

Mid-Peninsula High School

CONNECTIONS

MAGAZINE :: WINTER 2024



Girls Volleyball Celebrates Undefeated Season, Page 11



I would suspect that exactly zero people who are reading this letter have never heard of AI or ChatGPT. I would also bet many of you have spent at least some time thinking about what this new technology means for schools and student learning.

In this digital age, the landscape of technology continues to evolve, offering both incredible advancements and new considerations. One such innovation is ChatGPT, an artificial intelligence tool designed to assist and interact with users in a conversational manner. While ChatGPT presents numerous benefits, including educational support, accessibility, and convenience, it also comes with certain considerations. As your children engage with this technology, it's essential to understand both its advantages and potential downsides to ensure a safe and enriching experience in their digital interactions.

This is unequivocally true... but wait a moment and consider this:

That second paragraph was written by ChatGPT, when I asked it to write an introduction to a letter to families in my school about AI. While it is grammatically correct and contains some solid—albeit painfully obvious—information, I can't say that it's a particularly catchy or compelling intro. It also doesn't capture my voice; if you know me or have ever heard me talk about teaching and learning, you probably aren't surprised that I did not author such a tepid paragraph.

Of course, this rapid advancement in technology is having an impact on all schools, and here at Mid-Pen we are regularly thinking about, talking about, and experiencing its effect on teaching and learning. Friends of mine who work outside education frequently ask me what I think is going to happen to schools as these tools proliferate, and I always respond with the truest statement I can muster: *I don't know.*

What I do know is that I've never been prouder to lead our beloved school than I am at this moment. This is

because our school was designed from the beginning to be a place where students can learn what it means to actually like learning—sometimes for the first time in their young lives—which can only happen when they engage with teachers who care about their health and wellness first so that they can thrive.



Mid-Pen teachers are famous for noticing things about their students—their habits, their level of interest and engagement, their challenges—then tailoring their teaching to reach them effectively. They are so curious about each student that they get to know how they think, how they write, and how they compute. This means that our teachers are very likely to spot writing that was inappropriately influenced by AI; they have so many empirical examples of their students' voices that they usually know a ChatGPT paragraph when they see it. Even more importantly, they are in the best position to help students understand the legitimate possibilities for using AI as a study tool; it can be a great way to push through writers' block, for example.

As a professor at the University of Mississippi wrote in the AI policy for his education class, AI is not meant to avoid opportunities to learn through structured assignments and activities. Our "expert and compassionate teachers" teachers (to quote our mission statement) take their responsibility to teach academic and personal integrity as seriously as they do academic content. They make real our commitment to educate students "to impact a complex world." Their focus on students' growth, combined with their ability to keep learning themselves, is unusual and inspiring. They are the reason why Mid-Pen is known for changing students' lives... and those of their families as well.

Go Dragons! 

Karen Eshoo

CONNECTIONS

CONNECTIONS is published twice yearly for the parents, alumni, faculty, and friends of Mid-Peninsula High School.

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The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the authors.



Fall Play a Double Delight with Dual Cast Performances

This year's fall play, *Circle Mirror Transformation*, unfolded with two distinct casts, each delivering a captivating performance. The one-act play revolves around five strangers who convene weekly for an adult theater class, an experience that prompts personal growth and self-discovery. The dual casts skillfully brought the characters to life,

offering a nuanced and compelling portrayal of the transformative journey depicted in the narrative. The dedication and talent exhibited by both sets of performers underscored the vibrant theater culture at Mid-Pen, where students not only hone their acting skills but also delve into the deeper aspects of character development and self-awareness. 🐉



Cast members included, clockwise from top, Baz Dowling '26, Xyro Patch '26, Sophia Kapreilian '24, Sunday Donaldson '27, and Izze Garcia '26. Not pictured are Devin Paniagua '26 and Xesh Welser '27.

