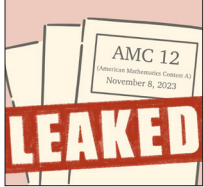




Forced participation in extracurriculars is a blessing



AMC 12A leak representative of new era of cheating culture



Stigmas and stereotypes undermine trans athletes' efforts

THE saratogafalcon

AN INDEPENDENT HIGH SCHOOL PUBLICATION



Friday, February 2, 2024 | Saratoga High School | Saratoga, CA | Vol. 64, No. 5

BY MitchellChen, AndrewLin & EmilyWu

The annual Speak Up For Change week, which lasted from Jan. 22 to 26 this year, had the theme of “Creating Your Own Wave.” The event was mainly organized by senior ASB vice president Emily Ta and the Speak Up For Change committee, comprised of senior Isara Chankhunthod, junior Vera Fung, sophomore Ava Cai and freshman Anson Hulme.

During tutorials and lunch, students engaged in various activities related to the theme. During a showing of “Inside Out” in the student center, guidance counselors Toni Jones and Frances Saiki handed out freshly popped popcorn to students. Several students quietly created art in the Wellness Center during “Paint Your Stress Away,” an event organized by freshman Madhura Natarajan. Other activities included creating friendship bracelets, hosted by assistant principals Kristen Cunningham and Abra Evanoff.

The week culminated with an all-school assembly during tutorial on Friday. Featured speakers were Chemistry Honors teacher Kathy Nakamatsu and juniors Aiden Chen, Angie Chen and Amy Pan.

“Childhood should be about putting ourselves out there to find something that we can be passionate about” — Aiden Chen

Chen was the first to take the stage. In his alternately witty and serious speech, he implored the audience to break the mold of seeking only financial stability and instead take advantage of their resources to try different things and identify true passions. He expressed gratitude to his parents for allowing him to quit activities he wasn’t interested in to make room for ones that he was.

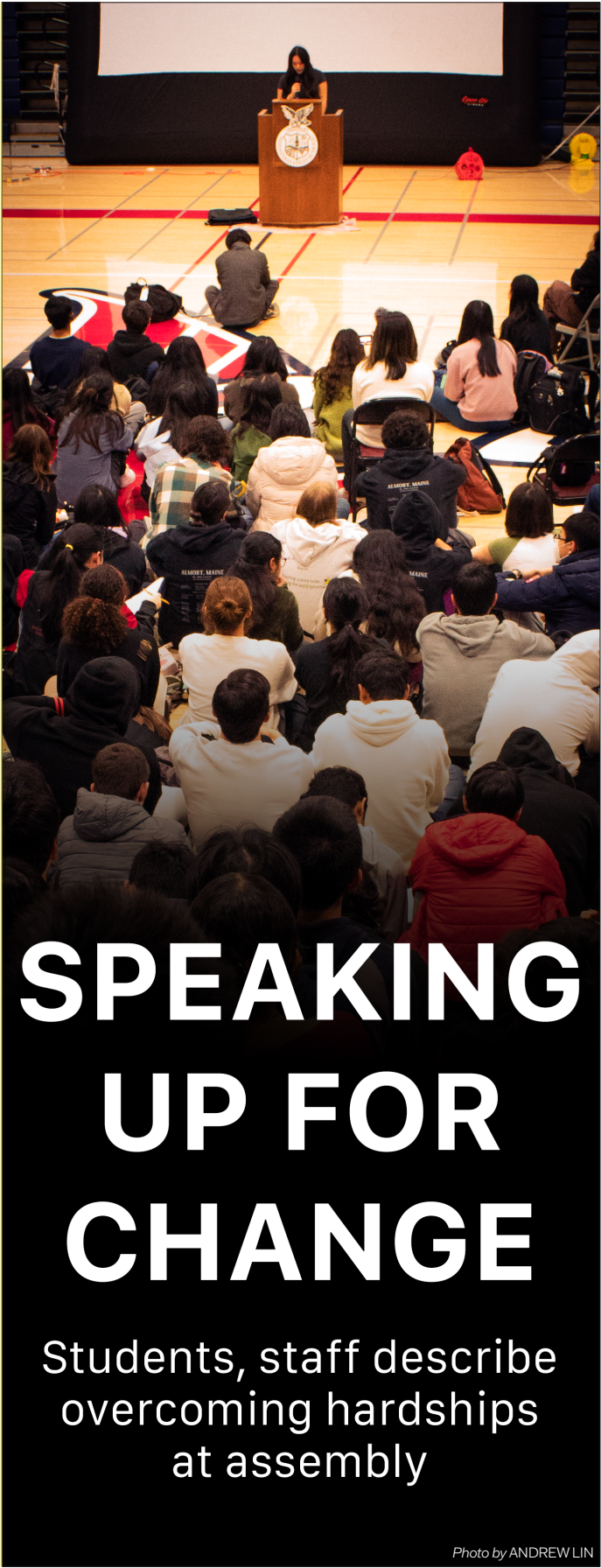
“Try things, even if you don’t want to! If you like them, stick to them, and if you don’t, get the hell out of there,” Chen said.

In front of a solemn audience, he reminisced about the constant support his mother would give him, and after her death from cancer last June, how he decided to honor her life by constantly striving to be who she always wanted him to be: “A happy, healthy and good person.”

“What is on the inside is so much more important” — Angie Chen

Next on the podium was Angie Chen. She described how she grappled with feelings of inadequacy: Her younger self felt that her naturally tall stature did not fit within traditional beauty standards imposed on her by society.

>> **Speak Up For Change** on pg. 3



SPEAKING UP FOR CHANGE

Students, staff describe overcoming hardships at assembly

Photo by ANDREW LIN

School starts 2 days earlier next year

BY WilliamNorwood & SarahThomas

In December, the board released the 2024-25 student calendar, which makes Thanksgiving break a full week and moves the first day of school back two days.

Next year, students will return to campus on Aug. 13, a Tuesday, several days earlier than this year’s start date of Aug. 17, a Thursday. This calendar change creates many challenges for the school, from teachers having to adjust their classroom schedules to complication in planning for Falcon Fest.

The expansion of Thanksgiving break followed a nearly evenly divided vote among teachers and staff at both high schools, with a slight majority favoring the new schedule.

The change addresses a common complaint from students wondering why the district only had Wednesday through Friday off for Thanksgiving, while most other local schools have a full week off. The Los Gatos Union School District (comprising the elementary and middle schools) has the full week off, which potentially disrupts holiday planning for families with students in both districts.

For staff members, this new schedule expands the length of the school year and potentially minimizes the time they have to set up their classrooms.

According to assistant principal Kristen Cunningham, district leadership and the District Teachers Association (DTA) are discussing a possible adjustment to the teachers’ working days, which are now

>> **Schedule Change** on pg. 5

New Falcon Nest under construction

BY AlanCai & AidenChen

Last semester, maintenance workers tore down the locker banks to the immediate left and right of the student center, clearing the way for long-desired add-ons to the center, assistant principal Matt Torrens said.

The left locker bank will be turned into a social corner called the Falcon Nest, an extension of the quad intended to serve as a social hub as well as a music storage area. The right locker block will be turned into storage space for drama equipment now stored in the back part of the library.

Torrens said construction is likely to be done by the end of the school year.

The Falcon Nest that Torrens envisions will be a space where students can come and go freely, lounge on bean bags or use other comfortable, outdoor furniture to do work and hang out.

Funds for the project will come from the Class of 2020, which couldn’t go to prom because of the pandemic but had already raised close to \$12,500. They decided to donate that money back to the school.

>> **Falcon Nest** on pg. 5

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WHAT EVEN IS GROUNDHOG DAY?

BY VictoriaLin & WilliamNorwood

Feb. 2 sometimes comes and goes with few of us even knowing it’s a holiday, much less acknowledging the day. Groundhog Day is, in fact, a noteworthy and interesting holiday. It ranks somewhere in between Opposite Day and St. Patrick’s Day.

This article is our best attempt to answer every question you have ever had about it. This year, you might even celebrate it.

>> **Groundhogs** on pgs. 10-11

Graphic by ISABELLE WANG

Regeneron Science Talent Search recognizes three seniors for their outstanding research

by SkylerMao
& LawsonWang

On Jan. 10, the Regeneron Science Talent Search (STS) recognized 300 students among 2,162 applicants nationwide for their outstanding research.

Among the winners were three seniors: Esabella Fung, Zeyneb Kaya and Kyleen Liao. They will each receive a \$2,000 scholarship and \$2,000 in STEM funding for the school. In addition, Kaya was named as a STS finalist (top 40 students). She will go to Washington, D.C., in March for a week-long competition, competing to win a \$250,000 prize.

The application process for Regeneron STS is intensive. First, an applicant must submit an up-to-20 page research report on their project, along with comprehensive answers to several questions about it — such as what it is, students' inspiration for it and why the project matters. There are multiple essays similar to college application questions that ask applicants to describe how their characteristics demonstrate their affinity and aptitude for being a scientist. The applicant then describes any activities they've done outside of their research and obtains two recommendation letters from people who are familiar with their academic setting potential.

Kyleen Liao: machine learning to predict the air quality impact of prescribed fire

Liao researched a project using machine learning (ML) to predict PM2.5 (inhalable particulate matter less than 2.5 micrometers in diameter) levels and the impact of prescribed fires — intentionally started by firefighters to clear foliage and reduce wildfire

risk — on PM2.5 levels.

Starting in her sophomore year, Liao participated in the Stanford AI4ALL program, which was her first exposure to artificial intelligence (AI). She was then paired with a mentor from the SHS science mentorship program to start her research. After a year, she started to work with Columbia University's environmental engineering lab to expand her research.

Her mentorship program included three mentors, Dr. Jatan Buch, Dr. Kara Lamb and Professor Pierre Gentine, all from the Gentine Lab at Columbia University. Since this project started a year before her mentorship, she already had a strong foundation before meeting her mentors. The mentors met weekly with Liao to provide feedback and advice on her project.

One crucial factor Liao attributed her success to was that she truly cared about her project and its goals. After seeing the large number of fires across the West and worldwide in recent years, she believed that her research about PM2.5 levels could help the community stay safer.

"My advice is to find something that you really care about and choose a project that you think is meaningful so when you are uncertain, you can persevere and keep pushing through," she said.

Liao said it felt surreal to become a Regeneron scholar, and she felt honored and grateful for the support from her family and mentors.

"They have an alumni network for the Regeneron winners," Liao said. "I'm really excited to join a lot of these inspiring scientists and peers."

Esabella Fung: a novel machine learning approach for assessing the labor supply

Fung created a project that developed a machine learning model that uses the Online Labor Index (OLI) to assess the impact of various factors on the labor market.

The OLI is a database that tracks trends in online labor changes and online labor supply.

The project started as an exercise to apply ML skills to industrial engineering, an area she is looking to major in. She found a website with OLI and open source data that included factors such as weather, population and language, and realized she could use this data to train her model.

She then expanded on her initial work and wrote an independent research paper detailing the procedures and data she gathered.

To Fung, the application process for Regeneron was essentially a reflection of the work she did so far. She felt that the application helped her reflect on her entire project and what she learned from the experience.

Upon hearing the news of her success, Fung was surprised.

"In my head, I thought that only people super experienced at research could win, and I wasn't really sure about my chances," she said. "I thought that I was just putting a shot out there because this project was something new that I was learning too."

In the end, Fung believes that as long as someone has the passion to learn and continue to research, they should pursue it.

"I think it just solidifies the idea that if you really want to learn something, then you should just do it," Fung said.

Zeyneb Kaya: a novel multilingual data augmentation algorithm for translation

For her project, Kaya developed an algorithm for the natural language processing of low-resource languages — languages that don't have a lot of data or resources behind it.

Since many AI algorithms focus on high-resource languages such as English, Kaya's project helped make AI more inclusive for these low-resource languages.

Prior to this project, she had already explored and researched low-resource language processing.

Kaya said she was partially inspired by her family, who also speak several uncommon languages at home.

Her personal connection and past experience with AI sparked her to start this project.

Kaya started working on her project in December 2022 and worked on it independently for the next year. At first, she felt hesitant about her idea.

"What was hard about my project was that it's an area that's not very well studied. So I had a lot of doubts as I was doing my project," she said. "Low-resource natural language processing is what I want to do, but are there people willing to listen?"

After putting so much time and effort into the machine learning project, and ultimately becoming a Regeneron Scholar, Kaya realized that her project was indeed something that she could pursue in the future.

"I felt really validated," she said. "Since a lot of AI has been focused on really big data, like scaling models in English, when this result came out, I was very empowered. I like this area of study, and I can succeed in it." ♦



Kaya

FALCON NEST

continued from pg. 1

When discussing how to spend the money, ideas like adding solar panels to the parking lot were considered but ultimately rejected for being too expensive — the solar panel idea cost hundreds of thousands to implement. Additional funding for the Nest has come from Bombay in the Bay (\$8,900) and the PTSO (\$5,000).

Junior Annaliese Shab likes the Falcon Nest idea because it provides another place to hang out for many students, as the student center is often crowded.

As of Jan. 25, the construction team has cleared out all of the lockers, flattened the cement and power washed the floor. Future steps include adding epoxy to the floors, painting the walls and installing a set of power outlets so students can recharge their devices while working there.

"I think it's really cool to see the school caring about the environment and people's health," said Sina Mahtaj Kharassani, a freshman class officer. "It's great to see another student center-type place on campus."

The Falcon Nest will also feature clay tiles hand-painted by the Class of '20 during their reunion in 2021. The class hopes that their year "2020" will be emblazoned on a wall of the Falcon Nest, Torrens said. The different designs and artworks featured on each clay tile will serve as a colorful reminder of the diverse class that graduated during such a tumultuous time.

Due to regulatory issues that accompany creating new indoor rooms, the Falcon Nest will not feature any doors, instead being an open-air sort of pavilion. The addition of doors would require indoor sta-



Photo by AIDENYE

While empty now, the Falcon Nest is expected to be a casual work space by the end of June.

tus and more administrative oversight and costs for construction approval.

An initial proposal to move the air hockey table from the student center to the Falcon Nest was rejected — there would be too much noise. Instead, a ping pong table may be added. Furthermore, the area is planned to contain heavy outdoor furniture and beanbags. Since the Falcon Nest has a roof, there are no concerns over weather erosion. However, a gutter in the ceiling may prove a challenge during construction and will most likely be redirected.

"When you do a project at a school, you have to be careful," he said. "For example, if you're putting the doors in, you have to go through a regulatory agency and it increases the cost, so to prevent that, we're keeping

it as simple as possible."

According to Torrens, if the Falcon Nest project is successful, the school may consider constructing another nest in the place of other current locker areas.

"If you look at East Side or San Jose Unified, most schools have gotten rid of all their lockers," he said. "There's only about seven locks on all of these lockers, so we feel that we should be re-purposing them."

Students interviewed by The Falcon said they are generally in favor of the transformation and look forward to its completion.

"I think not that many people use lockers anymore so it's great that we have a place to hang out," sophomore Nirvan Shah said. "I do hope to use it sometime in the future." ♦

Club commissioners enforce stricter guidelines

by SanjoliGupta
& NicoleLee

To ensure regular meetings of the over 90 clubs on campus, senior club commissioners Carine Chan and Josh Ta have enforced stricter guidelines on monthly meeting minutes forms and implemented a three-strike system to ensure regular club meetings.

"Since we have such a large abundance of clubs, we need to make sure the clubs that are present are actually active with their work and putting in effort rather than being

a 'college filler' club," Ta said.

Ta said that setting stricter guidelines on when minutes are due has placed pressure on clubs to put more thought and effort into their meetings.

Newly revised guidelines on club minutes introduced strikes, where a strike is earned for each failure to complete club minutes or if they miss a meeting — generally, two meetings are required each month except for those with long breaks. When a

club reaches three strikes, they are cut.

The student body has generally reacted to these changes more negatively, Ta said. Students now actually have to do work and be on time, revealing whether or not clubs have truly informative content and passionate members.

"It exposes the trashy, non-committed clubs [from] the highly active and well-functioning clubs," he said.

Ta hopes these practices continue in the future as there were many complaints

last year about club participation and activities. Commissioners received reports that members of certain clubs had left due to a lack of meetings, effort and participation.

