



The ARAGON OUTLOOK

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900 Alameda de las Pulgas, San Mateo, CA 94402

Aragon High School



National Orchestra festival

Ryan Li
NEWS WRITER

On Feb. 28, Aragon's Chamber Orchestra participated in the National Orchestra Festival at the Hilton in San Francisco's Union Square.

The annual festival is hosted by the American String Teachers Association, and was attended by middle and high schools orchestras from across the nation. The festival was held as part of the ASTA National Conference, which included workshops and sessions for teachers in music education.

At the festival, Chamber Orchestra performed their music in front of judges and received an average score of 87 points across six categories: tone, intonation, rhythm, technique, musicianship and repertoire. This score just met the threshold for the highest level "outstanding" distinction, reached at 86 points.

This is the first time Aragon Chamber Orchestra went to a nationwide festival.

"This festival is about the biggest deal for [the] orchestra world ever," said Director of Choirs and Orchestras John Chen. "It is this district's only time ever when we are performing on a national stage in [the] last 30 years ... Orchestras [around] the United States, including string [and] full orchestras, every single string player, string teacher, conductor, [was] at this festival and conference."

The orchestra played Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 3, Mahler's Adagietto from Symphony No. 5, Shostakovich's String Quartet No. 8, "Spring Breezes" and "Mo Li Hua."

"We have combined different types of classical music from different time periods, different places and also [more] modern music," said sophomore and principal violist Jaydon Li. "The last two pieces, 'Spring Breezes' and 'Mo Li Hua,' [are] traditional Chinese folk songs, which makes this program an international journey."

After performing, Aragon received a clinic during which Jeffrey Grogan, a music professor from Baylor University, conducted the orchestra and offered suggestions for improvement.

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[REDACTED]: EPSTEIN FILES

Diya Poojary
NEWS WRITER

On Jan. 30, the Department of Justice released over 3 million additional pages under the investigation into the convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

These files, including 2,000 videos, 18,000 images and private email chains seized from Epstein's devices provide further insight into both his previously covered up crimes from over 20 years ago, including sex trafficking and the prostitution of minors, and his life as acquaintance to many influential figures like billionaire Elon Musk, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg and President Donald Trump.

"People are very tired of seeing this ... song and dance going on with [the investigation]," said junior Anjalika Khare. "[The officials] were holding the files above our heads and people got sick of that ... [The investigation is] a circus, [with] the way Trump is also blatantly

dismissing the files, saying, 'Oh, this is not important. Can we move on to something else?'"

Trump, facing immense pressure from both Democrats and Republicans, signed the Epstein Files Transparency Act, which required the release of all the files so long as victims' identity was obscured. The Transparency Act required the DOJ to make all non-exempt files public by Dec. 19, but they failed to meet this deadline, fueling anger among the public.

"The handling so far has been abysmal, to say the least," said freshman Ryan Ford. "The president especially, and the higher-ups in Congress, have been flipping back and forth between the files existing and wanting to release them, or the files being a complete hoax ... Either release it or don't. Say they exist or say they don't. Stop going back and forth depending on whether or not it helps your argument."



Silver Sword reformed

Jannah Nassef
NEWS WRITER

The Silver Sword Community Service Award plan has undergone major changes due to complaints from both students and advisors, as well as the departure of Caroline Moala, the previous Silver Sword counselor.

The award is given to students who've accumulated points for the community service they participated in such as leadership or being club presidents. To avoid confusion caused in the past, the main change in the plan differentiates between community service and school service.

Students will be awarded the Silver Sword Community Service Award for participating in 200 hours of local community service and recording hours on the Silver Sword Community Service Award Annual Tracking Worksheet and Google Form annually. The Google form officially opens from April 20 to May 1.

The other award students can earn is the Silver Sword School Service Award, which is given for Aragon community service. Students who receive the award must participate in a minimum of three different activities, one leadership position, and earn at least 18 points amongst their four years. Individual positions are awarded one to three points.

"It used to be one award for service to the school, and outside community service; now one of the changes we're making is two different Silver Sword awards," said assistant principal Clarisse Mesa. "One is the Silver Sword School Service Award, and then [the other] is the Silver Sword Community Service Award, because that has been part of the confusion, [since] they're two separate things."

Students may prefer one type of service over another, and administration found it beneficial to acknowledge such preferences. This separation can also help with college applications.

"Community service is important and cool in its own way," Mesa said. "Students who like to do whatever form of service to the local community [are given] recognition of [effort] when it's a lot of hours ... [and] they [can] still put it on [college applications] ... You can separately report community service [and school service]. [That is] an Aragon specific thing. No other schools in our district have it."

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Epstein files release

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Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche said the delay was caused by the enormous volume of the files and the extensive redaction process, which was to ensure any identifying personal information about the victims or other such materials potentially jeopardizing the federal investigation was removed.

So far, however, the files follow no logical or chronological format, often featuring duplicates, and, much to the concern of victims and their families, haphazard redactions to different extents.

"The victims are not being brought to justice and the government is doing way too much to hide the perpetrators' identities," Khare said. "There are names being said but there is no action being taken against them. And that in itself is harming the victims, [by] causing more instability publicly."

Following a recent lawsuit by the victims, the Department of Justice has agreed to remove any files jeopardizing the victims' identities until any such details are properly redacted.

To many, the release of the new files confirm many suspicions about Epstein's inner circle of the elite and wealthy.

"[The files] prove that those in power can get away with basically anything," Khare said.

"At this point you got a president of the United States who's already been tried for felonies. You've got people like Bill Gates, other officials, CEOs, people who hold a bunch of money, people who have incredible influence over the social and political landscape, Elon Musk for example, [that don't have] anything happening to them. That shows something very clear about society [and] it's not very hopeful."

As of now, the files do present some leads and confirm that many of Epstein's connections maintained private communication even after his 2008 conviction, when he first pleaded guilty to a crimes. But most others present allegations

and claims with no concrete evidence.

"[If the files are] more allegation-based, why aren't we investigating harder?" said sophomore Rosie Mayor. "Why aren't we going more in depth to confirm things? Why aren't we trying to prove or deny the allegations?"

Many also believe the files prove some allegations regarding Epstein and his potential co-conspirators, especially Trump, may hold a level of truth.

"A lot of this stuff, it's not hard to believe," Mayor said. "If you see pictures of [Trump] and Epstein and ... [if] he was [mentioned] 38,000 times in the redacted version, it's a pattern of repetition. That leads me, and a lot of other people, [to] believe that obviously something is going on."

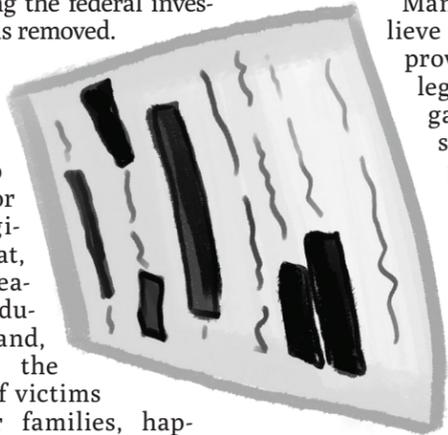
Additionally, many of Trump's opposition are wary of the declining interest of his supporters and the Make America Great Again movement in these files, despite previously supporting their release.

"Now that MAGA knows that ... Donald Trump is in the Epstein files, they don't want to admit their fault," Ford said.

"Because really, Trump being in the Epstein files has been one of the worst things to happen to their argument [supporting Trump]. Once they have found out that there is undeniable proof that he was involved [in Epstein's crimes], they [will] deny it and be dismissive of it."

Ultimately, many among the public want to see this investigation close in an appropriate way that not only brings the real events covered up by the Epstein files to light, but also delivers justice to the victims.

"Knowing that the people who caused you this trauma are going free, people who killed others are going free, [and that] people don't care about this, I think that's wrong," Khare said. "The victims deserve to be free [and] justice deserves to be given to them."



Australian kids lose access to social media

Ellie Blakely
NEWS WRITER

In November 2024, Australia passed the Online Safety Amendment Act, banning children under 16-years-old from having accounts on social media, which amended the 2021 Online Safety Act. The ban went into effect in December 2025.

The ban is the first of its kind and only prevents youth from creating accounts. They can still access content when an account is not required, including sites that enable limited interaction between users and allow users to post, such as Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok and YouTube.

Some believe the ban's impact will be minimal, as it still allows youth to open social media.

"If [kids can't] open [social media] at all, that's more isolating," said sophomore Vivian Saunders. "I grew up on the internet [and] I never had accounts for anything, so I kind of lived that already. I didn't post anything and I didn't feel like I needed to."

The law mandates that social media companies implement age-verification technologies, including use of government identification, facial recognition software and analysis of online behavior. If the companies refuse to comply, they can face fines of up to \$32 million.

This legislation comes as a result of concerns related

more than three hours per day on social media were twice as likely to experience anxiety and depression.

However, similar to California's Phone-Free Schools Act, which requires all California school districts to limit student phone use by July 2026, many recognize that social media has some advantages.

"It's kind of like two [sides] of the same coin," said sophomore Takeo Blakely. "You definitely have something that's beneficial and can spread awareness for a certain cause, but it could also be used to harm others and take people down."

Social media also has the ability to reduce inequality by offering students access to educational material and other opportunities.

"Apps like YouTube especially have a huge component of education, and it levels the playing field for people with less or more privilege," said sophomore Sara Chiguchi. "If you have wealth, then you will always be able to hire tutors to

dia companies from collecting personal data of users younger than 13-years-old, and other regulation has been left up to the states.

In 2024, Utah passed legislation requiring parental consent for minors, but it was temporarily blocked by a federal judge, who cited free speech concerns. The judge is not alone. Others also view social media bans as impeding kids' free speech.

"People [use] Instagram, Snapchat [to] make friends and connect to their friends," Chiguchi said. "And perhaps the government doesn't have a right to decide if kids are allowed to do that ... It does feel like a free speech infringement."

Students remain open yet cautious toward the prospect of a social media ban in the U.S. At Aragon, students use social media extensively to promote clubs, organize events and connect with peers. If social media were to be banned, it would dramatically change the way that Aragon functions and communicates.

"I would worry about the spread of clubs or other activities at Aragon," Saunders said. "We used it to get the walkout going. And I think that it's important that we had the voice to



get that kind of education. But if you don't have that many opportunities then having resources like YouTube will [help provide] that extra education."

In Australia, the ban has had mixed effects. Some children have reported feeling "free" since being forced off social media. However, others have found ways to circumvent the ban. Downloads of alternative apps surged in December, as well as purchases of Virtual Private Networks, which hide a user's location to avoid country-wide bans. Social media companies have also pushed back against the ban, warning that it will isolate teens from their friends and communities. In December 2025, Reddit filed a lawsuit in Australia's highest court attempting to remove the ban, citing reasons such as freedom of political discussions.

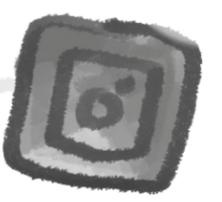
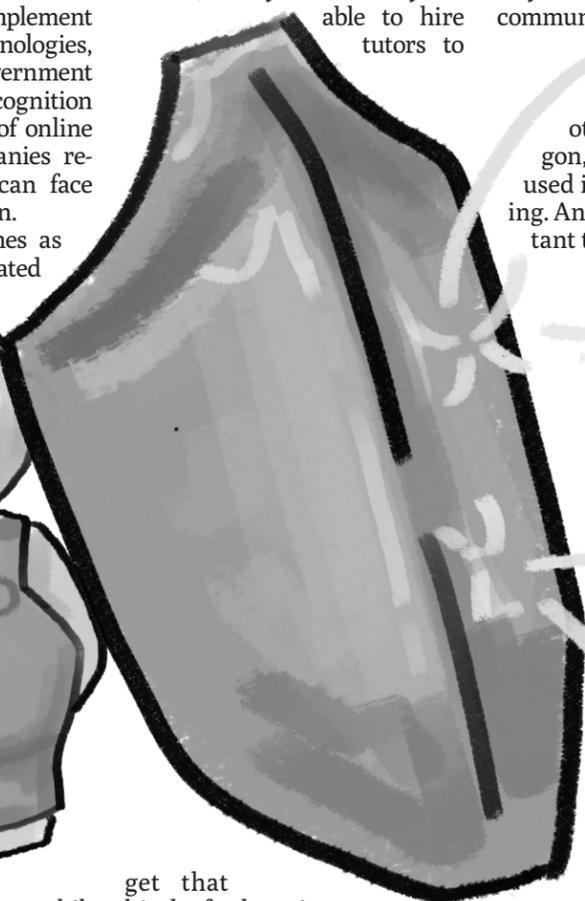
Despite these concerns, several other countries have introduced plans for similar bans, including France, Spain and Malaysia. The U.S. has opted for a less aggressive approach; existing laws prevent social me-

share our opinions. That wouldn't have been possible without social media. We could have done word of mouth, but that doesn't work as well."

In an increasingly digital world, social media is often viewed as essential for being connected and informed. As such, removing teens' access to social media could potentially limit their contact with the rest of the world.

"[We would] be really disconnected," said senior Ashley Alvarez. "In the past, people got by without social media, which is great. Social media is getting really bad, but I don't think we can go back."

Australia is the first country to take this step in limiting social media access for children, but it likely will not be the last. The world lies in wait for the outcomes of this groundbreaking change.



Silver sword: community and school services

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Some students appreciated the format of the Silver Sword printed sheet, finding it clear, while others viewed it as complicated.

"I really like that [the sheet is] a menu that you can see from the back," said senior Aarshiya Agarwal. "It is easy to ... [understand] and [see] how many points [one can receive] ... I do think they need to update [the points], especially as a Leadership student."

Additionally, students had issues with the point system; many disagreed with the categorization and felt certain positions deserved more credits.

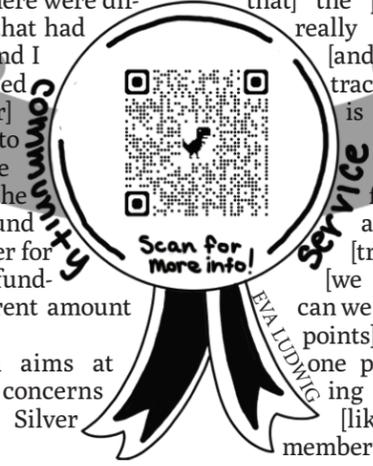
"The layout was kind of hard to understand," said sophomore Calla McLintock. "I'm in Leadership, and there were different [positions] that had different points, and I was really confused about that. [For] clubs, I did have to redo mine because I messed up on the club funding; [I found out] being treasurer for a club [that has funding earns a] different amount of points."

Administration aims at addressing such concerns with the new Silver Sword plan.

"A lot of the confusion was about the points," Mesa said. "[Students gave us feedback that] the points were really complicated [and] hard to track too, which is an issue for the counseling office staff and advisors to [track] ... So [we asked] how can we simplify [the points] ... [Now, it's] one point for doing something, [like] being a member or a player,

two or three points if you are a leader, depending on the exact amount of time involved in the specific [activity]."

Current sophomores and juniors are allowed to self-report points and don't need signatures for previous years; said points will be on the honor system. However, seniors must submit their old blue Award Tracking sheet with the fall semester's points and signatures to counseling advisor Angela Castillo by March 13. Students who fill out the sheets and qualify for the award are given a tassel as well as recognition for the services contributed to the community.



