

# THE PINER PROSPECTOR

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## Piner High School Students and Teachers Are Optimistic New Cellphone Policy Will Improve Student Engagement

*By Gael Paramo*

**Piner High School** students and teachers are optimistic that a new policy banning cellphones during school next year will lead to better outcomes for students after a period of adjustment.

**Andrea Correia**, Piner's principal, couldn't be reached for comment. Ms. Correia told teachers at a May staff meeting that the school cell phone policy would restrict cell phone use during class and during passing breaks and lunch. She said the administration has found boxes for the cell phones in classrooms that may be effective and is working on funding.



**Piner Principal Andrea Correia**



**Piner Science Teacher  
Jill Ambrose**



**Piner Math Teacher  
Libby Brooks**

Teachers especially are hopeful that the policy will reduce student anxiety and allow students to concentrate.

"I think it's great," said **Jill Ambrose**, a Living Earth Science teacher at Piner. "Students need uninterrupted time for electronic devices and programs/sites marketed to hold their attention so they can focus on learning and developing skills for adulthood and independence."

By using phones during school, "students are not immersing themselves in learning opportunities or taking advantage of building interpersonal skills and in-person relationships," she said.

While studies of cellphone restrictions have so far not found an improvement in student performance and especially test scores, teachers who know their students the best, say outcomes may improve over time.

“The new phone policy will improve students’ academic performance because the constant distraction will be reduced,” said **Libby Brookes**, a Piner math teacher. “I have some students that can handle the responsibility of having their phone in class because they make learning their first priority, while other students have no will power and drown in their phone like zombies.”

“I’m pretty concerned about the kids’ mental health due to how attached many of them are to their phones, almost all the students in our gym waiting to get in the locker rooms are on them,” said **Natasha Thiele**, a Piner gym teacher. “The equivalent of this is like giving babies a pacifier they cannot live without. A pacifier calms babies down during most times but instead of pacifiers for them, it’s phones.”

Not all teachers are optimistic about the new rule. Indeed they believe a subset of students will continue to resist the policy.

“Many students will comply, but there are going to be many who resist,” said **Erin Ramos Gomez**, a Piner English teacher.

“I have already overheard students discussing their belief that the new rule will be impossible to enforce at Piner, so they aren’t really worried about it. Most students have expressed concerns to me regarding the need to contact family in the event of an emergency.”

“I don’t think it’s going to make that much of a difference because students don’t tend to follow the rules, often regarding their phones,” said **Neil Strathman**, a Piner history teacher. “Which leads to distractions and inconsistent enforcement in classrooms.”

Students are of two minds on the topic of the cellphone ban: they can see why it might help but they think it may be too restrictive.

“A phone-free school policy can be a safety concern because phones are the fastest way for students to contact family in emergencies like lockdowns or medical issues, and without them students may feel less safe,” said **Alondra Paramo**, a Piner senior.

Phones “can be useful when used responsibly,” Ms. Paramo said. “A better option is allowing phones during break and lunch and during emergencies but not during class.” Other students said they supported the new policy.

“The new policy for next year will be an essential rule for us to assist us within our priorities to learn better,” said **Evelyn Hernandez Soria**, a Piner junior. “But at the same time, I find it way too strict for our community because phones can be very important during specific scenarios with students and their family members. It’s a better idea to let them be used during break and lunch but should not be used during class time.”

**–With reporting by Sophia Rodriguez, Marcos Espinoza and Inoke Seviua.**

## Science Teacher Eric Cecil Was Gratified to Be Named Teacher of the Year and Urges His Students to Never Give Up

*By Marcos Espinoza and Jackeline Cruz*

**Piner High School** teacher **Eric Cecil** was surprised to be named the school's 2026 Teacher of the Year after nine years of teaching there.

"I don't get people acknowledging me as a teacher very often as a teacher," Mr. Cecil said. "I have been here nine years and have not won anything and I feel really good but there are a lot of other teachers here that deserve recognition as well."



**Mr. Cecil posing with the insects he loves to study.**

Teaching wasn't Mr. Cecil's first job. He worked as a counselor for 17 years with emotionally disturbed and at risk youth before coming into the classroom.

"It was a really good job, I really liked being a counselor," he said. "But I did not have a college degree so I could not advance."

Mr. Cecil was encouraged to go back to school at the age of 39 by his wife Maureen who was a French teacher at Piner.

