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Mountain View High loses three students to deportation

'HEARTBREAKING' NEWS DESPITE EFFORTS TO HELP FAMILIES
SEEKING ASYLUM, SCHOOL OFFICIALS SAY

By Kevin Forestieri

Three students attending Mountain View High School were ordered to leave the U.S. midway through the fall semester. School staff say it marks the first time in recent memory that any student had to leave the district because of involuntary deportation.

Assistant Principal Daniella Quiñones confirmed to the *Voice* that three students enrolled in the district's English Language Development program have left the school after immigration court judges ruled they had to leave the country. She said she was unaware of any students being arrested by ICE agents as part of the deportation proceedings, and that some of the cases had been ongoing for over a year.

"I have never witnessed student deportations before," Quiñones said. She said she was shocked when the first one happened. "Then the second one happened, then the third," she said.

Despite serving some of the most affluent communities in the

Bay Area, the Mountain View-Los Altos High School District is also home to high-needs students who have recently arrived in the country. The vast majority of the 50 students enrolled in remedial classes through the district's English language development (ELD) department are recent arrivals from Central America, many of whom are seeking asylum, Quiñones said. It's a big change that has taken place in the district over the last five years.

Teens have had mixed success trying to get legal status, but it's only part of the challenges they face, she said. On top of trying to overcome the trauma that caused them to flee to the U.S. in the first place — including gang violence, drugs or poverty — many of the students are still dealing with unstable housing, family separation and financial hardship in Mountain View.

"The types of services these students need are beyond academic support, they need mental health support, housing support,

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MAGALI GAUTHIER

Margaret Abe-Koga will serve as Mountain View's mayor in 2020, following a unanimous vote by her colleagues on the City Council.

New mayor gears up for rent control measure, RV ban referendum

CHALLENGES AHEAD FOR MARGARET ABE-KOGA'S 2ND TERM ARE DRAMATIC SHIFT FROM 2009

By Mark Noack

In 2009, Margaret Abe-Koga took her first turn as mayor of Mountain View. It wasn't as fun as it was cracked up to be, due to factors beyond her control.

The impact of the Great Recession was just beginning to sink in: home values plummeted, development froze, the city budget shrank and cutbacks became mandatory. Being mayor of a medium-sized city meant hard decisions,

grim sacrifices and "a lot of lost sleep," she said.

Now more than a decade later, Abe-Koga returns to the mayor's seat, this time with a vastly different set of

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A little-noticed new law could upend argument against rent control

SB 330 REQUIRES DEVELOPERS TO REPLACE ALL RENT-CONTROLLED UNITS THEY DEMOLISH

By Mark Noack

Since rent control took effect three years ago, more than 300 older apartments in Mountain View have been marked for demolition. This trend has strengthened a leading argument against rent control: by

restricting prices, it's encouraging landlords to exit the apartment business, which is forcing out the tenants least able to afford new housing.

But a little-noticed state mandate that takes effect this month may completely upend that scenario for Mountain View. In

recent days, housing advocates and city officials have suddenly become very interested in SB 330, a housing bill by state Sen. Nancy Skinner that would essentially force landlords and developers to preserve rent-controlled apartments.

The bill, dubbed the Housing

Crisis Act of 2019, was just one among hundreds of bills in last year's legislative session that tried to address California's severe housing shortage. In general, Skinner's bill gained far less attention than other hot-button legislation like SB 50 or AB 1482, which mandated statewide rent

caps. While those bills faced intense opposition, SB 330 passed under the radar, receiving support in both legislative houses and was signed into law by Gov. Gavin Newsom.

To anyone glancing at SB 330,

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financial support,” Quiñones said. “These students are facing tremendous adversities in coming to this country.”

A fourth Mountain View High student who may have been subject to deportation this year left voluntarily due to a sick family member in his home country, according to Quiñones.

Traumatic pasts, ‘heartbreaking’ moments

Recent arrivals with poor English skills are among the school district’s most challenging students to teach core academic subjects, as many are still trying to acclimatize to a new culture and a new language. The majority of the students have limited experience in a formal educational environment and have few — if any — transferable credits that can fulfill high school diploma requirements.

For the most part, the students are from countries including Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, with some hailing from Peru, Ecuador and Colombia, said Sarah Block, a longtime teacher and ELD instructor at Mountain View High. The students are often escaping trauma and violence in their home country and have seen “so much” at such a young age, she said. It’s clear that they want to distance themselves from that painful history and stake out a better opportunity for themselves.

“They’re here mostly voluntarily. They want to get out and improve their lives, their parents want them to have a better life, and they come to rigorous schools in our community,” Block said. “Some are ready to jump right in and others have never seen a computer before.”