"We have clubs to make a positive impact on our school, our school's community," Ta said. "We have clubs to allow students to become more social, to learn and meet people who have the same interests they have, to learn about cultures and to allow our students to become more open minded to create a diverse and better Saratoga High School." ♦



Ta

Biking club president discovers community on rides

by AlanCai

Early on an occasional Saturday morning, junior Han Yeung can be spotted as he bikes through Saratoga neighborhoods with several riders trailing behind him.

Yeung is the president of the school's Biking Club, which he founded in October. The club has around 15 members and has gone on rides to Shoreline Lake in Mountain View and Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara.

He said his father served as the biggest source of inspiration for getting serious about biking.

Yeung wasn't exercising much during the pandemic, and his father suggested the sport. As his love for biking grew, Yeung began thinking about how he could share it with others.

"I noticed there was a lack of community; if you look at track and field and swimming, you'll notice a lot more participation," Yeung said. "If you ask anybody, they've probably biked casually before."

His father often encouraged him to use his mountain bike up and down a hill near their house. What started as 20- to 30-minute bike rides soon turned into hours-long rides. He later started biking to school and with friends.

Eventually Yeung switched from his father's mountain bike to a road bike, since it

was more efficient. That in turn enhanced his ability to do longer and more scenic routes, many as long as six or even 10 hours.

Last summer, Yeung found others who also wanted to build a community in biking, including juniors Richard Lee and Renn Blanco and freshman Dylan Zuo. Together they created the school's new bike club together.

Yeung said getting the club approved by ASB was a difficult journey.

Due to issues regarding student safety and school responsibility for accidents, the Biking Club was split into two parts: the ASB-approved Saratoga High Bike Club involves in-person school meetings where

students plan out their biking sessions. By contrast, the Saratoga Biking Club — which is not affiliated with the school — is a group of 21 members that goes on bike rides together outside of school.

"When I started the club this year, I hoped to educate people about bikes and get them into biking," Yeung said. "We're start-

ing easy, of course. As the year goes on, we plan to explore longer routes."

After the club's first bike ride along the Shoreline Lake in Mountain View this past fall, Yeung was excited to see how members came together as a team rather than as individuals.

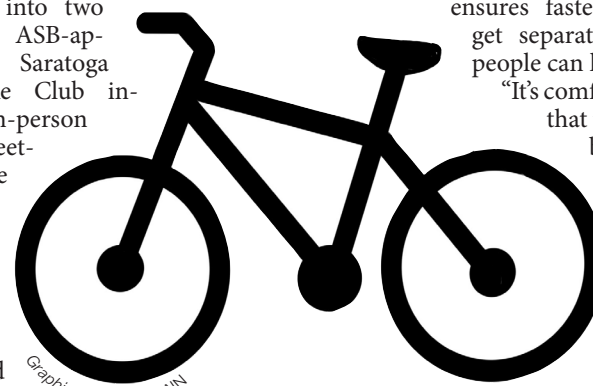
When biking together, the members typically line up in a vertical line, forcing the members to rely on one another for direction and so that they maintain the same pace.

By spacing out people of differing skills throughout the line, which is called stacks, it ensures faster people don't get separated and slower people can keep up.

"It's comforting knowing that there's someone behind you and in front of you while you ride," Yeung said. "If anybody messes up, then the person behind them might also fall, so we all take

it very seriously, and it draws us all closer together."

With the group doing biking once or twice a month on Saturdays, Yeung notes



Graphic by SAACHI JAIN

that the intense passion in the club has a lot to do with the motivated underclassmen, and he hopes they will continue the club after Yeung graduates.

For Yeung, the Biking Club is also an opportunity to get to know students with a shared interest in cycling, and he finds that

"We all take it very seriously and it draws us all closer together."

JUNIOR Han Yeung

his shared biking passion allows him to trust others and rely on them, too.

"We found a connection in the Biking Club that we didn't find in a lot of places outside," he said.

In the future, Yeung hopes to accomplish at least one big biking project, possibly taking a gap year before college to bike across America. For now, however, he hopes to be able to eventually bike 150 miles a day by himself, while also biking a cumulative 400 miles with the club before summer begins.

"What I like about biking is that you don't have to put in a lot of effort, compared to running," Yeung said. "I also like the fact that you get to see the world." ♦

>> bigidea

Full Week of Thanksgiving Break

School will start a few days earlier
Next year, instead of starting on a Thursday, school will start on Tuesday Aug. 13.

Evenly divided votes among faculty

A slight majority of teachers and staff at both Saratoga High and Los Gatos High favored the new schedule.

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LETTERS TO 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 sam.bai@saratoga-falcon.org, and sarah.thomas@saratoga-falcon.org. For ad information, email alan.cai@saratoga-falcon.org.

‘Why school?’ essays should be replaced with video introductions to increase authenticity

A hallmark of every high school senior's college application process is the “why us?” essay, intended to inform admissions officers about how an applicant would use a particular college's resources to succeed.

In theory, this essay is a vital filter used to separate determined applicants from a sea of the merely mildly interested. In practice, however, when a senior is applying to over 20 colleges (as is the norm at SHS), the differences between schools — such as between Purdue University and University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's Computer Science departments — become superficial. Each essay ends up as a soulless collection of ad-libbed name-drops of departments, classes and professors.

tinguish themselves from their peers, relate their passions in a visual format and leave a stronger impression on admissions officers. The video would take advantage of the sole benefit of the “why us?” essay: allowing students to discover what they genuinely like about the school they're applying to.

Students’ passions would clearly show through, setting them apart from others.

As the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words.

Unfortunately, given the rather formulaic nature of “why us?” essays and recent developments in artificial intelligence, anyone can now generate a passable version for the school they're applying to, with little risk of being caught.

Modern technology has progressed remarkably fast in recent years, but the college application process still relies mainly on text to demonstrate an applicant's personality and academic aspirations.

A better option for many would be a short video, which would allow applicants to dis-

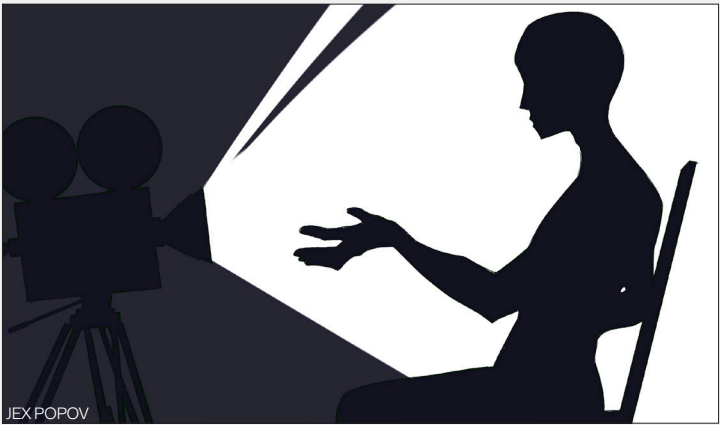
Despite Trump’s double-digit primary victory in New Hampshire, Biden still in favorable position

Former President Donald Trump faced off against his former United Nations ambassador Nikki Haley in New Hampshire's first presidential primary of this election cycle on Jan. 24. In the end, the primary was an easy victory for the former president, as he won with an 11-point margin over Haley.

Experts say Trump is now the inevitable GOP nominee to face off against President Biden next November. The primary was a key step in the race for the presidency, as the winning Republican candidate will affect both Biden's campaign and the election itself massively. New Hampshire's primary — which has historically been the first in the nation — has demonstrated the shifts in strategies candidates use to improve their platform and campaign.

Although Trump's victory was large in percentage terms, gaps are starting to show within undeclared (independent) voters. In 2016, independent voters were 39% of total registered voters and accounted for 43% of Trump's votes.

Last year, 43% of total registered voters were independent, making their support crucial for a candi-



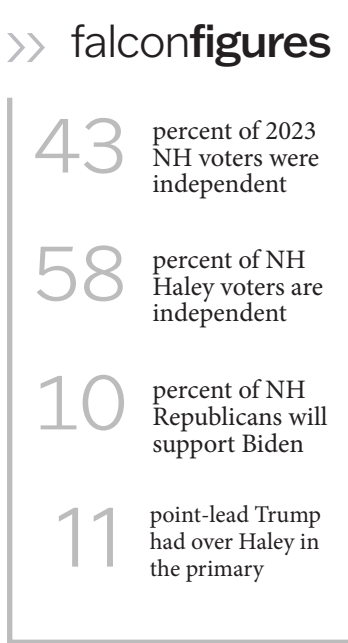
In some ways, of course, a video version of the “why us?” essay has the same downsides as the traditional text essay, but it also holds many more advantages such as communication through tone of voice and body language. Of course, applicants could read off a ChatGPTed or counselor-written script, but this is a problem that plagues text essays as well and would likely come out sounding wooden.

Like written essays, the majority of “why us?” videos will likely be flawed products, but even in the worst-case scenario, a video of the applicant speaking to a camera will provide admissions officers with more information with which to evaluate them than an essay ever could. ♦

Opinion of the Falcon Editorial Board

Editors-in-chief	Opinion Editors	Reporter
Lynn Dai Jonny Luo	Sam Bai Sarah Thomas	Andrew Lin

The Saratoga Falcon staff voted 20-14 in favor of this article.



lose. Whether the Republicans like it or not, the focus will be on the issues that matter most to voters, and abortion rights will inevitably be at center stage next fall.

If he does not change to focus more on independent voters and moderate his stances and behavior, then those without an affiliation will vote for anyone but Trump, likely costing him any chance at the presidency. ♦

Should parents force extracurriculars on their children? It's not a curse, it's actually a blessing

my strong opposition to it at times.

While parents forcing children to partake in activities might seem painful or even cruel, it is only through this effort that kids are exposed to different activities and fields that may later grow into a genuine interest.

Having particularly immature and underdeveloped mindsets, kids tend to lack the understanding of what is truly beneficial for them in the long run.

It would be detrimental if parents decided to “just be kind” and “give more freedom” to their children early on in this journey, when kids don't yet have the tools to make good decisions.

Clearly, not every activity that a child is pushed to do will turn out to be a passion that lasts for the rest of their life, but only through introducing a wide variety of potential interests early on — swimming, soccer, singing and art, to name a few — can they have knowledge to know what they want to pursue more deeply as teens or adults.

From my experience, I can't count the number of extracurricular activities I've tried, and I ended up giving up on a large number of them later in middle school.

However, the ones I kept were truly intriguing to me, and I'm grateful for the difficult times my parents put me through to not let me quit.

Once a child achieves a higher level in a hobby or grows more mature, they can see the true, rich value of the extracurriculars they've been forced to do. In my case, playing piano helped me communicate in ways no other

Since those painful days, playing piano has turned into something I truly enjoy.

I would sit on the piano bench — a pass-me-down from my mother to me — swinging my legs carelessly in the air and questioning why I had to follow my mother's path as a pianist.

I would do anything to avoid practicing — I went so far as debating with my mother to give me a day off of practicing on special days like the new year or my birthday.

In the years since those painful days, however, playing the piano has turned into something I truly enjoy, and contrary to my childhood self, I appreciate my parents for making me study piano despite

language can express, a feeling I've never experienced from anything else.

The moment that completely transformed my long animosity toward piano took place in 7th grade, on a car drive back home after a piano recital.

Now you're older, I will give you the freedom to choose for yourself.

Both my parents were in the car, praising my performance as far beyond my peers.

Their voices then paused. Sitting in the back of the car, I could only watch as distant street lights briefly lit up our faces before they were enshrouded by darkness again.

During one of these pitch-black intervals, my mother spoke.

“I know I have forced you a lot into playing piano in the past, but I was never forcing piano on you because I loved it,” she said. “As someone who grew up the same way as you, I finally understood and was so grateful to my mom one day for always being so strict and didn't let me quit when I was young.”

“Now you're older, I will give you the freedom to choose for yourself. Whether to continue playing the piano, or what you have always been saying since day one: to quit and never touch the hated keyboard for the rest of your life.”

My mother's voice maintained



As years go by, I cherish my parents' decision to enroll me in activities.

College early action decisions should be released sooner

College applications include three main options: early decision (ED), early action (EA) and regular decision (RD). Both EA and ED are ways to expedite the college application process, as applications are due usually by Nov. 1 and decisions come out mid-December to late January, according to the CollegeBoard.

Many EA decisions are released in January for colleges like Purdue, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and University of Wisconsin-Madison. That may seem plenty early, but the timing has the unfortunate effect of denying seniors the chance to know which EA colleges they've been

admitted to and adjust their applications, if any, to RD schools.

After all, why even bother applying to most of your RD colleges if you already got an acceptance letter from an EA college that's your top choice?

Additionally, a large majority of EA schools are public, which would make life easier for those who can't afford to keep spending as much money on application fees as others. With each college application costing around \$80, knowing you're already admitted to a top-choice college can easily save you and your parents hundreds of dollars.

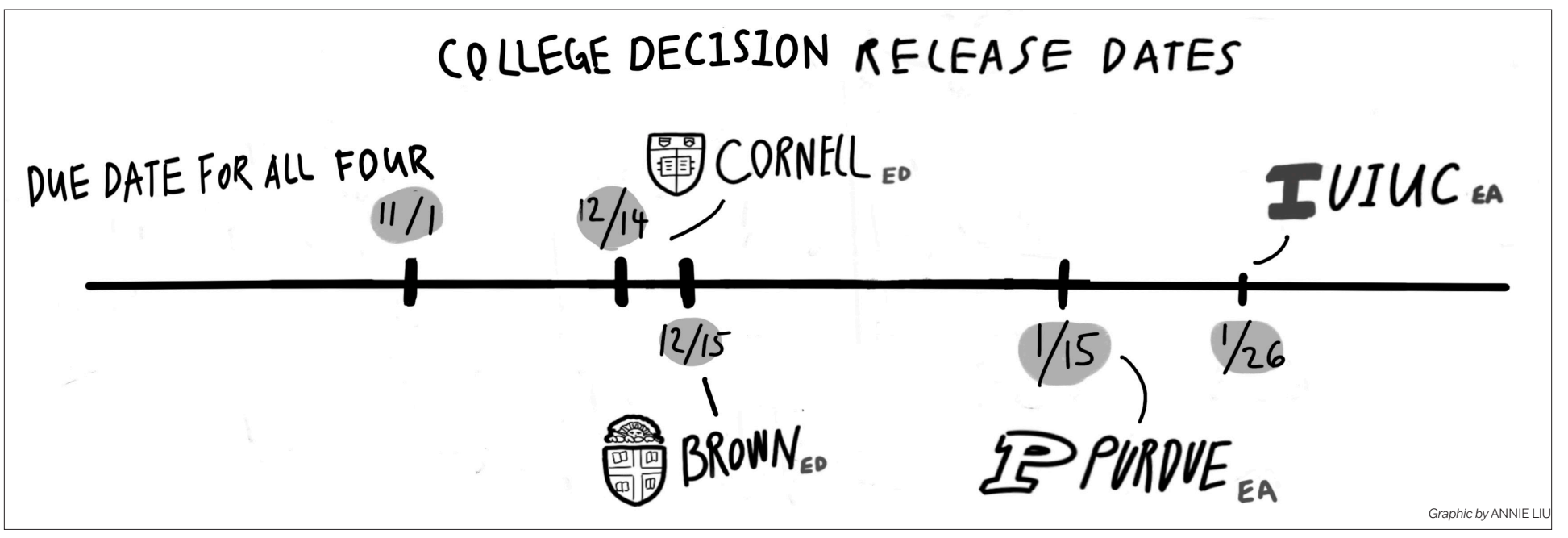
And, as ED is binding — meaning students must commit to that one school —

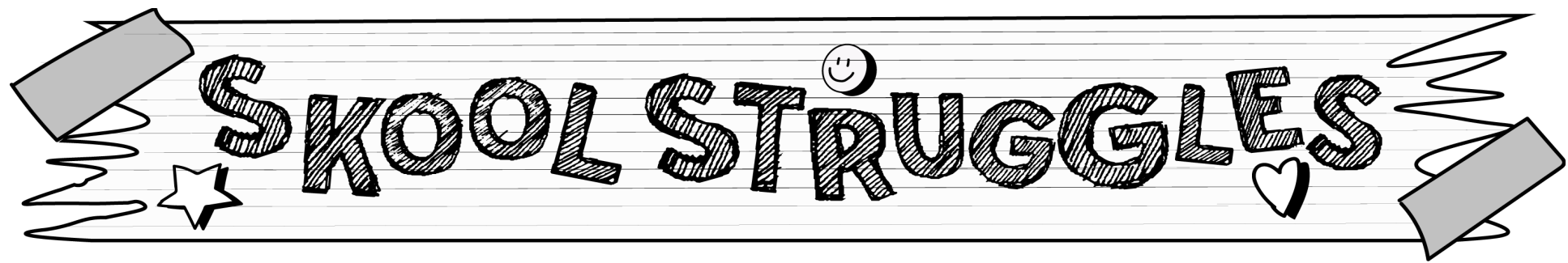
students have no negotiation power for financial aid or merit award packages.

