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Piner Students Express Serious Fears and Concerns About Deportation Threats

By Elly Somnavong, Aaron Moreno Gonzalez, Sebastian Witthaus, Damian Viveros

Already facing the potential change of their high school into a 7-12 school due to a budget shortfall, students at **Piner High School** now are bracing for more disruption in their lives from President Donald Trump's controversial plan to deport undocumented residents.

In interviews and written responses to questions posed by *The Piner Prospector* in the first two weeks of February, students expressed fear, frustration and resignation as they confronted the possibility of losing family members and friends.



(Photo credit: Press Democrat)

This article is based on comments or written responses to questions from 18 students and one teacher. The names of students and teachers quoted in this article are being kept anonymous in order to protect them from being identified by immigration officials or harassed by anti-immigration foes.

Many Piner students took part in the Monday, February 3 "Day Without Immigrants" protest at Courthouse Square in Santa Rosa, California.

Indeed, many Piner classrooms were anywhere from half to two thirds empty on Monday. On Monday, Feb. 3, the day of the Day Without Immigrants protest, 489 out of 1442 enrolled Piner students were absent. The number of absent students was more than three times the 129 absences on Thursday, Jan. 30 and the 118 absences on Wednesday, Jan. 29.



(Photo credit: Press Democrat)

"It felt good to feel seen," said a Piner freshman in a written response to questions. She expressed concern, however, "about some of my family members because most of them don't have papers" except for her mother.

She said her mother recently got her naturalization papers this year.

"It's a relief to know that she can't be taken by ICE," she said. "But my sister and aunts can and it worries me a lot that ICE could show up at their house or workplace or anywhere where they shop."

She said her family members who potentially face deportations "don't have a plan for how to respond to ICE if they do show up."

Some students said the current deportations were remarkably similar to deportations their families faced long before Trump.

A Piner junior said he is concerned that someone in his family could be swept up in President Trump's immigration deportation plans.

"I have several relatives who may be worried since they have relatives or small children and are worried if they are separated due to immigration problems," he said. "I have an uncle whose wife sadly passed away and now he must take care of his young children even if they end up deporting him and having to leave his children."

The junior said his family faced deportation in 2011, when Barack Obama was president, long before Trump's first presidency from 2017 to 2021.

"In 2011, my mother was deported, causing my brother and I to go live with her in her country of origin, causing our family to separate," he said.

"Nowadays nothing can happen to us," he said. "But we hope that Donald Trump's presidency does not affect us since my dad became a U.S. citizen. But sometimes I do think about that since immigration also takes people who are already citizens."

"Knowing that they have taken several people with citizenship does make me think about

my dad since right now I live only with him," he said. "My older brother and I live with him, so I wouldn't think about what would happen if I were to separate from him again. It happened once and I don't want it to happen again."



Photo credit:
Press Democrat

The junior said he is currently in a program that focuses on safe havens "and what we try to do is focus on problems in schools, however we are also focusing on the issue of immigration and what could happen if I.C.E. comes to the city."

In some cases, he said the program even tries "to get involved in the community by providing information to those people who don't know much about what to do if I.C.E. comes knocking on your door oh even if it is close to your neighborhood oh where you live." He said the program emphasizes that several schools in Santa Rosa "have the safe haven resolution and how this can help those families with immigration problems and how they can use these schools to 'hide' since what this does is provide them with a safe place where

immigration authorities cannot enter without the consent of the superintendent of the schools, helping to protect themselves and their families from all undocumented families."

Even students privileged enough to have parents who are citizens said they felt guilty for their privilege and wished their friends and their families could be spared the expected disruption in their lives and the indignity of living in a country that treats the undocumented so inhumanely.

"I feel a sense of guilt to even say that I am privileged to not go through this directly and I get an unsettling feeling in my stomach when I see that other people have to go through this and I don't," said a junior in a written response to questions.

"I dont think it's right and I dont think it's something to be proud of either because people are suffering and just because some of us aren't, doesn't mean we should not get involved with the situation. If you can sit there and feel no remorse for people who are suffering through it, then you are just as bad as the people taking families away."

The Piner Junior said that sadly she and her immediate family are concerned for some family friends and some family members.

"It's mostly my mom's side of the family rather than my dad's. My dad's side of the family

was born in Puerto Rico or Germany or here in the U.S.”

So far, she said, no one in her family has been affected by the president’s deportation plan.

“No they have not, hopefully they won’t be at all.”

The junior said “it’s hard to see other families being separated just because they were born in Mexico or other countries. It’s wrong because we are punishing people who had no control of where they were born.”

She said her family doesn’t really have a plan for how to respond in the event ICE shows up at their door or place of employment.

“No, our family doesn’t have a plan because it doesn’t affect us directly,” she said. But the side of the family “it does affect I’m not sure if they have a plan or not yet. In their case I really hope they have some sort of planning revolving around that issue.”

