



Social media too often misleads when it comes to mental health



Award show hosts — the good, the bad, and the awkward



Equestrian vaulters find community while competing

# THE saratogafalcon

AN INDEPENDENT HIGH SCHOOL PUBLICATION



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## BnB Boldly Brings the Heat

**Bombay in the Bay facts**

**Who participates in Bombay in the Bay?**  
Over 200 students across all grade levels will partake in this year's show.

**What acts will there be?**  
Specialty acts include Bhangra, Tamasha, Classical and Singing. There will be four grade-level acts and at the end of the performance there will be an All-Males Dance and an All-Girls Dance.

**How many tickets will be sold?**  
A complete sellout of the McAfee Center is expected, totaling 1100 seats.

**What charity will benefit from the show?**  
This year the profits will go to Abhyudaya, a nonprofit organization supporting underprivileged children and their families in India.

**Members from the Bhangra team, including all grade levels, perform to Punjabi music during Bombay in the Bay in 2023.**

Courtesy of ATREY DESAI

## Board puts \$128 parcel tax on the May 7 ballot

By WilliamCao & EricShi

In efforts to maintain the competitiveness of LGSUHS schools, the 5-member governing board has approved putting a parcel tax measure on the ballot this spring. If passed by two thirds of voters, it would raise the current parcel tax rate from \$49 to \$128. Funds from the parcel tax will be directed to hiring and retaining talented educators and funding programs at both Los Gatos and Saratoga High.

In October, the board presented the results of a poll implemented to assess interest and feasibility in raising the parcel tax from \$49 to either \$99 or \$249. However, an updated survey, presented at a board meeting on Jan. 30, led the board to settle on a figure of \$128 — a base rate of \$49 plus an additional \$79 per parcel.

The proposition is a mail-in ballot and will be due May 7. The text of the proposition will read as follows:

*To attract/retain highly qualified teachers in local high schools, maintain strong core academic programs including innovative science, technology, engineering, and math; continue advanced placement courses that prepare students for top colleges/careers, shall Los Gatos-Saratoga Union High School District's measure be adopted, renewing its expiring education parcel tax at the current \$49 plus \$79 per parcel, providing \$2,520,000 annually for nine years, with annual adjustments, citizen oversight, senior exemptions, no funds for administrators, and every dollar benefiting local high schools?*

District leaders hope the proposition will pass after seeing the results of a survey conducted from Jan. 2-7, which measured a 72% approval rating from residents for the new parcel tax. If it doesn't pass, the district will be without nearly \$1 million in annual revenue that it has relied on for more than a decade.

Formal notice of the election to approve

## Bombay in the Bay to perform Feb. 17-18

By JaneLee & NealMalhotra

On a recent Saturday morning, "I Hate Luv Storys" blasted from a speaker in front of the cafeteria as members from the school's competitive Bollywood dance team, Toga Tamasha, practiced their dance for the upcoming Bombay in the Bay (BnB) show. Senior captains Shyla Bhandari and Joshua Ta and co-captains senior Avik Belenje and junior Juhi Karamcheti retaught fundamental steps to make sure each dancer mastered the choreography.

BnB, an annual Bollywood performance held in the McAfee Center, is a showcase bringing together over 200 students across all grades — this year marks the show's 19th rendition. The goal of the performance is to raise money for a yearly rotating charity. This year the profits will go to Abhyudaya, a nonprofit organization supporting underprivileged children and

their families in India.

BnB is hosted by the Indian Cultural Awareness Club (ICAC), and will take place on Feb. 17 from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. and Feb. 18 from 5-8 p.m. Unlike previous years where BnB was on Friday and Saturday, the performances will be pushed back a day due to scheduling conflicts with an out-of-state orchestra coming to play at the McAfee Center.

"It's unfortunate we have to shift from our usual Friday and Saturday performances [to Saturday and Sunday]," senior ICAC officer Raghav Chakravarthi said. "But at the end of the day the performance is still happening, and it will hopefully be just as impactful as other years."

This year, ticket prices have dropped from the usual \$25 to \$20 in light of parent complaints about the prices, according to Chakravarthi. However, after the

first four days of ticket sales, the McAfee was almost sold out, with about 1,100 tickets snapped up, so officers believe that the higher number of ticket sales will help compensate for the lower price.

ICAC has also gained sponsorships from realtor Andy Tse and local Bay Area restaurant, Chaat Bhavan, along with several downtown businesses. In order to do so, the ICAC officers — Belenje, Bhandari, seniors Raghav Chakravarthi, Kavya Patel, Samik Patanayak and Anu Thakur — went around door-to-door in downtown Saratoga to pass out flyers and emailed sponsors from previous years.

To further promote their performance, the officers posted on their social media to encourage more students to participate and more community members and



Chakravarthi

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>> PARCEL TAX on pg. 4

## District picks Centrica to provide solar panels

By WilliamCao & EricShi

During a meeting on Jan. 16, the district board selected electrical services company Centrica to oversee the construction of solar panels at both SHS and Los Gatos High.

Centrica's bid beat out ones from DSD, NextEra and Solaris. The contract with Centrica is set to be officially approved at a meeting on Feb. 27. The direct project pur-

chase cost for the Saratoga High project is estimated at almost \$1.9 million.

According to information released by the board, the construction, which is projected to commence around July and be completed by April 2025, will include three rows of solar panel canopies shadowing the parking lot section close to the McAfee Center, two rows of solar panel canopies above the

>> SOLAR PANELS on pg. 5





## newsbriefs

### More AP Exams to transition to digital format in 2025

College Board will administer nine Advanced Placement (AP) exams digitally starting May 2025. Another six AP exams will be transitioned from the current on-paper format to a digital format in 2026.

The 2025 digital AP exams include: AP African American Studies, AP Computer Science Principles, AP English Language and Composition, AP English Literature and Composition, AP European History, AP Psychology and AP Seminar, AP United States History and AP World History: Modern. In 2026, the following AP exams will go digital: AP Art History, AP Comparative Government and Politics, AP Computer Science A, AP Human Geography, AP Latin and AP United States Government and Politics.

This year, Saratoga High will continue to administer the two English tests in a digital format and add AP European History and AP United States History into the digital mix. ♦

— William Cao and Eric Shi

### Employee COVID leave mandate reduced to 24 hours

In February 2023, the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (Cal/OSHA) mandated school staff, upon testing positive for COVID, to take five days of leave which deducts from their personal sick days.

The policy persisted until Jan. 9 of this year, when Cal/OSHA allowed school employees to return after at least 24 hours have passed since the onset of symptoms and wearing a mask for 10 days.

In earlier years of the pandemic, COVID illnesses effectively didn't subtract days from employees' sick leave because of reimbursements to the district from the government, and employees could miss as many as 10 days as they overcame the sickness and tried to test negative.

These updated regulations also require staff to wear a mask through the 10th day of their infection, while students are recommended to do the same. ♦

— Parav Manney

### Grad night for Class of '24 features surprise events

Preparations for senior Grad Night have begun and are being led by the Graduation Committee, led by senior parent members Shaugna Green and Alicia de Fuentès.

Grad Night will take place June 6 after the graduation ceremony from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m., with tickets currently priced at \$250. The event will be monitored by school staff members and administrators. Activities will be held across campus and will include live entertainment, music, minigames and more.

COVID protocol, according to the LGSUHS guidelines, will be mandated for the event. Any students exhibiting symptoms of sickness will be barred from attending the event.

The schedule for the party is as follows: students will check in at the quad at 10 p.m. and a video displaying seniors' fondest memories of high school will be played at 4 a.m.

In between, at 2 a.m., the Graduation Committee has planned a surprise event, which will be revealed at the party. At 5 a.m., the graduates will welcome the sunrise with breakfast and by 6 a.m., they will have made their final farewells to many of their classmates.

Grad Night will be the last high school-sponsored celebration that will gather most of the Class of '24.

De Fuentès mentioned the Graduation Committee is especially devoted to throwing a spectacular party since the graduating senior class was unable to partake in many festivities for their middle school graduation due to COVID-19.

"The hope is that this graduation party is mentioned in the chapter of 'Best memories are made by celebrating with friends!' of our kids' lives," De Fuentès said. ♦

— Meher Bhatnagar and Kavya Patel

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## The Saratoga Falcon

February 16, 2024



Courtesy of KRISTI OBERHAUSER

**Making Music |** Director Jason Shiuan conducts the Symphonic Wind Ensemble as they play "Takara-jima" by Hirotaka Izumi at the California All-State Music Education Conference (CASMEC) on Feb. 2.

# Symphonic Wind Ensemble performs at state conference

by AnikaKapasi & AngelaTan

Months of rehearsals culminated for the 59 members of the Symphonic Wind Ensemble (SWE) with a Feb. 2 performance at CASMEC held at the SAFE Credit Union Convention Center in Sacramento.

SWE's brass opened the 60-minute set together with the Homestead High Wind Ensemble I Brass, playing "Vienna Philharmonic Fanfare" by Richard Strauss. Performing eight pieces, the ensemble featured music educators as solo performers in compositions like "What We Saw There" by Matthew Vu and Emmanuel Séjournés "Double Concerto for Marimba and Vibraphone." Closing the set out with the finale of "Third Symphony, IV" by James Barnes and "Takara-jima" by Hirotaka Izumi, the afternoon marked the culmination of the countless hours of hard work the ensemble dedicated to the performance.

According to music director Jason Shiuan, the pieces all vary in genre, time period and skill level, but together they aim to meld together differences and unite in music.

"The message of 'musical friends are friends forever' was the impetus for much of our programming ideas," Shiuan said. "While [music director Michael] Boitt and I experience this [camaraderie and support] with many of the directors in this area, it's not really a common thing in other parts of the state or country."

Shiuan believed showcasing the collaboration between student musicians and educators was essential, especially in a time when many "tend to pit themselves against one another."

Following their acceptance in August, SWE began preparing their music during marching band season by regularly holding ensemble rehearsals during their designated class time and student-run sectionals after school. As the set list was solidified in January, guest conductors were rearranged for different pieces. SWE rehearsed with teacher soloists and the Homestead Brass during weekly Wednesday 6-8 p.m. rehearsals.

On Jan. 24, one week before the conference, SWE hosted a send-off concert at the McAfee Center, where they played their full set to simulate the performance procedure at CASMEC.

"I definitely think the overall endurance got better [at the send-off concert]. It was clear in the performance that both physically, our embouchure but also our mental focus lasted longer," Shiuan said. "With the adrenaline of the performance, the [preview concert] helped the comfort level [of the set] be better."

In their weeks of preparation, SWE also practiced with the mindset they were going to record their two staple pieces — "George Washington Bicentennial March" by John Philip Sousa and the finale of "Third Symphony, IV" by James Barnes — to apply for the 2024 Midwest Clinic International Band, Orchestra and Music Conference hosted from Dec. 18-21 in

Chicago. The ensemble was rejected from the conference in 2023, but plans to audition again this year.

According to Shiuan, planning for music conferences like Midwest requires careful consideration for the year ahead. He aims to prevent auditioning with a qualified group one year and seeing the ensemble struggle the following year in the absence of skilled members who already graduated. Shiuan has known he has wanted to audition with the Class of '25 since the students' freshman year and anticipates success with them this year.

### 12 members juggle SWE and All-State at CASMEC

During the conference week from Jan. 31-Feb. 4, 13 students from SWE — 21 students overall in the music program — performed with the audition-required All-State ensembles. After sending in recordings of the required excerpts and scales for their instruments, the musicians gained acceptance into the state-level groups in November. The SWE members accepted into All-State included two in Concert Band and four in Symphonic Band, as well as three in Symphony Orchestra and four in the Wind Symphony — the two highest-level All-State ensembles.

Senior flute player Eric Miao, first chair in the All-State Wind Symphony this year, said playing with All-State at CASMEC allowed for a deeper music understanding and a unique experience of fully immersing himself into music.

"The music making is at a higher level because the conductor tells us what they want in abstract terms, and we have to figure out how we are going to play it," Miao said. "It's also very intense in terms of time. Every day [at CASMEC] is six or seven hours of rehearsal on the most busy days. You don't think about school or anything else while you're there. It's your whole life for three or four days."

Performing with both All-State and SWE, Miao had to balance both sets of repertoire during the conference weekend. He found that performing with SWE came more naturally to him because of the ensemble's thorough preparation, allowing him to focus his energy on pieces for All-State.

However, although the SWE repertoire became "second nature" to him, he still experienced fatigue from having to maintain energy through the lengthy All-State rehearsal in the morning and SWE performance in the afternoon.

Nonetheless, the opportunity to perform with both All-State and SWE this year was a fulfilling experience for Miao.

"It was super great seeing a bunch of my friends from SHS after being away [at All-State] for a few days, and performing the music we worked so hard on and for so long," Miao recalled. "It definitely feels different to perform with the people I've known and worked with for years." ♦

## The Saratoga Falcon

February 16, 2024



Courtesy of HANNAH BUI

**Crafting club hand-makes bracelets.**

# Crafting club - perfect for relaxation

by SashaPrasad & EmilyWu

Starting at the end of a thin strip of canary yellow paper, senior Ella O'Reilly folded a loop and threaded the short end through to form a flat, pentagonal shape. She then pushed gently on each side to inflate the paper into a cute and puffy star. This detailed process unfolded during a crafting club meeting on Dec. 14, where Ella and other club members learned how to make thin strips of paper into an origami constellation.

The school's crafting club — led by president Ella, junior vice president Hannah Bui, senior treasurer Emily O'Reilly and junior secretary Lin Jensen — meets every Blue Day Thursday in room 408, advised by French teacher Elaine Haggarty. During meetings, officers lead around 20 members in a handful of crafting activities, which include making leaf dream catchers, lanterns and paper angels.

"We bring supplies and present slides with the instructions for members to follow along," Bui said. "It's very relaxing and members can talk to each other and bond over it."

Unlike many academic clubs, the crafting club is a stress-free obligation, according to Jensen. The crafts they organize are not large projects nor are they very practical. Instead, they are small, fun charms such as friendship bracelets and origami. The crafts largely depend on the season.

"During fall we made Halloween-themed art, and in the winter we organized many Christmas crafts such as ornaments and snowflakes," Jensen said.

Many officers and members have enjoyed crafting since childhood. To them, crafting provides an escape from external pressures like school and extracurriculars. Each craft — whether it is crocheting or origami — requires a different technical skill.