Thanksgiving Feast and Talent Show Unites Community

The Mid-Peninsula High School community gathered for the school's annual Thanksgiving Feast and Talent Show before the holiday break in November. Staffuly served students holiday classics, such as turkey, mashed potatoes, and cranberry

sauce, while the school's music ensembles and several solo performers provided the entertainment. Adding to the joyous atmosphere, a number of young alums returned to reconnect with old friends, contributing to the sense of continuity and festive spirit of the event. A cherished tradition, each year the event brings our tight-knit community together in a spirit of gratitude and celebration. 🐉



Students hold their phones aloft in support of Lucas Kao '25 performing at the Thanksgiving Feast and Talent Show.

Four New Trustees Join the School's Board

At its June Board meeting, Mid-Pen said goodbye to four longtime trustees completing their terms: Mary Hayes P'13 '15, Tim Reichert, Teri Spanner P'16, and chair Debbie Vielbaum. Incoming chair Phil Abrahamson thanked all four for their many years of outstanding service and wise counsel. Looking forward, the school is excited to welcome four new trustees to the Board this year. Our new trustees contribute valuable expertise and experience in education, non-profits, finance, administration, and more to their roles as stewards of Mid-Pen's mission.

Carrie Jeffries

The mother of a former Mid-Pen student, Carrie has more than 30 years experience in education. With a master's degree in education from Stanford, she worked as a consultant for a number of Palo Alto companies and startups while taking care of her young children. When her son was diagnosed with learning differences, Carrie turned her attention to finding, creating, and supporting educational environments that would maximize his learning. In 2003, her children's preschool, First Congregational Nursery School, needed a substitute teacher. Carrie filled in, was asked to be a permanent teacher the following year, and eventually became the school's Executive Director.



Clint Oram

Clint Oram is the father of a Mid-Pen alum who loved the school. In 2004 he founded the software company SugarCRM and is currently the Chief Strategy Officer and head of corporate development for the company. Both of his children attended the Charles Armstrong School, where he served on the Board of Trustees from 2014 to 2019. While on the Armstrong board, he led the Technology Committee for two years, served on the Audit Committee for one year and chaired the Finance Committee for three years. He is a true fan and ardent cheerleader of Mid-Pen and an avid supporter of its sports and music programs.



Cathy Shelburne

Cathy's career reflects a deep and varied background in independent school leadership, with national recognition as an expert in the areas of governance, coaching, professional development, DEIB and antiracism training and programming, and strategic planning. Cathy is currently a Search Consultant and Executive Coach at Carney Sandoe and Associates, a search firm for teachers and administrators in independent schools across the United States and abroad. Previously, she served as the Director of Professional Learning with the California Association of Independent Schools (CAIS) for eight years. Cathy has served as a trustee on numerous boards and organizations, including the Sea Crest School in Half Moon Bay and the Advisory Board of the Independent School Alliance for Minority Affairs.



Rosalie Whitlock

The parent of a Mid-Pen alum and grandparent of a current student, Rosalie has more than 45 years experience in the nonprofit sector. In 2022 she retired after 12 years as CEO of Children's Health Council (CHC) in Palo Alto, which provides comprehensive, integrated services to children, teens, and young adults with learning differences and mental health challenges, and she continues to serve as an ambassador for CHC. Before becoming Executive Director, she spent nine years on the CHC Board, two as Chair. Prior to her work at CHC, Rosalie was Head of Charles Armstrong School for 11 years. She is a former member of the International Dyslexia Association's Board of Directors, a founding member of Parents Education Network (PEN), and a former Executive Director of the Accelerated School Project at Stanford University. 





Mid-Pen Welcomes New Additions to the Staffulty Team

An addition to Elaine Barry (see page 5), Mid-Pen is pleased to welcome the following new members of the school's staffulty who have joined the school community in the past year.

Alexandra Arguello
Director of Finance



Alex joined Mid-Pen in Spring 2023 following a career providing consulting, HR, and accounting services to a wide range of businesses, nonprofits, and individuals. Most recently she served as Director of Operations and Senior Director for Client Services at Frederickson Partners in Menlo Park, a global executive recruitment firm, where she led all aspects of the firm's administrative operations. Alex holds a BS in Business Management from Menlo College. She lives with her husband and two school-aged children in Menlo Park.

