

Peter Alvarez arrives



COURTESY OF PETER ALVAREZ

Angela Nguyen
FEATURES EDITOR

On April 30, the San Mateo Union High School District Board of Trustees approved Peter Alvarez's contract to be Aragon's principal for the 2026-2027 school year.

Alvarez has over 30 years of experience across both assistant principal and principal roles at numerous high schools. Most recently, he has served as the principal of Campolindo High School since 2022.

Alvarez cited community values in his decision to apply to Aragon.

"I know that Aragon has incredible diversity ... incredible programs ... [and] some of the

most wonderful teachers," Alvarez said. "It had so many of the things that I truly value in education around [like] the [Advancement Via Individual Determination] program. It has students who are dedicated to academics. It has [a] parent community that's engaged [and] a teaching community that wants to do the best thing for kids."

The hiring process began with faculty meetings to discuss different values the staff hoped to see in the upcoming principal. Then, teachers were asked to volunteer for different stages of the selection process, which included the paper screening, interviews and visiting the school site. The first round of interviews with Aragon teachers, students and parents were divided into two groups: extracurricular/social emotional learning and instruction. The extracurricular/social emotional learning interview focused on school activities, while the other was on academic instruction
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Phone pouches coming

Diya Poojary
NEWS WRITER

On March 26, the San Mateo Union High School District Board of Trustees voted unanimously to implement a district wide bell-to-bell phone policy starting the 2026-27 academic year. This decision was made in accordance with the Phone-Free School Act signed by Gov. Gavin Newsom in 2024, which requires school boards to adopt policies limiting or prohibiting phone use in schools before July 1, 2026.

The policy restricts phone use from the first bell to the end of the school day. Some exceptions will be made in specific circumstances, such as for students with approved accommodations or medical, technology or translation needs.

This was a significant departure from Booker's recommendation, which suggested keeping the current phone policies, citing a relatively flexible framework to restrict phone use during classes that could be

enforced to varying extents by school, while also reducing expenditure, infrastructure and training required to institute a phone ban policy.

"[Initially] I was not on board at all [with the phone ban policy]," said SMUHSD Trustee Ligia Andrade Zúñiga. "But reading through the supporting documentation that I received, the different mental health studies and then [talking to] a group of teachers and parents and some students about it, I leaned more towards [it]."

In fall 2024, the committee corroborated concerns related to student academic performance due to phone use, cyberbullying, impacts on socio-emotional development and lack of face-to-face interactions.

Additionally, two Panorama surveys in the 2025 spring and fall semesters gathered general opinions from teachers, parents, guardians and students regarding the current phone policies, and any problems encountered with it. 84.7% of students and 56.6% of parents/guardians agreed that the current policy restricting cell phones during classes, but not breaks, worked sufficiently.
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ALLINAH ZHAN

Aragon presents "Till the Break of Dons"

Renee Ren
NEWS WRITER

Aragon's dance program held its annual dance showcase, "Till the Break of Dons," on May 8 and 9 from 7-9 p.m. Taking place in the theater, it featured the dance classes, along with Aragon Ballet Folklórico Club, Hip Hop Club, Dance4Health Club and the fall and winter dance teams.

"[The] end of the year showcase [is] where the students get to show off all the hard work, time, effort and dedication that they [have] put into their dances," said dance teacher Marisa Castillo. "[Not] only am I choreographing, but the students get to choreograph [as well]. They get to really see how

their work looks on a bigger stage, which is a very unique opportunity."

Choreographing the dances starts early in the year. Castillo first asks the dance class members for proposals of their dances in November. By January, classes are spent learning the dances and preparing for the show. Dance clubs

and dance teams were also contacted at this time to see if there is interest in participating in the showcase.

The choreography and themes that the dancers conveyed in their pieces originated from varying sources of inspiration.

"We did [an Indian classical piece] that focused on Lord Krishna's beauty and grace," said junior and Dance4Health Club president Kirthana Warrior. "Everyone has a special attachment [to] his dance pieces, because there's a lot of jumping and a lot of upbeat music. You correlate him to childishness and [having a] carefree nature."

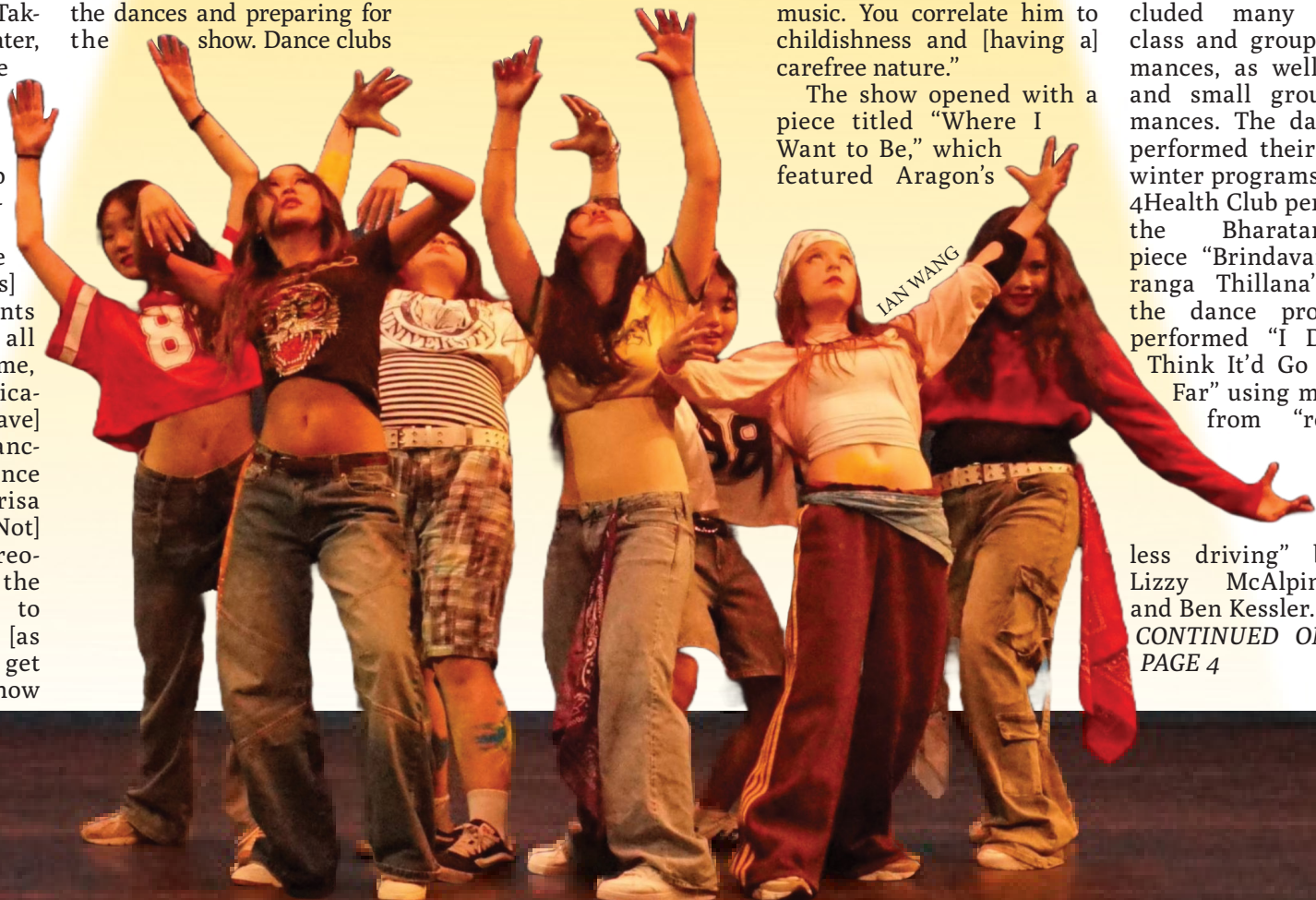
The show opened with a piece titled "Where I Want to Be," which featured Aragon's

dance classes.

It was followed by a few opening speeches from Castillo and the student directors.

The showcase included many whole class and group performances, as well as solos and small group performances. The dance team performed their fall and winter programs, Dance4Health Club performed the Bharatanatyam piece "Brindavana Saranga Thillana" and the dance program performed "I Didn't Think It'd Go This Far" using music from "reck-

less driving" by Lizzy McAlpine and Ben Kessler.
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IAN WANG

Alvarez to be Aragon's new principal starting July 1

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1 and involvement with teachers. The second interview round was with the District Office.

"[Alvarez's understanding of Aragon showed] when he was answering questions, [as did] his ability to connect to different aspects of our campus," said AVID and Ethnic Studies teacher Courtney Caldwell, who was part of the instruction interview. "It's an outsider coming in who hasn't worked on campus but has clearly looked at our [Western Association of Schools and Colleges report] ... He was able to speak about his experience and things he's done at his own school site, but also then connect to things at Aragon that were of value to him."

To gain further insight into Alvarez, members of the Aragon community also visited Campo-

lindo High School to speak to their students and faculty.

"The custodian talked about him coming out with pruning shears and pruning things on the campus," said English teacher Holly Estrada, who was part of the site visit. "Or people talked about him walking by and seeing a student all alone under a tree every day and saying, 'What are we going to do for him?' ... Their faces [showed] that they were crushed that he was going to be leaving but they loved and respected him so much that they couldn't get in the way [of] him doing something that might be better for him."

The visit also highlighted Alvarez's impact on community members.

"There was a guy who Mr. Alvarez had hired ... and worked with," said athletic director Steve Sell, who was part

of the extracurricular/social emotional learning interview and site visit. "He got promoted, [so] he was working at another school in the district ... and this [guy] took time out of his day to come [to Campolindo High School] and speak on his behalf ... [Mr. Alvarez] just left behind people who were extremely loyal to him, because he was a servant leader."

Throughout Alvarez's four-year stay at Campolindo, he made many changes to the school.

"I found out from the site visit ... [that] he recognized that the library was pretty dead," said junior Catherine Tsao, who was a part of the extracurricular/social emotional learning interview and site visit. "[Since the change] there's more [than] 200 students in there a day [at a 1300] student school, which is pretty

significant compared to how it was before [when] there were maybe 15 students."

The revival of the space was due to restructuring the library.

"We removed books that had not been checked out for at least 10 years," Alvarez said. "We retained titles that hold historical importance to the school. The library team then reconfigured the books to more closely resemble a modern bookstore, [and] adding titles monthly based on staff and student requests."

With experiences like this, Alvarez hopes to foster an environment at Aragon that is representative of every student.

"The most important thing that a principal can do is to create a big enough table for every student to find a seat at," Alvarez said. "My guiding principle is making sure that when I show up to school that I'm about

every student every day ... It's about creating the most complete, comprehensive educational program that you can put together with the resources that you have that meets the needs of every student, and trying to create that sense of belonging for every student."

To do so, Alvarez first plans to get to know Aragon better.

"I'm really looking forward to walking the halls of Aragon and learning from students," Alvarez said. "And being a part of an education community ... at all different levels, whether it's administrative, whether it's student, whether it's parent. Me being able to intersect all of those different groups is something that I'm looking forward to, and learning how to be a better administrator through the needs [I'm] able to identify and figure out a way to solve."

Bonini and Camacho face off for superintendent

Ellie Blakely
NEWS WRITER

On June 2, San Mateo county voters will select between Chelsea Bonini and Héctor Camacho in a race for county superintendent of schools. The election will have implications for the education system across San Mateo County.

The county superintendent of schools heads the County Office of Education, which provides support services for districts in the county, ensures they are compliant with state laws and reviews and approves districts' budgets. The county superintendent also oversees special education programs and Court and Community Schools, which serve vulnerable students, such as those in the juvenile justice system, those who have been expelled or those who are experiencing homelessness.

The role was previously held by Nancy Magee, who retired in February and died of cancer in April.

Camacho, the executive director of Equity, Social Justice and Inclusion at the Office of Education and a trustee on the San Mateo County Board of Education, began his 27-year-long career in education working as a classroom aide and has since held many roles in education, including as a teacher and university administrator.

Camacho said he was persuaded to run for superintendent largely because of changes in education by the federal government.

"We had a new federal administration come in, and the goals of that administration, as a California educator, felt very contrary to what we are trying to do here in California schools around [inclusivity]," Camacho said. "The work that [I've] been doing has been leading

to this moment where we need a real champion for children, for young people, for students — particularly those that have been and continue to be marginalized and [are] now attacked by their federal government."

Bonini also began her career as a teacher. She then became an attorney and practiced law for 25 years. She became involved in the local education system through her kids' school and served as a trustee on the San Mateo Foster City School District Board. Bonini also served on other commissions in the County Office of Education and is currently



COURTESY OF CHELSEA BONINI

rently a trustee on the County Board of Education.

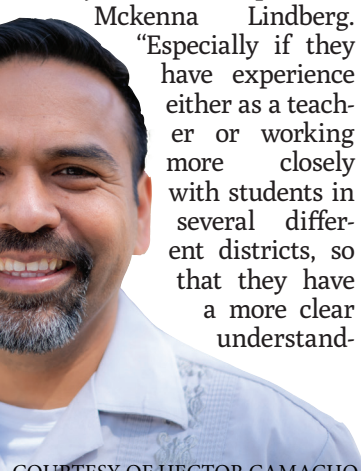
She said her experience as a mother has led her to focus on improving services for students with disabilities.

"[A family member] has some mental health disabilities, so I started doing a lot of advocacy around mental health and special education and students with disabilities," Bonini said. "We need to really focus on special education and make sure that we're serving kids each and every day and focusing on that, and not the processes that we get caught up within the legal realm around it."

While both Bonini and Camacho work within education in the county, they come from roles with differing levels

of proximity to the superintendent position. Bonini is a trustee on the County Board of Education, which is a governing body that sets policy, while Camacho works as an executive director at the County Office of Education, which implements policy and operates programs.

Some say this seemingly slight difference impacts their knowledge of the system in which the superintendent operates. Camacho might have an advantage in that he is more familiar with the



COURTESY OF HECTOR CAMACHO

management of the Office of Education, of which the superintendent is the head.

"Education is a system, and it's a system that is not serving every student and family well," Camacho said. "So you have to have that breadth of experience [of] actually doing the work to be able to know how to move the work [forward]."

However, others say that Bonini's experience of both making policy as a trustee on the Board of Education make her a strong candidate.

"She's done teaching," said Advanced Placement Psychology teacher Carlo Corti. "She's also done legal work, and she's done all kinds of work that just

hasn't been as recent [as Camacho's work]. So [Camacho] is connected to that office because of what he did in that particular office. But [Bonini's] role as someone who's had to make policy and make decisions about policy makes her more valuable."

Some students also say they prefer candidates with direct experience in education.

"The [county] superintendent should definitely have some sort of experience within the educational system," said sophomore

Mckenna Lindberg. "Especially if they have experience either as a teacher or working more closely with students in several different districts, so that they have a more clear understand-

ing of what students and schools need, and not necessarily only the funding and administration part of it."

Bonini hopes to utilize her experience as a trustee on the Board of Education to increase communication between the board and the superintendent of schools.

"[I would] push for more transparency and accountability, which, in my experience so far, has been a little bit lacking," Bonini said. "[We have not been] told as a board about certain agreements that we enter into, [and have not been] part of some of the roles that are embedded in the education code, like the courses of study that we offer students and our schools."

One of the main priorities for both candidates is im-

proving literacy rates across the county.

"Right now about 55% of our students are reading at grade level by third grade," Camacho said. "That is not something to be celebrated ... That needs to be 100%. We need to go all in, particularly on early literacy because we know that you can't have access to advanced literature, you can't have access to science ... if you cannot read well."

In addition to literacy, Camacho also plans to prioritize support for teachers.

"We have an educator workforce that is over taxed, underpaid and under supported in many ways," Camacho said. "We have to look at salary overall, housing, transportation [and] recruiting and retaining quality educators."

While the two candidates seem to have similar goals, Camacho may have an advantage in the race. He has raised more money for his campaign than Bonini, reflecting support. He has also been endorsed by the San Mateo Daily Journal and most local officials, including the three previous superintendents of schools.

In spite of this, Bonini was endorsed by the California and San Mateo Union High School District Teachers Associations.

"She's always shown herself to be someone who puts students first, who's willing to listen to people who work in classrooms about what the best interests and possibilities are for the students," Corti said. "Her actual plans are about trying to put resources into special education programs and worker training programs, while also maintaining academic excellence in our schools. She just has the right message."

Ultimately, voters will decide who they want to lead education in San Mateo County.

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New phone policy

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"I appreciate the flexibility [of the current policy]," said junior Emily Ma. "[During] school hours, I often use my phone to contact [club] members, coordinate events for Leadership that are happening, ... as well as to contact my parents in case I need to coordinate pick up times [or] ask them about something."

In contrast, 66.1% of teachers favored a bell-to-bell phone policy, and some students, like freshman Isabella Proemsey, also acknowledge positive outcomes a phone ban could bring.

"[It's] difficult when the teachers have to keep asking kids to put their phones away," Proemsey said. "[If] they're in the middle of a lesson or explaining something, [the teaching] gets really choppy."