For Ella, the start of quarantine was when she started crocheting as a hobby to overcome the boredom of being isolated in her house.

"I started crocheting and crafting and I realized doing things with my hands was de-stressing," Ella said.

Now, Ella finds the club to be a haven for crafting enthusiasts like her to take a break and relax during lunch. In the future, the officers also look forward to expanding their skill set by setting up more long-term projects.

"Crafting club teaches you how to be hands-on and take pride in the little things that can make a big difference whether it's reducing stress, enhancing fine motor skills, or improving self-expression and self-esteem," Bui said. ♦

# Seniors one step from national math teams

by JessicaLi, ParavManney & AmyMiao

USA Team Selection Tests (TSTs) are 4.5-hour, 3-question tests that are used as a key determining factor in selecting the International Math Olympiad (IMO) team and European Girls' Math Olympiad (EGMO) teams. Few students are advanced enough to take them, with only 38 students across the nation taking the TST this year.

The top six scorers will be selected for the IMO team (announced in late April). The first two tests were also used to determine the top four female participants, who make up the nation's EGMO team.

Among the 38 test takers were seniors Advait Avadhanam and Victoria Hu, who took two out of six TSTs on Dec. 17 and Jan. 11 proctored by guidance counselor and math club adviser Brian Safine.

Four remaining exam dates for IMO selection will take place in March.

Earlier during the winter Olympiad season, Hu also participated in a separate contest, the Math Prize for Girls Olympiad, where she received a bronze medal.

For Avadhanam, the chance to participate in TST with a shot at the IMO team is the culmination of years of effort. Since he's been studying competitive math since 6th grade and placed 10th in last year's TST cycle, he hopes his experience will increase his chances of qualification.

To compete in the TSTs, students must first undergo an extensive series of qualifying contests. They must meet the cut-off for at least one of the two-part American Mathematics Competition (AMC), which qualified Avadhanam for the American Invitational Mathematics Examination (AIME). Test takers must score well enough on the AIME to qualify for the United States of America Junior Math Olympiad (USAJMO)



Graphic by RICHARD FAN

## BNB

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parents to buy tickets. This campaign has had clear payoffs: All classes have noted increased participation compared to last year; in particular, the sophomore class has seen an increase from 15 girls to 25 this year.

In the two weeks leading up to BnB, participants have been practicing three to four times per week for each of the acts.

Although the Class of '27 is participating for the first time, freshman choreographer Ovee Dharwadkar noted freshman participation is higher than it was for the other grades during their freshman years. They have around 30 to 40 girls and 15 to 20 boys.

For Dharwadkar, choreographing for BnB is an opportunity to bond with others through Bollywood music and dance.

"I've always really liked listening to Bollywood music growing up; it brings out a different feeling. I think a lot of people can definitely relate to that, which is why they join," she said. "Also, just being able to dance with your friends in a no-judgment environment and hanging out is what really makes it super fun."

For the returning sophomores, they have noted significant improvements from last year in both dance quality and overall enthusiasm for BnB.

"Last year, people were uncomfortable with their partners, but this year, people have loosened up and built up more time for BnB," sophomore choreographer Nila Venkataratnam said.

and the United States of American Mathematical Olympiad (USAMO), which receive roughly 250 students each. Typically, the top 15 USAJMO takers and the top 45 USAMO scorers can then move on to take the Team Selection Test Selection Test (TSTST). Finally, the TST is administered to the roughly top 30 scorers on the TSTST.

Each three-question TST exam covers various topics, including algebra, geometry, number theory and combinatorics. The test prohibits the use of a calculator but according to Avadhanam, the test doesn't require much computation, instead focusing more on problem-solving.

The questions are written with increasing difficulty and test takers are required to write a complete proof for each question. The proofs are scored on a scale from 0-7 with 7 being completely correct and 1 being not meaningful.

Although partial credit is given, Avadhanam said graders are strict and many incomplete solutions are often given a 0. If a student solves 75% of a proof correctly, it would still likely receive a 2 or 3.

"When you're stuck, the best thing to do is to move to a different problem and then come back," he said. "Regarding time constraints, there isn't time pressure per se, but there is stress which can cause last-minute scrambles."

So far, he feels neutral about his performance on the first two TSTs and hopes to eventually make IMO this year.

"I've done OK so far, but I'm hoping the next few TSTs will be decisive," Avadhanam said. "If the nature of these tests is relatively easy, there's a gap of a few points separating 15 people sometimes, which is quite crazy given that there are only six spots."

### Hu participates in TST and wins medal at Math Prize for Girls Olympiad

Hu has progressed from competing in fast-paced computational tests to Olympiads over the years; she feels that being able to participate in the TST in December and January was a highlight of her competitive math career. She wanted to clarify that she didn't qualify for it in the same way as Avadhanam, however. Avadhanam is part of the IMO team selection pool while Hu was part of the EGMO team selection pool, which comprised the top 18 girls from the TSTST.

However, the junior class has noted how difficult it is to schedule rehearsals due to the busy and stressful nature of junior year, according to junior choreographer Mihir Shaik. Because of participants' busy schedules, Shaik has found that hosting weekend practices is impossible and even weekend practices do not have full participation.

The whole senior class act started their practices later than other grade-level acts. Due to many seniors participating in other, longer acts, like the All-Girls Dance (AGD) and All-Males Dance (AMD), the senior choreographers decided to start practices three weeks before the show.

"The senior act is about 6-minutes long split across three sections so there's not a lot of teaching we have to do," senior choreographer Arjun Rajee said. "The senior act is also an opportunity for people who haven't done BnB to jump in and participate for the final time since the dance isn't very difficult."

In addition to individual grade acts and AGD/AMD, BnB always includes four more specialty acts: Tamasha, Bhangra, Singing and Classical. To transition between acts, ICAC officers act out Bollywood movies, with this year being "Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani."

According to Chakravarthi, AMD and AGD are usually the highlights of the show, being the finishing acts.

They consist of seasoned dancers who have participated in BnB for all four years, and are usually 10-12 minutes each. Other specialty

acts like Bhangra and Tamasha are tryout only and consist mostly of upperclassmen.

The Bhangra team — performing a common Punjabi-style dance — is led by senior

Regardless, Hu said she feels thankful that she was able to cap off her Olympiad math journey with an exciting test at the national level.

"I am grateful for the rare opportunity to participate in these contests since I don't have many left," she said.

One of the other Olympiads Hu has competed in recently is the Math Prize for Girls (MPFG) Olympiad, the final round of the MPFG contest series.

In October, Hu first participated in the Math Prize for Girls (MPFG) contest in Boston as one of seven participants from SHS — all attendees had to place within the top 200 girls from the AMC in order to qualify.

After competing at MPFG and placing within the top 45 contestants, Hu then qualified for the MPFG Olympiad alongside junior Ishani Agarwal and freshman Vivian Zhong; the three of them took a 4-hour, 4-problem proof-based contest held at the end of November. Hu scored in the top 20, and received a bronze medal.

Throughout middle and high school, Hu has spent hours every week preparing for computational contests like AMC and AIME as well as Olympiads like USAJMO, which she believes helped her performance at the MPFG contest itself. This idea aligns with Hu's overall belief that a commitment to foundational contests lays the groundwork for success in others: She didn't prepare for the MPFG contest specifically, instead relying upon her experience from prior contests she participated in.

Hu additionally offered advice for aspiring mathletes.

"For people who want to do math contests, I would recommend starting fairly early because I found that it took a while to build up intuition and experience," she said.

Hu emphasizes that success in math contests stems from years of passion, dedication and patience, rather than an innate ability to effortlessly solve problems.

"A misconception people have is that math contest kids just look at a problem and know how to solve it, which is only true in speed-based competitions," Hu said. "For me, it's always a struggle to wrack my brain for potential ideas, but once you crack a tough problem, it's extremely rewarding. There's no feeling like it." ♦

captains Rajee and Ameya Saund and junior co-captains Arshia Desarkar and Saeel Thomas. This year, 10 girls and 10 boys were selected for the team. Following tradition, the act features props, such as ribbons.

## "I think it's a really good way for students to be able to come together."

SENIOR Raghav Chakravarthi

"Bhangra's super high energy and it takes a lot of energy to be able to dance through all 10 minutes along with grace," Saund said.

Another specialty act, Tamasha, is unique in that they also perform in local Bollywood dance showcases. The Tamasha captains held tryouts in August, selecting seven boys and seven girls for the team. Currently, they are preparing a 7-minute dance. With the inclusion of specialty acts and grade-level dances, Chakravarthi noted students often form strong relationships with their peers. Beyond being a large dance showcase, he feels that BnB has become a popular community-bonding event.

"I think it's a really good way for students to be able to come together because I feel like dancing and just hanging out with your friends is something that everyone enjoys," Chakravarthi said. "With all the work that people have to do at school, it's a way to get your mind off things, especially because we are working for a good cause." ♦



## PARCEL TAX

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the new tax rate was publicized on Feb. 7 as per the request of the county superintendents. The costs of levying this election will lie solely on the district to reimburse Santa Clara County and Santa Cruz County for the services provided in presenting the bill to the public. That cost is estimated to land in the ballpark of \$800,000 to \$1 million.

If approved, the new \$128 parcel tax would begin on July 1. The overall goal is to maintain the district's status as having some of the top high schools in the state; the board believes increasing the parcel tax to better fund the two schools' needs, like teacher salary and program funding, will bring the necessary boost to keep the two schools competitive when recruiting and trying to keep good teachers.

**If approved, the new \$128 parcel tax would begin on July 1.**

Educator salaries at LGSUHSd have fallen far behind several other nearby districts in recent years — for instance, Mountain View Los Altos has an average salary of \$152,524 as of the 2023-24 school year compared to LGSUHSd's average salary of \$117,963. As a result, several longtime teachers have left the district for higher-paying jobs in other districts, and the schools have had a harder time hiring top teaching talent.

District leaders also point to the cost of parcel taxes in other districts such as Palo Alto — \$836 per parcel — as evidence that the district's request to increase the tax from \$49 to \$128 is reasonable. Now they hope at least two thirds of voters agree. ♦

## Mock Trial club wraps up their season

BY CaitlinStoiber

The Mock Trial team competed in person again this year after spending the past three seasons online.

Out of the four competitions in the Santa Clara County tournament that the club attended this season — two for Saratoga High's prosecution team and two for the defense — the Falcons secured one win for the defense.

According to junior club president Ryan Heshmati, while the season didn't come with many wins, this year marked a fresh start for the team because they weren't online anymore. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, Mock Trial competitions were held online over Zoom.

Membership for the Mock Trial club also rebounded. The club, which is led by Heshmati, junior vice-president Aarushi Sharma, junior treasurer Diya Kapoor and junior secretary Caitlin Stoiber, had a total of 25 members this year, 17 of whom were entirely new.

The team also welcomed a new attorney coach, Christopher Van Meir. A deputy public defender with over 17 years of experience, Van Meir decided to help the rising generation of aspiring lawyers by coaching the school's Mock Trial team.

As the team struggled to adjust to in-person competition, Heshmati emphasized that Van Meir's experience helped them learn and grow as a team.

"Since nobody on the team had in person experience, we were in it together," Heshmati said. "What really enabled us [to succeed] was that we got a great public defender [as our coach]. [He] really helped us understand the necessary adjustments for in person competition."

Club practices ran every Tuesday from 6:45 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Under Van Meir's guidance, the team worked to break down the case packet — the main source of information pertaining to this year's fictional

court case.

This year's court trial was called People vs. Clark. In this fictional case, the defendant, Tobie Clark, is on trial for the first-degree murder of Kieran Sunshine, the CEO of a prosthetic limb company.

In order to enact Tobie Clark's trial, students in the club were split into two groups: the prosecution, led by Sharma and Kapoor, and defense, led by Stoiber and Heshmati. The prosecution created a case against Clark, while defense created a case supporting Clark.

Each member was also assigned a specific role (attorney, witness, pretorial, clerk, bailiff or understudy). During a typical practice, attorneys met with their witnesses and crafted a line of questioning for the witness. Afterwards, prosecution and defense competed against one another for a full trial round.

Tryouts for the club were held in September, where interested students played the role of an attorney or a witness through a simulation of a previous year's case. Many who joined said that they were interested in exercising their public speaking skills.

"[Mock Trial] is a really good opportunity to develop skills like public speaking, acting and thinking on your feet," said freshman Dyuthi Boinepalli, an attorney on defense. "It's also a great introduction into law."

**Prosecution**

For SHS's prosecution, scoring points and securing wins at tournaments has been an uphill battle. The prosecution attended their first competition against Los Altos High at the Santa Clara County Office of Education on Jan. 22. The judges scored in favor of Los Altos and failed to find Clark guilty.

"[Los Altos] knew all the blind spots of each witness, and they attacked those," Kapoor said.

SHS's prosecution saw greater success during their second competition against Leigh High on Jan. 30, where they won the ruling from the judge. However, they failed to win overall since they received a lower point total from the scorers.

**Defense**

SHS's defense, on the other hand, had their first tournament of the season against Lynbrook on Jan. 24, which they won due to the Lynbrook prosecution team forfeiting as a no-show.

However, during their second competition against Lynbrook on Feb. 1, they were unable to pull another win. Despite receiving multiple scores of 9 and 10 out of 10 total points for witnesses and attorneys, the team was unable to advance to the next round on either side.

Due to Lynbrook Mock Trial's position as a historically successful program — they were a Santa Clara Mock Trial finalist in 2023 — Heshmati was impressed with the defense team's "huge" performance.

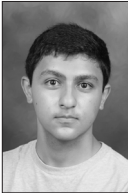
Boinepalli also said members of the team were able to learn from the strength and candor of Lynbrook High's witnesses' performance as it was the determining factor behind their victory.

"It was definitely challenging," she said. "We gave it our all and I'm happy with the result because I know we all tried our best."

Despite their lackluster results this year, many members are still impressed by their performance this season and remain hopeful for the coming years.

Heshmati felt that the team's season was a resounding success despite their low ranking.