Fatima Currimbhoy
ASL Teacher



A member of the Deaf community, Fatima comes to Mid-Pen with nearly 20 years of experience as an ASL interpreter, coordinator, and teacher. For nearly 15 years, she worked for the Deaf Counseling Advocacy and Referral Agency in San Jose, both teaching ASL and Deaf culture and managing the agency's interpreter services. Earlier in her career she taught both hearing and Deaf students at the elementary, high school, and university levels. She has a BA in Sociology from San Francisco State University and a master's in Deaf Education from McDaniel College in Maryland.

Ann Diederich
Communications Manager



With an undergraduate degree in History from Hamilton College and an MBA from the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern, Ann has spent most of her career in marketing for Fortune 500 companies, including leading Corporate Marketing at Intuit. She gained experience doing school communications as a parent volunteer at her daughter's high school in Menlo Park. Ann also has a certificate in compassion

facilitation from the Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education at Sanford and leads workshops for parents on how to find greater compassion in their everyday lives.

Carrie Dungan
Director of the Enrichment Center



Carrie joined Mid-Pen in 2022 as a substitute science teacher and last year served as Associate Dean of Students. She has a passion for environmental sustainability and earned a bachelor's degree in environmental science from UC Santa Barbara. Carrie enjoys traveling the world to scuba dive, is a PADI-certified Divemaster, and will be leading a student trip diving trip to Cozumel in 2024 as part of Mid-Pen's DragonWeek.

Gerry Fortain
Math Teacher



Gerry grew up in Buffalo, NY, and studied Chemistry at SUNY Buffalo. In college, he worked as a tutor during the day and a cook in the evenings to support his habit of purchasing guitars. After graduating, he worked in the fields of environmental analysis, plastics, and FDA compliance/food safety. He realized his childhood dream of being a teacher in 2021 when he joined the faculty of the Sand Hill School in Palo Alto, which serves students in grades 2-8 with language-based learning differences. He's never been happier since becoming a teacher and is thrilled to be working at Mid-Pen, which he joined in 2023.

Kurt Heise
History Teacher



Born and raised in Western Massachusetts, Kurt grew up on the campus of Deerfield Academy, where his parents were teachers. After high school, he attended Carleton College in Northfield, MN, where he earned a BA in history and played on the varsity soccer, club ice hockey, and lacrosse teams. He taught and coached at Rocky Hill Country Day School in Rhode Island for six years before joining Mid-Pen in 2022. 🐉



ELAINE BARRY

Shaping Learning Support and Transforming Student Success

In the fall of 1992, when Elaine Barry, Mid-Pen’s new Learning Specialist, returned as a Spanish teacher to the high school from which she had graduated a mere five years before, she couldn’t have anticipated that she would end up staying for three decades. Nor could she have imagined that she would one day play an influential role in changing the way her alma mater, and other independent schools in the area, support students with different learning styles.



and the Cheshire Cat, respectively, in their high school production of Alice in Wonderland.

The Mid-Pen search cast a wide net, but the best candidate was right in the neighborhood. Familiar with the school from both her professional experience and growing up in the area, Elaine had long admired Mid-Pen, which has been supporting students with learning differences for more than 40 years. Indeed, she was so energized about the school that she decided to apply for the position herself.

Starting in the '80s, teacher training programs were making significant advances in determining how to best help students facing challenges such as dyslexia and ADHD. At the same time, California began mandating that public schools do more to support students with identified learning differences. Private schools, however, were exempt, and most were doing very little to address the distinct needs of these students.

“Mid-Pen gets both the little things and the big things right,” Elaine observed, sitting in her new office overlooking the school’s Enrichment Center. She noted that most teachers know most students, including the ones they have never taught, and teachers and administrators are at the front door every morning greeting each Dragon by name, creating a strong sense of belonging among students.