"She said to me, 'you should get a different job. You should be going back to school,'" Mr. Cecil recounted. "So I said, I'm an outdoors person, I love camping, I'll be a biology teacher."

It took him 6 years to finish school. Mr. Cecil originally went to **Santa Rosa Junior College** and got degrees in liberal arts and natural sciences. He subsequently moved on to **Sonoma State University** and earned a bachelor's degree and master of science in biology.

Mr. Cecil graduated from Sonoma State with his science teaching credential in 2017 after student teaching at Piner High school with longtime science department chair Mark Mantoani.

He said after his student teaching he was given an opportunity to remain here and has been here ever since.

Mr. Cecil has taught Honors Living Earth, Living Earth, Health Science and Biotechnology. He has no favorite class, but he does have a favorite subject when teaching which is field biology, ecology and insect science.

“Insects and ecology are subjects I really like,” he said.

Mr. Cecil feels that a classroom that is exciting will have students engage with science in a way lectures can't.

He said one of his own high school science teachers, Mr. Healy, at Cardinal Newman High School, inspired him to get him into science.

Now Mr. Cecil hopes to inspire the next generation of scientists in the same way.

Asked about the students he's been most proud of during his time at Piner, he said he's always proud of students every year.

“It's not always about the biggest accomplishment either,” he said. “I'm most proud when a student who wasn't engaged becomes engaged. I hated high school. I had a hard time. I didn't go back to school until my late 30s. It's important to never give up. Just because you failed doesn't mean you shouldn't try again.”

***-with reporting by Xavier Coello and Inoke Seviua***

## **Piner's Restorative Justice Coordinator Delmar Billy Jr. Says the End of Program May Bring Challenges for Next Year's Students**

***By Gael Paramo***

**Delmar Billy Jr.**, the outgoing restorative justice coordinator at **Piner High School**, said the **Piner** community may face many challenges in redirecting struggling students in the wake of the **Santa Rosa City School District's** unfortunate decision to cut the Restorative Specialist position due to budget cuts.

Mr. Billy, who has worked at Piner for 11 years, said that an emphasis on Restorative Practices isn't a cure all, but that it definitely helps students understand more of the consequences of what they do.

During his time at Piner, Mr. Billy's motto has always been “Connection before Content,” meaning that he strives to connect students who are struggling with conflicts.

That means daily check-ins with students who are struggling with being at school and pre-circle meetings to prepare for conflict resolution meetings where the hardest work is done.

He said his “favorite part of this job as a restorative specialist is to bring students/young people together to restore the harm they have created.”



***Piner's outgoing Restorative Specialist Delmar Billy Jr.***

During pre-circles and conflict resolution meetings, Mr. Billy said he lets students express how they have impacted others and hear from the other parties that are involved.

“My job is not to change the way that you think,” he said. “It is to give you something to think about.”

To be sure, that work can be challenging and requires patience and persistence in the face of continued conflict.

“About 5 years ago, I brought two male students into my room, C-40,” he said. “We had a conflict resolution meeting. Both students said everything was cool. And during lunch time, they both got into a fight.”

He said the fight occurred after they had both promised in his room that everything was fine between them.

Even so, Mr. Billy described his time at Piner as “a true blessing.”

Before Piner, he coached student athletes and did youth work at a church in West Coast Sacramento, California, where he was a former youth pastor.

He trained through the **Restorative Resource Center** and it took a few years to get certified.

He went to **Cosumnes River College** in Sacramento and **Champions College** in Stockton, California.

## Piner's Lady Prospectors Girls Softball Team Rode an Impressive 11 Game Win Streak into Playoffs Before Falling to Miramonte 14-2