"Ultimately, some might get fixated on the scores but having competed for three years I have learned those are somewhat arbitrary and not worth getting hung up on," he said. "The season was excellent, in terms of growth as a team under the fantastic leadership of our coach. He took a group with zero in person experience and prepared us well for the transition." ♦



Heshmati

## Speech and debate duo partners qualify for nationals

BY EmmaFung & AnthonyLuo

Juniors Timothy Leung and Kinnera Potluri are now preparing for the National Invitational Events Tournament of Champions (NIETOC), which will be held in Bellevue, N.E., on May 10-12.

They earned their bid to NIETOC through a first-place win at the John Lewis Silicon Valley Urban Debate League (SVUDL) Invitational held at Silver Creek High on Nov. 19.

Leung and Potluri, who are also president and vice president of the team, participated in the Duo Interpretation category, which consists of two people delivering one 10-minute long speech.

**"You can't see yourself performing, so we went into the tournament pretty much blind."**

JUNIOR Kinnera Potluri

The duo attended numerous speech tournaments in the past as individual contestants, but the John Lewis Invitational was the first time they competed together.

They spent hours after school practicing their speech, refining movements and speaking style to perfectly capture the right emotions, whether it was joy, grief or humor.

With mixed responses from their preliminary round judges on the Saturday before the competition, Leung and Potluri were excited when they found out they made Sunday's elimination round, but still did not have any large expectations. Potluri described the win as unexpected.

"You can't see yourself performing, so we went into the tournament pretty much blind," Potluri said. "We didn't expect to win, and once we did, we thought maybe this speech can go somewhere."

Leung and Potluri are both accomplished speech and debaters and have won numerous tournaments over the last three years.

Leung, who specializes in Program Oral Interpretation, won the state championship in the category last year. Potluri, who specializes in Humorous Interpretation, joined Leung in attending the National Speech and Debate Tournament in Phoenix last June.

The two had originally planned to compete together in their senior year for fun, and began brainstorming ideas for what they could do as far back as last year.

However, since Potluri plans to perform her arangetram (an on-stage debut performance of an Indian classical dance student) next year, they decided to team up this year.

The Duo Interpretation category comes with a few specific limitations that competitors need to keep in mind. Team members must tell a story through their speech, and they are not allowed to touch each other or make eye contact.

In order to communicate effectively during their performance, Leung and Potluri used strategies that include maneuvering on stage and stopping just short of touching, or facing 45 degrees toward each other to avoid eye contact while recognizing and responding to each other's emotional cues; executing these cues requires extensive preparation and chemistry.

The premise of every Duo Interpretation speech varies greatly as well, ranging from humorous to dramatic and anywhere in between.

Leung and Potluri spent weeks brainstorming possible ideas for their speech, watching previous national champions to



Courtesy of TIMOTHY LEUNG

Juniors Kinnera Potluri and Timothy Leung run through their duo interpretation speech.

seek inspiration. Ultimately, the pair settled on adapting "Click," the 2006 film featuring Adam Sandler, whose character, a workaholic who struggles to find time to spend with his family, discovers a remote to fast forward through time.

"I had just watched the movie, and I thought it was pretty funny, but also that it had a really good message about living in the moment, so I told [Kinnera] that maybe it would be something we could do for our speech," Leung said. "She really liked that idea, and so did our coach, so we just went with it."

In the speech, the pair explores how being a workaholic can affect one's personal life, showing their story's main character abusing his time-traveling remote to skip past all the "boring" parts of his life until he eventually dies. Leung acts as the protagonist, Michael, while Potluri plays the role of his wife, Donna.

To make their message of living in the moment more powerful, they are working to get further in tune with their characters' emotions and make certain parts of their speech clearer.

The pair hopes to take their speech to the next level of tournaments, including the California High School Speech Association Championship in March and the NIETOC in May.

"I want to make sure that our speech can make an impact on people and make them reconsider how they approach their own lives," Leung said. ♦

## Quiz Bowl team works to rebound from loss of alumni

BY JaneLee

riety of topics including history, literature, pop culture, science, fine arts, philosophy, theology, geography and more. Quiz Bowl is divided into three divisions: competitive, standard and novice.

The school's Quiz Bowl team, which typically competes within the standard and novice divisions, is led by its upperclassmen officers: president Ahuja and vice president senior Rushil Saraf, as well as juniors Akshat Bora and Alan Cai, who are treasurer and secretary respectively.

This year's club has 15 members consisting primarily of sophomores and juniors, a slight increase from last year's 12 members.

Despite the club's increase in popularity, Ahuja noted that it has faced difficulties in placing as high as they did last year, where the standard team qualified for the National tournament and placed fifth.

Last semester, the club sent teams to the Fall Novice Tournament on Oct. 8, and California Cup #1, both of which were held online. In the California Cup #1, the standard team placed eighth of 16 teams, and the novice team placed 10th of 15.

Ahuja attributes these difficulties to the loss of talented veterans to graduation, including seniors Siddharth Kamannavar, Nithya Krishna, Nilay Mishra, Anthony Wang and Adam Xu.

Lifetime savings and price adjustment accounted for 40% of the score; project experience, qualifications, safety plans and financial stability accounted for 20%; System design, components and schedule accounted for 20%; Performance guarantee accounted for 10%; and contract exceptions and overall RFP (request for proposals) accounted for 10%. Under this scoring system, Centrica ranked first for solar panel installation and third for the installation of solar panels with electric vehicle charging services, giving it the highest average ranking out of all the listed companies.

Although Centrica ranked relatively low compared to other companies on the "lifetime savings and price adjustment" category, achieving a rank of No. 4, the company consistently ranked in the top two in all other categories, resulting in its top placement.

Centrica's deficit in savings is apparent when looking at a cumulative savings line graph procured by the board.

According to the graph, after 20 years, Centrica's total savings amounted to just over \$5 million, while competing companies DSD and NextEra provided savings of nearly \$9 million and just over \$6 million, respectively.

Still, the board determined the trade-off of total savings for Centrica's lead in all other factors, like project guarantee, experience, schedule and systems design was worth it for the creation of campus-wide sustainable energy infrastructure.

As the school shifts more toward alternative energy sources to help preserve the environment, the long-awaited prospect of solar panels is no longer a distant vision.

With concrete dates on when construction will begin and end, the board has begun to step out of the planning phase and has begun the development phase. ♦

## VEX Robotics teams gear up for coming competitions

BY DanielWu & SarahZhou

Following an intensive winter break packed with multiple build and practice sessions, the school's six VEX robotics teams are eager to put their robots to the test in upcoming competitions.

All teams have six members with two being team leads. Teams must win a regional competition or a noteworthy judge award at a regional competition to secure a spot in the state competition. From there, they can then compete to qualify for the world championship held from April 25-27 in Dallas. Teams 95071X, 95071V and 95071H have already qualified to compete in the state championship held on March 10 in Tracy. Meanwhile, teams 95071W, 95071Y, and 95071Z look to

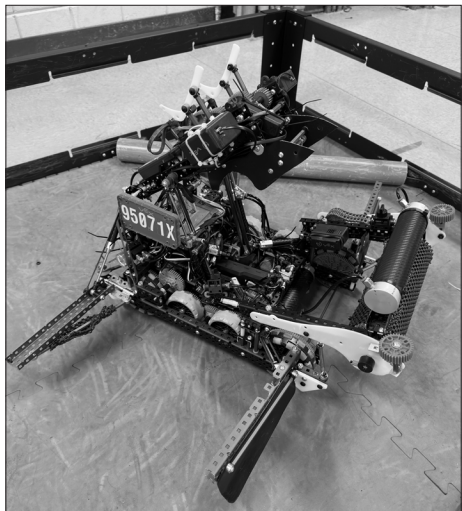


Photo by DANIEL WU

Team 95071X's robot with its ball pylons extended and climbing crane raised on Feb. 8.

qualify in upcoming regional competitions like the Saratoga Falcons Annual Robotics Tournament held at the school's large gym on Feb. 25.

This year's game, "Over Under," tasks teams with building robots capable of scoring acorn-shaped "triballs" into goals. During the final 10 seconds of a match, teams can elevate their robots via clamping to poles to gain extra points. Higher clamped robot heights equate to increased points.

Sophomore club secretary Richard Lee said team 95071X is nearing completion of a rebuild of their robot, which features improved maneuverability and clamp elevation.

95071X's new build runs seven pounds lighter compared to its predecessor, thus lessening the strain on the pull-up clamp and, in turn, increasing the robot's climbing elevation. In addition, the team fitted a faster drive train, which allows the robot to maneuver the field at higher speeds and increase the rate of scoring.

"Weight saving and speed were our main priorities; at this point, we're just fine-tuning and we expect the build to be competition-ready in the coming weeks," Lee said.

Lee added that the team employed a "parallel build strategy" to keep the old robot intact while constructing their new build as a safety precaution to ensure the team always had a functioning, competition-ready robot.

The six teams, with workspaces in rooms across campus, coordinate build strategies and share tips to maximize overall team results.

"Our H team is taking a similar approach to us [X team], so we share tips and stuff we learn through our trials and errors," Lee

said. "Generally, you'll see radically different builds at the start of the season, but near the end, many builds converge in design and play philosophy."

While team 95071X has made major build modifications given the two months they have until states, team 95071Z has directed their efforts toward training their drive team and enhancing their robot's autonomous driving. Their goal is to maximize points in upcoming competitions to qualify for states.

"Launching the tri-balls onto the other side of the field is tricky, so it requires our drive team members to practice more since we want to do it as efficiently and effectively as possible," 95071Z team lead sophomore Katherine Zeng said.

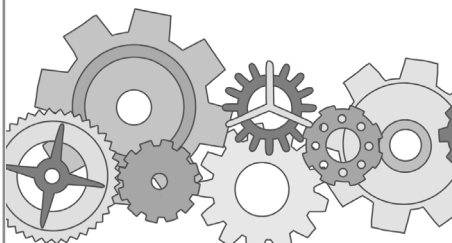
Zeng has also tasked her team with watching live streams of previous games to gain insights into strategy and gameplay. Ball control has been identified by the team as a make-or-break factor in elimination rounds, as most successful teams favored a slow but precise scoring technique rather than rapidly hoarding balls into goals with low accuracy.

Both Lee and Zeng are confident the club has ironed out growing pains from previous years, given its relative infancy of being founded in 2021.

Zeng emphasized the club's doubling in size from 24 members to over 40 members and the presence of robotics veterans as key contributors to a hopeful season. Lee drew parallels between Saratoga and traditional VEX powerhouse schools such as Milpitas.

"We exist in a period sort of after Milpitas and Park Bots dominated the field, so I think we're looking solid and on the come-up for states and worlds," Lee said. ♦

# ROSTER



## TEAM 95071H

Aidan Liu (9) PM

Debash Das Sharma (9)

Eric Liang (9)

Meera Minocha (9)

William Deklich (9) PM

## TEAM 95071Y

Alex Ge (10)

Eliza Lin (10)

Ishin Lidman (9)

Misha Khairam (9) PM

Nikhil Prabhakaran (9)

Sethan Sun (9) PM

## TEAM 95071V

Advika Mukherjee (10)

Eungyo (Lia) Go (10)

Nicole Hao (10) PM

Ruiyan Zhu (10) PM

Rebecca Chen (9)

Vivian Lei (10)

## TEAM 95071X

Adit Sharma (10)

Bryan Zhao (10) PM

Kai Otsuka (12)

Luke Zhang (11) PM

Richard Lee (10)

William Cao (12)

## TEAM 95071W

Andrew Zeng (10)

Atish Chatterjee (11)

Ayan Rai (10)

Mihir Shaik (11) PM

Naahur Saiwan (11) PM

Yuvaan Parwaney (9)

## TEAM 95071Z

Gonzalo Fernandez da Ponte (10)

Jasmine Lee (10)

Jerry Chang (10)

Katherine Zeng (10)

Mridhula Vudali (10)

Vedant Padhi (10)

All graphics by EMILY WU



# Alumnus runs thriving guitar shop in downtown

BY AmyLuo  
& KathyWang

As visitors stroll downtown, it's common to see an array of shops light up the dim side-walks, ranging from cozy cafes to miniature clothing stores to high-end restaurants. But one of the most eye-catching stores — located on Big Basin Way — is a small shop lit up by a neon-colored sign reading “guitars.” Inside, rows of multicolored guitars with a variety of designs and textures line the wall, drawing constant pedestrian attention.

Diamond Music opened in March 2022 and is run by Class of 2014 alumnus Tyler Diamond. He said it is the first guitar shop located downtown since the late '80s, and it specializes in selling a variety of collected guitars as well as offering guitar lessons to students of any age.

“The guitar shop is something that I didn't think would be my life,” Diamond said. “It kind of went from ‘no idea of actually doing it’ [running a guitar shop] and a month later actually running a business.”

Diamond largely attributes his passion for guitars to the video game “Guitar Hero,” which he received as a Christmas present at the age of 11. He recalls thinking it was the “coolest thing ever.” By then, he had already been learning how to play the guitar for a year. Later, during his high school years, he joined a couple of local rock and punk bands including “Ten Yards Away” and



Courtesy of YELP

A wall display of various types of guitars for sale at Diamond Music in Saratoga downtown.

“Fingers Crossed.”

His love for the guitar eventually inspired him to start buying, selling and steadily collecting guitars.

“If you play guitar, you've got to have guitars, so I ended up buying them used,” Diamond said. “I've never bought a new guitar because the value of a guitar halves as soon as it's first purchased. I learned you can get great deals online, so I was buying guitars

for good value while simultaneously selling others for profit.”

In the next decade, Diamond collected a total of 125 guitars through buying and re-selling on Craigslist and Facebook. In 2022, Diamond — with encouragement from his mother — opened his guitar shop.

“I'd always had that thought in the back of my mind like ‘hey, I have a really long life and when I'm older, like 60 or 70, I want to

open up a guitar shop.” Diamond said.

Diamond, who runs the shop on his own, admitted starting the business was a “huge gamble” as he didn't have anyone to guide him, despite graduating from business school at Menlo College. Upon starting his business, Diamond worried about paying taxes, doing inventory and managing day to day tasks, which he believes is a great deal of work for one person to do.

“I learned a lot in college, like accounting, but it's one thing to go to class and it's another thing to run a business,” Diamond said. “It ended up paying off. I have been very successful and hope to be here for many years.”

Currently, Diamond Music has 150 guitars in stock ranging from \$100 kids' guitars to \$5,000-\$7,000 high-end guitars. He mentioned that 90-95% of his clientele are in their 40-70s since the majority of his guitars are expensive ones.