Bell schedule voting favors current plan

Editorial Staff

Recently, teachers have raised the question of implementing changes to Aragon's bell schedule to better fit students' education. Aragon currently follows the district's model, which was the result of COVID-19 scheduling mandates. But after a visit from the superintendent where concerns about the current schedule was expressed, teachers were informed that they could propose edits to the district.

"The superintendent at some point said, 'Listen, you guys are really upset about this, give me an alternative,'" said Carlo Corti, psychology teacher and one of the staff members spearheading the voting process. "We decided to find what we're gonna do is just do some general feedback outreach to the faculty, talk about some different schedules, have a little conversation about the benefits."

The ballot included options ranging from complete schedule changes, such as having just one block day per week, to minor modifications.

Some of the minor changes proposed in the ballot included moving FlexTime to after fourth period, shortening the seven minute passing periods and doing announcements during Flex instead of fourth period. Other changes like moving lunch between fifth and seventh period on block days and moving brunch to after third period on one through seven days were also proposed. Minimal changes to timing amounts serves to provide for more teacher collaboration time, instead of directly impacting students' schedules.

"One of the primary things we've heard was [that] teachers really value their collaboration time with each other, and if there were a way to increase the amount of time that we had to

work together to plan, ... grade [and] work on problems of the school, that'd be beneficial," Corti said. "That's been the latest iteration of our surveys and schedules. [The idea has been that] if we'd made passing periods six minutes instead of seven, that would [give] a lot of teachers [a few] minutes more at the end of the day to meet, or if you did announcements during Flex times [instead of] during class, that would allow that to happen as well."

A return to the pre-COVID-19 schedule of three one through seven period

"There was lots of work that went into [our previous schedule]," said Advanced Placement Biology and Advanced Biotechnology teacher Katie Ward. "Lots of

major changes should occur to our current schedule, with more minimal changes yet to be discussed, this still begs the question of what students think.

In a survey conducted of 78 students, the Outlook found that 70% believed the current schedule to best fit their learning. The most popular major change was switching to all block schedules. There were no particularly favored minor changes.

"We often listen to student voices and we will survey students, listen to student anecdotes," Corti said. "We had a lot of information about what students thought was important. As an example, we know from Panorama data [that] students would love it if [class time ended on zeroes and fives]. It's just simple, right? It makes sense ... but it's so hard to get the right amount of [required educational] minutes with that five and zero ending."

Many students have also expressed interest in longer lunches. Unfortunately, the viability of that conversation is low, as 15 minute shifts require more movement in the larger schedule than simply adding on more time to the afternoon.

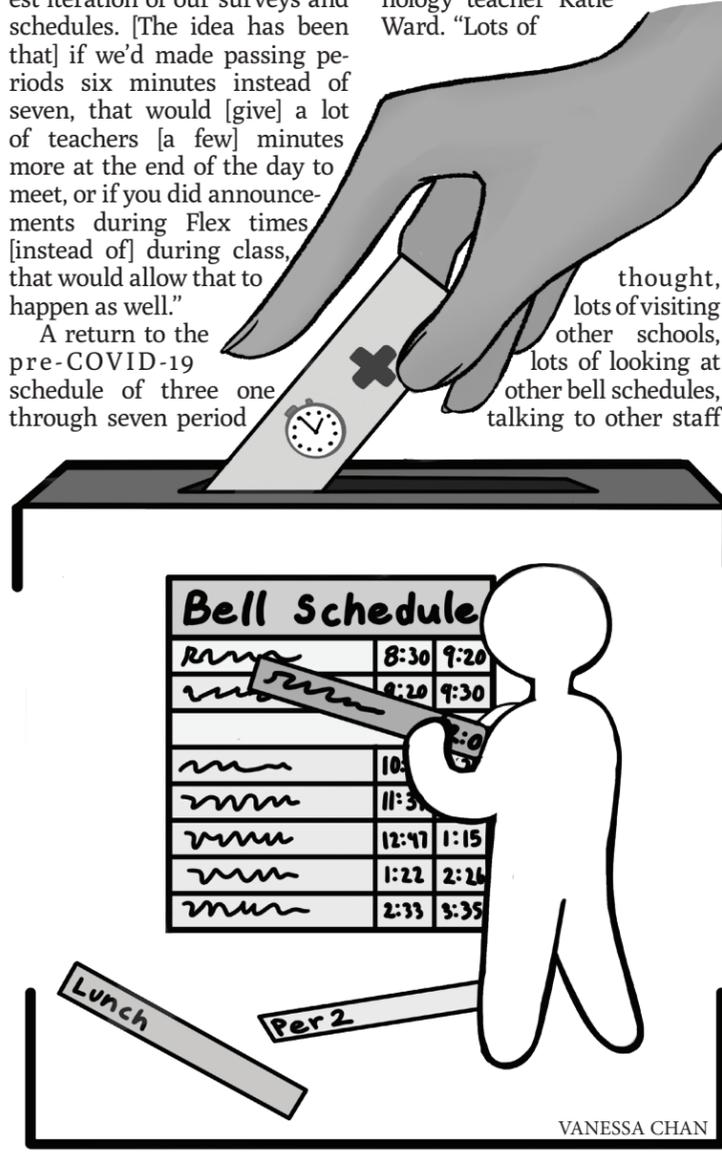
"[Extending lunch] would mean adding that ten to 15 minutes per day to the school day," said assistant principal Andrew Hartig. "Where that becomes a little tricky is that the teachers also have a contract with the district that says it's a seven and a half hour work day ... with so many minutes starting before and so many minutes after. So 3:45 really is our hard, [and] stop moving beyond that would take something else."

All in all, though many feel that changes to the bell schedule should be minimal, the possibility of change still suggests a positive trend toward school autonomy.

days and two block periods was also considered. In fact, the original shift away from this schedule sparked the conversation in the first place, as many found the district mandated change to San Mateo High School's schedule — instead of the schedule Aragon staff had crafted to best fit the school — to be unfavorable.

about ... advantages or disadvantages, ... looking at our own population ... [Switching to the mandated schedule] really did, for a lot of people here, [feel] very, very disappointing ... [it was unfortunate] to have all of that work just feel like it was being completely ignored."

While the teachers came to a general consensus that no ma-



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Safety concerns delays robotics teams' build season

Emma Shen
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Since late February, Aragon Robotics has been temporarily barred access from the shop — a space used for working with power tools. The shop area is associated with Arron Apperson's classroom, and is used for Engineering Tech and Constructions and Trades.

Up until recently, robotics members from the three technical teams — FIRST Robotics Competition, FIRST Tech Challenge and Marine Advanced Technology Education Remotely Operated Vehicle — were granted use of this room after school.

The current restriction is the result of an incident in which a robotics member removed a safety guard from a table saw and did not reassemble the parts. This guard was one of many safety precautions of the saw, which includes a feature that immediately stops the saw upon contact with electrically conductive materials — like skin or metal.

"A student was unfamiliar with a feature on one of

the saws, and [they] did not realize how to take [it] off," said robotics technical mentor Geary Chew. "And I'm not saying that you're not supposed to operate the machine without that safety feature ... [But it] was designed to prevent materials from inadvertently flying off the machine while it's being cut."

A programming mentor had been present during this, but there was no mechanical supervision — someone overseeing the process, who was also familiar with the shop tools.

"This was a non-injury incident, but it could have been [an injury one] ... I feel bad about it, too," Chew said. "That day was Chinese New Year. I took off early ... [and] we still had enough [mentor] coverage, but we did not have everybody watching the shop."

The saw had been used to slice a piece of wood, a task that had been completed without incident. However, the circumstances under which this occurred raised concerns about safety policies in the

robotics team, among other issues.

Within a week, a meeting was held with administration to determine how the robotics team should proceed.

"As a group, admin, Apperson and [robotics adviser Craig] Sipple all created a list of action items to make sure there's more supervision present during the power tool usage ... [and] make sure that mentors and students are better trained in power tool usage," said senior robotics director Aayushi Kothari.

There were preexisting protocols in place for many of these issues: adults needed to be in the immediate vicinity, basic shop training took place at the beginning of the year. But this incident became a call for revisiting those safety and supervision standards and stricter enforcement.

"[We have to] draft a supervision policy for multi-space activities, which we already have, but we'll write it down, re-evaluate and update the shop safety rules and training for students and adults, ... recruit additional adult coverage [and] re-

inforce the procedure to announce when we are allowed to use power tools and when we aren't," Kothari said.

As a result of this process, which also led to the cancelling of a regular robotics meeting, two of the technical teams have found themselves lagging behind.

"We're pretty much done with the fabrication that needs to happen, so it's not as detrimental, because most of the assembly can happen outside," said junior FRC design lead Reet Bhatia. "However, the entire process of the incident taking place, and then the conversations with mentors and admin, did effectively push us back one entire week, which means that the time that we budgeted for programming and for driver practice will need to get cut short."

MATE ROV encountered similar difficulties, although their competition season comes later, toward the end of April.

"The sheer canceling of the meetings was something that worried us, because we have a timeline going,

and a specific date that we wanted to test our robot by, and obviously, by delaying it, we weren't going to be ready to test it," said senior MATE ROV mechanical lead Emily Jane Vincent. "As of right now, we have fallen a bit behind, which is concerning, and especially as someone whose team wasn't at fault for the closure it was like, why are we affected by this?"

To work around the lack of shop access, FRC and MATE ROV have outsourced some minor tasks, like cutting materials, to other schools in the area and mentors.

"We were able to ask DTech's team to cut some plates recently for us .. and we were able to get other motors and stuff switched out with schools like Nueva," Bhatia said. "It's a part of gracious professionalism, [a value of FIRST]."

The season will come to the close at the end of April, and by then, the robotics team hopes to complete its review of the safety and supervision guidelines and implement its updated policies.



Table saw found in the shop lays unused.

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Aidan Kasten

Chamber orchestra

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“[The clinician] talked a lot about the emotions in [the Shostakovich piece], and how [we] had to have a lot more despair, like [a] really intense war scene,” said junior concertmaster Laura Wang. “Something really interesting that he said was that oftentimes when we’re playing in orchestra, we only listen to our own section, ... but we need to listen across sections to really connect the music together. After he said that, he had us try it, and there really was a difference ... The notes sounded a lot cleaner just because everyone was playing the right [notes] at the right times.”

Chen had to apply for Chamber Orchestra to participate in this festival. The orchestra’s high ratings at previous festivals was a strong factor in them being accepted.

“Our orchestra has been growing a lot recently: we’ve been having good musicians, we’ve been going to a lot of competitions and we’ve [had] a lot of achievements,” said sophomore cellist Kana Ueno.

“We went to the [California Music Ed-

ucator’s Association] State Conference in Sonoma last year, and we got a really good review by the judges.”

Since Chamber Orchestra was selected to participate last spring, they began rehearsing the music in class at the beginning of this school year.

“At the start of the year, we already had this vibe of, ‘We’re gonna work hard,’” Li said. “The whole year’s rehearsals were pretty much dedicated to this national orchestra festival ... It’s a really special feeling when everybody’s working towards one collective goal. Everybody is becoming so determined, and we really drill into all sorts of details.”

Outside of school, the musicians were expected to practice two hours a week and attend sectionals during FlexTime to rehearse specific parts of pieces. Students also completed practice assignments where they recorded themselves playing the pieces.

“My interpretations [and] my feelings in the pieces have really grown,” Wang said. “For example, I had a solo in the Shostakovich and at first, I didn’t really know how

I wanted to play it: whether I wanted super red hot and angry, or just flat and desolate. Through this process of preparing for this festival, I got to know the piece, and I was able to refine my musical interpretation [and] what story I wanted to tell through my music.”

Chen sometimes invited guest conductors to coach students and provide insight on the music.

“[The guest conductors] have a special insight,” Li said. “It’s giving us more variety and more perspective [on] music. And these guest clinicians, they are rehearsal machines. They reach maximum efficiency during rehearsal every single time they come in ... They really help us learn and improve, not only personally, [but] as a group too. They’ve made our ensemble much tighter [and] more together.”

Aragon’s Chamber Orchestra’s next concert will be the Symphonic Pops Concert, together with Wind Ensemble and the choirs at the theater on March 26.



Aidan Kasten

Forced outing ban blocked

Renee Ren
NEWS WRITER

In July 2024, Gov. Gavin Newsom signed Assembly Bill 1955, prohibiting school districts from outing their students to their parental guardians. In March 2025, the U.S. Department of Education launched an investigation into violations of the California Department of Education for Family Educa-

tion Rights and Privacy Act, which gives parents the right to view their children’s educational data. On March 2, the Supreme Court temporarily blocked the law, which is currently being reviewed in a lower court.

Outing is revealing the sexual- or gender

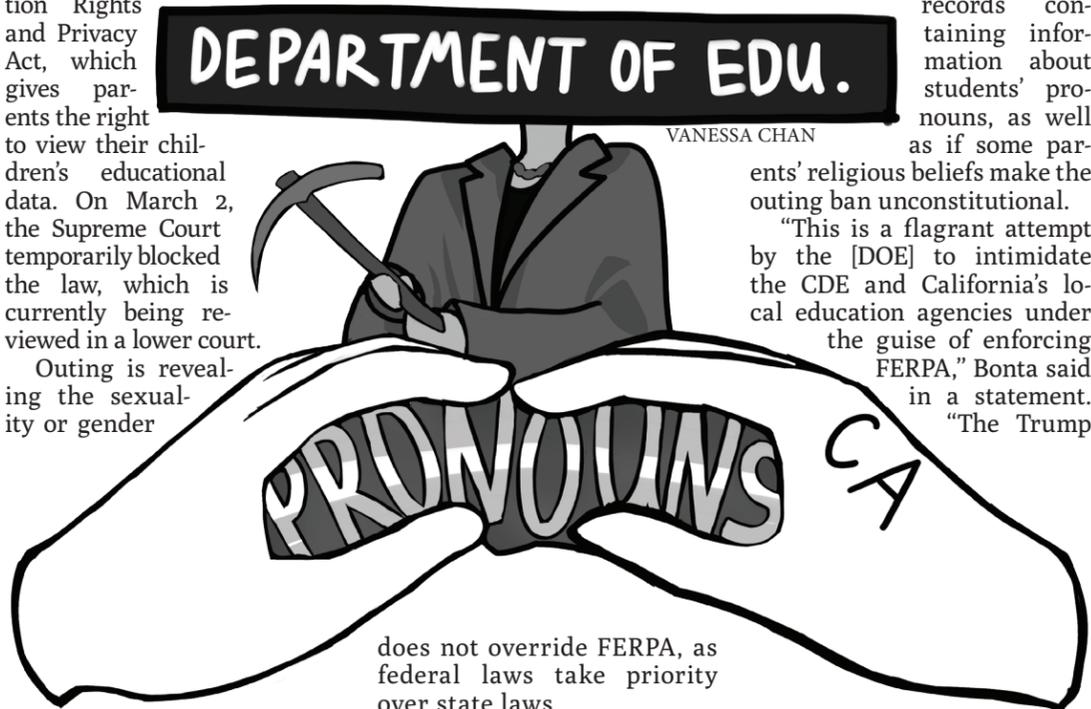
seven or more out of the 937 school districts in California had notified parents if their child came out at their school.

