



Seniors collaborate to release rap music on SoundCloud.



Seniors explore the necessity of in-person college visits.



Young girls' volleyball team endures a rough start to the season.



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HOMECOMING COMEBACK

BY Nikhil Mathihalli

Homecoming week ran from Sept. 20 to Sept. 24, featuring quad day performances from teachers and all grades, and a Saturday night dance. The seniors finished in first place, with the juniors placing second, the freshmen placing third and the sophomores coming in last.

With no prior knowledge of quad day, the freshmen, tasked with the theme of "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles," faced several challenges. Fresh-

man vice president and choreographer Anisa Taymuree fractured her foot late in the performance planning process, prompting drastic formation reorganizations due to the prominent roles she had in almost every dance.

The sophomores were also hit with their equal share of challenges — their main one being a lack of participation.

As it was their first quad day performance, choreographer Erika Anderson recalled that unfamiliarity with Home-

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All photos courtesy of ETHAN CHANG and SANJOLI GUPTA

Advisories delayed after negative teacher feedback

BY Sam Bai & Andrew Lin

The Professional Development Day on Oct. 5 sought to get advisory lessons back on track after a month-long pause caused by teachers' objections and concerns about teaching some of the content. The lessons, which resumed Oct. 13, will be similar in format to the Title IX presentations given earlier in the year.

The first advisory periods happened early in the school year and addressed Title IX. The revised 40-minute advisory les-

sons will continue to address issues such as sexual harassment, academic integrity, digital safety and mental health. They are currently planned to take place during tutorials on some Blue Day Wednesdays for the rest of the year.

Though teachers said they do consider these subjects very important, many expressed that they were not confident teaching the material in an informative and appropriate manner without receiving further in-depth training.

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Students in support of new vaccine mandate law

BY Christina Chang & Lynn Dai

On Oct. 1, California became the first state to mandate COVID-19 vaccines for K-12 students learning in-person at both public and private schools, an order that could begin next fall after the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approves a vaccine for children 12 and under. Gov. Newsom said students with medical concerns and other exemptions will be determined through a public process regulated by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH).

The mandate allows unvaccinated students to enroll in Independent Study, an at-home asynchronous learning program school districts were required to provide for the 2021-22 school year per Assembly Bill 130 of the California Department of Education, but prevents them from attending in-person school.

Since vaccine mandates have been announced, a few protests have arisen in schools throughout the state such as the protest on Sept. 28 at the San Diego Unified School District Office and the protest at Stanislaus County Office of Education on Oct. 6.

In contrast, a small sampling of SHS students appears to support Newsom's move.

According to a Google Form survey The Falcon conducted, 12 of 18 students are in favor of the mandate while six are not.

Some voiced their opinions via the Google Form. One student wrote "unless you have a specific health concern to not get a vaccine then you should absolutely do it because you're risking the well-being of those around you — it's immoral and selfish to not get vaccinated barring extraneous circumstances." Another wrote, "hallelujah ... my parents might loosen up about covid if everyone is vaxxed."

"I think any uncertainty about the vaccine should have been well taken out by now."

JUNIOR Adam Xu

Since the vaccine came out on Dec. 11, 2020, 185 million U.S. citizens, or 56.4 percent of the total U.S. population, have gotten fully vaccinated. At the same time, many vaccine protests, such as one by community members at SHS on May 15 during the Safeway Vaccine Clinic, have occurred.

Regardless of the school population's opinions, the school must abide by the vaccine mandate. As of right now, SHS already has a system in place for mandating other

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newsbriefs

Benefit Show announces theme and charity cause

The Benefit Fashion Show commissioners announced this year's annual show's "Retro Theme" on Sept. 30, following last year's popular "Vintage" theme. Funds raised by the show will go to the Audrie Pott Foundation, a charity that hosts anti-cyberbullying presentations at schools and offers grants for school therapists with the goal of supporting victims of sexual violence, according to senior commissioner Grace Hsu. Due to COVID-19 last year, Benefit put out a fashion magazine instead of organizing a fashion show.

Although the fashion show is scheduled to take place in February, the commission has already started coming up with theme ideas and planning for the show, which usually takes place in the gym.

"I think our overall goal is to make sure that everyone has fun. I always enjoyed being part of benefit so I want other people to experience that same thing," Hsu said.

— Kavya Patel and Sarah Thomas

Principal's assistant steps into new role at district

Since Sept. 13, principal's assistant Pola-Michelle Alas had been working two jobs, one at the district office and one at SHS. Come Oct. 25, she will be leaving the school to work in the business office at the district office full time under the direction of Delores Perley, the Chief Business Officer (CBO). Taking her place will be Alison Montgomery, who has worked as the registrar at Silver Creek High School for the past few years.

Over the course of her five-year tenure here, Alas managed substitute teacher assignments, processed school purchases, coordinated staff meetings and scheduling meetings for current principal Greg Louie and former principal Paul Robinson, in addition to her general office duties.

Her favorite part of working at Saratoga High has been the constant engagement with the student body.

— Sanjoli Gupta and Uttara Natarajan

Library gets new technician to handle work

Coming back from the pandemic, school leaders realized that the library and textbook room needed more help to run efficiently. Cynthia Cheng, who has been working at the school as a science lab technician for four years, has filled the newly created role of library technician.

In her new role, Cheng helps librarian technician Eun-sil Lee-Tapley and textbook room manager Nada Macescio to distribute and return books back into the system. Cheng also retains her previous duties as science lab technician.

Cheng said she was inspired to take the job after working at the Santa Clara County Library as an extra help page.

— Christina Chang and Martin Xu

>> falconfocus



TALISMAN // CARY CHEN

Sophomore Leo Shetler and junior Varun Iyer compete each other in bumper balls during the first school wide rally on Sept. 17.

picturethis



TALISMAN // CARY CHEN

HOMECOMING | Seniors Lauren Yarrington and Lauren Vandevort carry a lacrosse stick together, representing the girls' varsity lacrosse team during halftime at the Sept. 24 Homecoming football game against Monta Vista.

togotalks

What do you think about the devious lick trend?

"It's gross because people have the audacity to do it in school bathrooms."



sophomore Sunny Boppana

"I think they're really funny, but at the same time it's vandalism."



senior Henrik Zhang

TikTok trend sparks vandalism; admin looks for perpetrators

by Lena Aribi & Meher Bhatnagar

On Sept. 1, TikTok user @jugg4elias posted a video of a box of disposable masks he supposedly stole from school, captioning the video "A month into school absolutely devious lick. Should've brought a mask."

According to Urban Dictionary, a "lick" is a "successful type of theft." Since @jugg4elias's video went viral, the act of "devious licking," or stealing items from public facilities, has become a national trend.

Since then, thousands of students around the globe have participated in the trend, filming themselves stealing random items, ranging from paper towel dispensers to bathroom doors to school buses from their schools.

The videos posted on TikTok under the hashtag #deviouslick, have garnered over 73 million views.

The trend reached SHS on the week of Sept. 12 when a classroom hand sanitizer dispenser was found in a boys bathroom and four full rolls of toilet paper were found thrown into a toilet bowl.

"The student(s) who wasted the toilet paper rolls are inconsiderate of their peers and are vandalizing the restrooms. If identified, consequences will be levied."

PRINCIPAL Greg Louie

Paul Weir, the school's supervisor of maintenance and operations, had seen cones from the school's parking lot dumped into the boys' toilets.

He says in the couple years that he has been working at the school, he has never seen vandalism to this scale.

"Though we haven't caught anybody in the act, we've made the administration know that we are seeing more vandalism than usual," said Weir.

Many students have reported other instances of "devious licking" on campus. Sophomore Asad Khan heard of someone trying to knock down an office sign as well as sticking disposable menstrual prod-

ucts with the words "diabolical lick" written on them around campus. Additionally, he saw someone try to walk out of their classroom with a chair in hand, only to be stopped by a staff member and asked to return it. Weir said the school has sustained damage that still needs to be repaired.

"We have purchased some new towel dispensers to replace some of them that were vandalized because they are broken," he said. "You pull them off the wall, their plastic housings are broken, they are destroyed."



Graphic by ANJALI PAI

After seeing the wide range of destruction the trend had caused, TikTok took action, taking down videos with the #deviouslick hashtag, deleting the #deviouslick hashtag page and removing @jugg4elias's account.

While the trend has slowed due to TikTok's clampdown, many users are using words such as "diabolical" or "dastardly" to bypass TikTok's screening methods. As of Oct. 7, 13 students in the U.S. are facing criminal charges for participating in extreme versions of the trend, according to the People magazine, such as sneaking off campus to vandalize nearby park bathrooms.

At Saratoga High, consequences may range from suspension to a citation from the sheriff's department to a fine for reimbursement, according to Louie and the Saratoga High student handbook.

"I really hope that the school can get control of the situation and put it to a stop," Khan said. "It has already been dying down on TikTok so I hope that the vandalism will stop." ♦

VACCINE

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vaccinations. According to assistant principal Brian Thompson, every summer when students register for school they need to submit documents proving that they've been vaccinated against diseases such as tetanus, hepatitis B and chickenpox. Without vaccination confirmation, students aren't allowed to pick up class materials and attend class.

As such, Thompson said incorporating the mandate into the school's requirements will be an easy adjustment, adding that "it'll just be adding one more check box and one more piece of data for families to input."

Thompson said over 400 families attended the school-hosted vaccine clinic in May, accounting for "a really large percentage of student turnout."

Because he estimates that the majority of students are vaccinated, Thompson said that the upcoming vaccination mandate may only affect a few students at the school. So far, the school has offered vaccination clinics in March, May and August and will be offering a clinic for booster shots on Oct. 17.

because the scientific proof is out there in terms of the efficacy of the vaccine."

Similarly, senior Albert Ye, who received his vaccine in May, supports the mandate because he sees it as no different from other required vaccinations such as the tetanus shot.

"We've always had mandates like these, and there have been people who have been consistently opposed to these mandates," Ye said. "And somehow people think that the COVID-19 vaccine is going to be so radically different from these other vaccines that we already have tried and true to work."

Ye thinks that aside from medically related reasons, there are no valid reasons for not getting vaccinated as it's "just an mRNA packet being put into your bloodstream."

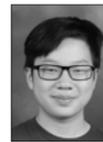
Additionally, for those who are uncomfortable with the mRNA technology of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, there are other COVID-19 vaccine options such as J&J and international vaccines that use more traditional methods, Ye said.

In contrast, sophomore Sarah Zhou, who also got vaccinated in May, said she is in support of vaccines but against a mandate requiring it. She said that although it is understandable to want everyone vaccinated amidst a pandemic, there are other ways to encourage people to get vaccinated rather than making it a requirement.

"Why would you mandate this to people who are uncomfortable getting vaccinated when their concerns are valid?" Zhou said. "It's not like they believe there's some chip in the vaccine or anything; they're just hesitant because we still don't know of any lasting long-term side effects since the vaccine has only been out for a year."

While the COVID-19 vaccine mandate currently allows for medical exemptions, it also allows for personal belief exemptions such as religious or ideological reasons, as per the Health and Safety Code (HSC) 120338 requirements.

However, if the COVID-19 vaccine is incorporated as a bill to the existing list of 10 required immunizations, it wouldn't allow for personal belief exemptions under Senate Bill 277 established in 2015 — a proposal Sen. Richard Pan of Sacramento, who chairs the Senate Health Committee, is already pushing for. ♦



Xu

"We've always had mandates like these and there have been people who have been consistently opposed to these mandates."

SENIOR Albert Ye

Junior Adam Xu, who received the COVID-19 vaccine at the school-hosted vaccination clinic, said the vaccine mandate is "especially beneficial" for students, who tend to transmit the virus at a higher rate.

"I think any uncertainty about the vaccine should have been well taken out by now," Xu said. "It's proven that this is currently a pandemic of the unvaccinated

Back in person, drama stages Shakespeare comedy

by Lena Aribi, Chris Chen & Avani Kongetira

Before rehearsals for the fall play, actors can be seen sitting outside the Therman Drama Center on the green park tables or inside on seats raised in a bleacher-like semicircle, laughing, joking or tripping over the chairs.

All of this activity is occurring as they rehearse for this year's fall play: "A Midsummer's Night Dream." The play, a Shakespearean classic about mythological love and misadventure, will be performed on Nov. 12-14 and Nov. 18-20 and will be the first in-person production since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The play follows a love rectangle between Hermia (Ella Tamas King), Lysander (Krishen Khanna), Helena (Gianna Cagliostro) and Demetrius (Jack Bulas), who enter a forest where the king and queen of fairies, Oberon (Taylor Zhou) and Titania (Julia Burgos), have come with several fairies, the most notable being Puck (Olivia Smith).

Despite the pandemic, the drama program is not anticipating drastic modifications for the performance other than mandated mask wearing indoors.

Drama director Benjamin Brotzman, who took over the department after former drama teacher Bryan Ringsted left over the summer, is looking forward to further rehearsals and getting into the "physicality of the show" through elements like stage combat. He noted, however, that performances will be made harder due to on-stage mask requirements.

"It's certainly difficult just because when we act, we act with the whole face, but now we have to rely on our eyes," said junior Amrita Gopal, who plays the role of Philostrate.

Junior Ananya Gupta, who is cast as a fairy, said that the switch from recorded performances to live ones may also prove challenging for the cast, but they are well equipped with the skills they learned last year.

Another hardship the fall play is facing this year is low participation, although Brotzman said the small dip in participation compared to previous years will not have a drastic effect on the quality of the production.

In 2019, "Sense and Sensibility" drew about 45 students, while this year's fall play has 25. Participation for the stage design, however, is higher than in previous years, due to the introduction of a new 8th-period technical theater class. The class is responsible for designing the set for the play.

Senior set designer Leslie Robinson, who also plays the part of Snug, said that the crew is currently gathering ideas for the set and costume designs. One of her main focuses is ensuring that every element of the design meshes together while finding ways to incorporate masks into the characters' designs.

Gupta also expected to run into challenges with the comprehension of Shakespeare's language, but believes that reading through the script during rehearsals is helping cast members. According to Brotzman, every cast that takes on a Shakespearean play is nervous at first, but he

ADVISORY

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A new advisory model pushed out by the district allows teachers the option of either presenting the curriculum to students, having another district staff member lead the lesson, or doing a push-and-play model with a video.

Chemistry teacher Kathy Nakamatsu said that she "wasn't comfortable" teaching some of the advisory topics without adequate training.

Instead, Nakamatsu proposed the administration "could bring in guest speakers who are trained professionals, and during advisory they could do something where all the freshmen go to the McAfee."

Another teacher, who asked to remain anonymous, added that there should be some level of training given to teachers before teaching lessons, saying "they shouldn't just be sent a slide deck and be told to teach X, Y and Z."

Hearing these concerns, district leaders decided to postpone some of the most sensitive topics to next semester, allowing time to decide how they will handle teaching these lessons and make necessary changes to format and execution.

Along with teacher complaints, students argued that topics have been taught repeatedly in advisories last year and this year, leading to apathy and indifference.

"Due to advisory taking up the entire tutorial, I noticed that some people decided to sleep or wander off as they felt that the material was not useful for them," senior Rishi Atreya said.

Atreya said that the administration could make advisory lessons more engaging by incorporating activities into the curriculum, as opposed to purely lecture-based classes.

Sophomore Ethan Chau believes one solution could be either condensing advisory and making it shorter or changing the lessons to something that all students can access from home, similar to last year's asynchronous advisories.

"I don't think advisory should be continued until they can resolve the issues of both students and faculty members," Chau said. ♦

HOMECOMING

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coming made "things more stressful, because they didn't have any previous experience or know what to expect." Additionally, few sophomores had heard of their theme of "The Fairly Oddparents," which made the script writing process harder.

On the other hand, the juniors leveraged their experience to produce a smooth performance with their theme of "Scooby Doo." Junior class treasurer Allison Tan attributed their successful performance — which featured a total of seven performances — to increased participation.

The seniors concluded quad day week with a performance following the theme of "Phineas and Ferb." With a total participation of about 80 students spread across eight dances, senior class vice president Kaylie Wong said that organizing Homecoming this year felt far different from previous years due to COVID-19 and had "much higher stakes."

Despite these challenges and her initial worries, Wong was ultimately happy with the results of the performance. Homecoming week capped off with the football game, where the Falcons won their first game of the year against the Monta Vista Matadors 31-14. The first non-gendered Homecoming court winners included seniors Ishaan Bandhari and Derek Hsu being named monarchs; also in the court were juniors Julian Berkowitz-Sklar and Jeremiah Chung; sophomores Taylor Chu and Eva Semin; and freshmen Juhi Karamcheti and Anisa Taymuree. ♦



For more Homecoming coverage, scan the QR code above.



Courtesy of SANJOLI GUPTA

Drama students look through the script for a new scene in "A Midsummer's Night Dream."

expects that they will get past this as they practice and become comfortable with the dialogue.

Despite difficulty with the archaic language, Gupta believes that having a live audience fosters more excitement.

"Not only are we interacting with our fellow actors, but we are also interacting and engaging with the audience members. They become a part of the story we are telling," Gupta said.

In spite of the challenges they are facing when rehearsing for the fall play, the cast is

enthusiastic to put on a performance that almost entirely mimics the pre-pandemic world.

"We should be able to have a show with a full set, full costumes and, [unless the COVID-19 situation changes], an audience," Brotzman said. "It's a lot to do, but the kids are so dedicated. When I see that dedication, excitement and passion for what we're doing, the job is not hard." ♦

Note: Michael Fok and Nilay Mishra also contributed to this story.