Elaine was part of a group of educators at Sacred Heart Schools, Atherton who saw an opportunity to help students with learning differences in a new way. They created a dedicated program to support students, instead of teachers trying to address students’ needs on their own, often with varying degrees of success.

“Another thing you see that is really distinct about Mid-Pen is that there’s time to do everything here,” Elaine said. “Kids don’t don’t have to say, ‘Oh, I can’t do that, because I’m too busy.’ They can be in a music ensemble and on a sports team, and the next semester try acting in a play.” Elaine believes that this chance to explore a variety of activities without pressure leads to personal growth and supports student wellbeing.

Thus Elaine became Sacred Heart’s first Director of the Center for Student Success, spending 14 years running the program before moving on to other roles, such as building Sacred Heart’s Sophie’s Scholars program, which provides participants extra support not only through high school, but beyond it as well. At the same time, she was attending graduate school, ultimately earning a Doctorate of Teaching and Learning from the University of San Francisco, focusing on how to help students with attention deficit improve their reading comprehension.

She also loves how the Enrichment Center functions as an afterschool option for those students who want to get extra support in learning how to learn, whether they have a support plan on file or not.

When the Mid-Pen Learning Specialist position opened up this fall, Head of School Karen Eshoo knew exactly whose expertise to tap for possible candidates. As it turns out, Karen and Elaine go back– way back–to when they were cast as the Mad Hatter

Looking to the future, Elaine hopes to expand the Enrichment Center so that all students, regardless of their learning profiles, see it as a valuable resource. “We want to continue to help Dragons deepen their self-motivation, persistence, and confidence,” she said. “We want all Dragons to know that we are here to support and to celebrate their academic and personal growth.” 



Challenges in the Age of AI Mid-Pen Teachers Navigate the New Educational Frontier

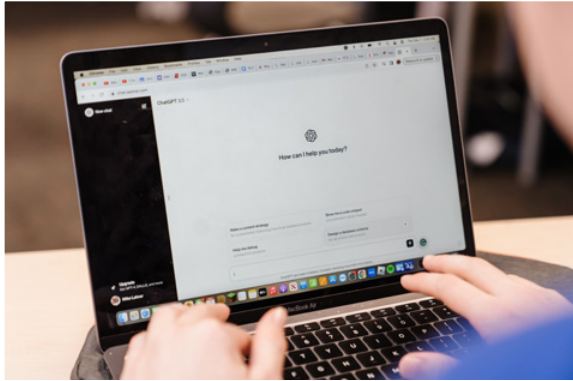
English teacher Cory Huttenga was in for a surprise while grading the journals of his 9th and 10th students last January. He noticed a sudden, unexplainable improvement in some students' writing. The shift raised suspicions of potential cut-and-paste activities from the internet during his classes' daily journal-writing sessions.

"Kids who might use their journals to rant about their frustrations at school or narrate their activities over the weekend were suddenly giving me synopses of stories that were super well-written," he recalled.

When confronted, several students admitted that they had received help from ChatGPT, a newly released program designed to understand and generate human-like text based on the input it receives.

"The idea behind the daily journal is training the kids in writing fluency," Cory said, "so it's essential that this is students' authentic writing."

Cory's concern was shared by other teachers at Mid-Pen, who, like their colleagues in middle and high schools across the country, have been grappling with the educational implications of the new technology known as generative artificial intelligence. Released in November 2022 by OpenAI, ChatGPT is perhaps the best known of these tools. The chatbot generates remarkably articulate and thoughtful-sounding text in response to short prompts—including from students using it to help them with their schoolwork.



English teacher Cory Huttenga confers with a student during class.

Cory initially contemplated banning computer use in class to deter the use of AI technology, but he reconsidered, acknowledging the inevitability of technological advancement and the need to equip students with effective tools.

“I thought, well, if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em,” he said. “We’re supposed to prepare students for a complex world, so I decided to open the gate and allow the use of AI, and just made it very clear that there are times when authentic writing is mandatory, such as students’ journals.”