While the committee itself estimated that costs could require anywhere between \$150,000 to \$200,000 per year, following evaluation of various phone case models, the QuietCase model was recommended as best suited to the committee's considerations, when considering affordability, durability and signal blocking strengths, while Yondrs emerged as the second choice.

A decision that the committee had a difficult time agreeing on was phone use during emergency situations.

"[In] an emergency, ... parents will be contacted immediately," said Dean Donna Krause. "There would be a phone blast that would go out ... [Also] if there is an emergency, you don't have time to [get your phones back]."

Krause noted that whether students would receive their phones back was still a pending decision.

Regardless, some students doubt the effectiveness of the protocol, especially if families depend on phones as a primary method of communication. According to the fall 2025 Panorama Survey, 48% of students reported using their phones throughout the school day to communicate with parents or guardians.

"[My] parents [are] not really into technology that much," Vasquez said. "I'm usually the one telling them what to do and how all this school stuff works, [including] technology. So me calling or texting them would be way easier than them getting an email from the school, especially since their first language isn't English."

The Board also acknowledged concerns about hindering the development of crucial digital media literacy skills, especially in an era when navigating technology in a healthy manner is emphasized. Some students share this sentiment.

"When we exit the school environment, there won't be anyone who's collecting our phones from us and locking [them] away so that, as [adults], we're focused on our studies or work," Ma said. "And really it comes down to whether the individual has the motivation and the dedication to maintain that discipline. That's a really important skill that we should be building up in school, learning how to rely on [our] own minds to resist those distractions."

In response, the District also plans to implement a digital literacy curriculum alongside the policy, addressing social media and online safety, mental health impacts and healthy device boundaries. Additional details are still underway.

Overall, the new phone policy is intended to be a blanket policy across the district, with specific implementation varying by each site.

With mixed opinions and continual updates being made to the phone policy that will remain in effect for five years until its presumed next revision, the outcomes of these changes in SMUHSD remains to be seen.

Editorial: phone policy phlops

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

After reviewing a district-wide survey and their task force consisting of a select group of representatives from San Mateo Union High School District schools, the district implemented a bell-to-bell policy against Superintendent Randall Booker's suggestion. This policy, in compliance with Gov. Gavin Newsom's Phone-Free School Act, will require students to put their phones into QuietCase lockable phone pouches for the entirety of the school day, a mandate the Outlook opposes.

During the decision process, Booker met with principals from all school sites to discuss options. His recommendation to the Board of Trustees was to implement a policy that did not extend into non-instructional times.

The Outlook stands behind Booker's recommendation to the board to vote against the blanket bell-to-bell policy. A survey of 58 Aragon staff members found that 65.5% of respondents believed the district's policy should include "site discretion to devise their own plans," and a survey of 757 students and families saw that 77.5% were against a policy that extended into brunch and lunch times, which is what this new policy will do. The board neglected this data and Booker's recommendation. Their decision was based on a broader district-wide survey and a task force that included a single Aragon student and two parents — hardly enough to be representative of the Aragon community.

Even the district-wide survey, which fails to break down site-to-site differences between schools, did not fully align with the final policy as passed by the board, finding that 56.6% of families, 30.8% of educators and 84.7% of students believed in keeping the current practices surrounding phone policy.

The Outlook asked trustee Jennifer Jacobson why the district did not allow individual sites to adopt their own policies.

"We just felt that we wanted this to be a unified choice," Jacobson said. "One thing that was put forward was the idea of equity: San Mateo has this [bell-to-bell] policy and there have been positive benefits from it that are measurable and observable. Some parents felt that it's not fair that those benefits are restricted to kids at San Mateo High School. Shouldn't they be extended to all of the students in the whole district?"

However, data from both the district-wide and Aragon surveys conclude that the majority of parents and students simply do not take this stance. Each school communi-

ty is different, and what works for San Mateo High does not guarantee success in Aragon, Hillsdale or any of the other diverse schools in the district.

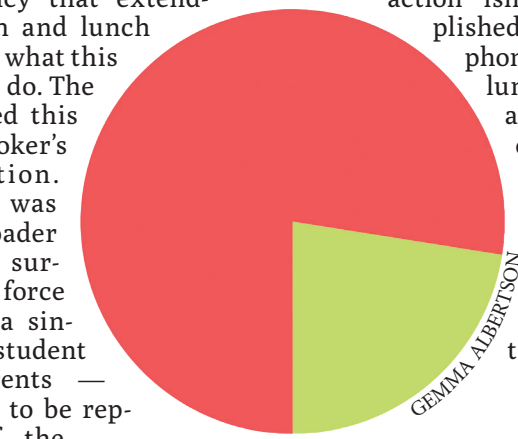
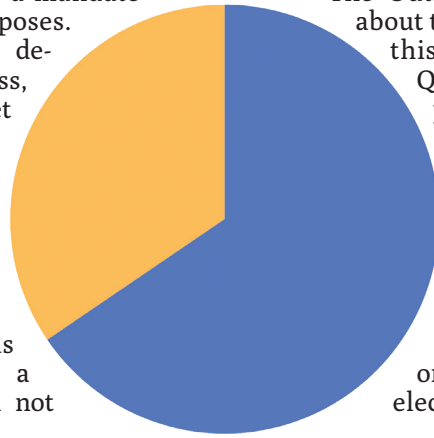
"When you go [to] different places [that] have a ... different culture, sometimes you do get kids who just sit in the hallway and scroll, and so they're not having that interaction with their peers," said assistant principal Andrew Hartig. "We see a lot less of that [at Aragon]. We [do] have some students who do that, but most of our students tend to be far more social."

The Outlook also has concerns about the cost of implementing this new cellphone policy. QuietCase lockable phone pouches cost upwards of \$18 per pouch, and for the 9,000 students in the district, the grand total comes to approximately \$162,000 taken out of the general fund, being routed from money that's spent on teachers' salaries, electricity bills and other school projects. If the concern is students' mental health, the Outlook argues that these extensive funds could be better spent on other initiatives that may have a larger

impact than removing phones from the equation: providing a designated wellness office for schools that don't already have one, more wellness counselors, improved mental health resources and curriculum, among other efforts. Increasing the amount of student-student interaction isn't solely accomplished by taking away phones either. More lunchtime student activities supported or created by the school would prompt students to connect more than simply removing phones from the equation.

"If we're looking at student mental health crises, not only do we need access to a wellness center and wellness service, we also need a harm reduction program to educate people," said assistant principal of Burlingame High School Jordan Loey. "[Burlingame is] one of the last schools that doesn't have its own designated wellness center ... [The bell-to-bell policy is] not the silver bullet that's going to solve all of the student mental health crises."

The Outlook chiefly recommends repealing this cell phone policy immediately; however, we recognize the unlikelihood that the school board would be willing to reverse such a significant decision so quickly. Thus, when the second semester repolling and reevaluation of the phone policy occurs, the Outlook must emphasize the weight of this data. Polling results and community opinions from students, teachers and parents should become especially influential when those community members have actually dealt with the changes in action. For a mandate this restrictive and widespread, the district must be open to feedback and fluidity.



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Aragon dance program showcases “Till the Break of Dons”

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“[The most memorable pieces for me were] ‘Burning Up That Hill,’ and ‘This is Me,’ [from] ‘Stranger Things,’” said freshman Tina Zhang. “I kind of recognize the character, so I find it kind of memorable. And [the visual engineering is] so good.”

Aragon Ballet Folklorico danced Jarabe Tapatio.

“We chose the most enthusiastic and vibrant dances and we also tried to do that with our costumes,” said Lesly Alegria, junior and Aragon Ballet Folklorico vice

president. “We [chose our] colors because those are the ones that stand out the most when performing. Sharing a lot of the footwork [was] definitely difficult, especially with the club members that recently joined ... but honestly, everyone [is] insanely amazing [and] they’re really fast learners, and you can see that they enjoy doing folklorico.”

The showcase included many whole class and group performances, as well as solos and small group performances. There were a variety of styles of dance, many featuring dances from different cultures.

“We [all] had countless rehearsals and stage rehearsals together, and that was really

fun,” Warriar said. “Bringing together dancers from different backgrounds and different styles and who have different experiences is a beautiful part of this. Whether it was the dance team or [dance clubs] or the dance classes, everyone came together with one purpose.”

The show ended off with a performance featuring the entire cast and participants of the show, titled “A Little Party,” followed by bows and curtain calls.

“I really liked [the performance],” said sophomore Jennifer Kim. “I walked in thinking it would just be a show [and didn’t really have expectations], but [after watching it, it] really made me excited. I plan [on going] to future shows now because of this one.”

Some members of the audience found that they resonated with the performances.

“I love dance,” said audience member Jean McFadden. “I dance myself, so I appreciate everything that was happening. I liked the solos,

and the people who put so much effort into it. The visuals were amazing, [and] it was amazing to watch. I was very charmed by all the dancers.”

Many of the performers hope to continue participating in “Til the Break of Dons” next year.

“There’s a certain amount of satisfaction that comes from executing a successful performance,” Warriar said. “You see that the audience was happy with it [and] everyone around you was happy with their performances.”

“Till the Break of Dons” will return in May 2027.



Senior Monet Jalbert, junior Kirthana Warriar and junior Claire Dong dance at the showcase.

JAYSON LIU

Dons masquerade at SVN West for prom

Diya Gourineni
NEWS WRITER

On April 17, juniors and seniors headed to SVN West in San Francisco to attend Aragon’s annual Prom from 7-10 p.m. Following the theme of Midnight Masquerade, some students donned masks and dark or silver-colored outfits.

A three floor venue, SVN West marked a new space for students, as last year’s prom was at the InterContinental in San Francisco. There were photo booths and a coat check on the first floor, the dance floor and food were located on the second floor and students could play mini golf on the rooftop. Masks were laid out on tables and balloons decorated the venue in accordance with the theme.

Leadership adviser Lindsay Bussey discussed why the venue was changed.

“We’ve been at [the San Francisco Design Center] for ages, but there was a request to move prom from Friday to Saturday, so we obliged [and] that required us to move [locations],” Bussey said. “Last year we were at the InterContinental Hotel [and] we were planning on going back there, [but] they were going to upcharge us by \$20,000 more than what we paid last year.”

This year’s prom cost \$100 for each student, sold throughout the month of March and the first few weeks of April. Some students found the expense to be costly. Although last year’s prom also cost \$100, previ-

ous years had cheaper prices, with a range of \$60-85.

“Students have to realize that [the price] includes the venue, all of your food,” Bussey

“For the people who didn’t get to go to the rooftop initially, it was kind of disappointing for them because they didn’t get to do [mini golf] later [once it

empty and there’s not as many activities,” Dussan said. “[On] the dance floor, because it’s so big, people aren’t really encouraged to dance, but the DJ is really good.”

Senior Estela Valero had a different perspective, explaining concerns with the event.

“They need some more lighting in [the dance area],” Valero said. “[But] it’s a little bit too [bright] in the main hallways and outside downstairs. Also the DJ, [is the] same DJ from all the other years ... He doesn’t play the best music.”

During the event, students could choose from a variety of food, with pasta, salad and desserts being offered. Students

“The food’s amazing,” Amaro said. “I love the pasta, the desserts are great as well.”

Many students questioned why tiramisu, one of the foods advertised as part of the buffet on the Canvas Dashboard, was missing. The lack of allergy warning labels for food items also was questioned, especially by an online petition about Prom posted by an Instagram account called @prom.petition. Bussey addressed the concerns by noting the discrepancy in communication between SVN West and the Aragon leadership team.

“We did check with [SVN West about] allergens and cross contamination,” said Bussey. “The only thing that we were told that was an issue was going to be the bread that had sesame seeds on it. We were told nothing else is going to be an issue. We started realizing the tiramisu was an issue when people with nut sensitivities started having reactions, and then immediately we pulled the tiramisu from the options for that night.”

As the night came to an end, seniors reflected on their last high school dance.

“It was kind of crazy towards the end, just thinking about how we only have a few weeks left before we graduate,” Senthilkumar said. “I feel like everything is more enjoyable when you find out that it’s your last one [and] it was pretty special to me.”

The next dance, Homecoming, is expected to be held on Sept. 26



Students dance at prom.

said. “The last two years we’ve had an Italian buffet, the [photo booth], [a] DJ, all of the games and activities. So it’s really an all inclusive price. When you get [to the venue], you do not have to shell out money for anything else ... We do make every effort possible to keep our [pricing for] prom tickets as low as possible, and sometimes we have to move the location to make sure that we don’t have to roll the cost over to students.”

Students had mixed opinions about the venue.

“I [enjoyed] the venue,” said senior Ethan Guo. “Having three floors gives me more space to walk around [and] I like not jumping around in one place.”

However, senior Sathini Senthilkumar took issue with the rooftop part of the venue.



JAYSON LIU

got dark],” Senthilkumar said. “They could have had better lighting [on] the rooftop, because it wasn’t that bright.”

Senior Maria Medina Dussan appreciated some aspects of the venue but felt there was room for improvement at prom.

“Because the venue is so big and open, it feels very

had mixed reactions regarding the quality of the food, however.

“[The food] was subpar,” Guo said. “The pasta was not al dente, the salad was very lackluster, [but] the desserts were fine.”

Junior Ollie Amaro expressed a different opinion, enjoying the different variety of food.

NEW CHAPTERS: TEACHER RETIREMENT

By Seanan Young, News Writer

MICHAEL FLYNN

Former varsity girls soccer coach and current Physical Education teacher Michael Flynn is retiring at the end of the 2025-26 school year. Flynn has worked 32 years in education, 21 of which were at Aragon. Flynn first started at Aragon as a soccer coach in 1996 and became a PE teacher two years later.

Flynn credits his retirement to future plans with his wife, and plans on moving to Spain in the coming year.

"Normally, the magic number [of retirement] is about 62 and a half," Flynn said. "But with everything going on in the world and politically, what's happening in this country, we felt it was best to finish now so that we can travel. My wife and I are planning to move abroad ... We want to be able to enjoy traveling while we're young enough."

Many students appreciate Flynn's unique approach to teaching PE class.

"My favorite aspect of Mr. Flynn is his optimism and positivity," said freshman Joel Levitt. "In many ways, a lot of students tend to [not]



MADELINE ALLEN

be excited for PE class, but Mr. Flynn does an incredible job of trying to make the environment fun [and] engaging ... Every day we line up in our typical roll call spots, [and] as soon as we start our warm ups, Mr. Flynn comes to me and my friend and shares with us [a] fact of the day, and we've made it a ritual."

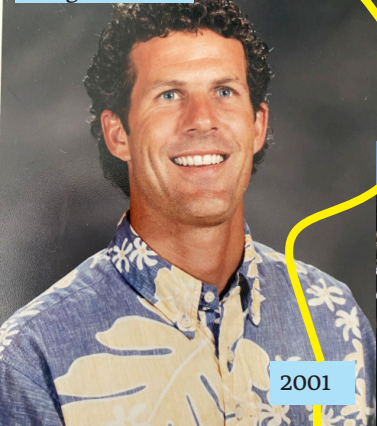
Flynn recalls one of his favorite memories teaching.

"One of my former students presented me with her banner to San Jose State," Flynn said. "She said, 'You believed in me. You kept on pushing me, even though I wasn't a very good runner. Your words were inspiring, and it motivated me to continue to work out.' And you don't hear a lot of that as a PE teacher."



1996: Flynn started coaching soccer at Aragon

1998: Flynn started teaching PE at Aragon



2001



2003



2019



2008: Flynn moved to Crystal Springs as athletic director and soccer coach



2005

2026: Flynn retires

2017: Flynn returned to Aragon

COURTESY OF MICHAEL FLYNN



1998: Katcher began teaching 3D Art and Fashion Design at Aragon

COURTESY OF KATHRYN KATCHER

1999

2000: Katcher taught Creative Foods class and art classes

2004: Katcher taught Advanced/AP Art and Art

2022

2026: Katcher retires

KATHRYN KATCHER

Art teacher Kathryn Katcher is retiring at the end of the 2025-26 school year. Katcher has worked at Aragon for 28 years.

"It's time to do something else," Katcher said. "I look at life as a journey, and it's time to do something different ... Don't expect life to be a straight path. You don't want to get from point A to point B, and when you die, say, 'Look what a nice straight line I have.' Doesn't make [for] a very interesting story."

Katcher stressed the benefits of retirement, citing newfound opportunities as a key perk.

"[It's] an opportunity to spend more time with my kids and grandkids and do my own art and travel and do whatever the heck I want, sleep in [or] clean my closets," Katcher said. "I'm just going to see where the wind blows me for a while."

Throughout her years of teaching, Katcher had many unique experiences.

"The interesting thing about teaching is that every day is different," Katcher said. "We've had lots of unexpected moments in our class, both good and bad. I've had wonderful artistic moments; I've had fights break out in my room; I've had all kinds of things."

Many students praise Katcher for her supportive nature and passion for art.

"I really like her as a teacher," said senior Elsa Richerson. "She's really nice. She's always supported me. I always feel comfortable in her room, even when I don't have her as a teacher."

