

STATE OF GRIND

Will the increase in dance regulation affect attendance?

BY COLIN NI

First, it was the waltz in the 1770s. Then, it was Elvis Presley's swiveling hips in the 1950s. And since the 1980s, with the spreading popularity of music videos on MTV, it has been "freaking," a sexually suggestive style of dancing, which found its way from 1980s pop culture into college and high school dances, according to an article from the New York Daily News.

Administrators across the country have done everything from cancelling dances to requiring students to sign contracts, in an attempt to discourage freaking. With new methods to enforce dance policies, MVHS administrators hope to do the same.

But this isn't the first time. In 2009, administration used spotlights on each corner of the rally court to illuminate the dance floor to discourage students from freaking at the Welcome Back dance.

"We want to create a dance environment that is more in line with our morals at MVHS," former Dean of Students Denae Moore said in a 2009 El Estoque article. Moore later added, "If we decrease the amount of freaking, I will consider that a success."

While each district school has individual dance policies, FUHSD Associate Superintendent Graham Clark believes the purpose of hosting dances is the same.

"[It] is really for schools to provide a comfortable, social environment for students to get together and have fun," Clark said in an email. "A high school dance definitely needs to have more structure and supervision than you might find at an over-21 night club in Las Vegas."

Same policy, new approach

Among other preventative measures, this year's Welcome Back and Homecoming dances marked the introduction of wristbands as a way to track students warned that their methods of dancing were inappropriate. The wristbands were given out to students before they entered the gym; students that were caught breaking the dance policies even after having their wristbands removed as a warning were asked to leave. Administration would not confirm whether or not any students were dismissed from either dance.

Though the methods of enforcement of dance policies may be new, the policies remained largely unchanged.

"Students are expected to behave appropriately and to refrain from dancing in an inappropriate, unsafe, and/or suggestive manner," reads the school policy. "Students who exhibit such behavior... may be removed from the dance."

In response

10,000
students in FUHSD
400 to 700
students
attend mixers

2,400
MVHS students
800 to 1000
students
attend dances

to changes, 65 percent of 349 surveyed students thought the wristbands were a good idea to implement, but other students thought the ways chaperones and administrators checked on students during dances were too intrusive.

Junior Michael Ligier agrees, to an extent, with the new policies that have been set by administration. He believes that freaking should not be allowed at dances because, in his opinion, it is demeaning and disrespectful to the girl. Although he agrees with the policies, Ligier doesn't think they are effective.

"They're trying to change the way [students dance] at school dances without changing the dance itself," Ligier said. "I don't think that works; they should instead be changing the [whole] dance."

Junior Victoria Ngo feels that the methods currently used to enforce the policies, which include closely checking on students and shining flashlights at them, may have a negative effect on the attendance at MVHS dances, as they make students uncomfortable.

This raises an important question: will the new methods of enforcement of dance policies affect attendance?

Stricter enforcement, lower attendance?

The question about dance attendance is one that administrators at Cupertino High School have already thought about. The number of students attending CHS dances has been decreasing since 2008, according to CHS Assistant Principal Andy Walczak.

"We've spent the last two or three years in ASB trying to brainstorm different ideas to promote dances and get kids to come," Walczak said. "For whatever reason, they're just not as popular as they were four or five years ago. We can't put our finger on [the problem]."

Walczak pointed out that the CHS dance policies are less specific than those of MVHS, and that the problem with inappropriate dancing there is less serious, if not nonexistent. As a result, the policies

have remained almost unchanged for the past five years. While CHS does not have a direct “don’t do this” guideline, as Walczak puts it, he believes it is instead more important to have teachers and chaperones active during the dance itself.

The decline in student attendance may have to do with the chaperones being more strict at their dances. In the past year, CHS ASB president senior Annie Boyle has seen chaperones tell students to stop dancing if they were dancing in certain positions, such as bending over more than 90 degrees in front of a partner. Boyle says this is something she had not seen much of before.

But CHS senior Veda Thirumandas thinks there might be another reason for the decline in attendance at their dances — students may simply be going to mixers, dances typically organized by students or clubs, instead.

All mixed up

The closest upcoming mixer, the “Doin’ it Grand Mixer,” is to be held Nov. 9. According to MVHS sophomore Duncan Levy, one of the students organizing the event, it has no dance-related policies, similar to many other mixers.

“Are you guys tired of lame school dances? You can dress HOWEVER you like,” the description of the Facebook event reads. “Get ready to party it out on this frightful night, with NO dance-related regulations!”

Mixers have fewer or no dance-related regulations because of the absence of a legal obligation. Any activities that do not break city, state or federal laws that occur inside a private event, such as a mixer, cannot be regulated by school or district officials, including teachers and administration; the policies are the organizers’ responsibility to create and enforce.

However, not all students are comfortable with unregulated dances. Forty percent

of students said freaking should not be allowed at dances, and currently, MVHS dances attract more attendees than mixers. MVHS freshman Shivalika Chavan, for example, is tolerant of other students freaking at school dances, but was discouraged from going to a mixer after hearing about how students dance there.

“What they do there [in private events], I have no control over, whether or not I believe in that style of dancing. It’s somewhat immaterial because it’s out of my realm of responsibility,” principal April Scott said. “What happens outside is not my concern. I just hope that there is supervision and some sense of respect for dance partners.”

Will the dance go on?

Although 68 percent of surveyed students thought new policies limiting or banning freaking would result in a decrease in attendance, both the Welcome Back and Homecoming dances had 800 to 1,000

students in attendance, and the number of students attending dances has been consistent for the past three years, according to Scott. She said students still dance in an inappropriate manner, but that the number of students doing so has definitely decreased compared to previous years.

Despite the changes, only 17 percent of students currently think that the dance policies are “very strictly enforced.” Scott believes that in order to alter how students dance at MVHS dances completely, small and incremental changes must continue to be made.

“If we compared dances this year to dances four or five years ago, they’re significantly different,” Scott said. “Changing the culture of anything takes time; it would be foolish for us to think one [change] is going to turn things around.”

c.ni@elestoque.org

WHAT ^{is your} POSITION on the NEW DANCE POLICIES?



I’ve had some students tell me that the type of dancing makes them feel uncomfortable, especially female students.

science teacher Lora Lerner

I think administration should reconsider how their actions are toward [students] because they come to students differently than how they perceive their actual message.

junior Victoria Ngo

I agree [with the policies] to an extent, but the way they are [enforcing] them is wrong.

junior Michael Ligier