Violation of FERPA can result in possible termination of billions of dollars in state education funding, which the DOE threatened unless the law was reversed. To resolve this, they proposed that the CDE notify all school districts that AB 1955

On Feb. 12, a federal judge issued a restraining order to temporarily block the withdrawal of funding. Attorney General Rob Bonta, who filed the lawsuit, argued that FERPA does not require schools to specifically out students to their parents, as the law does not mention gender identity. Questions of the law’s legality mainly center around whether parents have the right to view

records containing information about students’ pronouns, as well as if some parents’ religious beliefs make the outing ban unconstitutional.

“This is a flagrant attempt by the [DOE] to intimidate the CDE and California’s local education agencies under the guise of enforcing FERPA,” Bonta said in a statement. “The Trump



does not override FERPA, as federal laws take priority over state laws.

“We’re very fortunate because we only get two or three million [dollars in funding] from the federal government because we are a basic aid district, which means we rely mostly on property taxes,” Zúñiga said. “We have a lot more autonomy in our budget. [It is dangerous when the school is a] Title I school, which means they depend more on the federal government, [so] it’s a very high percentage of students that this will be affecting, and because of that, the majority of students will suffer.”

of a person without their consent. However, the law was created to prevent schools from revealing the pronouns of non-cisgender students. Supporters of the law say that it protected students’ privacy.

“[The ban is] more for the protection of the students because there are students [for whom], if they are outed, it can become dangerous,” said Ligia Andrade Zúñiga, a San Mateo Union High School District board trustee. “Students have been abused or disowned from their families.”

With the ban blocked, some believed that students could be widely affected.

“I’m fortunate that my [family] is very supportive of me,” said sophomore McKenna Lindberg. “[But] I have friends who ... haven’t [come out to their parents] out of fear ... and that’s what those laws protected. And now that [the law has been halted], that protection is no longer in place.”

In a press release following the investigation in March and before the Supreme Court ruling, Secretary of Education Linda McMahon said the federal government will hold California accountable and “restore parental rights.”

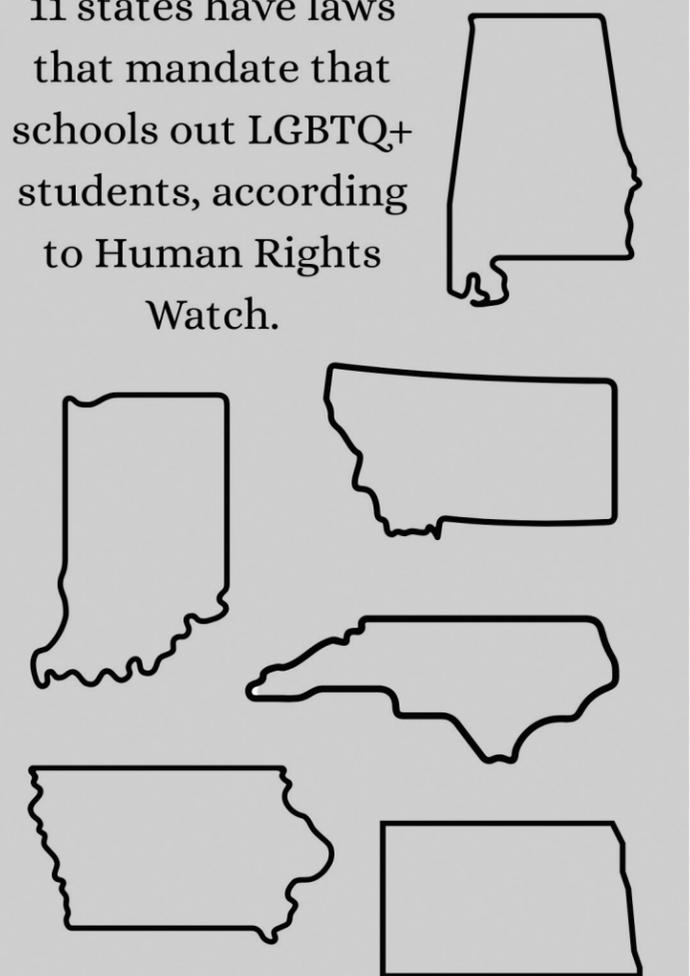
“It is not only immoral but also potentially in contradiction with federal law for California schools to hide crucial information about a student’s wellbeing from parents and guardians,” McMahon said when the investigation began. “The agency launched [the] investigation to ensure that students do not fall victim to a radical transgender ideology that often leads to family alienation.”

California was the first state to ban school districts from outing students to their guardians. Prior to this ban,

administration has produced no evidence that CDE is out of substantial compliance with FERPA or even a single instance where a school has failed to honor a parent’s request for student records. We will continue to fight to protect California’s students from unfair attacks.”

With similar lawsuits in Wisconsin, Massachusetts and Florida happening in December, three of the conservative Supreme Court justices have stated interest in hearing a case about a forced outing ban.

11 states have laws that mandate that schools out LGBTQ+ students, according to Human Rights Watch.



Claire Qi

Expected court decision on trans student-athletes

Diya Gourineni and
Erena Irokawa
NEWS AND SPORTS WRITERS

On Jan. 13, the Supreme Court heard two arguments about the legality of transgender student-athletes participating in the sports events consistent with their gender identity. The two cases were *Little v. Hecox* and *West Virginia v. B.P.J.*

In April 2020, transgender athlete Lindsay Hecox challenged Idaho's Fairness in Women's Sports Act, a ban on transgender women participating in women's sports in public schools. Later, in August, a federal district court temporarily barred the state from enforcing the law, but in July 2024, Idaho filed for an appeal of the ruling at the Supreme Court.

In June 2021, transgender athlete Becky Pepper-Jackson sued West Virginia for their Save Women's Sports Act, which bars transgender women from participating on women's sports teams from public secondary schools to college. The law was temporarily barred by U.S. District Judge Joseph Goodwin, which allowed Pepper-Jackson to compete in middle school. But in January 2023, Goodwin reversed his decision, leading Pepper-Jackson to appeal to the Fourth Circuit Court. The court then overturned Goodwin's ruling in April 2024, supporting transgender student-athletes. As a result, West Virginia petitioned the Supreme Court on the ruling in July 2024.

Both lawsuits argue that the states' acts violate Title IX and the Constitution's equal protection clause in the 14th Amendment. Title IX prohibits sex discrimination in educational systems that receive federal funding, while the 14th Amendment prohibits states from denying people

"It breaks [Title IX and the equal protection clause] because it is basing rules and laws against gender identity," Pate said. "They're trying to create equality in sports [and] this [is a] big discussion of fairness and sports [but] sports are inherently unfair most of the time, so it's hypocritical that they're regulating [which] bodies play in sports."

The Supreme Court ruling will likely impact similar state bans of transgender women in sports in 27 states. However, the Supreme Court most likely will not mandate a national ban. Currently, California law mandates that public schools allow transgender stu-

dent-athlete competing in the track and field championship meet, the CIF granted qualified additional cisgender females to the final for events with transgender girls. In addition, the CIF decided medals for cisgender female athletes would be separate from placement of transgender athletes.

While debates on whether to allow transgender student-athletes to participate in high school sports and in which category continue, the San Mateo Union High School District has not

However, opposition towards transgender athletes participating with their gender identity remains strong across the U.S., with many concerned about competitive fairness and biological advantages. While transgender athletes are allowed to compete consistent with their gender in some states, they are not in 27 states, the National Collegiate Athletic Association or most professional sports. They often argue that athletic divisions

[they] have different brackets for men and women, and if someone is trans and competing have different brackets for men and women, and if someone is trans and competing as a woman, it can be physically unfair to those who have worked hard to be high in their bracket as a girl."

There are less than 10 transgender athletes out of 554,000 in the National Collegiate Athletic Association that the NCAA president is aware of.

The Trump administration has taken a clear stance on transgender athletes in sports and gender-affirming health care. Since his return as president, Trump has signed numerous executive orders to restrict transgender women and girls from competing in women's sports, arguing that it is to protect the rights of cisgender female athletes. One of the executive orders, called "Keep Men out of Women's Sports," reinforces the definition of "sex" in Title IX as sex assigned at birth and not gender identity. In addition, the administration also cut off and limited health care funding for gender-affirming care which supports a person's gender identity.

Discussions about transgender athlete participation involve the role of hormones, such as estrogen for transgender women, and other gender-affirming care. Some researchers have evidence that estrogen could reduce or potentially eliminate the advantage that biological males may have above females. Supporters of gender-affirming care believe that regulating the hormone levels of transgender athletes is a better solution than bans.

However, some still argue that the solution varies depending on the sport, emphasizing the complexity of creating rules that include fairness, inclusion and competitive equality.

Pate played on the girls water polo and swimming teams for his entire high school career.

"It's really heavy when you're on the opposite team that you want to be [part of]," Pate said. "I felt alone. [I didn't change teams because] I was socially transitioning a little bit every year [and] I wasn't on hormones ... I love this sport so much. I didn't want to go through the steps. I was scared. I had great moments, I had good friends."

Having heard the arguments of the two cases in January, the Supreme Court's decision will arrive in late June or early July. The Supreme Court currently has a 6-3 conservative majority, so experts expect them to maintain the bans set by the states. Because the decision is not likely to uphold a federal ban, California will not be directly affected given that state law requires public schools to allow students to partake in sports based on their gender identity.



equal protection under law and unjustly discriminating based on race, gender or other characteristics.

Alex Pate, an Aragon alumnus and transgender athlete who participated in water polo and swimming at Aragon, believes the question of what defines fairness is important when considering the legality of the rulings.

dent-athletes to participate in teams consistent with their gender identity.

"The big part of [these state laws] is that it discourages trans people from playing sports," Pate said. "[In California] we have a pretty good chance of reaching up to [that] extent."

In accordance with California law, the California Interscholastic Federation, the governing body for high school sports, allows athletes to compete in sports corresponding with their gender identity. In May 2025, in response to criticisms by President Donald Trump about a transgender

athletes from competing in teams that align with their gender identity.

"Transgender athletes deserve the opportunity to participate in high school athletics," said Steve Sell, Aragon Athletic Director and member of the CIF Executive Committee. "When you weigh the amount of damage done to transgender kids when their gender identity is not respected versus the damage being done to cisgender kids having to compete with transgender kids, there's absolutely no comparison. There would have to be a surge ... [of] the percentage of transgender kids competing in California high school athletics. That's how small the number of kids who are competing [is]. What's really disappointing is the complete lack of empathy being shown for these kids going through the journey of being transgender."

have always been based on biological sex instead of gender identity. Supporters of this viewpoint also emphasize the differences of muscle mass and strength in males and females. Idaho, for example, argues that "male athletes have numerous recognized physical and physiological advantages over females that begin before puberty and persist despite circulating testosterone," highlighting the need to preserve fairness in women's sports. Another perspective suggests that by allowing transgender athletes to compete in their desired teams, it will significantly change the structure of women's sports as it is today as it challenges the current meaning of competitive fairness.

"Sports wise, it can sometimes be unfair [for transgender athletes to participate in sports based on their gender], especially [regarding] physical abilities," said sophomore Avery Kim. "For sports that are really physical, there's a reason why

California's burgeoning burden of crime and punishment

Ashley Tsui and Addie Rose
FEATURES WRITERS

In recent years, the state of California government has made many efforts to restructure incarceration, shifting the focus from punishment to support and orientation to future success beyond the jail bars. While prisons are often portrayed as cramped, harsh environments, the reality of the system is much more complex — rehabilitation programs exist to support the diverse range of prisoners' mental health and prevention of future crime relapsing.

The California prison system is managed by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitations, which is responsible for the implementation of shared cells, general rehabilitation programs and varying levels of security, among other arrangements. The system houses approximately 90,000 incarcerated adults in facilities across the state.

SHIFT TO REHABILITATION

In recent years, California has reduced overcrowding and shifted focus toward rehabilitation by increasing access to enhanced safety and providing mental health support instead of solely relying on punishment. Reforms have emphasized improving overall prison culture.

Change can be seen in San Quentin State Prison, which is being transformed into a rehabilitation-focused facility inspired by Nordic prison models. Their goal is to increase access to education, job training and mental health programs to reduce repeat offenses.

The rehabilitation process includes lessons in reading, math, employment, societal transitioning and financial literacy before inmates participate in parole planning and discuss their re-entry into society with prison staff. However, data from CalMatters shows that only around 40% of incarcerated individuals take part in these offerings, raising questions about their efficiency and necessity. That being said, low participation rates are also influenced by a lack of program availability, lack of funding or other conflicts of interest between prison administrators.

Additionally, formerly incarcerated individuals often face challenges reintegrating into society, including workforce discrimination. As a result, many return to crime, continuing the cycle of felony and punishment. 39.1% of people released from Californian prisons in fiscal year 2019-2020 were convicted of another crime in the next three years.

Another challenge currently being tackled is shared cells. Concerns about safety and mental health in shared cells have risen in recent years, as feelings of paranoia or anxiety may be common when faced with a potentially dangerous roommate.

"Being in an environment where other people have done the same [crimes] as you, doing something you shouldn't have done, I don't think that's going to encourage change," said junior Advika Singh. "Everyone's end goal is to not stay in prison, so it's easier if everyone is separate."

As a result of such concerns, the new California Assembly Bill 1140, the Single-Occupancy Cell Pilot Program, will create single-occupancy cells beginning in 2026-2027. The plan aims to transfer 10% of the population in four prisons into individual cells. Supporters say this could improve safety and mental health, while critics question the cost and whether it addresses deeper systemic issues.

JUVENILE JUSTICE

While rehabilitation is also a key factor in the juvenile justice system, juvenile centers also aim to keep adolescents aligned with public school education. They also provide access to counselors, psychia-

trists, nurses and recovery programs that focus on victim awareness, substance abuse treatment, anger management and career planning.

A strong focus on education allows juveniles to receive similar schooling and opportunities as non-incarcerated adolescents. Counties offer both high school and college level education experiences, placing emphasis on preparing for societal re-entry. These programs have seen clear success. A 2019 CalMatters article reported a 60% decrease in juvenile detention rates and a 73% decrease in arrest rates since 2007, thanks to programs emphasizing trauma counseling and rehabilitation rather than punitive treatment.

"[Secure Youth Treatment Facility] youths can complete high school [through] the Hillcrest School, which is run by the San Mateo County Office of Education," said Johanna Rasmussen, San Mateo County Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention Commission Commissioner. "We have graduations each year and we serve a lot of youth with special education needs [or even English as a Second Language] learners ... They really excel in their education. The same is true of our kids in the juvenile hall ... they don't stay a long time, but

they still go to school every day ... We try to work with them on what their educational goals will be and if they are going to be there for enough time to enroll them in college."

However, these opportunities are not as common for adult inmates, sparking discussion about how the system treats adolescents versus adults. Public support for adult rehabilitation is far less than that for juvenile programs.

"I wish that energy and excitement that people have for the idea of a rehabilitative juvenile carceral system could be transferred over to adult incarcerated individuals," said Aragon alumna Angelina Parker, the Co-founder and Youth Director of Peer Point, a restorative county-wide program for suspended, expelled or arrested youth. "We could be spending some of that passion building better

For the juvenile system, the LGBTQ+ population is considered too small for support programs to be instituted.

"We don't often have many self-identified LGBTQ+ youth, so we just don't have any identified programs," Rasmussen said. "That's an area we definitely need to improve and the reason why there's not a big focus is because the population is so minute and there's so many other problems that need to be tackled."

For disabled inmates, which is 40% of all prisoners according to a 2024 report from Disability Rights California, conditions like solitary confinement, where individuals lack human interaction for 22 to 24 hours, pose serious physical and mental health risks. Court-mandated improvements aim to provide more assistive technology within the year.

