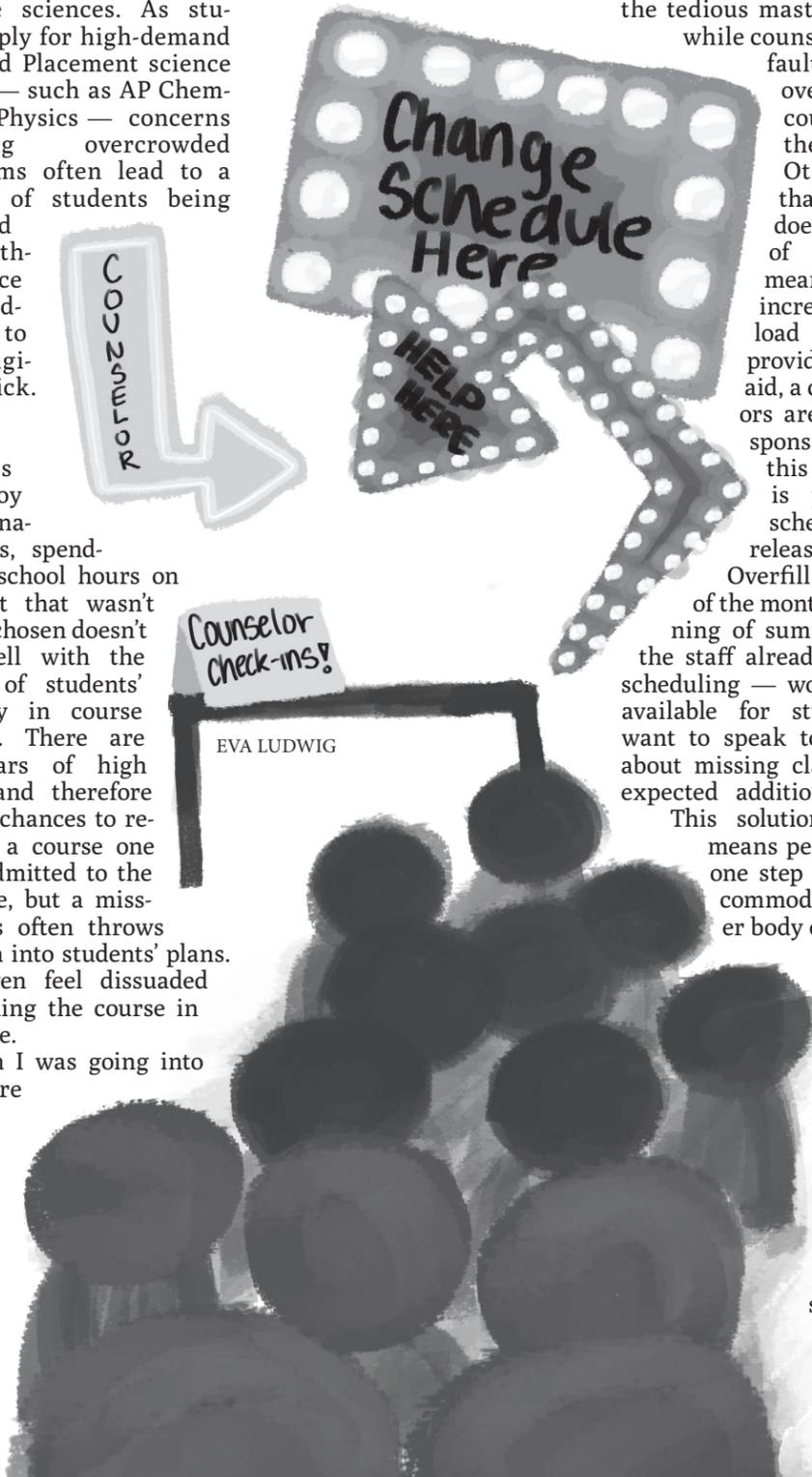
Unfortunately, the solution is not as simple as adding more classes or bringing in new teachers. With limits being placed not only on class size, but also the number of teachers, classrooms and periods a staff member can teach, asking every student to be accommodated is a high bar. So what can be done? For starters, an earlier release of schedules would give students more time to contest what they were assigned and ask questions about points where they feel their opinions were overlooked. According to the counselors, students ask for edits to their preference sheet up until the last day possible. By instead delegating some of that time to fine tuning their "finalized" schedule, students would get a better idea of what the next school year will look like and will gain more clarity on counselor's decisions, compared to the mad rush that is fixing one's schedule at the beginning of the next year. Freshmen can also be accommodated, since incoming 9th graders are required to finalize their course requests by mid-April. Furthermore, the majority of the scheduling process is completely computerized. The principal and assistant principals plan out the tedious master schedule,

while counselors fix the faults or spill overs not accounted for by the program. Other than that, Aeries does the brunt of the work, meaning that the increase in workload is solely in providing students aid, a duty counselors are already responsible for. With this in mind, it is possible for schedules to be released in May.