Additionally, Diamond expressed his love for working in Saratoga as it is his hometown and he receives a good amount of business from residents and local performers.

“I love the work that I do because it brings happiness to people. Everyone's happy coming into the shop. When someone buys a guitar, it's typically a great day for them,” Diamond said. “So I feel like I'm doing a good thing for the community — it's a positive experience all around.” ♦

# Winter Guard splits into two for the first time since 2019

BY JaneLee

Members of the varsity winter guard team, breathless, smiled at the audience at James Logan High School as the music faded out during a competition on Jan. 20. As soon as the clapping started, the JV members rushed onto the gym floor to help their varsity counterparts pick up the flags, rifles and sabres.

In contrast to previous years, winter guard has split into two teams this year, with 17 members on JV and 11 members on varsity as opposed to last year's 24-member single team.

The JV team consists of 14 freshmen, two sophomores, and one junior, while the varsity team has two sophomores, three juniors, and six seniors. The guard has not had two teams since 2019.

This year's staff includes director Russell Crow, JV director Alphonso Pitco, staff members Abigail Clark, Everett Henrie, Olina Ing, Annika Le, Ian Stick and Class of '23 alumna Mika Tippetts.

The varsity leadership team consists of varsity captains seniors Sophia Deng and Esabella Fung, assistant captains senior Lake Proffitt and junior Andrea Zhu

and JV coordinator junior Bryce Lee. JV's head captains are sophomores Kayla Bingel and Aditi Kankanwadi, and the assistant captains are junior Samy Tundlam and freshman Saachi Saraf and Shivanshi Saund.

The JV team will be competing in the Scholastic Regional A Division with “Macabre,” a show about the dead coming alive, featuring music from the musical “Beetle-juice” and the TV show “Wednesday.” The team has reduced their rehearsal time from the typical 3-hour rehearsal to a 2-hour rehearsal every Tuesday and Thursday to accommodate for varsity's rehearsal time. Despite their short rehearsal time and smaller team, JV members have seen noticeable improvements in their skills.

“The [JV] guard is technically small, but it doesn't exactly feel that way because the energy is still really high during rehearsal,” Kankanwadi said. “[The freshmen] are taking a while to adjust, but it's really clear that they want to learn and they're passionate about guard, so it's not an issue.”

Because of the cut in rehearsal time and different choreography, Bingel has noticed changes in the show from past seasons.

“JV has fewer hours and it also involves a lot of improv,” Bingel said. “It's very much up to us what we decide to do. I think I've dealt with less burnout [because of the fewer hours]. I'm able to focus more on technique.”

The varsity team's show, “Jazz in the Plazz,” uses the song “Another Day of Sun” from the movie “La La Land,” and will be competing in the Scholastic National A Division, a division higher than last year. Based on the idea of pedestrians enjoying jazz music in a park, “Jazz in the Plazz” uniquely features sophomore Luke Tjahjadi, who will be playing the saxophone at the start of the show.

Live music generally does not appear in winter guard shows, but the group will have this component. Props will include three picnic blankets and a park bench borrowed from the drama department.

Unlike the past two shows, the varsity team's music is much more upbeat, making members feel more energized. However, the lack of members has created a different atmosphere.

“Because there are no freshmen and barely any underclassmen, there's a lot more pressure [to per-



Courtesy of MADHURA NATARAJAN

The Winter Guard team practices their routine in the school's band room.

form well] because you can't hide behind anyone,” Zhu said. “The instructor-student ratio is a lot lower as well, so they can see any mistakes you make.”

Because the varsity team consists of experienced upperclassmen, the team quickly began focusing on improvement and tricks since the start of the season.

“As a smaller team, we get more individual attention to improve technique and learn new tricks throughout the season,” Deng said.

Both teams performed their show for the first time on Jan. 20 for CCGC Evaluations, and their first competition was on Feb. 10. The guard will compete through March and April, with CCGC Championships on April 6 at Independence High School for a total of six competitions.

“Even though we're two teams, and there are new additions, we're all close and always support and cheer for each other like one family,” Deng said. ♦

# USABO postponed ten days due to system overflow

BY AlanCai

The United States of America Biolympiad (USABO) was postponed on Feb. 1 after host site artofproblemsolving.com crashed, likely due to high site traffic and will be rescheduled to Feb. 12.

On test day, some test takers were able to access the test while others were stuck at the login page, prompting the Olympiad to cancel the contest, nullify the tests for all the competitors who were able to access it and issue a statement stating that the exam was rescheduled to Feb. 12.

The Olympiad has been held online on the Art of Problem Solving (AoPS) website since COVID-19. There is currently no intention to return to paper and pencil.

USABO competitor Arjun Krish, a sophomore who qualified for the semifinals round last year and placed in the top 50 participants, said it was quite disappointing that the test was canceled on the test day.

“[The Center of Excellence in Education] should've prepared for this knowing that the AIME was on the same day,” he said.

The American Invitational Mathematics Examination (AIME), an intermediate test to determine International Mathematical Olympiad Team USA selection, was also held on the same day, prompting heavy AoPS traffic.

Many people were already taking the test when the website announced that the USA-

BO would be postponed.

Krish added if the CEE did not retain a test bank — a collection of secure future tests — a rush to craft an emergency test within a few weeks may compromise the quality of the questions.

On Monday, Biology teacher and USABO coach Cheryl Lenz sent an update via email from the CEE confirming that the new open exam will contain all new questions. USABO questions require much deliberation and thought, which would be exceedingly difficult under such a tight deadline according to Krish.

Junior Armon Vuppala also expressed frustration over the unfolding of events and



Krish

## FOURTHPERIOD

### STAFFPOLICY

The Saratoga Falcon is published 9 times per year by the Advanced Journalism classes of Saratoga High School, 20300 Herriman Ave., Saratoga, CA 95070. Views expressed in The Saratoga Falcon are those of the writers and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the administration, faculty or school district.

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

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# College protests reveal undue influence of wealthy donors on administrative decisions

On Dec. 5, Harvard ex-president Claudine Gay sat in front of the House Education Committee next to the University of Pennsylvania's ex-president Liz Magill and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's president Sally Kornbluth. In front of them, Republican representative Elise Stefanik of New York asked about the actions being taken against Harvard students who allegedly called for the genocide of Jews.

Gay responded, “When speech crosses into conduct that violates our policies, including policies against bullying, harassment and intimidation, we take action.” Immediately, the internet blew up with calls for her to apologize, take action or resign for her inability to explicitly condemn the alleged calls for violence. Less than a month later, an investigation into her dissertation found possible instances of plagiarism and, with support from key figures in Harvard's governing board cratering, Gay was forced to resign her position.

Before Gay left her post, Magill also tendered her resignation on Dec. 11. Across the nation, reports of islamophobia and antisemitism in university campuses are skyrocketing and acts of violence are becoming increasingly severe.

Taken together, these events expose the fragility of our higher education institutions in the face of controversial, divisive topics like war in the Middle East. Without the proper foundation or support, schools are forced to focus on managing donor demands and maintaining a stance instead of providing a safe community for students to learn in.

Universities across the globe have long been hailed as melting pots of culture and diversity. Consequently, they've also been served with a side dish of protests and demonstrations. From Roe v. Wade to the Vietnam War, students have always taken to the streets to protest issues they care about. It also isn't uncommon for these protests to turn violent and ugly. UC schools have seen massive and deadly anti-war and anti-apartheid riots in the past; in fact, UCSB's infamous Isla Vista riots led to the tragic death of Saratoga High alum Kevin Moran back in 1970.

Yet, the situation today remains unique in a few ways. Instead of violence circulating directly between students and police or other bodies during protests, tensions are creeping up in every aspect of student life. During Thanksgiving break in In November, three high-achieving Palestinian college students were hunted down and shot, unprovoked, in Burlington, Vermont, allegedly by a hate-filled man named Jason J. Eaton who had targeted them because of their race. A — all three survived but one was paralyzed from the chest down. Just two weeks earlier, two Jewish students were assaulted at Ohio State University.

While most demonstrations have still been peaceful, these isolated incidents force college administrations to walk a precariously thin line in their responses. If they lean even a little too far in favoring one side or the other while not defending the other enough, they end up inadvertently fanning the flames of dissent, leading to incidents like doxxing trucks being deployed, displaying full names, faces, and more personal information to the public. But stay in the middle for too long, and the faces of these colleges end up in front of Congress for not taking a strong enough stance at all.

## As long as one has the right connections, the administration can be bent to their will.

Ultimately, colleges are left unable to draw clear lines between free speech and hate speech — in this case, between anti-Zionism and antisemitism, or between calls for genocide and those for freedom. These institutions' fear of controversy forces them to maneuver around any stances they take, leaving their students struggling to find a safe environment where safety should never be a question in the first place. Mixed responses from administration or campus police feed the vicious cycle even further by intentionally or unin-



LEYNA CHAN

tionally giving one side more lenience.

Eventually, these issues make their way up the ladder, where floodgates are opened for unqualified outside influences to push university administrations around however they like. Unfathomably rich donors and alumni are handed easy opportunities to exercise their influence. At Penn, alumnus and asset manager Ross Stevens withdrew a donation worth over \$100 million, and explained that he would only be open to negotiations if a new president, presumably to Stevens's liking, were to be put in place. A letter from Marc Rowan, who has donated millions to Penn's Wharton school, detailed questions that challenge the very fabric of the school's instructional and hiring methods.

By allowing donors and trustees this much power, elite universities have set a fuse alight, watching idly as the Oct. 7 attacks sparked hostility all across their campuses. As administrators and presidents alike took ambiguous stances and released vague statements on the violence, they opened the door for a relentless stream of criticism, and, even worse, succumbed to unqualified demands almost immediately.

Schools like Harvard and Penn have set a dangerous prec-

edent for other elite institutions, proving that as long as one has a big enough platform and the right connections, the administration can be bent to their will.

It's time for colleges to stand their ground against these influences — with Harvard's \$6.1 billion in operating revenue and Penn's staggering \$15 billion, the fate of faculty and administrations shouldn't be left in the hands of a select few donors who want their names plastered on new buildings.

In terms of student demonstrations, the past few months have shown that neutrality always leaves someone offended. Instead of trying to keep their grasp on the entire situation, colleges should focus on drawing a clear line on behavior that is genuinely harmful, intervening to stop doxxing, rioting, or other violence. At the same time, administrations should promote clear, productive discussions or public forums that may actually have a chance at de-escalating tensions and increasing genuine understanding.

Absent action, it wouldn't be surprising if more and more incidents like these continue to pop up around the country's most prestigious schools as students like us enter them — as we have seen, all it takes is one question to set the country ablaze. ♦

## Opinion of the Falcon Editorial Board

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The Saratoga Falcon staff voted 33-0 in favor of this article.

# The case for underclassman physics courses

BY AgastyaVitaldevara

Physics, along with biology and chemistry, is one of the fundamental sciences of life. Yet, unlike biology and chemistry, most students here are first introduced to the subject as upperclassmen, through either the 3-course AP Physics sequence or the college prep Physics class. This arrangement means students are often either woefully underprepared for the tough AP courses, or compelled to take the easier college prep version.

One possible solution? Introduce an alternative physics course option beginning in freshman year. Here many students are first introduced to the subject with AP Physics 1, a notoriously difficult

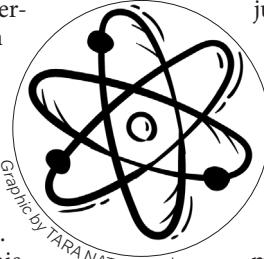
class with the lowest pass rate out of any AP exam. SHS exacerbates this stressful experience further by combining AP Physics 1 and AP Physics 2, both year-long classes, into a single year. As a result,

the material is accelerated even faster than the already advanced pace of an AP class.

The result is a class that is incredibly difficult for those without prior knowledge in the subject. In order to address this, the school should allow students to take Physics, or a Physics Honors class, prior to junior year so that they can build a stronger foundation before tackling the

advanced sequence. They would then be able to complete the full AP Physics sequence — 1, 2 and C — in time for graduation.

The school offers a college prep Physics course, which many juniors and seniors take as a less intensive alternative to AP Physics. This class is currently only available to upperclassmen, but could be offered as an elective in either freshman or sophomore year for students who wish to take AP Physics later on. Alternatively, an adapted Physics honors class could be offered in lieu of Honors Chemistry in sophomore year, allowing stu-



OPINION BY TARA NATARAJAN

dents to choose between the two tracks.

A possible consequence of offering additional physics options earlier on is students taking more than one science class as underclassmen. However, given the essential nature of understanding physics, offering physics would provide students with a net positive.

No matter what, in a perfect system, a strong physics education would begin in elementary or middle school. However, until the educational system is reformed, the school should compensate for the lack of prior physics education by offering students an introduction to physics earlier in their high school careers. ♦



# COVID-19 has shown how unprepared humanity is for another health crisis

BY SkylerMao

As global and U.S. agencies officially declared the end of the pandemic phase of COVID-19 on May 5, 2023, many expressed deep relief. The United Nations described the pandemic as a “once-in-a-lifetime” event, and many, believing another pandemic not plausible within their lifetimes, have been sliding back from healthy habits.

Over 10% fewer people stated they wash their hands “all or most of the time” compared to the beginning of the pandemic, according to a cross-pandemic study conducted by the United Kingdom’s Food Standard Agency.

To some extent, those that are moving away from strict pandemic guidelines have a point. Historically, a major pandemic is uncommon, happening every 100 years or so: the Cholera pandemic in the 1820s and the Spanish flu pandemic in the 1920s preceded the COVID-19 pandemic in the 2020s.

In November, China experienced the outbreak of a new strain of pneumonia that raised concerns from the World Health Organization (WHO). COVID isn’t over yet either — a new variant, called JN.1, has spread across the world, doubling its cases over the recent holiday season.

The rise in novel diseases has been troubling. Indeed, a study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences compared empirical pandemic data and current epidemiological factors. It found that the probability of an extreme epidemic will triple in the coming decades, due to the increased connectivity of society, among other factors.

Individuals and governments need to prepare for future pandemics by improving the response system to prevent the spread of

dangerous pandemic misinformation and focus on improving our organizational and infrastructural capabilities.

Throughout COVID-19, misinformation about the pandemic was extremely widespread and had harmful impacts.

