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Equity across FUHSD: Debunking rankings

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Collaboration

Unlike the other FUHSD schools, FHS does not clinch the top spots in statewide and nationwide rankings; however, FHS fosters a vibrant environment that goes beyond statistics.

In the annual U.S. News and World Report rankings, released on Aug. 29, 2023, FHS placed 314th statewide and 2,119th nationwide among the 2,613 high schools in California and the 17,680 American public high schools across the U.S. The rankings assess schools in five categories: College Readiness, College Curriculum Breadth, State Assessment Proficiency, State Assessment Performance and Proficiency and Underserved Student Performance. All five FUHSD schools ranked high; however, FHS placed last in the district.

With FHS ranking lowest in the FUHSD, the negative bias against the school is exacerbated. Despite unfavorable perceptions, the reality of FHS diverges significantly when one delves into its academic achievements, student demographics, extracurricular offerings and the ongoing efforts to enhance the overall school experience.

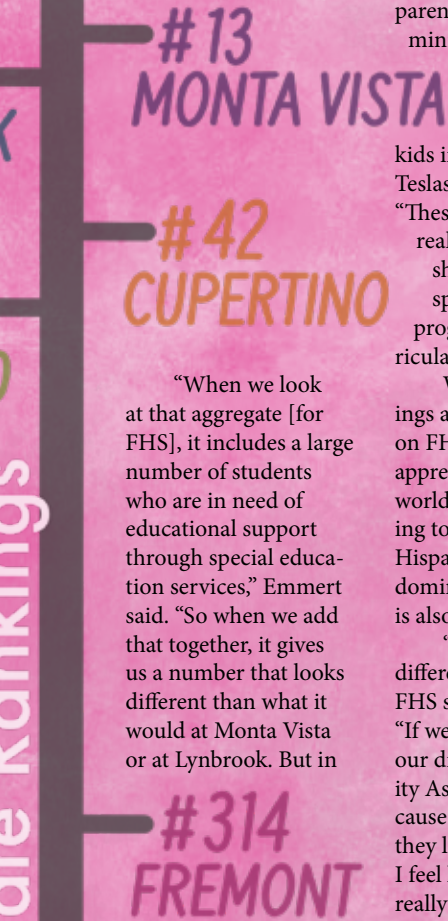
“Ranking a school like Fremont to me is a very complicated thing because we are so diverse, and the rankings are aggregates,” FHS Principal Bryan Emmert said. “[Rankings] don’t necessarily say anything about your experience.”

The high school experience varies drastically based on an individual student’s priorities. FHS English teacher Alex Han, who has worked at three out of the five FUHSD schools, argues that the students in each school have different motivations for participating in school activities.

“I think it’s the competition and the high stress that compels [students from other FUHSD schools], whereas at Fremont, it’s more of kids finding their own place of belonging on campus,” Han said. “So it’s more of an inclusive, safe environment, whereas [other schools] were more

about academics and performance.”

Rankings can never be fully comprehensive of the quality of a school, as there are too many factors that contribute to the high school experience that are not considered in rankings. Principal Emmert shed light on why the success of the district overall as reflected in rankings does not necessarily apply to FHS.



“When we look at that aggregate [for FHS], it includes a large number of students who are in need of educational support through special education services,” Emmert said. “So when we add that together, it gives us a number that looks different than what it would at Monta Vista or at Lynbrook. But in

my conversations with parents I’ve had as long as I’ve been here, what you need to figure out is what the experience is going to be for students like your student.”

For students whose primary academic struggle is learning English, FHS offers numerous classes in English Language Development to assist with their educational journey. According to CAASPP results from the school year of 2022-23, while only 20% of test takers at FHS did not meet standards in the math section of the test, 41% did not meet standards for the ELA section. ELD students make up 18% of the school, according to the 2023-24 school profile, making FHS’s ELD program the most prominent among the other FUHSD schools.