Overfill into the end of the month and beginning of summer — time the staff already spends on scheduling — would then be available for students who want to speak to counselors about missing classes or unexpected additional courses.

This solution is by no means perfect, but it's one step closer to accommodating a wider body of students.

As students find themselves settling back into school, with concerns about grades and college already causing enough strife, faulty schedules should not be an additional burden.



EVA LUDWIG

Suicide policy: how much is a life worth?



Seona Srivastava
FEATURES WRITER

(650)-579-0350 — the number printed on the back of every San Mateo County student ID — is full of holes, not only because of its 0's and 9's but because of the gaps where support is missing. For years, StarVista's 24/7 crisis hotline has answered over 13,000 calls in 2016 alone and connected teens, parents and neighbors to help them at their breaking point.

This summer, however, StarVista announced it would close its crisis services, citing the same problem that shadows so many community-based programs: no sustainable funding. The loss came at an ironic moment. September is National Suicide Prevention Month, when governments and schools double down on awareness campaigns, slogans and assemblies. But the

dissolving of a long-standing lifeline raised a harder question: what good are resources on paper if the people they're built for don't feel they can use them?

Traditionally, San Mateo County has invested \$15.3 million between 2013-2020 through county-approved Measure K sales tax in suicide prevention over the past decade. Between 2010 and 2015, the county recorded 370 suicides, with the largest age category being among adults aged 45 to 64, followed by young adults aged 20 to 44. These stark numbers underscore why policymakers have directed millions of dollars into programs ranging from awareness campaigns to psychiatric facilities. The county's 2017-2020 Suicide Prevention Roadmap organizes these efforts around three pillars: prevention, early intervention and crisis response.

Prevention, the first pillar, encompasses awareness campaigns, school assemblies, stigma-reduction initiatives and digital resources like suicideispreventable.org. Early intervention includes wellness centers, school counseling staff and all over San Mateo — a youth behavioral health hub where students can connect with both peer navigators and licensed professionals. Crisis response deals with the most urgent stage: specialized hotlines, psy-

chiatric facilities and the newly implemented 988 National Suicide & Crisis Line.

Each of these tiers is designed to reach individuals at different points on the spectrum of risk. Prevention is comparatively inexpensive, building a culture of openness before someone reaches a

breaking point. Early intervention requires steady investment in staff and infrastructure. Crisis response, meanwhile, is the most resource-intensive and highest stakes — requiring round-the-clock clinicians, inpatient beds, transportation and sometimes law enforcement involvement.

Yet even in a county that prides itself on funding crisis services, access remains inconsistent. Crisis facilities, such as a planned youth healing center for adolescents and transition-age youth, are still in development, demanding massive commitments in staffing and infrastructure. Despite these efforts, urgent care remains elusive and, in many cases, ineffective.

\$476 million allocated by San Mateo County to...

- reduce duration of mental illness
- fight stigma & discrimination
- increase people receiving public mental health services

San Mateo County invested **\$15.3 million** between 2013-2020 in suicide prevention



READ FULL ARTICLE ON ARAGONOUTLOOK.ORG

Macho to matcha: performative males

Angela Nguyen
FEATURES EDITOR

He's seen leaving the cafe with his oat milk matcha in one hand and "Becoming" by Michelle Obama in the other, his wired headphones blasting Clairo and his white tote bag decorated with Labubus and filled with tampons. Though these little trinkets may be seen as caricatures, they are actually one of the many props that dozens of guys use to win their local Performative Male contest.

The concept of "performative male" has recently gone viral, gaining as many as 28 million views for videos tagged #performativemale on TikTok. There are even contests around the world, in cities like Seattle, New York City, San Francisco and Jakarta where contestants compete and are judged to see who follows the stereotype the best, with San Francisco's contest having more than 900 RSVPs.

This rise in popularity was largely impacted by overconsumption and trend-hopping among Gen Zs. Adorned with Labubus or the need for matcha 24/7, these "performative males" are a product of the internet.

"[The trend of 'performative male'] didn't start serious, it was definitely a bit more [satirical], and it got mixed into consumerism," said senior Hayden Ha. "A lot of Asian cultures have been drinking matcha for centuries. But now that it's become this big thing, ... a lot of people are treating it as a trend."

As a result, this culture around curating a more likeable image to appeal to women is mocked across the internet.

