

THE PINER PROSPECTOR

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A Small Group of Piner Junior Senior High School Students Walked Out to Protest Sexual Harassment and Abuse

By Sinai Solorio and Evangelin Lam

About 28 students including girls and a few boys from **Piner Junior Senior High School** participated in a walkout on Friday, October 9, to raise awareness about sexual harassment and sexual abuse.

The students walked 2.5 miles from 1700 Fulton Road to the **Santa Rosa City Schools District Office** at 110 Stony Point Road to call for awareness and accountability of sexual harassment and abuse.

Protests to raise awareness about sexual harassment and abuse have increased since New York State prosecutors reopened an investigation of the alleged gang rape of a female student by 7 male students at **Cornell University** in 2024. The prosecutors reopened the investigation after the victim brought a civil lawsuit against the university and the alleged perpetrators this summer.



Piner sophomore Montserrat Gomez Zarco



Piner sophomore Halley Floranz



Piner freshman Emily Hernandez Garnica

Piner students who participated in the walkout said it was also in response to an Oct. 2 incident involving a social media post by a Piner student athlete – “Free the Cornell 7” – that



Ms. Gomez Zarco and Ms. Floranz during the walkout.

people in the Piner community criticized for being insensitive and/or deeply offensive.

“He probably thought it was funny.....and he probably didn't think much about it, but people absolutely did not take this as a joke,” said **Montserrat Gomez Zarco**, a Piner sophomore.

When students heard about what the student athlete said, they criticized him for making light of the serious topic of rape and sexual assault, Ms. Gomez Zarco said.

Other students who participated in the walkout spoke out about the importance of protecting victims in every way and making sure their voices are heard clearly.

“The reason I am participating in this walkout is because I believe that sexual assault is a serious issue that needs more awareness,” said **Halley Floranz**, a Piner sophomore.

Ms. Floranz said the protesters wanted “to stand up for survivors, show them that they are not alone and help create a safer environment for everyone.”

“I wanted to stand for those who can't make it, for those scared to speak up, for those who have” spoken up, said **Emily Hernandez Garnica**, a Piner freshman. “Sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and sexual assault is not a matter of age, race, gender, or appearance. It happens, it's real, it's devastating.”

In related news, Piner Principal **Andrea Correia** said the administration had completed an investigation into complaints filed against the student athlete and declined to comment further.

In a statement to the Piner Community, Mrs. Correia previously said school administrators “have a responsibility to listen when concerns are brought forward, to take those concerns seriously, and to respond appropriately.”

She noted that when concerns are reported, school administrators work with district leadership to gather information, investigate, and follow applicable policies and procedures.

“While we cannot share confidential information about individual students or disciplinary matters, I want our community to know that concerns reported to us are investigated.”

In the statement, Mrs. Correia also has said that the school “does not tolerate or condone sexual assault, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, or any behavior that makes another person feel unsafe, threatened, or disrespected.”

She has said she stands “firmly against these behaviors, as does Piner Junior Senior High School.”

“We stand with those who speak up, and with everyone in our community who believes that harassment, assault, and abuse have no place at Piner. Every student deserves to feel safe, respected, and supported.”

“Student voices matter,” Mrs. Correia has said. “Students have the right to speak up, to raise awareness, and to work together to create positive change in their community. We support students who choose to use their voices in ways that are respectful, safe, and consistent with our shared responsibility to care for one another.”

Integration of Middle Schoolers into Piner Junior Senior High Has Been Smoother Than Expected Due to School’s Strict Culture

By Xavier Coello

Piner Junior Senior High School’s first year as a comprehensive 7-12 secondary school has been challenging for middle schoolers, high schoolers, teachers, counselors, student safety advisors and administrators alike, though many say the integration has gone much smoother than they expected thanks to the school’s strong culture of strict adherence to behavior expectations.

School administrators have worked hard to make sure new middle schoolers feel safe on campus. They follow a different bell schedule, use the gym for physical education at set times and have their own building with areas for recreation. Such precautions are necessary because 7th and 8th graders at 12 and 13 years of age are too young and inexperienced to be exposed to high schoolers who can range from 14 to 18 years old.