Some students appreciate the variation of art mediums Katcher provides in her class.

"You get a lot of that creative freedom in her class specifically," Rich-



MADELINE ALLEN

erson said. "You explore a lot more mediums than you do in other art classes because you can choose between regular drawings, paintings of various mediums. You can even do a couple of mixed media pieces."

Katcher learned a lot after she transitioned from freelance costume designer to becoming a teacher.

"The biggest lesson I learned is being involved is always more fun than being on the outskirts, so put yourself out there," Katcher said. "Jumping in the middle of things is good ... When I first started here, I was a younger teacher, and [I was] busy with [my] family and I didn't get to know my colleagues very well because I was just too overwhelmed. And then when you have a little more spare time, you get to know little bits and pieces of people."

Katcher remains excited about all the changes that could happen for her in the near future.



HMC and MUN host first Don Model Congress

Siddharth Gopinath
NEWS WRITER

On April 24 and 25, Aragon held its inaugural Don Model Congress. The event was hosted by two clubs, Aragon's Harvard Model Congress club and Model United Nations club.

"A good number of people that are in HMC are also in Model UN because it's similar," said senior HMC treasurer Kate Sato. "This is the first time that there has been an official Model UN and HMC coming together."

The similarities lie in how HMC and MUN model real world political discussions.

"The aim of Model Congress is to [simulate] what it should be like," said junior HMC Louis Riviere. "We're not trying to be what it is like, but what it should be. And our club, we educate people on how the American government works."

During the event, which was free to all Aragon students, people would act as either a member of the Presidential cabinet or a U.S. Representative. The mock house of representatives worked to pass a bill that helped their side as much as possible. In the presidential cabinet group, students worked together as heads of departments to advise the president of the best course of action in a mock crisis.

Discussion during the House of Representatives was split into two parts, moderated and unmoderated caucuses. In moderated ones, representatives took turns giving speeches to other students and the chair who moderated it, while in unmoderated caucuses, they could collaborate with members of their party to form a strategy or engage in open discussion with the opposite party.

"I liked the unmoderated caucuses," said sophomore Rui Liu. "[There

was] much less pressure because we're speaking just as you would speak to a normal person."

Representatives often requested more time for unmoderated caucuses rather than moderated ones, during which they often debated other people directly.

"There's a lot of discussion involved in HMC," said senior Calvin Baxter. "It's important and it lets people learn."

In the presidential Cabinet, a pretend crisis was going on: there was an outbreak of a dangerous disease along the front of the Russia-Ukraine war. Delegates had to advise the president with their expertise, such as how research for a treatment could be done, whether it was worth it for America to spend even more money to help Ukraine and considering the possibility that the disease was a biological weapon made by Russia.

"Crisis is a situation going on in the world," Riviere said. "We'll start it with something that's actually going on, but then we'll diverge it so that it doesn't stay too political."

The event was attended by around 20 students. Originally, many more students signed up but did not attend.

"There were supposed to be more people to turn out and that signed up," Sato said. "Last minute, people had conflicts or they decided to drop out."

Some attendees preferred the low attendance.

"I really liked the size of it," Liu said. "It was very small, and it encouraged me to speak about my opinion without feeling too pressured that I'm gonna say something wrong."

Both clubs have plans on expanding into district-wide participation next year.

Supreme Court to decide on birthright citizenship

Naomi Kotani
NEWS WRITER

On Jan. 20, 2025, his first day in office, President Donald Trump issued an executive order targeting birthright citizenship for children born to parents who are in the country illegally. The order has since faced many legal challenges, with lower courts tending to block it as unconstitutional and against historical precedent. The Supreme Court heard arguments regarding the executive order's constitutionality on April 1.

The 14th Amendment guarantees citizenship for anyone born in the U.S. and "subject to the jurisdiction thereof," which has historically been taken to refer to someone under U.S. legal authority. However, Solicitor General John Sauer, who represented the federal government in the case, interpreted the clause in his arguments as restricting the group to which birthright citizenship can be applied.

Trump's order asserted that people born in the U.S. can only become citizens if at least one of their parents is in the country on a non-temporary visa, claiming that the 14th Amendment does not consider individuals who don't check this box to be under U.S. jurisdiction.

However, in 1898, the Supreme Court established in the case *United States v. Wong Kim Ark* that anyone born on U.S. soil was automatically given citizenship under the 14th Amendment, no matter their parents' legal status. The case involved an American-born man with Chinese parents, Wong Kim Ark, who was denied reentry into the U.S. after traveling internationally.

In response to Sauer's interpretation of the jurisdiction clause, several justices said that he was stretching the evidence he used to back up his claims.

Additionally, Trump has said that the 14th Amendment was intended specifically to ensure citizenship for the children of formerly enslaved people, but this has been disproved by legal experts.

"I see the Trump administration trying to use a selective, revisionist interpretation of the historical record of the 14th Amendment ... to bolster their argument," said Kyle Serrott, an ethnic studies and political science professor at Skyline College.

Trump sat in on a portion of the arguments, which no other president has done before.

"He was trying to intimidate the justices," Serrott said. "During Sauer's arguments with Trump sitting right behind him, the justices were pushing back and resisting some of those arguments by the Solicitor

General. It is unprecedented for [presidents] to go to [the court] ... This was a blatant disregard for any notion of separation [of government]."

Many legal experts expect the Supreme Court to rule that Trump's executive order is unconstitutional. But despite that, the fact that birthright citizenship is being questioned at all has raised concerns for some.

"The amount of precedent that we're setting moving backwards right now is absolutely sickening and horrifying," said senior Sophia Rayes. "It's so disheartening, because you think that there'd be linear movement, that we'd go forward and ... strive to be better, and the fact that we are being worse right now is just terrible."

For junior Cassey Rae Yokoo, who has citizenship because of the 14th Amendment,

"It's easy to take it for granted that I am a citizen of the U.S.," Yokoo said. "But at the same time, I'm extremely grateful that I am a citizen [because of birthright citizenship] and I don't have to go through any processes or have to be worried about, 'Is [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] gonna be at my door? Do I have the right documents?'"

One of the reasons Trump has cited for wanting to limit birthright citizenship is to prevent tourists from giving birth in the U.S. to obtain citizenship for their children. This concept, known as birth tourism, or derogatorily, having "anchor babies," accounted for less than 1% of births in 2020, according to the Center for Immigration Studies, which advocates for low levels of immigration.

Even if the Supreme Court strikes down the executive order, Serrott said that the case will likely have a long-lasting impact on the framing of immigrants, especially considering the historical use of certain anti-immigrant rhetoric which has been used to justify exclusionary policies.

"Stereotypes, racialized notions of who people are, those stay around," Serrott said. "We're seeing that all the way back from the 1880s. The federal government and the culture said that Chinese immigrants stole the jobs of hard working 'real' Americans. And then you see that today applied to people from Central and South America that are coming to the United States, this trope that they're stealing jobs. These racist definitions that get applied to whole groups, they stay. We're going to see the aftermath of this long after Trump is out of office."

In the case that the Supreme Court decides the order is constitutional, there is uncertainty over how exactly it would be enforced.

"When you give birth to a child and you're at the hospital, they print up the birth certificate and they send it to the state," Serrott said. "Is the hospital supposed to check the citizenship status or the legal residency status of the mother? Do they have to go before a court to certify that they're a citizen?"

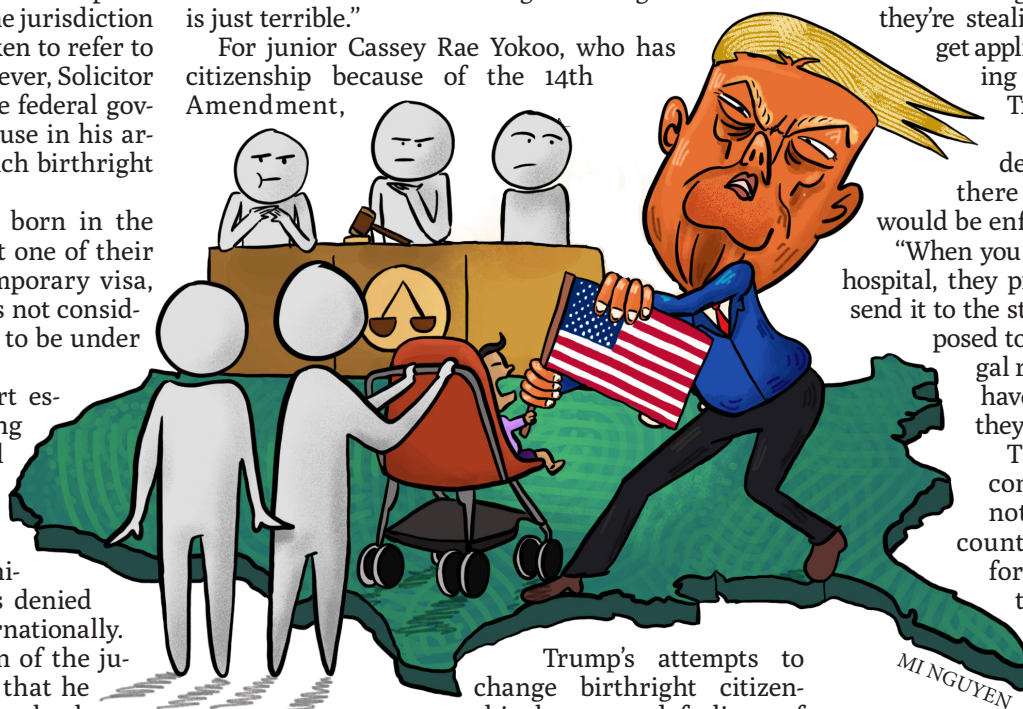
This could lead to such babies becoming stateless, meaning they are not recognized as citizens by any country, which could make it difficult for them to access rights like education and healthcare.

"You are taking away opportunities from so many people who did nothing but be born in a different country," Rayes said.

Even though Serrott and other legal experts do not think that the Supreme Court will side with Trump, there are other ways birthright citizenship might be changed.

"There could be an effort to pass a law that further restricts who can and can't be citizens, and to give further definition of birthright citizenship that would end up being litigated in some way," Serrott said. "But as far as changing or amending the 14th Amendment of the Constitution? That's not likely at all ... If you passed a law, you would get a lot more buy-in from judges, because they could say this is not just an executive order. This is Congress. It's more legitimate than an executive order."

The Supreme Court is expected to reach a decision over the summer.

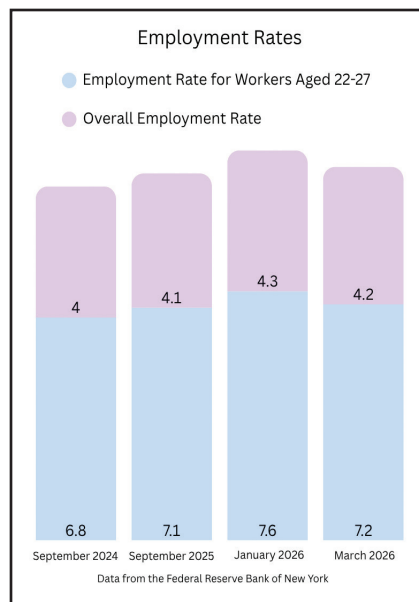


GENERATION Z TAKES ON THE JOB MARKET

Ryan Li and Addie Rose
NEWS AND FEATURES WRITERS

According to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, in December 2025, the unemployment rate for young Generation Z people aged 22-27 was 7.8%.

"We're cooked," said sophomore Linus Zhao. "On Instagram, TikTok, YouTube Shorts or Snapchat, you might have seen some [videos] where [there is] a person and they have a giant spreadsheet ... and it shows that they applied to [work at]



1,000 places, but in the end, they only got offers from one or two places. That's scary."

Though industries like healthcare added 37,000 jobs last month, total employment excluding health care declined by 367,000 since last year.

CAUSES

Many view entry jobs requiring prior experience as a barrier to employment for young people. LinkedIn found that 35% of entry level jobs required three or more years of experience, with 60.3% in fields like software requiring such experience.

According to World Economic Forum, entry level jobs as a whole have declined by 29% from January 2024 to September 2025, which has resulted in greater competition among Gen Z workers.

"I am noticing that students are facing more competition in general when it comes to jobs and internships, especially for positions that offer meaningful and hands-on experience," said Career Technical Education Coordinator Queenie Hua. "It's not necessarily [that] the opportunities don't exist ... It's just that employers are more selective, and many are looking for candidates who already have some level of experience."

Employers tend to avoid training employees by hiring those with several years of experience and advanced degrees, so many jobs are hiring college students who completed internships.

"I've been trying to apply to some jobs myself," said sophomore Robert Mo. "It's difficult to find a good job — I'm not even worried about the pay at this point. They either require me to be older or have a degree of some kind ... I'd be qualified to do some of

these jobs, but they just don't want me."

The percentage of older workers aged 55 and up has increased from 15% to 23% in the last 20 years due to higher life expectancy and the need to save for retirement. However, older people may not be competing for the same jobs as young people.

"The retirement age is going up and up and up," said senior Aidan Schneider. "My parents are both near 60, and they're not retiring for another couple years. [Although] older people [are] getting these jobs, older people generally have stayed in the same jobs, and those jobs aren't really changing ... All these new jobs are sparking up, so people could get those jobs, so to blame all the old people for taking up all jobs is pretty bad."

Difficulties for young people to obtain jobs can also be attributed to the "low fire, low hire" job market, which means companies are hiring less workers but also firing less workers. In December, the hiring rate was 3.3% and was steadily decreasing.

This can be attributed to uncertainty for businesses, which makes them hesitant to hire young workers. President Donald Trump's tariffs and mass deportations have created uncertainty due to increased costs, and reduced labor supply.

"Because the economy is less stable, people are more hesitant to hire new [graduates]," said Leo Zhuang, an employed member of Gen Z. "[The instability exists because] the president can single handedly raise the Dow Jones [index, which tracks the stocks of 30 high-profile companies] ... [If] he makes a comment, [that] we go bomb Iran [or] we kidnap the Venezuelan president, then [the economy changes] overnight."

One of the potential causes behind the high unemployment rate is artificial intelligence, which companies are beginning to use to replace workers. According to Goldman Sachs, AI could automate 25% of work tasks in the U.S., including 46% of office and administrative jobs, though, so far, Anthropic states that AI's actual exposure to tasks is a lot lower.

"My current ability level could be easily replaced by AI," Mo said. "You could probably ask ChatGPT how to fix a computer, and they'd fix it faster than I could. The first step towards getting a better job is getting a job first. [AI] just re-

moved that first step, [making] entry level work impossible."

Tech companies like Meta, Microsoft, Amazon and Google laid off tens of thousands of workers after the COVID-19 pandemic due to lower profits and overhiring during the COVID-19 pandemic, so older Gen Z tech workers entered a crowded job market.

"[Tech companies] are making money; they're not doing poorly," Zhuang said. "They can pay their employees. The thing that upsets me is that it's clear they hired too many people ... and they are just cutting headcount to improve margins ... Why did you hire these folks in the first place?"

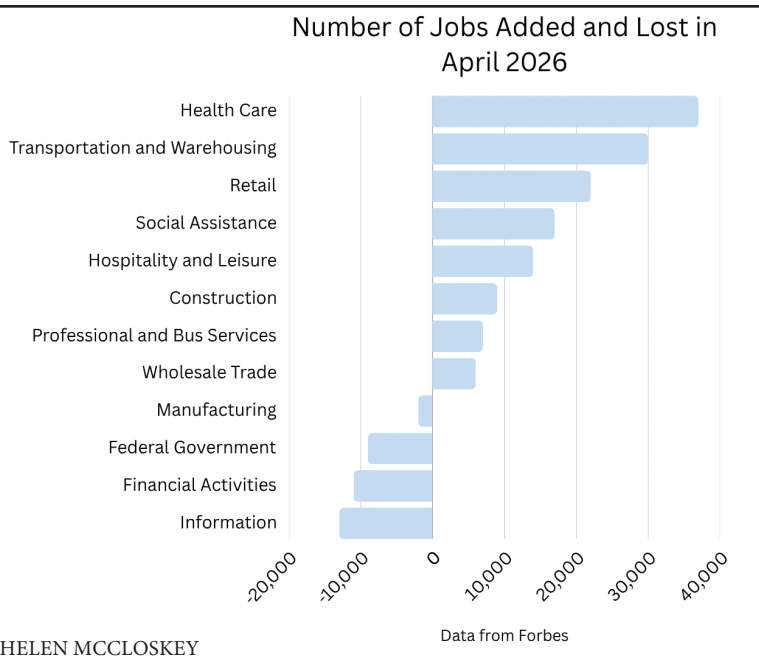
IMPACT

The job hunt process not only poses problems on an organizational level but has an emotional cost. Many experience frustration, stress and self-doubt because of their inability to get a reply to an application or an acceptance of the position.

"Not getting responses is discouraging, especially if I'm reaching out to professors in my [biology] department," said Aragon alumnus Toby Harris. "It'd be nice if they would reach back

many Gen Z workers feel held back by factors they cannot control, with 40% of Gen Z believ-

opportunities ... [by helping] them with [their] interviewing skills, mock interviews



ing their personal background and 40% believing their education prevents them from reaching their ideal career, according to the World Economic Forum.