California Assembly Bill 1144 proposes allowing disabled inmates or inmates 55-years-old or older to reduce work hours or retire without punishment or re-

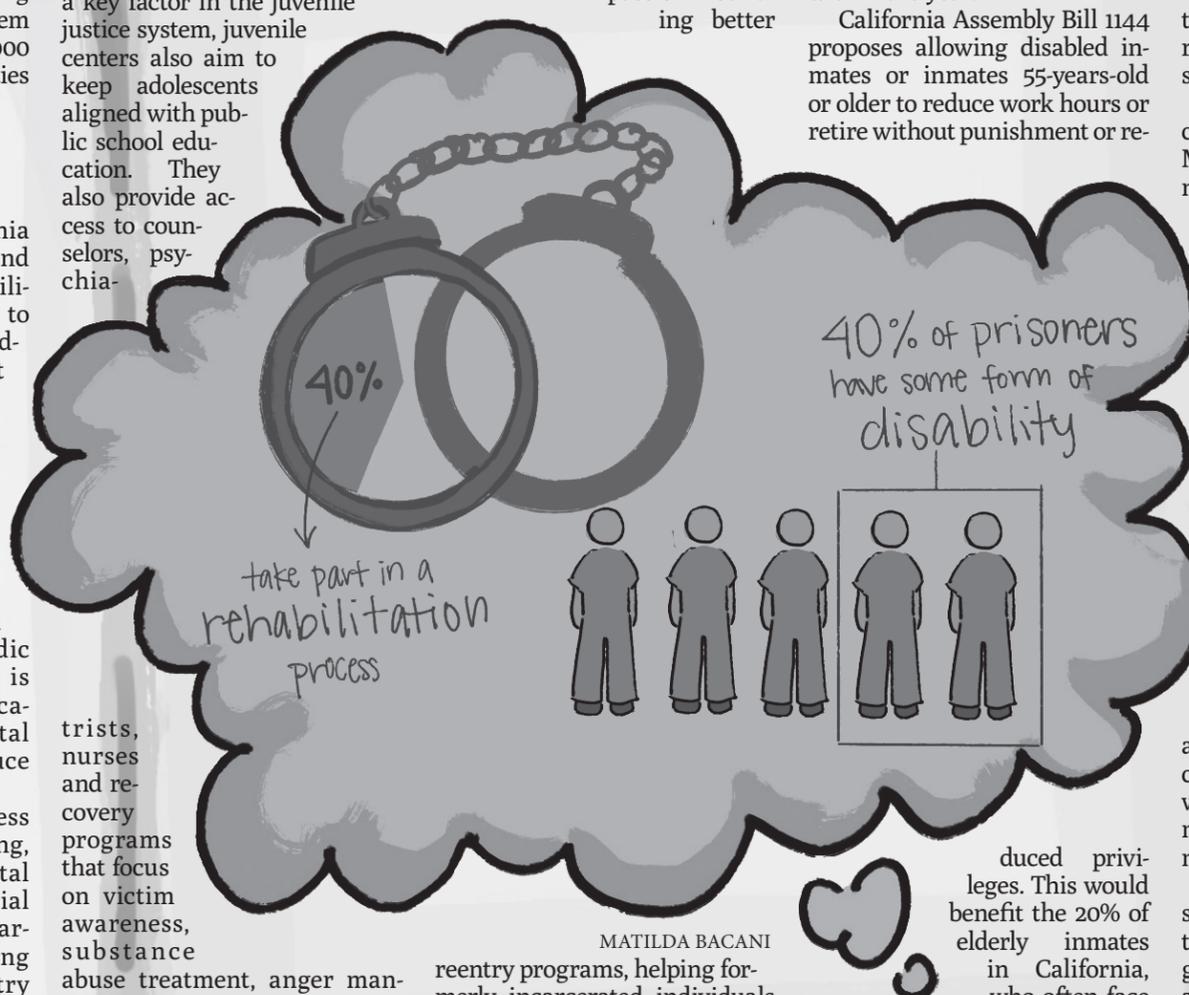
punishment. There is a lot of existing research that shows when you increase the certainty of punishment for a crime, the instances of that crime will drop a lot, but there's also a lot of research that shows going through the carceral system might actually make it much more likely for someone to return after they've been released for a whole host of reasons ... One main challenge that America has not yet solved is how to handle the dual and reciprocal relationship between crime and punishment."

The juvenile detention system in particular continues to evolve, focusing on community-based rehabilitation. With the closure of the state-run Division of Juvenile Justice in 2023, counties now manage youth incarceration, implementing stricter probation limits while balancing rehabilitation with facility safety and security.

However, there are still changes that can be made. Most notably, the end of minors being tried in adult courts, preventing crimes from being committed in the first place and standardizing education in juvenile halls — where juveniles reside during transitional periods of the conviction process.

"The thing I care most deeply about is stopping juvenile transfers to adult court," Rasmussen said. "It costs money, it creates a bigger public safety risk and it destroys the child's life ... Identifying early, in elementary school, [potential circumstances that could cause a child to commit a crime], creating a program for youth with juvenile hall commitments and eliminating juvenile transfers [is] my goal."

California's current prison system is complex and controversial, due to debates regarding safety, rehabilitation and minority conditions. Recent reforms and legislation have shifted focus toward preparing inmates life after release, offering more opportunities for self-improvement. While challenges remain — such as shared cells, solidarity confinement and program effectiveness — the system is gradually moving from disciplinary approaches toward support that aim to reduce recidivism and improve outcomes for incarcerated individuals.



MATILDA BACANI

reentry programs, helping formerly incarcerated individuals find jobs or opening up scholarship opportunities for them to pursue further education and reintegrate with society ... The better you can help a person reintegrate into society after they've been released, the lower their chances of recidivism, [a person's relapse into convicting crimes], are in the future."

TREATMENT OF MINORITIES

Additionally, the actual prison experience for minorities — including pregnant, LGBTQ+ or disabled individuals — contains support systems programs that vary in effectiveness.

The CDCR allows transgender, non-binary and intersex individuals to be housed in accordance to their gender identity, resulting in mixed experiences. Some report feeling safer and relieved, while others still face violence and discrimination. A study funded by the CDCR across six California men's prisons found that 65% of LGBTQ+ inmates reported being sexually assaulted by another inmate.

CONCERNS AND EVOLUTION

The California prison system has come a long way from purely punitive treatment and is now working to provide support to those who need it, as well as focusing on rehabilitation and preparing inmates to re-enter society. However, the balance between punishment and rehabilitation remains debated.

"America has a high crime rate and a high incarceration rate and you can't address one without the other," Parker said. "One way to lower crime is to increase welfare and support services ... but another way is through



ARTS & CRAFTS

Copy: Allinah Zhan, Claire Dong, Kyra Hsieh, Zack Li
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Fiber arts' modern forms originate from weaving and knotting from many ancient civilizations in China, Egypt and the Middle East. Babylonians and Assyrians created macramé, complex knots and hitches, for decoration, used as a pastime for sailors. Seafarers historically have also done tatting as a way to create lace with loops and knots. Today, knitting, which uses two needles, and crocheting, which uses one hook, employ yarn to create items from sweaters to coasters. Additionally, embroidery decorates these fabrics, with cross stitching being the most beginner-friendly form of embroidery. Quilting unites these fiber arts, stitching together shapes into one large fabric that feature embroidery, embellishments and appliques.

Paper crafts are found across many cultures. The traditional Japanese origami uses the structural memory of paper to create figures without glue or scissors. A similarly ancient paper art is Jianzhi, or paper-cutting, dating back to sixth century China. Designs are often cut from a single sheet of red paper, symbolizing prosperity. Beyond two dimensional designs, papier-mâché evolved into the Mexican craft of Cartoneria: using paper, wire and adhesive to sculpt alebrijes, or folk art sculptures of fantastical animals, piñatas and other related figures.

Soap making traces back to ancient Babylon, mixing fats, water and wood ash together. Similar practices emerged in Egypt, Rome and Sumeria. The most prominent modern methods of making soap are melt and pour, cold process, hot process and rebatching, which differ in the source of lye and how saponification is triggered. Some soapmakers add decorative swirls, ombres and other natural ingredients to spice up the products.

Tori Maciel (12) - Soap Making
What kinds of soap do you make?

"I make soap using olive and coconut oil completely from scratch. I don't buy the glycerin, and I make the lye itself by [mixing sodium hydroxide] with distilled water...I melt the oils together and then add essential oils and other additives. One time I tried using spirulina to dye it, but because the oil's a really dark color, you have to use a lot of it to show."

Any advice for beginners?

"Start with simple recipes, don't try anything crazy... just be careful. Watch a lot of tutorials, because it can be really dangerous if you don't do it correctly. It gets really, really hot, and it can burn your lungs, [eyes and skin] if you breathe it in. I use goggles, gloves and a mask, and I ventilate my area with a fan."

Jewelry making is a very ancient art. The first known jewelry — perforated shell beads made by Neanderthals — was discovered over 100,000 years ago. Ancient Egyptians used rings, amulets, girdles and other regalia to indicate status and wealth, bringing them to the grave. Gold jewelry originated in Bulgaria, with over three thousand gold artifacts discovered in an ancient cemetery dating back to 4600 years ago. Modern artists use all sorts of materials to create charms and the like.

Bethany Dang (10): Crocheting
What's your favorite part of crocheting?

"My favorite part is the outcome. I don't really like the process of making it, because it's kind of time consuming, and it's just doing the same motion over and over again, but the outcome's really cute and makes it worth it."

What's the hardest part of crocheting?

"Getting the stitches right. In the beginning it can feel awkward to hold the hook in the yarn, and sometimes, since you're a beginner ... it's easy to mess up. There's a lot of different [tutorial] videos that you have to learn, [and] some of them are really bad."

COURTESY OF BETHANY DANG



Anjalika Khare (11) - Henna
How did you get into doing henna?

"I've just been exposed to it for my entire life. I might as well adopt it and carry on something my family's been doing for so long. Mostly I had it done on myself quite a bit... Eventually I decided, why not buy a few cones of henna for myself? I started practicing on myself, my little sister and my mom. Eventually I started doing it for my family and friends as well."

Are there any designs, themes or motifs you like to draw?

"In most Indian henna art, you'll find flowers, natural themes, swans, butterflies [and] geometric patterns. Henna was one of the first forms of body art ever, and it mimics what people would see around them. I've gone into more modern styles now, like a lot of tattoos have cybersigilism."

Body art includes permanent and temporary body modifications. Piercings, especially ear piercings, are among today's most common forms of body art. Tattoos are also widespread and done by injecting ink into the skin using tiny needles. A temporary method that marks human skin with art is henna, a tradition that began in cultures throughout the Middle East, Africa and South Asia. Artists apply a dye made from dried, powdered leaves to stain skin with abstract designs.

COURTESY OF ANJALIKA KHARE

Ava Baptista (12) - Henna
How did you get into henna?

"I've done it since I was young. I've just always liked art. That's an outlet that I [used to] express that. Plus, I really like doing detailed stuff. I feel I have the patience for doing henna... I started again last summer because a friend recommended I start an account. She saw my work and thought that I could make a buck off of it."

What's the process of drawing henna for a client?

"What I would do first is get a comfortable space for my client because... [you] don't want them to be uncomfortable. I would [put on] gloves because [because the paste] stains. I would get the tube of henna, [either] red and brown. I would ask my client which one they want in advance. I'd also map out the sketch that they want."

Taylor Lee (12) - Jewelry Making
How did you start making jewelry?

"I was trying to pick up new hobbies [during the pandemic], and something I could do was pen pal friends, and I wanted to start sending them little gifts, so I started making beaded bracelets and teaching myself how to do other kinds of jewelry."

What's been your favorite project?

"I had a stint of time where I made these flower bracelets, and I made a bunch for people, so much so to the point where people started asking me if I was starting a business. That was why I started loving to do it even more. I would give different colors to my friends. It was nice because we all had one similar friendship bracelet."

COURTESY OF TAYLOR LEE



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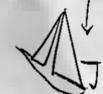
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AROUND THE GLOBE: STUDENTS STUDY ABROAD

By Roy Kong, Features Writer

Spain, Yucatan, Germany. Where to choose? Studying abroad is a program that many high school students partake in. At Aragon, many students do so through the “high school summer abroad” program at the Council on International Educational Exchange.

Aveah Pok
Madrid, Spain

Why did you study abroad?

I chose to study abroad because I've always had a really long[time] goal to become fluent in Spanish, and I thought a good way to practice my Spanish speaking was to study abroad and be fully immersed in Spanish culture. And another reason was because my friend had done it the year before, and they recommended it to me, so I thought it would be a good experience.

What advice would you give to other students interested in studying abroad?

Don't limit yourself from these kinds of opportunities. I didn't think I could thrive on my own, outside of the U.S. and away from my family. But really, you gain a lot more independence, and if you believe in yourself, that you can do this kind of journey, then you will, and you shouldn't be afraid of it.



Patrick Gomm
Berlin, Germany

What was the most memorable part about studying abroad?

I was [in Germany] during the Euros ... They played in the [Olympiastadion Berlin] Stadium there, which we got to tour through CIEE for free. We got to go into the locker rooms, and [my roommate] left his backpack in a very crowded area. They thought it was a bomb, so the bomb squad was surrounding it, and when he came back, he got arrested. Obviously there was nothing in it, but it was funny, because he was innocent.

Pacôme Polly
San Mateo, CA, USA

Why did you study in the United States?

I picked the United States because I wanted to speak English and I had never been to this country before, so I was curious to discover more. I didn't choose my location in the U.S.



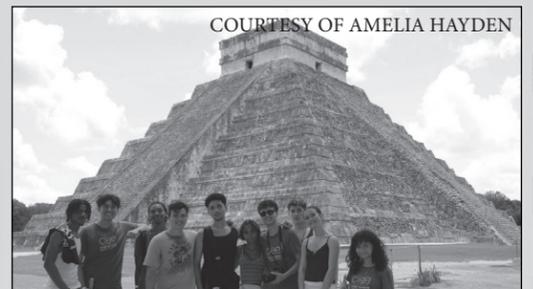
Amelia Hayden-Gephart
Mérida, Yucatan, Mexico

Did studying abroad make a difference in your learning?

I definitely think so because studying abroad connected me with the language. I was able to recognize the benefits of learning a language like how you're able to communicate and connect with more people outside of the U.S. as well as inside the U.S.

What was your favorite thing about studying abroad?

Meeting new people and getting to know the culture behind the language. [Mexico is] one culture of many that speak [Spanish], but it was really cool to meet people who grew up with the language and see it in action, rather than just in a classroom. It was really cool to hear [the language] in the streets and be able to speak it myself day to day.



Representation of LGBTQ+ relationships in media

Rebecca Chen
FEATURES WRITER

Edits featuring longing glances, slow-burning tension and emotional confessions from the recent hit show “Heated Rivalry” have flooded social media platforms, drawing millions of views, booming fandoms and sometimes intense online discussion. The series quickly gained attention for centering a male-male romance as its emotional core rather than treating it as a side plot as many other popular shows do. Its popularity mirrors the success of other mainstream titles like “Heartstopper” and “Red, White & Royal Blue,” which also place non-heterosexual relationships at the center of their narratives rather than on the sidelines. The viral attention and strong fan engagement surrounding these titles highlight a larger cultural shift: LGBTQ+ relationships are no longer hidden; they can actually lead the story.