To address concerns about AI-generated content, a staffulty meeting last spring introduced teachers to sites that detect AI-generated text. These tools allowed teachers to verify their instincts about whether students have used AI without acknowledgment. Director of Teaching, Learning, and Equity Jorge Rodriguez emphasized the need for conversations with students about proper AI use and academic integrity.

“We’re supposed to prepare students for a complex world, so I decided to open the gate and allow the use of AI, and just made it very clear that there are times when authentic writing is mandatory.”

-CORY HUTTENGA

“High school is the place to learn about plagiarism,” he said. “Students can and do make mistakes, which is why we have conversations with them about the proper use of AI, about cheating, and about how the outside world regards it.”

Jorge believes schools should approach AI carefully but ultimately should see it like any other new teaching tool, noting parallels with past concerns about spellcheckers replacing the need to learn spelling.

Tara Theobald-Anderson, Cory’s colleague in the English department, said the technology has the potential to help students become better writers, and has revised their curriculum in response to ChatGPT as a result. To help students become more critical readers and better writers, Tara’s classes now

incorporate more reading and editing of others’ work, including AI-generated texts.

“We’ve been doing a little less writing in class and a bit more reading other people’s pieces, fixing and changing them and making their ideas stronger and more



Cal Ankenman '26 says the use of ChatGPT has helped him become a better writer.



eloquent,” said Tara. “I have made a small shift where I’m asking students to focus more on editing their work and others’, recognizing errors and recognizing style.”

Students in Tara’s 11th and 12th grade English and Gender Studies classes have used ChatGPT to generate thesis statements for essays. Working in groups, students evaluate the results, determining which ones are good and how others can be made better.

Despite recognizing the value of AI, Tara reminds students of its limitations, cautioning them against relying solely on AI-generated content without understanding the material.

“We want to see what AI can do to make us into better writers, better editors, and to understand how writing works,” Tara said, “but I tell my students it’s not a replacement for learning how to write yourself.”

Tara envisions a future where AI-assisted writing becomes commonplace and acceptable, at least in certain situations, but stresses the importance of proper usage. “I remember people were super scared about Wikipedia all those years ago,” they observed, recalling concerns that it would stunt students’ research skills. “I think there is going to be a place for AI, but the problem that I frame with my students is that they don’t know how to properly use it yet.”

Cory, while preferring independent student analysis, says he sees value in using AI for more complex literary analysis, as some freshmen and sophomores are challenged to get below a surface understanding of the text. Some of his students, particularly those struggling with writing, have found success using ChatGPT to develop specific prompts, leading to improved writing skills. Cory noted that his stronger writers have continued to excel, while lower-skilled writers have demonstrated improvement through increased effort and engagement with AI tools.

“Rather than learning how to do the deep analysis all on their own,” he observed, “they’re

taking a different route, learning how to develop sophisticated prompts. With use of AI, they’re also developing skills to construct a proper outline, to introduce quotes properly.”


One student who has been helped by Cory’s willingness to embrace ChatGPT is 10th grader Cal Ankenman, who says he was onto AI long before any of his Mid-Pen teachers: “I first heard about it from my mom. She works at Google and she’s part of all the AI stuff.”

Cal, who has dyslexia, found AI helpful in generating initial drafts, allowing him to focus on refining his writing. With guidance from Cory, he learned to craft precise prompts, enhancing his understanding of good writing and utilizing AI to become a better writer. He understands, however, that

AI offers a slippery slope to plagiarism. While he would usually fully rewrite AI-generated text before handing it in, he says that having ChatGPT write the first draft “pretty much took out all the work for me.”

Now, with Cory’s support, Cal has learned to craft very specific prompts that require a detailed knowledge of the literature Cory assigns, and he spends a lot more time thinking about and polishing his writing, because it is easier to do than when he had to face a blank page.

“In the beginning, I really didn’t use it well, and I didn’t really know good writing from bad writing,” he said. “Now, with all of Cory’s feedback, I feel like I really know what sets good writing apart from bad writing and how to use the AI bot to help me be a better writer.”