SOLUTIONS

In spite of the difficulty many have faced with gaining employment, some have proposed ways to overcome them.

Some believe that educational institutions should

[and] resumes," Hua said. "[With] all the resources available at Aragon, I hope the students will take advantage of [them]."

In addition to efforts made by schools and applicants, some believe that employers also have an important role to play in improving the job market for young people. Employers might help by offering more entry-level positions that do not require extensive prior experience, as well as providing training opportunities that allow students to build skills on the job.

Some believe persistence and strong communication can make a significant difference in the job search process on the applicant end as well, especially in a competitive market where some applicants may give up too early.

"[Applying to jobs] is a process," Hua said. "It takes time, patience, networking and follow-through. If a student has good communication skills and if the employer says, 'Well, we're not hiring at this point,' I would recommend [asking for] their email, [and sending a message saying], 'Thank you, I understand you may not be hiring right now, but do you mind if I follow up?'"

Even though AI has replaced many entry level jobs, students can still apply for minimum wage jobs that are less reliant on computers to build their skills.

"Entry level jobs are harder to use AI for, because they're just a lot simpler tasks, but they're a lot more physical," Schneider said. "I worked at a golf course. [You] can't replace that with AI. I worked as a soccer referee; you can't replace that. There's these [jobs like] McDonald's workers. You can maybe add machines there, but you need someone to be a technician for that."

While some jobs still require human workers, members of Gen Z continue to face increasing competition in the workforce.



and at least tell me that their lab didn't have any spots."

The job market crisis can also have an effect on Gen Z workers' confidence. For example,

try to combat lack of employment.

"Within the College and Career Center, between me and Ms. Mary, we help students prepare not only for college, but for their potential job opportunities and internship

DAHLIA SELIG

Graphics by: Eva Ludwig

Senior Profiles

Photos by: Ian Wang, Cameron Trio

Jackie Wong & Madeline Allen

Reporting by: Roy Kong, Rebecca Chen, Gemma Albertson & Kyra Hsieh

SYLVIA DEMEULE

University of Geneva, Child Development

Why did you choose Switzerland?

It's kind of always been my plan to go to Switzerland, because my dad's family is from there, and initially, I wasn't even supposed to go to high school here. I was supposed to move and then go to college there, because my parents want me to experience life there. It's also cheaper from an education standpoint. So it was kind of always a plan ... I decided to go with Geneva, specifically. My grandparents live in that city, so I'm familiar with it, and I know my way around.

Why did you choose child development?

It was hard for me to decide at first, but the second I thought of being a teacher, I just knew in my soul that was what I wanted to do. I've always appreciated academic environments, and I've enjoyed learning, and I enjoy helping others learn. [I] just felt it was right for me, and I didn't even have to think that hard about it. I loved elementary school ... At the core of it, I really wanted to learn, and I want to share that learning with other people ... I've had so many incredible teachers who are in elementary school, but it's a good form of inspiration to want to be like them and maybe incorporate activities hiding in elementary school.

Why did you choose to become an elementary school teacher?

I don't want the stress of the older ones, but I don't want to make kids upset with test scores and grades. I feel elementary is a very formative part of somebody's life. You can really make a big impact, even if they don't remember it that way; you can build good habits for the future and help them. And I've always gotten along really well with people a lot younger than me, and been interested with little crafts and the fun colors. I like that type of art.



University of British Columbia, Applied Biology

CHARLOTTE WANG

What major did you choose and how did you become interested in it?

I am an applied biology major, which is basically just biology [in] real world context, rather than just concepts. I picked that major because a lot of the things that I want to go into are subsets of biology, so either sports medicine or astrobiology or CRISPR research with cancer. They all kind of tie into biology. And I wanted my undergrad major to be pretty broad in general, so that I wasn't stuck to one topic specifically, [or] if I wanted to change my mind later on. I've always been pretty interested in science my whole life.

What made you choose British Columbia for college?

It's a really great school, and I used to live up there so I know a lot about it and about the area, and I really love Vancouver. I think it's beautiful and that there's so much to offer. It's also just a [good] school. I'm not studying kinesiology, but I'm interested in kinesiology, [and] it [has] one of the best [kinesiology] programs. And tuition is pretty cheap for me. The area in general was one of the big things that attracted me to it. It's San Francisco but prettier, in my opinion, and you get beaches and mountains, but also forests at the same time, which I love that so much. And it's also a pretty big school.



ANNA GUBMAN

Fordham University, Theater Design and Production

How did your background in the theater lead to your decision?

My mom owns a hardware store, so I've always liked working with my hands and working with tools, and I've always liked set construction. I did stage through in middle school, but we didn't really get to do that much, so when I found out that we had a tech class at Aragon ... I took it sophomore year, and I just fell in love with it. I fell in love with the community. I fell in love with doing anything in it, and it's something I want to do for the rest of my life ... One day I painted three stages and I had a ball doing that ... I just found it really satisfying. I really like Lego. So building a set is like really big Legos ... I like the art of it a lot. I like how on your toes you have to be and how you have to be a quick thinker to fix things.

Why did you choose to major in theater design and production?

I ended up choosing it because I did it in high school. And I really loved it. I would work with adults, and they came in and helped out with things and taught me ... I researched more about it and [learned] you can work in so many different fields with that major. Like, so many different things in entertainment. So I was like, this sounds pretty handy and maybe possibly couldn't get fully replaced with AI because they actually need hands on people ... If I'm gonna go to college and if everything else is gonna get replaced with AI, I might as well do something that I love.

What will the program at Fordham have you do?

They are going to have me learn pretty much all forms of technical theater. Right now, I'm mostly just doing sets and I do stage management, [both of] which I love, but I also really want to learn about lighting ... I know nothing about sound. I know how to put a mic on, and that's it ... I think I have to take some acting classes, which I'm kind of terrified about, but we ball. They do a whole lot of different varieties of shows [like] black box shows, mainstage musicals, small plays, showcases ... [There's] a lot of opportunity, which I'm excited for.



LIBBY DIOLI

Auburn University, Flight

Why did you choose flight school?

I always wanted to be a pilot, and this was the best opportunity for me to be able to go from where I am now to the airlines. I've already done a lot of work with flying, and I almost have my private pilot's license. Flying is just my passion ... [Once] I was at a restaurant with [my sister] Anna and my dad and a whole flight crew walked in after getting back from the airport, because they had just finished a flight or something, and the captain was a female, and I thought it was really cool and inspiring. And since there's not a ton of representation [for women] in the aviation industry, seeing another woman pilot was just a big moment for me, and then that kind of inspired me to want to pursue becoming a pilot.

How do normal classes work out with flight practice?

I mean, there are normal classes that you have to take. I know, [for] part of the major at Auburn that I'm doing, I'm gonna have to take some regular math classes and regular physics classes. But then there are also aviation-specific weather classes, aerodynamics classes or airport operations classes ... The way Auburn does it is three days a week, you have time blocks where you're flying, and then on top of [that], you're also taking regular classes and the aviation classes in between.



LEV PERETZ

HEC Paris and Bocconi University, Data Science

What about Europe excites you?

The [HEC Paris and Bocconi University] campuses are a lot smaller, especially my campus, [so] it's the real undergraduate experience. It's one building versus the United States [where there are many on campus] ... And especially for my program, I'm going to be with 100-ish people for three years, so I have a chance to get to know everyone better and make tighter connections, versus having different classes with different people every single day.

How did you decide on your major?

My major is composed of a bunch of different parts. It's [artificial intelligence], data science and all [those similar fields]. But we have to choose a field that we're specifically interested in, and I'm specifically interested in data science because I [like] watching sports, and I'd hear the commentators talk about underlying statistics and X, Y and Z. I started playing a bunch of simulation games ... and so I started getting interested in data science, because there's a lot of misunderstandings of what most common media says versus what people or what the underlying stats say.. In soccer, there's something called the eye test, versus the stats test. You'll look at a player dribbling the ball a lot, and you'll say, 'Oh, he's a great player.' He looks like he affects the game a lot, [but] when you go into the statistics of it and you see that, yeah, dribbling the ball might look cool on the surface, but is there any actual benefit that he's adding to the team?



NOAH MILLER

U.S. Marines

Why did you choose the Marines?

My family mainly wanted [me] to do it because [I'd] be first [generation] Marines. It's interesting because it gives you job opportunities that you really never thought of. Like, you'd never think that the Marines will have electricians or construction workers, but they do. So it kind of opened my view to more stuff instead of just infantry.

Do you have a plan of what you want to do in the Marines?

I wanted to do infantry, but I just sadly got told that infantry is filled up right now, so they're putting me at [reconnaissance], which is arguably more dangerous than infantry ... [Recon is when] you go to places where there's supposed to be a battle or go find missing stuff and you just never know what's going to happen. It's so unprepared.

How does the Marines program work?

What I'm in right now is called the delayed entry program, so you're just working out every weekend, attending events and all that stuff. And then [in] boot camp, you get stationed in San Diego for three months. Then you go to ... Marine Combat Training school. And I believe in Mississippi, you get stationed there for a month. And then depending on what job you choose in the Marines, you go to other places.



CHIN-RAY KONG

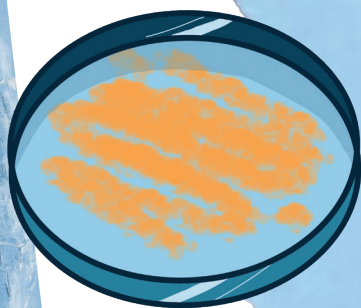
Johns Hopkins University, Pre-med

Why do you want to go into medicine?

I've had a lot of people around me who had a lot of medical issues, and I felt a little bit helpless, not being able to do anything. And my dad is a doctor as well, and sometimes when we've been flying on an airplane, and someone's had an issue, he's been able to step up and help, and I just felt that was very inspiring ... The moment I wanted to start doing [medicine] was [when] my relative [started having] heart issues. It was really stressful. Afterwards, I felt more motivation to start getting involved, monitoring devices and blood glucose levels.

What are you looking forward to in college?

Hopkins has their whole Bloomberg medical school. It's a really high-level medical school for this country, and they have a lot of overlapping programs for undergraduate students, and they also have research grants and opportunities to work with the teachers in their labs.



San Francisco Bay Area

- Abigail Dunwoody
- Addison Carter
- Aiden Moore
- Alexander Camarena
- Alijah Tanielu
- Alisson Escobedo
- Alisson Sesam Lopez
- Alondra Moncada
- Andrew Akkawi
- Andrew Alatta
- Anna Gevorgyan
- Anna Guevara
- Anson Yu
- Anthony Marilla
- Armando Cajbon
- Arun Yama
- Asher Walker
- Ava Baptista
- Becky Liang
- Berna Kolcak
- Brayden Nguyen
- Briana Bernal
- Briseyda Martinez Sanchez
- Cameron Ngai
- Carson Yu
- Cecilia Romersa
- Chanan Poon
- Christopher Pinto Murillo
- Claudio Dominguez Lopez
- Connor Pham
- Cristina Churape Samano
- Dahlia Anapolsky
- Daisy Pantofja Beltran
- Daniel Castillo
- Daniel Martinez
- Daniel Renal
- Darren Benavente
- Darrin O'Brien
- David Bautista
- Deanna Ortiz
- Deborah Linares
- Destiny Garcia
- Drake Poteet
- Dulce Zaragoza Sandoval
- Edgar Soto-Diaz
- Eleanor McGinty
- Elizabeth Magness
- Elizabeth Walter
- Ella Palmisano Salgado
- Elsa Richerson
- Emily Peng
- Eric Li
- Erlinda Tica
- Esmeralda Estrada Contreras
- Eva Ludwig
- Gerardo Zaragoza Padilla
- Gianna Michelucci
- Gwen Johnson
- Hana Nijem
- Hayden Ha
- Heli Artola Duarte
- Henrik Rezende
- Isabella Lee
- Isabella Razo
- Jack Green
- Jacob Guzman
- Jake Hu
- James Kropf

- James Welch
- Jasmine Gramajo
- Jayda Parangan
- Jayden Guzman
- Jayla Abdellatif
- Jayson Liu
- John Liu
- Jonah-Salvador Murillo
- Jonathan Ram
- Joselyn Ramos Chamale
- Josue Morales
- Julia Baltodano
- Julia Chau
- Julianna Jay Galang
- Julien Bergeron-Palmer
- Kallan Tu
- Kareem Tabch
- Kateryna Perylo
- Keilani Gates-Wai
- Keleyna Chang
- Kele'a Nacua
- Kenzie Hernandez Zhu
- Kevin Cisneros
- Kylie Avila
- Kyra Hsieh
- Lauren Pong
- Lesvia Menchu
- Lissette Aleta
- Livardo Perez Aguilar
- Lola Figueroa
- Madelyne Osuna
- Maeve Newsom
- Manuel Avalos
- Marcos Josue Vasquez Orozco
- Maria Gevorgyan
- Maria Medina Dussan
- Mariah Flores
- Mariia Havryliuk
- Mario Gomez
- Matthew Chen
- Matthew Kekoa Chang
- Max Gan
- Mayerlin Lopez Vasquez
- Melissa Flores-Torres
- Melody Khoshnevisan
- Michael Villanueva Ayala
- Midori Saito
- Natalia Camacho Cruz
- Nestor Sandoval
- Nicole Hanna
- Nikolai Herro
- Noel Padilla
- Oliver Tonthat
- Omar Gomez Valladolid
- Orion Smith
- Owen Donguines
- Paul (Baoluo) Yu
- Peyton Varni
- Rama Haddad
- Rone Yamasaki
- Rosa Rodriguez
- Ruby Nunez Arzate
- Sam Algahim
- Sammi Hollandsworth
- Sarah Walter
- Sebastian Herrera
- Shreeya Gupta
- Shuma Otsuka

- Sienna Shehadeh
- Simon LaCarrubba
- Soyumi Quispe
- Stephanie Rios Angulo
- Tessa Sandhu
- Thomas Gage
- Thomas Luong
- Tor Anderson

- Tyler Gin
- V Galstan
- Veraaz Khan
- Victoria Maciel
- Winona Reif
- Xavier Ruiz
- Zachary Wong
- Zander Chiu

- Sacramento**
- Ashley Caballero
 - Daniel Gomez
 - Emily Jane Vincent
 - Lucas Pemberton
 - Matthew Chong
 - Philip Lee
 - Sophia Cheng
 - Trevor MacMillan
 - Yang Yang

- Central Valley**
- Emily Toxcon Suruy
 - Niko Almazan
 - Zhagfar Galymuly
 - Hudson Atkinson
 - Santiago Smirnoff

- Inland Empire**
- Abigail Cruz V.
 - Bradley Lum
 - Takumi Ikuma

- Central Coast**
- Aanika Das
 - Adam Wu
 - Annalise Krause
 - Antonio Mangano
 - Ava Sims
 - Bryan Orellana
 - Charles Wilcox
 - Derek Chan-Wittry
 - Deston Epstein
 - Emerson Makuta
 - Harrison Hsu
 - Jude Bautista
 - Leonidas Telfer-Mantouvalos

- Luke Saunders
- Mads Spiegel
- Megan Chan
- Neeharika Kumar
- Phoebe Harger
- Reina Younes
- Samantha Stanley
- Shrisha Dandamudi
- Sophia LaCarrubba
- Samuel Young
- Tomas Canova

- San Diego**
- Anthony Vasquez Ayala
 - Ashley Alvarez
 - Audrey Wang
 - Benjamin Lee
 - Christine Choi
 - Daniel (Atalofi) Soto-Baker
 - Emma An
 - Evan Westheimer
 - Gabby Xiao
 - James Taylor
 - Kate Chong
 - Kylie Uyekubo
 - Maayan Shilon
 - Matthew Gregory
 - Nicole Zheng
 - Victoria Chen

- Los Angeles**
- Adilene Cruz Hernandez
 - Aila Liu
 - Alvin Lee
 - Ayla Lim
 - Charles Zhong
 - Charlie Wells
 - Colin Fournier
 - Dacia Knox
 - Dylan Lee
 - Elias Ausiello
 - Emily Im
 - Gabriela Morelos Gaspar
 - Gavin Epstein
 - Hannah Lin
 - Hannah Qutteineh
 - Julia Chang
 - Kabir Sulur
 - Kaitlyn Zee
 - Karina Lemus
 - Leighton King
 - Lia Araneta
 - Lizet Nunez
 - Meilin Rife
 - Miley Rooper
 - Nia Goulishev
 - Nyla Garrick
 - Riku Lowe
 - Samantha Green
 - Sasha Whipple
 - Sathini Senthikumar
 - Sevara Saidova
 - Shea Peni
 - Steven Sah
 - Sydney Lai
 - Taylor Lee
 - Tyler Nichols
 - Vera Turan
 - Yury Bychkov

- Arizona**
- Annabelle Hoyes
 - Haley Chun
 - Jordan Hosner

- Colorado**
- Benjamin Peachin
 - Evie Stern
 - Kostantinos Ginis
 - Lindsay Schumaker
 - Monet Jalbert