In the past, queer representation looked very different. Characters associated with the community were often hidden, written as tragic figures, or framed through stereotypes. Queer film and TV characters, like Maya St. Germain in “Pretty Little Liars,” Oberyn Martell in “Game of Thrones,” Lexa in “The 100,” Frank-N-Furter in “The Rocky Horror Picture Show” and many more, succumbed to the “bury you gays” trope.

Many of these storylines presented non-heterosexual relationships as temporary,

shameful or doomed. However, the trend has shifted. Main characters in bestselling novels, popular shows and major films are written as LGBTQ+, with romantic arcs that hold as much weight as heterosexual ones.

The popularity of men-loving-men relationships, in particular, has become noticeable. These stories are frequently idealized, deeply explored and centered in fandom spaces. Online communities create fanfiction, fan art and edits that further expand their stories. In many of these narratives, male characters are portrayed in more emotionally vulnerable and expressive ways than traditional media has historically allowed,

which some audiences find compelling because it challenges the rigid expectations of masculinity.

“I read more gay stuff than lesbian stuff, mostly just because I like the idea that males could feel less brutal,”

Liu said. “It helps with gender expectations.”

Some observers also point to broader cultural dynamics behind these trends.

“A big factor in why gay relationships are so appealing to straight women is that it removes women from the equa-

comfortable, and it also ties into the patriarchy and misogyny that is unfortunately very common in [the] media today.”

This leads to ongoing conversations about the imbalance between MLM and women-loving-women representation. MLM storylines are often given ma-

broading the types of stories being told.

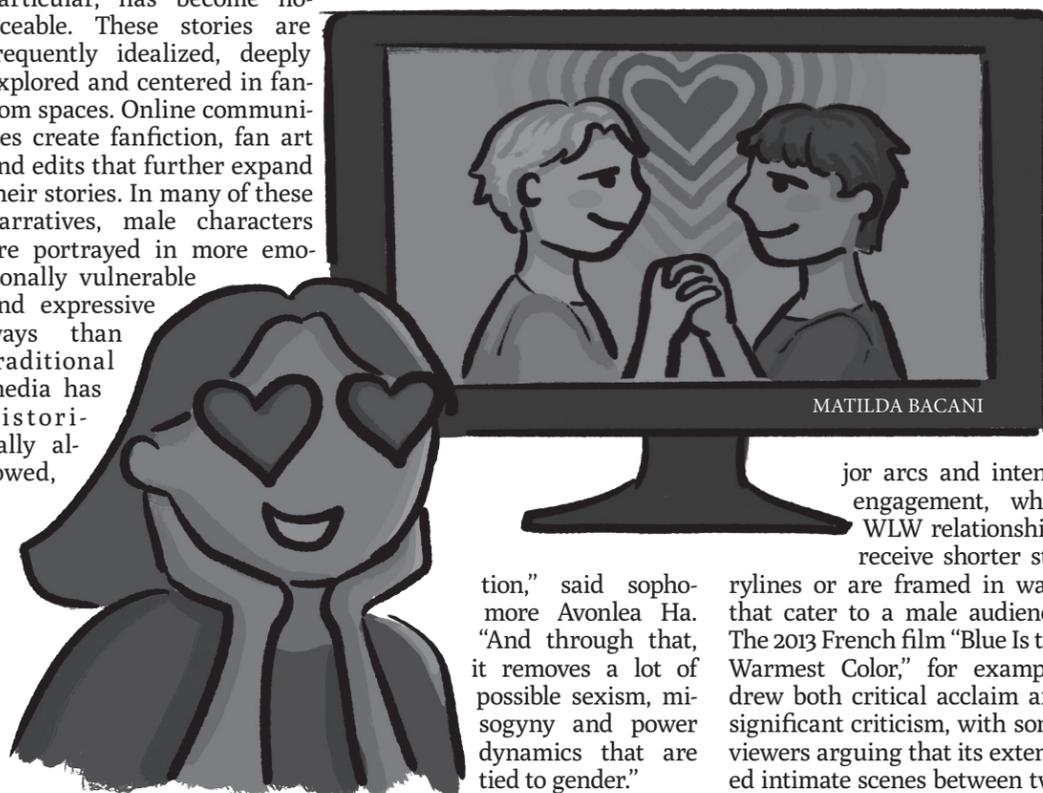
“Queer women are expected to portray more masculine roles, and queer men are expected to portray more feminine roles, when really that's just not exactly true,” said sophomore Nico O'Reilly. “Queer men can be masculine. Queer women can be feminine.”

Despite ongoing debates about stereotypes and fetishization, some believe the growing visibility is encouraging more creators to tell their own stories.

“While there are still a lot of issues with how queer people are portrayed, especially in the media, people are just feeling more inspired, especially by stuff like ‘Heated Rivalry,’ to get their own stories about queerness out there,” Ha said.

Many athletes have been inspired to come out through “Heated Rivalry,” including former hockey player Matt Kenny. Many more athletes, like Olympic figure skater Amber Glenn and Olympic alpine ski racer Breezy Johnson have been out as society has become more accepting.

Queer stories continue to gain more recognition. For LGBTQ+ teens especially, seeing relationships like theirs portrayed as central, meaningful and worthy of attention can reduce isolation and create space for more diverse storytelling. While representation is not perfect, it continues to evolve, moving from hidden subplots to stories that openly, and increasingly confidently, take center stage.



tion,” said sophomore Avonlea Ha. “And through that, it removes a lot of possible sexism, misogyny and power dynamics that are tied to gender.”

At the same time, discussions about fetishization continue, particularly regarding how different queer relationships tend to be portrayed.

“There has been a lot of history with lesbian relationships, in particular, being fetishized by straight men,” Ha said. “It is un-

comfortable, and it also ties into the patriarchy and misogyny that is unfortunately very common in [the] media today.”

This leads to ongoing conversations about the imbalance between MLM and women-loving-women representation. MLM storylines are often given ma-

broading the types of stories being told. Despite ongoing debates about stereotypes and fetishization, some believe the growing visibility is encouraging more creators to tell their own stories. “While there are still a lot of issues with how queer people are portrayed, especially in the media, people are just feeling more inspired, especially by stuff like ‘Heated Rivalry,’ to get their own stories about queerness out there,” Ha said. Many athletes have been inspired to come out through “Heated Rivalry,” including former hockey player Matt Kenny. Many more athletes, like Olympic figure skater Amber Glenn and Olympic alpine ski racer Breezy Johnson have been out as society has become more accepting. Queer stories continue to gain more recognition. For LGBTQ+ teens especially, seeing relationships like theirs portrayed as central, meaningful and worthy of attention can reduce isolation and create space for more diverse storytelling. While representation is not perfect, it continues to evolve, moving from hidden subplots to stories that openly, and increasingly confidently, take center stage.



The tea on San Mateo tea

Ethan Fei
FEATURES WRITER

Tucked away in a corner in downtown San Mateo, Izumi Matcha has quickly become a quiet favorite for students looking for something more focused than the typical boba shop. This shop centers their identity on one thing: matcha.

Izumi Matcha offers drinks that highlight the earthiness and depth of the tea. I ordered the strawberry matcha latte and the crème brûlée matcha, both of which were layered in flavor and leaned on the sweeter side, so that each sip contained a subtle contrast between sweetness and matcha.

The Strawberry Matcha Latte looked great, with a deep red at the bottom that made it seem like there would be real fruit in every sip. I could taste a hint of fruitiness with the strawberry flavor. The overall impression I got was that the strawberry was there more for color and sweetness.

The crème brûlée matcha felt completely different, and was much heavier and richer. Visually, the contrasting dark green and light brown layers looked distinct, making the

drink feel intentional and carefully put together. The top layer of the drink tasted thick and creamy, and when mixed with the matcha below, the drink became a blend of sweetness and a tiny bit of bitterness. Out of the two, the crème brûlée matcha felt more cohesive and intentional, whereas the strawberry matcha latte's flavor leaned a bit more on sugariness without additional flavor.

"I really like the crème brûlée one," said sophomore Daphne Ying. "Because it was very sweet and [had] some foam in it ... it gives the matcha more creamy flavor."

Since Izumi Matcha focuses solely on its namesake, they are able to perfect their recipes and serve drinks that taste more authentic and high-quality than the matcha offered at typical boba shops.

"In downtown San Mateo, we don't have a lot of only matcha places," Ying said. "[Izumi is] able to perfect its recipe and make it authentic and really, really good."

Prices fall around seven dollars, which feels slightly expensive but still reasonable, as it's similar to many other stores around and reflects the higher cost of using high quality matcha.

"The price is kind of over-inflated," Lee said. "[But] it's reasonable for matcha inflation prices."

The atmosphere of the shop matched its simple menu, with decor that gives it a calm, minimalistic feel. There was a display case of neatly arranged matcha paraphernalia near the entrance. Everything in the display looked clean, and well-organized, with each item positioned almost like in an exhibit.

I liked the ability to see the workers make the orders in real time, just across the counter. I had a clear view of everything that was going on, and even though the shop was slightly crowded, it still felt spacious. The simplicity of the shop makes it feel quiet and focused, almost like a studio rather than a typical boba shop.

"It's a really cute shop ... [that] has a very modern vibe to it," Ying said. "It's very neutral-toned] ... It's a nice little space."

In the end, Izumi Matcha may be small, but its focus on matcha, its clean aesthetic and its thoughtfully balanced drinks make it stand out, proving that a shop doesn't need a long menu to leave a lasting impression. For its intentionality, flavor and atmosphere, Izumi Matcha earns a five out of five stars.



MOLLY TEA

茉莉奶白

really stood out to me. It felt like the shop was trying to highlight the tea rather than hiding it using sweetness, making the drinks feel intentional.

"It's more tea-based, and it's more fragrant teas," said sophomore Daphne Ying. "My favorite was the pistachio one, because I felt like the pistachio flavor really hit through."

However good the drinks may be, the shop has massive drawbacks, which include its long line and varying prices, ranging from the premium osmanthus milk tea's price of \$7.99 to the more expensive snowy jasmine's price of \$8.99.

"[Molly Tea is] the most overhyped thing ever," said sophomore Maximillian Lee. "It was not worth the line. I had to wait very long to get the drink."

When I finally got the Peach Oolong, I was disappointed by both the taste and the presentation because it felt rushed,

with the drink that attempted to look clean and put-together but failed. Instead of a bold flavor, the tea landed in an awkward place where neither the peach nor the oolong really stood out. The flavor felt dull, and the tea didn't have much depth, making it taste slightly watered down.

Overall, Molly Tea is a shop with a unique menu and flavors that I felt were underwhelming. For those who enjoy subtle, fragrant teas, Molly Tea offers something different from the usual boba-heavy options. But for other students expecting bolder flavors or quick service, the long wait and subdued taste may fall short, making Molly Tea worthy of two out of five stars.



When Molly Tea opened in downtown San Mateo, the line wrapped so far down the street that it became part of the shop's identity. The hype was immediate, and for many people, irresistible. However, after visiting the shop myself, the experience made me realize that the shop didn't fully live up to its popularity.

Molly Tea immediately stands out because it doesn't serve boba. Instead, it focuses on more fragrant, tea-based drinks and has three main categories: floral fresh milk tea, floral snowy whipped and fresh oat milk tea. I ordered the Peach Oolong, a light drink with a subtle peach flavor.

The drinks did end up surprising me. They tasted different from the typical boba shops downtown, and the tea

Anticlimactic: Wuthering Heights

Cayleigh Wilson
FEATURES WRITER

In 2026, Emily Brontë's 1847 novel "Wuthering Heights" returns to the big screen just in time for Valentine's Day, though whether it's the right pick for a romantic night out depends entirely on one's taste in love stories. Starring Jacob Elordi and Margot Robbie, the Feb. 13 release transforms Brontë's tale of obsession and revenge into a spectacle that has sparked significant controversy.

"Wuthering Heights" remains one of the most recognizable and haunting romances in English literature. The novel follows the relationship between Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff, her servant and best friend. Its psychological intensity has secured its reputation as a literary masterpiece, prompting numerous film adaptations. The latest version seeks to repackage it for a new generation. Casting widely recognizable stars like Robbie and Elordi attracts Gen Z audiences who may be more drawn to big names than 19th-century fiction.

The most immediate controversy surrounds the casting of Elordi as Heathcliff. In Brontë's novel, Heathcliff's race is never explicitly mentioned, but Heathcliff is repeatedly described as dark-skinned and a socially excluded outsider. Casting the Australian Elordi has prompted criticism online before the film even premiered. "Obviously, he's not the original race of Heathcliff, but [Elordi] took the character really well," said freshman Isla Beltzner.

The film sidesteps the racial implications that define Heathcliff's outsider status, reframing him as brooding and mysterious rather than socially ostracized. And although Elordi's on-screen presence is appealing, taking away the subtle nuance that has long been a layer in the masterpiece puts Emily Brontë to shame.

Robbie's role as Catherine Earnshaw, the female lead, drew less backlash, though her star status certainly influenced the casting. Known for her commanding performances as Barbie and Harley Quinn, Robbie leans into Catherine's volatility, delivering a portrayal that does Catherine's personality justice.

Elordi and Robbie's chemistry is undeniable. The camera lingers on charged glances and lingering touches, amplifying the sexual tension, at times.

"There was a lot [of tension that] you could see it through the screen," said sophomore Amara Garcia. "I was getting so excited."

Robbie and Elordi's passion seemed to leap off the screen. Some scenes were not part of Brontë's original version, but the tension helped viewers stay engaged. The explicit moments may have been slightly uncomfortable, but they added to the drama of the film.

Brontë's novel unfolds gradually, but by contrast, the film compresses events, foregrounding Heathcliff and Catherine's

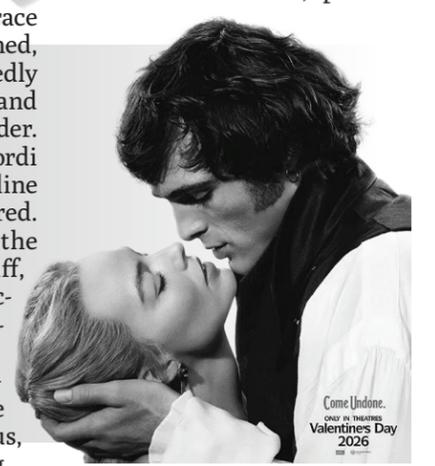
romance while minimizing the broader plot.

"There was a plot, but there was also a lot of making out," said sophomore Louise Martensson. "It was just unnecessary."

Because the romance was overemphasized, the absence of emotional depth in the relationship came as a disappointment. While it is difficult to transfer certain sentiments from a book to a movie, "Wuthering Heights" seemed to replace many details of Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship with physical displays of affection, making the climax of the movie, which should have been epic, lukewarm.

Visually, the film differs from the bleak Yorkshire moors that were described in the novel. Instead of muted grays, the cinematography included saturated hues. Some sets feature symbolic pops of color, which serve as fun easter eggs for book fans, but sometimes the bright colors looked vaguely tacky. This move was risky, given how many other aspects differ from the novel. Leaving the dreary aesthetic would have been more iconic, while also giving the film a more professional look.

The soundtrack has generated intense debate, particu-



COURTESY OF WARNER BROS. PICTURES

larly the inclusion of an original song by Charli XCX.

"The music ... wasn't bad," Martensson said. "It's just, why are we having Charli XCX write the music for a period piece?"

