

New definition of OVERCROWDED

All-time high population leads to bigger classes, changes in procedures

“We can complain about it, we can let it bring us down or we can fight through it and still get the best experience possible”

Michael Vergien
International Baccalaureate
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With the increasing population of Coppell and continuous pull of Coppell ISD's exemplary status, Coppell High School's ever-growing population has reached an all-time high.

Pushing 3,300 students, CHS is, for the first time, seeing classes of 40 or more become increasingly common. While the district is hard at work trying to solve the problem, instructors and learners have had to adapt to a vast amount of changes in their everyday routine.

A few teachers, including International Baccalaureate (IB) English teacher Michael Vergien, whose seventh period class contains over 40 students, have had to move his larger classes to the lecture hall.

“Classes have gotten larger every year since I started here,” Vergien said. “It's hard to have meaningful conversations with students because there are just so many of them.”

As one of the primary facets of the IB program is its extensive amount of writing, Vergien also expressed that the larger overall amount of students he has prevents him from assigning as much writing as he would like.

“It does make it difficult for me to give [my students] meaningful feedback in a timely manner,” Vergien said. “And I think across the whole school [students] don't even try to ask questions anymore.”

Students across all grade levels are

adapting to the change, as well. Many have never experienced a classroom with over 30 students until this year.”

“I think any class size more than around 22 is ineffective,” CHS junior Soumika Karusala said. “Forty plus people in a class kind of makes it harder to learn. [In the bigger classrooms], you don't really get to know everyone and it's important to know people in your classes so you can collaborate with them.”

In concurrence with the seemingly explosive core-class growth, many extracurricular courses are also feeling the effects of the mass amount of students coming to CHS.

“I have three classes with 40 students each back-to-back,” KCBY adviser Irma Kennedy said. “I'm fortunate to have a little bit more space because of the [KCBY] studio but I don't have all the resources that I need for that many students.”

As the number of students in Kennedy's classes is larger than ever before, she has two distinct advantages over most other teachers facing this issue: her classes can expand into the KCBY studio and, since her classes are a mix between KCBY I, II and III, the older students and directors can mentor and help teach the younger ones.

“I remember the day when people would say ‘no more than 25 in a class’ and that was big,” Kennedy said. “Last year we thought 35 was that magic number and I was at 36. Now it looks like 40 is pretty common in many classrooms.”

Although many students and faculty members are unhappy with the changes, the district and the CHS administration team are working hand-in-hand to try and take the first steps in solving the problem.

“It's pretty clear we need more space,”
Principal

Mike Jasso said. “However, we will always welcome students to Coppell High School. Whatever we do, we want to maintain that environment.”

Whilst the rumors of new high schools and freshman centers have spread rampantly since day one, the district has not yet made any final decisions as to how they will address the problem of overcrowding.

“The board is currently looking at different options of how we're going to handle student growth,” Coppell ISD assistant superintendent Sid Grant said. “There is nothing specific to report yet but there will be a workshop to talk about the different options. We're looking to have a bond election possibly this next year in order to pay for any additions we make.”

Although, for a short-term fix, Jasso said, the CHS administration will try to make sure every classroom is being used during every class period. This will be accomplished by a greater number of “floating teachers” moving from classroom to classroom throughout the day.

Jasso also said when scheduling especially large classes, administration makes sure to schedule them with teachers that can handle it.

“Having the right teacher is important, also,” Karusala said. “We have Mr. Vergien, and he is a great teacher. So even though we have [such a large class] he manages to take care of all of us and talk to each of us.”

Vergien, while adjusting to the new load, is also grateful for his students, who are taking the changes in their stride and working through issues with him. Overall, he is optimistic about the future and has complete faith in his superiors.

“We can complain about it, we can let it bring us down or we can fight through it and still get the best experience possible,” Vergien said. “I feel confident that the school and district are trying to make the situation better.”

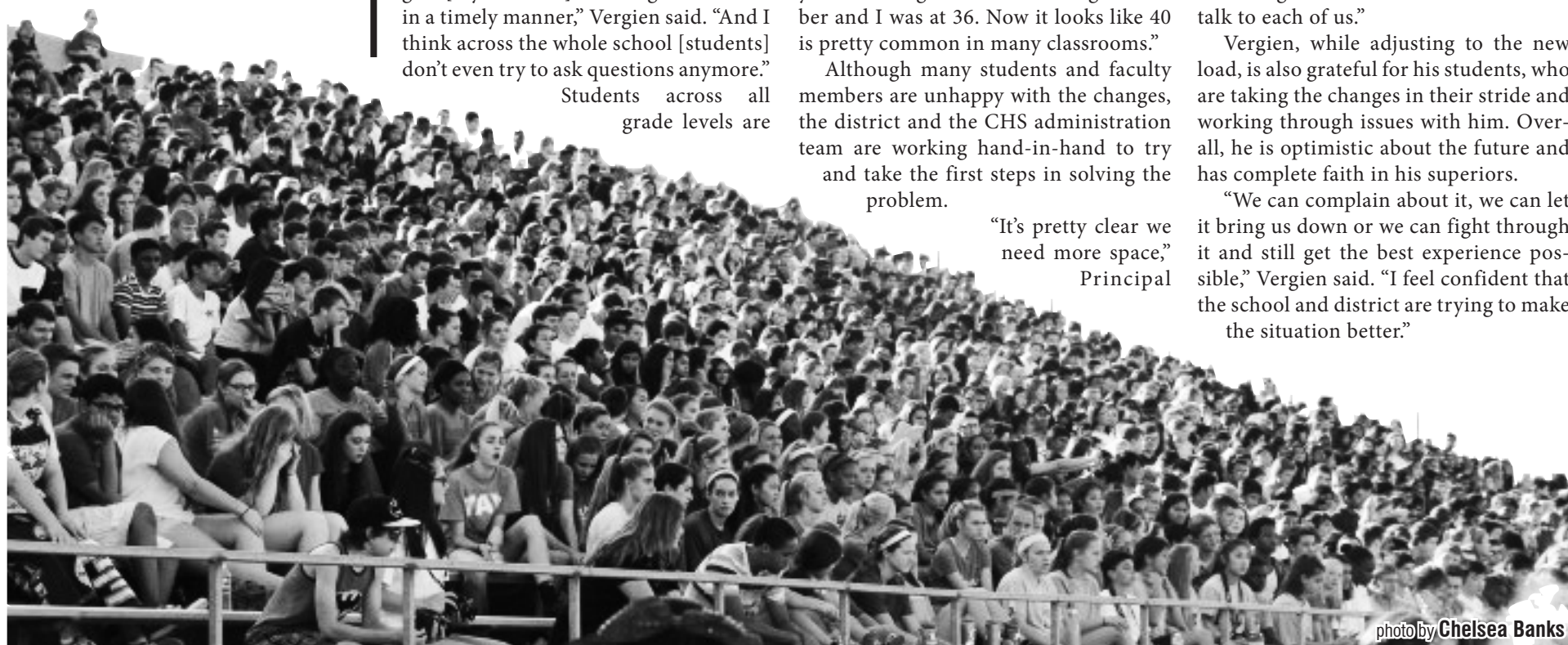


photo by Chelsea Banks