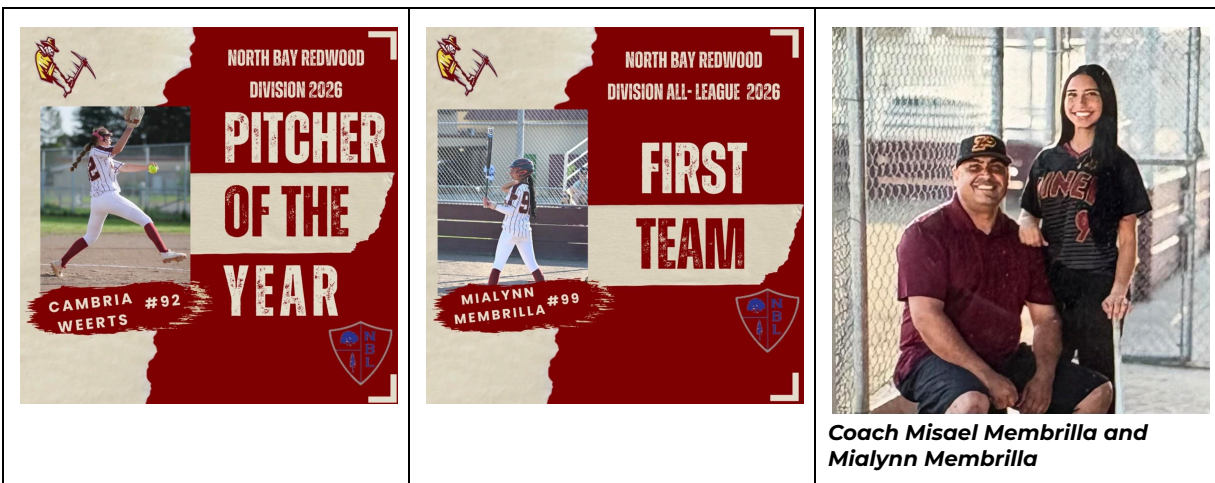
*By Eva Rodriguez*

**Piner High School's Lady Prospector** girls softball team won an impressive 11 games in a row as the team took first place in the **North Bay League**, split two league playoff games, a 3-0 win against **Healdsburg** and a 3-2 loss against **Ukiah** before struggling to a 14-2 loss in the North Coast playoffs against **Miramonte**.

In North Bay league play, the Lady Prospectors went 12 and 0 to go with an overall record of 16-8.

In the North Coast playoff loss, the Miramonte Matadors took an early lead after a single and an error in the first inning. After a wild pitch and another costly error, Miramonte increased its lead to 2-0.

**Cambria Weerts**, a Piner sophomore, pitched four innings in relief for the Lady Prospectors, giving up two hits and two runs, both earned, while striking out five and walking one.



**Coach Misael Membrilla and Mialynn Membrilla**

Sophomore **Camilla Parra**, Junior **Mialynn Membrilla**, and Freshman **Alyssa Burr** each collected one hit for the Lady Prospectors. Ms. Burr went 1-2 at the plate and led the team with one run batted in (RBI).

"The girls had many many errors on simple plays we would continuously spend time practicing," said Head Coach **Misael Membrilla**.

"These remarkable ladies dominated with an unstoppable 12-0 record in league, claiming the NBL Redwood title for the second year in a row, such a great accomplishment especially for all the freshmen who joined this year."

Despite the early exit in the North Coast playoff, the team seems upbeat about its season and prospects for next year.

"I would love to say congratulations to every single one of us," said **Leena Mae Prak**, a freshman. " I'm so proud of how far we have come as a team and our support for one another."

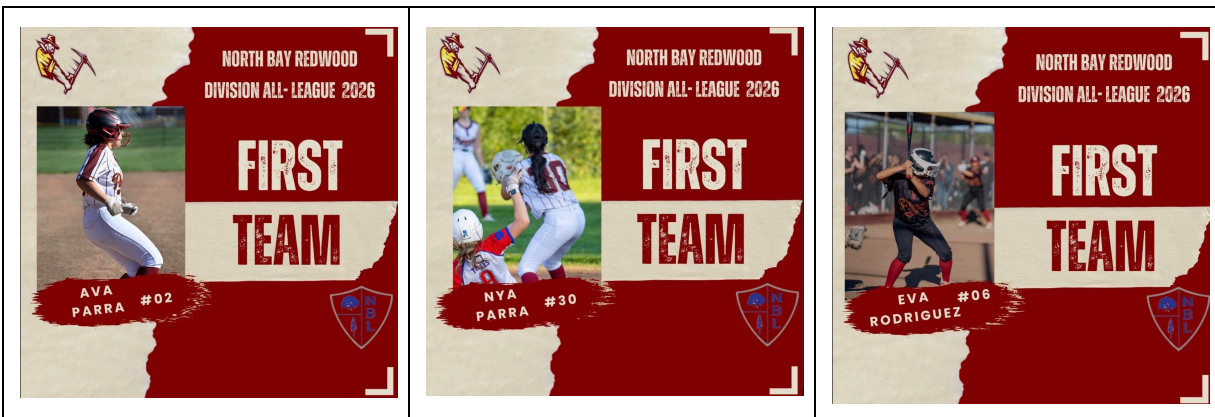
Ms. Prak said she feels "blessed to have these girls as teammates and I hope next year we take on that win!! I love every single one of the girls and I'm incredibly proud of all of our accomplishments."