In the meantime, she said she doesn’t know what to do if any of her family members are swept up in an ICE raid.

“No, I’m very uneducated on what to do,” she said. “I assume there’s really nothing you can do though. As sad as it may seem, what are you supposed to really do. You are trapped. It’s a very hard and sad topic to plan and prepare yourself for.”

While she doesn’t have to worry about attending school and coming home to find herself separated from her parents, she said “I do worry about coming to school because there’s a lot of people I care about that could at any given moment be taken away.”

Piner and other Santa Rosa City Schools have said on Parent Square that the district stands with students and their families and remains “unwavering in our heartfelt commitment to ensuring that every child—regardless of their immigration status—feels safe, supported, and welcome at school.”

Such words, however, may have a hollow ring to some students.

“I feel that schools are sadly no longer a safe place for undocumented students especially when ICE can come in and raid any time they would like to,” the junior said.

“People are now scared to come to school and go home because anything can happen and that’s the scariest part in the unknowing what will happen when you arrive home or walk outside to go to school.”

Teachers also expressed frustration about federal immigration policy changes and fears for the welfare of their students.

"Enough with the villainization of immigrants and the fear tactics that are dividing America," said a Piner teacher. "We are a nation built by immigrants! All students, regardless of mandates and immigration status, are safe with me."

Piner Inspired Class of '20 Grad To Protest Budget Cuts at Sonoma State University

By Aaron Moreno Gonzalez, Damian Viveros and Alex Guzman Ruiz



Piner Class of '20 Grad Abby Park at SSU protest

Abby Park has taken the lessons she learned as a 2020 graduate of **Piner High School** about social activism and civic engagement to heart and applied them directly to student protests at **Sonoma State University** against planned drastic budget cuts.

Park, whose mother is Piner education specialist Amanda Park, traces her student activism back to her senior year at Piner in 2020, which was an incredibly unprecedented time during the Covid 19 Pandemic when schools moved from the classroom to distant learning.

"There was little to do in terms of protesting and activism during the pandemic, but many of my peers were upset by the changes made to our year that could never be made up," she said.

Park said many social justice issues emerged during her time at Piner, including school gun violence at **Parkland High School** and the **Black Lives Matter** movement, which inspired her to continue working toward change, such as bringing awareness to BLM.

At Piner, Park was a member of ASB for the 2018-19 and 2019-20 school years, serving as secretary in '19-20.

ASB "taught me a lot about leadership skills and how to organize," she said.

While she was not an organizer in any capacity of the SSU event, she said she organized her friend group to get together and attend.

Park said ASB and Piner's students do incredibly important activism work with Monroe Elementary School during the toy drive during the holiday season.

"That yearly visit has changed children's lives, and even the smile on their faces made an impact on me each year."

Other social activism she's been part of included Piner's "Every 15 Minutes" production in the spring of 2019.

"Students were nominated by teachers to participate in an anti-drunk driving campaign before prom," she said.

As part of the production, she said a group of students reenacted a drunk driving accident. In addition, she said a group of students represented the people who died at the hands of impaired driving.



SSU Protest
Photo Credit: Press Democrat

"One of my friends was part of the reenactment, and listening to his recounting of his mom's close-to-real-life reaction to his dead-on-arrival body, influenced me to never drink and drive," Park said.

"Afterward, I posted about my experience so that my peers could understand the genuine impact that driving under the influence of alcohol can have."

Park said taking part in the protest at SSU "felt powerful and emotional."

She said many students, including myself, "are incredibly angry at the unanimous and sweeping decision made by the interim president and board of trustees."

"There were many chants before the virtual town hall began and I felt as though spirits were high and the 'vibe' was good," she said.

She said the campus community has rallied around the students and faculty that are affected.

"The atmosphere was incredibly uplifting, even during times when the Provost or president said something the general audience found entertaining."

Park said she attended the protest with a group of her sorority sisters, many of whom have majors that are impacted by the budget cuts.

"We were surrounded by students from across the SSU campus."

Asked what she learned about activism from the protest, she said she “learned about the importance of expecting accountability and transparency from our leaders.”

“As a leader, President Cutrer is responsible for the people she serves, not just her agenda,” Park said. “I also learned how important it is to question authority and their follow through.”

She said many of President Cutrer’s answers to questions from alumni, students, and concerned parents referenced research on the proposed budgets.

“However, students, staff, alumni, and parents were not given access to these budgets or the research results,” she said. “For the campus community to understand the facts and justifications given by leadership, these documents must be made available to us.”

While Park remains optimistic that the administration will listen to the protesters, she said the protest was still worth it.

“Even if the outcome does not change because of the protest, I think that the students, student-athletes, coaches, staff, and concerned parents showed the CSU system and board that we are a united front,” Park said. “Students from all backgrounds and walks gathered to stand up against something they believe is wrong.”

