

The PANTHER *press*

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Modesto High School

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2022 Winter Formal



Julio Barraza & Aylin Navarro



David Negrete, Lukas M, Valeria Perez, Jack Miller



Destiny Navarro & Grace Hampton

For the first time since quarantine, MoHi Panthers took to the dance floor in winter formal style. On January 29, 2022, the ASB Class of 2024 hosted the special outdoor dance in the Modesto High School quad area. The ever-familiar lunchtime hangout was beautifully transformed into a winter wonderland. Everyone came dressed to impress and ready for a fun-filled evening of dancing and socializing with friends.

During the night's festivities, winter court was escorted out with their friends, family members, and partners. Eduardo Sandoval Sanchez and Angelina Navarro were crowned this year's winter homecoming

king and queen.

After the royalty court was introduced, DJ Matt Escobedo played songs from the playlist decided on by students. To anyone observing, it was clear that fun was had by all in attendance. PAA President Evalyn Cazares said, "The homecoming [dance] was a very fun event. My only complaint about the dance is I wish the dance floor was bigger and I wish there were stricter COVID regulations."

Other students were pleased particularly with the planning that the sophomore class put into the event. Junior America Perez said, "The dance was well organized, and after two years of quarantine and sophomores not containing any knowledge about formal dances,

I believe they did an amazing job and performed well!"

The evening was also a great way to spend time with people outside of the classroom. Freshman Maya Wolfe said, "[The dance was a] great way to make friendships stronger and create new ones."

It was great seeing so many students at a school function having a good time. This is a step in the right direction toward getting back to a more normal school experience.



Story & Photos By: Jasmine Gonzales



Lily Basso & Thomas Rocha



Lolamaya Evans



Winter Homecoming

In late January, Modesto High School hosted its second homecoming for this school year. Like last homecoming, each class decorated the main hallway, including having a centerpiece and a banner. Due to the threat of a new COVID variant and a spike in cases, leadership kids were not allowed to do a skit or float, and the center pieces were made optional, even though every class decided to do them anyway. Despite various obstacles in the planning and implementing of the week's activities, the persistent and positive attitudes of both students and staff helped pull off another great week.

The threat of a new variant and the spike in cases caused a constant battle in almost every aspect of homecoming, including wondering if a homecoming game was even going to happen. According to the coaches if even one player had caught COVID, the entire game would unfortunately have had to be canceled. Another scenario discussed was the possibility of the game being open only to the players and possibly family members of the players. Fortunately, the worst-case scenarios remained hypothetical, and the game was open to up to 300 spectators. The typical mask mandates were in place with an occasional reminder throughout the night.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 was not the only hiccup faced by those organizing homecoming. To the dismay of many, a poster was displayed that was in poor taste, and Turlock High administration became aware as did Modesto High personnel. Activities Director, Ms. Molder gave more insight as to what happened and what was done to resolve the issue. Posters were made about a violent issue that occurred at Turlock High, and although it was unclear who made the posters, an attempt was made to stop them from the very start. Ms. Molder made it clear that the posters were disrespectful and in poor sportsmanship and that they should be disposed of. Even so, one of the posters made it into a hallway and students outside of the leadership class took pictures and the controversial poster spread. The leadership class discussed the situation and, in the end,

it was decided that the entire class would take full responsibility and post a public apology to Turlock High School expressing their sincere regret about the situation. Turlock High School administration felt Modesto High School handled the situation in a very classy manner. Ms. Molder expressed, "I'm always sorry if anything is offensive and 98% of what our kids do is creative and gracious. As the teacher I will take responsibility and make sure the kids know it wasn't ok." Ultimately, this was a learning opportunity and a reminder of the difference between being spirited and being insensitive. Moving forward, a valuable lesson has been learned by all involved.