"[The mockery is because of] the whole idea of guys who wanted to pull [people] and then [those guys] ended up go-

ing way too far," said junior Anjalika Khare. "People are going to make fun of the extremes in any case, that's why satire exists ... I got a video today [about a] performative male competition ... You had a guy holding five Laufey vinyls, a guy reading feminist literature and a guy passing around pads ... If you're doing it in [a] way for no actual benefit, it's kind of annoying. But also, I also get the satire [and] how it's funny. People will laugh at it. I laugh at it."

satirical sense, it's literally just a guy who manipulates you."

Even when dressed up as respect, the performative male behavior stems from the desire to receive validation from women.

"When you see men actually caring about feminist literature, or just feminism in general, even if it's out of a trend or a joke ... it's like, 'oh, that person is not only a feminist, but they support other aspects that come with being a female,'" said junior Aveah Pok. "To me, that just makes someone more attractive."

Previously, alpha males were a common trope



LILLIAN HUANG

In addition to the mockery, women on TikTok have taken to making videos about their experiences of dating a "performative man." They're described to use women's interests as a tool of attraction, granting them the title "male manipulator."

"There's a fundamental wrong in trying to get into somebody's interests in such a superficial way; just to try to pursue them, even if they don't really like you that way," Khare said. "If you put it in a literal [and] non

online, but following changes in ideas about masculinity, the performative male stereotype is now the primary target of satire.

"[There's] been a trend lately that women prefer softer and more emotionally open men," said junior Perlina Tse. "Sometimes people get scared of [gym bros, because] they're trying to act tough, but now, I hear a lot of women talking about liking a man that understands them more and [having] someone more sentimental."

Although the different "performative males" across time have always striven to receive affection from women, the expectation and standard is often misunderstood.

"I love matcha ... [and] I love talking to people about it," Tse said. "I was asking [this guy], 'do you like matcha?' and he's like, 'yes.' ... [The] only thing we were talking about is what I like, and he just copied [me], which is not what I want ... We want someone that's ... different, but at the same time, people think that being performative is different."

While the satirical roots of being "performative" are an attempt to call out those who only enjoy things like Labubus and artists like Clairo because they're popular, many meaningful causes such as men supporting feminism have been diluted as a result. The criticism they receive about these stereotypes is disguised through humor to be light-hearted, but it's a form of aggression to enforce the traditional norms of toxic masculinity.

"If men feel shameful about supporting feminism and feminist literature, [it] just draws people back to the traditional way of thinking, where men have to be men and be strong," Pok said. "That takes away from modern society [to] be open to all different types of people."

Further, it affects the larger concept of gender equality.

"[Performative males] read feminist books, so that women think they're more approachable," Ha said. "It's like a booby trap. [It] undermines the actual message that feminism is actually important."

Ultimately, the rise of the "performative male" follows a tradition of men being being satirized for their gender expressions. As time goes on, the name "performative" and its stereotype might change, but the prevalence of the topics brought by these concepts will always prevail.



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CONSPIRACY THEORIES

LA PROTESTS

As Los Angeles demonstrations against U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids continue, people online have accused billionaire George Soros and Democrats of planting brick pallets and orchestrating the protests.

CLIMATE CHANGE

According to the Misinformation Review by Harvard Kennedy School, climate change conspiracy theories are worldwide. In a cross-national sample, 18.69% agreed it was a hoax, and 29.51% were uncertain. Believers often accuse scientists of falsifying evidence and creating undue stress for personal gains.

ADDISON RAE

"In 2020, [Addison Rae] was in the Hype House, she was dancing, she was on TikTok, she was Charli D'Amelio's little sidekick," said senior Evie Stern. "Now you're performing with Troy Sivan, and Charli XCX. I don't know where she just gained pop star status, especially when it takes other artists in the industry decades to make it big. And you're just top charts and Spotify within a month? Somebody is pulling the strings behind the scenes. It could be the government, it could be aliens, it could be artificial intelligence."

BIRDS AREN'T REAL

Created by Peter McIndoe in January 2017, the theory posits that birds are government spies. This is a classic example of 'crazy' conspiracy theories.

"I saw this great TED talk [by McIndoe]," said junior Emily Ma. "People who didn't believe in that conspiracy theory would ... demean [believers], they would belittle them ... [Now believers] feel like these people are demonizing them. He was saying... it's so important to approach [people's beliefs] with an open mind and an empathetic standpoint."

WHAT IS A CONSPIRACY THEORY?

- ❑ Has no expert-backed evidence
- ❑ Dismisses information that refutes the theory
- ❑ Difficult to trace the theory back to a single originator
- ❑ Blames powerful entities like governments
- ❑ May involve the supernatural or prejudice against a group
- ❑ Creates shocking, oversimplified narratives
- ❑ Takes advantage of vulnerabilities
- ❑ Involves complex grand plots
- ❑ Draws patterns from coincidences

COVID-19

During the pandemic, there were claims that one, COVID-19 was a hoax and two, the Chinese government purposely spread the virus. A study by psychology professor Roland Imhoff et al. found that while the former mindset was "more strongly associated with reduced containment-related behavior," the latter was "related to an increase in self-centered prepping behavior."