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Clubs start to readjust to on-campus return

By Kavya Patel
& Sarah Thomas

During lunch on Sept. 14, members of Girl Up sat in English 9 and 10 teacher Megan Law's classroom, participating in a name game. People laughed as students failed to remember the names of all the club members and they passed around a bag of Goldfish. The club has been around for years, but this was their first meeting in person this year.

With school finally back in person, clubs have been given an option to hold their meetings either in-person, on Zoom or a combination of both. According to senior ASB club commissioner Nandini Desai, most clubs, including Girl Up, have opted to stay in person.

Senior Nithya Koneru, an officer from Girl Up, said that meeting in-person interaction is vital to the club's success. Because many of their activities are centered around discussing serious topics, the officers found that being online made it harder for club members to open up and relate to each other.

"Compared to last year, we have already seen a big increase in participation and can't wait to get started with our meetings," Koneru said.

Activities like large group discussions,

panels and rallies with other clubs and task forces on campus were impossible to coordinate over Zoom, she said. Being back in person has made these events possible again.

Koneru said that the first in-person meeting of the year displayed a big improvement from Zoom meetings. Students were engaged with each other, and attendance had increased considerably.

"We want to be able to provide a safe space for all individuals, which in an online environment was definitely harder because of the lack of connections you build through Zoom," Koneru said.

While most clubs decided to meet in person, the Genomics and Bioinformatics club has opted for a hybrid approach.

The club is a non-profit that provides competitive opportunities while introducing students to biotech concepts. They have

decided to have bi-monthly meetings — one in-person and one online — every Blue Day Friday.

Junior Isha Jagadish, the club's president, said she is excited to host in-person club meetings and work on projects with the rest of the club members.

"Our club was only accepted in the remote year, so we have never experienced in-person meetings before and virtual meetings have been running smoothly," said Jagadish, adding that both club officers and members were involved in their decision to have meetings both online and in-person.

During remote learning, 15 members participated online; currently, there are 70 members in the club's Facebook group.

The goal is to have around 20-25 members attend all meetings after seeing interest spike with the addition of many freshmen

and sophomores.

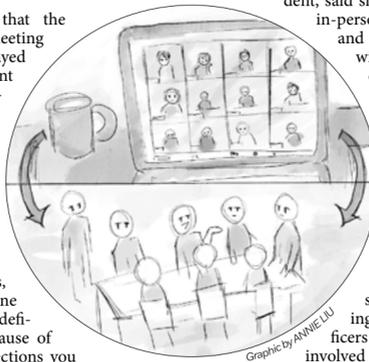
Jagadish said that online meetings worked well with the goals and format of their club meetings. During online meetings, they deliver informative presentations and work on research projects.

"Online meetings were actually very effective, contrary to what most people think, as it allowed us flexibility with guest speaker series, delivering presentations, and playing games like Kahoot," Jagadish said. "Our online meetings also give students a chance to attend other clubs during lunch, and ours after school."

She also mentioned the issue of the new lunch schedule, and how the shorter period impacts their efficiency.

Jagadish found that the 30-minute lunch period is not enough for a productive meeting, which factored into their decision to host hybrid meetings. While most clubs were extremely enthusiastic about transitioning back to in-person meetings, the Genomics and Bioinformatics club has a different perspective on what works for its members.

"Since there are pros to being online and pros to being in-person, we decided to go hybrid to get the best of both worlds," Jagadish said. "We're grateful for the opportunity to be in person and we're excited to see what it will mean for our club." ♦



Marching band recommences in-person competitions

STUDENTS LOOKING FORWARD TO PERFORM IN UPCOMING SHOW "BE ANYTHING, ANYWHERE, ANYONE"

By Shannon Ma
& Brian Sheen

Two weeks before school started, about 150 students entered campus for band camp. For upperclassmen, it had been a year and a half since they had practiced together in person, while both sophomores and freshmen had never marched on the field before, making the experience a refreshing step toward normalcy.

The marching band has since been learning and rehearsing their three movement show, titled "Be Anything, Anywhere, Anyone." The show is inspired by "Pure Imagination" from "Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory," as well as Prokofiev's "Symphony Number Five."

They were scheduled to first perform their show at the Cupertino Tournament

of Bands on Oct. 9, followed by the Foothill Band Review on Oct. 23 and the Napa Valley Band Review on Nov. 13.

"After a year like last year, I really wanted a positive spin on our show," band director Jason Shiuan said. "When discussing the show concept, we talked a lot about how you can imagine what you want to be, what a world will be like or what you can achieve."

One of Shiuan's main goals with the show is "to think beyond what our little bubble dictates," so he incorporated unique visual aspects, including students mimicking birds or strongmen and dancing during the jazz section in order to put less pressure on individual technique.

While Shiuan said the marching band staff was trying to avoid overwhelming students, they still needed to drill procedure, process and especially fundamentals. The

music was simplified in technique, although Shiuan said he found that students were doing well enough to add more technique as the show continued to develop.

This year's marching band schedule has slightly fewer 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday rehearsals and is more spaced out, in part due to the less stressful competition schedule. Additionally, because of the new bell schedule, some Blue Day rehearsals became sectional practices led by student marching band leadership.

"Managing my section is pretty fun, but it can be difficult at times," saxophone section leader junior Stanley Yang said. "We have to spend more time on basics to catch everyone up, and newer members are less disciplined, so it takes us longer to get stuff done."

So far, the marching band has performed at the halftime show of one football game and before the Homecoming football game against Monta Vista.

Marching band members are excited to travel to in-person competitions this season.

"I haven't really gone anywhere since [the pandemic]," freshman clarinet player Jayden Ham said. "So competitions are one of those things that make you look forward to it on your calendar."

Marching band students and staff said they are cherishing the opportunity to bond again and "look forward to creating that camaraderie," Shiuan said.

"Spending time with my friends in band is something I'm happy about," Yang said. "Band is the best family I could ask for." ♦



Yang

Speech and debate faces leadership change after resignation

By Nikhil Mathihalli
& Shreya Rallabandi

The speech and debate team's year began with officers scrambling to get it back on its feet.

The first challenge was to find a new adviser and head coach after English teacher Erick Rector stepped down during the summer.

Rector resigned over what he described as "a philosophical disagreement" with the team's booster parents.

According to team president senior Harshini Velchamy, the head coach stays with their competitors at weekend-long tournaments and signs students up for tournaments, aside from helping students with their events.

Because Rector was also the club's adviser, the speech and debate club has had recent struggles with registering and competing in competitions, as one of the roles of the adviser is to represent the program at Coastal Forensics League meetings as a school employee.

"After coming back from COVID-19, the speech and debate team was already struggling, so at a time when it seemed that the situation of the club could not get any worse, the loss of the adviser was devastating," Velchamy said.

Recently the club has found an informal staff adviser: new assistant principal Abra Evanoff.

Steve Clemmons, the team's debate coach who has been with the program since 2009, has replaced Rector as head coach. The club also recently hired a new speech coach, Kiana Young, who began on Oct. 1.

"At a time when it seemed that the situation couldn't get any worse, the loss of the adviser was devastating."

SENIOR Harshini Velchamy

Currently, Clemmons is the coach for both of the club's debate teams: one for Lincoln-Douglass (LD), which is an event where students debate individually, and another for Public Forum (PF), an event where students debate in teams of two. Approximately eight students are competing in LD this year, and around 15 are competing in PF. In total, the speech program has around 16 active members.

The hiring of Young is a significant step forward compared to last year's program,

where students were either coached by team captains or sought out private, often expensive coaching.

Recently, SHS Speech and Debate sent one LD team and two PF teams — five students in total — to compete in the Stephen Stewart Middle and High School Invitational from Sept. 24 to Sept. 26. This tournament marks the start of the speech and debate season, which began in August and extends until mid-March.

One of the club's main challenges this year was underclassmen retention. Last year, students who were completely new to speech and debate were restricted to solely online practices and competition, blocking them from experiencing the full scope of the activity and decreasing overall morale. Clemmons, club officers and event captains are currently manning the large group of underclassmen who are new to the program and hope that this year, in-person practices will encourage retention.

Additionally, funds continue to be a concern; since it cannot mandate registration payments from its members, the club is seeking creative means of fundraising to cover tournament and coaching expenses, among other fees. These expenses run into the thousands of dollars annually.

The team is planning to host the second annual Hyde Invitational for middle school-

ers from Oct. 30-31 as a fundraising event. The tournament, in which middle schoolers nationwide will compete in their respective speech and debate events, will be held online to align with COVID-19 concerns.

Students on the SHS team will judge individual speech and debate rounds.

The club's treasurer, junior Shreya Rallabandi, and PF captain, junior Anushka Sankaran, are working to garner interest for the tournament and attempting to exceed last year's numbers of eight schools in attendance.

"We're trying to take advantage of the fact that Hyde has to be virtual in order to get as much out of this tournament as we can," Sankaran said. "Not just money wise — we want our club members to be able to gain experience in their own events while judging middle schoolers."

Speech and debate tournaments will be virtual for the first semester, and it is unclear whether virtual competition will continue on into the second semester. Nevertheless, team members hope to continue their success from last year and be able to give their members an experience as close to a traditional speech and debate experience as possible.

"I'm really excited to see what we can do this year," Velchamy said. "I think we have a bright future ahead of us." ♦

City Planning Commission member resigns over comments widely seen as xenophobic

By Christina Chang
& Lynn Dai

In a public email written on Aug. 30, Cheriell Jensen, a member of the Saratoga Planning Commission, expressed opposition to the Regional Housing Needs Allocation's (RHNA) appeal to install 1,700 plus housing units in the city by 2023.

She wrote, "40.1 percent of persons (2015-19) in Saratoga are foreign born, and 45.2 percent do not speak English at home, demonstrating that Saratoga is now filling a housing demand from outside of the United States."

Why do we have to profoundly change our community and put our water supply at risk to serve high foreign demand?"

The backlash from the community for perceived xenophobia was swift and she resigned from the commission after mayor Yan Zhao asked her to do so.

Her resignation took effect on Sept. 14. Jensen issued an apology that has not yet been made publicly available.

The Falcon contacted Jensen for her comments on the situation, but she did not respond.

In addition to issuing a public condemnation of Jensen's letter during the Sept. 15 city council meeting, the council also plans to hold a study session with all the commissions in October to reflect on "[Saratoga's] Code of Ethics, Values and Mission."

Several Saratoga residents, including LGSUHS board member Cynthia Chang, expressed their disappointment at the comments and speed of the council's response.

"[Jensen's concerns] reflect a xenophobic and racist perspective that is out of

touch with our diverse Saratoga community," Chang said at the Sept. 15 city council meeting. "I was disappointed to learn of the silence and inaction on the part of the city council to [her] statement."

In addition to Chang, LGSUHS board members Katherine Tseng and David Guidry also expressed disappointment in Jensen's letter during the public comments section of the board meeting.

"There shouldn't be someone in power who is working against a vast majority of Americans."

SENIOR Noora Fayad

Although Guidry said Jensen should not continue to serve as a member of the Planning Commission, he said he is proud of the growth and changes in Saratoga since he moved here in 1973.

When Guidry was a student at Lynbrook High, nearly 90 percent of the school's demographics were Caucasian, a statistic that he said roughly reflects the demographics of SHS at the time.

Now, nearly 90 percent of Lynbrook's population is Asian, and SHS has a population that has become increasingly diverse over the years and white students are now the minority.

"We consider our cultural diversity as one of the strengths of our community," Guidry said in an interview with The Falcon.



Zhao

Model UN Club implements meetings in hybrid form

By Vicky Bai
& Arnav Swamy

When senior Selina Chen, president of the Model United Nations club, entered Spanish teacher Allison Dermont's room during a Monday lunch to host the first meeting of the year, it was filled with new, eager participants.

The club has quadrupled its membership since before the pandemic. The officers — Chen, juniors George Huang (vice president) and Shaan Sridhar (secretary), and sophomore Sanjoli Gupta (head delegate) — are excited to kick off the season with a booming group of 42 members.

Model UN allows participants to gain different perspectives to create an informed discussion on global issues in competitions with other schools.

From analyzing Panama's perspective on diplomatic protection to role-playing as the United Arab Emirates in a mock cyber security crisis, members of MUN get the chance to debate and advocate for other countries with their peers during discussions.

To make attendance as streamlined and as accessible as possible, the officer team has implemented a hybrid meeting system where members can meet on Zoom or in-person.

There are weekly online meetings at 9 p.m. on Monday via Zoom and bi-weekly in-person meetings, which occur every blue Monday in room 407. Currently, the club hosts interactive Kahoot!-like games to review competition

basics and plans to do a mock run-through of what a conference may look like for new members.

"Online meetings are used to figure out the business aspect of Model UN, while in in-person meetings we have more fun," Chen said.

Assignments include the committee type, like the General Assembly, Security Council, Economic and Financial Affairs Council, the committee session topic(s) and the country each delegate will represent. Delegates are expected to find sources to write position papers, essays that describe the stance a country has on a position. They also write opening speeches based on the same stance.

"Preparation is largely up to the individual," Chen said. "If a member is really dedicated, they will pour hours into it to get an award or learn a lot from the preparation process." Other members can put in less time and still gain valuable skills, she said.

In Chen's freshman and sophomore year, the Model UN team was not as active, with attendance averaging around only seven and attending only four conferences.

Yet during the pandemic, Chen found that the Model UN team could go to six conferences, more than to," Huang said. "It'll be amazing to see everyone at the first conference."

Whenever the club attends conferences, they usually start

"It's great that we keep bringing in new cultures and people who have different views that give our students a chance to learn the way the rest of the world thinks."

For her part, senior Noora Fayad said xenophobia in the Saratoga community is still prevalent.

When Fayad learned about Jensen's public letter, she was angry — but not surprised.

For Fayad, a first-generation American from Palestine and Lebanon, being called "terrorist" and "n-word" is normal.

"I'm so numb to xenophobia and racism in general, it's expected," Fayad said. "If someone doesn't say something xenophobic, I'm like 'wow, that's amazing.'"

Even so, Fayad was upset that Jensen focused on blaming Saratoga residents rather than focusing on fixing issues such as low water supply due to the state's droughts.

Instead of "scapegoating immigrants for using the water supply readily available to everyone, not just people of color," Jensen should take action to combat climate change, Fayad said.

While Fayad appreciates the city council's scheduled study session and Zhao's request for Jensen's resignation, she said there should be a system that ensures a higher standard for public officials — that they should be working for all the people in the community no matter their nationality, ethnicity, identity or gender identity.

"There shouldn't be someone in power who is working against a vast majority of Americans," Fayad said. "We, as immigrants, live in Saratoga. We pay taxes here, we support local businesses here. We built this country from the bottom up; we are the people who go into houses and clean them,

people who do the work that a lot of people don't want to because we came here in hopes for a better life."

Fayad said it's important to recognize the amount of xenophobia prevalent in the community.

Oftentimes, she said people with racist perspectives try to defend themselves rather than working on change.

While some like Fayad were upset by Jensen's comments, others had sympathy for someone they say is a good person who made a regrettable mistake.

In the city council meeting, Jeffrey Schwartz, who has been Jensen's friend for 40 years, said that although he does not condone her remarks, he chose to accept her apology.

"Those two offensive sentences are not Cheriell; she is not a racist," said Schwartz, previous vice president of the Board of The Women's

Housing Connection, the only homeless shelter in Santa Clara County for women. "She is a kind and considerate person with a good heart who has always supported diversity in our community."

Like Guidry, Schwartz said that many residents have embraced the increasing diversity compared to the majority white population from when he first moved here years ago.

"Some communities have had serious conflict with changing demographics, and increasing minority representation," Schwartz said. "No community is perfect or free from all bigotry. And we're certainly not. But Saratoga has been, and I am certain will continue to be, welcoming for all peoples. I hope that is not lost in this discussion." ♦



Fayad

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The staff of The Saratoga Falcon is committed to objectively and accurately representing the diverse talents, cultures and viewpoints of the Saratoga High School community.

LETTERS OF THE EDITOR

The Saratoga Falcon welcomes all signed letters of opinion, which are subject to editing for length, accuracy and grammar. Please send them to harshini.velchamy@saratogafalcon.org and tiffany.wang@saratogafalcon.org. For ad information, phone (408) 867-3411, ext. 222.

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Let's fix the post-pandemic club crisis

The members of the speech and debate team started the year on a sour note. Coming out of a year of purely online practices and tournaments, they found themselves with few returning underclassmen and barely any money. Even worse, they had no coach and adviser, either.

This trend, however, is not specific to just the speech and debate program: Clubs all over school are struggling, in part because of the enormous difficulty of finding willing advisers at a time of restricted room access at lunch. The best solution might be the toughest one: Cut back on the number of clubs so that the surviving ones are more likely to thrive while also incentivizing more participation on the part of teachers.

For an organization like speech and debate, infamous for the insane time commitment it entails for all parties involved, the dependence on an adviser is obvious, but it's not just that — established low-maintenance clubs are having issues as well.

The presidents of the Red Cross Club, for example, had to ask five teachers before finally finding a teacher willing to take on the role. The Red Cross doesn't even require an adviser to have any responsibilities besides keeping an open room during one lunch period every other week and signing volunteering hour forms.

Don't get us wrong; teachers are not at fault for not wanting to take on extra work for no compensation in an already difficult year. Even low-maintenance clubs do take up some time — time that teachers, especially amidst this weird transition back to 90-minute classes, 10-minute passing periods and in-person learning, simply feel they do not have — and in situations like these, it's essential for the leadership at this school (both ASB and the higher administration) to step forward with solutions.