Block has worked at Mountain View High since the 1990s and helped create the school’s Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, and has been an ELD teacher for about 12 years. The recent arrivals, she said, are often coming to the school with educational gaps spanning months or even years, and may have trouble simply sitting through class for a full school day — let alone meeting the academic rigor of a high-performing school.

Block said she could not recall ever having a student being deported, much less three teenagers in the span of a few months. Seeing students when they realize they can’t stay at the school because of deportation or unstable housing is always a heartbreaking moment.

“We see such dedication on their part, trying to get an



MAGALI GAUTHER

Sarah Block, who teaches English learners at Mountain View High School, said many of her students are working through trauma suffered in their home countries as they try to build better lives in Mountain View. The moment when the realization hits that a student has to leave school is “heartbreaking,” she said.

education here,” Block said. “And when students I’ve had realize that (they have to leave), you can almost see them giving up — just the weight on their shoulders, you can see it on their face and body language.”

School staff referred the students facing deportation to immigration legal support services provided by Services Immigrant Rights and Education Network (SIREN), but it’s unclear how much help they received. Pro bono legal representation is limited, Quiñones said, and families say hiring an immigration attorney can cost close to \$10,000.

Priya Murthy, SIREN’s policy and advocacy director, said she couldn’t disclose whether the three Mountain View High School students and their families received legal services, citing client confidentiality. More broadly, she said the nonprofit has seen a spike in demand for all types of legal services, ranging from consultations to representation in immigration court proceedings in San Francisco, particularly an increase in the number of unaccompanied minors facing removal proceedings.

Many of those young clients are fleeing violence from their home countries in Mexico and Central America, she said, and recent changes in case law and federal immigration policies have made it increasingly difficult for them to remain in the U.S.

“There have been initiatives that the Trump administration has put in place in order to make the lives of unaccompanied minors more challenging, when it comes to trying to make sure that they are as safe and protected as possible,” Murthy said.

Every person seeking help from SIREN’s removal defense clinics can get legal consultation, but the increasingly intensive work required to manage each case is making universal representation in court an impossibility. While

every case is different, she said the likelihood that teens facing deportation can stay in the country depends heavily on their age, when they left their home country and what kind of family ties they have in the U.S. that could justify staying. A family member legally residing in the area with a green card (permanent legal status) might help, she said.

Nowhere else to turn

The Mountain View High School families facing deportation came to school staff directly for help at various points during the fall, each with a level of desperation. They had an upcoming court date, were on the verge of being deported and needed representation, and simply didn’t know where else to turn. In all three cases, Quiñones said they were well into removal proceedings, leaving her scrambling to call every legal advocacy organization she could think of. She eventually landed on SIREN, believing it was their best shot at getting help.

Last year, the school held an immigrant resource fair with a cheat sheet of all the legal resources available in Santa Clara County, which came in handy.

“I basically reached out to everyone on that list,” she said.

Concern over immigration status and deportation, while paramount for students trying to stay in the country, is just one of many challenges facing the district’s ELD students, Quiñones said. She believes all 50 of the students classified as “ELD 1” or “ELD 2,” essentially teens with beginner and early intermediate English skills, are facing financial hardships and struggling to make ends meet. Many are feeling pressured to work to support their family on top of going to school, with some dropping out when they turn 18.

“They end up in an amazing community and a wonderful

high school that has so much to offer them, yet at a really basic level they just need the basic needs that other students have and take for granted,” Quiñones said. “Things like a family unit, a roof over their head, a stable income, or not having to work to contribute to pay the rent.”

Helping vulnerable students

The school has started initiatives aimed at alleviating some of the pressure, with the student Ambassadors Club launching what they’ve dubbed the “treasure closet,” Quiñones said. It’s stocked with donated clothing, new winter jackets, toiletries and canned goods, which are set out in an unused classroom for needy students.

An entire team of staffers at Mountain View High is devoted to support students learning English, including an ELD

coordinator and a therapist, who frequently find themselves helping families “in crisis,” whether it’s an impending deportation or a family being evicted from their home with no affordable place to stay.

Quiñones recalled one instance when a family that was evicted, briefly staying in a homeless shelter before being placed into stable housing, approached the district with a conundrum — their new apartment had no beds. She said she reached out to school staff members and, with their help, managed to get three beds to the family within 24 hours.

“We had three different teachers who drove trucks to their apartment in Mountain View to donate beds to the family,” she said.

Anyone interested in assisting ELD students and their families can contact Quiñones at daniella.quinones@mvla.net. ▀

Email Kevin Forestieri at kforestieri@mv-voice.com

Need a ride?

The Avenidas Door to Door transportation program uses dedicated drivers to provide rides to seniors in the community within a 12 mile radius, including:

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