EFFECTS

Conspiracy theories can create an enemy or "perpetrator" that people fear, causing them to respond with discrimination, be taken advantage of by terrorist groups or rationalize hate-based violence. They may induce doubts in science and medicine and indifference toward politics or extremism, putting democracy at risk.

"[Conspiracy theories] just instill a lot of doubt in people in power," said junior Marisol Solorzano. "They also, unfortunately, instill a lot of fear in the general public, because they are so exaggerated to make [the story] seem dramatized ... which intend to mislead people quite a bit. That's a real problem, and people just need to think a lot better when doing their own research, and not trusting everything that they hear."

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WHY DO PEOPLE BELIEVE IN THEM?

Conspiracy theories serve psychological, emotional and social needs. They provide simple explanations for complex events, which helps people feel safe and in control during uncertain times. The communities that form around these shared ideas often have an "us" versus "them" mindset, defending their positions through victimizing or valorizing themselves.

"[If there's] a mistrust in their government or if they see something that's vague, [people] probably want to change the story in a way that satisfies them," said junior Selina Stevanovic. "If Anastasia [Romanov] survived, it would be an interesting story and it would be very inspiring, but history isn't like a happy storytelling ending that's satisfying."

These beliefs are further reinforced by cognitive biases. Proportionality bias assumes major events must have major causes, intentionality bias rejects the idea of accidents or coincidences and confirmation bias makes people notice only evidence that supports their worldview. Motivated reasoning entrenches this cycle, helping believers avoid cognitive dissonance while strengthening their commitment to the theory.

OCTOPUSES

"I think octopuses are actually aliens," said junior Elizabeth Yuan. "They have so many skill sets that don't really make sense with other animals ... I think an asteroid landed on Earth centuries and centuries ago, and octopuses were trying to [explore] the Earth and figure out what other competing planets they have in the galaxy. The octopuses have a chip in their brain that connects them to the mothership ... Every time you eat octopus, everyone gets sick. COVID, I'm sure it was some sort of path from the octopus brain chips, and there's nothing we can do about that because it controls everything and there's contamination."

Is Elvis actually still alive?!

The vaccine conspiracy theory: they cause autism?

The moon landing was fake!

Theory: the JFK assassination was orchestrated

Are lizard people real?

The 5G conspiracy theory: planted by the government to control people?

is the flat earth real o_o ???
Pythagoreas, Plato, and Aristotle were all wrong...

PURPOSE

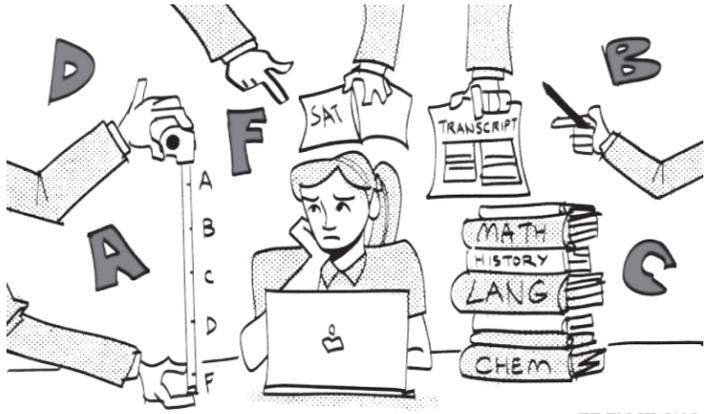
Conspiracy theories may be purposefully spread with political motives, such as to change public opinion. For example, President Donald Trump has supported multiple conspiracy theories relating to Barack Obama's citizenship and the Epstein files. On the other hand, he has been the target of many conspiracy theories himself. Most recently, people have theorized that the White House is concealing the president's health, leading to trending hashtags like "TRUMPDIED" and "TRUMPISDEAD" on X, formerly known as Twitter.

"At the same time, I feel like conspiracy theorists have a right to have those conspiracy theories," said senior Evie Stern. "Everyone's entitled to their own opinion, no matter how wrong it is, and honestly we need more free thinkers out there. The heliocentric theory started as a conspiracy theory, the Catholic church tried to shut them down ... Some conspiracy theories, at least most of the ones that I follow, I think it's just for [fun] and giggles. It's just fun to mess with people and ragebait."

HOW DO CONSPIRACY THEORIES SPREAD?

Conspiracy theories spread most easily during times of uncertainty, fear or social upheaval, when people are confused and anxious. They rely on simple, dramatic stories that blame powerful figures or organizations, using evidence from pseudo-experts. This creates communities around shared suspicion, making them slippery and hard to disprove, especially on social media. Algorithms promote sensational content, and echo chambers reinforce shared beliefs.