“The students I have spoken with have shared that they feel safe here,” said **Guadalupe Perez-Cook**, a Piner vice principal. “Some have also told me that we are strict, which I actually see as a positive because clear expectations and consistency help students feel secure and supported.”

Ms. Perez-Cook shared she has “also heard from parents who specifically chose Piner Junior High because of our structure and strong communication. They appreciate that administrators communicate with families when concerns arise and work with them to address issues.”

“One of the biggest benefits is that junior high students are becoming familiar with the campus, staff, routines, and behavioral expectations before entering high school,” Ms. Perez-Cook explained.

“Familiarity can reduce some of the uncertainty and anxiety that students often experience when transitioning to a new campus. They are also able to begin building relationships with staff that can continue throughout their years at Piner.”

For her part, Ms. Perez-Cook said one of the Piner administration's "biggest challenges is having two different bell schedules. Coordinating safety practices, supervision, schoolwide events, and daily operations around two schedules is complicated and requires a significant amount of administrative time.

She said supervision is especially important, but the amount of administrative time required to manage two schedules also means administrators have less time available in their offices.

"That can affect how quickly we are able to respond to emails, phone calls, meetings, and other needs. We are continuing to look for more efficient ways to operate as one comprehensive campus while still meeting the unique needs of both our junior high and senior high students."



**Piner counselor
Johana Perdomo**

Piner counselors including **Johana Perdomo**, who advises 8th and 9th graders, also have been working hard to make middle schoolers feel safe and welcome on their new campus.

"The junior high students that I have worked with have shared that they have felt welcomed since their orientation," said Ms. Perdomo. "They really enjoyed the first day of school where they got to build connections and walk around the campus."

Ms. Perdomo asserted that in the long run transitioning to high school will be smoother for the new junior high students.

"They will already have connections with the staff and the high expectations from our admin will not be a surprise for them. On our end, we will already know them as students, have seen their growth, and have developed rapport with their families."

Some junior high teachers said the integration has been more challenging than expected, because there are so many changes.

"It wasn't just a move to a new building and campus, but a shift in getting to know the entire campus and the high school staff," said **Julie Grange**, an education specialist and department chair.

"We often say we feel like first year teachers again."

Ms. Grange said many educational staff still have concerns about student supervision, although everyone is working to alleviate these issues.



**Piner Junior High
Education Specialist Julie
Grange**

"I believe the students feel safe, but comfortable is a different question, and change is hard for everyone," she said. "We are all learning to adjust and adapt."

"Being part of the high school campus will make the transition to high school much easier as they will feel comfortable and safe on the campus," she said. "Although, while they are in Junior High they can see how high school students act, for the good and bad."

So far the good has been on display much more than the bad according to some of the student safety advisors tasked with monitoring student interactions.



Piner Principal Andrea Correia



Student Safety Advisor Amanda Zabaljauregui

After an incident involving trash being thrown off the roof of the junior high building early in the year, Piner Principal **Andrea Correia** put a stop to it and made sure middle schoolers were aware that such behavior would be strictly policed using cameras.

"I have been surprised by how well the junior high students have acclimated to the campus," said **Amanda Zabaljauregui**, a Piner SSA. "They have adjusted well with the schedules and get to class in a timely manner for the most part. We do have issues with some of the students wanting to co-mingle with the high schoolers, but do our best to keep them separated."

Ms. Zabaljauregui explained that so far the worst incident to come up during the integration was a minor food fight "that was put down right away. We haven't had any incidents like that since.

"Thankfully, we have not had to break up any fights between junior and senior high students as of yet," she said. "We currently keep the junior high students near the L building during break and lunch. They must grab their food from the cafeteria and walk back to their area. We also have basketball and soccer to keep them engaged during lunch time."

For her part, Ms. Zabaljauregui shared "it has been nice having two more SSAs than last year to deal with the larger number of students on campus.

"Now that we have more students on campus, there are more behavior incidents so we are called to help admin at times and are taken away from supervision. This creates gaps in our zones and we've had issues with senior high schoolers taking advantage of us and coming out in droves while we are at the junior high campus."

Piner's New 7th and 8th Graders View Integration With High School Through Slightly Different Lenses and Concerns

By Sinai Solorio

Piner Junior Senior High School's new contingent of middle schoolers have very different views of the integration into the high school, with seventh graders understandably feeling considerably more vulnerable than the 8th graders.

