The John Jordan Foundation has awarded El Molino a grant of $25K, which will provide for much-needed Google Chromebooks, which significantly increase in-class computers for our students, Principal Matt Dunkle announced. “We are so grateful to the John Jordan Foundation,” Dunkle further stated.

JJF is a charitable institution investing in “programs and system change initiatives that improve quality of life for our most vulnerable citizens.” Their mission further states that they place special emphasis on providing “tools to succeed educationally and professionally.”

Our El Molino Education Fund, comprised of parents, alumni, administrators, current staff, and former staff, applied for the grant. Of course, new members are always welcome!

New Chromebooks Coming Our Way

Like a Family
An Inside Perspective from Freshmen to Seniors

What sets apart a Freshman from a Junior? A Sophomore from a Senior? According to the students, there are no distinctions—other than “height and maturity,” Juniors Soul Berna and Gage Anderson say, almost perfectly in unison. The crowd surrounding them smiles and nods in agreement. Small gatherings of students fill the quad; the soft spaces beneath the mature trees; around the umbrella-covered tables; in open classrooms.

And in each gathering, is found a mix of grades. There is no ‘one spot’ for Seniors, where Freshmen are unwelcome. There is no group too large or too small to include a new student from any class. In fact, a common theme that resurfaces with each interview, is that the students love El Molino “because it’s small, and everyone knows everyone!”

Freshmen and Juniors alike shared reasons why they love certain classes, and appreciate the teachers. Sophomores and Seniors gave examples of cool things they’d learned from specific subjects, and how their teachers are relatable. Students from every class joke about “wishing the toilet seats were heated.”

The one word that seems to describe the El Molino student body best, is family. They spend loads of time together—learning, eating, and being active. This ‘family’ is made up of unique individuals, each with a set of gifts, styles and abilities. They enjoy being together, and have moments of needing space from each other. Still, there is an undercurrent sense of belonging. The teachers and staff come alongside the students to encourage them, keep them accountable, teach them, and show support academically and socially. When asked to describe their school with one word, students respond with: happy, peaceful, small, pride, encouraging, interesting, and loving. Sounds like the description of a very special family, doesn’t it?

Advanced Placement Opportunities!

- El Molino is the only Sonoma County high school offering a Freshman A.P. class: Human Geography;
- Additionally, El Mo boasts one of the more extensive selections of courses in the North Bay, including: Calculus, Spanish (4th year), Biology, English, US History, and Government.

FAST FACT:

El Molino has 546 students, and 93 of those come from outside our district. 93! That is amazing. Three years ago it was 60.
A Club for Every ONE

We all have a need to belong, and while it’s possible to find that sense of belonging in the classroom or on a sports team, sometimes it takes something more specific. El Molino sets aside time, twice a year, to host ‘Club Days.’ Imagine tables set up around the quad, with students inviting other students with similar interests, to come and join their club. More than 15 clubs are represented, and all are student led. There’s a flash mob by the dance company, and various treats to entice the onlookers. Examples from this year include the Baking Club, Pasta Pals, Raza, and Surf clubs. Some groups are just for fun, and are meant to provide an escape from the mundane, while others hold more significance, and are tied to students’ beliefs or principles.

Avid club supporter, Cat Martin, explains that the Baking Club is well-structured with year long competitions, buffets, and judges, and uses Instagram and recorded meetings to track progress. Then there’s the Pasta Pals, “run by jocks who like to make pasta at lunch then eat it.” Students in the Raza Club seek to unify all races—they serve in the concession stand at sporting events, and gather together weekly.

When asked why someone should join a club, Cat expresses the importance of exploring new ideas, and further, shares that clubs cultivate a “supportive campus culture, and allow you to vary your interests in a low stress way. Plus they help break up the week!” The hope is that there is a club for every student. And if there isn’t… perhaps that’s a cue to start one!

The Athletes of El Molino

Shaping Confidence and Healthy Attitudes for Life

There is something special about the athletes of El Molino. These are students who are passionate about their sport, but see the importance of life beyond it. El Molino offers a variety of options. “We want them to participate in as many teams as they want, and to try new things,” states Athletic Director, Mike Roan. Few cuts are made, so there is abundant opportunity to be involved. A bonus to being a smaller school is that athletes get more one-on-one time with coaches.

When asked to describe an El Mo athlete, the words that keep resurfacing are ‘resilient, hard-working, and respectful.’ Coach Roan says, “We want to celebrate achievements, but our athletes also do well in the struggle. That’s where the tremendous growth happens.” He continues that he is awed by the support athletes show each other, whether or not their team record is outstanding.

This support is evident in the natural mentoring that takes place on various teams. Volleyball player, Sasha Senal (Senior), has tucked Ellie Roan (Sophomore) under her wing, stating, “I take pride in sharing tools with younger players, to instill confidence and build leaders.” Junior wrestler, Hannah Riccioli, and Freshman wrestler, Hayden Fields, have this same mentoring bond: “She’s my little protegé,” Hannah says of Hayden. Patrick Atkinson is a Senior baseball player, who shares a field with younger brother and Freshman, Ben. He says, “It’s just natural to help the younger players.” Natalie Alberigi (Senior) purposely made Freshman Julia Schulz feel welcome on the soccer team, knowing that being inclusive and encouraging with younger players “creates a good vibe on a team.” Win or lose, the El Molino athletes’ attitude is one to be proud of.

Teachers Learn Mindfulness Techniques

High school students seem to be experiencing troubling levels of anxiety, and organizations like Seeds of Awareness, a non-profit based in Petaluma, can provide strategies to help with this issue.

Four El Molino teachers volunteered to participate in a Mindfulness Fellowship program offered by Seeds of Awareness. Alexandra Dido, Jerod Brown, Kent Wilson, and Michele Larkin learned techniques they could use themselves as well as teach students.