"Social media is just such a broad platform, and so many different people use social media," said senior Ethan Guo. "Because such a diverse population uses social media, it's really easy to express different views for literally anyone to voice their opinion, and suddenly they go viral, they get millions of views. And that's how a lot of conspiracy theories get traction."



EDEN KWAN

Opinion: un-grading

Meilin Rife
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

A world where school is fun and students are excited to learn is possible. But that requires changing grades. As it is now, grades are automatically accepted as a one-stop-shop for the academic rigor of a student and their success in school, which will then be used to evaluate how “worthy” a student is for colleges and scholarships. However, what incentive structure do grades create? It doesn't seem that learning itself is a priority.

First, grades are not standardized. Every teacher has their own way of determining the value of a student's work. Some grades aren't even based on work but by participation in class.

Second, grades don't inherently motivate students to learn. While the thought process is that grades give students the motivation to do well in school, and thus learn, the truth is more complicated.

A 1982 study by AK Boggiano found that by providing a reward for hard tasks, a student's interest in completing it goes down. However, by providing a reward for easy tasks, students are more motivated to complete it. This second situation is similar to what many students describe as “busy work,” work that doesn't challenge or force students to grow, but is permitted nonetheless under the current model.

“If it were not graded, I would not do] busy work,” said senior Sydney Miller. “Sometimes it feels like homework is assigned just to give homework ... [When you get] a worksheet of stuff to do and it's really basic, it doesn't feel like it's helping you [learn].”

Furthermore, Boggiano's first finding is alarming, suggesting that with grades, students are less motivated to engage with material. This is because students attribute their motivation to do work as extrinsic before they decided if they wanted to do it intrinsically.

Third, grades disincentive being creative and potentially failing. If there is a surefire way to get an A, most students will take that path rather than exploring alternatives. Learning requires iteration of failing and retrying over and over.

“I tell my students on the first day and everyday that what I expect them to do in my class is fail,” said Engineering Technology teacher Mister Apperson. “But that has such a negative connotation for the vast majority of our students because it's tied to a grade, not tied to [the fact that] what I expect them to do everyday is something they have not done before, and I expect them to

not be good at it yet. I follow up ... with ‘I expect you to fail better tomorrow.’”

Those are the types of structures that encourage persistence and engagement in learning. One alternative grading system that especially honors this aspect of learning is portfolio grading, where students complete a series of projects throughout the semester, each one being worked on with iterative feedback — a great way to practice out weaknesses.

Other strategies include standards-based grading, where students are graded not by individual assignments, but by how many skills they acquire; contract grading, where the educator clearly outlines the assignments they want students to complete, and only assigns grades based on how many of those they complete; and collaborative grading, where students and teachers talk about what grade they believe the student deserves at the end of the grading period.

These may sound like fairytale ideas, but they have been put into application. Many respected colleges such as Brown University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology allow the option for choosing pass or fail grades, lowering emphasis on grades while still valuing academics.

Changing attitudes about grades requires more than just changes in the classroom — the home needs to be part of the conversation as well. Despite good intentions, when parents respond to the incentive structure of grades, they lose track of fostering curiosity within their children.

“Most of [my conversations about grades with my parents] are my parents just telling me to get my grade up,” said sophomore Tyler Sterry. “It's not telling me to do better academically, like [to] try to understand material more. My parents generally care more about grades than about me improving.”

Strategies for positive learning environments fostered by parents include asking questions about the material one's child has learned at school, or having them work through anything that stumped them that day. The focus should always be on reflection.

Although it may be impossible to imagine a world where grades are assessed differently, that does not mean that a reality like that doesn't exist. If students, teachers, parents and school districts all do their part, it is possible to reach that future. Changing grading systems is the key to bringing school closer to prioritizing learning and growth.

Opinion: lower the voting age

Darshan Bal
NEWS EDITOR

Every 16- and 17-year-old should have the right to vote in local and school board elections in San Mateo. They should get a say in the things that directly affect them.

In July, the United Kingdom introduced legislation that would allow 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in the country's next general election. Scotland and Wales already allow younger people to vote in local elections, and this legislation would follow numerous countries, including Austria, Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, Greece and Indonesia, which all have lower voting ages. Many United States' states — including California — allow 17-year-olds to vote in primary elections if they will be 18 by the general election. Further, many cities in the United States allow 16-year-olds to vote in local or school board elections, including Oakland and Berkeley. In 2024, a ballot measure passed in Albany, California lowered the voting age to 16 for municipal and school board elections.

Studies have indicated that lowering voting ages greatly increases voter turnout. For example, The National Institutes of Health found that in Austria, lowering the voting age increased the “first-time voting boost” when the people who have just been given the right to vote come out in large numbers. A similar study from The University of Edinburgh found that voter turnout was higher among 16- and 17-year-olds in Scotland when they were given the right to vote.