However, those who applied to EA schools are able to choose whichever college has given them the best financial aid package.

Earlier admission release dates would also provide a better opportunity for students to stay less stressed and more focused on school if they were accepted. If students don't get into their EA or ED schools, it would also allow for a shift toward applying to schools more suitable to them in the RD cycle.

Moving the release date to an earlier time might encumber the admission officers from processing the applications and finish





Mandatory sleepy time, a perfect solution for all

By Saachi Jain

It's the beginning of fifth period. After a heavy, fulfilling lunch, my body falls into what is commonly referred to as a food coma. Coupled with the average of four hours of sleep I receive per night in my junior year, it is a recipe for disaster. Just as the class clock strikes 40 minutes, my eyes begin to drift closed.

Around the classroom, most of my classmates are looking no better — multiple heads are down on desks as they fight sleep.

For my fellow up-perclassmen, sleep deprivation is a constant issue as we work our way through a heavy course load of many difficult classes and time-consuming extracurriculars. Many teachers often find themselves shocked at the number of students they see drifting into sleep during class.

However, the solution has been under their noses the entire time: dedicated in-class nap time.

Rather than chastising sleeping in class, they should promote it.

Including a 30-minute nap time in the middle of the school day would improve student health, both physically and mentally.

A practice that many of us took for granted as kindergarteners could make a world of difference for us today.

The practice should take place right after lunch, when many begin to feel drowsy

after eating a meal. Allowing students to recharge before moving on to the next class has been proven to improve performance, according to the Institute for the Future of Education. What more could you ask for? More naps means better grades.

Taking naps throughout the day has also been proven to lower blood pressure and improve the quality of sleep at night.

Consequently, these benefits have been shown to increase lifespan.

In countries such as Spain, the siesta, or afternoon nap, is integrated into school and work culture, with many schools even breaking at around 2 p.m. for a scheduled nap time.

According to Healthline, over 73% of high school students do not sleep enough each night, and falling asleep or zoning out in class can often lead to them missing crucial information in lectures or project instructions. I have fallen victim to this in some classes, later scrambling to borrow notes from my wide-awake friends afterwards.

Nap time shouldn't become a permanent solution. Students all go to bed at varying hours for varying reasons, though scrolling through TikTok for three hours before starting your homework may not be a justifiable one.

Rather than trying to solve the problem of unhealthy bedtimes, treat the symptoms. Allocate time for students to rest and recharge during the day, and everyone will be at their happiest and sharpest as the school day ends. ♦

Breaking down breaks: better ways to refresh

By Grace Lin

We all know the sinking feeling that accompanies a teacher not managing to cover necessary material by the end of class, and you get stuck learning the rest of the lesson on your own at home, adding onto the pile of homework you already have.

One reason teachers run out of time is the mistake they make when they offer a short 5- to 10-minute break in the middle of class. Although these short breaks might sound good on paper, they are not always effective.

Of course, students may request breaks because they feel the need to "refresh" their attention. Instead of teachers complying to these requests, they can give breaks from lectures by incorporating active learning into their lessons, such as having students work with their peers in group activities or holding fun demonstrations.

A science class with a packed schedule may not even have enough time to go over homework, complete a lecture and finish a lab in the first place, much less include a short break for students. Breaks are sometimes distracting to a point where students lose their focus and momentum, resulting in them not being able to resume their work after a break.

AP Computer Science A implements 5-minute breaks into the class. While many students greatly appreciate this break, I find it difficult to jump back to the task I

was working on before.

And this happens to other students in the class: Phones get picked up, students open video games and thumbs scroll through endless loops on social media apps.

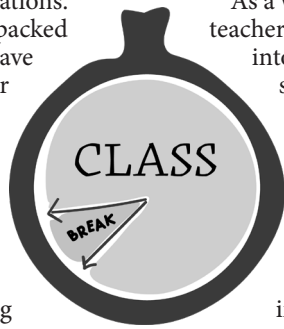
Then, before my classmates know it, their 5-minute break has passed, and they still want to continue using their phones. Most end up not being able to switch easily back to their working mode.

In reality, the best way to offer effective breaks is to integrate it into the class routine. For instance, Chemistry Honors students take a break in between lectures when students are asked to pick up a whiteboard from the back of the room.

Students aren't picking up their phones to start scrolling through social media apps, but they also aren't staying silent and in their seats the entire time.

As a way of keeping students engaged, teachers should integrate class activities into their routines like group worksheets, Socratic Seminar discussions, and demonstrations like the elephant toothpaste demonstration in Chemistry Honors, which helped students learn the concept of decomposition.

Although staying fresh is important in the learning process, breaks aren't the only means to this end. Instead, more active learning and the incorporation of necessary but different tasks are more effective than allowing students to play games for five minutes on their phone. ♦



National Geographic's decline reveals screen addiction

By Zack Zhang

The iconic yellow-bordered booklet of National Geographic's monthly magazine was a staple of my childhood. With an eye-catching photograph on the cover and a focus on natural science, the magazine piqued my curiosity and jump-started my interest in science and the natural world.

However, on June 28, less than a year since its first round of layoffs, National Geographic laid off its remaining staff writers, replacing them with a roster of freelance writers. Instead, National Geographic will focus increasingly on digital content and no longer provide print magazines on newsstands starting next year. (It will continue to provide print magazines to subscribers).

This change reflects the modern trend of decreasing interest in quality print publications and a consequent shift toward short videos as entertainment. Nonetheless, traditional media companies should still focus on maintaining the quality of documentary films and paper publications.

Despite being one of the most renowned and professional journals in the world, the 135-year-old publication has been struggling to survive in recent years. Starting in 2012, interest in reading printed magazines significantly declined as shown that overall sales almost dropped by half. This trend continued, and in 2019, National Geographic was bought by The Walt Disney Company.

Since Disney's acquisition of National Geographic, several cost-cutting measures, such as layoffs, have been carried out, greatly decreasing the publication's ability to put out quality content.

I still remember how astonished I was when I saw the documentary "Planet Earth: Blue Planet II" for the first time in elementary school. The amazing adventures I virtually experienced through foreign landscapes, animals and nature — from submarines in the deep to the mysterious Pacific and desert buggies in the vast, unpopulated Sahara — were all possible because of National Geographic's remarkable photography.

My childhood educational path was filled with high quality scientific documentaries that took years, if not decades, to make.

National Geographic will instead focus increasingly on digital content... [no longer] providing newsstand prints magazines.

However, as I have grown up, I've started to see far fewer high quality documentaries about nature being produced. My younger siblings have never watched a quality documentary made in at least six years, let alone any type of educational



Courtesy of National Geographic

movie.

Although the pandemic contributed to production difficulties for both natural documentaries and physical copies of scientific magazines, the deeper problem is how short-form media dominates today's internet.

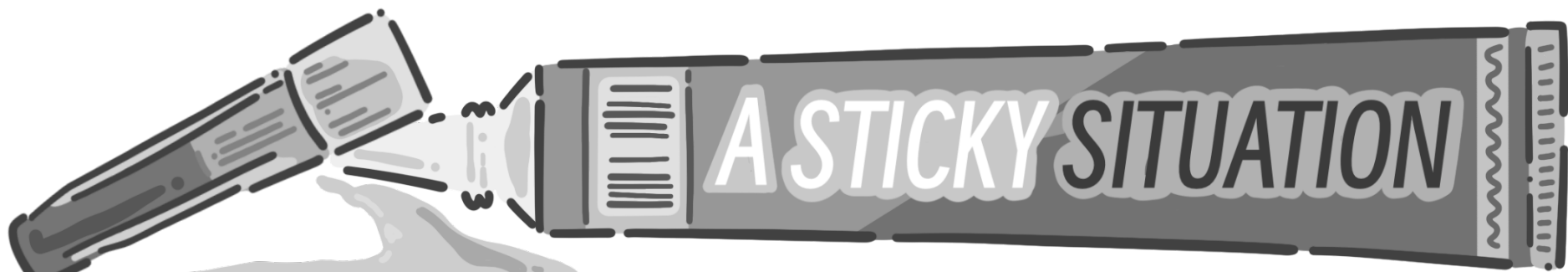
This unregulated trend has since caused a decrease in quality content and upsurge in misinformation.

The rise of TikTok, YouTube shorts and Instagram reels have packed our lives full of extremely short, mass-produced materials, squeezing out longer, higher quality content such as National Geographic documentaries and articles. For anyone writing a detailed in-depth research paper about the behaviors or habitats of a blue whale, they would be more inclined to take the shortcut and find a short 10-minute

YouTube video rather than watching an hour-long documentary.

This isn't just a problem among children and teenagers. Many adults can be just as easily lost in these attention-trapping short videos. Under the casual giggles and careless scrollings, we are letting our brains produce uncontrolled doses of dopamine in cheap content that sucks away our interest and attention span for other activities.

As much as I appreciate the development of technology that connects people's lives and makes accessing and sharing information more convenient than ever, I hope future generations will be able to experience the wonders of National Geographic documentaries and other groundbreaking content as I did a mere decade ago. ♦



The story of how superglue & a toothbrush defined my childhood

While the story I am about to tell may be new to readers, it is not new for people I've played Truth or Dare with over the years. Nor is it new for my sixth-grade Core teacher when I presented my end-of-the-year writing assessment. It is especially not new to the various kids I lured into being my friends by telling them this story to make them think I was interesting.

Through thick and thin, I have milked this tale as old as time — as I'm about to again. This is a PSA: If these words sound rehearsed, it's because they are.

It was a cold and quiet night in my old house in Sunnyvale in 2009. As a young 4-year-old, I was engrossed in playing after dinner, riding my play-bike around the family room and creating a storm of what I thought were Monet-esque drawings with my crayons.

After some time, my mom's dreaded call to go to bed rang from the living room, as was the custom every night. Like a good child, I ran to the bathroom after some initial resistance.

I commenced my nightly routine of brushing my teeth and washing my face, and I instinctively reached for the toothpaste. Grasping at the air while holding my toothbrush, I glanced over to the empty space to find no toothpaste. Hm. How curious, it was always there.

At 4, of course, my prefrontal cortex was anything but well-developed. Instead of asking my parents about where the toothpaste could possibly be, I chose to wander the

rooms of my house to look for anything that remotely resembled the shape of a toothpaste.

After scanning my parents' bedroom, looking in closets and trailing my eyes across the countertops of their bathroom, my eyes finally set on a tube on the wide windows that overlooked their bed.

A small clear tube with a cone-shaped red cap and a colorful label lay unassumingly on it. Satisfied with what I had found, I grasped it and walked happily back to my bathroom.

If the label was not the first red flag I should have noticed, the effort it took to push the gel-like substance out of the tube should have been. It was clear and liquid, unlike the usual aquamarine, minty toothpaste I usually used.

Still, I thought this would do just fine.

Putting it on my toothbrush and bringing it closer to my mouth, my nose caught a whiff of its synthetic scent. At this point, perhaps part of me realized I was making a mistake, but I still had to brush my teeth somehow, so I just went for it.

My ears hyper focused on the sounds of brushing against the deafening silence of the bathroom. Sticking the toothbrush into my mouth, I brushed it on my molars, my front teeth and every tooth in between. In the mirror I saw my toothbrush moving fast in every direction — up, down, left, right.

The gears in my mind worked faster than my actions. Clearly, something was not right.

My brushing slowed down. Every possible path that I could take to save myself from the hole that I dug flashed in my mind. My hot gaze focused on my reflection in the bathroom mirror, unblinking, and a sobering realization setting into my bones uncomfortable.

My teeth felt gummy. When I closed them, they did not open back up easily. And worse, the more time that passed the harder it became to open my mouth.

It was at this point that I decided to finally consult my parents about this cute (they didn't laugh) and lighthearted (they called poison control) mistake.

I remember trying to pacify myself that their response would not be too bad during

my walk of shame to the family room, but obviously, they were aghast. After I explained my cursed nightly routine to them and even went back to the bathroom to bring them the villainous "toothpaste," my dad cried "Oh my god" and my mom promptly ran to the phone in the kitchen.

Always in character, I burst into tears at their reaction and began to fear for my life (though unable to wail because my mouth was sewn shut). I passively listened to my mom's conversation with the lady on the line, hearing the word "superglue" thrown around. Sniffing and hiccuping to myself, I occasionally let my mind wander to think about who I wanted to say goodbye to first, convinced I was going to die.

My mother emerged with a knife from the kitchen and all hope of reaching my fifth birthday was lost until further inspection of the utensil. It was a butter knife. The next few minutes were dedicated to prying my mouth open with it as the lady had advised. She seemed surprisingly calm about the entire thing, as if she had received this query many times before.

My parents went to bed after they finished carefully rooting, undoubtedly tired after the night's events. I went to bed as well, left with a lump in my throat and a new gratefulness for my ability to speak.

Though sometimes I think my parents wish they kept my mouth shut, I choose to believe the opposite. No matter how much stress I caused them that night, I have never regretted it — after all, it provided me with a great story to tell. ♦

Cute local florists for your flora fix

By Annie Liu

My mom often invites me to go to flower shops during weekdays or weekends. Whether it's for actually buying plants or just going there for a pleasant walk, I always say yes.

Going to flower shops is a nice break, and they're basically miniature parks without an admission fee (if you can resist the urge to buy the plants, that is).

If you are bored, don't know where to go or need to touch grass, I present my list of my local favorites.

Home Depot: Affordable, seasonal plants

Though it falls short in bougie-ness and aesthetics, Home Depot sells affordable plants and has a vibe of its own! Not only can we go look at the pigeons that live underneath the big roof, we can also look at a selection of flowers in a big home development store.

The selection of flowers they have is not as diverse and unique. But being common doesn't mean it's not special, right? One thing I really appreciate is how they organize their plants in two categories, perennials and annuals, so I know if the flowers I bought will grow back every year or if I'm merely buying a bundle of fleeting beauty.

They have seasonal plants too. Right now, of course, they have Christmas trees big and small with little red bows, Santa hats and candy canes.

Trader Joe's: Aesthetic and special plants

The plants section at Trader Joe's is aesthetically pleasing AND affordable. Not only can we get groceries, we can shop at

their aesthetic plants section. They have special and seasonal plants in pretty pots, and each has a hand-written price sign with illustrations that I, as an artist, really appreciate. Sometimes they also write short descriptions on how to take care of them. I surely don't mind paying the price if the price is written in pretty fonts.

Summer Winds Nursery: Greasy variety

While they have several stores near Saratoga, my favorite is the Cupertino one with their beautiful vines hanging down from the ceiling to greet us.

Summer Winds has a great variety of plants from common, exotic to native plants. They also sell beautiful bird baths, bird feeders, wind chimes, pots and other decorations. Unfortunately, most plants here are overpriced, but I love looking at things I can't afford and wishing I could.

Summer Winds doesn't get enough credit for the effort they put into creating a calming and aesthetic environment. The interior feels really homey with a wonderfully curated combination of plants and beautiful pots entwined with delicate fairy lights and glazed clay figures. The outside garden does not disappoint either, with many flower boxes neatly organized and taken care of.

Summer Winds does not categorize their flowers in perennials and annuals, but the helpful staff they have are always there to answer questions and to nerd out about plants with you.

If you visit during holidays like Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas, they're always geared up with seasonal decorations.