“Our hope and intention is that we can support teachers with cultivating their own practices and strategies so that they feel confident and empowered to provide those strategies in their own classroom,” said Salina Mae, Director of Mindful Education Program at Seeds of Awareness, who provided the initial mindfulness training and continues with on-going support.

Mindfulness means different things to different people. “It could be as simple as learning how and when to take a deep breath, using calming techniques that help someone self-regulate, or having circles where people talk about group dynamics,” stated Dido. “I want the kids to get awareness of themselves, their emotions, their bodies, and how to regulate, because it is so stressful to be a teenager.”

Dido welcomed Mae into her drama class. “The group gave us an opportunity to talk about things that were bothering us at school, and then it gave us a chance to come up with solutions and then we were able to relax afterwards,” stated Hannah Berkheimer a 9th grader, who participated in that group and found it helpful. For More Info: www.seeds-of-awareness.org

Congratulations to El Molino Junior, Cooper Bennett and Thank You Legionnaires!

Every year American Legion Post 21 in Santa Rosa interviews El Molino juniors selected by teachers and chooses one to attend Boys State, the week-long summer leadership conference held at CSU Sacramento in June. This year, the Legionnaires choose Cooper Bennett, who succeeds last year’s winner, Owen Searles.
El Molino Welcomes New Teachers

CULINARY ARTS DEPARTMENT:

Mei Ibach, Head of Culinary Arts Dept

This past fall, El Molino welcomed Mei Ibach, a celebrated local chef known for her passion and infectious enthusiasm, to head the school’s Culinary Arts department.

Ibach has been a chef at Santa Rosa Junior College, College of Marin, Homeward Bound Marin, Rancho La-Puerta Spa in Mexico, private cooking schools, and venues around the world. She consults with restaurants and is often quoted in the press. “She is one of the most creative culinary chefs I have ever known,” says famed Sonoma County restaurateur John Ash, in a testimonial on Ibach’s website, www.malaysiamei.com

In Ibach’s Culinary Art classes at El Molino, the focus is on healthy eating and teaching the students cooking skills that they can use their whole lives. “I actually teach them how I was trained in a professional manner,” said Ibach. “I focus more on techniques and foundation rather than just recipes.”

The students seem to be enjoying Ibach’s background and teaching style. “Our teacher is amazing,” exclaimed Ahnricka Kjaer, a sophomore. “She is always there showing us new tips and tricks and she is very experienced.” Visit Ibach’s website to explore her background and even find some of her recipes.

SCIENCE DEPARTMENT:

Ryan Zamzow, AP Chemistry teacher

Ryan Zamzow is a recent graduate of Sonoma State, with a degree in Biochemistry. He did not find chemistry and teaching right out of high school. But after a significant event in his life, he decided to make a change and go back to college.

“One of the required classes was chemistry, but I was scared of it,” states Zamzow. When he finally signed up for chemistry, his class was taught by a wonderful teacher named Dr. Joe Ryan. “I really just understood it and fell in love with it,” Zamzow explains.

As a new teacher, Mr. Zamzow is still discovering his teaching style. The faculty at El Molino has shared tips and modeled for him, but he also looks to his previous chemistry teacher for inspiration. “Dr. Ryan didn’t just stand up and lecture for an hour, but you really had to think during class.”

Mr. Zamzow has seen advantages to teaching here. “El Molino has this benefit of being kind of small,” stated Mr. Zamzow. “The teachers know every student. There really aren’t any faceless students, and I think that is important for the kids to come here and know that.

COUNSELING DEPARTMENT:

Ashly Gerber, Marriage & Family Therapist

Anxiety Group Formed at El Molino

Ashly Gerber, a Marriage and Family Therapist Associate, provides individual, group, and family therapy for students and families in need. Recently, she implemented a new program at El Molino, called Anxiety Group.

“She has helped a lot of students with their anxiety and learn some new coping strategies.”

The groups are held once a week for six weeks, with no more than five students per group. During each group, students rate their anxiety on a scale from 1-10, discuss issues that have arisen during the week, complete a therapeutic art exercise, and learn coping strategies that speak to the students’ needs that week.

“My vision for this program would be that the groups will help destigmatize mental health issues so that students who are curious about their mental health or are struggling with anxiety would be comfortable coming to speak with me.”

Anyone who wants more information can call the El Molino school office at 707- 824-6550.
Getting to Know
Principal Matt Dunkle

Years ago, a young Matt Dunkle was an intern on Capitol Hill. He sat in on a discussion about the environment that ignited his desire to address young people, and to empower them to be a catalyst for change. This desire has become a reality at El Molino High School. Matt’s priority is his students, and his mission is to lead by doing. His ultimate goal is to help students “exit well, so they can manage both the known society challenges ahead, and the unknown.”

When asked to describe El Molino, Matt’s first word is ‘family.’ The small size of the school means each person is known... looked after... checked on. “There is ‘family.’ The small size of the school means each person is known... looked after... checked on. “There is ‘family.’ The small size of the school means each person is known... looked after... checked on. “There is ‘family.’ The small size of the school means each person is known... looked after... checked on. “There is ‘family.’ The small size of the school means each person is known... looked after... checked on. “There is ‘family.’

The guy behind the tie loves chocolate chip cookies, chips, and pizza. He plays soccer, loves to travel, and enjoys being at the beach with a good book. If given the opportunity to play hooky (which we would never suggest), Matt would choose to spend the day golfing, and end with a silly movie.

The school may be small, but Matt sees the big picture. He wants students to learn that “nothing is impossible. You may not see it come to fruition, but it can still happen. … and the commitment and hard work toward that goal is never a waste.”We’re so glad Matt chose the ‘Mill’ instead of the ‘Hill!’