In fact, ASB's job description states that, in the event that a club lacks an adviser, the club commissioners either help the club find an adviser or help the club settle down and maintain their club status while they're in the process of finding an adviser. Yet ASB fulfilling that duty is



only a surface-level solution to this issue: The administration must craft solutions that incentivize reasons for teachers to help clubs.

In other industries, professionals aren't expected to do extra work without any sort of reward. Why are teachers expected to give away their time and energy with zero financial compensation?

The administration and district leadership could start equating being a club adviser to something like teaching extra hours for pay. Some clubs such as speech and debate offer stipends for teacher advisers: An idea that can be further implemented to spread compensation to more club advisers as well.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, most clubs met during lunch, allowing members to simultaneously eat their lunch and participate in the meeting. However, due to the safety restrictions put in place this year, students are no longer allowed to eat indoors. Whatever interest students had after participating in a disorientating year online is only evaporating since students are basically forced to choose between eating and going to club meetings.

Clubs are unable to maximize their already limited meeting time since students show up 10

to 15 minutes late, rushing after they shove their lunches down their throats as quickly as they can — not to mention that lunch is technically 10 minutes shorter this year. While this problem seems almost unavoidable in order to keep students and staff safe, the ASB could allocate areas for clubs to have meetings outdoors and set up tents and projectors for members to use or even encourage clubs to use tutorials to meet instead.

Due to all these obstacles, many clubs have been forced to resort to the pre-vaccination method: Zoom. Genomics and Bioinformatics, for example, was forced to conduct club meetings online until they could find a teacher adviser — which is awful, since club retention and quality were both lackluster last year because students were unable to grasp the full concept of what clubs had to offer.

There simply just aren't enough rooms and teachers for the number of clubs that have

been introduced to the school. At this point, the most obvious and tangible solution seems to be cutting the number of clubs.

The current (non updated) club list consists of 65 clubs, a number which even excludes the stream of new clubs created over the COVID-19 year. There is a ratio of just around 19 students per club. An increase in the number of clubs leads to higher competition among them; this hurts both the clubs and the students.

Whatever the solution is, it needs to be implemented as soon as possible. With the growing quantity of clubs, their quality is declining.

Clubs are a crucial and necessary part of the high school experience; they're a place for students to bond, learn more about their interests and pursue new ones.

As a community, we should find ways to help protect this valuable experience before it becomes an endangered species. ♦

Opinion of the Falcon Editorial Board

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The Saratoga Falcon staff voted 35-4 in favor of the article.

College visits should humanize campuses

By EthanLin

With college application deadlines looming on the horizon, many students are frantically looking for resources that can make the process less confusing. College visits to the school, which are now both in-person and online, provide such an opportunity.

Through these visits, students are not only able to connect with their dream schools and display demonstrated interest, but they're also able to learn more about the various programs offered by these colleges.

Despite being advertised as having this dual purpose, most college visits lack the informative aspect, often simply regurgitating statistics or information that can

be found on their websites.

Although this may be beneficial for certain students who do not want to spend time doing research by themselves, the purpose of college visits should be to humanize the college application process.

Instead of listing out the school's median admissions SAT/ACT scores or average student body GPA, alumni should be using their time to talk about their personal experiences at these colleges and the people they were able to meet in different programs.

Of course, this is not to say that these quantitative indicators are not important for students to know — they definitely are.

But with the last year and a half spent online and away from social interaction, the college admissions

process is more confusing and impersonal than ever for many students, so more emphasis should be placed on humanizing it, instead of listing out the numerical variables that are a reminder of the past, two-dimensional Zoom world.

Many students under normal circumstances would have had a chance to visit colleges during their junior-year summer; however, due to COVID-19, only a few have had this opportunity.

Thus, for many students, these visits are a substitute for real college visits — visits that possess a more social approach that focuses more on the people rather than the numbers at these schools.

In order to foster a more personal feel at their visits, colleges

should cover a brief campus guide during their visits, outlining the various resources and facilities that the colleges have available. This way, students have a better sense of what the school has to offer.

Ultimately, college visits can be more effective and useful if they focus less on the numbers and more on the social and human aspects of their schools.

Instead of discussion regarding the quantitative data of students who attend particular schools, these visits should place more emphasis on humanizing the college admissions process and be an adequate substitute for students that did not have the opportunity or time to visit the college campus in person. ♦

Intrinsic motives not needed when doing extracurriculars

By ArnavSwamy

Let's face it: The academic culture at SHS is cutthroat. Students are expected to aim for the top colleges, which means taking numerous difficult AP and Honors classes, scrambling for notes before the test that makes or breaks their grade and generally not sleeping enough.

The question "What did you get?" is often followed by a sympathetic smirk.

In line with this culture, students have grown to use extracurriculars not only as a way to explore their out-of-school interests, but also as a medium to simply boost their college applications.

And contrary to what you might think, that's perfectly fine.

A lot of students attend top-tier universities to tie the school's reputation to their own identities. They may not be genuinely interested in the college itself.

For example, students interested in business may pursue UP-enn's Wharton School of Business, an extremely selective school, out of desire for prestige rather than true interest in it.

I'd argue that if a student can pinpoint a college that is able to give them what they need to succeed in life, participating in extracurriculars purely just for securing admission is not morally questionable. The college should individually excite each student based on a certain program, campus life or a reason that extends beyond the exclusivity of the college name. The idea is that college is a stepping stone to help them

Conversely, students who are

pursue what they actually want to do with their life, and so boosting college apps — in the form of extracurriculars — is perfectly valid.

For example, I'm currently interested in USC, specifically the school's humanities program. The school itself is highly competitive.

A lot of students attend top-tier universities to tie the school's reputation to their own identities.

As part of my effort to stand out, I'm in the Boy Scouts of America. While I enjoy Scouts as a program due to its diverse and engaging activities such as boating and camping, knowing that it might help my admissions chances makes it something I'm willing to devote a considerable amount of time to.

Truth be told, most kids end up doing a whole lot of activities they aren't interested in at first such as violin lessons or a sport like tennis. The activity or sport might become a true passion — or might not. The initial motivation for doing it matters little or not at all in the grand scheme of things.

Students who are more reserved may benefit from engaging in a team environment and being put in uncomfortable situations, common in sports or team extracurriculars like Science Olympiad.

Conversely, students who are

more extroverted may find themselves being attracted to more individualistic pursuits such as painting or writing.

Community service is much the same way. Whether it's volunteering at the library or leading a non-profit in India, acts of good have merits, regardless of intention.

That isn't to say all such pursuits are free from moral compromise: Many students here pick up multiple extracurriculars, attend only one or two meetings of that activity and exaggerate them on their apps to boost their chances into a top school.

If a student's participation is very low across the board, they are unlikely to actually benefit from their extracurricular activities, and those actively involved are left juggling a deadweight member.

The main criterion for worthy extracurriculars is that each student should be actively involved in them, not only for their personal benefit but to align with how they describe their extracurriculars in their college applications.

College admissions have become a game where cheating — or at least seriously exaggerating — is the norm. ♦



Take the football team's hype away

By HarshiniVelchamy

The lopsided scores say it all: 48-14, 44-0, 49-0, 31-14 and 14-0; our football team isn't doing fantastic this year. Honestly, they haven't been doing fantastic for a while.

Our football team has lost all of its games this year, besides a 31-14 victory against Monta Vista for Homecoming. For a sport that we have one of our largest school spirit events centered around, you would think that our football team would have a more impressive (or at least passable) record.

This piece isn't meant to be hateful. I'm not saying that our football team is bad, but they're definitely not as good as they could be.

I mean, that's a sport that I would be excited to watch: a winning sport.

And anyway, all putting football on a pedestal does is make it the center of our school's sporting universe, and while I don't think football isn't important, it doesn't deserve all the attention it gets.

Homecoming, for one, is the most spirited week in the school year but I'm not going to lie, it is pretty morally damaging to watch.

That's since one of the least successful teams at our school get to bask in the limelight while consistently triumphant teams and programs like marching band and water polo are shoved to the side and get zero to little recognition for their stellar performances.

Football, out of tradition and lack of creativity, too often gains outsized attention. Nothing's going to change it unless we make some bold decisions and take football off of its pedestal. ♦

But knowing this, our school still worships the football team, making their games school-wide events that students are encouraged to attend and dress up for.

Their senior nights are extremely dramatic with parents, families and other students watching the team walk down the football field with roses in their arms and posters in their hands.

Now, I'm calling for some bold action. And by bold, I mean, I

March 2021.

While there was a rapid decrease in the number of new cases starting in January, cases skyrocketed once again in July as the Delta variant broke through dipping vaccine immunities.

Taking more precautionary measures will be especially beneficial and stress-relieving for students who have older relatives or family members with underlying health issues at home.

While COVID-19 is not life-threatening for the vast majority of the vaccinated population, it can still be quite dangerous for elderly folk, especially as vaccine protection wanes.

The Delta variant of the virus is especially worrying. The CDC warned it was magnitudes more contagious than the previous strain — "as contagious as chickenpox" — and vaccinated people could still spread it.

If a large number of people disregard the risk of COVID-19, we could possibly see a surge in cases since we are in the gap of time between vaccine effectiveness starting to wane and booster shots being administered.

With many students being comfortable with gathering in large groups again, if one student happens to catch the virus, it can quickly turn into significant COVID-19 risk.

Though the virus particles rapidly disperse in outdoor air, it's hard to believe that it won't spread with waning vaccine protection and maskless students squeezed together less than three feet apart, let alone six feet.

Students should not necessarily stop attending social events like football games or homecoming, since the rate of new cases has remained steady over the past month; they should definitely take more precaution. ♦



Students gather, eat and socialize very close together all around the quad during lunchtime.

has stayed relatively constant at a rate higher than in the spring and summer months for about two months now. For example, the Delta variant caused a moderate surge, bringing the new case rate just higher than it was in the summer of 2020, but not close to the big winter surge.

Especially pressing is that the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines begin to lose effectiveness starting a few months after a person is fully vaccinated, meaning that over the next few weeks, vaccine effectiveness will start dropping for people who got it before April.

According to Google, 16.1% and 30.2% of Californians were fully vaccinated before April and May, respectively. For those

people, vaccine protection will likely start to slowly wane in October, if it has not already.

Though booster shots may be available very soon in California, there will likely be more skepticism surrounding it.

This is problematic because it may cause upticks in cases and deaths through the next two months. Students should be more conscious of the risk and try to avoid being maskless when in close proximity with others in order to prevent a surge from happening until booster shots are administered.

A cautionary tale can be found in Israel, which recently experienced a COVID-19 surge, despite being one of the first nations to vaccinate the majority of its population by

Texas's abortion chokehold is classist, inhumane

THE NEW TEXAS ANTI-ABORTION LAW FAILS TO PROTECT US CITIZENS' RIGHTS

By HannahLee

On Sept. 1, the Texas state legislature signed Senate Bill 8 (SB8) into effect, implementing one of the nation's most restrictive abortion bans up to date.

The law bans abortions as soon as fetus cardiac activity is detectable (at six weeks of pregnancy), which is well before many women even know they are pregnant — especially if they have an irregular menstruation cycle.

This ban doesn't provide exceptions for rape and incest and allows one to sue anybody suspected of helping a pregnant woman seeking an abortion, regardless of geographical location in the U.S.

Regardless of one's stance, the passage of this law is concerning; not only has SB8 sewn immense political divisiveness, some experts argue that it may be the first step in a slippery slope of politicians encroaching on citizen bodily autonomy.

Women's safety

The consequences are especially dire for Texan women of color, financially unstable or unable to travel. While some women are circumventing the law by traveling out of state for an abortion, those who cannot are left with no safe choices. With no safe access to abortion, women may resort to unsafe alternatives such as sticking a clothes hanger up or using bleach to flush the uterus, risking their own health and life.

While the pro-life movement opposes abortion, saying that everyone has a "right to life," it would be a lot easier to take their argument seriously if they were also strong supporters of universal healthcare, easy access to contraceptives and sex education, more child tax credit to eliminate child poverty and better child care.

If the movement fought equally as hard for all stages of life, it would have more meaning. Instead, the pro-life movement and anti-abortion supporters aim to strip women's right to make choices about their own bodies and lives.

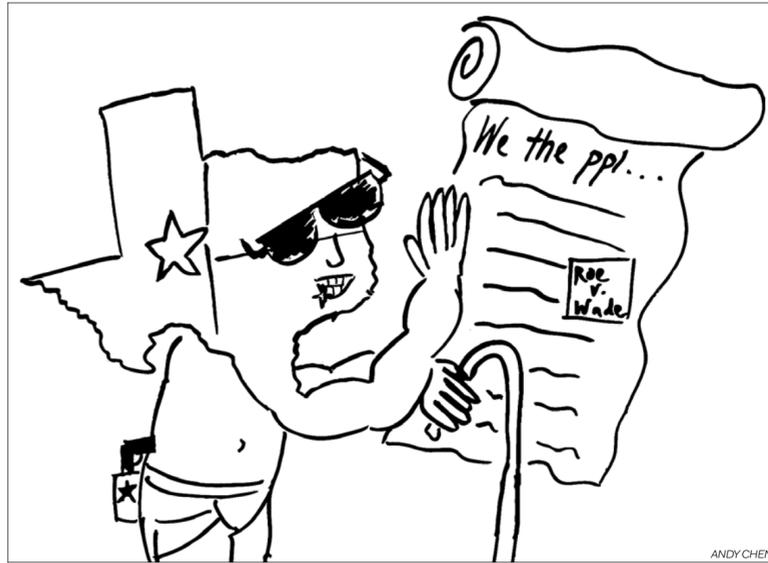
Supreme Court process

Historically when states have passed laws restricting abortion such as the Partial-Birth law, lawsuits against the state legislature are filed by advocacy and civil rights groups such as Whole Women's Health, requesting an injunction against the government officials that would be reviewing the process. Then, a judge of a lower appellate court, or sometimes the Supreme Court, can choose to either grant the injunction or block the law from being enforced until the controversies of the law have been debated and sorted out.

The SB8 challenge was filed against the judges of the presiding cases by several pro-choice advocacy groups, but the Supreme Court majority claimed that the judges were the wrong people to file an injunction against. Because of this, the court didn't grant an order blocking the law from being enforced several weeks ago despite all the constitutional controversies.

Due to Roe v. Wade, the 1973 Supreme Court decision that protects a woman's right to an abortion without excessive governmental restrictions, the creators of the new bill had to find a way to prohibit abortions without the government stepping in and thus chose to utilize vigilante-style enforcement.

Because of the clear prohibition of government interference, the Supreme Court voted in a 5-4 majority to allow implementation of the law, deciding not to take any action on the Texas legislation before it was fully examined and effectively criminalizing abortion



ANDY CHEN

in the state.

Vigilante-style enforcement

In the case of the new Texas anti-abortion law, however, there was no specific person or agency that enforced it. SB8 calls for vigilante-style enforcement — the legislation gives Texans that don't work in the government the power to file civil suits against peers, acquaintances or family suspected of having an abortion for a minimum of \$10,000 if they either had or assisted in an abortion.

This enforcement is chaotic and makes it difficult to know who to file an injunction against. Furthermore, the legislature is making it difficult for federal courts to enjoin the act, which is an effective assault on the Constitution.

Texas Right to Life, an extremist right-wing organization, has set up what it calls a "whistleblower" website that urges people to submit anonymous tips about

anyone possibly violating the law. In response, many TikTokers have been urging people to send in fake tips to overload the website.

If the challenge on abortion wasn't stopped at the Supreme Court, where do the duplication of citizens and their constitutional rights stop?

Not only are abortion laws stripping women of making their own decisions over their own bodies, but more concerning, without the Supreme Court following precedent, women in the U.S. could soon see the protections of Roe v. Wade disappear.

Resounding nationwide impact

The Texas legislation provides other state legislatures a roadmap on how to sidestep the Constitution, and not just regarding abortion. If successfully implemented, the law could potentially set off a string of legislation that circumvents Supreme Court rulings through employing vigilante citizen

enforcement in neighboring states. If the federal courts ultimately allow this law to stand, it's very likely that other conservative states will move to pass similar laws.

In fact, Florida State Representative Webster Barnaby has proposed a ban on abortion, mirroring the Texas law. Though the bill has yet to be put into place, many representatives and legislators are looking to implement something similar in the near future.

Women know what's best for their own bodies and lives. SB8 calls for putting conservative beliefs above the safety and freedom of pregnant women. If nothing else, the logistics of the law violate the spirit of the Constitution and should be soundly rejected by the courts. ♦

Editor's note: The legality of the law continues to be decided by various judges and courts; information here dates from Oct. 8.

AOC's 'Tax the Rich' dress: performative and hypocritical

By ShreyaRallabandi

The 2021 Met Gala on Sept. 13 was — quite plainly — plain. From a Party City-esque two piece to a blazer that looks straight out of the Anne Klein section of Macy's to the annual chain mail dress to a literal blanket, the outfits were somehow avant-garde in the most atrocious way, and most did not do any justice to the Met Gala's history of grandeur.

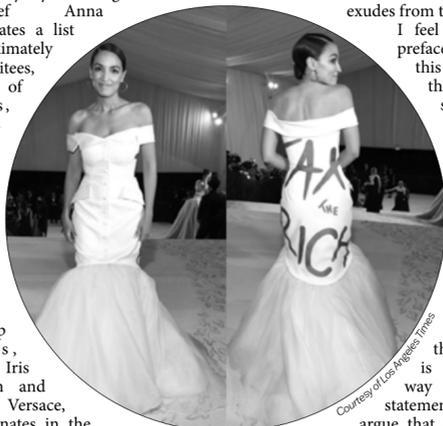
This year's theme was "In America: A Lexicon of Fashion." Celebrity guests usually partner with designers to interpret the year's theme and create a look that is perfectly fitted and ambitious. Multiple political and social statements made their way onto the red carpet.