In a survey asking adults eight false statements about COVID, such as “the government is exaggerating the number of COVID-19 deaths” and “you can get COVID-19 from the vaccine,” over 80% of those surveyed believed at least one false statement was true.

Misinformation regarding a potentially fatal pandemic can have devastating results. In the first three months of 2020, the WHO found COVID-related misinformation led to the hospitalization of 6,000 people and the deaths of 800 more.

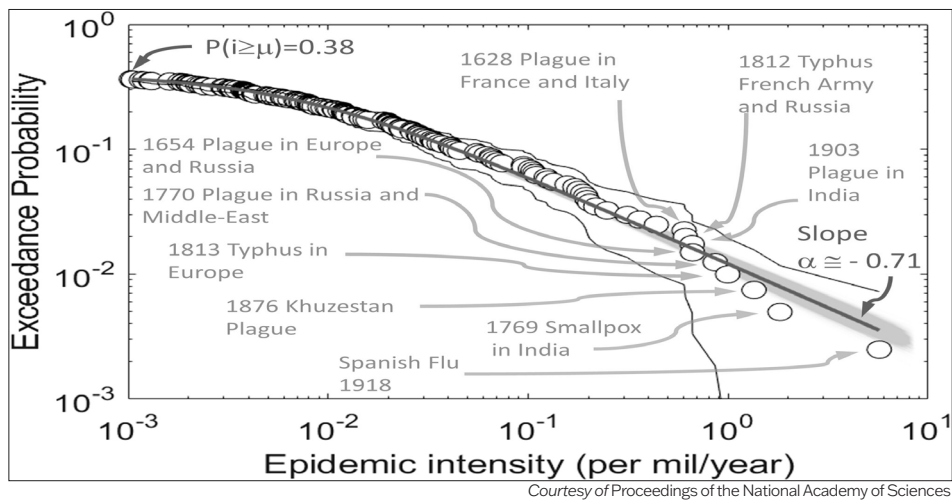
Furthermore, in a study analyzing over 80 million Twitter posts, researchers concluded that casual misinformation contributed to an over 150% increase in pandemic anxiety across all demographics, with the effect on minorities being most pronounced.

When people refuse to wear masks, stay at home or get vaccinated due to misinformation, their choices can seriously hinder society’s recovery.

What should we do? Although efforts are currently being made, such as social media companies saying that they’ll tighten moderation on misinformation, they are not enough due to lack of enforcement.

These companies should actively implement such moderation to combat misinformation through flagging “misleading content” or altogether removing substantially harmful content. In addition to these efforts, people can actively listen to and correct misinformation.

Next, we need to improve our emergency



Courtesy of Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences

pandemic preparedness. Having a plan to combat the pandemic is the most important thing society can do, which can involve taking what we know about our COVID-19 response and constructing a list for improvement.

For instance, the government’s recent step of creating the Office of Pandemic Preparedness and Response Policy (OPPR) was beneficial, but more effort and specialization should be put into the OPPR to facilitate its growth.

The Center for Disease Control, for instance, started as a small organization dedicated to combating malaria, but later became a large, governmental organization that helps with public health issues nationwide. Organizations develop and grow, so taking a powerful, small step now can lead to a much more solidified pandemic response system in the future.

We should also construct the infrastructure necessary to manufacture and distribute pandemic testing, vaccines and other

health products.

Crucially, barriers to COVID testing were a major factor that exacerbated the pandemic. We could spend more resources on maintaining a healthy supply chain for distribution, or creating a more streamlined manufacturing capability.

Increasing availability of testing and vaccines, especially in rural areas, drastically reduced the spread of COVID-19.

During the Omicron wave, increased testing in nursing facilities reduced the number of deaths by 26%, according to the National Institute of Health.

Although the next pandemic may seem like something far off in the future, it’s actually much more likely than we think.

Starting efforts now to combat misinformation and increase our preparedness would be extremely beneficial to future responses.

To prevent another 7-million death tragedy like COVID-19, we need to redouble efforts now. ♦

# Social media mental health advice is misleading

BY AlecGuan  
& JeremySi

Recently, a surge of questionable internet influencers have been making mental health claims without any actual expertise, degrees, or even research to back them up.

This has been especially true with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). According to The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, 52% of the videos covering the topic were deemed misleading.

Other influencers such as @4nn3m43 and @littlemissshinkicker are now participating in a trend called “undiagnosis,” where they use their self-proclaimed expertise to diagnose themselves with rare mental illnesses as a way of destigmatizing various conditions.

Not surprisingly, this effort to destigmatize mental illnesses only has an opposite effect, and is causing further stigma against those who are actually affected by these mental illnesses.

As more young people rely on the internet for information and usage of social

media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, the problem of online misinformation seems to be growing worse. According to a report from by the Pew Research Center, 3 in 10 adults said they regularly used Facebook to get their news while 26% of adults use YouTube.

Likewise, a report from healthcare platform PlushCare analyzed 500 TikTok videos on mental health conditions, and experts concluded 31% of the videos contained inaccurate information, and 14.2% of the videos contained potentially harmful advice such as advising medication with the consultation of a doctor first. For example, videos about ADHD contained misleading information where people labeled certain behaviors like disorganization and distractibility as symptoms, leading some users to misdiagnose themselves and stigmatizing individuals with ADHD.

Unfortunately, it is unrealistic to expect the government or the social media platforms themselves to fully address or solve this issue, so it is mainly up to the viewers to avoid this type of content, or at least be

cautious when exposed to it.

In this day and age, anyone has the ability to say just about anything on the internet, so it is critical now more than ever for users to take it upon themselves to filter the information they receive online.

In the past, to receive mental health assistance, individuals would consult certified professionals with years or decades of experience. Unfortunately, this help is now being spread with the swipe of a finger, although there are few trustworthy sources on social media platforms.

Recently, the T.H. Chan School of Public health at Harvard invited a group of mental health specialists to conduct an experiment where influencers implement and give their input on their teachings.

As part of the experiment, Trey Tucker, a mental health therapist and social media influencer, decided to integrate research he learned from the lessons he learned from Harvard into a TikTok video; the video was about how the brain responds to the sound of water. After a few days, the video performed poorly. He concluded that the platform itself was promoting sensationalistic videos that kept the audience glued to the screen instead of ones rooted in sound research.

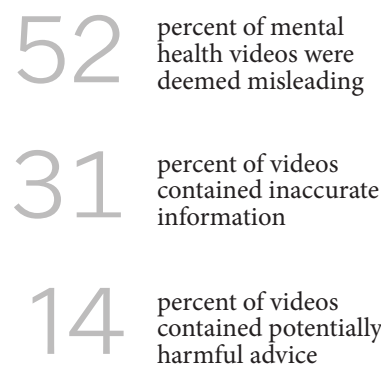
More engaging stories, such as people expressing their symptoms in whatever condition they struggle with, are put into people’s feeds for their stronger appeal. A 2022 study that examined 100 TikTok videos with the #MentalHealth tag and had an average of 13 million views, concluded that almost half of the videos reported symptoms of mental distress. The fact that a large portion of the #MentalHealth videos only exist as an attention-grabbing scheme for those who are supposedly “mentally unhealthy” shows that many videos still stray from trying to help people actually improve their mental health.

Researchers say that at worst, social media can be a depressing place where feeds are filled with content about self-harm or eating disorders, shedding light on these platform’s algorithm’s priorities when it comes to generating more views.

Furthermore, influencers like Ticsan-

droses, who exaggerates and mocks the Tourette syndrome in many skits, feign mental health issues for attention, which only creates a stigma against those who actually suffer from those mental health issues. In the case of Ticsandroses, a TikTok creator, faked having Tourette’s syndrome, an illness that causes individuals uncontrollable tics. After being exposed by an individual who actually had Tourette’s, she played it off as just a funny attention seeking grab.

## >> falconfigures



Courtesy of The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry

Rather than apologizing for her actions, Ticsandroses only drew negative attention to Tourette’s syndrome. These social media platforms are facilitating the exploitation of mentally unwell individuals, all for monetary gain.

Social media is a powerful tool where individuals can conveniently access information about mental health, but it is evident that social media platforms are unwilling to moderate the use of their product, resulting in the injury of billions of young people across the world.

As a result, it is absolutely crucial for the younger generations to take what they see and watch online with a grain of salt, or else society will have millions of perfectly normal people running around feigning mental illness and hurting themselves in the process. ♦



Graphic by EMILY WU

# Teachers, a more standardized grading scale would vastly help reduce students’ stress levels

BY SashaPrasad

The Canvas app plays an oversize role in most students’ daily lives.

Upon launching the app, a variety of outcomes unfold. Some courses display grades with suffixes, while others utilize signless letters.

Certain teachers round grades, but others maintain the original scores.

Why is it that some teachers choose to count a 93 as an A- while others choose to keep it as an A?

The answer is simple: personal preference. The grading scale is meant to be a standardized system, not a personalized one.

These conflicting grading policies contribute to the chaos within a student’s mind.

The purpose of grades is to convey a student’s accomplishment, adequacy, excellence and effort.

At SHS, where students already grapple with considerable stress, having distinct grading scales and methodologies for each class unnecessarily exacerbates academic pressure.

The purpose of grades is to convey a student’s accomplishment, adequacy, excellence and effort.

How can they be accurate if the student is being graded under different criteria for each class?

The grading scale seems like a relatively

simple topic — A’s, B’s, C’s and so on. However, some teachers have altered the scale to fit their preferences without considering the negative impact it could have.

Yes, different scales have different benefits, but it’s not worth it to individually change them at the expense of inciting cognitive overload in students.

One teacher is willing to round grades, provided that students do their homework, arrive to class on time, participate in class and do well on quizzes.

By contrast, another teacher carries a no-rounding policy in her class.

Students of both teachers struggle to see why one policy works fine in one class but not the other.

Every minor difference in grading policies has an immense impact on students and their mindsets regarding the class. There are roughly 70 teachers here, and many students will end up having a b o u t 25 of

them by the time they graduate.

Students sometimes struggle to retain the various grading rules made by each teacher based on one quick glance at their class syllabus in the beginning of the year, much less grasp reasons for the differences.

When discussing mental health, a prominent topic at SHS, staff members continuously suggest methods to create a calmer mindset in students.

MOSAIC sessions and assemblies are often organized for the purpose of finding possible solutions to this problem.

The Wellness Center, an on-campus institution, was solely built for managing mental health.

These resources suggest listening to music, taking a walk, talking to family, and much more.



Graphic by LEYNA CHAN

Though the methods are beneficial, removing an unnecessary stress-causing factor is a far more effective path.

No one grading scale is superior to the others, but the format of the scale is not something that is discussed or debated much.

At our school, it’s important to note that an A- and A both hold the same weightage in our GPA; a 4.0.

A consistent system, regardless if it has signs behind the letter or not, is critical to help mandate students’ stress levels. Students will gain clarity and be able to put their preserved energy to better causes. Not to mention, implementing a universal grading scale is completely plausible and harmless.

Six out of the 10 students surveyed agreed that the grading system incites stress and negatively impacts their mental health.

Though teachers and other administrators may claim that it is unrealistic to state that changing the current grading system will eliminate all problems; students face numerous challenges through various school courses, but it will help to dilute students’ stress levels.

The trend of unnecessarily complicating tasks for students under the guise of “college preparation” needs to come to an end. This is not to say teachers are to blame but rather the nonuniformity of the grading system.

Implementing a more standardized school wide grading system would enhance students’ academic and cognitive capabilities.

More importantly, it would enable them to concentrate on the subject matter of their classes rather than being preoccupied with trivial concerns such as whether a teacher will round up or not. ♦

As someone who’s not in a relationship, I often feel pressured around Valentine’s Day to get a romantic partner, go on a cute date and then rave to my friends about it. On several occasions, I’ve been tempted to send a candy gram to someone just to stir up some romance for myself before Valentine’s Day.

However, a wholesome experience in my sophomore year Chinese class showed me that it’s completely valid to spend the holiday platonically with people you value, whether that means friends, family, teachers or classmates. The love that is celebrated on Valentine’s Day isn’t limited to people who are dating or married — it’s for everyone.

On a chilly Friday a year ago, the magic of an approaching Valentine’s Day captivated my Chinese teacher, Ms. Chang. I remember groggily walking into my 2nd period classroom and being immediately bombarded by vivid sheets of cherry-red paper, a bowl of pink-and-gold chocolate kisses and my teacher’s beaming smile.

The love that is celebrated on Valentine’s Day isn’t limited to people who are dating or married — it’s for everyone.

“Class, we are going to write love letters today!” she said.

Multiple stressed-out junior and senior students unanimously groaned:

“Laoshi [teacher], this is a terrible idea.” “I don’t like anybody!”

“I don’t celebrate Valentine’s Day!” My teacher laughed and passed out the dazzling red sheets and accompanying scissors, saying, “If you don’t want to confess your love, you can write a letter of appreciation to a classmate, a friend or me!”

Although I was half-asleep and didn’t feel like writing about my feelings, I sketched a lopsided heart, cut it out and scribbled a few sentences in Chinese that expressed appreciation for my friend across the classroom. As I decorated the card with daisies and hearts, familiar memories flooded my mind, reminding me how much I cherished our friendship.

When my friend and I exchanged our letters, we giggled over memories of how we first met in freshman year, both new to the district and extremely shy. We gasped when we realized our cards both mentioned how grateful we were to each other for sharing our snacks.

Meanwhile, many of my classmates were struggling to use Google Translate to convey their feelings onto red hearts. With the extra time, I tore my scraps of red paper into rectangles and began folding miniature paper boats, which was my usual hobby during boring lectures.

Fold in half, fold two triangles, turn up edges, pop it open, fold up corners, open it up — I repeated this process multiple times until my desk partner leaned over, curious as to what I was doing.

For the rest of the period, I meticulously taught him the steps that I had learned since I was a kid. My classmate, a first-time boat crafter, folded a boat that was a bit squashed and nearly capsized, but I was proud to have taught someone my silly pastime. In 15 min-



Graphic by ANGELATAN

utes, we had made a whole fleet of cute red boats and set them on the desk to admire.

Soon, the bell rang and students shuffled out with red heart cards stuffed in their backpacks or gifted to the teacher, all of which were received with a grateful hug. Her eyes glittered with affection for us as we walked out with chocolate kisses placed in our hands. My handmade red paper boats floated inside my jacket pocket, eagerly waiting to become gifts for my friends.