Homecoming week is so much more than just the posters in the hallway, and this year the lunchtime activities were fun and lighthearted, and many kids participated. Monday, freshman day, students competed in a boot the balloon game, where participants had to run back and forth to pop their balloons on chairs. Funny enough during the 4th period lunch; round one of the teams even broke a chair but continued their play. Other games throughout the week included table tennis, an interesting version of ping pong, and the very entertaining potato sack race. Students were having fun and even raced so hard some broke their potato sacks halfway through the race. Students laughed and took pictures of the games, and those who participated thought it was a very fun time.

The hallways each morning had just as much effort and were very exciting to see. Although many of the leadership classes had fewer participants on their teams for varying reasons, it did not stop them from doing their best to put things together. In order from freshman to seniors the themed days were, Among Us: neon day, Wii Sports: pajama day, Minecraft: white lies, Mario Kart: anything but a backpack day, and of course, the traditional Friday spirit day. In the class competition Seniors once again came away with a clean sweep.

By Gieselle Martinez

Another great part of homecoming week was the outdoor rally, which required lots of last minute adjustments. The rally included dancers, color guard, cheer squads, band, and the announcement of the winning homecoming royalty. Many of the performance coordinators agreed that being outside did add on some stress to planning the entertainment. The concrete was a constant stressor but was somewhat eased with a floor mat being placed onto the ground. The participants were excited to perform. Ms. Kutzman, Modesto High's dance teacher and the new color guard coach did a wonderful job coordinating her hard-working students. She mentioned that she was, "Super excited because the students did the fall rally and they don't usually do it. They wanted to, and I agreed and was excited to do something they like."

Along with all these new changes were some cool traditions such as the return of Mrs. Coito and the Panther pledge.

All of this excitement of course led up to the final homecoming game. The players came ready to battle. They played a really good game, with special credit to the varsity team who kept the score close throughout. People filled up the gym to support the teams and cheerleaders. The coaches commented that they are all really proud of their players, and while it was an especially hard season, it was nevertheless a good one.



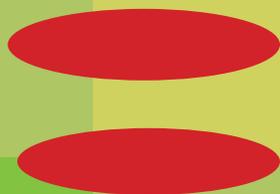
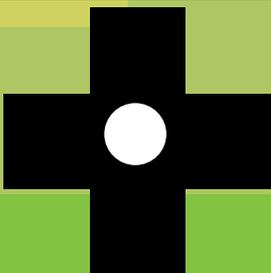
The freshman coach, Mr. Paulson, felt that it was a struggle because some of the players had missed a big gap in learning organized basketball. There was a lot to teach, but they all learned quickly and efficiently. He added, "The kids were positive about it and showed up every day, no matter the circumstances."

The JV team's Coach, Mr. Roberts said that he's "happy about the growth that we've made over the season. Basically, seeing the players be able to catch on to the scheme and they did well with being able to kind of improve throughout the season."

It was a very hard year because of COVID-19, and it was constantly an issue with the fear of players missing practices or games and half of the roster being absent at any given time. The persistence is to be commended.

Varsity Coach, Mr. Peterson emphasized that the game is not always about winning, that being able to play basketball and share experiences while competing is also just as important, especially to the players this year.

With the acknowledgment that this homecoming was difficult with many unforeseen obstacles, it is without a doubt that the student body, staff, players, cheer squad, dance team, band, and color guard and many others made this homecoming a memorable experience.



Story by Zada Sam

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New Year's Resolution Update

New Year resolutions are an opportunity for people to do some self-evaluation and perhaps set some goals for the upcoming year. These resolutions are often goals relating to self-improvement of some sort. It is not uncommon for people who participate in the tradition of New Year's resolutions to tend to lose progress over time and eventually forget about the goal or give up. So how are MoHi Panthers doing with keeping up with their resolutions?

Some students' resolutions are focused on milestones and interests.

Sophomore Angel Cazares, a student who enjoys weightlifting, said, "My new year's resolution is to get my driver's permit and bench 225." So far, he has kept his progress and is almost finished with getting his permit and is able to bench 195 pounds.

Some students opted for resolutions that focus on school.