Ms. Parra also spoke about her pride in the team's season.

"I'm proud of us all and how far we have come as a team," she said.. "I'm very grateful to be a part of this team this year, and I'm glad we all got along so well."

Both Ms. Membrilla and Ms. Parra said they will never forget the memories and friendships made during the season.

"I'm going to miss the practices, games, laughs, and even the stressful moments because we all went through them together," Ms. Parra said. "Seeing how much every single one of us grew, both as players and people, we truly built something special. I'll always be thankful for this team and for every single one of them."



At the end of the year, Ms. Weerts won North BNay Redwood Division Pitcher of the Year, while Ms. Membrilla, **Ava Parra**, **Nya Parra**, and **Eva Rodriguez** earned First Team All-League Honors. Ms. Prak, **Guiliana Lower**, and Ms. Burr also made Second Team All-League selections for the season.

## The Success of Piner High School's Spring Concert Reflected the Commitment of Student Musicians Who Rose to the Occasion

**By Gian Almorado**

The success of this year's **Piner High School Music Department's** "Spring Concert" shows what can happen when Music Director **John Mayer** sets the bar high for his student musicians and they rise to the occasion.

A new lighting system, a larger music program, and the addition of student teacher **Cooper Ysias** also made this year different from past years, Mr. Mayer said.

Mr. Mayer said he and Mr. Ysias divided up their duties to assist in preparing for the performances.

“This semester, Mr. Ysias has been teaching the Concert Band, which he has done an excellent job preparing for the show, while I have been teaching the Symphonic Band,” he said.

Deliberately, Mr. Mayer chose more challenging music this year to broaden the students’ abilities. He said that he programmed hard music all over the board.

“I was really looking for them to make their music more interesting, and they’ve taken up that challenge.” Mr. Mayer said.

He praised the musicians’ work ethic to learn difficult music, and said the Spring Concert was a celebration of the fruits of the school’s music program.

The concert included Rock Bands, Choir, Symphonic Band and Guitar Ensembles, which entertained the audience with their diverse repertoire of music.

Given the commitment of the students, Mr. Mayer said “this year’s concerts have been the easiest ever in my career. Things have been ready for us for about 1 month now.”

Among the songs played at the concert were popular rock songs such as “Can’t Stop,” by **the Red Hot Chili Peppers**, “Island in the Sun,” by **Weezer**, “Stacy’s Mom,” by **Fountains of Wayne**, and “Iris,” by **The Goo Goo Dolls**.

The Piner Choir sang offerings such as “Daylily,” by **Movements**, while Concert Band played music like “Carpathia,” by **William Owens**, “Dark Ride,” by **Randall Standridge**, and “Star Wars” by **John Williams**.

The Symphonic Band added more complex pieces from artists like **Gustav Holst**, **Richard L. Saucedo**. They also played two songs, “Pirates of the Caribbean” and “Jurassic Park,” which are pretty popular in the music industry.

Mr. Mayer singled out several students for praise including senior bassoon player **Dex Griggs** for his dedicated efforts and solo playing, and **Brian Guadarrama** for his work with the trombone ensemble and also **Oliver Reyes** for his work as the percussion captain.

Mr. Mayer said with Mr. Reyes leading the way, the band and other leaders have aspired to do more and to want more. “He is very committed, and hardworking everyday to get the percussion section on it.”

Finally, Mr. Mayer said the greatest source of his pride in the Spring Concert may be the effort of the Chamber Singers, who performed an octet on their own.

“They were one of the many students in the music program who demonstrated their commitment,” he said.

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**REPORTERS/EDITORS**

Gian Almorado  
Sam Bautista  
Xavier Coello  
Jacky Cruz  
Raul Diaz  
Marcos Espinoza  
Jordyn Gregg  
Alex Hicks  
Adan Lopez

Angel Mondragon  
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Yaretzy Sedano  
Inoke Seviua