That day I didn’t have a stereotypical Val-

entine’s Day experience like receiving roses, going on a dinner date or getting a lavish surprise.

However, my atypical experience that day — which included reaffirming friendships, making memories with classmates and spending time with my teacher — assured me that I don’t need a romantic partner to enjoy Valentine’s Day. After all, a holiday of love means you can show affection and gratitude toward anybody valuable in your life. ♦



# Dear SHS: Let us skip our non-essential classes

by DanielWu  
& SarahZhou

OK, OK, OK. Before we make our core argument below, we know we must attend school regularly; it's a state requirement for graduation, etc. We get it.

But . . .

As second-semester seniors, we find ourselves struggling to get out of bed daily — on top of still being sleep-deprived, school simply doesn't matter as much anymore.

However, second-semester senior year is a little overhyped: There is still work for college apps to be done, and there isn't less work given in classes at all — in fact, many popular senior classes such as AP Government, Economics and AP Physics have harder second-semester content. We do not have less work; we just do not do it as often anymore. It is in fact a struggle to keep our grades above a C.

This brings us to the issue of class. We do not want to come anymore. Thanks to all the MOSAIC lessons on mental health and the importance of sleep, we have realized we

need to put ourselves first, and now is time to catch up on the countless hours of sleep sacrificed to finish the 20 pages of APUSH notes during junior year. As a result, we are already routinely and fashionably late to our first and second-period classes.

Showing up half an hour late and still not missing much got us thinking. Are most classes really necessary to attend? In college, most lectures aren't mandatory and most college students we know skip almost every lecture they have — especially AM ones! After all, the lecture recordings and copies of note packets are posted on Canvas. You could say that second-semester seniors are just trying to make the adjustment from high school to college easier by starting early.

In all seriousness, most classes we are forced to attend every day are "this could have been an email" vibs.

If a class is just the teacher reading off a slide deck, we do not think our attendance is that necessary. As long as the class agenda isn't something discussion-based or related to group work, or if there's a test or quiz,



Graphic by LEYNA CHAN

skipping shouldn't be frowned upon.

We're probably going to do it anyway — many parents don't mind excusing an absence on occasion, and some seniors are already in the process of mastering their parents' voices for callouts to the office, but excusing absences remains a huge hassle.

Skipping classes to study for a test or quiz for another class is already a very common practice here — the sacrifices we made for the grade were crucial to our mental health, so for the sake of our physical and mental health once again, please let us skip our nonessential classes. ♦

# Tote bags are symbolic of Gen Z fashion and styles

BY WilliamNorwood

Every morning, I hop out of my car, exhausted after completing a lengthy drive to school. Rubbing the sleep from my deprived eyes, I grab my tote bag and backpack before walking to class. You may be thinking it seems redundant to carry both a tote bag and backpack to school, but no, my tote bag is for my lunch.

You might jump at the hypocrisy — William, how could you possibly use a backpack while endorsing tote bags as the superior method of storage?

Here's how I can justify my actions.

Tote bags are far more fashionable and convenient than backpacks, and whenever it is possible to fit all of my materials in a tote bag, I always elect to do so. Unfortunately, my excessive workload as a Saratoga High student pushes me to favor backpacks most days.

The tote bag was originally created by L.L. Bean in 1944 as a water resistant canvas bag to carry ice from a car to an ice chest. Ever since the 1960s, the tote bag has evolved from a water resistant bag to a fashion statement — sometimes an admittedly pricey one with costs running into the hundreds of dollars.

Still, rather than dying out like many other fashion trends of the day, the tote bag transformed into the bag Gen Z knows and loves today adorned with screen-printed designs or embroidery if you're posh (I'm British).

The modern tote bag is by far the most convenient bag, and it does not sacrifice utility in its pursuit of fashion.

It has no random, rarely-used inner pockets with zippers and mesh, but is simply one large pocket. This prevents you from losing materials, ID cards, or anything else in some random backpack pocket that you can never find again.

Plus, this added factor of easy access makes tote bags the most reasonable method to transport your belongings from place to place — whether it's to the local Westgate

Shopping Center or to your fourth-period class — when possible.

Now, a tote bag often includes a cute design on the front. If you smack a design on a backpack, they often look 10 times worse than a plain color, but with a tote bag there is far more stylistic freedom.

A tote bag with any desired design is chic and stylish; it will elevate your outfit, guaranteed. On the other hand, a simple backpack (don't forget the roller ones) with a design makes you look like a serial killer or a fifth grader.

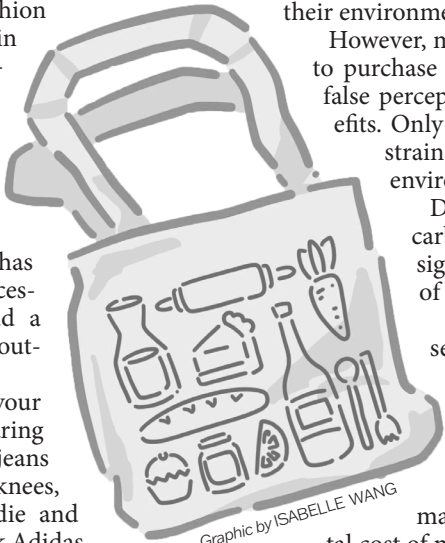
Adding to their allure, tote bags have become a key addition to level up any outfit, and they aren't an exclusively gender specific item.

Within the fashion industry, certain items are often associated with certain said genders, but tote bags have shattered the traditional boundaries of fashion, and they have become a staple accessory to simply add a softer edge to any outfit.

Picture this in your head: someone wearing some light blue jeans with rips on the knees, a boxy black hoodie and some white on black Adidas sambas.

When you first look at this outfit, it is pretty mediocre to say the least. However, when you now add in a tote bag to that sample outfit, you not only look like a functioning member of society, but somehow, your outfit becomes more cohesive and stylish.

Tote bags are no longer just a seemingly functional item. They are an expansion of you as a person and a sure-fire way to increase the fashionability and personality of any outfit. ♦



Graphic by ISABELLE WANG

## togatalks

What are your opinions on the new fashionable tote bags?




“You can store more lightweight objects in a tote and carry them around for use in public settings.”

sophomore **Jena Lew**



“They're convenient and stylish — it's all you could ever ask for in a revamped bag!”

junior **Ashish Goswami**



“Tote bags are overhyped and just another prime instance of hyper-capitalism.”

senior **Diego Rocabado**

# Don't buy the hype: Tote bags aren't the holy grail

BY NikaSvizenko

Every few months, new trends emerge on social media and incite a frenzy where everyone rushes to buy the latest clothing or product. These trends span from clunky Stanley Cups, MSCHF's Big Red Boot, and overpriced UGG slippers to the most recent one: tote bags.

Tote bags have gained the spotlight as an alternative to a backpack. Like many trends, these bags are absolutely overhyped and not worth the praise or, in some cases, even the price.

The tote bag was originally popularized as a reusable shopping bag after the ban of single-use plastic bags in many states due to their environmental impact.

However, many people continue opting to purchase these bags because of their false perception of environmental benefits. Only few are aware of the actual strain that these bags place on the environment.

Despite being reusable, the carbon footprint of tote bags is significantly higher than that of plastic bags.

According to a 2018 research study conducted by the Ministry of Environment and Food of Denmark, these tote bags need to be reused 20,000 times, or every day for 54 years, to make up for their environmental cost of production. This renders tote bags to be significantly more eco-harmful than their promoted eco-friendly, biodegradable and long lasting bag.

Of course, not everyone wears tote bags because of the environmental impact; many wear one as a fashionable accessory.

Even then, hoarding should not be re-branded as “collecting.”

Owning one tote bag is understandable, but we need to stop normalizing owning dozens of these bags, only to use each of them once before leaving them in our

closets to collect dust.

While it is virtually impossible not to consume products harmful to the environment in today's world, and we should not blame people for enjoying fun things, an emphasis should be placed on overconsuming a product designed to be sustainable. This is just ironic and unnecessarily damaging.

**Backpacks are much more comfortable for carrying accessories — after all, they're designed for that.**

Tote bags are often uncomfortable, especially if the straps are too short or when carrying heavy items that stack up on each other. Backpacks are much more comfortable for carrying accessories — after all, they're designed for that purpose.

What's most astonishing is the number of people who have seem to lost their minds on being willing to shell out significant sums of money for multiple Marc Jacobs tote bags. Mind you, each of these specific bags has prices exceeding an exorbitant \$350.

The phenomenon has led to a distorted perception of value, where the brand name alone seems to justify the exorbitant price tag.

Celebrities, in particular, play a significant role in perpetuating this trend.

With their influence and large platforms reaching millions on social media, their endorsement of the Marc Jacobs tote bag further amplifies its allure, creating a false sense of necessity among their followers.

To be sure, tote bags aren't the worst thing in the world, but if you're going to buy one, at least purchase one from a grocery store, museum or other place that sells them for a reasonable price.

The bottom line? Do not spend \$350 on a plain tote bag of questionable value. ♦

# FALLING IN LOVE WITH BUJO

## Bullet Journaling: A Better Way to Plan Each Day

**Whenever I scroll through my phone,** kept the idea of using bullets to organize timelapses of multicolored markers and calligraphy pens fill my screen. Popular creators proudly display vibrant pages in their journals, rewarded with thousands of comments and likes.

These meticulously decorated to-do lists and calligraphy titles have taken over my life — my love for bullet journaling has evolved into a near obsession.

The concept of bullet journaling, also known as bujo, was first created by Ryder Carroll in 2013. His website describes it as a “system that combines elements of mindfulness, productivity, and self-discovery.”

Using a key of bullet points, users can organize their tasks in a more concise manner than writing everything in a calendar or traditional planner.

This concept has since transformed from a minimalist task logger to a maximalist way for people to unleash their artistic creativity while planning their days. While many have



Jane Lee

While I may not be up to par with AmandaRachLee's skills, I take pride in my journal. Even those with zero artistic ability can make aesthetically pleasing spreads — in particular, using stickers has saved my journal multiple times in the past. Stickers are especially convenient for beginners because they effortlessly spruce up any blank page, don't require any artistic skill and are easy to arrange.

However, the time commitment of bullet journaling, as well as journaling in general, is one of the most difficult aspects for me. Carving out an hour to set up the week's journal is difficult for a high school student, especially on the Sundays I spend wishing I hadn't procrastinated on my AP Euro homework. It's simply unrealistic for a full-time student to have a spread as aesthetic as a content creator. Instead, busy students can opt to pick out a dated — or even undated — planner to organize tasks, adding decorative doodles or stickers if they want to keep the aesthetic portion of bujo.

Another option for a visually pleasing but less time consuming journal is pre-set up journals. AmandaRachLee has made these a part of her brand, with her popular Doodle Planners coming in both hardcover and digital editions. In each of her planners, there are hand-drawn monthly cover pages, calendars and even mood and habit trackers.

Personally, I find that light grid journals such as the Midori brand work the best because they have conveniently pre-designed organization (a lifesaver for someone like me who can't draw straight lines), but the option is truly up to you and your style preferences.

While influencers make bullet journaling seem easy, the painstaking time and artistic abilities it requires to reach their level of expertise may be impractical for most students. Nevertheless, the joy in seeing an aesthetic weekly spread will always be superior to writing out my tasks in a boring Target planner. ♦

# Childhood money making: a valuable experience

**At the moment I gained consciousness,** I almost immediately grasped the value of money. \$2.50 could buy me a scoop of ice cream at the Baskin Robbins nearby, \$15 could purchase a cute stuffed animal from Toys R Us and a couple hundred dollars could pay the water and electricity bills — although that last one didn't matter as much to me.

My earliest source of “income” was getting money from my grandparents. During their yearly visits from China or Malaysia, I always counted on discovering lucky red envelopes tucked away in their bags. As their visits became less frequent, I turned to my parents: the keepers of my finances and my source of more crisp dollar bills.

In elementary school, I began asking for an allowance because all my friends had one. My mom and I bargained a deal of \$10 per month if I completed my daily responsibilities of practicing piano, washing the dishes, doing homework and completing Chinese lessons.

This system, easily used as leverage, had a severe downside for me: My mom would threaten to deduct my allowance whenever



Angela Tan

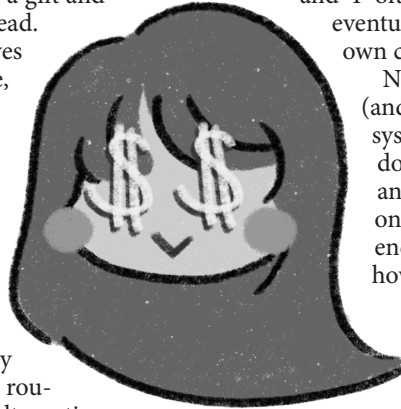
we argued. More often than not, my entire \$10 would be zapped away by one explosive argument, and my motivation for the week would disappear with it.

In fourth grade, I got smarter and asked to be paid for babysitting my younger siblings. This was my ultimate power move because I had two mischievous younger brothers who nagged my mom all day. If I worked enough hours a day, I could quickly earn HUNDREDS of dollars!

To my dismay, my mom was not so generous and offered me a measly \$1 per hour instead. She reasoned that, as an older sister, I should be taking care of my brothers free of charge — my \$1 per hour was simply a charity bonus.

After only a few weeks on the job, the pay being embarrassingly below minimum wage and the horrific working conditions (tantrums and physical attacks from my brothers) left me no choice but to quit the job.

By middle school, I was tired of feeling as if I was being scammed by my own parents. I even considered flying a solo trip back to my grandparents' houses and begging for money. However, there was one source of



wants, so even if I wanted to buy a few stickers or pens on Amazon, I still had to pass through their financial judging process. I saved money for the purpose of buying something I would want in the future, and I often wondered if I would eventually save enough to pay my own college tuition.

Now that I'm in high school (and free of all my allowance systems), I have more freedom with where I can go and what I can spend money on, but my younger experiences keep me careful with how frequently I swipe my credit card and only enjoy occasional splurges on boba or lunch with my friends.