Park said activism is important to her “because there are always going to be figures (physical or institutional) that stand against my morals and ethics.”

As for her future, Park said she plans to become an elementary school teacher.

“As a future leader, activism is important because you can act as a voice for those who do not have their own,” she said.

This specifically relates to SSU, as the budget cuts were made without the consultation of each department that would have been effective - those people should have been allowed to advocate for themselves.

“Activism is not only attending protests and making big statements, it’s just about standing up for what you believe in, even in small ways,” she said. “Every action contributes to the larger movement. Take action in a way that seems right for you and be brave!”

Piner Varsity Boys Basketball Overcame Early Season Woes, Fell Short in Valiant Playoff Push

By Elly Somnavong, Aaron Moreno Gonzalez, Alex Guzman Ruiz

Even though they didn’t win the **NorthBay Redwood League** title, the **Piner Varsity Boys Basketball team** may look back on this magical season as a triumph over adversity as new head coach **Marc Anderson** and players overcame early season anxieties to put together a season they won’t forget and can build on next year.

Through the pre-league part of the season, the team went 10-7 with tough losses against **Sacred Heart** and **Christopher Creek**. The players admit they weren't playing well and much of the reason was the cool reception they gave to Anderson.

"In the beginning of the season it was a little difficult," said **Tyler Coester**, a senior point guard and leader on the team. "Everybody was used to playing for Coach Erickson." Indeed, **Mike Erickson** has coached the basketball team at Piner for 37 years.

"We had challenges on and off the court," Coester said. "There was a lack of respect and a lot of sh#t talk. It led some players to leave the team."

Coester's teammate **Apollo Pereira** gave Coach Anderson high praise for the team's success this year.



Tyler Coester

"He came into a role that was hard to fill after Coach Erickson," Pereira said. "He came in and we're 19-10. He deserves a lot more credit than he gets."

Anderson himself is philosophical about the early problems and the way he and the team overcame them.

"Some folks base their decisions on what they're familiar with," Anderson said. "They came to Piner to be coached by the legendary Mike Erickson, who had seven league titles. I had big shoes to fill."

Anderson wasn't just some new kid on the block, however. He has been at Piner for 9 years as Student Advisor and previously coached Girls Varsity Basketball.

"I knew the boys not as players but as students," he said. "I'm their Student Advisor."

For his part, Anderson said it was a big adjustment for him and the players.

"I was presenting concepts to them they hadn't experienced before," he said. "It was a struggle."

Disappointingly, the last stop on the team's drive to the league and section titles this year ended in a loss against **San Rafael High School** on Feb. 18. The team lost 56-41 as the Prospectors couldn't rekindle the energy that enabled them to beat the Bulldogs 64-58 during the regular season.

Brendan Walker, a senior, led the Prospectors in scoring with 11 points, 8 rebounds and 1 steal. Coester scored 8 points with 5 rebounds, while Pereira scored 4 points with 6 rebounds, 3 steals and 2 blocked shots. Senior **Jaden Hernandez** scored 4 points with 8 rebounds and 3 steals, while **Anthony Cardoza**, a senior, scored 6 points.

Pereira, who had been the team's leading scorer during the season and playoffs, had an off game.



Apollo Pereira

"I always tell my players/coaches that we will never use an injury/sickness as an excuse," Anderson said. "If you dress up, you're healthy enough to play. He had a bad game, it's unfortunate but that's what happened."

Before that loss, however, the team's magic brought them NorthBay Redwood League Tournament Championship wins against **Ukiah High School** (63-50) on February 14 and **St. Vincent de Paul** (59-40).

The team's victory against the Ukiah squad in the playoffs came after two wins against Ukiah in league games.

Reflecting the team's early season struggles, one of those victories was a squeaker as the team won 64-58 despite 19 missed shots, 11 turnovers and being outrebounded.

In the playoff game against Ukiah, Pereira led the team in scoring with 25 points, 11 rebounds and 4 blocked shots. Coester added 14 points, 8 assists and 6 rebounds.

Pereira's leading performance was especially important because he missed 5 games due to an injury during the football season. He injured his knee and now wears a brace.

"I'm a little slower but not that much."

Anderson said "this team is very senior-lead. They are competitive. When the fourth quarter comes they know it's now or never."

Anderson said with the struggles of this season in the rearview mirror he likes the team's chances in the push for the league and section titles next year.

"Our goal is the No. 1 seed for the Section playoffs and the Tournament Championship. Our other goal is the Section Title."