New York Representative Carolyn Maloney carried a purse reading "ERA" for the Equal Rights for Women act, and rapper Saweetie wore a Christian Crowan gown with a train that was an homage to both the Black American Heritage and Filipino flags.

The most notable of the political looks, however, was the Aurora James gown that New York Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, better known as AOC, wore: a sleek, white, off-the-shoulder mermaid gown with a large tulle fringe. The words "TAX THE RICH," were emblazoned across the back of the gown in harsh red.

For those who may not be too familiar with the Met Gala, here's a quick run-down:

It's simultaneously a fundraiser for New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art and a high profile social event for the world's famous. Every year, Vogue's editor-in-chief Anna Wintour creates a list of approximately 600 invitees, consisting of celebrities, billionaires and designers.



Courtesy of Los Angeles Times

All the guests spend time getting custom-made looks from the world's top designers, such as Iris Van Herpen and Donatella Versace, which culminates in the actual gala's red carpet, exhibit, cocktail dinner and, of course, loads of paparazzi. It's essentially a celebrity prom, but with invitations. Oh, and, if you don't get invited, the tickets cost \$35,000 each.

By now, the hypocrisy of AOC's dress may have already reached you — being at an

event that represents the pinnacle of wealth and fame, an event which costs its guests \$35,000 to attend, and demanding higher taxes for the rich? Hypocrisy exudes from the situation.

I feel the need to preface the rest of this by clarifying that I earnestly support the idea of taxing the rich. I don't think billionaires should exist. And some may argue that donning a dress amidst the affluence of the Met Gala is the perfect way to make a statement. Some may argue that the argument is tone-deaf, considering that she and her constituents have not actually increased any taxes for the United States' "top five percent."

But I think that, no matter what AOC's intention was, her protest execution was extremely poor. The Met Gala's setting

wasn't ideal for a tone-deaf claim, especially considering that protesters advocating for racial justice were being arrested right outside of the Met Museum. On one hand, it definitely took guts to wear a dress that attacks those she's dining and partying with, but on the other hand, she's dining and partying with them. Going to a \$35,000 event and wearing an expensive dress asking to tax the rich? It seems a tad ironic.

AOC was not the only guest who used their outfit to convey a message — Cara Delivigne bore a chestplate reading "peg the patriarchy" on the red carpet. And at least AOC was not the only one who had completely missed in the outfits aesthetics department: Model and designer Ella Emhoff, Vice President Kamala Harris's stepdaughter, wore a sparkly red bodysuit with matching red sweatpants that had basically nothing to do with America or lexicons of fashion.

At the end of the day, this year's Met Gala was just disappointing, in more ways than one. I'm all for political and social opinions being expressed in one's fashion choices, but I'd advise anyone doing so to check themselves before they wear exotic furs to a PETA conference or a hunter's jacket reading "I Really Don't Care, Do U?" to a detention center for migrant children.

But if you would like to make a statement, the bare minimum is to look good while you do it. ♦



By KaashaMinocha

Driving through the bustling streets of downtown Los Angeles in August, I felt my anxiety climb to an all-time high. While visiting UCLA with my family, I was simultaneously practicing for my driving test at a DMV in Glendale shortly thereafter.

The trouble that day started when I approached an unprotected left turn on a narrow two-way street. Not knowing how to gauge speed, I whipped around the corner at 20 miles per hour, leading me to almost crash the cars right near the curb.

But that wasn't the worst of it. I was at a red light along the traffic-heavy Wilshire Boulevard, with cars in front and behind me. Noticing that a freeway exit was coming up, I rushed to switch places with my mom — but as soon as I stepped out of the car, I realized that I had left the car in drive mode.

Though the car started moving, my reflexes saved me in time, and thankfully, I didn't hit anything.

Regardless, you probably don't want to hear about how my mom screamed cuss words at me. Meanwhile, Kaaya, my twin sister, laughed at me in the backseat.

After going through this traumatic experience, I was pretty down, and expected the worst when I went in to take my driving test in Glendale.

I cannot begin to explain how unprepared I was. I had only practiced for 10 hours total, mostly consisting of a few driving lessons I had completed and a few short drives on the empty streets around my neighborhood.

I was angry at my parents for forcing both my sister and me to take the test in Los Angeles, on totally unfamiliar roads, especially when I clearly hadn't had

enough practice. Nevertheless, I tried to stay optimistic. With the Glendale DMV's reputation for generosity and an 86% pass rate, I would be fine, right?

Wrong. Everything seemed to be going well — I changed lanes smoothly, and even managed to take the first few turns at a nice, slow speed. Then, however, came the section I was most nervous about: reverse backing.

I pulled over to the side of the road and my examiner told me to reverse the car in a straight line. But I had never practiced this maneuver before. As I began reversing, the car gradually began turning into the middle of the street. Although my examiner granted me two more tries, I was ultimately unsuccessful.



Wincing, I watched her draw an "X" on my test sheet, knowing that I had failed. I drove back to the DMV defeated, upset that I hadn't practiced this crucial skill.

To make matters worse, Kaaya passed, and I was forced to celebrate her victory amid my defeat.

But my frustration and anger only drove me to work harder. The very same day that I failed, I scheduled my next driving test, eager to practice as much as I could.

Seeing Kaaya drive me to

school while wearing the "New Driver" shirt my mom bought her, I pushed myself to take every opportunity to drive and practice reverse backing.

Going into the test the second time, I felt confident. I had a gut feeling that I would pass this time and had already spent time browsing online for wallets with clear slots for my license.

Unfortunately, my instincts proved false. I was stunned. I thought I had done everything perfectly.

My driving examiner claimed that my reverse backing was "perfect," and I merged lanes smoothly, but apparently, my jerky braking and inconsistent stopping distances added up to 18 errors. I needed 15 or fewer to pass.

At this point, I was furious. My mom and I tried to "fight it" by talking to both the examiner and DMV manager about how the marks were petty, but they wouldn't budge — the examiner proudly claimed that he had seen times before passing.

Still, the failed test made me feel like a total failure. Why did I constantly have to be in the passenger seat?

When school started, I saw my peers driving to school, running errands and going off campus to grab lunch with friends. I felt jealous of those with this independence.

I cringed and hated that my mom still had to pick me up from activities, without having the luxury of leaving and going places whenever I wanted to. It was this intense FOMO that prompted me to schedule my test for mid-October.

Though I face heavy pressure to not to fail for the third time — for fear of taking the written test again — I'm staying hopeful. Third time's the charm, right? ♦

We hate astrology.

By AtreyDesai & VirajReddi

"Oh my god, are you a Pisces? The horoscope for today says that you'll lose something important. What's your rising sign? And your birth date?"

Don't feel bad if you didn't understand a word of the above spiel; few would be able to decipher the word-vomit going on there. And that's exactly what astrology is: incomprehensible puke.

Astrology, at its core, is nothing more than a method for people to stop making decisions for themselves and to instead attach their beliefs to fake cosmic entities. The unasked-for advice, the "Oh, you're a Scorpio? You must be very manipulative" comments, the preconceived judgments — astrology is just an irritating scam, relying on individual interpretation of vague references;

it more often reflects subconscious desires and beliefs than the moon's good favor on Arieses on a given day. Let's look at an example: The Sagittarius Daily Horoscope for Monday, Sept. 20, stated that "owing to the transit of the Moon in Pisces, you may finally find answers to problems that may have been troubling you for quite some time now."

The prediction in horoscope is vague enough to be technically accurate in a number of different scenarios. Does this mean I'm going to finally figure out No. 20 on my Physics homework? Maybe I'll find a way to cut off that one annoying friend? Who knows? An avid astrology fan chooses one specific interpretation of

any given prediction because they want it to be true, not necessarily because it is true. Encouraged by this horoscope, they might finally change their mindset and sit down to grind out No. 20 on the homework instead of putting it off.

Or perhaps, believing the stars are with them today, they might tell their clingy friend to leave them alone and block them on every social media platform. This person didn't do these things because astrology somehow predetermined it — they made these decisions because they inherently wanted to do so; astrology gave them that added confidence boost.

Making decisions can be difficult, and at some point, it can feel easier to attribute this decision-making to a random cosmic entity, rather than accept that you're responsible for your own decisions, actions and personalities. Astrology becomes the scapegoat for a person's own will and action in the world.

The Moon and planets are rocks in space — they don't concern themselves with finding answers to human questions. Yes, the Moon has gravity, and yes, it orbits in cycles around Earth. However, those cycles aren't going to help you decide when to prepare for the one SAT test you keep putting off.

Astrology can be a fun activity: something to laugh at with friends or to confirm your subconscious beliefs. But please, stop taking it seriously and believing that your life depends on planets that couldn't care less about what you're doing. Because let's be honest — you determine your own actions, and it's time to own up to that. ♦

My bad habit: online shopping

By SarahZhou

Ping! "Your saved search has 4 new results!" a Depop notification displays. I immediately tap on it to see what new listings have shown up for the pair of shoes I have been scouring high and low for — 2015 Andy Warhol x Chuck Taylor All-Star Hi 'Campbell's Soup' shoes.

Though photos of the shoes had originally been sent to me as a joke — my friend stated that the shoes were "the worst things I have ever laid my eyes on" — they have stuck in my head as the most glorious sneakers ever since.

The results on Depop are usually disappointing — all of the listings are either priced exorbitantly high or advertise a completely different product. However, it is imperative that I continue refreshing my searches until I find a suitable listing. Though I was originally look-

ing for shoes, a colorful flower-embedded resin ring caught my eye on the "Explore" page. At only \$12, who could say no? I don't need a new phone case, but what's the harm in buying a few more cases?

Well, speaking from experience, these little purchases do add up to quite a lot.

I have a love-hate relationship with shopping. I'll compulsively scroll through Mercari or Depop for hours when I should be, doing homework. I go through, liking and unliking listings, then change my mind and add random items to my cart until hours later, I wind up with tons of jewelry I know I'll never wear, shoes that are not even in my size, and an ugly-cute pair of pants that are starting to look more ugly than cute. Of course, I click checkout anyway.

However, my unfortunate spending addiction is not entirely my fault. I would like to place a

hefty amount of blame on stores for creating rewards programs.

The idea of receiving a few measly rewards points after spending over \$100 at one store is simply too alluring a deal for me to turn down. After all, I am only \$294 away from receiving a \$20 love note from Nordstrom!

According to an article provided by the American Addiction Centers (strong wording, I know), there are six varieties of shopaholics: compulsive, trophy, bargain, bulimic, big-spenders and collectors.

I definitely fall into the collector category. Until I have every single color and pattern of a certain clothing garment that I (may not necessarily) wear, my collection is painfully incomplete.

The solution to a severe shopping addiction? I haven't found one yet, but in the meantime, you can try praying to the shopping gods that your bank will forget to charge you. ♦

All graphics by JOANN ZHANG

NOSTALGIA

LETTER to my YOUNGER SELF

Annie Liu



Dear fifth grade me,

Hello! Your 15-year-old, sophomore-year self speaking here. You can carry on eating your sugary after-school snacks. You'll have no regrets about that. Just make the most of your time, OK?

You don't know me yet, but you will. Time will change everything. Time allows people to reinvent themselves and improve. It is a gift and a curse at the same time, leaving the dwellers in their memories, yet constantly changing every aspect of the world. Changes are hard to adapt to, but they always have a silver lining.

If you're wondering, I ended up in a completely different place, somewhere far away from where you live now, Shanghai. I'm in Saratoga, California.

No, it's not New York — not every state in America is New York. Anyway, I've been here since middle school. It's a brand new environment and a brand new group of people. Life will feel strange for quite some time after you move.

When you move, you will feel silenced by your incoherent English. For that period of time, you will feel like you lost your ability to speak, and all

you can do is silently agree, laugh, nod and point.

Having no clue what the people around you are talking about, you feel alone. Memes? What are memes? What are you supposed to say?

You will miss Shanghai badly. I beg you to appreciate your surroundings more and look around more. The rustling willow trees, the bustling neighborhood, that one pool you catch tadpoles in, your friends and your school will forever be in your memories. When you leave, you'll dream about going back.

I wish for you to try something new every day, go out a little bit more and spend more time with your friends around the neighborhood, instead of killing time on your iPad whenever you have the chance to.

I know you think you never had anyone's approval. That's OK, you don't have to seek other peoples' approval — you don't have to be the perfect student or meet the standards of a conventional girl. Your own self-acceptance is enough.

You've always been told to reach for success, but everything gets complicated, and life becomes an obstacle course that only gets more difficult. The real

challenge is to stay happy.

Nothing matters more than happiness. Though often misunderstood as synonymous to wealth and reputation, happiness comes from doing what you like and living as the person you want to be — more and more I've found that to be the ultimate goal in life.

But, you wonder, what about achievements? What about graduating from Harvard, becoming a CEO — succeeding in all of the conventional ways? Many people seek this kind of success in life.

But success isn't about having other people to look up to you. Real success occurs when you can take full responsibility for yourself, become self-sustaining, kind and appreciative.

A successful person is someone with passion who in turn pursues their dreams. That's hard to do, but it's the only way to genuine happiness.

Sometimes, people feel the need to fit into a mold, but that never works. Do you want to know why? Pretending to be someone that you are not will do you no good. You need to become your own character, a person who you design.

I know this sounds like some My Little Pony moral-of-the-story, but it is

a valuable thing to know.

Try to remember the good times. For instance, you deserve to brag a little about being the fastest runner at your elementary school.

Sprinting across the track with the wind blowing against your face, outrunning everyone running beside you — it felt like you were on top of the world.

Oh, and do you remember that time you won the reading project award?

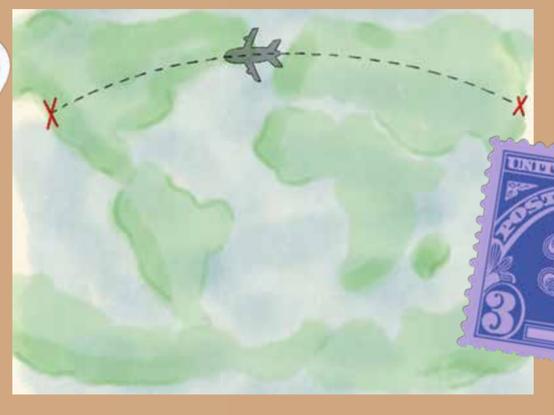
The storytelling award for doing a little skit about "Harry the Dirty Dog" with Cynthia and Lynne? Everyone praised your dog mimicking skills. And that laughter you brought to your peers! You were so proud. I'm proud of you, too.

It's going to be hard for you to adapt to moving across the globe and becoming fluent in a new language. You will struggle, and you will feel loneliness.

But do not fear. You'll manage. There is nothing to fear, for change is inevitable and struggles will only make you stronger.

I wish you well.

Sincerely,
Annie ♦



POKÉ-MEMORIES

Nicole Lu



At lunch, when the rest of the Foot-hill Elementary School 5th graders ran around swinging from monkey bars and dribbling basketballs, my friends and I sat on a bench, crumpled pieces of paper in our grubby hands, battling our invisible Pokémon.

It didn't matter that we looked absolutely crazy as we shouted out complicated names and moves among ourselves. As the rest of the school laughed and played around us, we immersed ourselves in our own imaginary world.

For those of you who know little about the franchise aside from Pokémon GO, allow me, a former die-hard fan of the TV show, to explain Pokémon.

Pokémon, short for the original Japanese name "Pocket Monsters," is a media universe created in 1996 by Satoshi Tajiri. The franchise is managed

by the Pokémon Company and was founded by gaming companies Nintendo, Game Freak and Creatures.

The video and trading card games revolve around a world where characters known as Pokémon trainers collect, train and battle fictional monsters.

Stumbling across a Pokémon encyclopedia one day at the school annual book fair, I immediately became infatuated with the cute and colorful species. Eevee — a brown, furry Pokémon with giant eyes — and its "evolutions," or stages of development, particularly drew me in (I mean, just look at their faces!). What began as an innocent obsession quickly became a major dent in my parents' wallets.

My friends and I collected hundreds of cards to ogle at and trade with each other at school. We didn't know

how to actually "battle" the cards (they were just for show), but we always sat down during recess, lunch and the five minutes before class to pull out our cards and subtly flex our Pokémon one another.

Back when Target sold party packs of Pokémon cards, I would collect the boxes and also the "limited edition" ones on Amazon.

By the time I grew out of my Pokémon phase, I probably had over 200 cards ranging from overpriced Target gift packs to the sparkly Japanese Charmander evolution cards that I convinced my mom to buy for my ninth birthday.

I was also fascinated with the TV show, and I recently decided to revisit the very first episode. Watching the 22-minute episode of 10-year-old Pokémon trainer Ash Ketchum and

his Pikachu made me feel like a proud parent watching childhood videos of their grown children.

The 90s animation style transported me back to the feelings of bliss and innocent happiness I had when I first binged the episodes nine years ago.

My Pokémon obsession lasted only a year at most, but it still feels so bitter-sweet looking back because I used to be so carefree about life.

Ash may still be 10 years old, but I've grown older and taken on the responsibilities of my teenage years.

Still, once college applications are over, I might just go back to my roots and challenge my friends to a Pokémon battle.

After all, I still have my stuffed bag of Pokémon cards tucked somewhere, ready to take me back to a world of pure, nostalgic fun. ♦

UNFORGETTABLE four-square

Ethan Lin



On a recent visit to Argonaut Elementary School, I spotted the only thing that still felt familiar to me: the four square court. It was nothing more than a few white grid lines, empty and blank against the black top, the paint faint and flaking off. The squares were uneven, crooked and lonely; overshadowed by the animated yellow monkey bars and slender blue slides of the playground.

