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Tuesday,  
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2023

# The Campanile

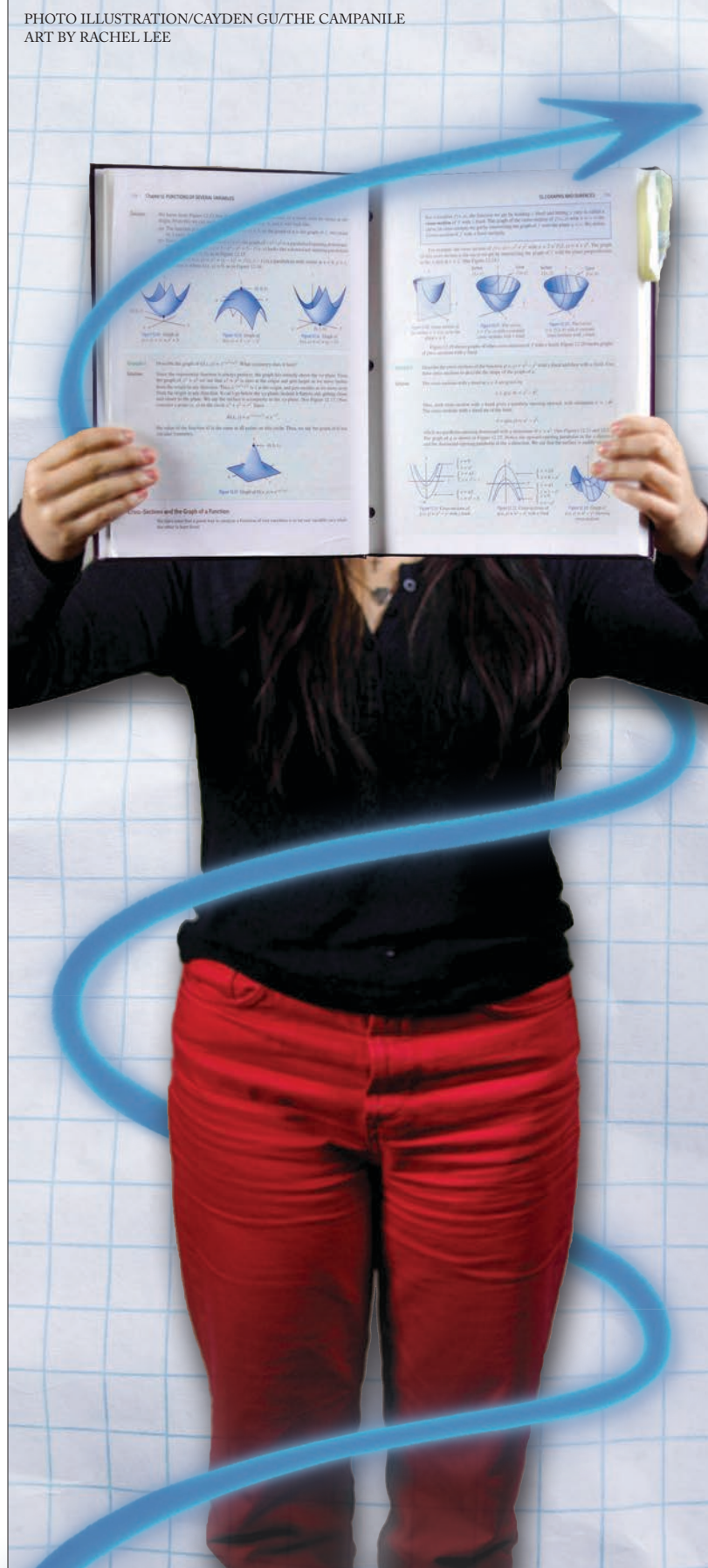
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Palo Alto High School, 50 Embarcadero Road, Palo Alto, CA 94301

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ART BY RACHEL LEE



## THE VERDICT IS IN:

### PAUSD'S MATH PLACEMENT POLICIES DON'T ADD UP

Judge rules district violated Education Codes, issues writ of mandate

A Santa Clara Superior Court judge has sided with the plaintiffs in a case against the Palo Alto Unified School District and its method of placing students in high school math classes. A court order, signed by Judge Carrie Zepeda on Feb. 6, requires the school district to revise its ninth grade math placement policies to comply with California Education Code and the Math Placement Act.

Judge Zepeda found that PAUSD violated two education codes mandated by the state, including the 2015 Math Placement Act which "requires school districts to develop, establish, and implement fair, objective and transparent mathematics placement policies for ninth grade students that consider multiple objective measures as the basis for placement."

The judge also ruled the school district violated EDC 51228.2, which states that school districts cannot force students to repeat classes if they have already completed the UC-approved equivalent.

According to the writ of mandate issued by Judge Zepeda, "PAUSD must adopt a math placement policy that uses multiple objective academic measures."

Palo Alto parent Avery Wang, an adviser to the lawsuit, said parents filed the lawsuit to ensure a quality education for their kids.

"We're just very upset that this was happening," Wang said. "(The current math placement policy) lowers the amount of education that kids are getting. Coming out of Palo Alto, PAUSD used to have a really great reputation."

Wang said PAUSD schools and the opportunities they provide are the main reason many families move to Palo Alto despite the high cost of living, and he wants to ensure all students are receiving the best education possible.

"I've even heard, in fact, the only reason some people want to live in Palo Alto is the excellent schools," Wang said. "But as a result of what's been happening and kids being held back, they're not getting the education they deserve."

Paly parent Edith Cohen, the lead plaintiff in the lawsuit, said putting advanced students in courses where they already know the material is detrimental for students. She also said she is disappointed that it took a lawsuit for the district to comply with state law.