Many 16- and 17-year-olds are already working, taking care of their family members, running businesses, doing internships and taking on all sorts of adult-level responsibilities. In “2011, people under 18 paid over \$730 million in income tax alone,” according to the National Youth Rights

Association. Yet, they were given no representation in the way that money was spent; despite taxation without representation being such an important principle in the U.S., we ignore that key idea when it comes to youth voting.

Younger people are also often treated as adults in other ways. There are thousands of people under the age of 18 who are tried in court as adults in the U.S. every year. Thousands end up in adult

prisons and jail, according to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

We expect young people to know right from wrong. We expect them to be able to navigate and handle the adult legal and prison systems. And yet, we refuse to give them a say in the system that has persecuted them.

School board members should have the primary goal of creating an educational

young people are just not as competent. They have a lesser understanding of the issues they would be voting on, and are not able to grasp the real impact their decision might have.

But the same goes for adults. Tests for competence in voting — like literacy tests in the Jim Crow era — have always been used to discriminate against certain groups, and they have been stopped for that reason. Why should such discrimination be allowed to continue against the younger population? Any attempt to justify incompetency as a reason for preventing youth voting opens a whole world of injustice that it has taken almost a century for the U.S. to get past.

Many young people are also incredibly politically informed, and care about political issues more than some adults. According to Pew Research Center, 30% of U.S. adults ages 18-29 participated in some form of climate activism in 2023, compared to just 16% of adults ages 50-64. Youth climate protests are increasingly common and are a demonstration of the active interest of youth to be engaged in making political decisions to better our world.

“A lot of bills will affect us,” junior Annie Donnellan said. “Especially when we're voting for leaders who have [a say] in bills affecting climate change. That will affect us and our future more than it will [anyone] else. We're going to be on this planet longer, so we should have a say [in] what's happening.”

Still, many also argue that giving younger people the right to vote would only give more votes to their families. They are likely to feel the

pressure of their parents and communities to vote a certain way, placing an unnecessary burden on youth. But again, the same thing goes for adults. An adult may feel some level of pressure from their spouse, families or communities to vote a certain way.

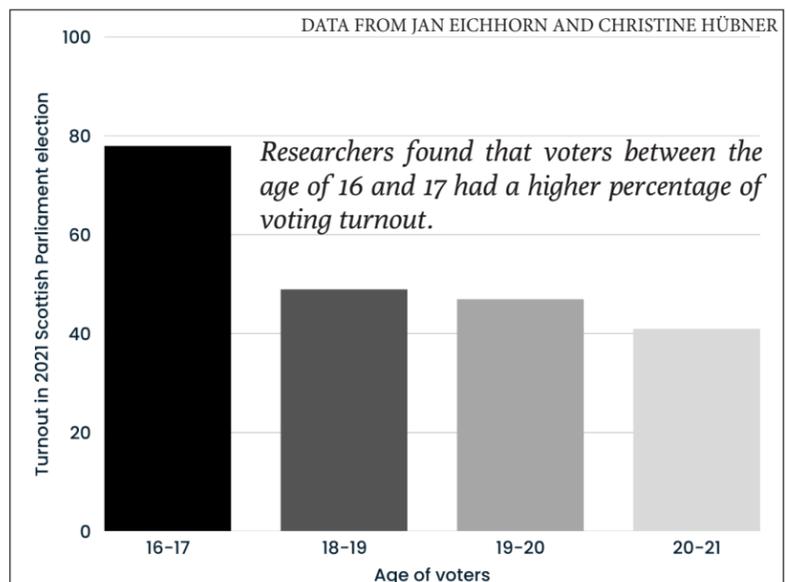
That pressure may result in them making a decision they would not have otherwise made. Voting pressure is a systematic issue that must be reformed, but lowering the voting age does not affect it in any way.

Instead, lowering the voting age for local elections will give younger people a real say and encourage them to continue being politically informed, making longer-term voters who make use of their right.



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system that is best for students, similar to how government officials should have the primary goal of benefiting the place they oversee to best help citizens. However, while citizens are able to select a candidate they feel is best for them, students are not given the same choice. A democratic political system is designed to allow voters to hold those in office accountable for continuing to help them. Yet, school boards are



not being held up to the same standard by those they represent — creating a situation where officials are not receiving crucial, direct feedback from students. If an adult with no children in school can vote in their local school board's elections, why can't a student of that district — who is being affected the most by the outcome — have that same right? Why can they not hold their officials accountable?