Sophomore Yenerly Melchor said, "My new year's resolution is to stop procrastinating and to focus on completing anything that needs to be done before the due date, so that I'm not stressing when it's actually due." Yenerly believes that she has definitely improved her habits of procrastination despite that it's not an easy habit to break especially only 3 months into 2022.

Other students create resolutions around self-improvement.

Junior Angelica Creech said, “My new year’s resolution is to lose weight and actually stick to the things I say.” After basketball season was over, she started doing track and mentioned that losing weight wasn’t too bad, though she still hasn’t been able to stick to things she says.

Junior Russell Dingwall said that his new year’s resolution is to “finish off this year strong.” He mentions that so far he has been passing his core classes and maintaining his schedule.

Junior Chinanu Agunanne said, “My new year’s resolution is to get better at my track events as well as to work out more.” Track has recently started so she doesn’t know how much better she has gotten yet. Chinanu says that her resolutions are going well.



One student decided to give her resolution goal a shorter timeline, so that she can re-evaluate her progress at that point.

Junior Dhara Patel said, “My new year’s resolutions were to maintain discipline and stick to it for at least 8 weeks. Once the 8 weeks pass, discipline would become a habit, and I can trust myself to follow a process for the rest of the semester... I want to improve and fix my habits that I learned caused problems for me last semester.” A few weeks later, she states that she has been true and consistent with her goals and schedules, allowing her to stay organized to the best of her abilities through the stresses and messes that she faces.

While sticking with a resolution can be difficult, remember that a goal can be set at any time. If you have something you want to work on or improve about yourself, you can reset today and start working toward a new and improved version of you!

In early February, Modesto High Panthers wrapped up the county-wide Academic Decathlon competition, earning 19 medals and the top essay in the county award. Academic Decathlon is a ten-event scholastic competition with 3 official divisions or teams. Each year there is a new focus. Last year's focus was World War II, and this year it is "Water: a most essential resource." The honors division contains up to 3 members with a GPA of 3.80 to 4.00; the scholastic division has members with a GPA of 3.2 to 3.799 and the varsity division recruits members with a GPA of 2.0 to 3.199. There is also an alternate division. The members of this division compete individually in eight of the ten events, only abstaining from speech and interview.



Senior Haiying Zeng showing off her medals.

This year, Modesto High's official team was represented by Nithya Medam, Jennifer Chang, Fernando Bazan, Emre Soydemir, Yaparita Eliyah, Jaya Naidu and Haiying Zeng. A full official team would consist of 9 members, so only having 7 members hurt the overall score. All but one of the official members is a senior, so the team will be looking to bring in lots of new members next year.

ACADEMIC DECATHLON

BY TEJASWI POUDEL

Academic Decathlon covers multiple subjects, which include economics, art, math, literature, history, science, and music. In this year's Academic Decathlon, Modesto High won multiple medals in several categories for both the official team division and the alternate division. Some notable winners were Haiying Zeng, Richard Zheng, and Nithya Medam. Each placed first in their divisions for their essays. Yaparita Eliyah and Richard Zheng placed second in their divisions for math. Modesto High's team point champion was Haiying Zeng and Nithya Medam had the highest scoring essay in the county.



Many of the Academic Decathlon team members hanging out after the awards ceremony.

Senior Yaparita Eliyah, official team member, said that her goals for the competition were to "mainly have fun and do my best." Junior Hannah Diep said that she feels Academic Decathlon is "very educational and it takes a lot of hard work and dedication in order to do well in it." This year's Academic Decathlon was a success, with winners in numerous categories and individual successes for all. Most importantly the members had fun studying together and being involved in an on-campus club.



Senior Nithya Medam with her award.

Mock Trial County Champs

By Dylan Starn



Photo by Mr. Mitchell

For many months the students on the Mock Trial team, coached by Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Johnson, have been preparing for their upcoming tournaments. Students have been dedicating time and effort into learning the legal process. Students were given a legal case to study regarding some sort of criminal act; this year the act was regarding a first degree murder. From there students were assigned into two different “groups”, prosecution or defense. The role of the prosecution is to prove that the accused party is guilty of the crime. As for the defense, their role is to prove that the accused party is not guilty.