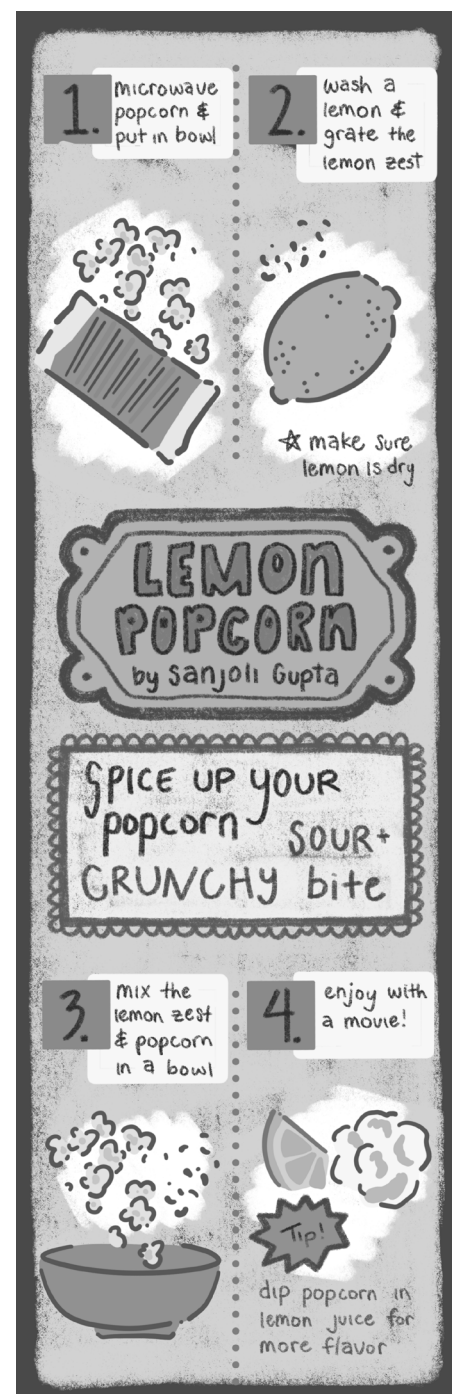
Yamagami's nursery is known for its exotic selection of plants, fruits and vegetables. Their plants are probably the most special and come in the most variety. Each time I go there, I find something new.

The flowers are also beautifully arranged for us to freely gaze through the isles and find special plants. I often see hummingbirds and small birds zooming around from flower to flower, pot to pot and branch to branch. The flowers there are beautifully arranged for us to freely gaze through the isles and find special plants.

What's most special about Yamagami for me is the bonsai area they have; they sell bonsai starters in traditional pots. I always need to touch them to double-check if they're real, because being able to make miniature trees is just pure wizardry.

Yamagami's also decorates for the seasons as well. Along with adorable decorations and fairy lights, they offer seasonal sales.

While flower shops may not provide the vast open spaces that parks do, they offer a concentrated burst of natural beauty and the opportunity to connect with the outdoors on a bite-size scale. It's a great starter pack for developing an appreciation for the simple yet profound beauty of flowers and plants. ♦



GROUNDHOG DAY

IF I COULD RELIVE A DAY...

WHAT IS IT?

by Victoria Lin
& William Norwood

Feb. 2 sometimes comes and goes with few of us even knowing it's a holiday, much less acknowledging the day. Feb. 2 — Groundhog Day — is, in fact, a noteworthy, interesting holiday. As far as the holiday goes, it ranks somewhere in between Opposite Day and St. Patrick's Day.

This article is our best attempt to answer every question you have ever had about it. This year, you might even celebrate it.

What even is Groundhog Day?

The holiday takes place on Feb. 2 and is practiced in some parts of the U.S. and Canada.

Its premise surrounds a Pennsylvania Dutch tradition. If a groundhog emerges from its burrow and sees its shadow, it will go back in and winter will continue for six more weeks. If it does not see its shadow, spring is said to arrive early.

However, the holiday is much more deeply rooted in European cultures and traditions. Groundhog Day has evolved and has come through a multitude of different cultures, and combines

ideas from different pagan celebrations.

According to CNN, the evolution of the holiday began in the "pre-Christian era of Western Europe, when the Celtic world was the predominant cultural force in the region." Instead of solstices, the Celtic year uses four dates that were the "turning points" of the year. One of them was February 1.

The Christian "turning points" became cemented into European culture, with the November date being named "All Saints Day," the May date being called "May Day" and the February date "Candlemas."

Candelmas became a day when Christians would go to Church with their candles, which would be blessed, as a sign of light and warmth for the winter. The animal element of the holiday comes from the Germans, who relied on a badger to read the weather.

Where are the groundhogs at?

The best known event occurs in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, every year with the groundhog Punxsutawney Phil, who is the groundhog most people track on Groundhog Day.

According to the Punxsutaw-

ney Groundhog Club, Phil never dies, so we have no idea how they chose him back in 1886. Across the country, there are six other groundhogs, each named after their homes: Milltown Mel, Essex Ed, Chattanooga Chuck, French Creek Freddie, Staten Island Chuck and Ms. G, but the groundhog Milltown Mel passed away in 2022.

Sometimes groundhogs pass away and are found dead on Groundhog Day in their burrows.

Are groundhogs even accurate?

Phil — the first and most famous groundhog — is correct only a mere 36% of the time, according to followers of this sort of thing. Though to be fair, if we had a chance of sleeping for the next six weeks or getting up now, we would continue sleeping.

Even with Phil's failing grades in weather prediction, the tradition continues due to its cultural significance and the hype surrounding the event. Many people travel from across the country to get a glimpse of Punxsutawney Phil on Feb. 2.

Why is the holiday so famous?

The 1993 movie "Groundhog

Day," starring Bill Murray, follows the life of a weatherman who goes to Punxsutawney to watch the famous Groundhog Day reveal. In a weird time loop, the reporter ends up living Feb. 2 again and again and tries everything to get out of the loop.

Although the movie never increased much attention to the holiday, as it already had a large following, it added to the meaning of Groundhog Day.

The movie has become so associated with Groundhog Day that the Cambridge dictionary defines it as "a situation in which events that have happened before happen again, in what seems to be exactly the same way."

This year, we hope Phil will come out of his burrow. It has been way too cold, and you best believe we do not want six more weeks of winter. ♦

HOGTALKS

"My birthday last year. I had a great time at a Model UN conference."



Junior Anushka Tadikonda

"The day back when COVID happened when we got to go home for a year."



Senior Jarrett Singh

"My sixth birthday because my mom made me a Sponge Bob pinata."



Junior Arthur Wang

"When I was in third grade and first saw snow in Yosemite. It was very magical."



Junior Kinnara Potluri

A DAY IN THE FUTURE

What is the meaning of life? To live. To live is to soak in new experiences through the skin, to acquire knowledge and improve yourself, to breathe and know that tomorrow is another day, with new horrible, joyful possibilities. To die is simply to stop evolving.

"Which day would you like to relive forever" is probably way too simple and lighthearted of a question for deep, existential thoughts, but it's something I can't help but wonder about when I hear it.

Questions like this, I believe, should be answered with the same basic concept as questions like "which food would you like to eat forever if you had to choose one?" In my case, the answer is salad.

A salad in turn becomes a placeholder for something poten-

tially great. In a less "experimental" salad, you've got the greens, veggies and meats (occasionally), all chopped up and tossed together into the same bowl. Then you have room to add some dressing on top, maybe some Parmesan cheese, and boom, you've already got a plethora of possible combinations available.

However, the salad also holds a nebulous definition: Anything solid chopped up is basically a salad, at least from my way of thinking. This way, you can keep experimenting with the same old pile of greens so your tastebuds don't metaphorically decay from eating a 5-star Michelin meal three times a day every day until you die.

The variation in choosing an inherently basic and flexible meal is the key to being able to eat it

forever, which is the same when it comes to the topic of reliving one day forever. If you had to choose one, the key isn't the enjoyability of the day, necessarily — instead, it's the stability of it. You have to pick a day when you had all your essential needs for experimentation met — in my case, free time, transportation or a slightly older age.

If a hypothetical cruel god who assigns such horrible fates to our lives is susceptible to loopholes, I would ask to relive a day in my future instead of my past. Specifically on a non-school day around the time of April — because I like spring — in the year 2024. Is this a risky move? Yes, absolutely. But I think in these circumstances you have to go big or go home.

Similar to the salad, I would experiment with different activities each day to make use of my time.

The day I want to repeat is set this year to give me the opportunity to use a car. I'm currently a sophomore without a driver's license, and as this is America, I can't afford to be getting around with the poor public transportation system. An older-looking me would also have a better chance of getting a fake ID or passport for greater freedom of movement.

Perhaps I'd go on a plane somewhere and visit Europe. I could submit myself to the FBI, using some classified government secrets that I'd learned previously to prove my identity, and have some experimental surgery performed on me to figure out how I even got in this situation. Y'know, for funzies.

Yeah, I would probably not beat the original premise of Groundhog Day. But hey! At least I probably wouldn't go insane either. ♦

A DAY IN MY CHILDHOOD

Purpose is overrated. The idea that everyone has to be significant, find a meaning, leave their mark in history or change the world is an overrated and damaging idea.

So . . . if I could go back and relive a day, I would just choose any random day from my childhood. Preferably, I'd relive the days of third grade: Having just moved from China, I marveled at the new environment and the new friends I'd made.

Of course, I've definitely had a few regrets, but even if I went back, I really wouldn't know what I'd have done differently. I wouldn't return to my childhood to undo my mistakes. So I would like to go back and relive any carefree day as an 8-year-old with nothing to stress about.

Now caught in the complete tornado of junior year with tests

and quizzes haunting every corner of my schedule, homework grinds until 2 a.m. and a never-ending to-do list, I would really just like a day to do nothing.

A typical day would involve reading iconic elementary classic books such as "Rainbow Magic," the defining series of my childhood, going to my local Gardner

Park or just enjoying myself wholeheartedly with no strings attached. We would flounce around the park, climb up on top of the monkey bars and hang by our legs and play those old playground games like grounders and tag. There was also an old dried creek near the park, and we would go in there and walk along it, finding old stones and pretending we were going treasure hunting.

Do you remember the days when there was nothing on the

line? No AP exams waiting to bite you in May, no sense of needing to redeem yourself or impress others. Now, I'm just stuck with AP classes, SAT prep workbooks and the AP U.S. History textbook about old white men fighting and arguing.

I'm really just longing for the bountiful amounts of free time I used to have access to as a kid. Doing nothing is too underrated. And because of the hustle culture, even when I am doing nothing, there's a constant obligation to feel like I should be doing something.

I'd go over to my friend's house after school, sit on the ground and watch pointless 5-minute craft videos on YouTube to follow and laugh along to. Perhaps I'd also talk about silly topics for hours until some parent came and dragged me away, in which I would put up quite a performance to stay for

even just 10 more minutes, by not so subtly suggesting the parents "catch up."

Maybe I would even recreate the time I went to a friend's house to hang out but fell asleep as we were talking. If I were to go back in time, I'd also tell myself to sleep, to make up for all the sleepless nights that would later ensue.

I miss the feeling of my carefree childhood, before I learned about the billions of things that I have to worry and stress about. Right now, I think even something as simple as literally staring off into space would give me some peace of mind. ♦

GREY OR

Golden

Graphic by ARIEL ZHOU

WITH A FEW HICCUPS, THE 2024 GOLDEN GLOBES WAS A NIGHT FULL OF CONTROVERSY AND HISTORICAL WINS.

BY AnthonyLuo

Hearing a joke about boobies at a major awards show probably wasn't on anyone's 2024 Bingo card. Neither was a 68-year-old Kevin Costner reciting a line from America Ferrera's now-famous "Barbie" monologue. Yet, both of these unexpected events took place at the 81st Golden Globes, which aired live on Jan. 7.

After bribery and diversity scandals dissolved the Hollywood Foreign Press Association in 2022 and took the Globes along with it, the show has been through some tough times in recent years. Last year, they aired on a Tuesday night to historically low viewership, despite smooth proceedings and great hosting by Jerrod Carmichael.

This year, the show returned to its usual Sunday broadcast under a new contract with CBS and with new management under Dick Clark Productions. Ratings still dwindled in comparison to previous years, but saw a 50% jump from last year with more than 9 million viewers.

Generally, the atmosphere felt much brighter as well, which made for a noticeably more engaging show, for both viewers like me and the live audience. Many viewers likely tuned in for host Jo Koy, whose awkward monologue took the internet by storm. From controversial jokes about Taylor Swift and "Barbie," to blaming his own writers for all the bits that didn't land with the au-

dience, it felt like the stand-up comedy was the least funny portion of the show.

At the end of the day, though, Koy did his job despite the short 8-day notice he was given that he would host, successfully setting the stage for the presentation of the awards, which were all definitely highlights over the course of the night.

Presenters provided the audience with some much needed humor, no matter how awkward. One screenshot-worthy moment occurred when Will Ferrell and Kristen Wiig danced to royalty-free music while presenting Best Male Actor. The stars of "Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse" even killed two birds with one stone, emphasizing the value of good writers while dissing studio executives and ChatGPT as they presented Best Screenplay.

The gags didn't stop there; nominees and winners alike provided viewers with tons of memorable interactions. Jennifer Lawrence mouthed "If I don't win, I'm leaving" and then immediately stood up and cheered as Emma Stone won Best Actress in a Musical/Comedy for her performance in "Poor Things." Later on, Kieran Culkin poked fun at Pedro Pascal as he accepted Best Actor in a Drama



Courtesy of CBS

TV Series for his role in "Succession" (Pascal's hilarious reaction immediately turned into an internet meme).

Aside from all these bits, the awards themselves proved to be not just well-chosen but unprecedented, with many historic wins across the board celebrating an amazing year of film and TV. "Beef," a dark comedy drama about a road rage gone wrong, and one of my all-time favorite Netflix shows, took home three wins, and Steven Yeun's was especially exciting — his powerful and extremely hilarious performance as Danny Cho, a struggling handyman trying to provide for himself and his brother, sticks with me to this day.

"The Bear," another tightly crafted masterpiece about a star chef trying to keep his late brother's restaurant alive, took home three wins for itself, including a first for young actress Ayo Edebiri, who I think is one of the funniest people in her generation. Unfortunately, Ebon Moss-Bachrach got snubbed for his supporting actor role in the show, despite performing what is hands-down one of the most uplifting, creative performances on screen.

"The Boy and the Heron," a poignant story about grief set in the backdrop of the Pacific War, took home

the trophy for Best Motion Picture - Animated, a historic first for Studio Ghibli and director Hayao Miyazaki. Even though it faced tight competition with "Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse," I think this win was completely deserved, as Miyazaki's semi-autobiographical story was a much more personal film, allowing it to transcend any boundaries set by studios or franchises.

Actress Lily Gladstone also made history as the first indigenous person in history to win a Golden Globe, receiving an award for her performance in "Killers of the Flower Moon." I have yet to watch the film, a historical drama about the Osage murders directed by Martin Scorsese, but I definitely trust that the performances were stellar across the board. Personally, I would have loved to see at least one win for "Past Lives," which has remained a favorite of mine, especially in the writing and directorial categories for Celine Song. Being her first feature film, "Past Lives" was an intricately crafted, nuanced tale of romance that deserves praise for being able to stay extremely simple on the surface while also delving deep into its characters and themes.

This year's ceremony marked a strong return for the familiar awards shows of the last decade, featuring exciting nominations across the board and a whole list of unforgettable moments. As awards season continues, let's hope this ceremony is a positive sign for what's to come. ♦

Choir bounces back with strong additions

BY AlanCai

Fridays at lunch can bring about a peculiar sight in the music building: A small dedicated group of students and staff inconspicuously heading upstairs toward the choir room.

This group of roughly 30 comprises the Falcon Choir, a group that choir director Beth Nitzan started last school year. The choir was formerly known as the Falcon Tenor Bass Choir but changed to the Falcon Choir in an effort to provide more inclusivity to singers with higher vocal ranges.

"Originally, the [Falcon] Choir was targeted at lower voices," explained junior Aiden Chen. "Due to recent interest from a more diverse collection of people, Ms. Nitzan changed our name to increase our ranges."

"I think the choir is great because it is very low commitment and still provides fun performances."

JUNIOR Aiden Chen

Unlike the concert and chamber choir classes, the Falcon Choir is not a school class and also makes it much easier for students of limited vocal ranges to participate by singing in more flexible territories.

As a member of the Falcon Choir, I have enjoyed the diversity of vocal ranges and specifically the accessibility provided to individuals with lower vocals. The choir started last year as a small close-knit group of music department students. Many orchestra and band students also joined to further their musical horizons and gain musical ex-

perience beyond their instruments.

I became one of the choir's members after learning of it from band director Jason Shiuan and Chen.

"I think the choir is great because it is very low commitment and still provides fun performances," Chen said. "People don't realize how fun singing with others is, so I hope more people join Falcon Choir either this year or next."

Chen added that his experience as a drum major in the band has also helped him visualize how the music fits together.

"For band and orchestra members, the Falcon Choir can really help improve pitch and musicality," he said.

The choir, heavily featuring individuals from the orchestra and band programs, serves as a bridge for music students to experience a different facet of music.