Still, many believe that

“A Matter of Time” until Laufey strikes again

Zack Li
FEATURES EDITOR

On Aug. 22, Icelandic-Chinese singer-songwriter Laufey released her third album, “A Matter of Time.” After distinguishing her musical career with a Grammy award for her previous album “Bewitched,” “A Matter of Time” reflects Laufey’s growth and developed confidence as an artist as she explores a greater variety of themes.

For a pop artist, Laufey’s influences are extensive: from jazz greats like Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday to classical inspirations through her violinist mother to theatrical works from the Great American Songbook. In “Bewitched,” these influences complement Laufey’s rich alto voice, bossa nova tunes and the themes of swooning romance and heartbreak that popularized her music. Certainly, Laufey stays true to this style in the opening songs of “A Matter of Time,” “Clockwork” and “Lover Girl,” which lament the downsides of head-over-heels love. Compared to “Bewitched,” however, the instrumentation is noticeably more layered and ornate, setting the production expectations high for the rest of the album.

The next track, “Snow White,” stands out as a raw and vulnerable dive into Laufey’s struggle with fairytale levels of beauty standards: “The people want beauty; skinny always wins / And I don’t have enough of it.” The song is beautifully tender in a

topic that Laufey has never really opened up about before — a testament to her artistic vision. Meanwhile, “A Castle in Hollywood” interestingly features production from Aaron Dessner, known in part for his

highlighting the old-timey circus vibes of the track. Laufey’s voice also begins to become more pronounced, a change from her usual quiet vocal, and one that suits the layered instrumentals well.

even though I’m leaving you” and slow, elegant orchestrals and vocals, the track is honest and well-crafted.

The next few tracks best demonstrate the variety that Laufey tackles with “A Matter of Time.” She chants, “I’ll break it first, I’ve had enough / of wait-

edgy lyrics: “It’s just a matter of time / ‘til you see the dagger... brace your heart / for cold, bitter, bloody sabotage.” A divisive track, its departure from her trademark soft production has left fans reeling from whiplash.

“The only thing I wasn’t fond of was ‘Sabotage,’” said junior Megan Hugo. “I still like ‘Sabotage’ for its diversity and how different it is. It’s just, compared to her other songs, I wouldn’t listen to it as much.”

It’s clear that to Laufey, this album is one of exploration; after defining her style with “Bewitched,” “A Matter of Time” is an album in which she attempts to push her boundaries as a musician. And opinions on how it compares to “Bewitched” are still divided.

“I’m still split up between the two, because ‘Bewitched’ has had time to marinate in people’s heads ... [while ‘A Matter of Time’] will need time to be as established as ‘Bewitched,’” said junior Elliot Lee. “[But] so far, I like [‘A Matter of Time’] more than ‘Bewitched’ because of all the different things she does in it.”

For the risks she takes, Laufey has certainly come out of this album with wider range and growth. But despite that development, the vocal jazz and bossa nova vibes that are so quintessentially “Laufey” are missing — earning “A Matter of Time” a score of four out of five stars.



COURTESY OF VINGOLF RECORDING

work with Taylor Swift, making for Laufey’s version of a traditional pop song. The next two tracks, “Carousel” and “Silver Lining,” slow down in tempo as they delve into the messiness of love: “Tangled in ribbons, a lifelong role / Aren’t you sorry that you fell, onto this carousel?” Production follows through with these two tracks, with the piano and accordion instrumentals in “Carousel” beautifully

Reaching the midpoint of the album, the orchestral interlude “Cuckoo Ballet” beautifully combines motifs from prior songs to tell an instrumental fairytale, confirming the Disney princess themes emerging in the album. Likewise, the following track “Forget-Me-Not” takes on the form of a love letter to Laufey’s homeland Iceland in a similarly enchanting manner. Featuring Icelandic lyrics that translate to “don’t forget me,

ing ‘til you lie and cheat” in the dump-him anthem of “Tough Luck,” belts out a story of heartbreak over more of Dessner’s production in “A Cautionary Tale” and takes a risk with “Clean Air,” an unexpected country song about the feeling of escaping a toxic relationship.

Finally, the album culminates into “Sabotage,” where the dark side of romance that Laufey discusses throughout the album climaxes into instrumental jumpscare and unusually

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New athletic trainer: Fredy Cedillo Martinez

Claire Dong
SPORTS EDITOR

Aragon has recently hired a new athletic trainer, Fredy Cedillo Martinez. Originally from San Diego, Cedillo earned both his undergraduate and graduate degrees in kinesiology at San Diego State University. Cedillo chose this career because of his love for sports as well as his previous experience as a soccer player.

"I was an athlete my whole life," Cedillo said. "And after I left the sport, I knew I wanted to pursue a profession that would allow me to provide healthcare services to high-functioning athletes."

Though Aragon is his first job as a certified athletic trainer, his experience spans multiple sports and training environments. Before arriving at Aragon, Cedillo completed clinical rotations at both California State University San Marcos and University of San Diego, where he worked with a variety of collegiate athletes.