- Texas**
- Amora Grover
 - Bing Cheng
 - Charlotte Hanshaw
 - Madison Britt

- Washington**
- Aidan Schneider
 - Anthony Song
 - Anya Kurinskas
 - Arjun Thirumalai
 - Declan Kennedy
 - Ivan Lan
 - Matthew Wang
 - Meredith Huang
 - Oliver Levitt
 - Oscar Nicolson
 - Sophia Rayes
 - Tylo Liu

- Oregon**
- Alex Reed
 - Emma Jensen
 - Jack Morrow
 - Reese Pavolotsky
 - Vera Muryna

- Idaho**
- Olivia DeBastiani

- Montana**
- Lorelei Rustay

- Minnesota**
- Jung Lok To
 - Leilani Tsao
 - Madison Ketcham

- Missouri**
- Sawyer Linderman

- Illinois**
- Erin Finn
 - Ethan Yang
 - Kate Sato
 - Velia-Isabyl Lopez

- Michigan**
- Isabel Moorhead

- Indiana**
- Aarshiya Agarwal
 - Kevin Ho
 - Shaurya Tiwary
 - William Haas

- Ohio**
- Ethan Guo

- New York**
- Anna Gubman
 - Brody Friedeberg
 - George Tao
 - Jack McNeely
 - Julian Koop
 - Liam Dirksen
 - Maliyah Brisset
 - Matthew Hagedorn
 - Sheridan Stewart
 - Zoe Mok

- Massachusetts**
- Alexandre London
 - Calvin Baxter
 - Charles Harger
 - Dahlia Selig
 - Dora Chen
 - Emma Shen
 - Evan Ricket
 - Gemma Albertson
 - Jihye Yi
 - Leah Chinn
 - Lily Anagnoson
 - Matteo Kong
 - Rory Thomsen
 - Seona Srivastava
 - Sydney Miller

- Rhode Island**
- Eden Kwan

- Connecticut**
- Anjali Datt
 - Cecilia Bode

- Pennsylvania**
- Brandon Potter
 - Charlotte Graham
 - Ethan Hua

- Washington D.C.**
- Giovanni Picetti
 - Jocelyn Toxcon

- Maryland**
- Chin-ray Kong

- North Carolina**
- Aayushi Kothari

- Tennessee**
- Luke Novak

- Georgia**
- Ananya Bhavanishankar
 - Max Mendell

- Florida**
- Brooke Lau

- Finland**
- Geneva Hanna

- Switzerland**
- Sylvia Demeule

- United Kingdom**
- Benjamin Cheng

- Italy**
- Lev Peretz
 - Vittoria Ferrero

- Canada**
- Charlotte Wang

- Mexico**
- Stephanie Rios Angulo
 - Joseph Zúñiga

Done, Blastoff!

343 out of 429 seniors responded.

Polling: Allinah Zhan, Angela Nguyen, Claire Qi, Helen McCloskey
 Layout: Allinah Zhan
 Graphics: Allinah Zhan

Opinion column: Israel's immorality

Jannah Nassef
NEWS WRITER

Earlier this month, the state of Israel passed a law prescribing execution by hanging for any Palestinian convicted of "terrorism-related" acts. The death sentence will exclusively apply to Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, but not Israeli settlers convicted of terrorizing Palestinian residents; hangings must be carried out within 90 days of a ruling.

Proceeding the passing of the act, Itamar Ben-Gvir, the Israeli Minister of National Security, popped champagne, while wearing a noose pin on his suit. Days later, Ben-Gvir celebrated his birthday with a cake picturing a noose on it as well as the message "Sometimes dreams do come true." A law assigning the death penalty to one race, but not the other, is similar to regimes such as Nazi Germany. Israel's actions are ironic; descendants of genocide victims are now emulating their oppressor.

The Death Penalty Information Center reports that the death sentence is prescribed for those who have committed deadly "terrorism-related" acts seen in Israel's "Counter Terrorism Law 5776-2016" with the goal of "negating the state of Israel." The issue with applying such a grim, irreversible sentence to cases of terrorism, is that the legal bounds and specifications of "terrorism" as defined in such a way that they could apply to a Palestinian acting in self-defense. On Oct. 29, 2000, Faris Odeh, a 14-year-old boy, was shot in the neck seconds after throwing a rock at an Israeli tank. The snap shot of this scene became the face of resistance in the West Bank as a symbol of a popular means of self-defense amongst Palestinian children, known as "Dabash" in Arabic.

General Avi Bluth, responsible for managing the occupation of the West Bank, confirmed that Israel was practicing a two-tier firing policy where the military freely fires at Palestinians throwing rocks but specifically avoids shooting Is-

raelis who do the same. Avi Bluth mentioned that the Israeli military killed 42 Palestinians who threw stones in 2025, and admitted that the Israeli Defense Force does not shoot at Israeli settlers for doing the same, due to the "profound societal consequences."

The difference between Dabash and Israeli-settler violence is that the former is done by children against military personnel responsible for terrorizing Palestinian families. The latter is done by settlers against Palestinian families resting in their homes. Not two weeks ago, an Israeli settler was filmed throwing rocks and attempting to break into the home of activist Issa Amro, a stark difference from children pelting a tank. And yet, under the law, the settler is considered blameless and Odeh a terrorist.

In an interview with Middle East Eye, Knesset member Amit Halevi stated that during the IDF's raid of Al-Shifa hospital, "300 terrorists were born" in the maternity ward. When the interviewer corrected him, stating "300 children, not terrorists," he stayed loyal to his statement, repeating "No; terrorists." When even Palestinian babies are called terrorists, this death penalty law cannot be relied on to only apply to actual violent acts.

Israeli courts have historically been unreliable and biased regarding the convictions of Palestinians, and cannot be trusted with the responsibility of justice. According to Amnesty International, Israeli courts have a conviction rate of over 99% regarding Palestinians accused of crimes, and Israeli authorities have notoriously used cruel and humiliating punishment to evict false confessions. In reports by Al-Jazeera, the Peoples Dispatch and Defense for Children International, Palestinian men, women and children have testified to

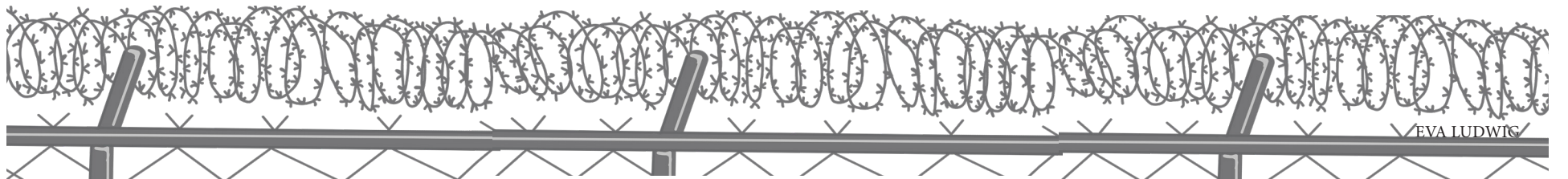
being water-boarded, severely beaten with batons, sleep deprived, sexually abused and attacked by dogs among other torture methods. B'Teslem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in Occupied Territories, reports that 60% of children jailed for throwing stones between 2005-2010 were under 14, and 852 out of 853 children arrested were imprisoned. Such examples prove that there is no course of action a Palestinian can take to shake off being considered a "terrorist" unless it is in compliance with Israeli colonialism.

The Israeli government is able to rationalize the death penalty by using sensationalist labels against Palestinians, and shuts down criticism by weaponizing antisemitism.

"This [Labelling pro-Palestinians as anti-semites] makes it easy for [Israelis] to do whatever they want," said sophomore Dimitri Cooper. "[It lets] Israelis get a chance to be the victim and get away with a lot of things."

This law isn't an isolated act of racism against Palestinians, but rather a

part of a larger trend in Israel's continued oppression of the Palestinian people. It supports settler occupation of Palestinian land by intimidating the Palestinian people into silence. Genocide cannot become normalized, racism cannot be the standard and the murder of Palestinians cannot be a headline we ignore. As youth, we have the responsibility of creating change through questioning the status quo, humanizing the oppressed, remaining educated and fighting oppression through any possible way. Whether it be through awareness on social media, boycotting or educating oneself, we must find avenues for change and cannot remain silent on injustices being imposed on Palestinians.



A politician's prize: "affordability" has lost meaning

Seona Srivastava
FEATURES WRITER

When Donald Trump ran for president in 2024, he made one promise above all others: he would make things affordable again.

In the 2024 election, the word was everywhere in his campaign — on the trail, in speeches, in policy pitches. But not everyone was convinced by the rebranding.

"He sees some value in the disaffected worker, which has definitely been a big part of his base — people that are either being laid off or not employed in the same way they once were as a result of shifts within the kind of jobs we have in this country," said senior Oscar Nicolson. "He thinks he can use these people and still take their votes in the [Grand Old Party] without actually helping them because once you get into his base, everything is blamed on outside forces. By not taking any accountability, it's very easy for him to not help those people and help people within his own interests."

More than a year into his second term, the results are mixed at best. Inflation rose again in March. Gasoline prices have climbed with the Iran war. Federal cuts have squeezed low-income households further.

The University of Michigan's Survey of Consumers, often dubbed the gold standard for measuring consumer sentiment,

hit a record low with its index dropping to 47.6, signaling low consumer confidence in the country's currency.

"Expectations for inflation in the short run are changing," said senior Matthew Hagedorn. "There are immediate and pretty damaging consumer affordability and also concerns about ... the uncertainty it brings to financial markets ... Of course, energy is an input for every business, so that's a lot of where we see inflation getting passed on to consumers more ..."

Blocking the Strait of Hormuz really messes with logistics and supply chains. That incurs costs; even if it's small, it's still going to be there — plastics for health-care, fertilizer [and] a lot of basic inputs are being affected."

The gap between political promise and lived reality is hard to ignore. During times of economic uncertainty, even ordinary choices start to feel like they're consequential.

"My parents and I complain about [the gas prices] a lot," said junior Tristan Leva-

doux. "It becomes harder for me to drive because I don't want to use as much gas. I feel bad spending my parents' money, and my parents get mad at me if I spend too much ... So I think we should pull back [our forces in Iran] so we can focus on ourselves."

The power of "affordability," experts say, comes from its universality. University of California, Los Angeles linguist Jessica Rett describes affordability as "a much weirder noun than economy" because unlike broad economic terms, it carries deeply personal meaning. But that experience isn't universal, even within the same hallways.

"Most students here, because we live around such privileged areas, won't personally care about changes from the Iran conflict, because it won't really affect them personally," said junior Lam Le. "Even if they work a job, everyone is usually supported by their parents."

That unevenness is, in many ways, exactly what politicians are counting on. Democrats point to child tax credits, paid leave and subsidized child care. Republicans point to deregulation and energy production. Both call it affordability.

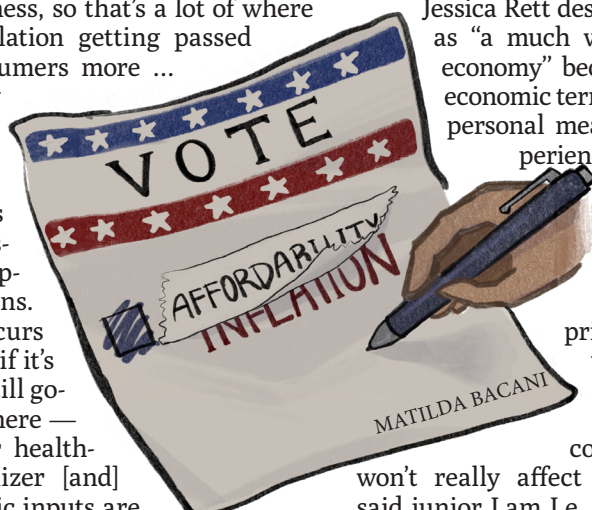
When the same word can mean everything, it risks meaning nothing.

A younger wave of politicians, including New York City mayor Zohran Mamdani and Texan Democratic nominee for Senate James Talarico, represent a left-populist strain, appealing to a similar base as Trump: working people frustrated by rising costs. However, they offer different solutions. For example, Among Mamdani implemented Streamlining Procedures to Expedite Equitable Development, a program that would expedite the process for affordable housing projects by eight months.

"Looking at Zohran Mamdani as an example, I feel like he's more believable, because with the policies that he's implementing in New York, he's actually trying to fix housing and rent and doing things for the people," Le said.

Whether the messenger is Trump, Mamdani or anyone in between, the word itself remains slippery — powerful precisely because it means something different to everyone who hears it. What it means to a student planning retirement accounts at 17 is not what it means to a family stretching a paycheck through a month of rising grocery bills. Politicians know that, but the question is whether voters do.

"The best thing that we can do for this country is inform more people," Nicolson said. "And the best thing you can do as a voter yourself is to be informed."





➤ WARNING! SPOILERS AHEAD ➤

APEX: reach for the peak

Nathaniel Wilson
FEATURES WRITER

You are trapped in an unfamiliar forest with a man you just met, and you are beginning to suspect he is not who he says he is. Run for your life.

This scary scenario is exactly the story of the film “APEX,” which was released on April 24 on Netflix.

The movie starts with Sasha, played by Charlize Theron, and her husband attempting to summit a challenging cliff-side in Norway. However, she is unable to and they decide to head back because of bad weather — only for her husband to fall and die. After she has given up climbing due to the traumatic incident, Sasha finds her way to an Australian forest where she plans to hike and canoe. However, a deranged park ranger named Ben, played by Taron Egerton, begins hunting her in a “Saw”-esque cat-and-mouse game. It is revealed that Ben has been hunting in this park for years and is a cannibalistic-tribilistic-savage. Eventually Sasha gains the upper hand, cripples Ben and kills him by dropping him off the Blue Mountains in Australia, which she has to climb in order to escape. By the end, she is able to summit the mountain, and collapses at the top, symbolizing her overcoming her trauma and escaping this nightmare come to life.

The acting in this movie was quite good on all ends, with Theron and Egerton making the scenes come to life with their realistic portrayal of emotion. Despite Ben being psychotic and creepy, Egerton does a tremendous job humanizing him. The portrayal makes his character still redeemable and almost likable at points. It was sometimes hard to understand Ben’s British accent, but overall the dialogue was pretty easy to follow.

“The villain was really good because [he’s] a natural comedian,” said freshman Aarnav Karki.

The biggest complaint I have is that Sasha’s character was not done enough justice. At

times it can be hard to feel attached to Sasha’s character, mainly at the beginning. She is kind of annoying — very self-righteous and not the best decision maker — especially compared to her husband who is calm and reasonable.

The movie is paced well, and I love that it is only 90 minutes, which makes for an easy watch. There were lots of small details that could easily be missed, mainly in dialogue, but not necessary to the plot, which are likely to be picked up during a second watch.

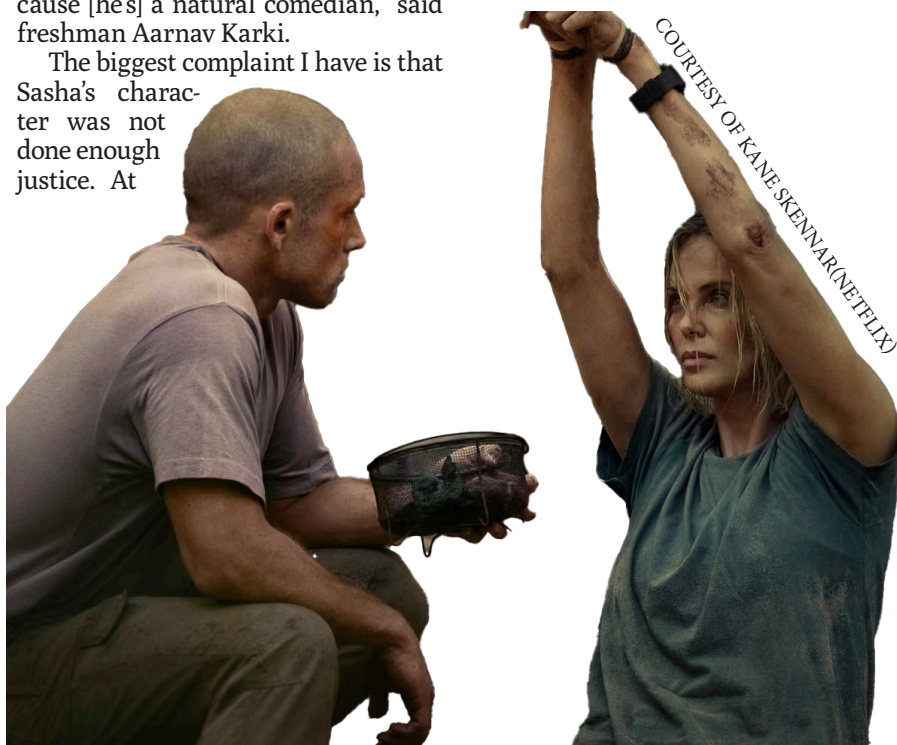
“I thought this movie was ... adrenaline pumping [and] pretty fast paced,” said freshman Albert Li. “[It was] pretty good for me. I really liked it.”