Despite his affinity for ChatGPT, Cal remains cautious, recognizing the tool’s tendency to generate inaccurate information. And he shared a valuable lesson learned about trusting everything the chatbot generates: “When I’m quoting something from a book, I stay away from using AI,” he said. “I learned that last year when I turned in an essay that had a quote from a book that didn’t exist.” 

“We want to see what AI can do to make us into better writers, better editors, and to understand how writing works, but I tell my students it’s not a replacement for learning how to write yourself.”

-TARA THEOBALD-ANDERSON

JON AUSTIN

Cultivating a Global Perspective in Students

In his 18th year at Mid-Pen, Spanish teacher Jon Austin is one of a handful of current teachers who joined the school in their 20s, so fresh-faced that they were sometimes mistaken for students, but who, with almost two decades of experience, have evolved into being seasoned masters of their craft and are core to the culture of the school.

Jon joined Mid-Pen as a full-time Spanish teacher in 2005, not long after graduating from the University of Massachusetts with a major in Cultural Anthropology focused on Latin America and a minor in Spanish. During and after college,

he had friends. To make sure the trip would be a success, he partnered with a specialized tour company to ensure a rich and authentic experience for students.

Since that first adventure, he has worked with the same student travel agency to organize trips to Ecuador, Peru, Spain, and, most recently, Costa Rica. All trips have included group travel in both cities and the countryside, as well as homestays for students with local families, providing students with about a week of total language immersion. Participants on the recent Costa Rica trip said they were a bit trepidatious going into the homestay but found it to



he traveled throughout Central and South America. He began his teaching career as a GED tutor for a bi-lingual community development agency and then as an instructor for a college preparatory Spanish conversation class while also doing other jobs that recent college graduates do, such as gardening and working at a bookstore.

Jon's passion for learning about other cultures led to the creation of Mid-Pen's first international travel offering for students, a 2015 summer trip to Mexico. The Dragons spent two weeks in southeastern Mexico, where Jon had lived after college and still

be the most rewarding part of the trip and a source of tremendous growth, both personally and in terms of advancing their language skills.

In his time at Mid-Pen, Jon has tailored his curriculum to accommodate a range of learning styles. He tries to engage both sides of the brain to make language come alive, incorporating music, art, literature, and discussions of current events. He also encourages students to retake assessments to help them improve their grammar and vocabulary mastery while reducing the stress that can get in the way of learning in high-stakes testing situations.



With a significant number of Mid-Pen families speaking Spanish at home, Jon realizes that his classes have to support the language skills of heritage Spanish speakers at Mid-Pen alongside those who are new to the language.

As he explains, “Heritage speakers naturally act as language and pronunciation modelers for new learners, while benefiting from seeing how the structure of the language is broken down and understood with a beginner’s eye, as you would when deconstructing sentences in an English class.”

By the time they get to Spanish 3 and Spanish 4, students from both backgrounds are working side by side, using their conversational Spanish and knowledge of the mechanics of the language as they delve deeper into writing, literature, and other intellectual pursuits.

Outside the classroom, Jon’s passion is cycling. He feels fortunate to live in one of the best parts of the country for cycling and enjoys spending a lot of time exploring on two wheels. He also reads as much as time allows but admits it’s hard to keep up with his favorite authors during the school year. 🐉

Epic Costa Rica Adventure Fosters Growth and Bonding

Adozen Dragons enjoyed an incredible two-week journey to Costa Rica last summer packed with a broad range of experiences, from zip-lining in Monteverde to practicing traditional craft-making skills in the vibrant artisan town of Sarchí.

