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## **John Barakos**

*Marcel deVries- Campolindo High School Senior*

Sometimes, the load that comes with being a teenager and a high school student can be a lot to handle. Accessing mental health service at school benefits students who may otherwise have to struggle on their own. While academic counselors can help with some challenges, they often do not have the bandwidth to meet regularly or for extended periods of time. This is where John Barakos, licensed MFT and Campolindo's crisis counselor, fills the void.

"It's a confidential space outside of school counseling. He is a tremendous help to us because our time is limited, although we wish we could do more. His job here is invaluable," said co-worker Jenna Wrobel.

Barakos holds an open door policy for anyone struggling in the school environment. He has around 50 regular clients, then takes teacher referrals and what he calls "drop-ins," which are students in crisis. "There is no typical drop in, it's really varied...We have everything from friend issues to suicidal thoughts," said Barakos.

When meeting with students, Barakos first listens, then recommends short-term solutions. "I see a lot of anxiety, so sometimes we teach mindfulness and breathing," said Barakos. He also offers suggestions on how students can manage their class load and many extracurricular responsibilities.

Barakos' job has become even more significant since Campolindo adopted Stanford's "Challenge Success" program in an effort to improve the campus culture and climate. "This is an extremely high-achieving school...just the stress from the academic load is very high, plus parent pressures and family stuff," said Barakos. His goal is to show students that they can be academically competent while taking care of themselves and enjoying life.

In particular, Barakos said that "having a position at the school that directly deals with mental health and social-emotional issues, not just academics, is vital." Many districts, including AUHSD, cannot afford a full time school psychologist. The Moraga Education Foundation has provided the funding support to maintain the crisis counselor position at Campolindo.

Giving students face to face validation about their struggles and using the Challenge Success program as a rubric, Barakos hopes that he can help Campolindo students find a healthy balance between their achievement and social-emotional needs so that their experience at Campolindo is successful and positive.