Seventh graders who range in age from 11 to 12, said they were scared to be on the same campus as older high schoolers who can be anywhere from 14 to 18. Eighth graders who range in age from 12 to 13, were less concerned about being around older students.

So far the biggest challenge for seventh graders seems to be the middle school's coed bathrooms, which include stalls for boys and girls to use in the same room.

"Well for the bathrooms people look at me weirdly sometimes," when there is a group of girls, said **Adelyn Rose Moran**, a seventh grader.

"A group of guys once banged on my door because they thought it was funny," she said. "This all happened in our co-ed bathrooms. I can't imagine how the high school bathrooms will be."

The bathrooms also were a concern for **Victoria Solorio**, another seventh grader, who said she also worried that the bathrooms at the high school might be similar to the ones at the middle school.

To be sure, the bathrooms at the high school are completely separate for boys and girls.

Even so, Ms. Solorio doesn't always "feel secure" on campus. "I'm scared because I am a 'sevie.'"

The high schoolers "don't treat 7th graders" with respect, she added.

Ms. Solorio said she generally tries to avoid the high school campus and "even the office."

The presence of high schoolers makes it scary for middle schoolers, she said.

"I don't like it at all," said Ms. Solorio.

She would prefer that seventh and eighth graders had more "personal space," meaning space for middle schoolers alone.

Despite her unease, Ms. Solorio said that when she has interacted with high schoolers, they've treated her fairly well.

"You can tell that they don't want us there, and they show it by calling us names, for example 'sevies.' It's annoying."

Other seventh graders said they also weren't always treated well.

"They treat the kids badly like they weren't 7th graders before" themselves, said **Emily Imiranda Sanntana**, a seventh grader.

Ms. Sanntana shared an experience that could be considered a little intimidating.

One day "a tall, tall guy cussed me out when I was going to P.E.," said Ms. Sanntana. "When I go to the office, I feel scared."

If the seventh graders feel a little intimidated, the eighth graders seem more confident and safe perhaps due to being a year older.

For example, **Jennifer Moreno Cecilia**, an eighth grader, said she feels safe, and knows high schoolers "won't do anything to me personally."

Ms. Moreno Cecilia said she has friends among the high schoolers and feels comfortable with being on campus.

Finally, another eighth grader, **Ana Claudia Alcazar Soto**, said the middle school may feel a little confined on the campus.

"I feel like we have a small space," she said.

Piner Junior Senior High's New Theater Teacher Liz Gaines Is Breathing New Life into Piner's Already Vibrant Theater Scene

By Alyssa Burr

Piner Junior Senior High School's theater scene feels a lot livelier this year.

Elizabeth Gaines just joined as the new theater teacher, and the energy is obvious. Ms. Gaines has been a teacher at Piner for three years.

Right away, she's jumped in with fresh ideas for a haunted house, a spring musical, and new shows are already brewing.

The haunted house is one of the biggest things coming up, according to Ms. Gaines.

"The haunted house this year will have some of your favorite scares that the spooky season brings, from blood-sucking beasts, to things that creep between your floorboards at night."

Honestly, it sounds like she's not holding back. The Drama Club and the new Production class are teaming up to pull it off, and they're determined to surprise visitors.

Ms. Gaines wants to mix things up, maybe with live music from Piner's own rock band E-22 for a few nights. The budget isn't any bigger than usual, but Ms. Gaines sees that as a chance to get creative, relying on Do-It-Yourself magic to turn the Performing Arts Center into a full-blown spooky spectacle..



Piner Theater Teacher Liz Gaines and family.

After Halloween, Ms. Gaines and Music Director **John Mayer** are switching gears and lining up a spring musical.

Auditions will start before the semester ends, and anyone can give it a shot. The show itself is a rock musical written by a local playwright, so expect live music, guitar riffs, and tons of energy. They're aiming to premiere the production before Spring Break.

There's talk about the production class doing a staged radio drama, too. Picture students on stage, telling a story with live sound effects. Ms. Gaines describes it like listening to a podcast or a bedtime story, but watching students bring everything to life right in front of you.