"I enjoy seeing people who really know one instrument transfer those skills to another musical skill," Nitzan said. "It has been fun to see [the students] out of their own, figuring out what they can reuse, and at what they may say, 'Oh, that's different!'"

To make the choir more inclusive and enjoyable, Nitzan chooses classic pop songs. Some of them include "I Want It That Way" by the Backstreet Boys and "Sweet Caroline" by Neil Diamond, both of which were performed at last year's end-of-season concert.

This year, the choir is hoping to gain more members — both students and staff. In addition to a new class of freshmen and a variety of other students, two staff members, Physics teacher Tom Casavant and plant manager Paul Weir, have joined the chorus.

"This is truly one of the best community activities I've experienced at a high school," Casavant said. "I'm really impressed with the program and appreciate Ms. Nitzan for putting together such a diverting activity for students and staff to enjoy." ♦

Student-led band springs into spotlight

BY LawsonWang

The last note of "Basket Case" by Green Day lingered in the air of the McAfee Center stage late last August as rolling applause slowly replaced it during a concert sponsored by the MAGIC organization.

Soaking in the applause were three sophomores and one freshman who make up a band called Pollen Prone. It was their second performance since the band's formation last May.

The group had its beginnings roughly a year ago when sophomore guitarist Alec Guan realized his friend, sophomore Alex Ge, plays the drums. After asking around in his classes, Guan was able to recruit a vocalist, sophomore Shirina Cao. To complete their band, they just needed someone to play bass.

While asking around, Guan realized how hard it was to find a bassist. However, after much searching, he discovered that freshman Mason Cheng, a tennis teammate outside of school, actually also plays the bass.

Although the process of getting the members was relatively easy, finding the time to practice and perform has proved to be a challenge. While it was easier to meet during the summer, they are now only able to meet once a week, with more practices occurring during the weeks leading up to performances.

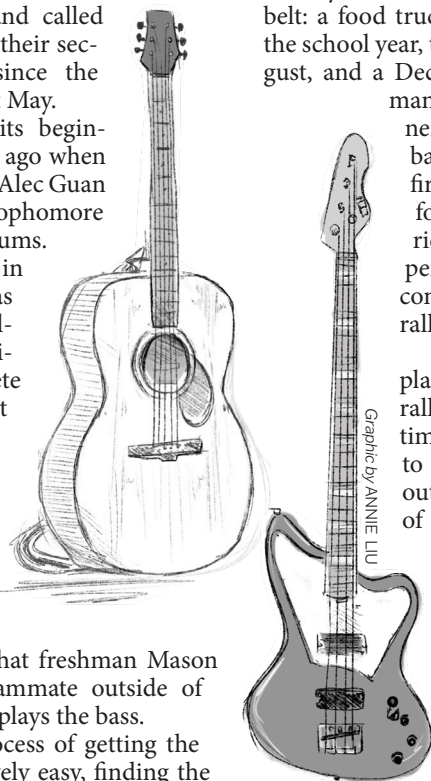
The other major challenge has been finding times to perform together. The band also has to consider how to transport

their instruments, particularly the drum set, which is often an inconvenience in both practice and performance.

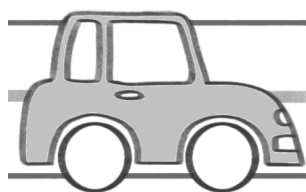
"It's sad that we can't attend as many performances as we wanted," Ge said. "In a perfect world, I would like to attend every rally, but I'm also content with our current pace." Despite these obstacles, Pollen Prone already has three performances under its belt: a food truck gig in the beginning of the school year, the MAGIC concert in August, and a December night rally performance. Despite their initial nerves before playing, the band performed well in their first performance during the food truck fest. Their experience allowed for smooth performances at the MAGIC concert and December night rally.

Not everything went as planned, though, as the night rally did not have enough time and forced Pollen Prone to cut one of their two songs out of their set, voiding a lot of the hard work and practice the band put in for this performance. In the spring, they plan to focus more on academics, especially as AP tests approach. As a tentative plan, they hope to perform during graduation or participate at the Saratoga library's Battle of Bands. Whether it's practicing together or performing on-stage, the four members agree that playing together has been a great experience.

"I've always wanted to form a band," Guan said. "It's just a fun experience. I'm no longer that bedroom guitarist, you know?" ♦



Graphic by ANNIE LIU



Staff FRIENDSHIPS

Graphic by NICOLE LEE

Two science teachers reflect on their shared chemistry

BY JexPopov

The bond that science teachers Kristen Thomson and Lisa Cochrum share is legendary in the science wing. Their names go together like peanut butter with jelly or macaroni with cheese.

Known for their opposite personalities, the pair nonetheless share a strong, nearly 24-year friendship that has included numerous trips together all over the world.

"We met in Miss Thomson's interview at the high school for her job, May of '99," Cochrum said. "And from the moment I met her, I liked her."

The first bonding moment of their friendship was over Thomson and Cochrum's previous trip to Ecuador. On that trip, Thomson just so happened to have a wonderful tour guide whom she developed a crush on.

"Don't ever fall in love with a tour guide on vacation," Cochrum said. "We all know that rule. It won't work out. And as you know, I'm a liar liar pants on fire because [Thomson's] still married to him today and has two lovely children."

Cochrum was even one of the first people to see Thomson's children in the hospital when they were born.

Cochrum even claims that Thomson's second child, Isla and an anagram of Lisa, was unofficially named after her.

"It's no fun to confirm or deny claims," Thomson said.

From the mentions of all the adventures Cochrum has taken Thomson's children on, from taking them to San Diego to Cochrum's name being one of the first few words Isla could write, it's clear that Cochrum has always acted as an aunt figure to Thomson's children.

Since the start of their friend-

ship, Thomson and Cochrum have traveled together to South Africa, Madagascar, Borneo, Malaysia and Scotland.

"We've always been good friends, but I think the moment that solidified a lifetime friendship for us was when we both got sick camping in the middle of Madagascar," Cochrum said.

At this point during the conversation, Thomson cut in to clarify that she was the one who was sick to the point of not walking, while Cochrum was only a little sick.

"She hands me this wonderful, nasty concoction of sugar water with salt," Thomson said.

Cochrum cut in again as Thomson explained "And how did you feel afterwards?" "Gross... And I could walk." "Oh, it actually improved her, and her husband made her drink it!"

In the interview, the pair continued to laugh about a memory they shared in Scotland, where Cochrum got to show off Thomson's father-in-law's calf at the official Farm Show, a time when Cochrum had to give a speech at the end of the banquet that she wasn't aware of very far in advance.

"[The speech] was written on napkins in the car, and [Thom-



Photo by JEX POPOV

Science teachers Lisa Cochrum and Kristen Thomson share a smile.

son] was throwing clothes on me and jewelry on me and fixing my hair, so I looked presentable," Cochrum said.

Thomson's awareness of the inner mechanisms of her friend's mind goes so far, in fact, that she has even harnessed something she calls the "Cochrum Stress Meter," correlating the volume of Cochrum's hair to the amount of stress she is feeling.

"It's proven with science," Thomson said. "Absolutely proven with science."

Thomson said she feels as if Cochrum is like a sister to her. Indeed, throughout the interview, the two bounced quips off each other without any effort, laughing at shared experiences and existing in perfect harmony even as their personalities differ like night and day: quiet and loud, organized and chaotic, straight hair and curly hair.

Perhaps their coincidental moments brought this perfect pair together, but it was the bonds of shared time and friendship that has kept the two of them in each other's lives.

"She gets me. Like there's no one else when you have complete trust with everything. That's the best thing," Thomson said. ♦

Daily carpools to school foster teachers' friendships

BY SamBai & AnnieLiu

Waking up at 5:45 a.m. or earlier to get to school might be hard for some students to imagine. For many teachers, however, waking

"If it's a good commute, then 45 minutes later, we're pulling into the parking lot here," Tyler said. "It's a literal marathon each day I'm commuting. It's 26.2 miles from [Journalism 303] to my door."

A good example of the commuter nature of the school's teachers is the English department, where 8 of 10 teachers live in Santa Cruz County and several regularly carpool.

Journalism adviser and MAP 9 teacher Michael Tyler, who lives in Santa Cruz and has carpooled mainly with fellow English teach-

ers Suzanne Herzman, Natasha Ritchie, and Amy Keys over the years, said he tries to be out the door by 6:45 each morning this year to arrive in time for his first- and second-period class.

"If it's a good commute, then 45 minutes later, we're pulling into the parking lot here," Tyler said. "It's a literal marathon each day I'm commuting. It's 26.2 miles from [Journalism 303] to my door."

However, the journey is filled with daily challenges. Highway 17, the road connecting Santa Clara County to Santa Cruz, has been named one of the most dangerous highways in California. It has two lanes each way that snake through hilly mountain ranges, and road conditions resulted in over 660 crashes last year. If even one lane

is blocked, the hundreds of cars on the highway at any given time can come to a dramatic halt.

"There can be a series of slow trucks going 25 miles an hour who slow everyone down," Tyler said. "If it's a bad day and there's an accident or some sort of stall, it can take twice the amount of time, and it makes it so [teachers] are bumping up against the start of period one or period two."

When driving alone, Tyler listens to audiobooks to pass the time.

"Over the years, [listening to audiobooks] has helped me take my time because I enjoy the books so much that I don't feel rushed," he said.

Many of the carpooling English teachers live within a mile or so of each on the westside of Santa Cruz, creating carpooling as an enticing opportunity. On Red Days this year, Tyler frequently drives in with Herzman. Carpooling days

often involve conversations about the shared classes and offer the added benefit of saving hundreds of dollars in gas through the year, not to mention good company.

"This year I have a great schedule, Red Days are my Tyler days and Blue Days are my Ritchie days, and so we often end up spending a lot of that time chatting," Herzman said.

Other than spending a long time driving, teachers said living far away from Saratoga makes attending school events difficult as well. With almost two hours on the road each day, it is difficult for teachers like Tyler and Herzman to attend athletics events or other activities that occur at night.

"When you live in [Santa Cruz County], you can't really be part of the life of the school in the way that you would want to," Tyler said. "I would love to run over here to catch a basketball game occasionally. But it's just super hard."



A year after principal Greg Louie awarded Torrens with a Scotland certificate for "Lord Torrens," Tarbox edited him into a picture of a Scottish lord with a hunting dog, which is shown on the left.

Graphic courtesy of JOEL TARBOX

Tarbox pokes fun at Torrens via Photoshop

BY SamBai

When Media Arts Program teacher Joel Tarbox first came to the school nine years ago, he met

Matt Torrens, then a 11th grade MAP and history teacher. Their sarcastic sense of humor matched immediately, and thus a simpatico relationship began.

Nearly a decade later, one tradition in their friendship remains as strong as ever — Tarbox

photoshopping Torrens onto various funny moments. "It's to bring a kind of comic relief for the staff," Torrens said. "It is only on our teacher Facebook pages or sometimes staff emails."

The tradition started when Tarbox was asked to add Torrens into a group photo of MAP teachers. Wanting to do something special, he decided to photoshop a photo of a confused Torrens into the picture. Soon after, Tarbox started photoshopping Torrens as a tradition in memory of the moment.

"Sometimes we get pictures of security cameras from the admin



Tarbox

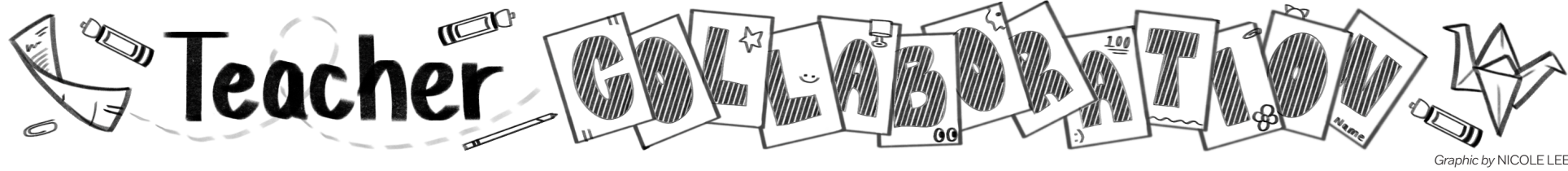
if something happens on campus, and they ask if anyone can recognize who the person in the image is," Tarbox said. "I would then photoshop [Torrens'] face in it and send it up, saying 'I enhanced it and I think we might know who it might be.'"

Many of these photoshop moments, however, are not planned, as Tarbox improvises whenever he finds the right opportunities to have fun with his friend. He said the photo editing typically takes less than 10 minutes, and are then posted on the teacher Facebook page or through staff emails.

Last Halloween, Tarbox was also one of several staffers who dressed as Torrens, wearing a wig, shorts, and carrying a backpack — all to honor the assistant principal.

At the end of the day, Tarbox says his jokes are done out of "admiration, affection, and respect" for Torrens.

"It's a fun little relationship between them because everyone knows this back and forth is very light hearted," English teacher Erick Rector said. ♦



Students help to alleviate teachers' workloads

BY SarahThomas

For many upperclassmen, taking fewer than six academic classes often leaves a hole in their schedule that many seek to fill with some kind of school service for a period.

Of the few options for school service, dozens end up being teachers' assistants (TAs) each year. The job varies by teacher, but many end up helping grade homework, assisting in setting up classroom activities and sometimes doing a variety of other mis-

cellaneous tasks.

For senior Jarrett Singh, being Spanish teacher Gina Rodriguez's TA for her Spanish 3 class this year has been a relatively light workload, even though he doesn't speak Spanish. The most recent Spanish course Singh has taken was Spanish 1B four years ago when he was in eighth grade at Redwood Middle School. Since he can't grade work or help students due to his lack of Spanish skills, his responsibilities are limited.

Though Singh has never taken a class with Rodriguez, his schedule left him with a free third period. When he was searching for a class to TA for, Rodriguez offered Singh an opportunity to TA for her.

Since he began assisting Rodriguez, Singh has even noticed slight improvements in his Spanish skills, and he said that his skills have improved from a 0/10 to a 3/10.

"Since I don't have enough Spanish knowledge to actually correct things, I just total the points for assignments," Singh said.

Unlike Singh, most TAs help a teacher they've had in the past. For senior Johnason Yao, assisting Thomas Wang's Digital Electronics class was an easy choice.

"I liked Mr. Wang a lot," Yao said. "And he was teaching the class, so I asked him if I could be his TA."

For his part, senior Advait Avadhanam, well known for his advanced skills in science and math, decided to be a TA because of the positive experience he had taking Matt Welander's AP Physics 1 and 2 course his junior year. Avadhanam's experience assisting physics has been slightly different to other assistants' experiences, as he is currently enrolled in the class he assists.

He noted his relationship to the students

he assists is slightly different than ones typically formed in an average classroom.

"Most relationships between TAs and students are pretty formal," he said.

Since all of the students taking AP Physics C are seniors, their relationship with Avadhanam is much less formal.

"I like people in my class, they call me Batman," Avadhanam said.

As a current student in AP Physics C, Avadhanam doesn't grade or test labs for the course. However, he is tasked with helping Welander grade AP Physics 1 & 2 tests, something most TAs don't do.

Avadhanam shared that he was first asked to grade assessments by Welander during a TA period where he had nothing else to do.

Though many other TAs are not tasked with grading assessments, Avadhanam felt that Welander was comfortable with his skills in Physics when he was asked to grade FRQs.

His other responsibilities involve "testing new equipment and labs" for AP Physics 1 & 2 and grading homework.

"I guess I didn't understand before how difficult being a teacher was," Avadhanam said. "I definitely appreciate them more now." ♦



Singh



Courtesy of JOHNASON YAO

After a day of work, TA Johnason Yao poses with engineering teacher Audrey Warmuth.

SHS Friday Letter: a teacher-scope group project

BY FlorenceHu

Every week, teachers and other staff members gather recent news about the school community, adding each of them to principal Greg Louie's Friday Letter. With each piece of information, they hope to attract attendees to school events, shine a spotlight on outstanding clubs or students and provide guidance information regarding academics.

Louie came up with the idea of sending out a consistent newsletter more than 10 years ago while working as the principal at Santa Teresa High School, which he brought here when he was hired at the start of the 2020-2021 school year following former principal Paul Robinson's retirement.

"I wanted to make sure that we have something that captures all the upcoming [events] so people can plan accordingly," Louie said. "I wanted to also recognize when they've done something that's achievement-worthy."