“We have more ELD students here than the other campuses and districts,” Emmert said. “So we received significantly more funds than

other districts, meaning we have more sections of classes. If you go to the other campuses, they’re not going to be even close to what we have for that.”

According to FHS’s 23-24 school profile, 29% of the student population is socioeconomically disadvantaged — the highest in the district. Additionally, 56% of FHS parents have a bachelor’s degree or higher, whereas at least 80% of parents have a bachelor’s degree at minimum in the other FUHSD schools.

“In Cupertino [High School], you see kids in the back parking lots with Teslas, BMWs, Mercedes,” Han said. “These students are coming from really wealthy backgrounds, and it shows a lot in academics. They spend a lot of time in afterschool programs and do a lot of extracurriculars.”

While some have mixed feelings about the effects diversity has on FHS’s academic standing, many appreciate it because of the real-world experience it offers. According to U.S. News, FHS has a 39.7% Hispanic population, making it the dominating racial demographic. FHS is also 32.5% Asian and 17% white.

“Fremont definitely has a lot of different cultures and ethnicities,” FHS sophomore McKayla Hsu said. “If we look at the other schools in our district, a lot of them are majority Asian, which might be given because of the area we live in, but since they live in the Bay Area bubble, I feel like the diversity of Fremont really helps us fully integrate with the typical American life, because we interact with different types of people.”

Despite the diversity within the school’s overall student body, most academic extracurriculars reflect only portions of the school’s demographics. All other FUHSD schools have a majority Asian population, with HHS lowest at 43.6% Asian, and CHS, LHS and MVHS ranging from 70 to 80 percent Asian, according to their respective U.S. News profiles.

“Some events like Speech and Debate are very historically white and Asian dominated,” FHS senior and Speech and Debate co-president Alan Lu said. “Being from a school that’s more diverse and less Asian compared to other schools in our district, it’s harder to get interest, but at the same time, it makes me more passionate about wanting to get more diverse perspectives in Speech and Debate.”

The extent of

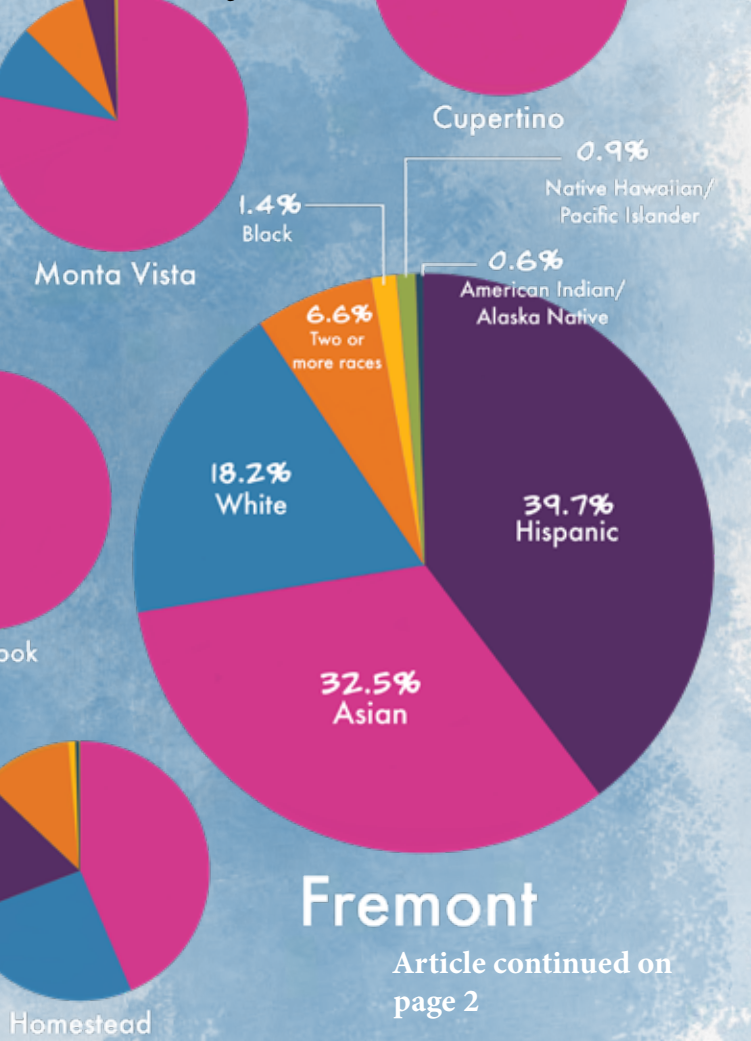
opportunities and support for the FHS community is emphasized when compared to the resources provided to faculty and students of schools below the national poverty line.