On January 25, the Mock Trial team had its first tournament of the year, with a score of 407- 406, earning a win in the first trial of the year. To continue with their winning streak the team was victorious in their second tournament against Patterson on February 1, with a score of 438-362.

Although, due to COVID19 all of the

tournaments have been hosted online. Mr. Johnson, one of the coaches for Mock Trial, said, “At the beginning of January, we were told our trials would be conducted virtually over zoom. While this was unfortunate, this is a perfect example of the real-world experience which Mock Trial provides that other academic extracurriculars simply cannot match.” Having to have many of the Mock Trial tournaments virtually is just another reflection on the real world. The real court system is having to make adjustments due to the pandemic as well.

Many students in Mock Trial decided to join for a number of reasons. Sophomore Liliana Timmons mentioned that she joined Mock Trial because as a future career



Photo by Mr. Mitchell



Photo by Mr. Mitchell

she is interested in law. “I am in Mock Trial to get the experience so that I can use it for future reference. I am considering studying to become an attorney after I graduate and Mock Trial is something that can help me if I choose to go down that path in the future.”

Others such as Freshman Dilshan Pandher said, “I am in Mock Trial for multiple reasons, one being to get better in public speaking and another one being to be a part of a club.” Mock Trial is a club that can not only benefit a future lawyer but the club also improves skills and it is an opportunity to be able to meet new people.

Our Mock Trial team has been putting in numerous hours of hard work to be able to compete in these tournaments, and throughout these past several weeks the team has gone up against some competitive schools. In fact, on February 15, the Modesto High Mock Trial team competed in person against Turlock High for the

county championship and won! Due to this victory the team was able to go on and compete at the state level in mid-March. The team faced some stiff competition in its four trials at state, coming away with a victory in the first round.

Coach Mr. Mitchell emphasized that the biggest lesson the team learned at state is that “it takes a lot more practice to do well at that next level.” The Modesto High Mock Trial team will take all they have learned this year and apply it to their approach next year for continued success.



Photo by Mr. Mitchell

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

HOW ARE STUDENTS DOING?

Across the country, there's increasing awareness about student mental health. National Public Radio refers to this as a crisis — a second pandemic schools and students alike have to reckon with on a daily basis.

During distance learning, student wellbeing suffered. Being stuck at home was an unhealthy environment for many students for a variety of reasons: isolation, further exposure to toxic family dynamics, missing out on the social promises of adolescence. During this time, Modesto High conducted over 1000 home visits “to check in on students that weren't logging in,” said Assistant Principal, Mr. Taylor. He personally visited about 150 students. In the process, students were followed up with and directed to either academic counselors or a behavior specialist.

Student return to campus was turbulent. Since returning, staff has noted a lot more anxiety amongst students, consequential of how students lost the social connection to others over lock down and the pandemic's weight on everyone.

“It's hard,” said Psychology teacher, Ms. Coufal, about the pandemic. “Because of the prevalence of COVID discussions — friends, family, media — it constantly takes up part of our cognitive load.”

When asked how they were doing, students indicated struggling with their mental health or merely feeling okay. “Every day is tiring,” said junior Emiliano Contreras. “It's hard to get up in the morning.”

When it came to school specifically, many students reported feeling overwhelmed. “I'm drowning in homework, and I'm missing a whole bunch of school,” shared PAA sophomore Daisy Houx-Miller. “I feel there are only a few teachers that genuinely really support me.”

IB Junior Valda Stone said she's constantly mentally exhausted, even when she isn't doing things — because just thinking about how there's always something to do next overwhelms her. Sophomore Megan Owen reiterated Stone's point of feeling exhausted all the time. Junior Liliana Basso-Bond said IB has completely tangled her priorities and left her mental health last.

But, a silver lining raised by the students was that the program makes them feel accomplished. “I know IB will help me in the long run,” said senior Jordan Perez.