The song "I Think I'm Gonna Die in This House," which garnered popularity on TikTok prior to the movie release, plays during the opening sequence. Its modern, synth-heavy production seemed to clash against the 19th-century setting. Yet, it set the tone surprisingly well, adding energy that traditional orchestration couldn't achieve. It proved that sometimes breaking the rules can make a movie more memorable, even if it made the first scene unintentionally funny.

"Wuthering Heights" had its ups and downs. While elements like the original music added excitement, changes such as Heathcliff's race change seemed to blatantly disregard Brontë's artistic vision. Perhaps the worst aspect of the movie was the shortage of emotional resonance and the removal of key details, making this movie deserving of two out of five stars.



Opinion: we should not let media strip away humanity

Seona Srivastava
FEATURES WRITER

The most honest piece of journalism about youth mental health I've read wasn't written by a journalist.

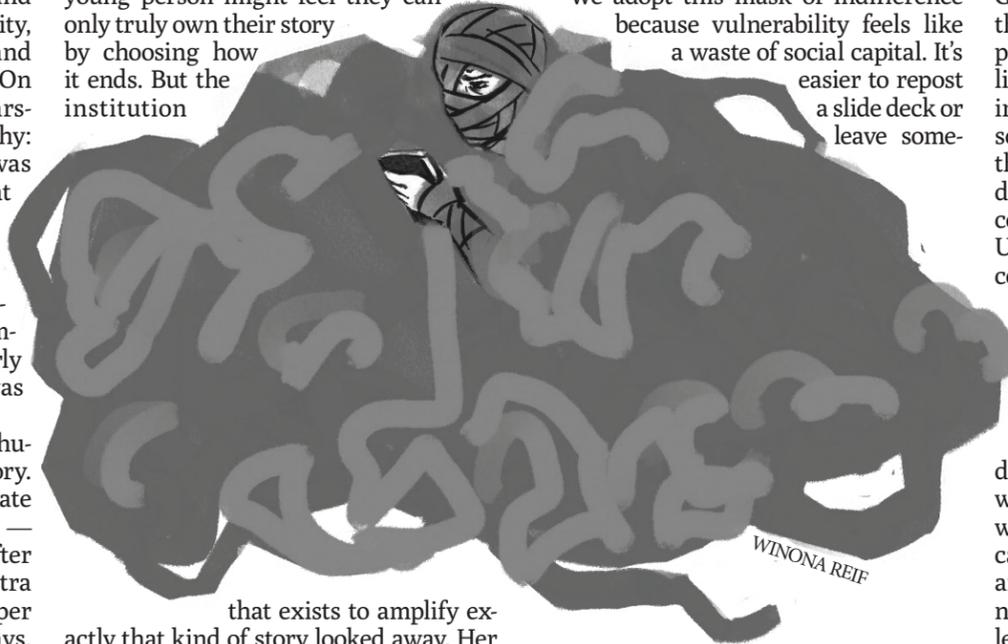
Summer Devi Mehta was a girl whose family shared space with mine. When thinking of her, I remember someone who loved Minecraft and hip-hop, and had a dream of living in New York City, a dream that felt less like a wish and more like an eventual certainty. On Feb. 3, she died by suicide at 16-years-old. In her own words, she named why: Summer was a trans girl, and this was central to her death. In the days that followed, her family shared her story and asked strangers for \$1 million dollars to donate to the Trevor Project, the leading suicide prevention organization for LGBTQ+ youth, a community that attempts suicide at nearly four times the rate of their peers. It was Summer's final wish.

But when the news broke, her humanity started to leak out of the story. The Palo Alto Daily Post's first update — published the same day she died — didn't name her until two days after she passed. But even with the two extra days, the most human detail the paper could offer was that she acted in plays, sourced not from anyone who loved her but from a casting website. The rest was about train delays, rubber cones and infrastructure statistics.

From a journalistic perspective, I understand this. When I covered suicide policy for The Outlook six months ago, I was handed a thick stack of guidelines to avoid "contagion" and "bias" — rules designed to protect the vulnerable, written with the best of intentions. But when a publication strips out the humanity of a story, it doesn't just fail the person being

covered but the reader, too. You cannot form an opinion about something you cannot feel. You cannot act on something you have already scrolled past.

And there is a haunting irony in the fact that, in her final moments of feeling powerless, Summer performed a profound act of agency. It is a staggering indictment of our social systems that a young person might feel they can only truly own their story by choosing how it ends. But the institution



that exists to amplify exactly that kind of story looked away. Her family had to instead.

And we are not much better. We are already marinated in catastrophe. We watched the Epstein files drop with clear names, dates and images, expecting a reckoning, only for the news cycle to simply turn the page. We see headlines about immigration enforcement raids — unconstitutional, family-separating, life-upending. Repost a "Know Your Rights" infographic for twenty-four hours, and call it solidarity. But reposting is the performance of caring:

it costs nothing, changes nothing and lets us feel like we did something without having to sit with the discomfort of actually doing something. When you are shown everything simultaneously — climate change, immigration, gun laws — but are given virtually no power to affect any of it, your empathy muscle withers, and then atrophies.

We adopt this mask of indifference because vulnerability feels like a waste of social capital. It's easier to repost a slide deck or leave some-

one on delivered than it is to have an intimate, difficult conversation. We are told we are the "leaders of tomorrow" — as if tomorrow excuses the fact that today, our voices don't count, our votes don't exist and our outrage is only useful as an aesthetic. We are handed the weight of the world's problems, but denied a lever to move it.

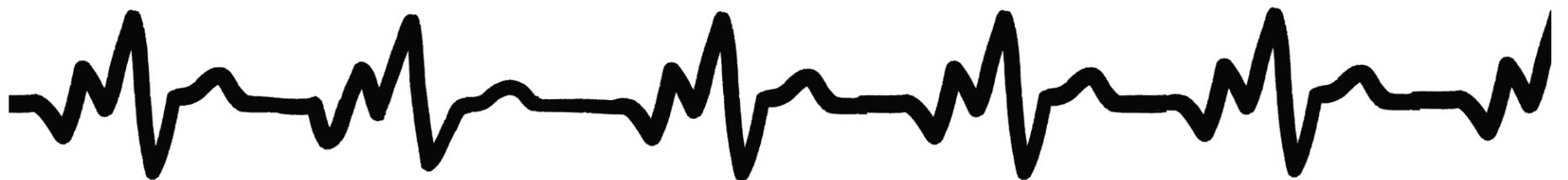
Yet, the floor occasionally shifts. The algorithm that usually numbs us was, for a moment, repurposed to organize us; the same tool that built our indifference be-

came the one that built the recent district walkout on Jan. 30. Students proved it is possible to hijack the shallow breadth of social media and force it into the depth of a movement.

The change has to start with how we tell our stories. For publications, the mandate is clear: resist clinical distance. Stop treating human beings as "events." Give us the Minecraft, the hip-hop and the NYC dreams, the details that make a person irreducible to a headline. A publication's job is not to dump information into a void. It is to give the reader a reason to care, and then a path to do something about it. If a publication's reporting doesn't evoke a visceral reaction when covering the fourth suicide in Palo Alto Union School District in two years, it isn't considered objective. It's irrelevant.

And for us, the students, the challenge is to trade breadth for depth. That means something specific: put down the slide deck, text the friend you've been avoiding, have the conversation you've been scared to start. One deep, difficult, and messy conversation with a peer about the fear we all feel is worth a thousand Instagram slides. Yes, caring is risky. Yes, you might speak up and nothing might change. But the alternative is a slow, cold desensitization that leaves us as hollowed as the headlines we scroll past.

The fundraiser for Summer is a \$1 million ultimatum delivered to our collective empathy. Her family gave readers a person and dared them to look away. Summer's final wish was that her death would make the world kinder. Whether it does depends entirely on whether we let her become another story we learned to scroll past — again — or whether we finally decide that some stories demand more from us than that.



Opinion: patient autonomy matters more than life

Anushka Punjabi
FEATURES WRITER

In 1997, Oregon became the first U.S. state to legalize physician-assisted death under the Death with Dignity Act. Over the last two decades, the law inspired similar legislation across the globe. In the U.S., physician-assisted death is now legal in 13 states — California, Washington, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, New Jersey, New Mexico, Vermont, Montana, Illinois, Delaware, New York and Oregon — and the District of Columbia. This policy has extended to countries like Canada, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Colombia, and ranges in specifics — in Switzerland, physician-assisted death can be performed by non-physicians. The passage of physician-assisted death laws marked a shift in medical ethics and public policy, putting patient autonomy at the forefront of care.

Physician-assisted death can be described as a physician indirectly aiding in a patient's death, whether than means providing them with the means and knowledge of how to end their life — often through doses of drugs — or honoring their wish to stop or refuse treatment to prolong their life.

For patients who are terminally ill, life can become a prolonged sense of dying, defined by pain, dependence and a loss their of control.

"If [the patient] has six months to live, it is [already like] death," said junior Ronon Lohr.

By giving patients the legal right to choose when and how to end their life, physician-assisted death lets them make a decision without being at the mercy of a debilitating disease.

Passed in California, the End of Life Option Act allows for physician-assisted death so long as certain requirements are fulfilled: the patient must be an adult, able to make their own informed decisions and have a prognosis of six months or less to request medication to peacefully end their lives. The law is deliberate and heavily regulated. Patients must make multiple requests, receive confirmation from two physicians and show mental competence. These safeguards exist because the decision is serious. But just because a choice holds gravity does not make it immoral.

In fact, denying the option of physician-assisted death is what crosses a line.

"It allows someone to die with control and dignity," said junior Macklin Berg. "I don't think it devalues life at all. Devaluing life would be if they didn't choose to die and people around them were choosing for them."

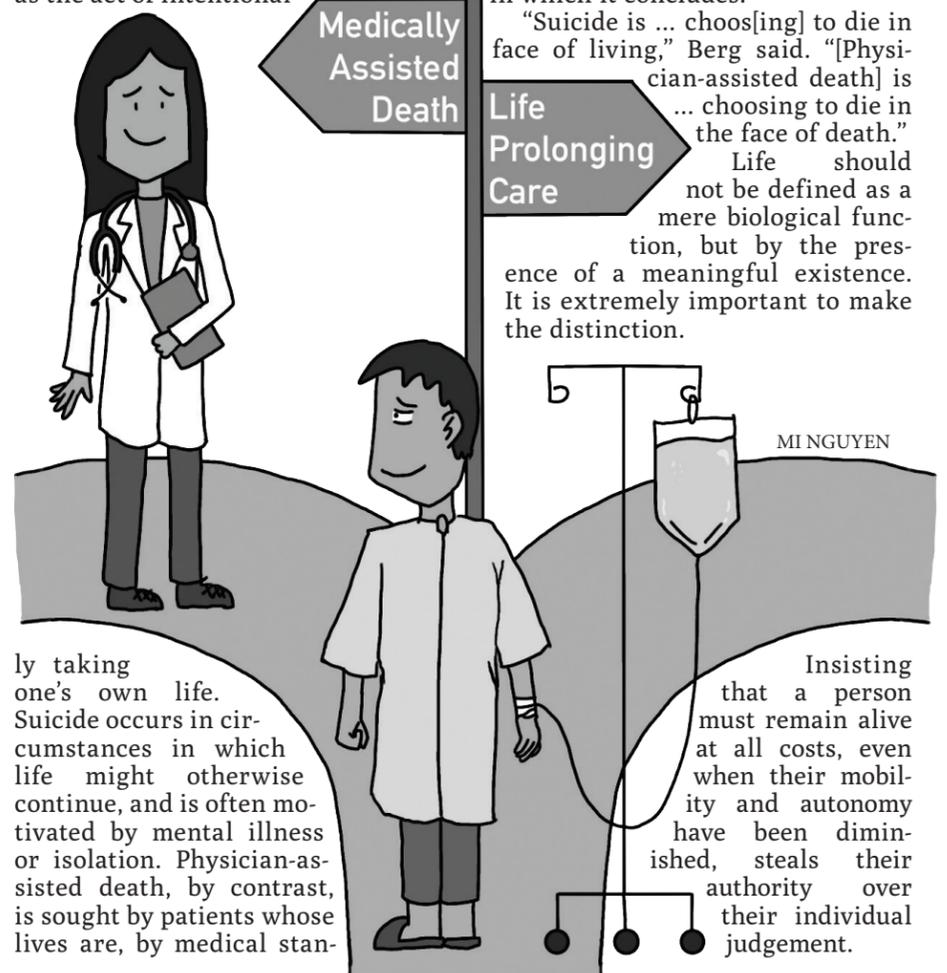
Denying a terminally ill person the right to die peacefully and take control of their death does not protect life, and it is a self-centered way to exercise control over the lives and personhood of others.

It is important to clarify the distinction between physician-assisted death and suicide, which is defined as the act of intentional-

ly taking one's own life. Suicide occurs in circumstances in which life might otherwise continue, and is often motivated by mental illness or isolation. Physician-assisted death, by contrast, is sought by patients whose lives are, by medical stan-

dards, coming to an end, and whose desire is not to escape life itself but to exercise control over the manner in which it concludes.

"Suicide is ... choos[ing] to die in face of living," Berg said. "[Physician-assisted death] is ... choosing to die in the face of death." Life should not be defined as a mere biological function, but by the presence of a meaningful existence. It is extremely important to make the distinction.

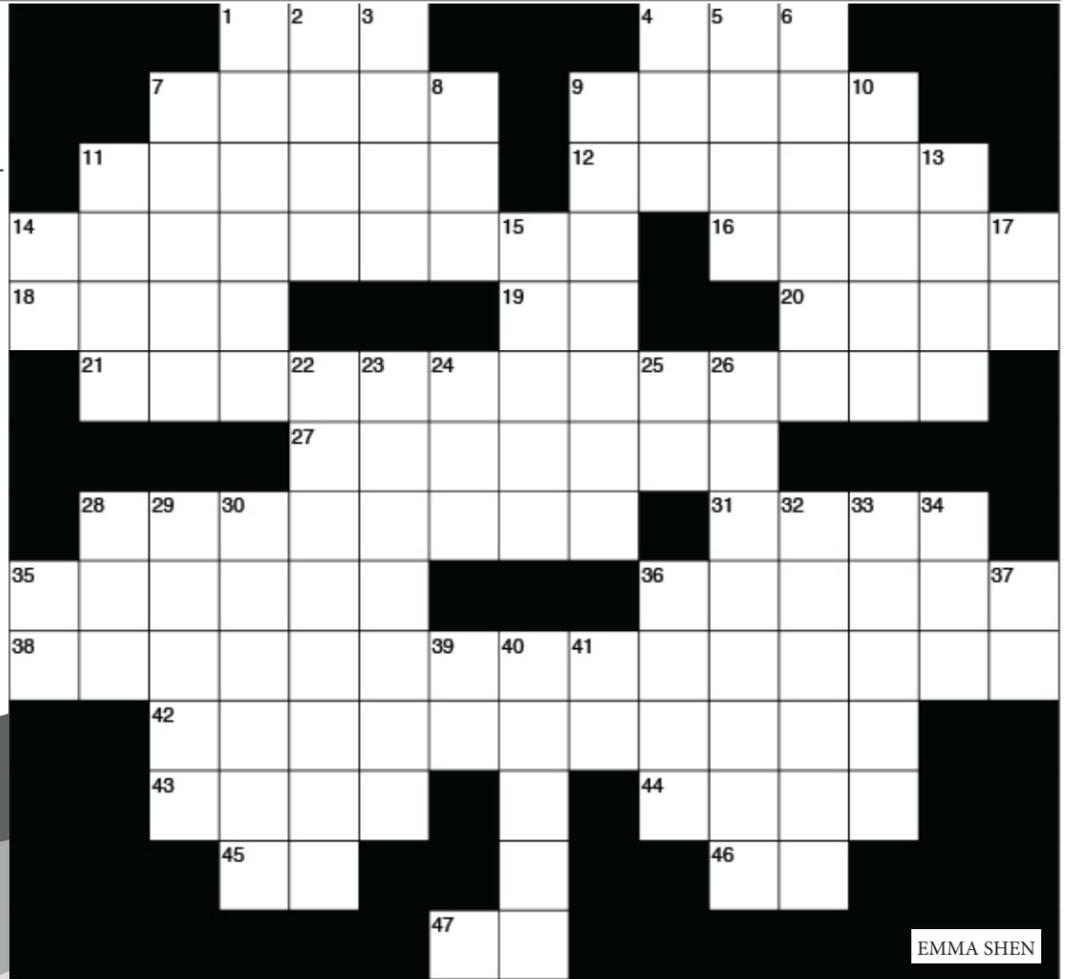


Insisting that a person must remain alive at all costs, even when their mobility and autonomy have been diminished, steals their authority over their individual judgement.