"I wanted to also recognize all of the cool things we've recently done."



PRINCIPAL Greg Louie

Before Louie, Robinson had an unofficial weekly newsletter, where he compiled most of the information himself. Like Robinson, Louie originally dug through emails and scoured calendars for events, sports games, guidance meetings and club events to draft the letter by himself.

"[This process] would take almost a whole day just in of itself," said Louie. "It suddenly dawned on me that I could do this easier, and that's when I started sharing it with everybody [teachers] and asking them to add information."

The crowdsourcing approach — asking others to contribute significantly — in turn lightened his load to concentrate on other priorities while also improving the quality

and accuracy of the letter's contents, he said. Each Monday morning, Louie sends out a Google Doc template to teachers and staff, usually with a lot of similar information from the previous week. He gives them edit access to the document.

Teachers and staff then add information about the latest news and updates from the school. In addition, many students and student groups also email requests to have Louie include announcements in his letter.

The main categories include ASB News and Updates, Other News (which often includes upcoming events and student accomplishments), College and Career Center (CCC), Guidance Counseling News, Wellness Center, Class of 2024 Announcements, Falcon Family Peer Tutors, Toga Athletics, Fundraising and Donations and Resources.

The streamlined collaborative process has allowed Louie to spend around two hours each week revising the previous week's letter to exclude past events and irrelevant information, proofreading and formatting the final Google Doc draft and then sending out the email through ParentSquare, a communication platform used by the school for sending out information. The letter goes out to more than 3,600 individuals.

Over the years, the letter has had major improvements and changes. One piece of feedback Louie received early on was that the letter was too long, and people didn't want to have to read the entire letter. To solve this, Louie added a table of contents so people could skip to the important headings. Additionally, he uses asterisks to denote topics important for parents, some of whom would write to him about topics mentioned already in the letter.

With Ward's addition to the staff last year came the CCC section, which offered guidance counseling advice and announcements specific to college and career opportunities. Another recent addition was the Class of 2024 Announcements.

"What's new this year was the section just about the graduating class," Louie said. "There's usually things that are pertinent to the seniors that I don't want to get lost, so we just have one that's dedicated to the Class of 2024."

Though the letter usually only goes out



Graphic by ISABELLE WANG

The process of crafting the Friday Letter each week invites input from staff and students.

to staff, students and parents, Louie sometimes sends out the relevant news to rising 9th graders in the spring. In the past, staff members like activities secretary Anna Ybarra would put up the letters on the school website, allowing anyone (including alumni and community members) to see them.

However, Louie said he doesn't currently have staff members who have the time for webbing the letters, and the school would need a webmaster to do it.

To help more members of the community access it, Louie has had translator Jean Poo write the Chinese translations. Poo, a mother of SHS alumni, previously volunteered to translate community updates for Robinson.

She continued to do these translations for the Friday Letter, which she hopes will help more students and families access this information. According to Registrar Robert Wise, 31% of the student population iden-

tify as Chinese and 25% cite Mandarin or Cantonese as their home language. However, because she is currently experiencing personal family issues, Louie is looking for another translator for the next few months.

Louie also said the headers for each section, made with preset shapes in Google, could have better design.

"I tried to give [the headers] something cinematic, but it's Google Art," Louie said. "It would be cool if I had some student support, like art students or graphic artists who can do something really cool with it."

In the end, the letter has grown from a one-man job to a group project for all staff members and the community.

"I'm most proud of the fact that it's collaborative — all the different staff will contribute, and I have students who email me and ask to put something in," Louie said. "The Friday Letter is truly a collaborative community campus. It's not just my letter." ♦

INTEGRITY VIOLATED

THE AMC 12A TEST WAS LEAKED PRIOR TO THE TEST, RAISING QUESTIONS ABOUT THE VALIDITY OF ITS SCORES

BY AlanCai
& FlorenceHu

It was lunchtime on Nov. 4 at the Berkeley Math Tournament (BMT), a competition where 700 of the most promising young mathematicians participate as teams through four rounds of group and individual tests. Each test seeks to assess the team's understanding, general knowledge, speed and strategy. Most participants also planned to take the American Mathematics Competition (AMC) 10/12 A contests, other high-stakes tests, later that week on Nov. 8.

At the BMT, some students caught wind of news posted in their math communities' message boards on Discord, Reddit and the official Art of Problem Solving (AoPS) website, which facilitates math contest discussions, provides study resources and offers preparation courses on competitive math. The rumor flew that students had discovered a copy of a leaked AMC 12A test — five days before the actual test date.

(USAMO/USAJMO).

Instead of mailing out its tests in print like some AP tests, the MAA delivers digital copies of tests in advance for local administrators to print and scan.

Although much more efficient and scalable, this system gives a precarious window of time during which leakers may gain access to official copies.

According to assistant principal Brian Safine, who this year is helping the math club manage competitions, this window of time is usually just a few hours in advance, so it is still unclear how the test leaker was able to access it days ahead of the contest.

With access to copies of the test ahead of schedule, those who saw the leaked version of the exam may have been able to use the internet and calculators, circulate their own answer keys and collaborate with others — in other words, some participants feared others may have potentially taken advantage of the leak and cheated.

While the original test post was removed quickly, the damage was done. Those who saw it subsequently re-leaked on multiple math forums, including the influential Online Monmouth Math Competition math Discord server.

A change.org petition that called for the MAA to address the situation further exacerbated the leak by posting screenshots of the few problems as evidence, drawing even more attention to it.

Junior Akshat Bora was greatly disappointed about how the situation played out. He said that obtaining answers to the leaked problems ahead of time rendered real effort worthless for non-cheating participants.

"The leak was very disappointing because it meant that a year's worth of hard work meant nothing, and the cheaters could memorize the answers in minutes," Bora said.

Despite widespread petitions and clear evidence of leaks, the MAA did not cancel or modify the test. In response to the controversy, the MAA issued a public statement: "We have already identified the source of the leak. This specific test site has been disqualified from this competition cycle and banned from participating in the MAA AMC in the future."

To try to remedy the harm caused by the leak, MAA officials promised that they had "mechanisms in place, utilizing both human resources and artificial intelligence, to identify broad statistical anomalies, as well as anomalies within individual competitors."

No further details were provided on how artificial intelligence or human resources would be used to analyze test scores and determine disqualifications.

Local test results align with historical norms and expectations beforehand

Despite all of the issues surrounding the leaked exams, it appears that Saratoga students had a largely normal testing cycle. Saratoga typically qualifies 30-60 students to the AIME each year.

This year, according to a district press release, 49 students qualified. Additionally, it appears that the test takers were not affected much by the AIME cutoff. To qualify for the AIME, the minimum score for AMC 12A was 85.5, and the floor for the B was 88.5. However, the USA(J)MO test, which accepts far fewer students every year and is based on a combination of their AMC and AIME scores, may have a significantly altered floor.

Yim takes on trends with cheating in schools and its low rate of consequences

Math teacher PJ Yim, who also coaches competitive math, said a similar situation occurred when the 2020 AIME was postponed and eventually administered online due to the pandemic. Students took the test at home rather than in a regular test setting, which Yim believes led to widespread cheating.

"Back in COVID-19, so many people who had never even touched AIME magically made USA(J)MO, and after COVID-19 was over they just crashed," he said. "If they couldn't ensure that [the test] was above board, they should cancel it, because it's quite worthless."

Yim believes that cheating, in the face of modern society, has been downplayed. He has noticed that punishment for academic integrity violations has drastically decreased over the years in the school setting.

"The payout from cheating is so high now," Yim said. "[Students] used to be suspended, kicked out of the class, and given an automatic 'F' on transcript. Now, I think they give you 'Oh, they're just a kid, let's just see what happens.'"

He emphasizes that the consequences of cheating should be tighter, like that of many colleges, where getting a zero and being banned from the class or even expelled are likely consequences. Yim also said by the time a student is caught cheating, they have likely cheated dozens of times.

"It's like running a red light. The chances are, when you get caught one time, you've probably run over the red light 50 times already," he said.

Yim believes that more emphasis should be placed on maintaining academic integrity, and students should be made more aware of the consequences of violating it.

"I have yet to hear the words 'honor' and

'integrity' in the forefront when we're raising our young," Yim said. "I get to talk about getting them ready for the future — all these buzzwords, but honor and integrity is not one of them."

"If they couldn't ensure the test was above board, they should cancel it."



MATH TEACHER PJ Yim

Yim said the AMC 12A leak was handled poorly and MAA should have accessed its problem bank to remake the test entirely. He believed that since tests were crafted years in advance, administrators should have swapped out the leaked test with a 2024 test.

"This was really messed up and this should not happen again," he said.

To prevent the second exam, the AMC 12B test, from being leaked, Bora said that a group of MOPpers (Math Olympiad Program qualifiers) — the top 60 students in the country — created a fake "leaked" test and circulated it within cheating servers to confound and mislead would-be leakers. Some mathletes like junior Alan Lu, who qualified for USAJMO the previous year, expressed disappointment at this violation of academic integrity.

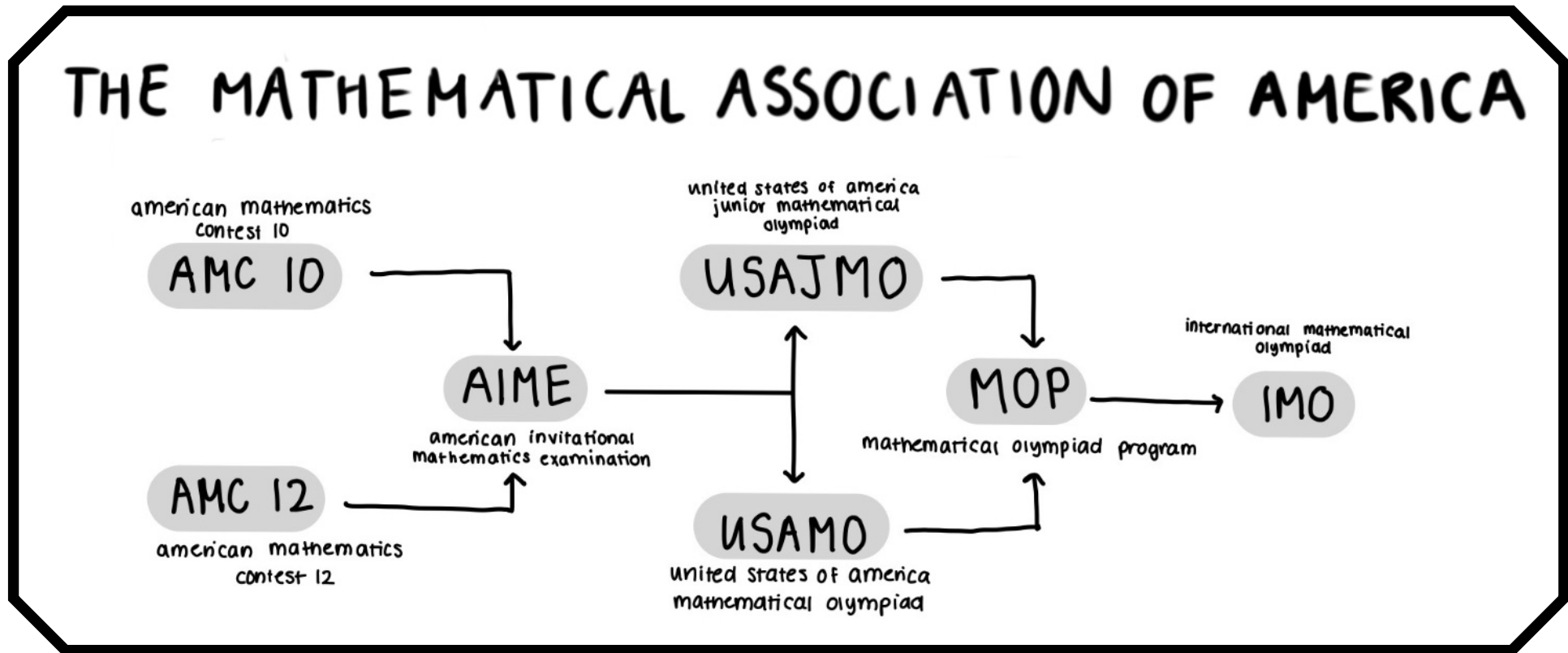
"I'm very disheartened by the entire ordeal," Lu said. "It's really unfair to people who work hard in math and will definitely inflate cutoff scores for both AIME and USAMO."

He added that this year's test felt especially easy compared to previous years. "Problem number 25 felt more like a Problem 16-20 level difficulty. Even without the leak, this test is lower quality," Lu said.

For many of the school's mathletes, this year's testing cycle left a generally negative impression.

However, some students are optimistic about improving testing in future years, hoping that the MAA and test administrators will better monitor leaks and mandate more thorough background checks for competition managers, administrators and proctors.

"I sincerely believe that the MAA could improve the educational experience for generations of math competitors to come," Bora said. "This is a very important issue for me and the rest of our community." ♦



All Graphics by SAACHI JAIN

Adjusting from Korea to Georgia to Saratoga

When June Hwi Chang arrived in Georgia in March 2022, he looked forward to facing less pressure to achieve perfect grades. However, he was initially hesitant about whether he had made the right choice to stay.

"I knew there were only a few [East or South] Asians in American schools, and I thought that white people were the majority of students. But [that was] not [the case in Georgia]," he said.

"I was surprised that students here can freely ask questions."



JUNIOR June Chang

As a result, Chang wasn't too keen on moving to the U.S. His father first brought up the idea of studying abroad in America for a year when Chang's older brother was attending a pilot college in Florida as part of Korea's mandatory military service. During his father's one-year sabbatical, Chang found several considerable changes between the educational system in South Korea and the U.S.

Compared to the more holistic admis-

sions process for undergraduate colleges in the U.S., only a few options ensure a successful career in Korea, all of which hinge on the results of a pressure-packed college entrance exam called Suneung.

Once attending school here, Chang also observed wide differences in the two systems. Under the standard Korean school structure, every student takes the same class with other students in the same grade. The same group of students do not move each period; rather, teachers move from room to room, Chang said.

For Chang, the most noticeable difference between American and Korean education systems is the way students learn.

"I was surprised that students here don't feel ashamed when they ask what they don't know or understand," Chang said. "In Korea, students make fun of people who ask basic questions. It's making fun of them as friends — this kind of behavior makes students afraid to ask questions during class."

After seeing the advantages of the American school system, Chang stayed in the U.S. So, his parents made an arrangement for him to stay with his mother's uncle in Saratoga. Chang has been living with him since last March.

Among the challenges he is facing this year are writing essays and participating in Socratic Seminars. Even so, he is happy to stay here and not face pressures in South Korean schools. ♦

Finding freedom: a long anticipated immigration

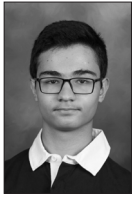
Sophomore Mani Solimani's parents wanted to move to America from Iran since he was born, but they were unable to do so until the months leading up to the start of his freshman year, finally overcoming years of visa issues.

His aunt came to the US in 2001 after winning the lottery through the U.S. Diversity Visa Program, and she strongly urged for Solimani's family to move to America as well.

However, because they did not have enough of the right documents and other issues with the registration, their application was rejected. The Iranian government finally approved it around four years ago, but due to the pandemic, they were unable to move until 2022. After securing their green cards and visas, the family joined their aunt, a long-time resident of Saratoga.

A native Farsi speaker, Solimani had taken English classes both in and out of his Iranian school from 1st to 5th grade, but he forgot the language after pausing instruction for three years.

Solimani had to relearn most of his English through the school's English Language Development (ELD) class, where they reviewed grammar, read books and held discussions.



Solimani

overcoming his language barrier by speaking to him only in English, buying him English books and encouraging him to read for at least an hour daily.

Aside from the language, Solimani has seen differences in cultural norms of freedom, which he said interferes with how supportive relationships are formed in communities. In Iran's authoritarian regime, freedom is restricted and strong censorship is imposed.

Because of the restrictions on free speech and the risks that come with violating censorship laws, Solimani said that the social norms of communication limit some relationships.

"America feels better than Iran because we can support each other. Everyone cares about each other," he said.

Solimani easily made his best friend, Gabriel Solis Gomez, who moved from Mexico three years ago, in his freshman year P.E. class.

Solimani said this friendship wouldn't have been as easy or trustworthy to form if he faced a similar scenario in Iran. The Iranian social environment puts extreme-minded people and pit them against each other.