Struggling with mental health can be difficult, a daunting task to face especially this young — which is exactly what makes it such an unprecedented crisis across the nation. “It can be isolating and lonely when you feel like no one understands,” said junior Ella Hernand, “but I would emphasize to students that they are never alone and there is always someone that will listen.”

WHAT CAN STUDENTS DO, IF THEY NEED HELP?

Modesto City Schools (MCS) partners with the Center for Human Services, supplying mental health clinicians like the student assistance specialists (SAS), like Ms. Gross, in residency at Modesto High. The number of clinicians a school has available depends on the student population.

Ms. Gross is one of two SAS, that provide “early intervention and prevention services to students and families.” Ms. Gross specializes in providing emotional and mental help for students who might be struggling with anxiety, sadness, grief, or relationship troubles.

In the past, SAS have been on-campus for only parts of the week; Gross said she was pleasantly surprised to find her position increased to 5-days a week, as well as another specialist added to the staff roster.

To sit down with Ms. Gross, though, students must have a conversation with a staff member. Gross specifically advised students to see their counselor for a referral to her office, echoing the similar sentiment of going to an academic counselor for mental health assistance shared by the school.

But, in some cases when students have gone see their counselors for non-academic purposes, they’ve been turned away, deferred, and felt their mental health



being trivialized.

Junior Liliana Basso-Bond went to speak to her counselor for a personal issue but was turned away because she needed a doctor’s note to begin receiving support. Senior Angel Herrera reached out to his counselor because he was battling with his mental health but never received a message back. Junior Angelica Creech went to see her counselor for a traumatic experience she underwent and witnessed her experience be reduced to a statistic.

Although there are students, like sophomore Morgan Bicek and freshman Destiny Mead, that have faith in on-campus counseling services, there remains a large proportion of students that are disheartened by the institution. The door to the counseling office being open all day doesn’t matter when students don’t want to walk in, in the first place.

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

MODESTO HIGH'S RESPONSE TO STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

When asked if they felt the school cared about mental health, students gave varying responses. Freshman Jazzmine Gary said the school does care, at least a little bit. Mead said that it's up to the student to bridge the gap between the school and students to find support on campus. Sophomore Erik Diaz feels the school only cares for students from a business side. Senior Katie Casey said she knows that the school is doing better, but she doesn't know how to seek help on campus.

Junior Megan Florida shared that she's reached out for help while attending Modesto High but feels she's gotten nothing in return. "I got a pat on the back and a, 'Thank you for sharing; you're so brave,' and that's all I've ever heard from them. I feel ignored at this school."

There are four school-specific mental health resources: the NAMI club, counseling services, warmlines and hotlines, and specialists. Modesto High facilitates these resources via social media and Schoology blasts. "I think it's our responsibility to put every resource that's available, out there," said Activities Director Ms. Mulder, who looks over the school's active Instagram page.

Despite efforts, though, many students are not even *aware* of the resources. "I don't know how to access any of the resources, except the hotlines," said junior Emma Tran.

"But, I only know the one that's on the school ID."

Modesto High, as a public school, does not operate on its own. Mental health policy is shaped more so by MCS, and it is the school's responsibility to take the district-provided resources and make that knowledge available to the students.

The school tries to make the information accessible via social media. Everything the school posts online, such as on Instagram, has to be "endorsed" by the county. "I have to get the district's approval because it's coming through Modesto High," said Ms. Mulder. "So the district is involved."

Social media plays a massive role in communication, whether it be among students or between students and the school. It is also a space in which the disconnect is amplified. "I'm 41 years old," said Assistant Principal, Mr. Taylor, "so I stopped pretending a long time ago that I knew what the teenagers were going through. I know there's a lot of pressures on students today that were not there 25 years ago before social media was there... so I am concerned about that."

Coupled with the difficulties of getting proper counseling services, the distance between the school and students grows larger. "There is no easy way to say that the school doesn't genuinely care about students and their mental health," said Basso-Bond expressing her view, "but it has proven to be true through these past two years."