“Here at Fremont, I’d say that the kids here have help, or three-fourths of the battle already won because they have the things that they need,” FHS English teacher Chary Salvador said. “Kids have the things they need from their families, and if not, they have things that they need from the school, and the school provides a lot.”

To aid students who may be struggling in academics, the FUHSD offers the AVID program, a four-year elective, aimed at providing students with the tools they need to succeed in high school. The AVID program at FHS served about 10% of the student body last school year, making FHS the school with the biggest AVID program in the district.

“I think it’s really important to have a support system, and that’s what AVID offers. It’s a program that focuses on your future and your skills, and later on, they help with college,” FHS AVID 11 student Karime Quintero said. “It’s really helpful and there’s a sense of community there.”

Compared to other top-ranking schools in the FUHSD, FHS is often dismissed for not having the same level of academic rigor. Due to these preconceived conceptions, some students felt that they were at a disadvantage in attend-



ing FHS due to a lack of academic opportunities.

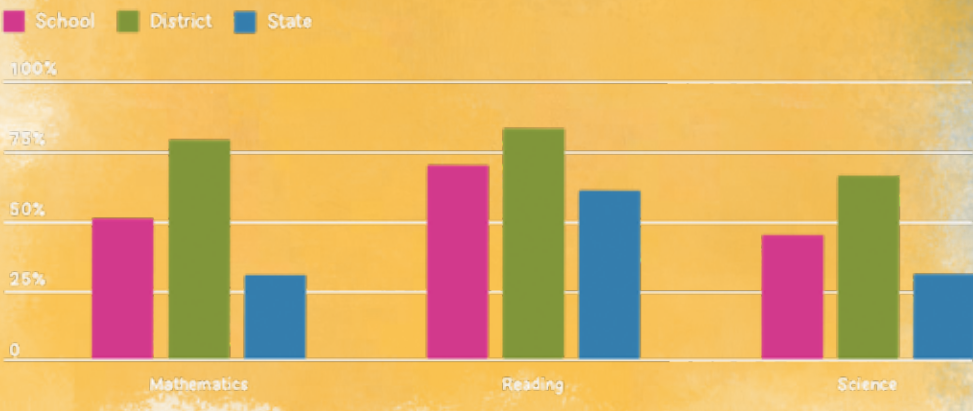
“There was this perception that somehow, Fremont’s different, and it was going to limit what students are able to do, but you have the opportunity to take [APs and Honors] just like you would at any other school,” Emmert said. “I think for a lot of people that was shocking because they thought somehow that Fremont’s worse than the other schools.”

These differences are highlighted in FHS’s elective offerings compared to other schools. FHS boasts a selection of Career Technical Education, or CTE, classes in fields like engineering, automotive technology and culinary arts. Electives such as photography, which is not available at FHS, or auto shop, an elective exclusive at FHS in the district, require specific facilities, like a black room or a machine shop respectively, to provide an insightful learning experience — causing the variation.

The wide variety of clubs, sports and teams at FHS offer a plethora of opportunities for students to explore passions or new interests. With many programs being student-run, most do not require extensive support from faculty to thrive. Despite this independence, student leaders in FHS feel like their needs are not being supported by the school in terms of faculty or funding.

“All the board members are having to talk to our teachers and find anyone that would be willing. It’s kind of hard right now because a lot of teachers have their

Overall Percentile on Smarter Balanced Test



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