My parents' frugality taught me to see the importance of money, a value that will stick with me through college and beyond. Even if I have savings and purchases I impulsively want, I would rather invest in something that is truly important to me, even if I don't yet know what that is. ♦

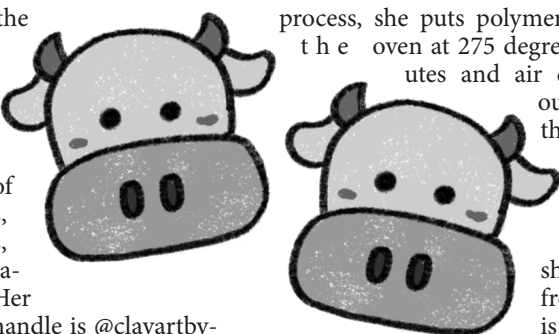
# ClayArtByJulie: Molding a hobby into a small business

BY JessicaLi

Meticulously going over the edges and surfaces of the black ball of air-dry clay, sophomore Julie Dong carefully shaped the body of a sheep clay craft, completing the first step of her creation. Animal items are some of her favorite pieces to create, and she was relieved that her creation was off to a good start. Such is the typical process Dong uses as part of her small business, ClayArtByJulie.

She sells a diverse collection of hand-made earrings, magnets, keychains, Christmas tree ornaments and more. Her business's Instagram handle is @clayartbyjulie and her Etsy is @ClayArtByJulie. Dong started her business in June 2020 during the pandemic. Fueled by boredom during lockdown and faced with a growing collection of useless clay items, she decided to turn her hobby into a business to make productive use of her inventory.

She first discovered her passion for clay



their desired order and Dong draws it out to confirm that her design fulfills their criteria. Though the process usually runs smoothly, she has to deal with unhappy customers once in a while.

“One time, the clay melted once it was received by the customer,” she said. “As a result, they left a bad review on the website without consulting me beforehand or [submitting] a request to send another ornament. I resolved the situation by messaging them and sending them a new piece, so they removed their review and everything ended well.”

Dong often struggles with the limited time constraints for creating custom orders, especially during the school year. Usually, Dong receives one to two orders a week, and custom orders are rarer. “The customer typically gives you 20 days per order, so I need to take into account the clay drying time, which can be very time-consuming, taking from three days up to one week,” Dong said. “I also need to figure out my schoolwork schedule and extracurriculars, so juggling multiple things can be challenging.”

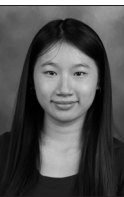
As for the future of the business, she

hopes to keep it alive for as long as possible, but if she gets too busy in college, she plans to put her business on hold and come back at a later time so it doesn't become stress-inducing. On the bright side, managing a small business has allowed Dong to experience memorable and educational interactions with fellow small business owners.

“Once I met a 70-year-old lady on Etsy who ordered from my shop, but it turned out she was also a seller,” Dong said. “I learned a lot from her about how to prioritize shipping, and it was nice meeting someone I usually wouldn't meet and hearing their unique perspective.”

Besides receiving advice from other sellers, Dong also leans heavily on her mom for general support like sorting through tax forms and driving her to the postal office. Still, she appreciates the freedom she has in running a small business on her own.

“My favorite part about being a small business owner is that you can decide everything you want to sell,” Dong said. “No one's restricting you to selling certain items.” “It's really rewarding and something you wouldn't experience normally.” ♦



Dong



# Lessons outside the classroom: first dates "do"s and "don't"s from teachers

by Anika Kapasi  
& Beverly Xu

For all our hopelessly single SHS students, we're capitalizing on the greatest source of dating experience on-campus — people who teach us how to find chemistry, dance to our own tunes and find integral traits we want in a partner all while writing our own stories — our teachers.

**Math Teacher PJ Yim: Be genuine about your character to find your "old shoe"**

**Falcon:** What would you say to absolutely do on a first date?

**Yim:** To do? Show the worst side of yourself.

**Falcon:** And the reasoning?

**Yim:** Well, the thing is, if she still likes you after seeing the worst, then she's a keeper.

**Falcon:** And anything absolutely not to do?

**Yim:** Don't show the best side of yourself. Do you know why?

Because that's false advertisement. You're at your best like 1% of the time.

**Falcon:** What about your average self?

**Yim:** So that's what I do. [What I said before]

about showing the worst side of myself is] a lie: I didn't show the worst side of myself; I just behaved as normal. What I would never do is show the best of myself — go out of my way, because it gives a false impression.

**Falcon:** Do you have any experiences with first dates — any trainwreck experiences?

**Yim:** If it's a bad thing, there's one case where I got set up. I couldn't stand her because she was like a sack of potatoes — while everybody else is helping out, doing the dishes, she just [sits] there ... She just sat there like a little princess. One thing: I don't date princesses. I try to treat them like one, but if they act like one, then ... But I felt obligated to just continue to go out and meet her because we were set up. That's one of the worst things about being set up.

**Falcon:** What year was this? High school? College?

**Yim:** [My] early 20's? But other than that, I always had good experiences with people because I didn't think about dates seriously; to me it's a hangout. I just treat it as I'm getting to know somebody so I don't put any expectations on them or me ... But you know what the best thing is?

I don't have to worry about that anymore. I'm married.

**Falcon:** How long has it been that you haven't had to worry about first dates?

**Yim:** Since 2001.

**Falcon:** Would you say that with your wife, you hit it off instantly or afterwards?

**Yim:** You know, the funny thing is, it was instant. As soon as she walked in the door: 'Yup, we're done.'

**Falcon:** How did you know?

**Yim:** I don't know, I just felt it.

**Falcon:** How long did you guys date?

**Yim:** Three days.

**Falcon:** Until you guys got engaged?

**Yim:** Three days and she left Korea. We talked over the phone for a little bit and I said, 'Let's get married.' She said, 'Really?' And I told her, 'If you don't know it, you're too young for me. I'll move on.' And she's like, 'No, no, no, hold on.' I said it again and she said yes.

**Falcon:** That's very impressive.

**Yim:** No, she felt like an old shoe. [Awkward silence.] Okay, always pick the positive thing. What's so good about old shoes?

**Falcon:** They're reliable?

**Falcon:** They're warm?

**Yim:** The fact that they're old shoes and you're still wearing this pair — they must be really comfortable. I felt this comfort with her that I never had with anybody else. I just felt comfortable — that was it. I didn't have to try, she didn't have to try; we were just comfortable with each other.

**Music teachers Sean Clark and Micheal Boitz: Just don't**

**Falcon:** We are asking teachers on campus what is some advice for do's and don'ts on dates and we are wondering what is yours?

**Clark:** Don't. You can write it in quotes, "said by Sean Clark," with a period.

**Boitz:** You know, if you want to get a lot of dates or a lot of interest, be Sean Clark.

**Clark:** [proceeds to ignore Boitz.] Don't. Just don't go on a date.

**Falcon:** Why just no? So you don't have any actual advice for dos and don'ts?

**Clark:** What do you mean "that's not the actual advice?" Don't. Don't go on a date. ♦

## DATE IDEAS

Whether it's the first date or the 10th, coming up with fun date ideas can be a struggle.

It's especially difficult once the Valentine's Day magic leaves the air: According to Psychology Today, break-up season peaks in March, so be sure to take your partner out regularly and remind them of how much they mean to you.

We all know about the classic movie date, but in reality, these dates usually result in few real interactions with your partner.

Why stare at a screen when you could be staring at each other and actually

talking?

A much more romantic option is to go ice skating, especially before winter leaves California. The Sharks Ice indoor skating rink is a great option, with an admission fee of \$15.

This is an especially brilliant plan for your very first date. Imagine gliding together in a romantic wintry atmosphere, holding onto each other as you try not to slip.

Fear not if neither of you have experience skating — if anything, it means falling into each other's arms more frequently — as focusing on your balance will take your mind off of any nervousness. You can always grab a warm cup of hot cocoa afterward for a sweet end to a freezing day.

Gifts of a bouquet of flowers is a sweet gesture for any date, but why not also take your partner out to a flower arrangement class?

This way, you both will walk out with a personalized

bouquet, as well as know of how to arrange future ones.

Alternatively, if you and your partner prefer food over flowers, consider the tried-and-true method of taking them out for food, like a stroll around mainstreet Cupertino.

As a high school student, you might not have a lot of money to splurge on a fancy restaurant.

So, consider making a homemade meal for your date. Your date will view you in a whole new light once you reveal your secret culinary skills.

Otherwise, if you're a walking kitchen hazard, consider grabbing fast food but taking your date out to a nice spot for dessert afterwards. Remember, it's the thought that counts, not the money.

Say you prefer activities with a little more action. Places like the arcade or mini golf course are perfect for you. You can show off your swings and land hole-in-ones to impress your date, or win a cute stuffed animal for them with tickets from the arcade. Golf and San

Jose features both mini golf courses and an arcade.

Cute thematic architectural components fill the atmosphere with bright colors. Just don't get too competitive.

If both you and your partner are homebodies, baking without a recipe is always a fantastic, albeit chaotic, option!

To add to the vibes, I recommend first making a baking playlist together. Then, toss any ingredients you see fit together in a bowl without searching up a recipe online.

Once you open the oven, you'll be faced with a surprise that — fingers crossed — might actually be edible.

Remember to note your partner's likes and dislikes when choosing the activity and try to make it special for them by sprinkling your own twist.

Thank me later! ♦

## COMMUNICATION 101 (no, not rly)

1. What do you do when your partner starts opening up?

- Change the topic
- Immediately start thinking of solutions
- Listen to what they have to say
- I'm single

2. Has your partner said they enjoy spending time with you, regardless of the time or place?

- It's never come up, but they seem happy
- A little awkward so we say it once or twice — it's comfortable around them
- We always talk over what to do together and it feels natural to say it aloud
- I'm single

3. Do your friends like your partner?

- They've voiced their concerns
- Haven't gotten around to it/impartial/no friends
- They love them!
- I'm single

4. How do you tend to resolve disagreements?

- Ignore the issue and let it wash over
- Mull over it alone for a while and text about it after
- After seeing each other unhappy, discuss face-to-face how to avoid it in the future
- I'm single

If most of your answers are A: Might need to talk more with your partner, even if it feels forced.

If most of your answers are B: Be sure to keep in mind that they're a person too, and that sometimes they just need your reassurance rather than suggestions.

If most of your answers are C: Wonderful communication skills, congratulations!

If most of your answers are D: You're single :)

# Love in Bloom

they love me, they love me not

## Life as a certified third wheel

After two and a half years in high school, I can confidently say that I am a professional in third wheeling.

In my friend

group of four girls, three have been in stable relationships for at least a year, and my best friend has been dating her boyfriend for seven months. And although the sappiness of their relationships has sometimes been nauseating, I must admit third wheeling does have its perks.

Third wheeling is like being the extra in a romance film where you didn't audition for the role but somehow found yourself stuck in it anyway.

Witnessing my friends experience almost every emotion possible in relationships — happiness, anger, sadness and especially annoyance — has been the perfect form of advice.

Knowing the "do's" and "don'ts" to every situation makes it easier to recognize glaring red flags in relationships, to carve out the standards I should hold a guy to and to recognize the most common roots of miscommunication.

Even though I started out as an extra, at some point after my friends had been dating for a while, I was able to befriend their boyfriends, so my position as the third wheel became less intrusive.

It was easier to tag

along on their dates and reassuring to know that my friends' boyfriends were a good match for them.

However, even with the pros of third wheeling, there will always be cons. The awkward instances when I hang out with two of them while they unsuccessfully hide the fight they're currently in has been excruciating, to say the least.

It's weirdly silent, their eyes dart everywhere and fixate on everything except each other and you have no clue whether you should say something or not to spark conversation. If you are ever stuck in this position, I have one word of advice: *run*. Bolt out of that room as fast as your legs can carry you before you're hooked into being the middleman for the two of them.

But most importantly, after the honeymoon phase, my friends have absolutely no excuse to cancel our plans to go out with their boyfriends.

With complete offense toward their boyfriends, I met them first. Therefore, I am more important. And no — they can not join us in our plans. My ideal hangout will never be sitting in the backseat of the car to get ice cream.

Ultimately, one pro will forever and always outweigh all these cons: Seeing my friends happy in their relationships is, without exception, the greatest reward.

Watching my friends light up when they talk about their boyfriends or seeing them smile every time they come up to us makes third wheeling worth it and honestly, not that big of a deal to begin with. ♦



# who is your CELEBRITY CRUSH?

## The holy trinity of dystopian movie men

BY KavyaPatel

Many of my friends will quickly agree that I have horrible taste in men at school. Though they may be right in a couple of cases, NO ONE will ever be able to challenge my taste in celebrities. My favorite celebrity crushes, who all happen to star in dystopian movies, are considerate, funny, bold and humble both as fictional characters and in real life.

### 1. Theo James (ignore that he's 40 now, it doesn't matter)

I didn't know what a crush was until I was 12 — that was when I watched "Divergent" for the first time and saw the beauty that is Four, a protagonist played by Theo James.

There was just something about his brooding, mysterious aura that captured my attention so strongly. He gets bonus points for helping tear down a tyrannical government, too.

Four is such a likable character simply because when he's first introduced, he already gives off a mysterious vibe. Every girl wants a guy who has a soft spot for them, especially someone who is closed-off to every-

one else. Under an oppressive government targeting "divergent" — those who don't conform to society based on an aptitude test — Four and Tris needed each other more than anything, making their relationship even more special.

I have watched the first movie AT LEAST 10 times, and every time I watch it, I fall more in love with Theo James.

My hours spent scrapping through the 2014 YouTube press interviews of him may never be won back, but they were totally worth it.

Theo James also keeps his personal life very private and doesn't have common social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok or Snapchat.

For me, this removes so many potential red flags because it gives the impression that he isn't one to overshare or get caught up in fame.

And not that I need to mention it because it's obvious, but HE IS JACKED.

It's ironic because Theo James was playing a character named "Four" and Four is 18. I am 18 and I was born on the fourth. Fate??

### 2. Tom Blyth

When I first saw the young Coriolanus Snow edits on my TikTok Page even before watching the "The Ballad

of Songbirds and Snakes" (the prequel to the "Hunger Games"), I thought Tom Blyth was attractive.

I know that Snow turns out to be responsible for the murder of thousands of innocent children, but before he became the villain (and honestly, even after), he was SO FINE. It showed me that maybe I am indeed incapable of liking a man without thousands of red flags.

Though it's been months since I watched the movie, I still scour the internet for YouTube clips of Blyth interacting with Rachel Zegler and the rest of the cast of "The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes."