ACROSS

- 1. City without the vowel
- 4. See you, in text
- 7. Dutch word for woman
- 9. To supply with weapons
- 11. ___ Leone, a West African country and Frank Ocean song
- 12. -onist, the leading character of a story
- 14. The 2025 Louvre heist or 1911 Mona Lisa theft, for example
- 16. Fast-breaking meal during Ramadan
- 18. Home to Mormons and dirty sodas
- 19. Mountain, abbreviated
- 20. Lead singer of Panic! at the Disco; rhymes with 3D
- 21. Will roll jelly across the

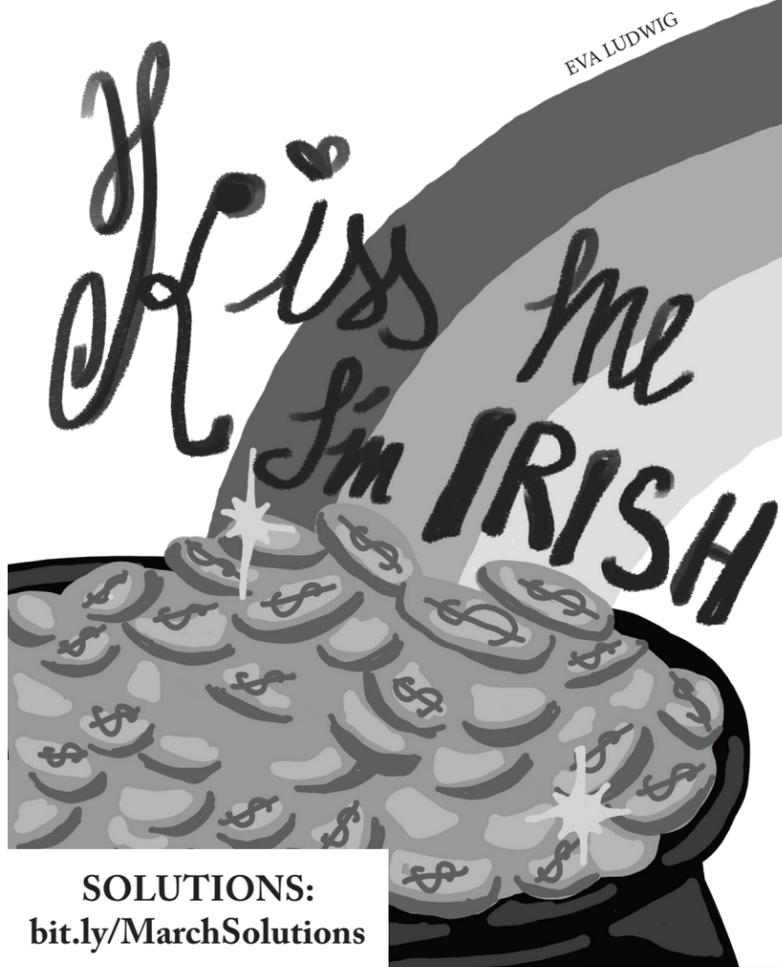
- floor when invited to make a desert
- 27. A nonsecular individual
- 28. There's an unprotected ___ driving out of the Aragon student parking lot
- 31. Superhero accessory
- 35. Consolation
- 36. -sexual, the opposite of 3D or 5D
- 38. Popular proverb, ___ is not 14D
- 42. A period to recover from a foot injury?
- 43. Members of Congress, abbreviated
- 44. Airb___ or hawth___
- 45. Nanogram
- 46. Commercial
- 47. ___-N-Out



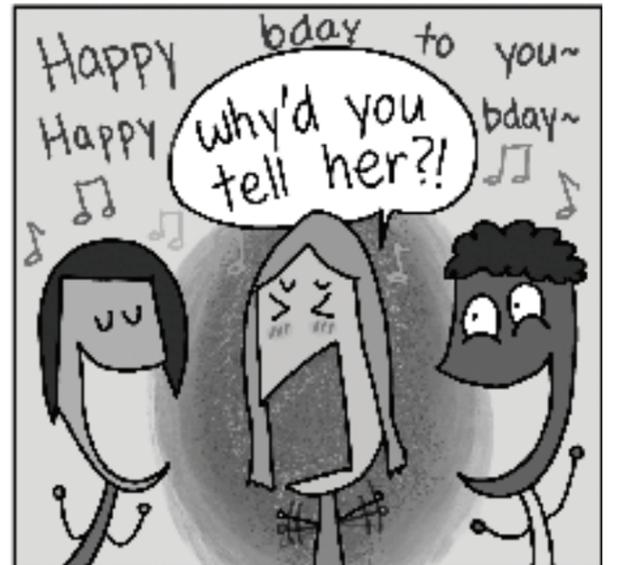
EMMA SHEN

DOWN

- 1. Nativity scene
- 2. Unit of pressure
- 3. Lesbians but Japanese
- 4. Core natural resources, abbreviated
- 5. Gay men but Japanese
- 6. Like the people who commit 14A
- 7. ___-in, an essential organic micro-nutrient
- 8. The duo that sang Last Christmas, minus an 'H'
- 9. [REDACTED] files
- 10. Join together in holy ___mony
- 11. Señorita, abbreviated
- 13. Earth goddess in Greek mythology
- 14. Chemical symbol for gold
- 15. ___ Lumen, fire girl in Elemental
- 17. Subject, in email
- 22. Hooking
- 23. Response units for crash victims
- 24. Air handling unit, abbreviated
- 25. Videogame console Nintendo ___
- 26. And so on
- 28. Laughing in text
- 29. They (plural, female) in Spanish
- 30. What the witch wanted to do to Hansel and Gretel
- 32. To show up for
- 33. Key and ___, American comedy series
- 34. ___ on the side of caution
- 35. Crime on 9D island
- 36. Dwarf rally song in Snow White
- 37. Operating system, abbreviated
- 39. Tea in Spanish
- 40. Georgetown, colloquially
- 41. ___ and behold



SOLUTIONS:
bit.ly/MarchSolutions



MI NGUYEN

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Reporting by
Phoebe Harger and
Max Feng

Photos by Madeline Allen,
Brandon Ho, Colin Fournier,
Haley Lau

Following two seasons as league champions, the Aragon boys tennis team is very different from years past.

"I lost a lot of guys from those two teams," said coach David Owdom. "[However,] I still have a couple very talented players from that team."

Despite this, some feel the team still isn't as strong as years past.

"I think we were strongest last year and the year before because six of our seniors left," said senior Max Gan.

Coming off of a strong season, with the girls ending second in PAL Bay Division and the boys in fourth, the Aragon track and field team hopes to continue doing well.

"[Last year] we had a number of kids go to CCS," said head coach Denise Fournier. "The hope is that the girls [4x100-meter relay] or girls [4x400-meter relay] will get a school record this year."

Last season many records were set, including the boys 400-meter dash by senior Charles Harger, girls 100-meter dash by junior Mina Hwang, boys 4x800-meter relay by Harger, senior Tyler Nichols, senior Luke Novak and alumnus Miles Rokala, girls 4x100 by alumna Stella Pisaro, senior Madison Ketcham, junior Amelia Hayden-Gephart and Hwang and finally the girls pole vault by alumnae Fern Aceituno and Eliana Shao.

The team has many strong athletes returning, including many of the record breakers.

"All those people with the exception of the pole vaulters are still on the team this year," Fournier said. "So we should be able to show a very strong team in the league."

Aragon's track and field team offers many different events, from the mile to the 100-meter dash. Each event has its own

Last year's boys varsity volleyball team ended the season winning 15 of their 33 games, entering CCS playoffs and exiting in the first round.

With a roster composed of six sophomores, seven juniors and only four seniors the previous season, the team was young for a varsity team. This season, the team is now matured, and many of

"[Regardless] we're still really strong [and] we have a few returning players, some good sophomores and a lot of good freshmen this year."

During the average practice, Owdom tries to make it primarily gameplay.

"A lot of these people have attended clinics," Owdom said. "But they don't play people. When you're playing people, [losing a point] matters. When you lose a point at a clinic, [you move on] to the next one."

One of the biggest issues the team is facing early in the season has nothing to do with tennis itself.

"The only thing that's bad is [that] the flu has taken over our team," Owdom said. "Some [players] are even

head coach, and they all practice separately.

"We're pretty separated by event," Fournier said. "Each event is so different and [they] train differently from the other ones."

The team radiates a good chemistry both within and among grades.

"I'd say the team chemistry is just as good as last year, if not better," Harger said.

"The practices seem to be very fun and engaging for all of the athletes. I always see everybody wearing a smile."

The team is on the uptick with many strong runners returning along with new runners ready to improve.

Their next meet is the Fifth Annual Fighting Knights Relays on March 14.

the players continue to play.

"We have a lot more juniors than we did last year," said senior and middle Luca Mangano. "We're also a lot more balanced this year."

There is only one sophomore on the team this year, ten juniors and six seniors as opposed to four.

"I have ten returning varsity players," said head coach Meliame Hala'ufia. "I hope that ... [they are] coming in a year later more experienced."

With the stronger team, Hala'ufia has some more ambitious goals.

"[We hope] to win league, make it to CCS and get as far as

playing hurt, and I don't want them doing that."

After the team overcomes the wave of sickness, they have lots of goals.

"We're definitely going for PALS again," Gan said. "And hopefully we can make it past [the] second round of CCS."

Tennis is a pretty competitive sport for playing time, as Aragon only has one team.

"We only have one team, so it's all varsity," Gan said.

"But [only] the top ten have the matches that count toward the team's wins."

Despite the limited playing time, the team still has camaraderie and everyone is friendly with each other.

"I spoke with a parent the other day," Owdom said, "She [said that her son] says the seniors are so nice and

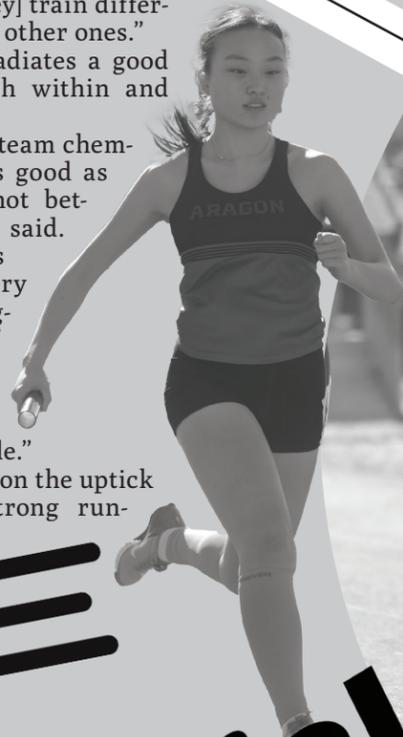
helpful. When I hear that, that's great."

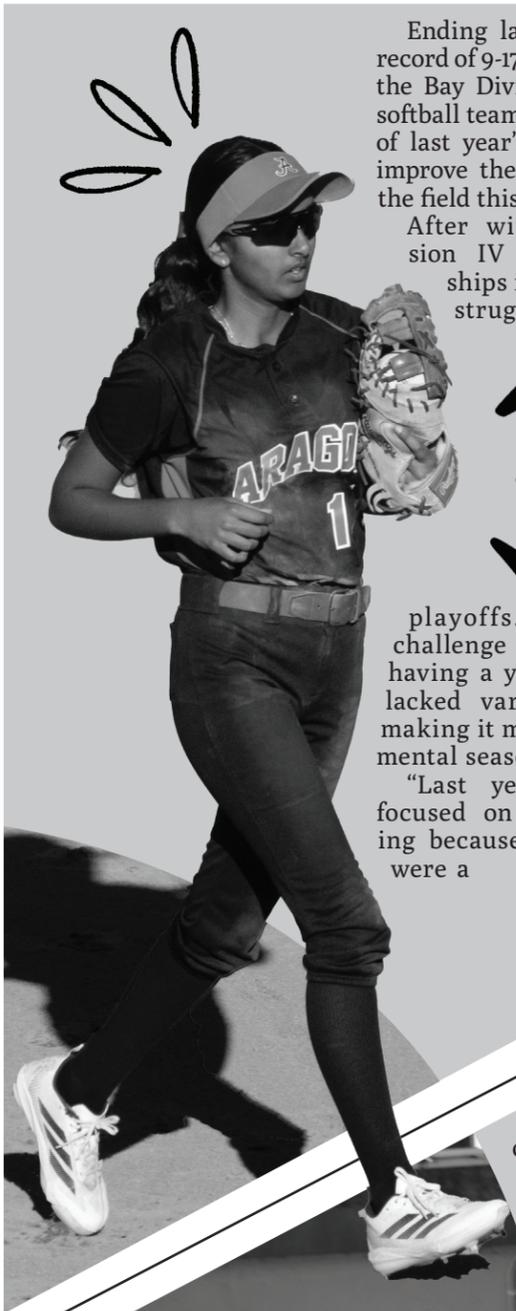
Their next match is on March 12 against San Mateo High School.

Boys Tennis

Track & Field

Boys Volleyball





Ending last season with a record of 9-17 overall and 5-9 in the Bay Division, the Aragon softball team looks to build off of last year's experience and improve their consistency on the field this season.

After winning the Division IV CCS championships in 2024, the Dons struggled to see the results they wanted during last year's season, ultimately falling short of making the playoffs. Much of that challenge stemmed from having a young roster that lacked varsity experience, making it more of a developmental season for the team.

"Last year we were focused on rebuilding because we were a

really young team, but now this season we are focused on playing at the highest level possible," said junior Tahlia Shahani. "I think we have really strong players but also just a great team dynamic, and we're really hoping to win CCS this year."

Although the roster remains underclassman heavy, with just two seniors leading the team, the Dons have many strong returning players who gained valuable experience last season.

"I think that we're starting the season off a lot stronger than last since we were able to get close last year and get to know each other really well," said sophomore Rachel Horwitz.

Softball

Head coach Bill Barthold finds it difficult to predict this season's results.

"It's hard to say right now [where we'll place]," Barthold said. "We've only had one meet and we didn't have a full complement of swimmers. It may not be a true reflection of the overall team quality."

Many of the swimmers have different goals.