In his weekly email update sent to district families on Feb. 24, Superintendent Don Austin attributed much of what led to the lawsuit to poor website design.

"After reviewing the District website and informational materials regarding math placement and pathways, I can see why there was a degree of confusion," Austin wrote in the update. "Despite the best efforts of everyone involved, the explanations of our placement process were cumbersome and wordy. The governing policies were difficult to find, and the explanations were often confusing. As a result, the website was completely redesigned and organized to be user-friendly and cleaner."

Austin did not respond to interview requests, and Principal Brent Kline said PAUSD would not comment on Judge Zepeda's ruling. Greene Middle School math teacher Kourtney Kientzy and Paly Math Department Instructional Lead Natalie Docktor said they did not know how the district would respond to the writ of mandate.

The judge's ruling gave the district until March 8 to present to the court an acceptable math placement policy, but as of March 10, PAUSD had not submitted a new policy, according to an email from Cohen. A hearing for PAUSD's lack of compliance with the writ of mandate was scheduled for March 13.

*Editor's note: The final version of this article was written on March 12 with the most up-to-date information available. A more recent version reflecting the March 13 hearing will be posted on thecampanile.org as more information becomes available.*

**Tyler Wong**

Photo Editor

## Wind, rainstorms cause series of power outages

**Henry Liu**

Staff Writer

Fallen trees and harsh weather conditions from a Feb. 21-24 storm caused power outages and school and highway closures in Palo Alto, East Palo Alto and Menlo Park. According to PG&E, which spans across Central and Northern California, coming winter storms could cause more outages in the Bay Area.

Power was eventually restored to 4,000 PG&E customers in East Palo Alto and Menlo Park by 6 p.m. on Feb. 23, and Highway 101 reopened to traffic after an initial weather-related closure on Feb. 23.

Outages also forced Nixon and Escondido to shut down for a day, and students in the Ravenswood School District in East Palo Alto returned to classes on Feb. 24, after roughly 48 hours of power outages.

History teacher and East Palo Alto resident Grant Blackburn said his power outage lasted over two days.

"I got a notice around 2:20 p.m. on Tuesday when the wind storms were happening that I had lost my power," Blackburn said. "When we went home on Thursday, the power finally came in at 8 p.m."

Blackburn said the prolonged outages meant his refrigerator and freezers could not run, causing some of his food to spoil.

"(My wife) had to drive to Mountain View to find a Safeway that had bags of ice

and put those bags of ice in the freezer and the fridge," he said. "Before she left to get the bags of ice, we both went and threw a bunch of stuff out."

Thousands of people across Palo Alto, Stanford and Menlo Park experienced power outages on Feb. 21 according to the Palo Alto Utilities, including a brief 25-minute outage in Midtown Palo Alto affecting 3,380 people.

Palo Alto Utilities also reported more small-scale outages and road closures on Twitter during a subsequent storm from March 9-11.

Xiaomei Zhang, a Palo Alto resident and Paly parent, said extra precautions were necessary to get through the night without power.

"(At 4 p.m.), the power went out," Zhang said. "I went to the garage to get the emergency supplies and camping supplies out. The lighter would not auto-start so I (had) to use the match to cook dinner."

With the outages causing significant problems for many families, Blackburn said he considered himself fortunate.

"We're lucky that we have camping equipment, a fireplace, a gas stove, a gas water heater so we could make do," Blackburn said. "There are some families that live in this area (who) lost more food than we did, and the ones that have babies have to spend money staying at a hotel. There are some people who couldn't afford to do these things."

"We're lucky that we have camping equipment, a fireplace, a gas stove, a gas water heater so we could make do."

Grant Blackburn

## Admin rebrands 'Wall of Rejection' as redirection

**Dinu Deshpande**

Sports Editor

Based on his concerns related to what he said was its negative messaging, Principal Brent Kline said he will allow students to post to what used to be called The Wall of Rejection as long as it is rebranded as The Wall of Redirection.

The Wall of Rejection is a tradition where seniors post their college rejection letters on an outside wall of the Haymarket Theatre and often annotate them with responses to the college's reasons for rejecting the student.

ASB President Ashley Meyer said despite administrative concerns, the Wall of Rejection is meant to unite seniors.

"Rejection is tough and everyone goes through it," Meyer said. "It's to have that outlet of putting your feelings onto a wall and feeling connected towards other students who also were rejected," Meyer said.

Kline, who initially had all letters removed from the wall, said students did not follow school policy when it came to the Wall of Rejection.

"You can't just put stuff up here at school without going through the proper channels," Kline said. "To me, it felt like (the Wall of Rejection) had a



ART BY RACHEL LEE

very negative connotation, and I thought, 'Why would you want to do that?'"

But after talking with ASB, a joint decision was made to reinstate the wall as the "Wall of Redirection."

"When I brought students into the conversation, they made me see it differently, and that's why we revised it," Kline said.

The name change sparked controversy, though, in part because of a rumor that the wall would also have to include acceptance letters, which senior Anjali Bhattacharya said would contradict the purpose of it.

"It could actually have the opposite effect, because then someone who got rejected from a school might see someone's acceptance, which defeats the point," Bhattacharya said.

But Kline said the only change he wants to see is the name.

"It's the same thing, but we are trying to make it more positive this time around," Kline said. "With this, a rejection letter is an opportunity to pursue something else. There's something else meant to happen, (and) that's when the conversation moved to the idea of turning it into a Wall of Redirection versus a Wall of Rejection."

Meyer said she is satisfied with the joint compromise and the positive connotation the new name carries.

"Now, it's looking at the wall as redirection instead of rejection because rejection is redirection, leading you to different opportunities," Meyer said. "Now, it's rejection on a more positive note and not seen as negative."