So with a haunted house, a new production class, a spring musical, and maybe a radio drama on the way, Ms. Gaines' first year as theater teacher promises a lot for the theater department. It looks like things won't stay quiet for long.

Piner Principal Andrea Correia Uses Recent Incident Involving Real Looking Fake Currency on Campus as a Teachable Moment

By Evangeline Lam

At a recent **Piner Junior Senior High School** boys varsity football home game, Principal **Andrea Correia** felt compelled to spend some of her valuable time checking the authenticity of \$20, \$50 and \$100 bills being used to pay for tickets and concessions.

That's because Mrs. Correia and other Piner administrators recently came across counterfeit currency and/or movie-prop money that is designed to look like real U.S. currency that allegedly was removed from a classroom. That alleged theft is being investigated by Vice Principal **Norma Vasquez**, who declined to comment.



The funny money looks quite real until you look closely.

In an email to the Piner community on Parent Square, Mrs. Correia stressed that she was disclosing the movie prop money because she didn't want students to be taken advantage of.

"This isn't about getting students in trouble," Mrs. Correia said. "It's about making sure our kids understand the potential risks and know how to protect themselves and each other."

"Sometimes something that starts out as a joke or something that seems harmless can turn into a much bigger problem, and I want our students to have the information they need to make good decisions."

Mrs. Correia and other administrators declined to identify the students who allegedly had the money.

To be sure, she also didn't indicate that the students had tried to pass the money off as real currency.

"For some students, this may simply seem like something fun, funny, or interesting to have," Mrs. Correia said. "However, some of these bills can look surprisingly realistic, and that is where my concern comes in."

She said students "may not realize that trying to use these bills, trade them, give them to someone else, or even unknowingly pass them along can create a very difficult situation."

Moreover, she urged parents to talk with their children and ask them whether they have seen, received, purchased, or been given any bills that seem unusual or different from normal U.S. currency.

"This is a great opportunity to remind them: If you aren't sure a bill is real, don't use it. Don't accept or purchase money from someone if you are unsure where it came from."

She said it's important that students know they must never try to spend or pass along money that they know—or suspect—is counterfeit or movie-prop money.

"If someone gives you questionable money, bring it to a trusted adult rather than trying to figure out what to do with it yourself."

"Most importantly, never let another student pressure you into using or passing along questionable currency."

Alan Zermeno, a Piner junior, said he found some of the movie prop money in a cubbyhole in **John Williams'** classroom and took it with him when he left.



Junior Alan Zermeno

On September 24, the junior said he found the funny money in his 6th period Engineering Class.

"When I got to my table, I noticed something peculiar," he said. "Inside one of the holes that had been drilled into the table I saw what looked like a whole dollar bill. I looked around to see if anyone else had noticed it, but I was the only student in the classroom besides my teacher."

"At first, I thought I had gotten lucky. I was excited at the thought that I had found a dollar at school but when I looked at it more carefully, I noticed the words 'copy Money' printed on it," he said.

That was when he realized he had found a fake bill.

"The bill looked like an actual dollar. If I hadn't taken a closer look, I might have accidentally used it to buy something. Luckily I noticed the words before that could happen."

The next day, after showing the fake bill to some of his friends, he decided to cut it up and throw it away.

"I had no use for it, and if I gave it to someone else, who knows what they might do with it? They could have tried to use it to buy something."

In the end, finding the fake dollar was an unexpected experience.

"What I thought was a lucky find turned out to be something I had to be careful with. It also taught me that sometimes things are not always what they seem, and it is important to look closely before assuming something is real."

Mr. Williams declined to comment.

Former Grace Students Using the Confidence and Resilience Built in the Program to Succeed on their Own with ‘Limited Support’

By Elly Somnavong

Piner Junior Senior High School's cohort of former **Grace Program** students is doing the best they can this year with limited support in the absence of the much cherished credit recovery program.

The program, which featured credit recovery opportunities through an alternative high school on Piner's campus, allowed students who normally don't do well in high school to get back on track and graduate on time.

Indeed, the Grace Program was one reason why Piner leads all area high schools in graduation rates over the last several years. Unfortunately, the program was cancelled because of Santa Rosa City Schools' budget woes last year.