Along with the pace, despite being a thriller, the plot made sense. Suspension of disbelief is only required at some points throughout this movie because decisions by characters are logical.

My favorite parts about the movie were the beautiful shots of nature. The opening scene in Norway was picturesque, at a thrilling altitude and an exciting environment for a movie to start. The rest of the movie was filmed in New South Wales, Australia and featured gorgeous wide shots of expansive forest and mountainous terrain, engrossing you into the maze and prison that is the Australian jungle.

Despite the problems with Sasha’s character, this movie gets a lot of points in my book for the way it was filmed due to the length, scenes and pace. And in general, the characters, dialogue and plot made it a solid thriller. This movie is definitely worth watching as it packs a lot into 90 minutes, making it worthy of a four and a half stars out of five stars.

OUR OUTLOOK



Pokémon Champions plays too much

Ethan Fei
FEATURES WRITER

The first thing I noticed when I loaded into Pokémon Champions is that the “adventure” is gone. There are no forests or caves to explore, no towns to visit and no professor with a lab coat. Instead, I was directly dropped into the city of Frontier and handed my very own gym — the main battlefield in the Pokémon franchise. Soon I realized that this wasn’t just a new Pokémon game. Rather, it was entirely centered around one aspect: battling.

In a traditional Pokémon title, you start as a fledgling trainer in a sprawling region filled with towns, routes and wild areas. You are allowed to explore, catch Pokémon in the wild and level them up, slowly building your team stronger. In contrast, Champions replaces this exploration element with a small barn area to “recruit” fully evolved Pokémon immediately, removing the entire training loop. While previous Pokémon games prioritized the completion of gym challenges to progress through the central storyline, Champions deviates from this tradition. Pokémon Champions has only your gym, no villains and no narrative, as it’s built entirely around competitive battles.

The shift in structure becomes even more obvious once you start battling. Because every Pokémon arrives fully evolved and battle-ready, the game pushes you straight into competitive formats that normally take hours of grinding to reach. For players who already follow the Video Game Championships —

the official Pokémon battling formats — this streamlined approach actually makes sense.

But that shortcut comes with trade-offs. The game’s tutorial is long, scripted and surprisingly unhelpful. Instead of easing new players into competitive thinking, it rushes them through menus and mechanics with little explanation. For a game that markets itself as an accessible entry point, the onboarding feels strangely shallow. In addition, even though there are fewer Pokémon, item and move options, the game doesn’t explain how they work at all, leaving new players con-

Where Champions struggles most is depth.

“They only have selective types of Pokémon, so you can’t use all of them, limiting your potential with other Pokémon,” Elias said.

The roster of available Pokémon is limited, with only 186 out of the total 1,000, and the item pool is even smaller, with many competitive staples missing from the game.

The technical side doesn’t help either. Players mentioned reused animations, lag spikes and visuals that fall short of mainline titles.

“The graphics are definitely not as good as the main releases; they really pale in comparison to past quality,” Rogers said.

Still, Pokémon Champions isn’t without value. For players

who want to battle without grinding through

hours of story, it offers a fast, low-stakes way to practice competitive formats. Champions can serve as an introduction to competitive Pokémon, using its simplicity as a way to get more players involved in the competitive scene.

That being said, many Pokémon game fans gravitate to the games primarily because of their beloved formula — an aspect Champions has moved away from.

“It’s a cool alternative for competitive players, but it’s definitely not to the point where I’d say that’s [going to] overtake the original [games],” Rogers said.

In the end, Pokémon Champions feels less like a full Pokémon game and more like a competitive playground — a stripped-down experiment that succeeds at accessibility but stumbles in execution. Pokémon Champions is a promising idea, but it doesn’t feel complete, so I give it

two out of five stars.



OUR OUTLOOK





EVA LUDWIG

“Kehlani” sparks new self-identity

Ashley Tsui
FEATURES WRITER

On April 24, Oakland-born R&B artist Kehlani released her fifth studio album, “Kehlani,” the same day as her 31st birthday. The singer’s self-titled release discusses ideas of reinvention and a newfound personal identity.

Following her best period of well-being and after her single “Folded” catapulted her to success and won her two Grammys, Kehlani decided it was time to begin a new era.

“[After] getting really healthy and well and grounded, what better time to reintroduce that I’ve found myself for the first time in years?” Kehlani said in an interview with Sway’s Universe. “You get the record that changes your life, you gotta follow that up.”

The very first track on the album, titled “Intro,” is a spoken, 30-second-track, where Kehlani sets the stage for her album, briefly mentioning ideas like a reborn heart and speaking from an unfiltered, truthful voice: “You’re about to hear a heart that’s been stretched, healed and reborn. A voice stepping into its truth, with no fear and no apologies. I am Kehlani.”

Moreover, in “Lights On (feat. Big Sean),” Kehlani zeroes in on another aspect of personal growth: her sexuality. For this track, she uses a lower register and embraces her sensuality, highlighted by lyrics like “all the lights on, my body out on display.” This motif is also seen in tracks like “Oooh” and “Pocket (feat. Cardi B),” both of which focus on Kehlani’s vocal ability. Throughout the album, she adopts a more mature, more soulful vocal sound, which subtly sets this apart from her previous works, strengthening her newfound musical individuality.

In addition, staying true to her R&B roots, many of Kehlani’s new songs are inspired by love, reinforcing themes of yearning and devotion. A particular stand-out is “I Need You (feat. Brandy)” for its striking lyricism. The collaboration with fellow R&B artist, Brandy, makes the track more memorable for the blend of two distinct, yet complementary vocals. Both singers’ voices come through beautifully and the emotion behind the song conveys a sense of longing that is so classically R&B.

There were a few prominent tracks, though, such as

“Back and Forth (feat. Missy Elliott)” and “Shoulda Never (feat. Usher),” which both had subtle hip-hop and pop influences. There was more wordplay and more unique beats, which caused these songs to stand out from the rest of the album, as well as from Kehlani’s past work. However, this may have been due to the creative ideas of the artists she collaborated with, as both Missy Elliott and Usher are known for blending R&B music with hip-hop motifs.

Nonetheless, the various collaborations reinforce the album’s loyalty to the R&B genre and create a unique sound that makes it stand out.

“There were lots of collabs and I think that’s cool since you can hear a lot of different peoples’ voices [on one album], like Usher, Brandy, Cardi B,” said junior Aubrey Leao. “I like the vibes and the lyrics, though the meaning [of the lyrics] was only kind of there. I’d highly recommend it if you like R&B and wanna hear lots of voices.”

In the final track, “Unlearn,” Kehlani describes her mindset when trying to heal from past relationships in order to grow and prepare for a new one through this slow, smooth track, poetically concluding her reinvention album. But, like many other songs on the album, “Unlearn” spotlights Kehlani’s soulful vocals and utilizes a relaxed beat in order to do so, making it not particularly distinctive when compared to the rest of the album.

As a whole, Kehlani’s self-titled release reinforces her newfound identity through lyricism and message, yet maintains her previous musical sound and voice. However, considering her goal with this album was not to reinvent her music genre, but rather, to re-establish herself as a mature, confident artist, I would argue Kehlani’s self-titled piece was successful in conveying this new identity.

Despite some musical repetition, Kehlani’s new release, with its creative articulation of her new personal individuality and aesthetically attractive — albeit slightly overused — sound, earns itself four out of five stars.

OUR OUTLOOK



“Michael:” a mediocre movie

Max Feng
SPORTS WRITER

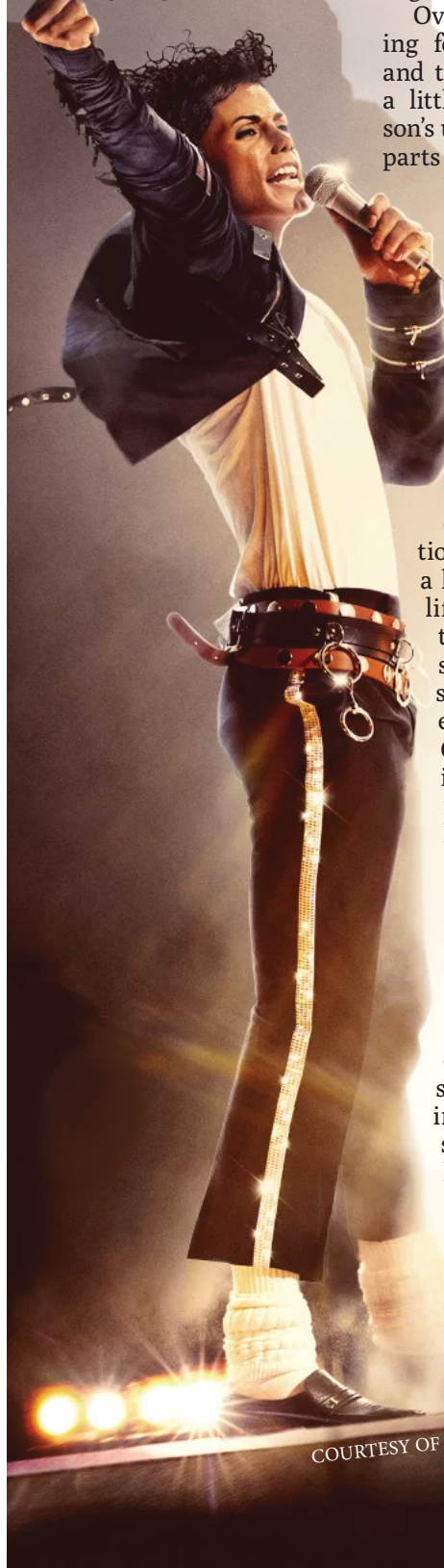
The “Michael” biopic finally moonwalked into theaters on April 24. It chronicles the first three decades of singer and songwriter Michael Jackson’s life, from his childhood up until the end of his “Bad” album tour. Directed by Antoine Fuqua, written by John Logan and starring Jackson’s nephew Jaafar Jackson, as Michael Jackson, the biopic was a peculiar ride exploring Michael Jackson’s music and upbringing.

The movie has received skewed reviews, with stunning reviews from some of Michael Jackson’s fans but deplorable ones from critics.

“I liked the movie,” said junior Azul Tepeu. “I loved it, matter of fact. I think it was one of the best films I’ve seen in my whole life.”

The film opens with him walking into Wembley stadium for his “Bad” tour before thrusting the audience into a flashback of Michael Jackson’s childhood that takes up much of the first act. His raw emotion is amazingly portrayed by child actor Juliano Valdi. His voice was almost identical to Michael’s, with perfect pitch and a rich quality to it.

“[Something that] surprised me was how [well] the little ver-



COURTESY OF LIONSGATE

LIONSGATE

sion of Michael acted, performed and just sang,” said freshman Hailey Keenan. “He sounded amazing.”

While the first act feels rather slow, taking up around the first 45 minutes, it discusses Michael Jackson’s feelings of alienation and loneliness and his conflict with his father, setting the scene for the remainder of the biopic.

In acts two and three, the conflict between Michael Jackson and his father, Joseph Jackson, continues to build. It finally comes to a climax when, in a freak accident filming a Pepsi commercial for his father’s tour, Michael Jackson’s hair lights on fire. It symbolizes how the bridge has been completely burned between Michael Jackson and his dad and how he no longer feels obligated to listen. Their relationship was beautifully developed in the film, and some of Joseph Jackson’s behavior explained some of Michael Jackson’s eccentricities later in life.

The movie ends feeling very rushed as the finale of the Victory Tour is shown immediately after Michael Jackson’s burn recovery and then transitioning into a full circle moment as he walks into the stadium shown in the opening of the movie. He sings “Bad” and as the song concludes the credits begin to roll.

Overall, the movie’s pacing felt accelerated at times, and they should have focused a little less on Michael Jackson’s upbringing to include key parts of his adult life.

“[The plot] was a little fast,” Keenan said. “They skimmed over a lot of stuff ... It also just felt like they were going through every step of Michael’s life, but fast.”

The producers entirely gloss over Michael Jackson’s first four studio albums, and annoyingly, Michael Jackson’s formation of a relationship with a key figure in his life, his lifelong friend and mentor Diana Ross. In fact, she is not included whatsoever throughout the entire movie despite Kat Graham originally being cast to play her. Significant developments like when he filmed the charity single “We Are The World,” or anything about the filming of “The Wiz,” which could’ve enhanced the plot, were also completely removed. It really could’ve helped to diversify the plot, giving more insight into Michael Jackson as an artist outside of his most popular albums.

Additionally, the questionable decision to omit introducing Quincy Jones and Rod Temperton, producer and

songwriter respectively, was irritating considering they were crucial elements in the production of “Off the Wall,” “Thriller” and even “Bad.” On the topic of “Bad,” they also failed to include the production for the follow-up to “Thriller,” which is widely regarded as on the same level of popularity and acclaim.

During this period in Michael Jackson’s life, they also skipped over a lot of controversies, like the tabloids calling him “Wacko Jacko,” or how the general public saw him. The movie seemed like it was, at times, filmed through the rose-tinted goggles of its producers, an idealistic contrast to how some people perceive him in reality. Specifically, their choice to end the movie two years before the prevalent child abuse allegations against Michael Jackson sparked a lot of controversy amongst viewers.

Despite all of this criticism, the film has many redeeming qualities. Colman Domingo’s portrayal of Joseph Jackson was commendable, and his acting was the highlight of the movie. He truly did feel like a villain, whether it was him leaning in to beat Michael Jackson and cuss him out, or when he delivered lines so raw as “I own [Michael] nine to five.”

Another redeeming aspect of the film were the scenes of Michael Jackson performing, whether that was at the Motown 25th anniversary or on the final day of the Victory Tour, truly transports the viewer back to a time when he ruled the world. In terms of the soundtrack, the mixing was beautiful, almost as if Michael Jackson was having the concert right in front of the audience. The recreation of the iconic Motown 25 moonwalk performance was beautiful to say the least, and the music video and studio scenes felt very real.

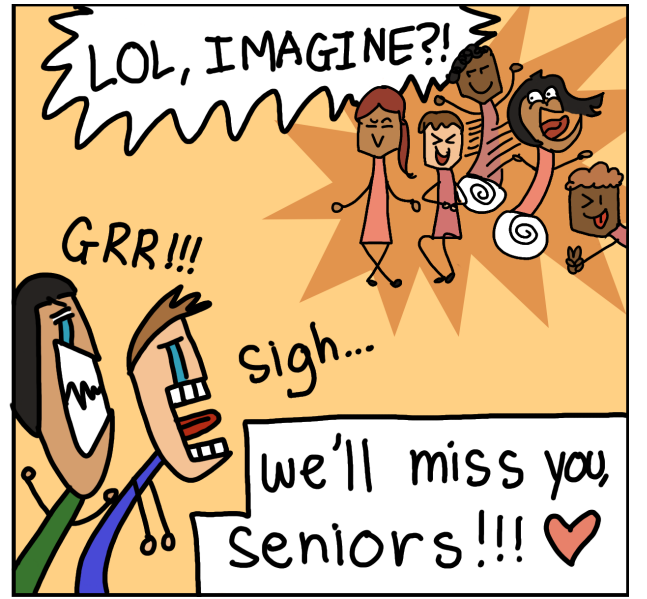
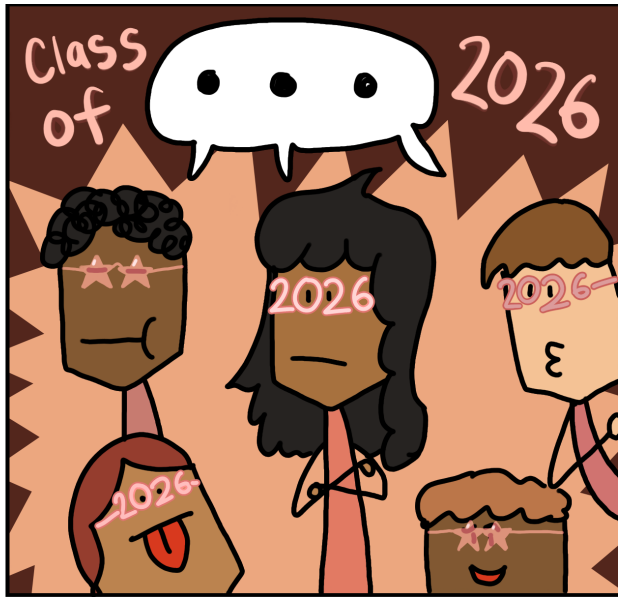
Overall, the movie’s goal was to boost Jackson’s legacy in a time when most news about him is bad.

“I always felt that younger generations didn’t know Michael or his story,” Fuqua said in an interview with Deadline. “In order to tell anything about Michael, you had to remind people about the magic of him, the power of the music, and the fun that he brought into the world and his own insecurities.”

The theme of isolation and conflict between Michael Jackson and his father provided a very interesting backbone to the movie that brought insight into Michael’s background and character to a broader audience. While critic reviews were quite low, I feel the main goal of the movie was accomplished, and despite how the overall plot of the movie was sometimes incomplete or bland, I would give the movie three out of five stars.