The students had time to relax and bond in the thermal springs and waterfalls surrounding the Arenal Volcano, but also experienced profound growth through family homestays and learning about ecology and sustainable farming. They returned expressing their gratitude for the dedication of chaperones Jon Austin, Lesly Vasquez, and Raul Salazar, for pushing them to stretch out of their comfort zones. 🐉



Girls Varsity Volleyball Goes 12-0 in League Play

By Kurt Lange, Athletic Director

After an impressive performance in 2022, some players on the Girls Volleyball team may have questioned how they would fare this year, given that all the team's starters had graduated. Early in the season their coaches, brothers Franc and Alec Salazar, told them simply: "How you do depends on you and if you are willing to commit to putting in the practice and the hustle."

And hustle they did, winning their PSAL North division with a 12-0 record, the first undefeated season in the history of Mid-Pen volleyball.

Despite being relatively new to coaching, the brothers studied how they could push their players in skill work and conditioning, optimizing the drills they used. In practice, they could see the team's potential and believed they had the makings of

a championship team behind the leadership of co-captains Abby Wee '24 & Cherilyn Rodriguez-Valladares '24. Beyond winning, however, they also wanted to develop a team whose players supported each other and had fun together.

The brothers' own playful camaraderie rubbed off on the players, creating a special chemistry and family feeling across the whole team. Among other things, the coaches credit the team's success to how often the players got together in their free time just to play for the fun of it, building experiences needed for the fluid teamwork that led them to victory.

"We played really hard, and we worked really well together as a unit," said Abby, reflecting on a remarkable season. "I'm just so proud of the team."

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Chloe Kummerer '25 completes a spike. On the next page, Kimberly Rodriguez '26 goes up for a block.



SEASON RECAP

With early wins over Eastside Prep and EPA Academy, things were looking positive for the team right from the start of the season. A close out-of-league 3-2 loss to KIPP Esperanza provided the jolt the team needed to settle down, as it went on to win the next 12 matches by either 3-1 or 3-0 scores.

The girls were finally eliminated from CCS play-offs at the league tournament, losing to KIPP Navigate but beating EPA for the third time this season. Including championship and non-league play, the team had an amazing overall record of 15 wins and only 2 losses!

Departing seniors include Abby Wee, Cherilyn Rodriguez-Valladares, Fin Collart, Toni Nava, Katie Gonzalez, and Tanisha Gundugobula. Both Abby and Cherilyn made first-team all-league. Juniors Ruth Schar and Chloe Kummerer were named second-team all-league, and Lillie Martins received an honorable mention. Sophomore Ally Mintz made first-team all-league and classmate Kimberly Rodriguez made second-team.

Both Franc and Alec were awarded the league's prestigious Honor Coach Award in recognition of the team's amazing season.

With four freshmen and two sophomores, the Mid-Pen JV volleyball team played 10 matches, winning four. Ninth graders included Meeru Singahl, Amelia Filo, Jaqui Urzizo, and Betsy Contreras. Sophomores Caz Emmens and Xenia Hernandez rounded out the team. You will definitely see some of these girls on the varsity team next year! 🍀



CO-ED SOCCER

Coaches: Raul Salazar and Kurt Heise

With 27 players, this year's roster was the largest in Mid-Pen soccer history, but after losing seven seniors from last year's squad, there were a lot of questions about how this year's season would shape up.

Our league record of 1-1-8 was not a true reflection of this team, which showed a lot of heart and grit. Two of those losses were by only one goal, and in a 3-0 loss to the eventual league champion, North Valley, the Dragons held them scoreless for the entire first half. There were many exciting moments this season, and Coaches Raul Salazar and Kurt Heise are excited about next year's prospects.



Our six departing seniors include Henry Chant, Bryce Lawson, Maisy Palmer, Marco Alcalde, Logan Shaw, and Calvin Healy. Henry and Bryce received first and second-team league honors respectively.

With seven juniors, five sophomores, and nine freshmen, there will be plenty of players for the next few years. Congratulations to Oliver Carpenter '27, who received an honorable mention from the league in his first season playing competitive soccer.