Cedillo's day-to-day responsibilities include looking over documentation, doing injury evaluations, rehabilitation, taping athletes before practices and monitoring teams

during games or training sessions. The documentation side of his job involves keeping detailed medical records on injuries, treatments and recovery progress, as well as communicating with coaches about player availability. During lunch, he sees athletes for prehabilitation — preventative exercises and stretches designed to reduce the risk of

future injuries — along with injury evaluations or rehabilitation. His time after school is spent moving between fields and gyms, checking in with different teams and ensuring they have the resources they need. With high-contact sports like football, he is especially vigilant during games, traveling with the team when it is necessary.

"I have to travel with the football team all the time when they have away or home games," Ce-

dillo said. "I have to be there basically managing everything."

For student-athletes, having someone like Cedillo around is reassuring. Even minor injuries, if not treated properly, can derail a season or sideline an athlete for many months.

"If you injure something, it basically follows you for the rest of your career if you're not careful," said senior Luke Novak. "I sprained my ankle in the middle of the cross country season. It took me out until

the end, and because that ankle was weaker, I injured it again as the track season was beginning."

Trainers make a significant difference not just in emergency response, but also in shaping the long-term wellness of athletes.

"They definitely help you when you go down with an injury, and they give you exercises to do at home," Novak said.

Due to limited resources in a high school setting, Cedillo cannot meet with every athlete proactively the way college trainers might. Instead, most students visit only after an injury, at which point he does a full evaluation to identify both the immediate issue and any underlying risks, correcting muscle or body imbalances when he sees them.

At Aragon, Cedillo hopes to build a culture of awareness and prevention to help everyone succeed in their sport.

"I want to help the youth, empower them with knowledge, and help them participate in their sport in a safe manner," Cedillo said. "It's a reward that I would want to have forever."



The new athletic trainer, Fredy Cedillo Martinez, poses for a photo.

MADELINE ALLEN



EVA LUDWIG



Heat and hustle: summer sports practice

Claire Qi
SPORTS EDITOR

Many athletes find that they have the need to continue dedicating time and effort outside of the sports season in order to stay fit and competitive. For a lot of fall athletes, this means having practices even during the summer.

Many sports, including football, golf, sideline cheer, track and more, have optional training scheduled over the summer. These practices allow athletes to refresh their skills and prepare for the official season even when school is not in session.

Sophomore sideline cheer co-captain Emma Dwight appreciates the opportunities that additional practices can bring.

"I like [summer practices]," Dwight said. "You can see your

team and you can get to know your team. It's [also] a good way to stay fit during summer."

Summer practices are also useful for improving skills. Many mention seeing a large improvement after consistently practicing their sport over the summer.

"I've definitely grown as a dancer," said sophomore and sideline cheer co-captain Chloe Watson. "Also, I've become more vocal and become a better leader [compared to] last year."

While many athletes appreciate the opportunity to get some more training in, having additional practices during the summer can be a problem for those who want to travel, participate in academic programs, get a summer job or just get something else done with their time.

For some sports, athletes have to commit a huge amount

of time from their summer, maybe even more so than during the season.

"[We had practices] from two all the way to seven," said sophomore junior varsity football player David Perez. "[They occurred] about five days a week."

Summer practices are technically optional, but participation in these practices could affect chances of getting better opportunities on the team or even getting into a higher level, which makes attendance important for athletes who want to get further in their sport.

"The more consistent you are about showing up, the [greater chance for] better spots you have," Watson said. "And that goes [for] a lot of [other] sports [as well]."

Some coaches have different opinions on exactly how required summer practice atten-

dance should be. This depends on both the sport and the coach's personal preference.

"A lot of players missed [summer] practice," said sophomore junior varsity golf player Charlie Liu. "[My coach] was understanding because he knew a lot of the summer practices [could be] hard to make. [He had no objections] as long as I went to a driving range while I was on vacation."

On the other hand, some coaches care more about regular attendance of summer practices. They believe the willingness to commit yourself, even outside of the athletic season, shows a lot about personal motivation and work ethic.

"My coach was very serious about [not skipping summer practices] because he wanted us to become disciplined," Perez said. "Showing up could

show the coaches that you're consistent and [they] can trust [you] to show up on time."

While summer practices vary for different sports, the general consensus is that they are helpful for staying in shape even outside of the season or even getting some more practice in. It is also very impressive to see how much coaches care about the development of their players.

"I really appreciate the fact that some coaches will give up their summer vacation to help their athletes improve and not forget the skills they learned during the season," Liu said.

Ultimately, it is evident that even during the summer, many athletes and coaches were active and hard working in hopes of obtaining better results in the upcoming season.