In the seven or so years since I graduated, both the elementary school and I have changed. The classroom colors and teacher names are different. The exhilaration of feeling tanbark between my hands or teetering on the green plastic seesaws has long faded. Running down the grassy ridge toward the black rubber swings no longer carries the same thrill that it once did.

Yet the four unassuming white squares on the pavement remain the same and hold meaning for me.

Stepping into one of them, I felt a wave of nostalgia. It brought back memories of lunch breaks spent shrieking and laughing with friends, friendships made and broken on these courts.

This monochromatic battleground has held countless rounds of four square — a boisterous handball game set up in a two by two square grid, with four players standing in each of the squares. The only equipment needed to play is a rubber ball.

One person is designated as the "king," a role marked by a slashed line through their square. The king gets to initiate play, hitting the ball from their square into the square diagonal to theirs.

After this serve, the game begins, and each player proceeds to hit the ball into the others' squares.

The only rule is that the ball must bounce

once within the confined lines of your square before landing in the square of another player.

The game ends when the receiving player fails to send the ball back in the same manner — by hitting the ball directly into another player's square without having it bounce in their own first.

Once a player loses, the remaining players rotate squares counterclockwise to replace that person. The goal is to ascend into the king's square — a feat done by forcing out the king.

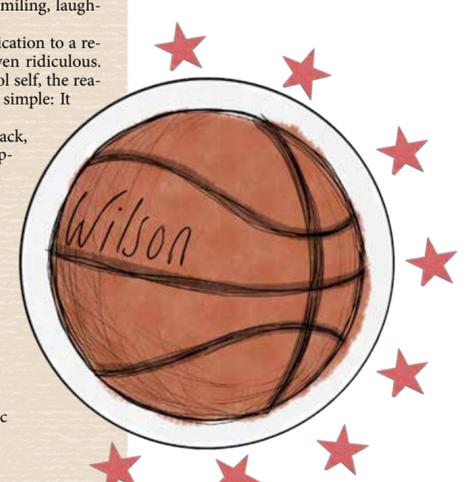
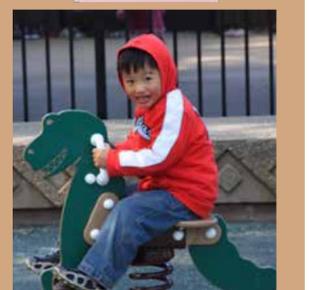
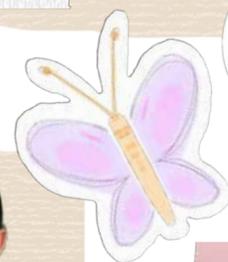
Hitting the ball outside of the two by two court will also result in a loss. With the game revolving around lines, there were often fierce arguments between friends. We would constantly bicker over whether the ball was in or out.

Winning was like popping bubble wrap, a perpetually obnoxious and satisfying affair, while losing was putting on wet socks, unfortunate and repulsive.

Typically, there was always a long line (no pun intended) of kids waiting to play, and everyone wanted to have the most playing time. I remember skipping out on lunch many times just so I could get to the black top earlier and claim the king's square.

My most memorable four-square experience happened after school, on a particularly rainy, cold, winter day.

Many students had already gone home, but my friends, Drew, Evan, Chris, and I decided to stay on campus a little longer — the thrill of playing the game was too compelling.



Seniors collaborate to release SoundCloud rap

BY Shreya Rallabandi
& Bill Yuan

"We got local musicians in the house!" DJ Delicious spoke into the microphone at the Homecoming dance on Sept. 25. Immediately after, the introductory bass notes of "srt!" blared through the speakers, hyping up the crowd on the dance floor in front of the quad steps.

"srt!" is senior Sahil Shaik's first single. He and senior Rishi Atreya have been experimenting with making and releasing rap music on SoundCloud, an online audio distribution platform.

"It made me very proud that people were singing the lyrics to my song at our school dance. I would've never guessed that would have happened," Shaik said. "It was very monumental."

Atreya, who goes by the artist name "Reesh," released his first single "Off This Earth 'Freestyle'" on July 10. Atreya first wanted to make music because he hadn't found music that catered toward his own preferences and wanted to fill that gap.

"Why can't I just listen to myself?" he said. "I never really had the drive to get famous or anything, and the desire to make good music is still what pushes me forward. But at the same time, now that I've created more music, I feel like there's been pressure to make more and more."

Not long after Atreya's single, Shaik released "srt!" under the artist name "luvshakes" on July 13. Shaik said he wanted to



Under the name "Reesh" and "luvshakes," seniors Rishi Atreya and Sahil Shaik make freestyle music on the platform, SoundCloud, with inspiration from rage music and melodic rap.

make a song that would be "extremely hype" while driving.

"I worked on 'srt!' for about two weeks, and it was a huge struggle," Shaik said. "I had to keep rerecording to hit notes, use presets and find lyrics that I liked. But hearing those lyrics while driving on the highway and with the bass turned up goes hard."

Shaik and Atreya's friendship and love for music have persisted throughout high school, and their music-making journey began the summer after their junior year. They began by making a Discord group chat and freestyle rapping (rapping on the spot) in calls and listening to music together.

"We would call each other and listen to

music often, and then we started getting more into freestyling — coming up with flow from the top of your head," Atreya said. "The more and more we did it, the more we felt we could create a song."

Their freestyle lyrics would often draw from their aspirations to "make it" in the music industry. Atreya has had this aspiration since his junior year, but never had the time to pursue it until last summer.

"I also wanted to start making music because it's nice to do on the side to get away from all the academic pressure, which is especially hard in Saratoga," Shaik said.

Shaik's style was heavily influenced by artists like Juice WRLD and B Lou, as well

as genres like '90s hip hop and the underground rap scene. His first single is mostly about a Dodge SRT, a car frequently referenced in this style.

Atreya's biggest inspirations are artists from the angelic rage music genre, including SoFaygo, Lil Tecca, Ski Mask the Slump God and XXXTENTACION.

In addition to these artists, the duo draw from their own personal experiences as well. "I don't like lying about what I say," Atreya said. "It's more of a projection of where I would like to be."

On Sept. 10, Atreya and Shaik collaborated on the single "rackies4u," which features a slower tempo in contrast with Atreya's style of fast rapping.

"Atreya was always more into classic rap and hard lyrics — the rap that's so fast that it's hype," Shaik said. "Personally, I'm more into melodies and not full on rapping."

Shaik and Atreya have received overwhelmingly positive feedback from their peers, with many of their friends advertising their releases on Instagram and other forms of social media.

The two are also working on getting Spotify creator accounts to establish themselves on more music streaming platforms.

Though neither has concrete career plans for music, they both aspire to continue it as a hobby.

"A career seems quite impossible, but of course I hope for it," Shaik said. "It's therapeutic for me, and it will never go away in that sense." ♦

Netflix original 'Squid Game' is a must-watch show

BY Vicky Bai

Currently topping U.S. charts and trending on social media platforms like TikTok, "Squid Game," a new Korean original released by Netflix on Sept. 17, is a must watch nine-episode series that features popular Korean actors Gong Yoo and Jung Ho-yeon. The thriller drama follows the journey of a middle-age man in Seoul who joins a secretive survival game along with 456 strangers to win a cash prize of 45.6 billion won, or \$39 million.

The survival game isn't just a typical bloody, Hunger Games-esque battle to win; it's an actual critique on poverty amid capitalism. The participants are forced to play popular childhood Korean games (red light, green light, tug-a-war, marbles) that turn out to be a deadly assessment of injustice.

Only one of them can survive. The cut-throat competition — only one contender can survive — literally and figuratively juxtaposes with the innocent children's games. The film fills the plot with tension as loyal

friendships are tested and cheaters are ratted out. It's no surprise that TikTok fans have taken a liking to the film, posting videos with the movie soundtracks and character analysis.

The diversity of participants in the game comments on the struggles from people of all backgrounds that join together in their financial struggle. Gihun, the middle-aged main character, faced divorce, a gambling addiction and business failures that left him with massive debt.

Another character, a Pakistani migrant named Ali, was exploited in his workplace and hasn't been paid in months, forcing him to leave his family. Sae-byeok, a North Korean defector, was robbed and separated from her mother, pressuring her to steal to survive. And Sang-woo, the supposedly rich businessman who graduated from a prestigious university, is secretly drowning in investment bankruptcy.

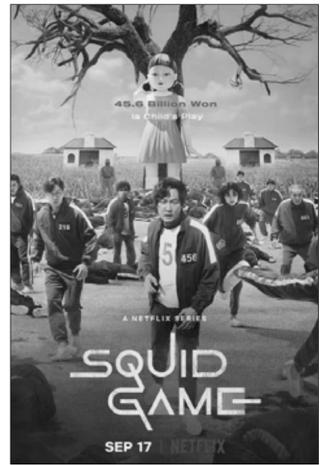
These 456 participants, initially have a choice to leave the deadly game if the majority democratically votes to do so. After

the first game, leaving over 200 participants dead, the remaining participants vote to leave the game and are put back into the real world. The film then documents the financial struggles the characters deal with that ultimately leave the characters begging to join the survival game again, where they would risk their lives for money.

"Squid Game" stands out in its focus on exposing the flaws of capitalism. The characters are all portrayed as just desperate people trying to survive the game to escape poverty. The rules in the game reflect rules in modern society, like the democratic vote early on in the film.

Even in the last episode, Gihun is forced to watch bystanders ignore a homeless man on the streets, shining light onto a pessimistic view of human morals.

A plot twist at the end does not disappoint either, though there are loose ends to be tied up in Season 2, which is predicted to be released in 2023. Anyone looking for a tension-packed, yet thought-provoking film should give "Squid Game" a go. ♦



Courtesy of NETFLIX

Blackpink's Lisa solo debuts with confident title track 'Lalisa'

BY Anamika Anand

Among the dark stage, Lisa's sparkling outfit stood out as she started her TV debut of her new single: "Lalisa." The stage exploded with energy as she and her backup dancers moved in sync to the bass beat of the song.

K-pop girl group BLACKPINK's Lisa Manoban, known as "Lisa," dropped her solo debut on Sept. 9 with title track "Lalisa." "Lalisa" reached a whopping 73.6 million views on YouTube in the first 24 hours.

"Lalisa" was released as part of Lisa's solo single album, a hip hop studio album sharing the same name. The song is versatile, with each verse having a beat with a different vibe, along with a music video that parallels the different sides of Lisa. The chorus is a repetition of her full first Thai name, "Lalisa," and has a simple but incredibly catchy melody that gets stuck in your head after the first listen.

The album also includes a second track titled "Money," an all-English track that

consists of rap for the most part.

The album has skyrocketed up charts since its release, selling 736,000 copies and breaking the record for fastest-selling female album in the first week, according to Forbes. Through this solo album, Lisa proved to audiences that she can shine on her own, outside of BLACKPINK.

Lisa is known for being Blackpink's lead rapper and main dancer, so releasing a solo album allows Lisa to bring her other strengths, like singing, as well as her Thai background to light.

Because Lisa doesn't have many opportunities in BLACKPINK to sing, hearing Lisa's silky-smooth and flexible voice is a pleasant surprise throughout the song. In addition to wowing fans with her melodious voice, Lisa also takes her rap to a higher level by including rap verses in both English and Korean.

Lisa told Billboard that she didn't think she could rap in English that fast, but her smooth flow suggests otherwise.

"I practiced for an hour, and after that I went in to record. I pushed myself very hard to complete it," Manoban said.

In addition to her effortless voice and bilingual rap, one of the best verses has to be the third verse, which is accented with traditional Thai music, making "Lalisa" even more authentic to Lisa. Lisa was born and raised in Buriram Province, Thailand, before getting accepted as a trainee into the South Korean entertainment agency YG Entertainment, where she later debuted as part of BLACKPINK.

It is rare for a non-Korean K-pop idol to be so successful. But in the process, Lisa has made her home country proud. She does a great job of being

true to and honoring her roots in the music video of "Lalisa," showing that she has not forgotten where she came from.

During a scene in the music video, for example, viewers can see Lisa wearing a traditional Thai golden headdress with a stunning golden outfit, sitting on a throne.

Throughout the rest of the music video, Lisa looks out of a colorful house decorated with palm trees and flowers to match her blue and magenta outfit. This entire set brings out her sweet and charismatic personality.

The way each of Lisa's different sides and strengths are conveyed in the music video is very captivating. One moment she looks innocent and angelic and the next she is a confident rap goddess, telling the world that she knows exactly who she is.

"Lalisa" is a bold and powerful track and what makes it even more lovable is the authenticity and truthness that Lisa incorporates in it. Let's hope Lisa will release a song in Thai and break even more records in the future. ♦

Time's up for overlooking sexual misconduct in rekindling of China's #MeToo movement

BY Hannah Lee

On Aug. 16, the Beijing police arrested Chinese-Canadian pop star Kris Wu on charges of rape, following an investigation that was launched after multiple females on Weibo (a Chinese version of Twitter) accused him of raping and drugging them. His arrest marked an era of women starting to speak up against sexual abuse in China.

The case against Wu began in early June when 19-year-old student Du Meizhu accused him of forcing her to drink until unconscious with him when she was only 17.

According to the Chinese media outlet NetEase, Du stated that Wu paid her 500,000 Chinese Yuan (~\$77,000 USD) in exchange for keeping quiet on the incident.

At the moment, Wu hasn't been charged with any crimes, but he has been apprehended by the Beijing police.

Wu, now 30, entered the entertainment industry in 2012 as a member of the K-pop band EXO, which became one of the highest-grossing boy bands both in South Korea and internationally.

After departing from the group

in 2014, Wu became widely adored as one of China's four "Princes of Pop." At the height of his fame, he starred alongside Vin Diesel in the action movie "xXx: Return of Xander Cage," played an NBA game with Justin Bieber and performed on stage with Travis Scott.

His arrest marked an era of women starting to speak up against sexual abuse in China.

When the first allegations against him surfaced, Wu denied all allegations on a now-deleted Weibo post, writing, "I've never raped, seduced, or drugged any female or underage female. I will go to jail myself if I ever do anything of that nature." He also stated that he would take all legal responsibility and went as far as accusing Du of fabricating the allegation.

Despite Wu's blanket denial response, Du's post opened the floodgates. Soon, over 30 girls, two of whom were minors, had posted allegations of sexual assault

against Wu.

The allegations quickly went viral and sparked an outpouring of support for the female victims. However, the cases also reignited a debate on whether the #MeToo movement can properly thrive in China's heavily censored and conservative environment.

In the past, talking about sexual assault was considered taboo in China. For instance, in 2015, a group of women known as the "feminist five" was detained by the government for organizing protests against domestic and sexual abuse by marching Beijing's streets and public transportation while wearing wedding dresses splattered with fake blood.

Since it took the United States by storm in 2018, the #MeToo movement has also spread to China as younger generations demand precautions for prevention. Though government censors and those against the feminist movement have attempted to shut down feminist posts circulating on Weibo, female activists have still managed to find a way to communicate on the #MeToo movement via emojis such as using the "rice" and "bunny" emojis, which

are pronounced "mi" and "tu," respectively, in Mandarin (alluding to the pronunciation of "me too"). The current reignition of the #MeToo movement in China has allowed women to speak up about sexual offenses and abuse.

For instance, three years ago, Zhu Jun, a popular news anchor, was sued by a screenwriter who accused him of groping and kissing her without consent. In response, Jun countersued her for defamation and refused to show up to the court trial. Since then, there's been no official press nor verdict and the victim's social media account was shut down.

In Wu's case, however, the attention from the public has skyrocketed to the point where authorities can't ignore it in fear of backlash, which may have played a significant role.

Since then, fans and fashion endorsements including Louis Vuitton, Lancôme and Porsche have slowly terminated their contracts with Wu. China's state censors have also scrubbed Wu's online presence entirely, taking down his Weibo account with 51 million followers and removing his wax figure from the Madame Tussauds



Courtesy of VARIETY

Pop Star Kris Wu was formally arrested on rape charges on Aug. 16.

Wax Museum.

As of now, there has been little update on Wu's status as he awaits further police investigation.

Nonetheless, the exposure Wu's case has brought to China has been so great that even government censorship can't stop word from spreading.

The more awareness brought to cases like these, the more power women and other victims have in getting their justice, even in a tightly controlled communist state. ♦

'Currents': Galactic synth elevates earthly concerns of today

BY JoAnn Zhang

Entering the world after a year-long submersion in my own fantastical, isolated world has been abrasive, to say the least. After the days I spent squirreled away in my dim, warm room, my return to the white fluorescence and speed of "normal" life feels like I'm being dragged half-awake at 4 a.m. and dunked into an ice bath. Since I'm no Saratoga swim teamer, this has been a cold hell for me.

What's softened the spiritual scratch of this jarring transition is music — specifically, the acclaimed album "Currents" by Tame Impala. A solo-produced persona by Kevin Parker, Tame Impala harnesses the influences of myriad genres — R&B, disco, pop — into their signature synth neo-psychedelia that drives "Currents." Throughout the album, Parker relinquishes control, questions unfulfilling intoxication, loses love, is mired in love triangles, navigates loves burgeoning, surreal and messy — the whole human shebang.