CO-ED CROSS COUNTRY

Coaches: Alan Cameron

This season, three Dragons took on the intense slopes of Bay Area cross country courses. Led by Senior Bella Maxcy '24, the Dragons competed in the PSAL North Division. They tackled courses in Half Moon Bay, Menlo Park, and Belmont. Coach Alan Cameron was exceptionally proud of his small but mighty team, and is confident that more students will realize they secretly love Cross Country. 🐉



Seniors Henry Chant, above, and Bryce Lawson, inset, won first- and second-team league honors respectively, while Oliver Carpenter '27, right, won honorable mention.



Young Alums Return for Thanksgiving Feast and Talent Show



Fourteen young alums returned to campus November 17 to catch up with old friends and teachers and to join in the school's annual Thanksgiving Feast and Talent Show. Back row from left: Uly Cruz '23, Juan Pablo Lara-Nava '23, Quinten Suppes '15, Schuyler Zandbergen '18, Jess Spence '22, and Cameron Main '22, Front row from left: Cristina Jaimes '23, Amber Rodriguez '23, Alex Magaña '23, Mayrin Ceja '23, Coco Zubizarreta '22, Hana Dvorak '17, and Joe Bello '19. Not pictured: Nyla Byers '22.

Jeffrey Harris, who taught art at Mid-Pen from 1996 to 2002, is currently living in Mendocino County and is a School-to-Work Transition Specialist with the Mendocino County Office of Education. "My son Finnegan, who was born while I was teaching at Mid-Pen, was married in September 2022 at 24 years old," he writes. "Some of my old Mid-Pen buddies and students remember him as a little squirm."

Reflecting back on his early career at Mid-Pen, Jeffrey recalled that "Mid-Pen opened the door and gave me an opportunity which really did launch me into people work, which I still do to this day, 25 years later. Seeing *Connections* magazine, I am in awe of the growth the school has continued to make. It's night and day and entirely different than the one I taught in, though I'm sure it has many of the same qualities, fostering independence, creativity, and more. It was definitely a high point in my life."

Matt Reilly '13 is the Channel Account Manager at Handbid, a fundraising software company based in Denver, where he is in charge of channel partnerships, commercial sales, and other business development. After graduating Mid-Pen, Matt attended college for a year and then gave a shot at playing soccer professionally. In 2016 he found his way to Hungary, where he played for a short time, before breaking his foot and returning to the Peninsula, where he pursued a career in software sales.

"This was an exceedingly difficult task, as I had no degree," he writes. "Nevertheless I broke into a company and started slinging software out of Mountain View. In 2018 I moved to Austin to continue to grow in my software career. When COVID hit and I got laid off, I moved to Denver to be closer to family who had moved there about a year earlier. Since working for Handbid, I have helped hundreds of organizations raise millions of dollars through our support channel or events. I still continue to serve our clients in my role while also helping with the growth of the business."

Grant Myers '18 recently reached out to Director of Admissions Randy Johnson to interview him for a paper on "What is Education For" that he was writing for a class at Evergreen State College in Olympia, WA, where he is enrolled after earning two separate associates degrees. When he is not studying, Grant coaches the South Sound YMCA swim team.

Jeannessa Lurie '19 is living in Monterey, where she works as a dog trainer and handler and attends CSU Monterey. She expects to graduate in May 2024 with a BA in humanities and communications. "I spent the first three years down here managing a doggy daycare and grooming salon," she writes. "Over the last three years, my boyfriend and I have fostered over 15 dogs and cats, placing them all in successful adoptive homes. I now am a certified dog trainer with a specialty in behavioral modification, military, and police K9 training. I have successfully rehabilitated three previously aggressive dogs, and taken four puppies through our basic obedience program with flying colors. I am in the process of training my dog, an American Bully named Humphrey, to be a personal protection dog. We are also working on the American Kennel Club's Canine Good Citizen Advanced course. In 2024 my boyfriend will be going into the Army, so we will begin our journey as a military family! I am so excited to see where our journey takes us next!"



A sophomore at Loyola University Chicago, **Logan Levine '22** writes that "Mid-Pen helped me figure out what I want to do with my life: be a teacher and teach at a school like Mid-Pen, and help students like Mid-Pen helped me."



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