OUR OUTLOOK





MI NGUYEN — @CUACREATES

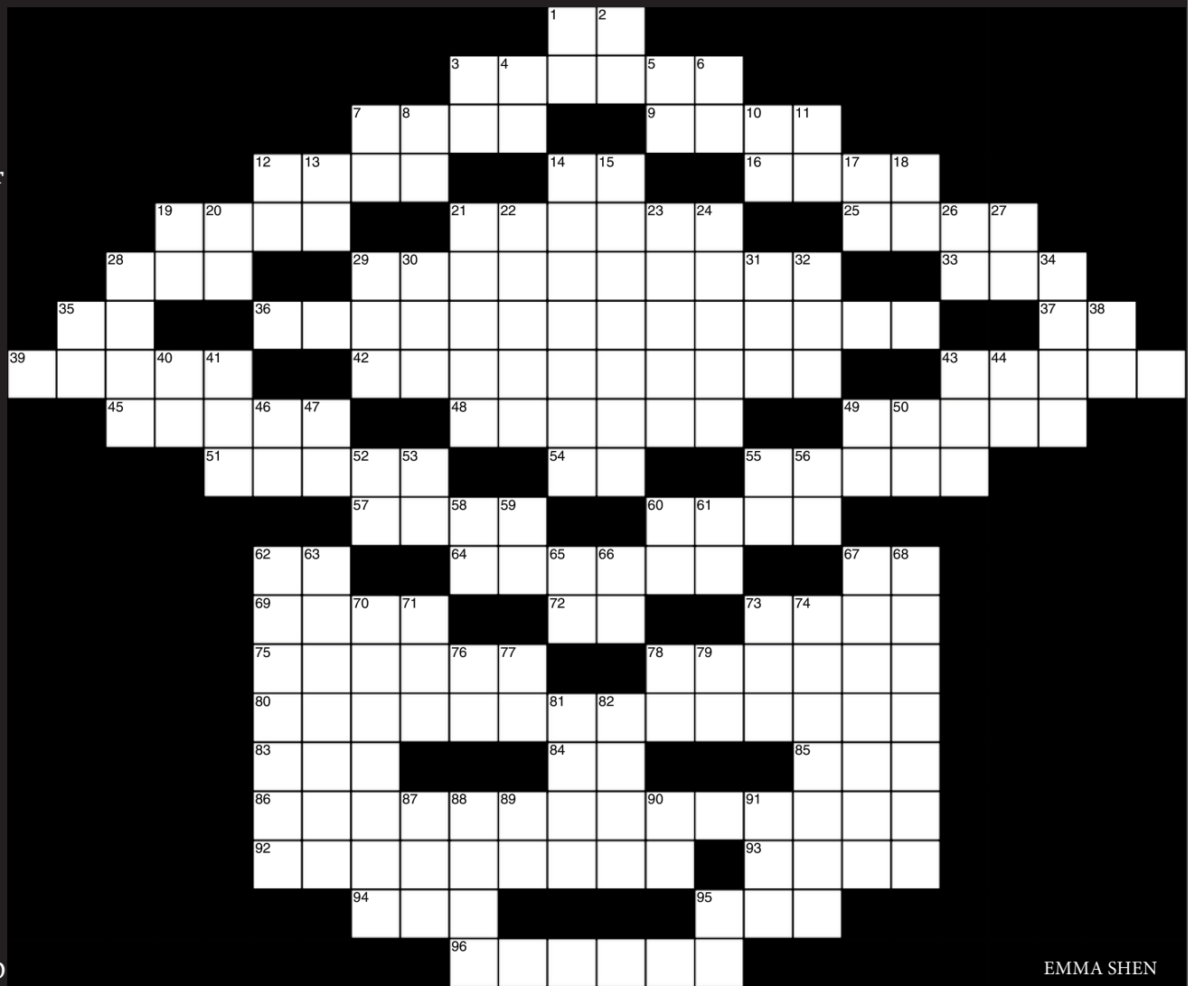
ACROSS

- 1. Tired
- 3. Tired
- 7. Tired
- 9. Tired
- 12. Tired
- 14. 14D of Science
- 16. Tired
- 19. Tired
- 21. Maintain the ____ quo
- 25. Tired
- 28. ____ Arbor, Michigan
- 29. Rips into shreds
- 33. Common allergy
- 35. Standard unit of mass
- 36. What seniors might throw on May 28th
- 37. Abbr. for English-speaking country in the Eastern Hemisphere
- 39. What jingles on cowboys' boots; San Antonio style
- 42. French knife technique resulting in long, thin strips
- 43. Young chap
- 45. Shape of the November crossword
- 48. Avenue, Boulevard, Drive, etc.
- 49. Cancel, as a mission
- 51. What's on the top half of this page
- 54. Jr's original
- 55. A Madison Square Garden basketball player
- 57. What a senior would wear on 74D
- 60. Shock with a stun gun
- 62. Arkansas, abbr.
- 64. Largest artery in the human body, plural
- 67. Computer science
- 69. Dior, misspelled
- 72. __ Capone; Alcatraz gangster
- 73. Boom ____ by Charli xcx
- 75. When the hour hand is west
- 78. Tame ____
- 80. Hee hee
- 83. ____ you tired?
- 84. Slither ____
- 85. Prefix meaning three
- 86. I don't recognize your contact
- 92. Dish-drying cloths
- 93. German composer of the

- late Baroque period
- 94. Male child
- 95. Home project
- 96. Water heater

DOWN

- 1-8. Tired
- 10-13. Tired
- 14. Postgrad degree
- 15. Spaghetti sauce, for a white T-shirt
- 17. Tired
- 18. Tired
- 19. Zinc
- 20. Zinc
- 21. Saul if he were plural
- 22. Characteristic
- 23. Singular point ahead, in sports
- 24. ____ary, ____izer (related to cleaning)
- 26. Zinc
- 27. ____lu, the largest ethnic group and nation in South Africa
- 28. Water in 68D
- 29. ____ Mahal Palace
- 30. What colleges often have at the end of their email address
- 31. Royal Canadian Navy
- 32. ____, you're it
- 34. Someone without this may speak or act without a filter
- 35. Popular American health care consortium, abbr.
- 38. ____ Prime Minister Keir Starmer
- 40. Type of toy developed in the 1960's
- 41. Study of human society, social relationships and institutions, abbr.
- 43. ____ choy
- 44. "____ So Gay" by Katy Perry



EMMA SHEN

- 46. Country whose capital is Bucharest, abbr.
- 47. Unit of measurement for wavelength of light
- 49. ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, for example
- 50. Calculus class only taught by Cheri Dartnell
- 52. Colorful social media platform, abbr.
- 53. Colorado, abbr.
- 55. Kansas, abbr.
- 56. Home of the Patriots, abbr.
- 58. Washington, abbr.
- 59. Nitrogen monoxide
- 60. Student who helps teacher for grade
- 61. Advanced classes for underclassman English and history

- 62. Inflexible and firm; persistent
- 63. Katcher and Flynn (see page 5)
- 65. Egyptian sun god
- 66. ____;DR
- 67. Relating to heat
- 68. Biggest world language program at Aragon
- 70. Bring back what ____ mine (Tangled)
- 71. First three letters of "Umbrella" singer
- 73. Restaurant that serves Thai pizza and BBQ chicken pizza on 31st
- 74. May 28, for Aragon
- 76. Unavailable
- 77. American poet ____ Cummings

- 78. Reverse of 49D
- 79. Emcee
- 81. Queue
- 82. Male main character in Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind
- 87. Vacation time!
- 88. What someone might do if you cut them off on the road
- 89. Exclamation when hurt
- 90. Dubs
- 91. ____-Wan Kenobi
- 95. Delaware, abbr.

SOLUTIONS:
bit.ly/MaySolutions

RECRUITED ATHLETES

Reporting by Phoebe Harger and Sabina Gulati

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ATHLETES

CHARLIE HARGER

Tufts University



When and how did you first get into running track?

"I first started track at Borel in eighth grade. I had done cross country in sixth grade but I realized that distance running was just not for me. So after we came back from COVID-19, I was super excited to try out short sprints."

What was the most challenging part of your recruitment process?

"The most challenging part of my process was dealing with the 'no's' from schools I really wanted to attend. When I visited my dream school, the head coach gave me an offer in person, but when I texted him to accept it a couple days later, he told me that he was mistaken and no longer had space for another recruit. That response was super hard to stomach, but I was grateful to still have other offers from amazing schools like Tufts."

What are you looking forward to most about competing at the college level?

"I'm super excited about being able to compete at large invitationals and run on tracks I used to only see on TV. I will also be in the same conference as one of my club teammates, so I am looking forward to seeing her at multiple meets a year. Honestly, I'm just excited to continue doing the thing I love the most, and I'm really thankful to have this opportunity."

MADISON KETCHAM

Carleton College

Who has been the biggest influence on you in your journey as an athlete?

"I would definitely say my club coach, Coach Sunny. He's just always been a very positive person in my life, and he keeps me motivated. He's very supportive, but he's [also] hard on us when it comes to the game. He's one of the best coaches I've ever had, and [that's] been really helpful."

What are you most looking forward to next year?

"I'm looking forward to getting better at soccer ... meeting new people ... [and] growing as a person. Last year, the [Carleton soccer] team made it to the final eight, so I'm hoping that we can maybe win the National Collegiate Athletic Association tournament. I'm going to a school where I feel like I can really [grow] academically ... and make connections."

How did you first get into soccer?

"My parents put me in soccer when I was young. I went into a lot of different sports, like [many] people, but I just always enjoyed [soccer]. I always had fun. [With] some other sports that I played, I found it really stressful ... but then this one was like an outlet for me to just express myself."



LORELEI RUSTAY

University of Montana

When and how did you first get into playing soccer?

"I first started playing soccer when I was in second grade. Honestly, I saw all of my friends playing American Youth Soccer Organization and wanted to try it too. My mom also played soccer growing up and in college, so that definitely inspired me to start playing."

What was the most challenging part of the recruiting process?

"The most challenging part of the recruiting process was staying patient and not giving up. It took a lot of work and commitment to constantly send emails and play in front of sidelines full of coaches. Having a strong support system cheering me on the entire time really helped me stay motivated."

Who has inspired you the most throughout your athletic career?

"A lot of people have inspired me throughout my career. My mom has always been incredibly supportive but I've also been lucky to play alongside so many talented athletes who have pushed me to grow and improve. Being surrounded by those people is a huge reason why I'm able to play college soccer today."



LILY ANAGNOSON

Tufts University



When did you realize you wanted to swim in college?

"I started swimming competitively when I was about eight. [Since] my parents had both swum in college, I imagined myself at least doing [the same with] a sport. I didn't know for sure that it would be swimming, but by the time I was in middle school, I [saw] myself doing it in college."

Why did you choose Tufts University?

"I really love swimming, [but] I didn't want to be at a school that was going to weigh me down a ton and not let me enjoy other things. Both of my parents went to college in Boston, so I've been [there] a few times and I just loved it, and I knew that I wanted that city environment. I think the vibes of the team and the city were the biggest things that stood out for me with Tufts versus other schools."

What are you looking forward to most about competing at the college level?

"I'm really excited for Tufts. Especially because it is D3, I have a much higher likelihood of making NAAs, which I think is an experience that so few people get. It's really special ... and with the times I'm doing right now, I should be able to make [it]. That's the main thing I'm looking forward to."



When and how did you first get into playing volleyball?

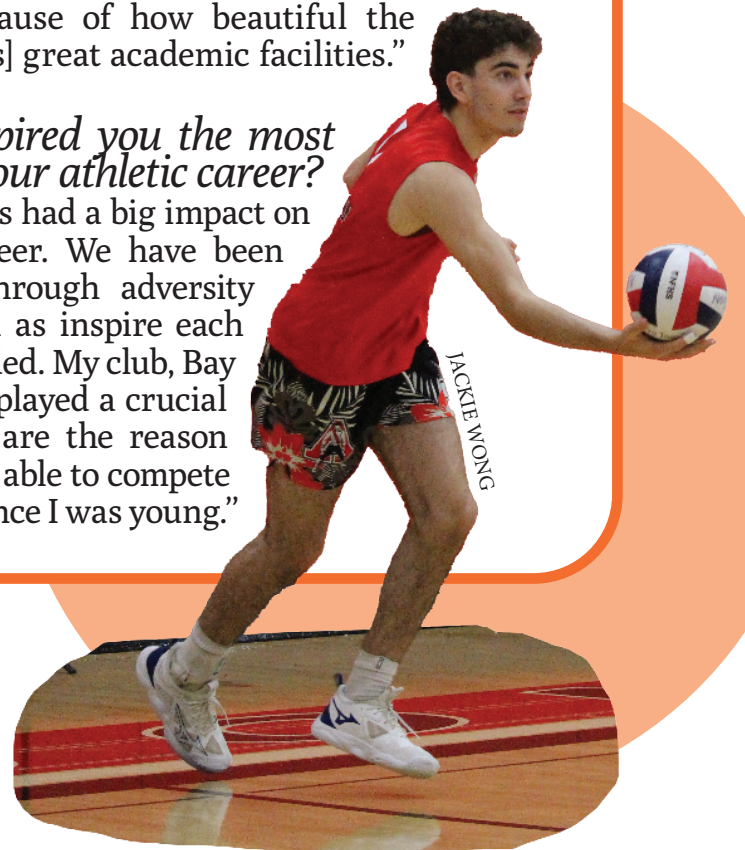
"I grew up in the volleyball gym. My parents played when they were young and they coach now, so I spent most of my childhood in the gym playing volleyball."

Why did you choose University of the Pacific?

"I chose University of the Pacific because of many reasons. One is because the coach, Devin, is a great guy who has a lot of support behind him and has been communicative throughout my whole recruitment process. Another reason is because the alumni of the program are some of my club coaches and the reason why the school's volleyball program is being reinstated. Lastly, just because of how beautiful the school is and [its] great academic facilities."

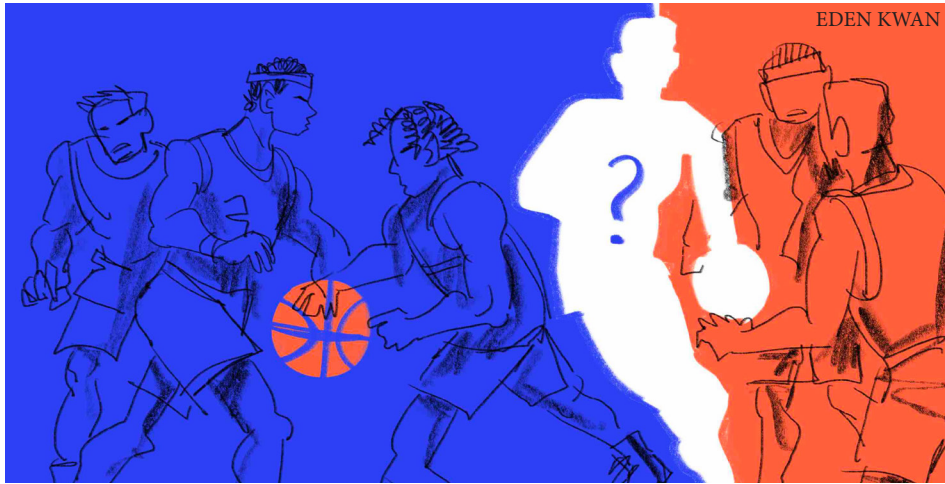
Who has inspired you the most throughout your athletic career?

"My family has had a big impact on my athletic career. We have been able to fight through adversity together as well as inspire each other when needed. My club, Bay to Bay, has also played a crucial role since they are the reason why I have been able to compete at a high level since I was young."



University of the Pacific

SANTI SMIRNOFF



EDEN KWAN

Predictions for NBA Playoffs

Oliver Levitt
FEATURES WRITER

Over the last seven years, the NBA has been in a never before seen era of parity, with seven different teams winning the championship over the last seven years, starting with the Toronto Raptors in 2019, followed by the Lakers, Bucks, Warriors, Nuggets, Celtics and last year's Thunder. With a combination of the NBA's harsher financial restrictions to crack down on super teams, front office decision-making and post-season injury in recent years, the NBA has changed from a league filled with dynasties in the '90s, '00s, '10s to one where no team can stay on top for back to back seasons in the '20s.

"It's very good for the league, because it means it's not a repetitive product," said senior Brayden Nguyen. "But as a Warriors fan, I think it's horrible. I miss when it was just Warriors [vs.] Cavs [in the finals]."

Currently, there are four teams remaining in the NBA playoffs: the Thunder and Spurs in the West and the Knicks and Cavaliers in the East. Only one of these teams has won a championship in the last seven years, meaning there could be a new champion once again this season. Personally, I'm rooting for a new champion, whether that be the first Knicks victory in half a century, the first Cavs win since LeBron and a redemption for James Harden or a first Spurs win since Tim Duncan and the start of Victor Wembanyama's all-time dominance.

Realistically, the Thunder have the highest odds to win the championships as the favorite, with -175 odds in Vegas.