"Currents" blasts off with the foot-tapping "Let It Happen," in which spirited instrumentals hand off expertly with Parker's dreamy vocals, hypnotizing with the urge to let life happen (the titular refrain "So let it happen, let it happen" sums it up well). Yet an individualistic ambition ("If my take off fails, make up some other story / But if I never come back, tell my mother I'm sorry") and instrumental verve subvert the veneer of passivity for a message of purpose and destiny inhering within; the speaker has kept their passions and individuality tamped down but "can't fight it much longer" — an especially relevant sentiment in

a school where familial and cultural pressures constantly clip students' personal ambitions.

Another song that feels particularly tuned to adolescence is "Yes I'm Changing," a smooth, R&B influenced percussive number that's par-for-the-course dreamy, but especially emotional and personal, describing Parker's breakup with fellow musician Melody Prochet.

Lines like "Life is moving, can't you see / There's no future left for you and me" parallel high school relationships, where teens grow up and apart into their separate futures ("A world beyond that door / is calling out for you"). As someone who's found herself on this forking road a few times, I could only intuit the feeling the song articulates: the ache brimming in the strong forward-facing beat, the grief and faux-blasé stoicism.

At the outro, a coruscating tinkle promises hope and a brighter future.

Parker bows out with the funky, nimble "New Person, Same Old Mistakes" in which Parker is reborn, yet finds himself sleeved by the body of their old self, a struggle that quarantine-hatched identities can relate to as they re-enter society.

Having released four lauded albums over the span of a decade, Tame Impala is a fairly prolific artist. To me, "Currents" is the trophy of their oeuvre, a stunning display of Parker's perfectly married instrumental rigor and lyrical precision. Moreover, "Currents" invites the listener onto a psychedelic synth spaceship, where a seraphic-voiced Parker sings songs that speak straight from your bones and the reality of life — the most comforting companion anyone could have to return to the outside world. ♦



Courtesy of CNN

"In the Heights," taking place in the Latino barrio of Washington Heights, NY, follows the life story and complicated relationships of corner store owner Usnavi, played by Anthony Ramos, and aspiring fashion designer Vanessa, played by Melissa Barrera. This musical was directed by John Murray Chu.

'In the Heights': inspiring music but flat storyline

BY Kaasha Minocha

As I opened the doors to enter AMC Saratoga for the first time in June, inhaling the scents of buttery popcorn and cheesy nachos, I couldn't have felt happier to be back and ready to watch "In the Heights" after reading several promising reviews. As I exited the theater, I had to conclude it didn't live up to the hype — though it was a good movie.

"In the Heights," a John M. Chu-directed movie adaptation of Lin Manuel Miranda's stage musical, tells the story of several characters in the small Latino barrio of Washington Heights, New York.

Usnavi, played by actor Anthony Ramos, owns a local corner store and runs the struggling business with his cousin, Sonny, played by Gregory Diaz IV. Though Usnavi feels a special connection to Washington Heights' lively energy, camaraderie and people, he longs to return to the Dominican Republic, where he grew up. The story also follows Usnavi's complicated love affair with Vanessa (played by Melissa Barrera), who hopes to become a fashion designer and move downtown.

Additionally, Usnavi's friend Nina is a "genius" who has just finished her first year at Stanford University, where she feels like she doesn't fit in. She faces the pressure of succeeding in college as she represents the "suenos," or dreams, of her neighborhood.

The film blends generational conflict (Nina, a first-generation college student struggles with Abuela Claudia, the Washington Heights "grandmother," who left

Cuba and embraced uncertainty when she was young), cultural confusion, multiple love stories and the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act), which Sonny explores as an undocumented immigrant as he attempts to become eligible for U.S. citizenship.

Additionally, when Abuela Claudia sings her solo "Paciencia y Fe," I was in awe. The song touched on her experience and problems in Cuba and how moving to New York changed her life forever. Miranda's lyrics beautifully capture her obstacles, struggles and the sacrifices she went through as a young Latina.

Though "In the Heights" comes to life in the theater, its 2-hour runtime wore me down the further it dragged on. The film is told in a series of vignettes that reveal different characters' experiences, leading to an incohesive plot. The swirl of plot threads, tones, themes and experiences all feel like pieces of an incomplete puzzle, where most characters are left underdeveloped.

What's more, the conflicts and questions that the film aims to resolve are predictable. Usnavi finds the courage to ask Vanessa out, Nina goes back to Stanford after finding her belonging and Usnavi helps Sonny gain citizenship. And though the film clearly emphasizes the takeaway themes of family, hope and dreams, several scenes act as fillers, rather than adding to the storyline.

So, would I nominate it for an Academy Award for its screenplay? Unfortunately, not. But would I recommend watching this film for the "theater experience"? Most definitely. ♦

LG science class promotes primary research

THREE SHS STUDENTS TRAVEL TO SISTER SCHOOL FOR 6TH PERIOD TO WORK ON HANDS-ON PROJECTS

by Nidhi Mathihali
& Howard Shu

Every Blue Day after 4th period, senior Arya Ashok rushes to the parking lot along with juniors Jeremy Lu and Ishir Lkhani to hop onto one of the school's big white vans. Assistant principal Matt Torrens then drives them to Los Gatos High School for a 6th-period Advanced Science Research (ASR) class, an advanced laboratory science course where students work on laboratory and field research projects of their own design.

Ashok, Lkhani and Lu are currently the only three SHS students taking the course; five SHS students started the semester in the class but two had to drop it because of scheduling issues.

They are all taught by science teachers Cathy Messenger and Jennifer Lee, who are co-teachers for the same 6th period class. There are 25 students enrolled in ASR and this is the first year Lee has joined Messenger in teaching the class.

Students decide which subfields they wanted to study at the beginning of the year and receive the necessary materials to get started. Different subgroups include computer science, engineering, biomedical engineering and physical sciences.

Messenger believes the class takes a lot of effort, but is very satisfying, especially since she learns new things from students every year.

"I'm so excited that Ms. Lee wants to join me because I could not find another teacher to talk to me for years," she said. "It takes a lot of time for the teacher, but it's so worth it."

Ashok's experience with the research-based class has been positive.

"Since you get to design your own projects, it's very individual based," she said. "You have the freedom to go deeper and do research in the field that you want, whether that's theoretical physics or chemistry."

Ashok thinks ASR has allowed her to see how research is often done in the real world because she has been able to experiment with lab equipment not normally used in traditional science classes.

Ashok said that although the class suits

students who have spent a lot of time outside of school working on science projects, the class helps students of all expertise.

"I think this class is a great choice for everyone since you really get to explore and learn a lot about a specific subfield in research, which is something that not a lot of high schoolers have experience in," she said.

The class has been around for 11 years at Los Gatos High, but this is the first year it has been offered to Saratoga High students.

Students are expected to present their completed year-long work in March at the Synopsys Championship, a science fair hosted by the Santa Clara Valley Science and Engineering Fair Association. A select few of the projects qualify to advance to state and national fairs. ASR also helps students create their project materials for the Synopsys Science Fair by organizing the forms, board, presentation and abstract.

"The class is very project based compared to other technical courses, but you still have to work really hard on the overall project itself."

JUNIOR Jeremy Lu

Students create a wide variety of projects, ranging from creating a phone app to investigating a specific mechanism for causing cancer using a little microscopic worm, Messenger said.

Lu himself has been working on computer science projects, including one that uses artificial intelligence to detect pain from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in war veterans using artificial intelligence and fMRI brain scans; his other projects predict the thoughts of an immobilized person.

"For example, someone with quadriplegia isn't able to move at all, which makes my project effective because they

would be able to communicate without needing to talk or use braille," he said.

He believes that this class will help him further his research in these fields.

"It's very similar to the STEM classes [STEM A and B] offered in Redwood Middle School," Lu said. "The class is very project based and not as focused on the grade compared to other technical courses, but you still have to work really hard on the overall project itself."

Lu said that because there are not a lot of tests or assignments, it is significantly different from rigidly structured classes like calculus or physics.

Instead, students have been focusing on note-taking, documentation, researching articles and performing labs. This familiarizes students with both the technical and the research processes.

opportunity since it showcases my abilities, and I'm confident in how my results [for the Synopsys Science Fair] will be because I know I put in and will continue to put in a lot of work." ♦

When she visited the University of Wisconsin, she was also able to discover the campus energy and environment by observing the students attending summer school there.

"Originally, I really wanted to go to a city for college. But when I was visiting schools, I realized college towns seemed a bit more fun than I had thought," Bettinger said. "By visiting these schools, I'm now more open to different schools than I was going into it."

Along with Bettinger, guidance administrative assistant Gita Ramanathan added that campus tours have several benefits.

"Having done in-person tours as a parent myself with my now college-going kid, due to COVID-19, seniors are missing out on the following aspects: the ability to speak with current students, sitting in a lecture, an opportunity to talk to a professor in their major and gauging the vibe," Ramanathan said. "However, our school-hosted in-person visits have been very effective as students are able to meet with the representative and understand their campus life and admission guidelines."

Senior Anthony Zheng also visited Northwestern University and the University of Chicago over the summer.

He noted that while he thinks that college visits are informative, they are not necessarily a necessity — especially considering the inconvenience of traveling during the pandemic.

In fact, his primary reason for making the East Coast trip wasn't to visit colleges, but rather, to visit his older brother, who was working an internship in Chicago at the time.

When senior Morgan Bettinger set foot on the Boston University campus, it felt surreal. The images and virtual tours that she had seen on Google didn't do justice to the quiet bustle of student activity and warm sunlight shining on the open walkways, nor could they capture the peppy lilt of Bettinger's tour guide, a student who gestured enthusiastically at the expanse of the Charles River.

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Junior Jeremy Lu (bottom right) works on a candy chromatography lab report with his group.

His favorite part of the class is that there are always opportunities to improve his projects.

"Ms. Messenger is a teacher who genuinely cares about how you're doing in the class," Lu said. "They both focus on your mental state."

Lu believes the class is rewarding for people who spend a lot of time outside of school working on projects, as they can continue to develop their work in a structured class.

"I think ASR is open to a lot of people who really enjoy their fields and just want to develop it more," Lu said. "I am really glad for this

opportunity since it showcases my abilities, and I'm confident in how my results [for the Synopsys Science Fair] will be because I know I put in and will continue to put in a lot of work." ♦

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College visits offer insights but are still limited

by EstherLuan
& KaashaMinocha

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Senior Morgan Bettinger stands outside at the front of the NYU Stern School of Business during her college visit tour, which she took over the summer amid COVID-19 restrictions.

"It was nice to get an idea of the environment and culture of each campus, but it didn't really inspire any drastic changes in my college list," Zheng said.

Remaining COVID-19 guidelines and the aftermath of several pandemic restrictions meant that several of the buildings on the two campuses Zheng visited were closed to visitors or for construction purposes, affecting his ability to visit both of the entire campuses.

Nevertheless, Zheng said the student-led tours were still a great resource for learning more about programs and facilities on campus.

"I would definitely still recommend seniors to take [college] visits if there's a convenient opportunity for them," Zheng said. "It gives you a good feel for what the college is like and if you'd fit well in the environment, but it isn't a make-or-break experience." ♦

Students and teachers discuss effectiveness and alternatives to textbook use for history classes

By CarolynWang

Sitting at her desk in world history during online learning last year, junior Jenny Chan struggled to keep her eyes open as she read her history textbook.

Despite difficulties in staying engaged with the material, Chan found herself most interested in the material during world history and U.S. History teacher Michael Betz's lectures.

"The way he retells stories from the textbooks changes boring facts to intimate anecdotes," she said.

Although textbooks are a staple in most history classes across the country, some teachers and students find them to have downsides.

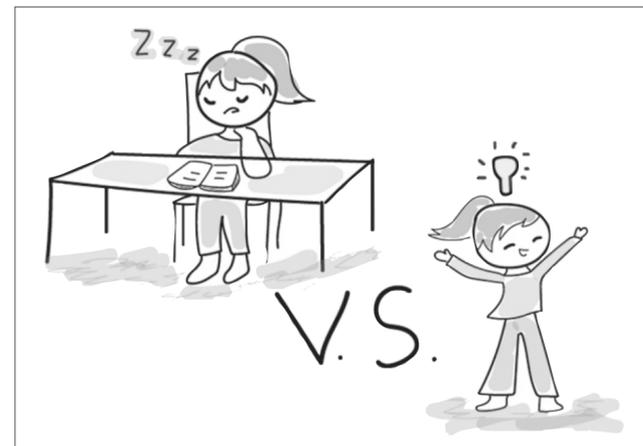
"There is so much they have to do in that space," Betz said. "A lot of the time, they just dedicate events like the War of 1812 to one paragraph and don't mention them in a lot of detail."

"Textbooks are secondary sources... To my knowledge, most teachers would prefer primary sources."

HISTORYTEACHER Michael Betz

In the past, the district would decide which textbooks to buy in part based on which company offered the best deal, since each book costs about \$160. History textbooks used by Saratoga High and Los Gatos High are traditionally evaluated by a textbook committee and are used in the curriculum for an average of seven years before being switched.

In recent years, Betz has noticed textbook decisions being made with fewer teachers in the discussion.



Graphic by CAROLYN WANG

"I am not one to normally compliment textbook companies," Betz said. "Based on constraints, they have to decide what is and isn't important, [analogous to] agenda setting in the media."

A comprehensive study by The New York Times contrasting Texas with California history textbooks published by companies like Pearson and McGraw-Hill indicated that history books are altered by publishing companies depending on the most popular political beliefs of the state or educational institution.

California and Texas, two of the largest textbook purchasers in the country, lean liberal and conservative, respectively.

In one example presented in the article, McGraw-Hill's California-edition U.S. history textbooks contained annotations on the Bill of Rights noting that "rulings on the Second Amendment have allowed for some gun regulations," while the Texas-edition did not.

In the remote school year, Betz also asked students in each of his World History classes for their opinions on the textbook "World History: The Modern World" by Elizabeth Ellis And Anthony Esler, some of whom commented that "it was standard" but preferred to get their information from primary sources and the news.

Chan did not consider textbooks to be the most effective tool in her history education.

When she answered the homework questions from the book, she estimated that the information stayed in her mind for one or two weeks before vanishing.

"I have the memory of a goldfish, so I believe that most students who also have such memory capacity share my sentiments," Chan said.

Chan said that finishing the textbook questions was more of a side task she tried to do as quickly as possible, and not something she was interested in.

Rather, Chan found herself immensely engaged during Betz's synchronous lectures, which consisted of a mixture of current events, historical topics from the book and updates related to the school.

Chan said finishing the textbook questions was more of a side task, not something she was interested in.

Chan said that she felt alternate learning strategies beyond the textbook immensely enriched her learning experience, particularly in history classes where memorization plays a large role.

"Anytime I am allowed to learn through primary sources or conversation, I feel that what I am learning is more worthwhile because the information stays with me," Chan said. ♦

Falcon Family Peer Tutoring offers peer guidance

by AtreyDesai
& SarahZhou

When struggling with a class or looking for test preparation support, students often turn to expensive tutoring centers like Mathnasium and Elite Prep for help. On average, students will spend between \$25 to \$80 an hour for private tutoring, with some high-end tutors costing upwards of \$200 per hour, according to NBC news.

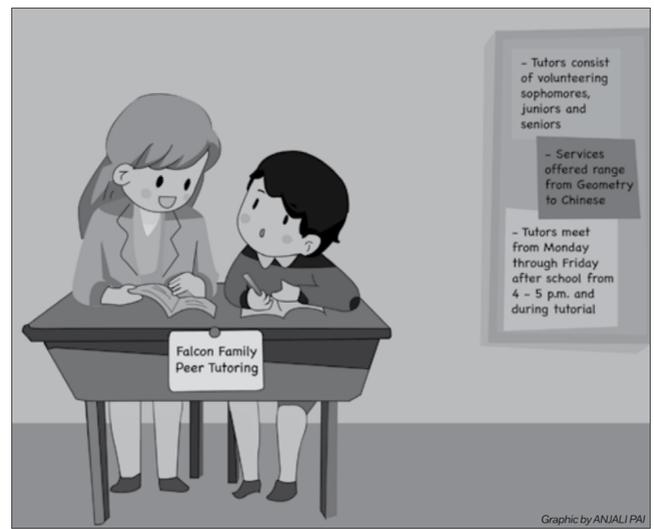
In an effort to discourage families from needing to rely on these programs, principal Greg Louie started the Falcon Family Peer Tutoring Program last October.

The program meets from Monday through Friday after school in the Student Center from 4-5 p.m. and during tutorial. Volunteer students are a mix of sophomores, juniors and seniors; subjects covered range from geometry to Chinese.

Louie said the program was inspired by the SAINTLY Tutors Program, which he had previously established during his time as principal at Santa Teresa High School. Over the course of a year, the SAINTLY Tutoring program helped more than 100 students.

Though the nearly year-old Falcon Family Peer Tutoring program is still working on establishing credibility within the community, the program has received over 60 tutor requests in the past two years and Louie ultimately hopes to achieve the same level of student participation as Saintly's Tutoring program.

The goal of the tutoring program is to provide accessible academic support for



students.

"[Saratoga students] have a history of depending upon adult and outside tutoring organizations; our students and teachers are ultimately the best aides for our students who have needs," Louie said.

This year, the program is offering both one-on-one services and group tutoring to SHS and Redwood Middle School students.

Unlike last year's fully virtual program, tutees can request to meet either on Zoom or in-person after school, Louie said.

Tutors, including senior Shreyas Rana, have found that providing an in-person tutoring option has allowed students to feel more comfortable asking for help.

"I feel like [in-person tutoring] is more open and natural for students to come in

and ask questions, and it seems easier to talk with them because it's like a friendly conversation," he said. "Online, it feels a little forced and it's harder to get ideas across."