The team will also be backed by Clemson commit junior Taylor Workman, who provides both leadership and collegiate-level talent to the lineup. With experienced returners and emerging underclassmen stepping into larger varsity roles, the Dons are confident as they head into the season and hopeful to finish with a winning record and trip to the playoffs.

Their next game will be against Aptos on March 13 at Aptos High School.

ter than they are," Barthold said.

Athletes who swim off-season at club teams adjust to a different training regimen.

"I would say Aragon [practice] is a little less challenging for me," said freshman Christopher Lu. "The intervals are a little shorter, and I don't think it's as much swimming."

Sophomore Siena Chen details the average daily practice structure.

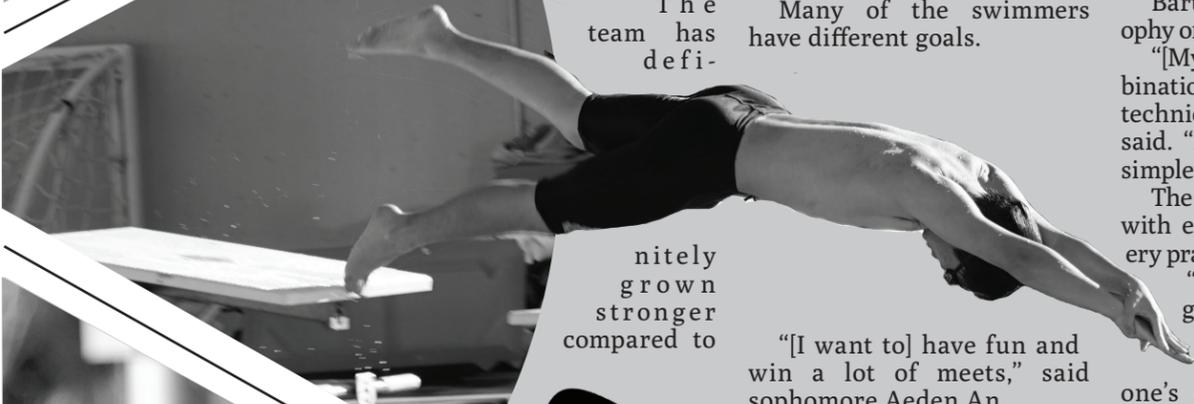
"We do warm ups and then usually do two or three different sets," Chen said. "Sometimes we do drills to make our strokes better."

Barthold shows his philosophy on how he runs practice. "[My practices are] a combination of conditioning and technique drills," Barthold said. "I would say that's the simplest way to [describe] it."

The team is very friendly with each other, making every practice a safe place to be.

"I think it's a really good environment," Lu said. "We're pretty friendly and everyone's chill with each other."

Their next meet is on March 14.



nitely grown stronger compared to

"[I want to] have fun and win a lot of meets," said sophomore Aeden An.

Barthold's main goal is to help the athletes improve.

"My goal is very simple: it's to make [the swimmers] bet-

Swimming

tering the season with a significantly younger lineup, relying on many newcomers to step into varsity roles for the first time.

Luckily, the team has been putting in the work since the new year, holding several weight training workouts a week throughout January before officially starting tryouts and field practices in early February.

"A lot of the girls have been showing up consistently, putting in the work in the weight room and on the field," said head coach Ashley Parham. "Since we are a younger team, accountability and hard work are going to be critical if we want to compete at a higher level this season."

Despite having a more inexperienced team than last year, new players such as senior Annalise Krause are

excited and hopeful for the upcoming season.

"So far the team has been really uplifting, especially to the new players," Krause said. "I think we're a really hardworking team and I'm sure we will only continue to improve and work better together as the season progresses."

In addition to individual development, the team is also working to improve overall communication and organization on the field.

"A big thing we're focusing on in practice right now is calling and designing offensive plays," said senior Natalie Horwitz. "We also just need to start communicating more with one an-

other, which I think definitely starts at practice."

As the season gets underway, the girls lacrosse team is hopeful that their hard work in the offseason, as well as their continued efforts at practice, will translate into improved results on the field and a possible playoff run. Their next game will be March 13 against Presentation High School.



After ending with a record of 3-10 overall last year, the girls lacrosse team is looking to find more success on the field this season. As 13 of last year's varsity players were seniors, the team is en-

Girls Lacrosse

LAST WEEK'S SCORES:

Track & Field
v. San Mateo
3/4

Varsity Girls:
W 76-58

Varsity Boys:
W 76-48

Varsity Boys
Volleyball
v. Lowell

3/4
W 3-1

Varsity
Badminton
v. Mills

3/5
W 25-5

Varsity Boys
Tennis
v. Burlingame

3/5
W 6-1

Varsity Baseball
v. Crystal
Springs

3/6
W 4-3

Varsity Girls
Lacrosse
v. Notre Dame

3/6
L 20-12

Varsity Boys
Golf
v. Woodside

3/9
L 198-244

Varsity Softball
v. Santa Teresa

3/7
W 6-4

GIRLS SOCCER DEFEATED IN SEMIFINALS

Luke Trimble
SPORTS WRITER

First year head coach Kaylyn Toyama's inaugural trip to the postseason took Aragon's girls soccer team all the way to the Division IV Coastal California Section semifinals, where they fell 1-0 to the Menlo Knights.

The Dons finished the regular season 6-5-7 overall, going 4-4-4 in their league and earning fifth place in the Peninsula Athletic League's Bay Division.

"I thought we did well scoring more and finishing goals towards the end of the season because that was a problem we had at the beginning," said freshman and midfielder Reina Chen.

On Feb. 21, the top-seeded Dons hosted the eight-seeded Pacific Collegiate School Pumas (11-4-2 overall, 8-2-2 league) in a defensive quarterfinal battle that stayed scoreless through overtime. Impressive goalkeep-

ing performances from both teams prevented either side from pulling ahead late.

"Our goalkeepers did absolutely phenomenal

and they really kept us in the game with some awesome saves," said junior and right wing Keira Michon. "And our defense really came together ... making sure that they covered everybody, but also making runs up the field and making sure to get back [on defense]."

With neither team leading after overtime, the game went to a penalty kick shootout where each team had five kicks to take the lead over their opponents, which played to the Dons' favor.

"We knew that they didn't have a goalkeeper," Toyama said. "So our biggest strength was that if we could get lots of shots off, we had a solid defense. Hopefully if we went to [penalty kicks], we could win."

The Pumas missed their first two penalty kicks, setting the Dons up with an opportunity to advance to the next round.

"Going into that moment, I practiced it a bunch of times. And so I had a plan," said junior and left winger Tessa Matthews, who took the first penalty shot. "I was going to go bottom left corner, and so I just stuck to the plan, and kept calm."

Matthews buried the shot exactly where she intended for the first score of the game. Each of the next three Aragon players followed suit, nailing their attempts as the Dons cruised to a 4-1 victory.

Following the win against the Pumas, the Dons rolled into a semifinal matchup against the fifth-seeded Menlo Knights (8-3-7 overall, 5-1-4 league) on Feb. 25, where

the Dons' defense started off strong again.

However, with nine minutes to go in the first half, the Knights sank a shot in the bottom corner of the Dons' goal for a 1-0 lead.

"This game was unfortunate," Toyama said. "[Goalie Lorelei Rustay] didn't see the ball because it was a corner kick. It deflected off somebody and then went into the goal, so it was really no fault to anybody."

The Dons' defense backed up their goalkeepers by continuing their shutdown performance for the rest of the match.

"I think we did a good job of defending our backline," Matthews said. "They were running after every ball and were super aggressive ... We did a good job of just not giving up."

Unfortunately, the Aragon offense's opportunity for a comeback ran out.

Although the season ended sooner than the Dons may have liked, Toyama still considered her first year to be a success. Her coaching prowess proved valuable to the players' and team's performance in her opening season.

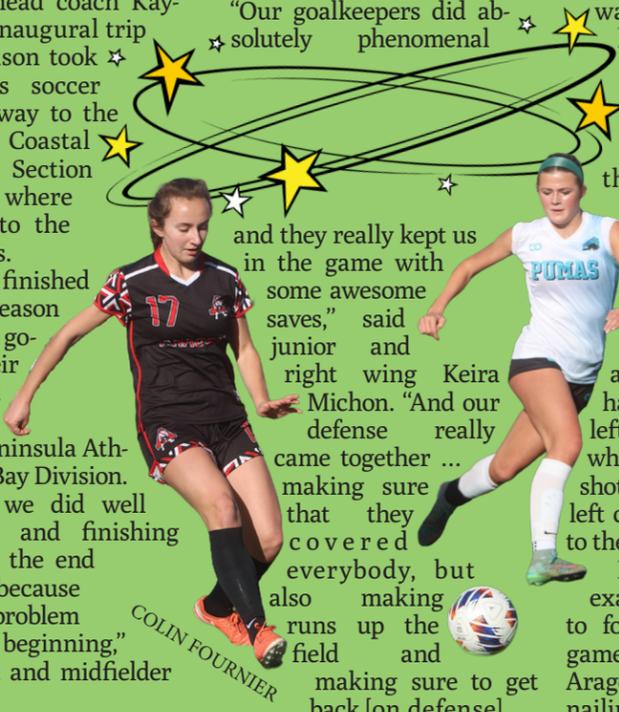
"She did a really good job of checking out how the other teams played and then helping us adjust and really work as a team to figure out how we all play and then adjust that on the field," Michon said.

With a fantastic debut season in the books, Toyama will look to build upon the team's 2025-2026 success.

"It's a really good program. I really like all the girls in the program," Toyama said. "Every-

body buys into what we're working on and commits to showing up for each other, so I'm really just excited for the girls and to see the next levels we can push [to] next year."

The new look team will begin their new season next winter.



COLIN FOURNIER



AIDAN KASTEN

GIRLS BASKETBALL FALLS SHORT IN CHAMPIONSHIP GAME

Alex Choy
SPORTS WRITER

On Feb. 28, the Aragon girls varsity basketball team suffered a 64-27 loss against the No. 1 seed Valley Christian Warriors in the Central Coast Section Division II championship game, closing out a memorable playoffs journey for the Dons that featured wins against rivals San Mateo and Hillsdale.

This also marks the conclusion of a largely successful season, which saw the team finish fourth in the Peninsula Bay League. In the process, they had clawed their way back up from a five-game losing streak, before igniting into a seven-game winning run in the latter half of the season.

"We started off the season in a really tough place," said

senior and team captain Ellie McGinty. "We were losing a lot of games by so few points ... [but] I'm

most proud of the fact that our team never gives up ...

[Regardless of the results] we always keep working harder and pushing forward."

Having clinched the No. 3 seed in Division II, the team came into the playoffs with strong expectations, looking to end their season on a high note.

Aragon's first challenge would come in the form of the No. 6 seed San Mateo Bearcats. The Dons, having beaten San Mateo in both league matchups, came into the game with confidence.

Against the odds, San Mateo initially succeeded in their efforts to keep Aragon at bay with a stubborn defense, stunning the favorites with a sequence of breakaway layups as Aragon struggled to respond on offense. As the first quarter concluded with the Bearcats seemingly in control, Aragon knew that if they wanted to win, they would have to press with the intensity they had been lacking, and in the second quarter, they did just that.

"The turning point was [when we started] applying a lot of pressure on them," said senior and team captain Daisy Pantoja Beltran. "Their guards ... weren't that good at dribbling the ball ... Once we pressured them, they kept turning over the ball ... [and] it was [all] good from there."

Aragon's relentless aggression stopped San Mateo's offensive threat for much of the game, leaving the door wide open for the Dons to cruise into a commanding 55-27 victory, allowing them to set their sights on their next roadblock, Hillsdale.

"We all hate Hillsdale, [and] we ... take the rivalry very seriously," McGinty said. "We definitely were expecting that it was gonna be a hard game,

... [but] something that really fuels us is [when] you're out there, you're out there to win, to represent your school, ... your community and your friends and [classmates]."

Winning against No. 2 seed Hillsdale would be no easy task, especially as their fiercest rivals. With both teams ready to fight their way to a place in the CCS Division II finals, the stakes could not have been higher for the season's final "Battle of the Fleas".

The sky-high anticipation and tension developed into 32 minutes of play which could have only been described as a breathtakingly fiery and relentless contest, with nonstop back-and-forth action marred by dirty fouls — it was a strenuous struggle of passion, pride and grit.

"When you're out on the court [and] you feel ... the motivation and the intensity [while] playing Hillsdale specifically, [it] just cannot [be] replicated," McGinty said. "Every round, every point, ... every single little thing really adds up. They are really tight games because of how similarly skilled we are, ... [and] it makes the rivalry ... even greater."

As the clock ran down, both teams were seemingly inseparable. A late run by the Dons put them into a four-point lead, 38-34. Barely a single minute later, they had squandered

the lead, and with five seconds to go, the spotlight fell on senior and center Jayda Parangan who, with the ball and an open layup, was granted the opportunity to win it all.

"Just five seconds before, ... I had given them the game," Parangan said. "We were up by two, and I basically threw [the ball] into [our opponent's] hands, for a layup. I was mad at myself, [thinking] 'If we lose, it's my fault. So I have to [make amends].' ... Then, [in that moment], it was a beautiful pass from Lauren [Pong], ... and the ball [was] right in front of me, I just had to put it in the basket."

And with that shot, the Dons had punched their tickets to a seventh CCS championship game in truly spectacular fashion, and under the most unfavorable of circumstances.

The Dons had little time to celebrate, however, as the final team standing between them and the CCS title, No. 1 seed Valley Christian, would be their most formidable adversary yet.

"Most private schools go to the open division, ... but Valley Christian actually dropped down into our division to play us," said

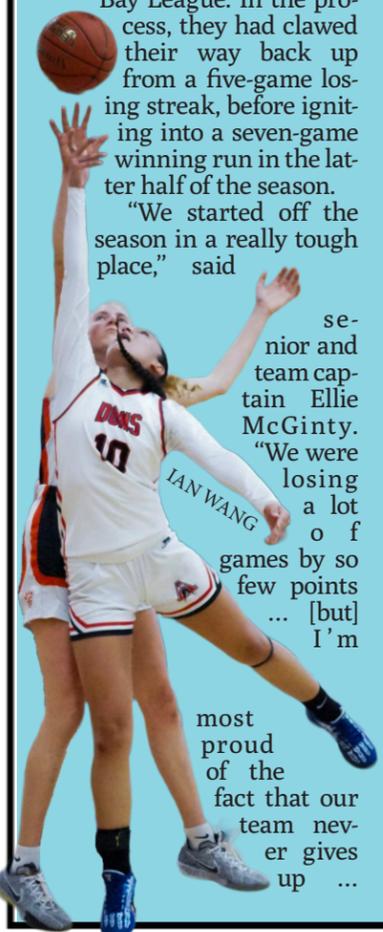
McGinty. "That wasn't expected, and we knew it was going to be a really hard game, but obviously we were still hoping to win."

Unfortunately, the game would prove to be a mismatch, with Valley Christian overwhelming Aragon for much of the game and drifting to a 64-27 win.

While the score told a tale of a crushing loss, spectators and players alike would say otherwise. The game itself epitomized the team's fighting spirit and the unwillingness to give up — something no scoreline could ever show.

"It was a testament to our season ... [that] when you're in the gym six days a week, grinding it out with the same people, you want to play hard ... [and] work hard," McGinty said. As the game closed out, so did a truly memorable season, full of ups and downs.

The team played their last game of the season on March 3, losing to University Prep, 65-60.



IAN WANG



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