Three Piner Journalism Students on What Black History Month Means to Them



Sebastian Witthaus

I am white. It is noticeable in my appearance, and though culturally I am Jewish and Native American, I know my appearance gives me privileges many don't have, even as a transgender man in the LGBTQIA+ community. **Black History Month** is not about me, nor do I have personally any say in it at all. It would be wrong to say Black History Month means nothing to me, because that is far from the truth. I am glad that we have this month to uplift black voices more so than we do in regular time, and I am happy that people take advantage of this month to spread awareness, talk about the history, and more. This month doesn't directly benefit or affect me, it never will in the slightest, and personally, I feel like I have no say in

this month as someone who is white. I am not the best person to talk about Black issues with, nor am I one to try and share an experience I do not have. I try to take the time this month to learn what I can of history and how to be a more respectful person to those of more marginalized groups than me, but it will truly never feel like enough as someone who is no way, shape, or form, a part of the communities we're uplifting today. All I can do is try and help uplift important voices and let others more deserving take the spotlight.



Aaron Moreno Gonzalez

Black History Month to me is the month of February. This is the month of the year where the world celebrates black history and culture. We take a look back at the past learning about black culture, stories, and influence. We learn about the stories of civil rights leaders like **Martin Luther King Jr**, **Malcolm X**, and the **Black Panthers**. We get to learn where they come from, why they did what they did, why they didnt stop fighting for what they believed in even after struggling. We learn their stories. All these people stood up not only for themselves, but for every African American that was in America. Their and many others' bravery helped America turn into a better place. Without these leaders America would be a very different place.

This month we look back at the wrongs that African Americans endured long ago. This month we celebrate black culture. Some examples of black culture are jazz, hip hop, soul food, hairstyles (cornrows, dreadlocks, etc.), fashion (baggy clothes, sagging, etc.). This month we celebrate black influence. We would all probably still be wearing dress shirts and pants as fashion if it wasn't for black influence. It's really important that we learn about black history so that we can see how bad America treated African Americans. It's also important so we do not repeat the same mistake we did in the past. Black history month to me means celebrating and congratulating African Americans on their accomplishments and culture.



Eva Escamilla

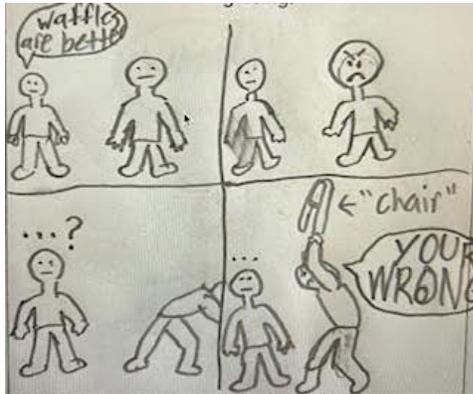
In my eyes, **Black History Month** is a way to recognize and celebrate the contributions of Black Americans in our community. Looking back on years before, the black community has gone through a lot whether it was racism which started back in the 17th century or when Jim Crow segregation laws became the norm in the 20th Century. These specific laws impacted the black community because it created a world full of hate toward Black Americans. They were separated from friends and family, separated from whites and other cultures. They had no freedom. During this time black people had no rights and say, they would constantly get put to work in the hot sun for multiple hours with no breaks.

They were beaten and whipped, and would get called racial slurs. This caused African Americans to build up trauma about their unequal treatment. So, it is important for others and myself to remember why racism is NOT okay. In this day and age, racist comments are normalized because people see them as "jokes" or simply "not offensive" which is not respectful or mature. It is 2025 and I believe there should be a change in society when it comes to African American appreciation. I believe that we should treat all cultures with respect. There is no legitimate reason not to do so. In my eyes we are all human beings in the same world. Black History Month means to show appreciation for what the community has done throughout history. It also shows inspiration for those who look up to others and for future generations. Black History Month is a way to get educated as well, to learn about their history and cultural traditions.

Black History Month honors the contributions of African Americans to U.S. history. Among the prominent figures are **Madam C.J. Walker**, who was the first U.S. woman to become a self-made millionaire; **George Washington Carver**, who derived nearly 300 products from the peanut; **Rosa Parks**, who sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott and galvanized the civil rights movement; and **Shirley Chisholm**, who was the first African American woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.

Black History Month: The celebration of Black History Month began as “Negro History Week,” which was created in 1926 by **Carter G. Woodson**, a noted African American historian, scholar, educator and publisher. It became a month-long celebration in 1976. The month of February was chosen to coincide with the birthdays of **Frederick Douglass** and **Abraham Lincoln**.

PROSPECTOR FUNNY:
“Two People Respectfully Disagreeing”
By Freshman Phillip Brady



CORRECTIONS

Kimberlee Case's first name and **Lucian Wee's** last name were misspelled in the last issue of The Piner Prospector. Ms. Case is a social sciences teacher at Piner and Mr. Wee is a sophomore.

Due to typo, a quote from Ms. Case contained the word “country” instead of the intended word “county.”

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