The program currently has 13 active tutors, and over 30 students from both SHS and Redwood Middle School have filled out a tutor request form for a tutor.

Tutors have joined the program for various reasons, ranging from wanting to be a community volunteer to feeling a sense of civic responsibility.

Junior Arav Panchmatia said he joined as a tutor to ensure that underclassmen can have a stress-free homework experience.

Although this is his first year as a tutor, Panchmatia, who tutors in math, physics and computer science, has already implemented a

The trash dilemma...

WHERE DOES IT GO?

By Sarah Thomas & Sarah Zhou

Every Friday, a McNeilus garbage truck pulls into the back parking lot to empty gray recycling bins. In over three months, however, the waste in these bins — filled with too much garbage and not enough recyclables — have not been taken away.

This is one of the major challenges the school faces in trying to become greener. To reduce waste on campus, students need to start using recycling bins correctly and more total recycling bins are needed, school officials say.

The recycling bins currently on campus have all been rejected by West Valley Collection for over three months as rotten food mixed in with other items makes the entire bin invalid for recycling.

One problem is the gray color of the bins, which students mistake as indicating they're for trash. Until new blue recycling bins from West Valley arrive, this will continue to be the case.

Promoting recycling awareness

Paul Weir, the school's plant manager, oversees campus maintenance and facilities. He sees the positive efforts some students have made but also the difficulty at succeeding in the daily battle against the tons of waste the school produces annually.

With a limited number of outdoor recycling bins on campus, it's essential that they actually be filled with recyclable items, Weir said. Items like food, used napkins or plastic wrap are often discarded into bins by students after lunch.

"It's taken me months to get the recycling bins dumped. I even told them 'I'll pay you, come and take it as trash, I need it off the campus,'" Weir said.

When the school's roughly 1,230 students carelessly toss non-recyclable items into recycling bins, the waste adds up, Weir said.

"This high school is a machine: It has people in it from 5 in the morning till 10 at night, seven days a week," he said. "The trash that's generated comes from the community, the students, the cafeteria and the classrooms."

To combat this problem, Weir has recently spoken to West Valley Collection & Recycling, the school's waste management service, about disposing of old bins and purchasing 30 new bins.

However, according to Weir, the delivery of the new recycling bins has continually been delayed due to unresponsiveness from West Valley Collection's supervisors.

And while having additional recycling bins would theoretically be more helpful, Weir said the

added bins wouldn't be as effective without a change in students' actions.

"I would love to and need to appeal to the students," he said. "I really need students to be educated and care enough to recognize what is recycling and what isn't."

Recently, Weir has started working with the Green Team, a student-run club on campus, to address school waste and environmental consciousness.

Last year, in an effort to promote recycling on campus, the Green Team partnered with ASB to draw attention to the recycling bins in the quad by painting and decorating them.

However, policy changes have been harder to implement. According to assistant principal Matt Torrens, it is difficult for the school and club to work together to implement substantial change due to a lack of consistency caused by yearly turnovers in club leadership.

"The projects take until October to get rolling, the holidays are difficult and then we have a couple of months before AP testing and clubs go quiet," Torrens said.

Despite this hurdle, the Green Team's primary goal this year is to make significant progress on improving the school's recycling habits, said the club's president,

senior Cici Xu.

The club plans to educate students on proper waste disposal practices and encourage students to learn more about ecological advocacy.

Xu hopes that composting services on campus will be in place by the end of the year, and more attention will be brought to the issue of adding solar panels to help meet the school's energy needs.

Weir and the Green Team have had difficulties implementing change due to COVID-19 health guidelines that prevent the sorting and filtering of collected recycling. As a result, since before the pandemic began, the school has regularly needed to discard all contaminated recycling.

Reducing energy usage

Though the school has not completed any recent analysis of its carbon footprint, an energy audit conducted in 2011 showed the district's energy usage far exceeded that of neighboring districts included in the study, with SHS consuming 25.2 percent more energy

on average.

Many of the report's suggestions, including updating lighting systems and installing solar panels at both Los Gatos and Saratoga High, have gone unimplemented, as the cost of the projects, according to the energy audit, would total to nearly \$2 million with a payback time of 11 years.

However, as more houses and institutions switch to sustainable energy sources, the price of solar panels has gone down nearly 70% in the past decade, according to a study from the Solar Energy Industries Association.

In 2016, the Green Team was able to introduce a proposal for solar panels to the school board, but the idea was abandoned because the cost of solar panels takes too long to break even.

Another complaint that has kept them from being instituted at the school are concerns about how they would look and change the aesthetic of the neighborhood.

Installing solar panels would also require significant outside funding.

Despite recent talk from the board of installing solar panels at both schools, Measure E Bonds are not enough to cover installation, superintendent Michael Grove said.

Solar panels aside, the school has introduced methods to reduce energy usage including the purchase of new windows and blinds that conserve electricity by reducing energy loss through windows, as well as upgrading the air conditioning and heating capabilities to become more efficient and comply with the county's indoor COVID-19 guidelines.

Now that students are back to in-person school, the administration is shifting its focus from online learning to working on reducing SHS' carbon footprint by reducing paper and plastic dependence, principal Greg Louie said.

Although various school officials have echoed this sentiment, little concrete action is visible on campus.

Though the Green Team's and Weir's efforts are important, Weir said that they alone are not enough.

He said the student body needs to care about environmental change, help promote recycling and practice proper recycling habits, as unrecycled trash adds up, further contributing to greenhouse gas emissions and climate change.

"We've started ecological dominoes that are falling in sequence," Weir said. "We can calculate our carbon footprint and predict things, but we need to do something about it. The students need to care." ♦

FALL MEANS FIRE SEASON

By Christina Chang & Lynn Dai

While teaching one of her remote learning classes in August 2020, English teacher Amy Keys learned that she needed to evacuate her home in UC Santa Cruz (UCSC) faculty housing within 12 hours due to the CZU Lightning Complex fire. After finishing her 7th period class, she began packing photographs, important documents, her adult children's long-ago artwork, writings and keepsake items from her travels.

Keys stayed with her sister-in-law in Berkeley for a week until she was notified it was OK to return home. She recalled ashes falling from the red, gray sky and news reports showing the landscape up in flames. The fire ultimately reached within a mile of the UCSC campus.

Reflecting on her experience with the fire season last year, Keys said she's nervous about this fire season and others to come.

"I feel really grateful and lucky so far [to not be experiencing that this year]," Keys said. "I really feel for the people who are experiencing the fires and suffering right now."

California's history of megafires dates back to 1932. Yet according to a 2021 New York Times article, the ten largest fires since then have occurred since 2010, with the 2020 August Complex Fire burning over a million acres and the 2018 Mendocino Complex burning over 450,000 acres.

So how does California plan to solve this problem? Ironically, through more prescribed fires — low-intensity ground fires that whittle down the fuel load necessary for large fires to burn — a solution that's proving to be the "most promising [method of fire] prevention," according to a National Geographic article. One hundred years of misguided forest management aimed at suppressing fires has "allowed two to four times the normal amount of woody fuel to accumulate even as the biggest, healthiest, most fire-resistant trees were being logged out."

Despite strong support from the scientific community, such preventative measures have a long way to go before their implementation starts taking effect. In February 2020, a Nature Sustainability study reported that California would need to burn 20 million acres to restabilize in terms of fire.

Even so, the California

Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CALFIRE) has already started taking action. Starting in 2019, CALFIRE planned to spend a billion dollars over the next five years from the state's cap-and-trade climate fund for restoration, fuel reduction and prescribed fire and new research, among other purposes.

County updates wildfire protocols

In response to the Dixie Fire, Santa Clara County has updated its wildfire protocols, a set of procedures that come into effect when the state declares the beginning of wildland fire season, which began on May 10 this year. Wildland fire season usually lasts for four months, spanning from June through September. In recent years, the window has expanded both earlier and later.

The protocols for handling these fires are always evolving. Captain Justin Stockman said that the ten fire departments of the Santa Clara

County Fire Department (SCCFD) reassess their response each time new ideas, hazards, technologies and capabilities emerge.

Recently, they deployed the routine use of tactical water tenders, which quickly transport additional water where fire hydrants aren't available.

Stockman said the department prepares for fires by conducting periodic training and drills to avoid delay. As an agency, the SCCFD uses a three-pronged approach to fire: education, prevention and emergency response.

"The SCCFD firmly believes that the best way to fight a fire is by keeping it from starting in the first place," Stockman said in an interview with The Falcon.

When a fire starts, the department tries to dispatch a large force to overwhelm it before it has an opportunity to become too large and difficult to control.

This approach is an effort to prevent large fires such as the two most severe fires in Northern California last year: the SCU Lightning Complex fire, which burned in eastern Santa Clara County and was the fourth largest fire in recorded California history, and the

CZU Lightning Complex, which burned in San Mateo and Santa Cruz County and threatened western Santa Clara County and certain parts of Santa Cruz County, including near the UCSC campus where Keys and her husband live. According to Stockman, these fires strained resources statewide and caused unhealthy air quality across the region.

Since May 10, there have been 76 vegetation fires in SCCFD's jurisdiction. However, Stockman said this data is "imperfect because it only reflects the communities where SCCFD provides emergency response, and in many cases it is difficult to determine whether a fire impacted or threatened vegetation." Additionally, this number only accounts for a small proportion of the total number of incidents: the 1,430 emergencies in Aug. 2021 categorized as Emergency Medical Service, service, fire Alarm, hazardous conditions and other types, fire and rescue make up less than two percent of the total.

"While these big fires are a stark reminder of the wildfire risk that exists throughout Santa Clara County and the Bay Area as a whole, they only tell part of the story," Stockman said. "There are hundreds of other fires sparked in Santa Clara County each summer that never grow large enough to make the news or enter into our common memory."

According to Stockman, the SCCFD has held all vegetation fires this season to less than 1 acre, the result of effective pre-fire planning, resource deployment and early detection and dispatch.

"Every action taken by our community to prevent wildfire makes a difference and we are endlessly thankful for their continued and consistent efforts," Stockman said.

As a part of their countywide fire service review, the Santa Clara County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) held a community meeting on Aug. 25. During the open session, county residents provided input on the community's fire and emergency medical service, with many upholding the sentiment to prioritize fire prevention.

Junior prepares for wildfire season

Junior Kaelli Trateng, who lives in the mountains up Oak Street past Madonna Cemetery, recalled that from her room window, she could see the flames of one of last September's fires.

However, her house was separated from the

fire by a valley. She felt that it "wasn't an immediate threat."

Still, Trateng's family was constantly checking the fire zone map, which indicated who would have to evacuate, and her home got near the edge of the evacuation zone multiple times. While they had planned an evacuation route along with a place to stay, they ultimately didn't need to leave their home.

She said her family was mostly impacted by the poor air quality caused by the fires. "We had to stay indoors and buy ten air filters. We also shared them with our neighbors because it was really bad out there," Trateng said. "And we closed all the windows and couldn't have air conditioning since we didn't want the bad air coming in. It's just like you're stuck in your home."

In preparation for this year's wildland fire season, Trateng said her dad cut down the brush surrounding their house a couple times a month so that if something catches on fire, it wouldn't be near their home.

She advises that others ensure they have an escape route in mind, a place to stay, maintain defensible space around their property and have essentials ready to go in the case of being evacuated.

Student advocates for relief support

Beyond the Saratoga community, however, farming communities that have been heavily impacted by wildfires in recent years are more vulnerable to suffering.

To combat this, Green Team president Cici Xu, the lead of the Saratoga/Los Gatos City Action team of Silicon Valley Youth Climate Action (SVYCA) and co-lead of its State Advocacy team, advocated for state-level welfare bills concerning wildfire relief with state legislators over the summer.

"Youth voices are very powerful ... After all my advocacy, I've realized you should definitely be yourself!"

SENIOR Cici Xu

"I'm really afraid these wildfires will exacerbate the gap between vulnerable and more well-off communities," Xu said.

Xu urged students to be more attentive to wildfires in the news and join youth coalitions in the Bay Area, as she believes students can empower and represent struggling communities through these organizations.

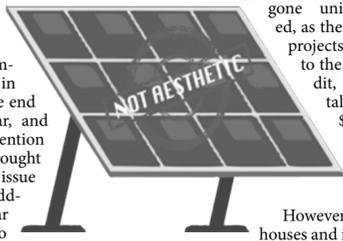
"Youth voices are very powerful," she said. "After my two years of advocacy work, I've realized that you should definitely believe in yourself."

Xu, who was born in China and came here to live only a few years ago, recalled when school days there shut down because AQI levels soared above 300. The kids there could do nothing about it.

In contrast, Xu said that in the U.S. there are enough resources to "even start your own initiative if you're really passionate about the environment."

Xu hopes SHS can integrate the topic more into their science curriculum.

"There are a lot of ways for students to get connected with wildfires in welfare," she said, noting the Green Team at school and the Youth Climate Action Coalition. "I feel like we can challenge ourselves to be on the same page as the environmental awareness communities in other schools. We need to keep our connection with nature alive." ♦



FOOTBALL

Falcons kick off league season with 1-1 record

BY Andy Chen, Jonny Luo
& Nikhil Mathihalli

The league football season kicked off triumphantly with a Homecoming game win on Friday, Sept. 24 against Monta Vista, followed by a disappointing loss to Gunn High School on Friday, Oct. 1.

The team's 1-1 league record comes after four mostly lopsided preseason losses to Aragon, Westmont, Willow Glen and San Mateo.

Loss against Gunn High

Coming off their first win during the Homecoming game, the Falcons lost 49-0 in an away game to Gunn. The Falcons are currently 5th in the El Camino League.

Junior running back and wide receiver Paolo Navarro partially attributed the loss to fatigue from numerous events during Homecoming week. Additionally, the team has been affected by a small roster and lack of experience, with many of the junior athletes having missed out on play time in previous seasons. Navarro started playing football in his freshman year, and was unable to play for half the JV season due to a sprained ankle.

In his sophomore year, pandemic restrictions did not allow the JV team to play as much. Navarro also had to swap into

the varsity team as a backup due to Tyler Chaffin, a Class of 2021 alumni running back on the varsity team, getting a hamstring injury. He played two JV games and two varsity games — the last varsity game was canceled because of a COVID-19 case on the team. Navarro said that the situation is similar for many other players on the team.

For Navarro, the loss to Gunn was disheartening and demotivating, especially since the team had hoped to carry their momentum from their previous win.

"After Homecoming, everyone was really happy, and I personally wished that this last game hadn't ruined the happy state everyone was in," Navarro said.

Falcons win Homecoming game

As students, parents and teachers watched from the packed stands in awe, the Falcons beat the Monta Vista Matadors 31-14 on Friday, Sept. 24, marking the crown jewel of a week of Homecoming festivities.

The team had much to prove going into the game; it was both the Homecoming game as well as the team's first league game.

"We knew we were going to be in front of a large crowd and playing an opponent that was very beatable, so we wanted to show SHS what we were capable of," said senior Parsa Hashemi, a team captain and wide receiver. "We're straight up tired of all the hate we've



As middle linebacker senior Parker Smith blocks two Monta Vista players head on, junior running back Paolo Navarro takes the ball and sprints past the Monta Vista team's defense.

received [for our past performances] and wanted to prove all our doubters wrong."

The Falcons took a 10-0 lead in the first quarter behind a rushing touchdown and field goal from Hashemi. By halftime, the Falcons had extended their lead to 24-6 following two rushing touchdowns in the third quarter from Hashemi and Navarro. Though the Falcons were stagnant at 24-14 in the third quarter, one more rushing

touchdown from Hashemi in the fourth was enough to secure the team's first win of the season.

"This was an extremely special moment for me as I've been waiting for this moment since freshman year: to play on Homecoming night as a senior," Hashemi said. "This was such a meaningful win for the seniors. We worked so hard and to see it all come together was really rewarding." ♦

CROSS COUNTRY

As members increase, teams pick up the pace

BY Vicky Bai
& Nicole Lu

Senior co-captain Amoli Vanavadiya glanced at the clock as she raced by on the last leg of the Baylands Santa Clara Valley Athletic League (SCVAL) meet on Sept. 21. The numbers flashed red: 23 minutes and 7.9 seconds for 5,000 meters, a new personal best.

Such success contrasts with last spring's pandemic-delayed and -restricted season. The number of cross country members was limited to around 10 members per gender last year due to pandemic concerns, but the two teams have increased to a normal 60 members total this year.

"Last year, we had less people and less meets, most of which were around the school," Vanavadiya said. "We now have less restrictions, so there are team nights and more bonding activities. I think we can go pretty far from here and I'm looking forward to the future."



Dance

While the girls on the team set their sights on breaking personal records in the aftermath of last year's unconventional season, returning senior and boys' cross country running star and co-captain, Harrison Dance, is in the process of securing a spot as a college cross country and track athlete at possible destinations like Georgetown, UC Berkeley and UCLA.

Dance has consistently placed high in both cross country and track meets. His accomplishments include winning the CCS Division III cross country championships in 2019, winning the Mt. SAC competition in 2019 and holding the current school record for the mile, running a time of 4:12.26 last school year.

"I want to run cross country and track in college because I've had a really fun time running out here," Dance said. "The track is where I've made most of my friends, so I want to continue doing that in college."

The boys' cross country team is looking to qualify for the CIF State Championships

in November, and Dance has made it a personal goal to qualify for the national cross country meet. He also hopes to break the school record for the 3,200 meters race — he currently runs a 9:15.20, just short of record holder 2015 alumni Steven Sum's time of 8:56.86.