"Most likely to win is the Thunder or the Spurs," said senior Kaleb Brodeth. "The refs are on the Thunder's side. They flop and get a bunch of fouls."

Led by MVP superstar Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, known for his foul-baiting tendencies, the team has amassed much hate for their leader's ability to make his way to the free throw line through questionable foul calls.

"It's not unethical," Nguyen said. "I think he's playing the game to the rules that it's conformed to, but I think the NBA needs to adjust to how he's playing. He doesn't need to adjust at all."

Having won 64 games this season and last year's championship, they pose a looming threat to all teams left standing in the playoffs, already sweeping the Lakers and the Suns. The Thunder are not only filled with elite star power with Gilgeous-Alexander and all star Chet Holmgren, but they also have one of the deepest bench rotations in history. Ten players that could easily start on other teams are frequently coming

off their bench, including the likes of bench scorers Jared McCain and Isaiah Joe, as well as elite defenders Alex Caruso and Luguentz Dort.

While the team seems unstoppable, there have been cracks in their seemingly perfect lineup, namely Victor Wembanyama and the San Antonio Spurs. In the regular season, they went 4-1 against the Thunder, notably ending the Thunder's 16 game winning streak and eliminating them from the NBA Cup.

"The Spurs have a good amount of star power and are very connected," Brodeth said. "They have Wembanyama. He is a smooth player and able to score from all three spots. He plays good defense. That could catapult them to an NBA championship."

This difference in defense could be the deciding difference in a Spurs-Thunder series.

"I think that the Spurs are gonna win the championship because I think Wembanyama, Stephon Castle and Dylan Harper are all just so good," said junior Will Kelley. "They're an athletic team, they're so good defensively that I think they're gonna beat the Thunder. They have more size, more athleticism, way more skilled, they're a better team overall. The Thunder is really the only obstacle they have because whoever is coming out of the East is not gonna be a good team."

Interestingly, the Spurs are leading the league in defensive rating, while the Thunder are leading in offensive, though the Knicks have the highest net rating. This creates an interesting conference finals picture, with top rated teams actually making it out of their conferences.

While some, including myself, believe in Wembanyama and the Spurs' ability to beat the Thunder in a seven game series, others think that the Cavaliers are best suited to win the East and the finals.

"Cleveland Cavaliers are going all the way," Nguyen said. "2017 James Harden is back, fear the beard. I've never seen James Harden hoop like this since 2017 when he took the prime time Warriors with Kevin Durant to game seven ... [He's not bad in the playoffs because] he just scored 30 points [in game five against the Pistons] and hit a game winner [in game four]."

Though the Thunder may be the favorite by Vegas odds, many NBA fans are hoping to crown a new champion and continue the era of parity.

Whether it be the Spurs defense, the Knicks overall rating and huge fan base or James Harden's recent return to greatness on the Cavaliers, there are many pathways, though unlikely, that could lead to a shocking Thunder defeat in the NBA playoffs over the next month.

Boys volleyball wins CCS Champs

Max Feng
SPORTS WRITER

On May 16, the Aragon Dons' varsity boys volleyball team became the CCS D1 champions, beating Mountain View High School 3-1. The energy was electric as the third-seeded Dons prepared to face off against the fourth-seeded Spartans. The crowd was buzzing as fans from both teams gathered at Saint Francis High School to watch the CCS Division 1 Championship game.

The starting lineup for the first set consisted of senior court captain and setter Santiago Smirnoff, senior and junior outsides Ailesh Chauhan and Tyler Rivera, junior and senior middles Raghav Vemulapalli and Cameron Ngai, senior opposite Charlie Wilcox and junior libero Peyton Chiang. The set started out with teams playing evenly, with key attacks by Wilcox and Rivera until the score was 6-6. Vemulapalli had a crucial spike into the middle of the court off of a bad pass over the net, which snowballed into an early lead.

The Dons continued to build a lead to 18-11, until momentum shifted and the Spartans started to claw back. The Spartans scored six straight points and head coach Meliame Hala'ufia called a time-out. Immediately after, Vemulapalli killed off a quickset by Smirnoff, shifting energy back in favor of the Dons. They ended up winning the set 25-21.

"After the first set, I thought we were going to sweep them," Vemulapalli said. "Somehow they came back in the game."

The second set started off well for the Dons. After losing a point, they bounced back, with Ngai putting away three key points off of Smirnoff's sets. However, the Spartans weren't letting up as they made many kills, the score in their favor until it hit 9-12, when the Dons rallied back, bringing the score to 14-12 and forcing the Spartans to call a time-out.

The Dons maintained the lead until 18-15, when the Spartans fought back

heavily. As the score hit 23-23, the Spartans scored two break points, eventually winning the set 23-25 on an ace.

The Dons rolled into the third set, putting in #24 senior opposite Ben Chang to replace Wilcox. He got his first point to bring them a lead of 2-1, which they wouldn't lose for the rest of the set. The Dons really started to take over the game after 19-14 and ended up routing the Spartans 25-19. The Spartans played in a reserved fashion for the whole set, not having a lead at any point in a display of the Dons strength. It was a contrast to the loss in the second set. Smirnoff attributes that to constant adaptation.

"We talked about what we could have done better," Smirnoff said. "We made adjustments accordingly, and then we just got it right back together through the whole time."

During the fourth set, the Spartans dropped the ball several times due to miscommunications that threw their flow off. At 11-10, a crucial rally was won by the Dons and energy seemed in their favor. However, immediately after, the Spartans fired back and brought the score to 11-11. For the rest of the set, Spartans coach Josh Sullivan argued with the referees' calls despite the fact that the game was very even, with the Spartans usually having a one-point edge over the Dons until 22-22. The Spartans began playing scared, tipping the ball and giving simple balls over the net until Rivera had a powerful kill, winning Aragon the game with the final fourth set score 25-22.

After the game, Hala'ufia reflected on being able to pull through and win the championship for the first time in program history.

"I was very happy with our team," Hala'ufia said. "It's been thirteen years, so this is the first [championship] for program history. We've been [here] before but we lost two years ago."

Chauhan also reflected on a similar sentiment.

"Me and Santi [have] been on varsity since sophomore year,"



BRANDON HO

Chauhan said. "We lost in three [sets] to Mountain View that year in CCS D[ivision] 2. That was sad, so we got it back for the class of [20]24 ... Seeing us win that CCS medal truly made me realize this program is special."

Smirnoff gave closing opinions on the experience of the game as a whole.

"It was a great atmosphere," Smirnoff said. "Better than we've had all season ... [We've] got a great group of guys and [we] got through it together, played great and talked to each other when there [were] struggles."

With this win, the team advances to the CIF tournament. Their first game of the tournament was on May 19, against the Laguna Creek Cardinals.

SPRING SPORTS RECAP

ANGELA NGUYEN

5/14
Baseball vs San Mateo
4-1 Win

5/13
Softball vs King's Academy
10-8 Win

5/7
Boys Lacrosse vs Gunn
13-3 Win

5/5
Girls Lacrosse vs PRIORITY
13-14 Loss

Track and field secures breakthrough at Last Chance

Olivia Mukherjee
SPORTS WRITER

On April 25, the Aragon track and field team headed to Mountain View High School to compete in the Central Coast Selection Last Chance Invitational. One of the final few meets on the calendar before the postseason truly begins, the Last Chance is a meet where many athletes are looking to lock down qualifying times and get these times as low as possible before the main championship season begins.

This meet, a qualifying meet for the CCS championship, drew runners from all over the Central Coast, and served as a perfect occasion to measure times for many of the longer events. For Aragon, the meet was useful due to its proximity to both the PAL and the CCS championship season. After the April 25 meet, Aragon went on to compete in the PAL Frosh-Soph Championships on May 2, and the PAL Varsity Trials and Finals on May 9.

A standout performance for the Dons came from senior Tyler Nichols in the 800 meter event. The Aragon senior clocked a time of 1:57.33, a new personal best, and moved him into the 4th spot in school history for the 800 meters. For the whole season, he had been chasing the elusive mark of two minutes, a goal that he finally met with his effort on Saturday.

"I went out controlled on the first lap and just trusted that I had the ability to close," Nichols said. "Seeing 1:57 on the board, I couldn't believe it at first ... It was definitely a great experience."

The fact that the invitational took place so close to the postseason also added a competitive element to the meet, raising pressures especially for runners in the longer distance events.

"Everyone knows there aren't many chances left, and you can feel it," Nichols said. "Warmups feel different ... The races feel different."

Sophomore Isaac Albert had one of Aragon's other top performances of the day, setting a new personal best in the 1600 meter race at 4:58.33. Albert stayed with the pack for the majority of the race and kicked hard in the final few hundred meters. The performance marked a major breakthrough for the experienced distance runner.

"The pace went out quickly and I just tried to stay calm," Albert said. "By the last lap it was just about hanging on and seeing what I had left."

For many of the runners, especially in the longer races, a meet like the Last Chance can be invaluable in preparing for the pressure of a championship meet.

"There's something about being in an actual race that

brings out a different effort," Albert said. "You find out a lot about where you're at."

In the shorter races, freshman Noah Perfettini-Derenne and sophomore Mario Escalante both ran personal bests in the 100 meters, recording times of 12.53 and 13.35 respectively. Senior Darren Benavente added a personal best 25.06 in the 200 meters.

For now, Albert, along with a large portion of the Aragon team, are looking to make their last big efforts at the upcoming PAL and CCS championships.

"I want to see how far I can go at PAL and CCS," Albert said. "[You] put in a lot of work during the season and the championship meets are when [you] get to see what it adds up to."

Freshman Matias Fernandez-Rodriguez, juniors Amelia Hayden-Geophart and Mina Hwang, as well as seniors Tyler Nichols, Luke Novak and Luke Saunders moved on to the CCS finals on May 23 at Gilroy High School.

The Dons' badminton season finished off with CCS Finals on May 16th. Junior Allison Hsu is ranked 4th competing in women's singles and seniors William Ye and Anson Yu, ranked 4th in men's doubles will be advancing to the CIF tournament on May 23 at Independence High School.



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Senior Max Gan prepares to serve.



IAN WANG

Luke Trimble
SPORTS WRITER

On May 6, the Dons' boys varsity tennis team (15-6 overall) defeated the Mountain View Vikings (13-5 overall) by a score of 5-2 in the first round of Central Coast Section playoffs. The Dons' CCS campaign followed a dominant season that ended in their third consecutive Peninsula Athletic League title.

Despite the Dons' continued success, grabbing the top spot came as a surprise to many on the team, with the departure of last year's senior class forcing the Dons' team to turn to many new players for the 2026 season.

"We lost a lot of talent off last year's team," said head coach David Owdom. "No way I thought they'd be the champions of the league ... but these guys proved they're champions. They proved me ... wrong."

The team clinched the top spot on April 22 in their final match of the

Boys tennis wins first round of CCS

season, which came against the Carlmont Scots (9-3 league).

In No. 1 singles, senior Veraaz Khan squared off against the top ranked PAL player, the Scots' sophomore Lucas Rowe.

"We knew going in, their number one guy is the best player in the league," Owdom said. "So we knew that was going to be tough."

Veraaz Khan was unable to come out on top, falling 6-0, 6-0.

"I wish I was more consistent and [didn't] miss as frequently," Veraaz Khan said. "[I wish I] played longer rallies."

Senior Darrin O'Brien and sophomore Azmir Khan claimed singles No. 3 and 4, and each doubles set went to the Dons, giving them a 5-1 lead.

No. 2 singles player Pacôme Polly was the final Don playing Wednesday night, locked in a tiebreaker battle with Carlmont's Aaron Zhang. With a crowd gathered outside the court, Polly won the tiebreaker 11-9, securing a 6-1 victory for the Dons.

CCS spot clinched, the Dons began looking forward to their first match of the playoffs.

"There's 12 automatic bids and 12 at large bids," Owdom said. "We're an automatic ... There's a team tournament for the other automatic bid, which we avoid because we won."

With the playoff tournament comprising the top teams in the section, the Dons were also looking forward to playing against more prestigious opponents.

"There are really fantastic players [in the playoffs]," Veraaz Khan said. "And since they play singles one, they're people [that] are gonna be committed for tennis, which is not

me. So ... it's good exposure to play with really good players."

The Mountain View Vikings visited the Dons on May 6 in a first round CCS playoff matchup, which featured four super-tiebreakers.

The Dons were already in the lead when the match kicked off at 4 p.m., as the Vikings, who were missing a player, forfeited singles No. 4 to Azmir Khan.

The first tiebreaker of the day came in singles No. 1, where Veraaz Khan won the tiebreaker 10-6 after splitting his first two sets. O'Brien found himself in the same situation in

"I had a lot of mental resilience," Cheung said. "Normally we win the first set and then we lose [the] second one because we don't keep the same level [of] intensity, but [we] just [stayed] in the moment and [tried] to really finish the match."

In singles No. 2, Polly was the last Don playing in a close third set tiebreaker, with his teammates cheering from the sidelines. Again, Polly pulled through, winning 10-8 as the Dons cruised to a 5-2 win and a trip to a second round playoff match two days later.



HALEY LAU

Junior Pacôme Polly hits a forehand shot.

singles No. 3, winning his tiebreaker 10-8.

The Dons slipped in doubles No. 1 and No. 2, with a third tiebreaker deciding the latter by a score of 4-10.

Sophomore Linus Feng and junior Kian Cheung put the Dons back on track in doubles No. 3, winning both sets with ease.

"Everyone really wants to have fun," Cheung said. "They all enjoy being there, and we all hype each other up. If my teammates are cheering [for] me, [I] try to do better, try to improve every shot."

The Dons' season ended unceremoniously in the second round at Homestead High School on May 8, where the hosting Mustangs won all seven matches to advance past the second round.



BRANDON HO

Boys lacrosse falls to Los Altos

Alex Choy
SPORTS WRITER

On April 24, the Aragon boys lacrosse team lost to the Los Altos Eagles 13-1, despite a solid first-half performance that saw the Dons' stubborn defense frustrate a technically superior Los Altos side.

While most teams would interpret this result as a major drawback, the Dons, in a state of rebuilding, reflected on the game as a demonstration of their vast improvement from the start of the season.

"This game was really good for the team," said junior and defensive captain Justin Pita. "[One] thing that contributed to that idea was both the individual and also the team growth that occurred during the game and after it."

Aragon remains quite a long way from reaching the level of teams like Los Altos, but they have had plenty of positives to focus on, primarily with the rapid development of their fresh batch of newcomers.

"These new kids that are coming in, [it doesn't matter] whether or not they know a lot about the sport, they're athletic," Pita said. "They're quick, they're strong and it helps a lot ... I would say [the team rebuilding] is a matter of time. You can't rush these things ... It can be challenging but I'm impressed ... to see how [these new players] have developed rather quickly."

Some players attribute their success to a modified coaching system.

"The team is in a better state than last year," said sophomore and midfielder Sam Choslovsky. "We have [valuable] new coaches ... who have a good idea of what they're planning on doing, and they've got a good setup."

While the Dons were under no real pressure to win, they had a determination to bounce back and redeem themselves after a tough loss at Hillsdale a few days prior. Even as massive underdogs, the team still went in with high standards, anticipating a gritty, dynamic match.

"Obviously, expectations were always going to be high," Pita said. "We walked into [the] game knowing there was going to be a fight ... We did have a plan to go in and be a little bit more experimental in the sense of trying out people at new positions, especially [because] we were limited on numbers."

From the very start, it seemed that the Dons' improving team chemistry had taken their defensive ability another step forward.

"We definitely ... communicated [better] when people were cutting in ... to shoot," Pita said. "One of the bigger problems that we struggled with at the start of the season was communication ... But [recently], we've been talking a lot more, people know what to say, and it's ... really helping the team."

Aragon conceded four unanswered goals in the first half, but their persistent perimeter defense, along with crucial saves from junior and goalkeeper Santiago Corona, prevented many goals from Los Altos.

However, it was during the second half that the Dons' structure and gameplan began to unravel. By the end of it, exhaustion had dealt its damage on the Dons, while Los Altos tucked away nine more goals to cap off their comprehensive 13-1 victory.

"Our defense was kind of a matter of how long we could last," Pita said. "We were pretty solid in that first half ... but what it comes down to is, after so many rounds of defense, we just get tired, ... especially when a lot of our defensive players were injured ... I am [still] proud of them for playing through it and being strong."

Despite the disappointing defeat, the Dons found consolation in their singular goal, scored by Choslovsky at the end of a brilliant solo run through multiple defenders.

"I see a great future ahead of us, especially because this is one of the hardest teams in the league, ... and as it was my first ever goal, I view this as a big success for myself," Choslovsky said. "We also did better than our last game against the same team."

Having previously gone two full years without a win, the boys lacrosse program has been enjoying the full effects of their team rebuild. They won four games this season and have good reason to expect a future of even greater success.

"All I can really say is, I'm probably the most excited I've been about this program in a long time," Pita said. "At the end of the last season, we didn't even know if there was going to be a team. But with the progression we've made this season, I really believe in this program's future, and I'm really excited to see how much further we can push it."



Players face off before beginning to play.