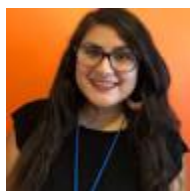
In recent years, Piner described its Grace Program as a “unique program on the Piner High School campus, to help students get back on track to succeed and graduate.”

Through Grace, students are able to earn credits that were missed during previous school years with academic support, small group setting, and advocacy.

To get into the Grace Program, students must be referred by their counselors and be interviewed and approved by the Grace counselor.

To stay in good standing, students had to attend school 85% of the time, have no discipline incidents, and be making an effort during the time frame that their application was being considered.

In order to stay in the program, Grace students also had to be respectful of Grace teachers, the counselor, and their peers, had to be making progress toward graduation, had to bring their chromebook for classwork and had to be using cellphones only when permitted by teachers.



**Former Grace
Counselor
Johana Perdomo**

Piner's Grace Program had been so successful that other schools in Sonoma County had visited with Grace teachers to talk about their successes and challenges. Indeed, teachers and counselors from **Carpe Diem High School, San Antonio High School, and Sonoma Mountain High School**, all alternative high schools in Petaluma, met with Grace teachers a year ago.

Former Grace “students are doing the best they can with limited support,” said **Johana Perdomo**, the former Grace counselor who now works with 8th and 9th graders at Piner.

“Teachers have been very understanding and supportive of Grace students and their transition into bigger classes,” said Ms. Perdomo, who is known affectionately as “Ms. P.”

"My priority with my [former] Grace students this year is to continue to build their confidence. They are scholars, they are capable – they just need to be reminded and given grace to blossom to their full potential."

Ms. Perdomo said it has been a challenge for her to be able to connect with more teachers about former Grace students.

"In the past Grace teachers and I would have monthly meetings to brainstorm on how to support students who were having a hard time," she said. "Teachers would be able to share what was working in their class for a student who was struggling in a different class."

She explained without that collaboration "it makes it difficult to support all students the same."

"The gap in collaboration is not to anyone's fault, but more so time limitations and that students are spread to all different teachers. Where before it was 4-5 teachers."



Senior Angelina Olivares

Grace "was more than just a program to me," said **Angelina Olivares**, a senior who expects to graduate this year thanks to the program.

"It became a place where I was able to grow, learn, and discover strengths within myself that I didn't know I had," Ms. Olivares said.

"Through the program, I gained knowledge, skills, confidence, and, most importantly, people who supported and guided me along the way," she said.

"The encouragement I received helped me become a stronger person and taught me that I was capable of more than I sometimes believed."

Ms. Olivares said she didn't realize how much the program meant to her until it was shut down this year.

"At first, I felt like I had lost something I depended on, but over time, I began to understand that the lessons I learned were never really gone. They had become a part of me. The support and guidance I received helped me grow, but losing the program also showed me that I had grown enough to continue without it."

Ms. Olivares said now realizes that she "had learned how to stand on my own, trust myself, and use the skills I had gained when facing challenges."

"I started to see the experience in a different way. I began to appreciate the moments that challenged me because they helped shape the person I am today."

She said she became more comfortable making decisions for myself and handling difficult situations without always looking for someone else to guide her.

"Even though leaving the program was not easy, it gave me a chance to discover strengths I did not know I had. I now carry those experiences with me and use them as a reminder that I can adapt when life changes unexpectedly."



Senior Anderzon Nazarez

Ms. Olivares is not the only former Grace student who has found the resilience to success without the program.

Anderzon Nazarez, also a former Grace student and now a senior at Piner, also expects to graduate on time this year because of what he learned in the Grace program.

"I expect to graduate as planned because I joined the Grace Program just in time and I was able to get my grades and credits back on track to graduate with a free period before the Grace Program got taken out," said Mr. Nazarez.

Mr. Nazarez said the Grace program helped prevent him from transferring to a different school during the middle of his junior year.

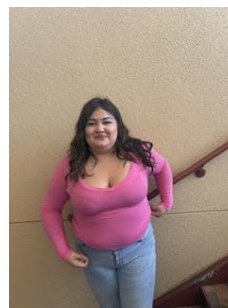
"It helped me get a chance to kind of restart and improve my grades and credits," he said. "The program allowed me to earn extra credit that would later forward to my senior year. Now because of the Grace Program I get to enjoy my senior year with a free period and get to be a little ahead with my credits, this is why the Grace Program meant a lot to me.