"I'm aiming to be a top seven runner for cross country in college," Dance said. Recently, Dance placed first place in the Lowell Invitational on Sept. 11, Baylands on Sept. 21 and the Westmoor Ram Invitational on Sept. 25, which were "unexpected but exciting" because he hadn't raced for more than a year.

Boys' cross country has had these three meets along with the Artichoke Invitational on Oct. 2 at Half Moon Bay High School, the Crystal Springs Invitational on Oct. 2 at Crystal Springs and the second SCVAL meet at Baylands on Oct. 5. Their upcoming 42nd Asics Clovis Invitational will be held Oct. 9 at Woodward Park.

The girls had an additional opening meet at Lynbrook High School on Sept. 7. Additional star runners on the girls'

team include sophomore Sara Bright and juniors Elizabeth Stoiber, Elsa Blom and Isha Goswami. Other key boy athletes are sophomore George Hu and juniors Anand Agrawal and Wasil Khan.

"I think we can go pretty far from here [the Lynbrook meet] and I'm looking forward to the future."

SENIOR Amoli Vanavadiya

As the teams start picking up in mileage and pace, both teams hope to make the post-pandemic season the best it can be.

"I'm just grateful for the coaches and everyone on the team who surrounds me with a positive attitude," Dance said. "We have a great community and we're really excited to be back working together. I'm so proud of how close the team has gotten." ♦

GIRLS' GOLF

Freshman finds love for sport after suffering an injury

BY Harshini Velchamy
& Joann Zhang

Walking up the hill at the 9th green at the Saratoga Country Club, freshman No. 1 golfer Sarah Lim took a deep breath as she placed her marker behind her ball. She analyzed the slope of the green, replaced her ball, picked up the marker and stuck it back onto her visor. With a clear mind, she moved her putter face back, let her arms take control and watched as the ball sank into the hole, contributing to her score of 42 against Los Gatos on Sept. 22.

Lim, despite her youth, has been the leader for the team in each match. After losing two members of the travel team to graduation last year, the team had

struggled to fill its spots with experienced members. Those losses have been offset by the additions of Lim and freshman Melanie Lee. While off to a rough start with losses against Palo Alto, Monta Vista and

Lynbrook, the team won two matches against Los Gatos and tied with Gunn. With their 2-1-5 record, they stand 5th in the league. Lim currently is the league's 7th ranked player.

Lim has been playing golf recreationally since she was 11. Her love for the sport originated from her dad and grandparents, who took to playing after a debilitating undiagnosed foot injury forced her to quit dance

and soccer. "I got a bunch of x-rays and an MRI but no one could figure out what was wrong with

my foot. I was in a boot for five months," she said. "The worst part was quitting [dance and soccer], but it got a lot better once I started playing golf."

After continuing to play golf recreationally throughout middle school, Lim practiced in her backyard during quarantine. Lim started competing in tournaments during winter of 2020, devoting almost every spare minute to the sport.

"I would practice almost every day for about two to three hours after school, practicing until sunset," Lim said. "Sometimes, I would even stay after sunset and use my phone flashlight to practice more. It was super time consuming, but I didn't mind because I'm a perfectionist so I would set a goal and stay till I got it."

Over the summer, Lim played in age-grouped Junior Golf Association of Northern California (JGANC) tournaments, consistently placing in the top three to five. Lim has been competing in Junior Tour of Northern California (JTNC) tournaments over the past few months, placing top 10 in the majority of them. She has also qualified for American Junior Golf Association (AJGA) tournaments.

Lim plans to continue competing throughout high school, aiming to play golf in college and potentially beyond. While unsure whether she would try to play professionally, Lim just wants to focus on getting better.

"I sacrificed a lot of my time, effort and even some of my social life," Lim said, "but in return, I made new friends and I get to compete in a sport I love." ♦



Lim

BOYS' WATER POLO

Falcons' victory over Lynbrook key to their 11-0 start

BY Sam Bai, Andrew Lin
& Esther Luan

As the clock counted down to the end of the final quarter, senior Kendal Jarvis launched a long range shot at the opposing team's goal. It hit the goalie's fingers, then tipped into the net, scoring a point as the buzzer sounded; the Aug. 31 game ended with a 19-6 victory against Santa Teresa.

As of Oct. 7, the boys' water polo team was 12-0. After their Oct. 12 game against Lynbrook, currently placed second in League, and their Oct. 14 game against Wilcox, the team will go on to play against Cupertino on Oct. 19 and Milpitas High School on Oct. 21.

The players attribute their success to the chemistry they've built over the years. According to senior set defender Chris Wu, the team has developed mastery of their key plays, as most of the starter senior varsity players have been on the team for at least three years.

"Our sense of self-responsibility and pushing each other allows us to constantly improve ourselves," said captain and attacker senior Marcus Kuo, who is currently the leading scorer of the varsity team.



Senior set defender Chris Wu winds up to take a shot in a home game against Milpitas on Sept. 7. The team ultimately won 19-6 and as of Oct. 8, remain undefeated in their league.

"Players also feel inspired to perform their best this season in honor of previous coach Jerome Chung, who passed away in

early March at age 37. He was a beloved and essential part of the team, Wu said.

"We all want to make Jerome proud, and

we know he would have expected us to perform well," he said.

The team's closest match was a Sept. 21 game against Lynbrook. The game started slow with the score tied at 2-1 until the third quarter. However, senior Byron Jin scored a key goal in the third quarter to bring back the momentum, and Kuo scored multiple goals in a row. The team ultimately won 8-2.

The win against Lynbrook solidified the team as the best in the league, Wu said, adding, "It was empowering to know we could beat the only other team in the league that hadn't lost yet."

The team looks to round out an undefeated season. However, as the majority-senior team will include only four current varsity players the coming year, they will inevitably lose a lot of skill and experience in the coming season. Senior Jaime Fernandez da Ponte hopes the underclassmen players will take the opportunity to improve themselves as players.

"It's important to not be demoralized by losing — losses help shape the team and show errors," Fernandez da Ponte said. "It takes years of losing games to start winning, and the process is the most important thing." ♦

GIRLS' VOLLEYBALL

Falcons off to a rough start amidst lack of upperclassmen

BY Atreya Desai
& Sarah Zhou

On Sept. 9, onlookers witnessed a flurry of activity at the girls' varsity volleyball game against Milpitas. After prevailing in a close third set 25-21, the team won the match 3-0, bolstered by opening shot points by co-captains

and outside hitters senior Sonia Purisai and junior Lisa Fung.

The Falcons have a record of 1-6 as of Oct. 7 with a 3-1 loss to Wilcox on Sept. 16, 3-2 to Santa Clara on Sept. 21, 3-0 to Fremont on Sept. 23, 3-0 to Lynbrook on Sept. 28, 3-0 to Cupertino on Sept. 29 and 3-0 to Wilcox on Oct. 7.

The team is still adjusting to new head coach Thomas Ching. Ching, the team's third new coach in three consecutive years, following the retirement of Coach Steve Chiou two years ago along with a

short stint by former boys' varsity volleyball Coach Brendan Wang last season; Wang left the team to coach club volleyball.

Players generally had a positive experience with Ching, though there are concerns regarding his inexperience — specifically, "an incapability of providing feedback to players."

Currently, Ching is working with players on strengthening fundamental skills, such as passing, diving, setting and hitting.

"For the front row players, we are trying to work on staying motivated to block every hit and closing our blocking seams to take the load off of our back row defense players," Purisai said.

The six-game lose streak has motivated the team to work harder, Purisai said. Coach Ching has begun to work on player-specific

drills in areas of improvement.

This year, Purisai is the only senior on the team. Other seniors who had previously played, including senior Jordyn Sin, who had moved to Texas earlier this year, Brooke Huynh, Lily Yang and Nithya Koneru, decided not to play due to "COVID-19 concerns and lack of practice," Huynh said.

Despite missing her senior friends, Purisai is excited for the rest of the season.

With the influx of freshmen joining the team, including middle blocker Shreya Raghuvanshi and outside hitters Dahlia Murthy and Emerson Pak, Purisai has noticed that players in different grade levels tend to bunch together, causing a split within the team. Currently, the team is working on bonding.

"I feel lonely sometimes because all the underclassmen are friends, but I love all of them and think they're amazing people," Purisai said. ♦

GIRLS' TENNIS

Freshman holds No. 2 singles position

BY Anamika Anand
& Aiden Ye

Inspired by her older sister's example, freshman Megha Horantur began playing tennis in the United States Tennis Association (USTA) when she was 8 years old. This year, she earned the spot of No. 2 singles player on varsity.

"It's just having fun and playing matches with the entire team, so we don't really think about if someone is a freshman or sophomore," Horantur said.

She attributes her elevation to varsity to hard work and practice: She goes to additional practices with Lu's Tennis Academy after school.

However, even with key additions such as Horantur, the varsity

team is struggling to win matches; many key players either graduated or opted out. The team has only 10 girls instead of the standard 14. The expectation is as COVID-19 cases become less of a concern, the number of players will increase in future years.

"[Tennis is] just about having fun and playing matches with the entire team."

FRESHMAN Megha Horantur

The varsity team has a record of 0-6 as of Oct. 7, with losses to

Palo Alto, Cupertino, Los Altos, Mountain View, Cupertino and Homestead.

Horantur attributes their record to players being out of practice after the pandemic. As the team gets more used to competitions and becomes more consistent, she believes that the team's performance will improve.

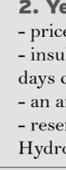
The team has seen a lack of consistency, so they often practice with only half the court, forcing their shots to land more accurately.

Getting back on the courts has been a smooth process, with players bonding and improving. "I think we've got the best school spirit out of all the teams, and all that's left is the performance," team captain senior Nisha Agarwal said. ♦

WATER BOTTLE HIERARCHY

**1. Hydro Flask**

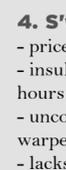
- price: \$30-100+
- insulation time: 12 hours hot, 24 hours cold
- variety of offerings in cap options, colors and bottle sizes

**2. Yeti**

- price: \$20-100+
- insulation time: 10 hours hot, 3 days cold
- an array of options
- resembles a poorly-executed Hydro Flask; ugly

**3. Gatorade**

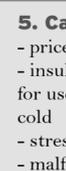
- price: \$5-25
- insulation time: not specified
- one-of-a-kind squeeze bottle
- limited color options
- makes you feel like an athlete even if you ride the bench

**4. S'well**

- price: \$20-50
- insulation time: 15 hours hot, 36 hours cold
- unconventional shape; looks like a warped pear
- lacks physical appeal

**5. ThermoFlask**

- price: \$20-40
- insulation time: 12 hours hot, 24 hours cold
- invented in 1910, it's the grannie of the water bottle world
- dark colors

**5. Camelbak**

- price: \$10-50
- insulation time: not recommended for use with hot liquids, 3-5 hours cold
- stress-inducing childhood nostalgia
- malfunctioning straw

— Christina Chang and Shannon Ma

snapshots



TALISMAN // CARY CHEN



Courtesy of TONY KUO



FALCON // ANDREW LIN



TALISMAN // CARY CHEN

Seniors Derek Hsu and Ishaan Bhandari are crowned Homecoming Monarchs during halftime of the Homecoming football game against Monta Vista on Sept. 24. The Falcons won 31-14, and have a record of 1-5 as of Oct. 8.

The varsity boys' water polo team defend against Wilcox High School's offense. The Falcons won with a score of 13-7.

Seniors Christian Li, Benjamin Li and Christopher Liu and junior Mason Wang do leg raises at a Fitness Club meeting on Oct. 6. The fitness club meets every other Wednesday in the Ray Goni Fitness Center.

Senior Harry Dance runs Oregon drills on the track at cross country practice on Oct. 7.

Stuck at home, sophomore becomes more introverted

Annie-Virus



Annie Liu

Just months into quarantine, I longed for real human interaction. I missed sitting with my friends during lunch, talking about the workload, tests and quizzes. I missed sharing and being scared to share my stories on assigned prompts for English class. I missed the interesting small talks I could have with students. Now, the tables have turned; I've had a rough adjustment back to in-person learning.

In a way, I'm an introverted extrovert: I'm an extrovert around introverts and an introvert around extroverts.

When school went online in March of

2020, I was surprisingly disappointed. I felt trapped in my house, anxious to go out and see my friends and relatives. I missed being around others, and I found myself going grocery shopping just to see people walking around.

Plus, sitting in front of a computer for long periods of time quickly grew tiring. I missed my friends. I missed group projects. I missed almost everything about in-person school.

But when change comes, adaptation follows. I learned to adapt to this new way of life and found joy in being alone. During quarantine, I spent more time drawing or listening to music, activities that left me refreshed and energized.

As I got used to staying at home and not speaking to anyone, I felt safe, in a way, at home. My desire to go outside lessened and I didn't have the desire to talk to anyone anymore. I became scared to unmute on

Zoom, and I even forgot how to care about my reputation and relationships. Nothing felt human anymore.

During quarantine, I spent more time drawing or listening to music, activities that left me refreshed and energized.

Inevitably, the first day of in-person school in August rolled around and my anxiety rose with it.

"Oh no, I'm going to have to deal with people again," I thought to myself. "This is it, game over, the good life is over."

What was I supposed to do again?

Where's the unmute button? Where's the "turn off camera" button? Wait, say that again please?

I found it hard to approach people and speak.

It had been a long time since I've seen crowds of people, and even longer since I've been at school.

I struggled to look people in the eyes and think of something to say.

The school day felt so much longer.

Being back hasn't been all bad, of course. My classmates talk to each other and laugh at jokes, and I know I can easily share questions and concerns with others.

It's a feeling that I had long forgotten in the days of online school.

Still, the fear and habits I acquired from quarantine are still present, yet I am getting used to being in a responsive, live environment. I am sure I will grow to like it again, but it will take time. ♦

How to cope with bad essay grades

VictOreo



Victoria Hu

We've all been there before. You wrote an essay. You've revised, reworded and polished it until it sparkles like your mom's kitchen countertops. Then it's time for the teacher to hand back your graded work.

You tell yourself to keep your expectations low. But secretly, you're proud of your work, so your hopes skyrocket. You lean forward, anticipating a nice high number circled on the rubric. To your horror, blood-red ink marks deform the pristine white paper and the rubric score is scandalously low. The reality of your situation slowly settles in.

How is this possible?

As someone with an unbreakable glass ego and tissue-paper-thick skin, I am the most qualified person to answer this question and teach how to accept writing critiques. As you sit and wonder what your parents will think, take a moment to

cope with your pain through the classic five stages of grief.

Denial: Writing is an art — it's subjective. Not including an MLA header was your artistic choice. After all, you defied the societal expectations of your English class by choosing a new way of structuring your paper. When you wrote your formal, expository paper in first person, you were creating an emotional connection to the reader to strengthen your argument. When you didn't capitalize those "I's, it was symbolic of how small you feel compared to the vast expanses of the universe.

Clearly, your teacher has different tastes in writing than you do, but I am amazed by your revolutionary new techniques. In fact, I recommend auctioning your magnum opus to an abstract art museum or selling it to eager parents who will show your paper to their children and tell them all about why their writing isn't good enough.

Anger: You've spent all your time and energy at 3 a.m. clicking away at the keyboard for this essay. You've spent money on this assignment by working with a tutor, money that you could've used to buy boba. You've even ruined your eyesight staring at the screen. Your teacher is crazy to expect anything more

from you. What do they want, your first-born child? Or worse, going to tutorial to ask for help? It's because of your teacher's unrealistic rubric that your self-confidence is suffering, and they deserve to know all about it.

Bargaining: You've poured so much of your soul into your essay, it's practically a horcrux. Sadly, it's a horcrux with a bad rating, but there's one person who can help you fix that grade — your teacher. You just need them to admit that your writing is phenomenal — or decent at the very least. The solution I recommend? Join the dark side. Since you're already on track to becoming Voldemort, it's only a baby step further to sell your soul to your English teacher in order to salvage your pride and GPA.

Sadness: Mope. Shed a few tears. Personally, I find questioning my life decisions with a mug of tea always helps.

Acceptance: Congratulations on making it this far! Ultimately, the final stage is internalizing the fact that your writing may sometimes be genuinely trashier than California's air quality. But everything will be all right — there's always room for improvement.

No one is perfect. Bottle those tears you shed and use them to water the seeds of optimism and your recuperating self-esteem. Work on revising your returned essay. Next time, ask for more peer edits and teacher feedback ahead of time.

If your grade feels like a sinking ship in rough weather, don't worry. By following my sound advice, like the Titanic, you can probably keep it afloat. ♦



Graphic by VICTORIA HU

topten

WAYS TO GET BORED

- 10 **Count to 100.** 98 ... 99 ... 100. Was that really worth it?
- 9 **Play Madden 21.** It's the same game as "Madden 20," and you wasted \$60.
- 8 **Wait an extra five minutes to go to class.** The district probably thought they should double the length of passings for double the greatness.
- 7 **Wait for Windows to update.** Hey, I know you're in the middle of doing something super important, so let me hit you with a 6-hour update!
- 6 **Watch Netflix adaptations of anime.** If you fed it to a cow, and it went through all four stomachs and excreted out, it would still be better than Netflix adaptations.
- 5 **Browse r/politics.** Another meme roasting Trump, what's new?
- 4 **Watch "Space Jam: A New Legacy."** LeBron is the GOAT at basketball, but not so much at acting.
- 3 **Wait in the mile-long hot lunch lines.** Woohoo! Time to eat lunch ... Oh wait, 5th period already started.
- 2 **Listen to the daily announcements.** Why do golfers bring spare socks? In case they get a hole in one! Hahaha...
- 1 **Read this top 10.** We probably should have included a disclaimer...

>> Nikhil Mathihalli and Aiden Ye