"My first thought [upon arrival] was: make friends," Solimani said. "It was easy because I feel like everyone wants to make friends here." ♦

Solimani's aunt helped him with

GLOBAL INFLUENCES: STUDENTS SHARE THEIR IMMIGRATION STORIES

BY: AnnikaGho & FlorenceHu

THIS STORY HAS BEEN MODIFIED FOR PRINT.



TO READ ABOUT THE EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS, SCAN THE QR CODE BELOW.

Singapore to SHS: Finding new enviorments and culture

Having spent the previous five years living in Singapore, junior Rayyan Ahmad also had adjustments to make when his family moved to Saratoga last August — but not on the level of some other students because of his family's previous moves. For example, because his education was conducted in English even before arriving in the U.S., Ahmad didn't face a language barrier in the same way that many foreign students do.

Born in Pakistan, Ahmad moved to Saudi Arabia at age 2. At 12, he moved to Singapore. The family moved as his father

changed jobs. Within each of these countries, Ahmad often moved from city to city and frequently changed schools, leading him to become more adaptable to sudden large changes.

His move from Saudi Arabia to Singapore, in particular, was what he called a "massive change," as he had spent 10 years in Saudi Arabia. However, from Singapore to the U.S., Ahmad didn't feel the change to be as difficult since he was only in Singapore for a significantly shorter time.

"I feel like I'm less sensitive to change — after the first initial

move, I kind of got used to it," he said.

Ahmad's father, who previously worked in advertising and marketing for companies like T-Mobile, Nestle and Nivia, began working for Google a year after the family landed in Singapore. Following a series of layoffs, Ahmad's dad took the offer to move to offices in the U.S.

"Some impressions we had were that the U.S. had a lot of opportunity, a lot of freedom, a lot of land, which are all true," Ahmad said. "One of these freedoms was more accessible education."

Singapore has 5.5 million people residing in just 283.5 square miles (about five times smaller than Rhode Island, the U.S.'s smallest state).

With the high population density, there is high competition for admission to Singapore's select few universities.

The country hosts one of Asia's most acclaimed institutes — the National University of Singapore (NUS), which has an acceptance rate of 5%. For Ahmad and his family, who do not have Singaporean citizenship, it was extremely difficult to get in and receive higher education within the country.

Despite this, Ahmad still had a rigorous class schedule. At a British international school in Singapore, he took a total of nine classes

— English, Math, Chemistry, Biology, Physics, Geography, Computer Science, Economics and French — but only had six periods of 55 minutes each a day. This resulted in schedules that varied from day to day, and not every class had the same amount of instructional time in a week.

Core classes such as English and Math were fitted into each day of his schedule, along with at least one of his science classes, while electives were taken two to three times a week.

"The teachers here have time for students."



JUNIOR Rayyan Ahmad

Ahmad said he enjoys Saratoga's 85-minute classes.

"You can focus more on each class rather than [needing to learn concepts in another shorter period]," he said. "It helps you better understand the concept and what you're learning."

While Ahmad's Singaporean school had International Baccalaureate (IB) courses, the UK's equivalent to Advance Placement (AP), there was still a greater focus on standardized testing, such as preparing for the General Certificate of Secondary Education

(GCSE). The GCSE consists of exams for each of Ahmad's subjects, contrasting standardized tests of the American school system such as the SAT and PSAT. Standardized exams are highly valued by employers to compare students and they provide student skills information for their secondary school.

While Ahmad said teachers in both countries are generally respectful, kind and always willing to help, he has found that teachers at Saratoga can provide more personalized attention, due to teachers having fewer and smaller classes.

"The teachers over here have more time for each individual student," Ahmad said. "[Teachers] can address questions during tutorial."

He often spends tutorial in English teacher Mary Palisoul's classroom, where she offers additional help in working through difficult literature such as the novel "Beloved."

Ahmad and his family plan to stay in the U.S. for several more years. He plans to pursue business or finance at a 4-year American university.

"It was kind of difficult to adjust to the new school system [at first]," Ahmad said. "I think I managed to adapt well to the new school as everyone here was so very supportive."

"Overall, I think [my SHS experience] has been a really positive experience." ♦

TRANSGENDER ATHLETES

Graphic by ANNIE LIU

THOMAS'S SITUATION SHOWCASES HOW SWIMMERS AND OTHERS FACE DAUNTING CHALLENGES IN THEIR SPORT

BY JexPopov

On Feb. 9, 2022, Fox News came out with another story generating outrage at trans existence regarding the transfeminine swimmer Lia Thomas. Thomas — 22 at the time — had just transferred from the male swimming team at the University of Pennsylvania to the female one, following her one-year Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) treatment and the cancellation of the 2020-2021 swim season due to the pandemic.

Controversy broke out when then-collegiate teammate Riley Gains gave an interview to Fox News during Thomas's first year of swimming on the female team about how harrowing she found the experience of sharing a locker room with someone she referred to as "a biological man."

This wasn't the first time an incident regarding a transgender athlete had sent heated discussions spiraling across the world, such as the outrage directed at the Olympics for permitting transgender women to play on women's teams in 2004 and the outrage at cisgender woman Kristen Chalmers being beaten in an amateur cycling race by transgender women Tessa Johnson and Evelyn Williamson.

schools to prevent them from competing on an athletic team outside their assigned gender at birth, as an impediment on the rights of trans athletes.

As a trans man myself and someone who has both participated briefly in school athletics (wrestling) and is currently taking Intermediate Physical Education (IPE), I sympathize with Thomas' situation.

Since my social transition two years ago, I have regularly changed in the men's locker room.

Even so, I cannot imagine being in her situation: In an interview by the New York Post, Thomas's cisgender teammate Paula Scanlan mentioned that the cisgender women on the team went to change in the bathroom instead, implying that the locker room itself had no actual changing stalls. There were no places provided for Thomas to actually change in privately, meaning that she had to strip naked to get into her swimsuit under the judgmental eyes of her cisgender teammates. And then to have one of her teammates bash and misgender her to a famous new station, no less. Personally, in that situation, I would feel so, so alone, hated and utterly humiliated.

Reflection from an SHS trans athlete

Junior Jay Louie, a trans man who competed on Saratoga High's boys' swim team his freshman year, told me about his own more specialized experience on the subject.

"If you're in charge of designing a changing room, there should always be stalls for anyone, even if they're not trans," said Louie. "[Stalls are] just for anyone who's just uncomfortable being publicly stripped naked in order to get into suitable clothes for whatever sport is being played."

Louie emphasized the specific brand of humiliation that came with his experiences being trans and on a swim team.

"When I would go up on the board at some other swim meet outside of the school, I would get on the board, ready to start the timer, and the [person starting the timer] would always be like, 'aren't you in the wrong section?' because I had to wear the female swimsuit in order to actually swim," Louie said.

Especially in the realm of swimming, community acceptance is absolutely crucial for a trans athlete.

As someone who has been briefly on the wrestling team and is in IPE, I already have a hard enough time walking out and letting other people see me without a binder (a garment to flatten your chest) on, since I have to take it off in order to actually breathe during exercise. When you're swimming, the body you're uncomfortable with is on full display, and everyone could see that you're different.

"I think that teammates, no matter what, even if they see that you weren't born a female or born a male, should still respect you for who you are," Louie said.

Louie said sometimes factors in sports are just "unfair" and that the athletes at a disadvantage just have to work harder sometimes, be it due to a cisgender woman competing against a transgender woman, or simply one competing against a taller woman or a cis woman with naturally higher testosterone levels.

Inconsistency in cisgender athletes

Even within purely cisgender athletic spaces, humans will always vary in physiology - some athletes already have an advantage over others due to being taller or lighter or having genetics that allow them to more easily build muscle in one specific area, and this is just something you have to learn to overcome as an athlete.

Even when discussing hormones in regards to biological advantages

(in the field of women's sports specifically), you have to take into account that some cis women you compete against will also have higher testosterone levels than you. Just look at athletes Caster Semenya, Francine Niyonsaba and Margaret Wambui — all cisgender women, all disqualified from competing in the Olympics due to naturally having higher testosterone levels than the approved range.

In fact, according to the International Association of Athletics Federations, (IAAF), when conducting a study on cisgender athletes going to compete in Olympic events, 13.7 percent of the women had higher testosterone levels than the typical female range, and 4.7 percent of the women were even in the typical male range. And when it comes to cis men, 16.5 percent of them had testosterone levels under the typical male range, and 1.8 percent fell within the typical female range. And yet I bet more often than not transgender athletes who fit in their assigned range for the sport will get more criticism for being "biologically advantaged" or "biologically disadvantaged" than these cases suggest.

If officials managing higher-level sports want to have transgender athletes on HRT for a little bit before starting to play on the team of their actual gender, then I believe that is fine, but there shouldn't be as much focus given to testosterone hormones as there currently is in general, because it already varies so greatly in our population regardless of whether you're trans or

cis, just like other factors that may give athletes an advantage in various sports.

Steps we can take

"[Trans athletes] worked hard to be where they are," Louie said. "They worked hard to survive. They worked hard to have the confidence to go into a sport where they would be seen as basically cheaters because of their previous hormones."

Louie also emphasized the importance of comfort for any trans athlete. Trans athletes should have comfort and assurance they could live as they really are and play on the team they belong to, he said.

I cannot help but agree — the world already undervalues the comfort of trans people.

Gender affirmation and correct pronoun usage are seen as "frivolous" by many, and trans people are constantly expected to argue why they deserve to exist and have rights. We're constantly expected to step aside and shrink ourselves down, to make ourselves invisible for the comfort of cis people.

Maybe if the lawmakers and critics just saw transgender athletes as people, deserving of comfort and basic rights, then such heavy scrutiny would not be placed on someone like Lia Thomas, who was not trying to make anyone uncomfortable, and many others like her.

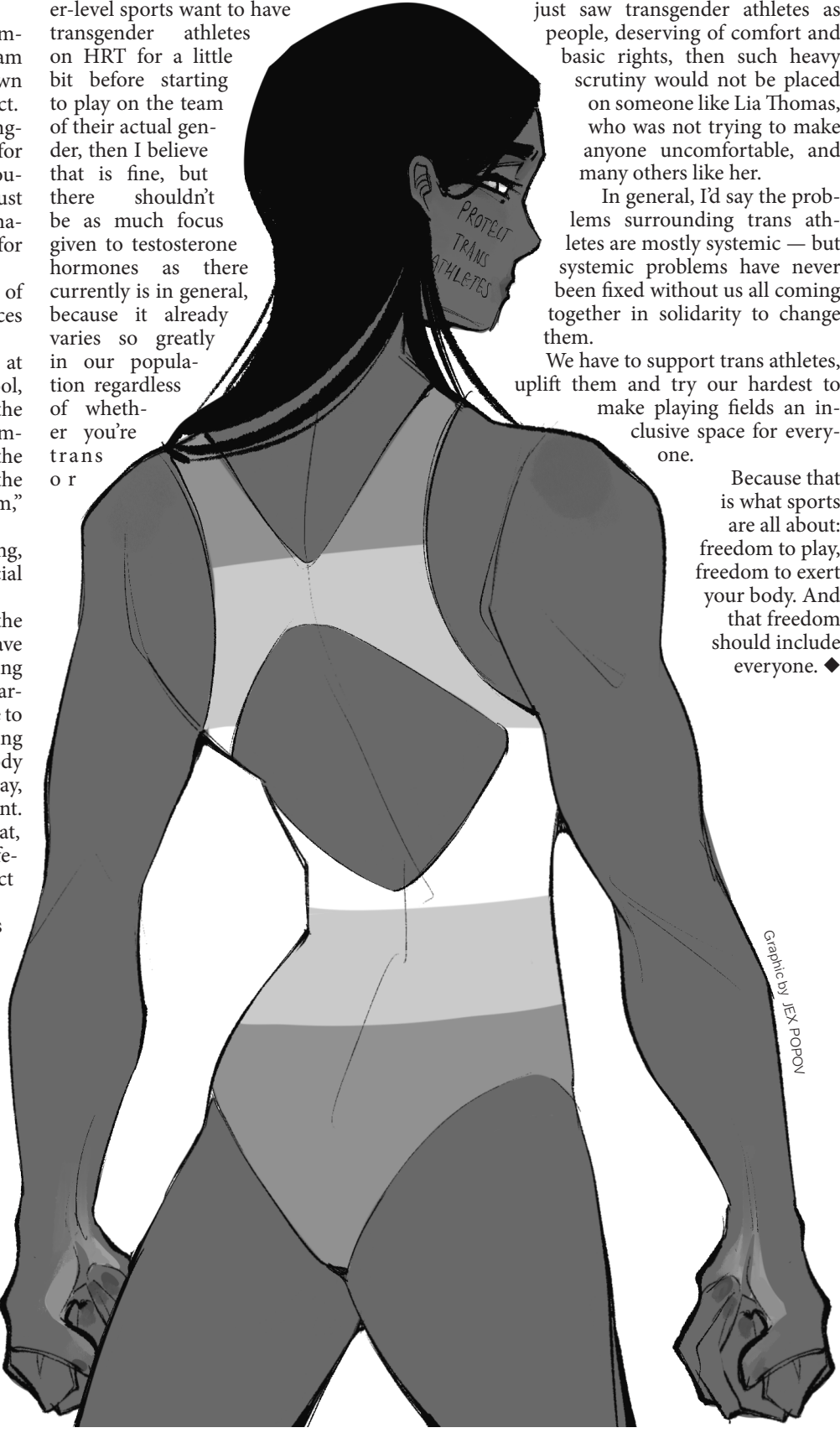
In general, I'd say the problems surrounding trans athletes are mostly systemic — but systemic problems have never been fixed without us all coming together in solidarity to change them.

We have to support trans athletes, uplift them and try our hardest to make playing fields an inclusive space for everyone.

Because that is what sports are all about: freedom to play, freedom to exert your body. And that freedom should include everyone. ♦



Louie



Graphic by JEX POPOV



Photo by RAYYAN AHMAD

Rayyan Ahmad (third from left) and his friends huddle together, posing in a backyard before going to the prom their school hosted in Singapore.

Head injuries force football players to weigh risks

BY LawsonWang & RuiyanZhang

Football has a well-deserved reputation of being one of the most dangerous high school sports. Injuries can range from concussions to fractures, and a growing body of evidence links the sport to brain diseases like chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), which results in a progressive decline in memory and increase in depression and aggression.

A recent story by The New York Times documented how more than 40% of high school and college football players were diagnosed with CTE.

As a result of this growing concern over head injuries, many parents struggle with deciding whether to let their children play football.

Varsity captain Keion Ashjaee-Marshall, a junior who plays running back and line-backer, has seen participation in the sport decline over the years locally.

"We haven't had a supportive culture, especially from parents," he said of the general reputation of the sport these days. "A lot of people believe in the stereotype about football getting you injured."

This season, football had 46 varsity and JV players combined; last year, the program had 53 players.

Athletic trainer Caitlin Steiding said this year's football season resulted in 10 doc-

umented head injuries between the two teams.

Players are educated on how to stay safe on the field. For example, tackling with the head and not the shoulders is a common yet dangerous mistake that leads to serious injury, Steiding said.

"There's no way to actually prevent everything unless you put everybody in a bubble," Steiding said. "But teaching kids the proper mechanics of tackling really helps minimize injuries."

Other safety measures include Guardian Caps, a foam cover worn over traditional helmets to reduce impacts from hits. Guardian Caps are now quite a common measure taken during practices and sometimes games, and studies have shown that wearing them reduces concussion rates by 52%.

Steiding primarily helps guide players through the concussion protocol, which involves first assessing the injury's severity, then referring athletes to the correct doctor to guide their recovery. She also administers a baseline impact test for all players playing sports, so she has historical data to refer to in the case of a head injury.

Junior Doug Bettinger, who plays tight end and safety, had two concussions this football season, both from getting hit in the head while making a tackle.

"It was hard to focus," Bettinger said of the injury. "I was dizzy, lost my balance and had a lot of motion sickness, so it really af-



Against Prospect High School on Aug. 25, football players prepare to snap the ball back.

ected my life."

With Steiding's help, Bettinger was redirected to doctors outside of school and recovered quickly from the motion sickness. After passing the baseline test two weeks later, Bettinger was able to play again.

Now, Bettinger wears a Guardian Cap both during practices and games; he was the only player to choose to wear one during games.

"People just don't enjoy wearing it. They want to look cool," Bettinger said.