WHAT CAN BE DONE, TO TACKLE MENTAL HEALTH?

Students put forth a plethora of achievable ideas, within district-policy restrictions, for tackling mental health. Students mentioned creating in-class resources for students, having counselors come into classes to talk about on-campus resources, hosting a mental health week to raise awareness, and reminding students where to go for help, in the physical world — not over social media. In terms of the on-campus IB program, students proposed coordination of deadlines and mindful attention to the school-life balance of the students.

The IB program is under customary five-year review, and this time, the school's chosen focus is on socio-emotional wellbeing. "All teachers are under a lot of pressure," said IB Coordinator, Mrs. Castellani. "We're in this job, and we care about the students, and we're seeing them struggling." She recommended that IB students attend the recently-started IB Club, sponsored by former IB student and current IB teacher Mrs. Battig; the club seeks to demystify the program and serve as a vehicle for helping students succeed.

Ultimately, across the school, students desire a more tangible response to student mental health from Modesto High, seeking administrative action that is proactive, rather than reactive. "I think the school should listen to our voices more, instead of just posting motivational quotes," said PAA junior Deimos Vann.

What the issue boils down to is communication: students don't feel comfortable seeking out the school's resources, the school doesn't try to rectify the issues because no students are voicing their opinion, and the cycle continues. Many students continue feeling unsupported. The school persists in believing students feel cared about.

"I don't have the magic solution, and I don't think any student has the magic solution," said Mr. Taylor. "But I think, collectively, if we worked on some of these things, we could make some progress."



Students at the "Out of the Darkness" Walk, an event for suicide and depression awareness

STUDENT SENATE

Modesto High School administration has decided to implement a Student Senate on campus. The purpose behind this body of students and administrators is to create an open atmosphere for students to be directly involved in and aware of the changes and events taking place on campus.

The Student Senate is intended to create a body of student leaders who will serve as direct liaisons to the Associated Student Body, forming a connection between the remainder of the student population. The intention is to have one student senator from each second period class in representation at a monthly meeting.

Junior Julio Barraza, PAA Secretary and Student Senator said, “The Student Senate is like the PAA and ASB Executives, they’re representing their class. During each meeting they discuss events and problems that are going on in the school and how to solve them. Each second period teacher elected one student to participate in the Student Senate.”

On February 11, 2022, the Student Senate had its second meeting in the school library during second period. At this meeting, some survey information was discussed. People gave input on homecoming and the winter formal, acknowledging what worked and how to improve in the future.

MHS principal, Mr. Manning said about the group of students, “The student senate is a collective group of students – one student from every second period class. What happens oftentimes, is that the leadership kids are involved in the school as well as the athletes, but what we’re trying to do is to get everybody involved. And so we have a representative from every single class during the second period. That brings in

students from all walks of life.” When asked how the first meeting went in January, Manning said, “We had our first senate last week in the library, just to introduce everybody to one another and explain the process moving forward.” He added, “Those meetings are once a month. The student representatives will go back to their second period class and relay information, so it’s going to be a back and forth type of thing. And the goal here is to hear all students and all voices.”

Activities Director, Ms. Mulder, added her perspective of the group, “The student senate is to provide representation. Every single classroom - it’s just more of a connected voice. The senators also get to kind of lead within their class as they relay information and take student responses back to the next meeting. We see it already working because of all the feedback we got and participation in homecoming. It’s about feeling the true pulse of the student body.”

When asked about the way in which the Student Senate works with the ASB Leadership class, Ms. Mulder explained that as hard as the ASB Leadership students try to represent the entire school, they just can’t do it alone. “ASB makes sure the school constitution is being followed. It votes on and passes all that is done. It makes sure everything follows order and leads all the big activities. She adds, “That does not mean that we [leadership class] are truly representing our student body even as much as the kids might have hearts to do it. It doesn’t happen, so getting representatives from every classroom on campus together once a month, to me, is the first step to getting information in and out, making sure people are represented.

By Jasmine Gonzales