For his part, what Mr. Nazarez misses most about the Grace program was the smaller class sizes, which helped ease the anxiety of meeting new people and getting to know them.

"Now that I'm in my senior year I'm thankful that Ms. P was able to get me into the program in the middle of my junior year before I had to get transferred to Ridgeway. Thanks to Ms. P and the Grace Program I get to enjoy my senior year with a free period."



Senior Bryan Avina



Senior America Lopez

Other former Grace students including **Bryan Avina** and **America Lopez**, seniors who expect to graduate in May 2027, said the closure of the Grace Program has affected them in many ways.

"One of the biggest challenges has been losing the extra support I had when I was struggling with school work or needed help staying on track," Mr. Avina said.

"It has also been harder to stay motivated and focused because I no longer have the same structure and support that Grace provided," he said..

Another challenge has been adjusting to having to handle more things on his own, especially when he's already trying to keep up with classes, assignments and responsibilities.

"Without Grace now there are days that I feel so alone and unsupported and genuinely like I won't make it," Ms. Lopez said.

"But because of the Grace program and what it has taught us, I know that I've made it through worse and can and will make it through every feeling, emotion, and struggle that comes my way. I really hope that before the year ends they can bring the Grace program back."

Piner Girls Wrestling Pioneer and Team Captain Alina Phillips Hopes to Lead the New Team to This Year's State Championships

By Vanessa Gutierrez

Alina Phillips, one of only two girls on last year's **Piner Junior Senior High School Varsity Boys' Wrestling Team**, said she joined the team because "other girls wouldn't do it" and she wanted "to try something different."



Junior Alina Phillips

Ms. Phillips, who is a junior now, made it all the way to the North Coast Divisional Championship last year. She wrestled boys during league meets but girls during the divisional championships. This year she hopes to go to the State Championship.

To be sure, Ms. Phillips isn't the first or only girl on Piner's Varsity Boys Wrestling Team. Two years ago **Jocelyn Diaz** was the first Piner girls NBL champion, and last year **Genavieve De Mauro** also placed 2nd in the girls NBL championships.

Ms. Phillips said she received a warm welcome from the Piner Boys' Wrestling Coach **Doug Erickson**. She said her coach "was proud of her because we don't have a lot of girls trying out for the team."

She said the coach didn't treat her any differently than he did the boys. Moreover, she shared that the other boys on the team also treated her with respect.

"They treated me like another brother."

"Coach said 'if you want it that bad then you have to put in the work and try your best,'" she explained. "Wrestling with just guys will make you tough. Don't give up."

Wrestling with the boys sure did make her tough and she didn't give up. That's how the first Piner girl wrestler made it all the way to the divisional championship in her first year on

the team.

Last year, Ms. Phillips said the other boys on the team, especially **Ricky Elias**, were always there for her at matches, telling her not to give up and to fight hard.

Because of her pioneer status on the team, Ms. Phillips was elected team captain. The three other girls on the team are the twins **Ariana Guytan** and **Aisha Guytan**, who are seniors, and Ms. De Mauro, a junior.

Ms. Phillips and Ariana Guytan wrestle in the 126 pound weight class, while Aisha Guytan and Ms. De Mauro, respectively, wrestle in the 115 pound and 140 pound weight classes.

"I'm always hoping to get a few more girls to join the team," Ms. Phillips said. "I went to orientation and put up flyers around campus. And I always ask girls I meet if they'd be interested in girls wrestling."

For his part, Coach Erickson said he has had the pleasure of coaching Ms. Phillips for the past 2 years.

"I knew from the start that she was going to be someone special," he said. "Her grit and determination and wanting to constantly improve her wrestling game. There is no quit in her!"

He described Ms. Phillips as "a true leader," which is why the group has "selected her to be the captain of the very first all girls Piner wrestling team. With hard work from the team, I believe she can lead them to many victories."

TO SUBMIT A TIP ABOUT AN EVENT THAT THE PINER PROSPECTOR SHOULD COVER, PLEASE EMAIL JOURNALISM CLUB ADVISOR/TEACHER DAN LONKEVICH "MR. L" AT DLONKEVICH@SRCS.K12.CA.US

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