Sophomore Anthony Tran, who also suffered a concussion this year, chose not to wear a Guardian Cap during games.

"We have numerous stickers on our helmets to represent our schools as well as to honor Saratoga's greatest head coach, Benny Pierce," Tran said. "I think that some players don't like the look of the guardian cap on a helmet in game as well."

Although playing football comes with a variety of risks, many players still elect to continue playing for its many rewards.

"The bond that I have with other players makes me love football more," Bettinger said. "I like being with them every day, and it makes me keep playing football." ♦

WRESTLING Team learns through film

BY VictoriaLin & AidenYe

As her opponent went for a single-leg shot, junior co-captain Rebecca Bossow caught her overextended arm with a "cow-catcher" move, flipping her opponent onto their back and winning the match. Just two meets ago, she found herself in a similar situation, but failed to capitalize on her opponent's sloppy shot, getting taken down.

In the span of two weeks, through film review and individualized practices, wrestlers like Bossow have made improvements to their defensive and offensive abilities.

Wrestlers say the team's 0-4 record as of Jan. 26 is not representative of the stronger individual performances — they were forced to forfeit matches in weight-classes they did not have on their team.

With seven out of the nine wrestlers this year competing for the first time, head coach Bianca Adams has been pushing for more participation in tournaments, which offer wrestlers a great opportunity to compete and improve skills.

On Jan. 19, the four varsity members — Bossow, junior co-captain Keion Ashjaee-Marshall and seniors David Baek and Aiden Ye — participated in the 2024 Mid-Cals tournament, the most competitive high school tournament in Northern California.

Following each competition, the team gathers to review recordings of their most recent matches. The coaches provide breakdowns of missed opportunities or better methods to deal with various wrestling positions through live demonstrations.

"Watching film is good because when you're in the moment, you don't notice all of your mistakes or opportunities you missed out upon," sophomore Jayden Kwong said. "The coaches help me find things I left out on the table I can capitalize on next time."

With SCVALS occurring soon in early February, the entire team has worked on finishing and defending shots this season.

"We'll have a better feel for the other teams in our league compared to the first time we went against them," Kwong said. "We're more prepared and ready to go." ♦

Lacrosse makes a return

BY GraceLin & NikaSvzhenko

The boys' and girls' lacrosse teams are set to play this season after not running last year due to a lack of registrations and difficulties hiring coaches.

The Sports Boosters organization — a nonprofit organization that pays for resources like concussion testing, athletic scholarships, strength and conditioning training — helped the athletic department find four coaches this season with experience coaching or playing lacrosse.

In previous years, lacrosse has struggled with small rosters. During the '22 spring season, girls' lacrosse only had 15 players, but 10 were needed for a game. Athletic director Rick Ellis had to regularly check on whether the team would have enough players that week to compete.

Last year, all the teams were canceled due to a lack of coaches.

Junior Riley Adler, one of the many lacrosse athletes disappointed with the situation, said she worked with parents, teachers and school faculty to find a coach to lead

The boys' lacrosse team has 20 sign-ups, one part-time coach, Moran and one full-time coach, Brian Dodge. The school decided to run a boys' team too late, so they were unable to get into a league, Ellis said.

They instead plan to compete as an independent team, meaning they will not be part of any athletic league. The coaches and Ellis are working to set up matches against local schools.

Adler is excited for this year's spring season and encourages others to join.

"Lacrosse is such a fun sport to learn and play," Adler said. "The girls are extremely inclusive, and the sport is geared towards new players with little to no experience." ♦



Adler

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Falcons rebound after illnesses and injuries

BY BillHuang & Bryan Zhao

With the score tied 50-50 and the clock ticking down in a game against Monta Vista on Jan. 18, senior co-captain and point guard Bryan Wang slowed his pace and prepared for one final play. With a few cross between in a row, he dribbled by his defender to finish a tough layup, leading the Falcons to a hard-fought 52-50 win, their third league win. Coach Mike Davey pumped his fist in celebration on the sidelines alongside cheers from the crowd and bench.

"We needed to win this game to be a contender for winning the league," junior guard Steven Ning said. "[The win] also gave the whole team a confidence boost for the upcoming games that we were playing."

The team won 56-50 against Lynbrook on Jan. 23. Before, they lost to Cupertino 40-37 on Jan. 20 and lost 46-38 to Fremont on Jan. 16. On Jan. 11, they beat Santa Clara 61-42, and they also defeated Homestead 70-59 on Jan. 9. To start the league season, the team suffered a tough loss against Lynbrook High School losing 61-52 on Jan. 3.



Senior Bryan Wang brings up the ball against a player from Monta Vista during a match on Jan. 16.

As of Jan. 26, the team was third in the El Camino league at 4-3.

The team's starters are junior power forward Daniel Jadali and seniors point guard Wang, guard Brooks Overton, center Ra-

ghav Chakravarthi and power forward Kali Duvvuri. Wang, who received a D3 basketball offer for Pacific University in Oregon, is one of the team's key scorers, averaging 14 points a game.

GIRLS' BASKETBALL Players: 4-12 record fails to demonstrate progress

BY MitchellChen & ArielZhou

While the girls' basketball team overall record stood at 4-12 as of Jan. 26, many of those losses have been close games, and the team is seeking to close the gap and turn losses into more wins.

"There's been improvement being shown. Our coach and other coaches in the league have noticed," senior guard and co-captain Zinnerah Ahmed said.

The girls are one of the top rebounding teams in the El Camino League, but many of the points being scored on them come from

layups. Offensively most of their points are not scored from designed plays but through individual skill and talents. The team's top scorer is junior point guard Urvi Iyer.

Recent scores include a 54-41 loss to Mountain View on Jan. 24, a 38-32 win against Cupertino on Jan. 20, a 40-37 loss against Gunn on Jan. 19 and a 32-20 loss to Milpitas on Jan. 17.

Returning players have had to adapt to the system of new coach Manny Steffen and new freshman teammates this year. According to Ahmed, this slowed down their development as a team because the Falcons were at a disadvantage in terms of height and

team chemistry.

Though adjusting to a new coaching style and incorporating new teammates has presented challenges for the team, Ahmed remains optimistic about the progress and improvements the team has made so far. She notes that freshman forward Payton Steffen and Emma Williams have been good additions to the team.

"They're working hard through practices and games, and they're getting the play time that they deserve," Ahmed said.

Senior co-captain center Priyanka Meduri said the freshmen bring a new dynamic to the team.

"The addition of the younger players has brought fresh energy onto the team," Meduri said. "Their enthusiasm and eagerness to learn has added a new layer to our gameplay."

The recent games, though mostly losses, have served as valuable learning experiences for the Falcons. Meduri highlighted the team's ability to focus on incremental improvements, as the team's determination to bounce back pushes them to work harder.

"After each game, we come together and improve as a team. I am hopeful the next time we play we will have a much better chance of beating them," Meduri said. ♦

GIRLS' SOCCER Cintra steps up as goalie

BY AmeliaChang & RuiyanZhu

The girls' soccer team (5-8 as of Jan. 25) is keeping a positive mindset as they look to learn from their losses and battle their way uphill for the rest of the season.

"We've lost a few tough games against good teams but it hasn't been really reflective of our success as a team. We've been connecting really well and are able to move the ball around," senior co-captain and midfielder Kate Oberhauser said.

tated players to play the position, leading to uneven results. The team finally solved this problem when junior Sofia Cintra stepped up to the position.

"Participation is going down in girls' soccer, and we don't have a lot of options for goalie," Cintra said. "I feel like we were suffering from that."

This year is Cintra's first time playing soccer on an actual team; she started training last September. Before, she had only played casually with friends with no outside of school training or club. Her coaches primarily trained her in her new role, but training with teammates incorporated also gave Cintra more experience.

"I enjoyed [soccer] and I feel like it was a sport that I wanted to try and get better at, because initially I did dance, which is a lot different," Cintra said. "I would be happy to continue playing goalie in the future, especially if the team still needs one next year."

Thanks to Cintra, the team's defense has improved. Players have also implemented a new defensive formation that is a 5-3-2 shape, with 5 defenders at the back, 3 midfielders and 2 forwards, compared to their previous 4-3-3 formation.

This provides more reinforcement in the backline. Cintra has also started adapting to her new role, and she said that it has been stressful for her. On Jan. 16, she played goalie against Mountain View for the first time.

"It's an exciting position, but it's certainly not easy," she said. "But now that we have a goalie, I hope things will go uphill." ♦

BOYS' SOCCER Falcons lose chance of CCS

BY MitchellChen & ChristinaLabban

With the season well underway, the boys' soccer team has lost any chances of advancing to CCS this year: As of Jan. 25, they were ranked sixth out of eight in the league with a 1-4 record. Even winning all six more games would not be enough.

The team lost 3-1 to Los Gatos on Jan. 19, 2-1 to Milpitas on Jan. 17 and 3-0 to Monta Vista on Jan. 13. Their only win was their first game vs. Lynbrook 6-0 on Jan. 10.

The team, under the guidance of coach Connor McGoldrick, is working on refining their execution on offense.

Senior striker and captain Yul Hong, slated to play soccer at the Naval Academy next year, is still working hard to help younger players develop skills such as ball-keeping and passing behind the opponents' back line.

The Falcons were disadvantaged in pre-season due to difficulty with finding a new coach; as such, the team is still getting used to playing with each other.

"We should have had a few preseason scrimmages to get everyone warmed up and ready for an upcoming season," sophomore goalie Orion Tamas King said. "However, due to miscommunication with other schools, we were only able to scrimmage amongst ourselves before heading into this season."

Hong believes the underclassmen will adapt to the faster paces on the varsity level as they get more experience with each game.

"I'm not surprised we haven't been able to play to our full potential as we've had less time to prepare for the season compared to other teams," Hong said. "However, I feel like the team has pretty good chemistry and the underclassmen have been doing well."

Notable standouts include sophomore forward Matez Casanova and Tamas King, who have been able to adapt well to playing on the varsity team. Both have made key plays during games, including a save against Los Gatos early in the game.

"The upperclassmen communicate well with the underclassmen and give us tips to help us improve," King said. "I have hope for the rest of the season because our team is starting to get used to playing with each other and build better chemistry."

Both Hong and King still have high hopes for the rest of the season especially with the strong level of talent on the entire team.

Sophomore Matez Casanova and junior Langdon Huynh previously practiced at Palo Alto Soccer Club and Major League Soccer (MLS), respectively.

Both are highly competitive clubs, and the two brought their talent onto the school team.

"We need more communication if we want to achieve our goal of a winning season this year — something I know we can do," Hong said. ♦



Hong

snapshots



Photo by BRYAN ZHAO



Photo by BRYAN ZHAO



Photo by BRYAN ZHAO

Senior point guard Zinneerah Ahmed sets up a play against Milpitas on Jan 17.

Enginnering teacher Audrey Warmuth works with seniors on their final project.

Counselors Toni Jones and Frances Saiki prepare popcorn for the "Inside Out" movie for Speak Up for Change week.

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Graphic by ALAN CAI

Amateurs' kitchen: combining sweets and salts

MacJello Trio

William Norwood, Nicole Lee and Isabelle Wang



As sane people slept comfortably in their warm beds on a bleak, cold December morning, we decided to exercise our creative minds and create a new culinary “masterpiece” — something following trendy fusion food combinations made popular such as sushi pizza or a pho burrito. Call it our attempt at being innovative.

Isabelle first headed to William’s house, bringing with her a bag of ingredients. Just

a few minutes later, Nicole arrived. Inside the backpack, she had packed a variety of seemingly random ingredients: cheese, pasta and jello.

Our goal: to combine mac and cheese with jello and see what would happen. Our version of Gordan Ramsey was senior Mitchell Chen, who guided our process and evaluated our efforts.

We first cooked the mac and cheese. On our first attempt, William overcooked the macaroni, leading to a disgusting mess of mushed cheese pasta.

However, after Isabelle took the reins and tried again with a timer on her phone, we were able to cook the pasta perfectly. After transferring the pasta to a plate, it

was only a matter of combining the pasta with the jello.

While waiting for the pasta to cool down, we started creating the strawberry flavored jello. Mixing a simple solution of jello powder and hot water, we were able to quickly and efficiently mix up a delicious jello.

Then, quickly before the mac and cheese cooled and the jello firmed up, we mixed the neon red liquid with the creamy, artificially yellow noodles and poured the mixture into a bowl.

Our final concoction: the classic, red and round jello, now tinted slightly orange by the artificially yellow cheese and little elbow macaroni noodles suspended

throughout it.

On first taste, the macaroni and cheese and jello were bizarre. The texture mixed relatively well, but the sweet flavors of the jello and the saltiness of the macaroni and cheese did not mesh well. Still, William could not stop eating, heaping spoonfuls of the red and yellow dish onto his plate.

For her part, Nicole found the creation to be disgusting. After eating a spoonful, she spat it out. Sadly, our attempt at fusion had flopped.

We probably won’t share our jellified pasta with anyone anytime soon, but it also hasn’t set us back on the idea of trying interesting food combinations in the future. ♦

Busting well-known personal hygiene myths

Hygenic Hu?

George Hu



Due to the stress of busy high school lives, it is easy for students to not notice the subtle differences between hygiene myths and realities. Luckily, understanding the differences often takes less effort than people may think.

Let’s start with the idea that using cotton swabs is a safe way to remove earwax. It’s perhaps not surprising that this is a myth. Swabs could do more harm than good. Us-

ing swabs can cause earwax to go further into the ear canal. This not only leads to discomfort, but also can lead to infection, punctured ear drums, and hearing loss. Having earwax comes with benefits such as preventing the ear from becoming excessively dry. Earwax can also disappear naturally, as it usually moves closer to the outer portion of the ear and then falls out. Another common belief is that food that has been on the ground for 5 seconds or less is still clean to eat. This, too, is a myth. As soon as a piece of food touches the ground, it gets contaminated with bacteria. Additionally, moist foods obtain more bacteria than drier foods. Therefore, it is better to just throw foods that hit the ground in the trash. Simi-

larly, many people believe toilet seats are living and breathing cesspools (or the equivalent). Thus, their first thought after using a toilet is to thoroughly wash their hands.

However, objects like smartphones, keyboards and desks tend to be much dirtier than toilet seats. Lastly, many people think that tooth brushing in the shower is the same as tooth brushing with the sink. The truth: Tooth brushing in the shower exposes teeth to more bacteria than tooth brushing at the sink. Showering leads to a moist environment, which causes the growth of bacteria.

The best advice when it comes to hygiene beliefs: Don’t believe everything you’ve been told. ♦



Graphic by GEORGE HU

Please shut the lulu up

Delulu Saralu

Sarah Thomas



If you’ve found yourself on the internet in the past few months, chances are you’ve seen this phrase somewhere: “delulu.” Maybe you’ve seen someone complaining about their unrequited crush, proclaiming that “delulu is the solulu” as a justification for their stalker tendencies, or calling themselves “delulu” for mistakenly believing that they would pass a test without studying.

I can’t emphasize the depth of my ha-

tred for this word enough. It’s so ridiculous that it makes me understand why the rest of the world thinks that Gen Z is fundamentally stupider than any other age group.

Why can’t people just say “delusion-al?” Or “dumb” or “crazy” or “ridiculous” ... the list goes on forever.

There are so many normal ways to convey your idiocy without saying “delulu” and causing everyone in a 10-mile radius to cringe. Even in 2014, when most of us were in elementary school, this phrase would have elicited eye rolls and full-body cringes. I beg of you, turn off your phone, delete TikTok and expand your vocabulary before I have an aneurysm. ♦

topten

MANIPULATIVE BEHAVIORS

- 10

Lying. Liar liar pants on fire. I saw you take the last piece of pizza.
- 9

Passive Aggression. Aw sweetie, do you need a time out to process your emotions? Use your big-boy words!
- 8

Fake tears. No one’s cutting any onions, save your tears for another day.
- 7

Blackmail. Give me your candy or I’m going to tattle tale what you did.
- 6

Yelling. “Don’t make me use my teacher voice,” said Dumbledore.
- 5

Hypocritical behavior. Stop projecting your insecurities like its a movie.
- 4

Gatekeeping. You don’t want me to find this really underground artist with only 1,237 streams on Spotify?
- 3

Guilt trip. I don’t want to go on a guilt trip. Save it for the next person.
- 2

Gaslight. It’s not real. A solid conspiracy made up in your head.
- 1

Silent Treatment. I’m sorry, I can’t deal with mediocrity right now. Bye.