There is one particular video from the movie press tour that I'm sure many other Tom Blyth-obsessed fanatics have seen: a clip of

Blyth putting a rose in Zegler's hair as a reinterpretation of one of the scenes in the movie.

In the clip, he asks her "Do you mind?" before gently placing the flower behind her ear. THE GENTLENESS. THE

WHOLESONENESS. THE RESPECT. I didn't even think men like this actually exist. It genuinely blows my mind that Tom Blyth is real.

### 3. Ki Hong Lee

I am ashamed to say I watched "Maze Runner" far after the birth of the dystopian era of movies.

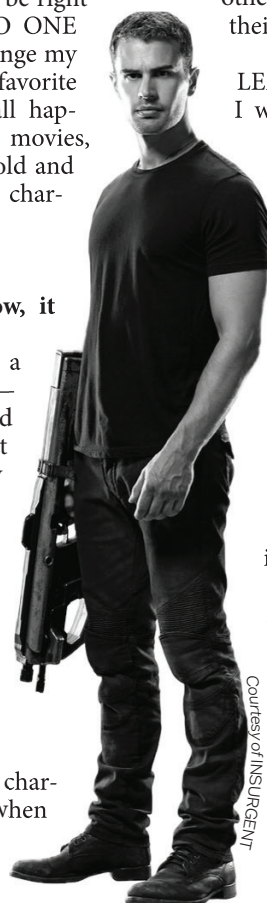
But even if I was late to the game, it's never too late to appreciate Ki Hong Lee for his amazing job at bringing Minho to life in the "Maze Runner" trilogy.

In the first movie "The Maze Runner," he played a "runner," responsible for charting a maze which changes paths several times a week.

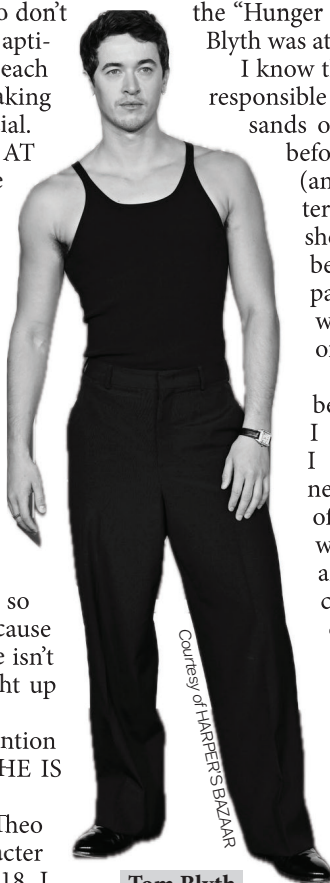
I'm not quite sure what it is about him, but his rustic, vintage, "I have dirt all over me and I risk my life everyday" look is extremely attractive.

Especially since Asian Americans are a minority in Hollywood and the TV industry in general, it was refreshing to see an Asian

character not represented as the nerd, but a respected athlete. ♦



Theo James



Tom Blyth



Ki Hong Lee

## Three actors everyone should appreciate aesthetically

BY EmmaFung

Hollywood. A wonderful land of entertainment where anyone can be satisfied, as there are just so many movies and TV shows of various genres. However, while you can find yourself appreciating the cinematography, the plot and the mesmerizing soundtracks in any movie, it's also important to take a step back to admire other factors.

Highly important is...the physical attractiveness of the cast. I know it sounds shallow, but in my opinion, that factor can make or break a movie.

So without further ado, here are the top three movie men that I believe truly enhance movies purely with their looks.

### 1. Orlando Bloom

I don't trust my mom's taste, really. So when she told 5-year-old me I had to watch "Lord of the Rings" for "the plot," I rolled my eyes in exasperation as I prepared to watch her gush over 40-year-old men for three hours. However, my jaw dropped when a beautiful elf man with long, flowy blond hair entered the screen, a bow and arrow slung across his shoulder.

My mom quickly turned to me and excitedly told me that this was Legolas, the character she was talking about, but I was way too focused on the screen to pay her any attention. This was my first encounter with the man, the myth,

the legend: Orlando Bloom.

"Lord of the Rings" quickly became my favorite movie franchise ever since that magical first impression. Now, don't get me wrong, the film series itself is nothing short of fantastic.

The plot follows a young Hobbit named Frodo, who suddenly finds himself on a quest to destroy the "one ring of power." He meets dwarves, Orcs, elves and other creatures along his journey, all of whom he forms close bonds with.

There is blood, heartbreak and so much more that quickly captured my interest and had me watching the series over and over and over again.

However, I'm not sure I would have been so engrossed in the series if another man was chosen to play Legolas.

There was just something about Orlando Bloom leaping through the air with a box and arrow strapped to his back and a completely blank expression stretched over his face that immediately captured my heart.

One particular scene I remember vividly was when he used ONE HAND to swing around a horse's

neck and pull himself onto the animal. I know it's a little hard to picture, but just know that I forced my dad to rewind that scene approximately seven times. Oh, and don't even get me started on him in "Pirates of the Caribbean."

was introduced in the movie, standing in a museum casually after poisoning a woman's coffee and setting up a shootout just to steal an artifact.

I didn't say anything at first, in fear of my family judging me for finding a mass murderer attractive, but that fear quickly disappeared when his tragic backstory was revealed.

I mean, maybe he did try to kill the Black Panther and take the throne for himself, but he did it to get revenge for his deceased father, and after all, who doesn't love a family

man?

### 3. Christian Bale (without the beard)

I'm sure that most of you have seen the "sigma male" edits that have been circulating TikTok.

Most of them usually include clips of the mastermind serial killer Patrick Bateman from the 2000 film "American Psycho." Out of completely normal interest, I found myself watching the movie one night.



Graphic by EMMA FUNG

### 2. Michael B. Jordan

I have been a Marvel fan pretty much my whole life, so I was filled with excitement when I heard about the new movie "Black Panther" coming out back in 2018. I quickly became immersed in the plot and characters, but one character in particular really captured my attention.

It's not just me — my sister's eyes also widened in awe when Jordan's character, Killmonger,

## 'Mean Girls' musical movie remake fails to escape shadow of iconic 2004 original

BY SashaPrasad

Though first aired what feels like lifetimes ago in 2004, "Mean Girls" has remained a comfort movie — and cautionary tale — for teens around the world ever since.

The plot is fairly simple: Cady Heron, who has been homeschooled in Africa all her life, moves to Chicago and enters high school, where she encounters "the girl world," otherwise known as toxic popularity, for the first time.

She quickly figures out the system and steals the spot of Regina George, queen bee of the "Plastics," a clique at the top of the social hierarchy. In the process, though, she loses her love for math, empathy and real friendships in her new position of power, and in the end, the girls realize their divisions are trivial and disband the "Plastics."

The original "Mean Girls" transcended typical box office success to become a cultural phenomenon.

What makes the movie so iconic that it has stayed popular for two decades? Many teens can relate to the body image and social insecurities the movie addresses while indulging in its sharp comedy and colorful characters.

Twenty years after the original movie aired, Paramount released "Mean Girls, 2024," an adaptation of the 2018 Broadway musical "Mean Girls" (yes, they made a musical version and then a movie-musical from it). The 2024 adaptation, for the most part, follows the same plot as the 2004 version — oftentimes actors recite the exact same lines as the original. The key difference between the two versions is that the film's creators also tried to appeal

to a younger audience in the newer version, specifically Gen Z viewers, by excluding outdated aspects of the original such as the Plastics hanging out at the mall every day and using flip phones.

### The musical film also fell short in terms of wardrobe, which was a large aspect of the original.

Unfortunately, as a result of these changes, the film found itself caught between its millennial and Gen Z audiences. The original film fit perfectly in its era, when early 2000s films starring blonde girls surrounded by drama (think "Legally Blonde" and "Gossip Girl") were all the rage.

The new film? Not so much. While the writers attempted to "modernize" the film through TikTok filters and pop culture references, much of the film's subject matter does not reflect typical teen behaviors today. In order to resonate with the audience, the movie either needed to be set in the early 2000s or rewritten based on current "mean girl" high school trends. Neither of those options happened; consequently, the message of the movie became diluted.

Moreover, the producers made a crucial mistake in cutting out a large amount of the original humor. It is understandable that many of the jokes in 2004 would not pass in 2024s cancel culture — such as Regina's homophobic comments about Janice, or a scene where Cady walks in on a pedophilic

coach and a student together in the janitor's closet. However, instead of substituting offensive bits with sharp and witty (and socially acceptable) humor, the writers inserted unfunny jokes. In short, the new movie lost the original's humorous edge.

Many viewers were also caught off guard when a song played in the first five minutes of the film because the movie was not properly promoted as a musical. These songs may have worked on Broadway, but they fell flat in the film production. The vocals, besides pop powerhouse Renee Rapp singing "World Burn" as Regina George, were dull, and the choreography resembled generic TikTok dances.

While Rapp had prior experience playing Regina on Broadway, the 2024 movie swerved and took Regina's character in a different direction. Here, the producers made the decision to make Regina more overtly mean as well as vulnerable. Though Rapp captured Regina's character for the most part, she lacked the deceptively sweet appearance and sense of passive aggressive underhandedness that made Regina so unique in the original.

On the other hand, fellow members of the "Plastics": Gretchen (Bebe Wood) and Karen (Avantika Vandanapoti), the outliars: Janice (Auli'i Cravalho) and Damien (Jaquel Spivey), and the main love interest, Aaron Samuels (Christopher Briney), all added more depth to their characters than the original actors. The same cannot be said for Angourie Rice, who played the main char-

acter Cady Heron. In this rendition, Cady was timid and shy instead of charismatic and confident, which makes her revenge arc all the less compelling. Even when she plotted and came to power as the "new" Regina George, she came across as being more misguided than malicious. Ultimately, Rice was not convincing in her role and the essential parts of Cady's character were absent.

The musical film also fell short in terms of wardrobe, which was a large aspect of the original. Mini skirts, pink pumps, flared jeans, Converse, flannels and velour tracksuits are only a few of the Plastics fashion staples in "Mean Girls" 2004.

In the Gen Z paradox, the outfits looked effortless and cheap. Rather than leaning into Y2K, stylist Tom Broecker attempted to modernize the looks — but the outfits worn by the Plastics were not unique and prominent,

nor were they realistic depictions of what teens wear to school in today's world.

A movie remake is successful only when it elevates the original. While the "Mean Girls" 2024 attempted to merge the

2004 and 2024 high school experiences in order to attract viewers across both generations, the result lacks cohesion.

It fell short in far too many departments: the music and dancing, the casting of key characters, the fashion and the humor. It lost the essence of both Tina Fey's "Mean Girls" on Broadway, as well as the original Mean Girls — maybe the bar was too high to begin with. ♦



Graphic by ANAMIKA ANAND

## togatalks

What do you think about the new 2024 "Mean Girls" as compared to the original movie?

"I enjoyed the new interpretation of the movie as it was very engaging since it was a musical. The modern jokes really resonated with me."



senior Zinneerah Ahmed

"I think that the new Mean Girls is a decent movie; however it doesn't compare at all to the original. The musical aspect was corny."



senior Aritra Bagchi

"I really liked the new movie, but I don't think it can compare to the original movie's cast. The musical twist was a unique addition."



junior Angie Chen

## Awards show hosts — the good, the bad, the awkward

BY AnthonyLuo

Imagine sitting in front of your TV for three hours straight and watching as a list of names while a select group of celebrities enjoys a dinner together. Sitting on your couch, you'll watch them get unbelievably drunk and enjoy some foie gras and caviar while you wait impatiently for your instant noodles to finish cooking. Pretty bleak, right? Now, insert a well-known comedian into the mix to read those names, and you've got a run-of-the-mill, only mildly entertaining Hollywood awards show.

Sometimes, the simple addition of a talented comedian makes for an absolute spectacle of a night that goes down in history. But what sets these shows apart? Why does Ricky Gervais' Golden Globes monologue work, while Jo Koy's doesn't? In other words, what makes a good awards show host?

At first glance, the obvious answer seems to be that better comedians make for better hosts. However, various examples disprove that claim; take famous comedian and former late-night host David Letterman, for example, who was labeled the worst awards show host by TIME magazine after a disastrous monologue at the 1995 Oscars. Instead, I think the success of a host comes down to two factors: their ability to adapt to various situations and their understanding of the audience.

Oftentimes, what makes or breaks a comedic monologue is the presenter's ability to adapt to the audience and think on their feet. The nature of awards shows arguably makes this job easier — the audience is full of A-list celebrities whose jobs are to express themselves, but knowing how to adapt is still largely dependent on the host's talents.

Take, for example, the most

recent Golden Globes. When Jo Koy's monologue this year didn't land with the audience, he turned to making excuses and blaming those jokes on the other writers instead of trying to come up with better material. In contrast, when Ricky Gervais hosted the show in previous years, he committed to all of his jokes. An infamous example is from his 2022 monologue, where he made numerous jabs at Hollywood's notoriety for its connections to pedophilia and called out his audience for their alleged connections to Jeffrey Epstein.

In the best cases, though, the need to adapt never comes up at all because the host understands their audience and job. When this happens, you end up with some of the funniest, most passionate hosts — like stand-up comic John Mulaney, known for his more traditional comedic style and clever writing. Between his monologue at this year's Governor's Awards and his



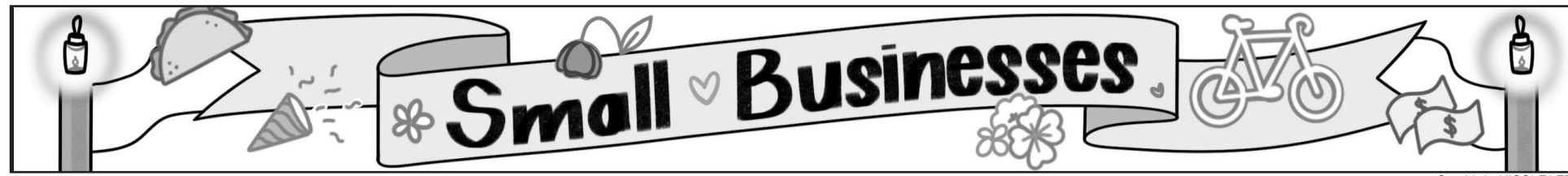
Courtesy of AP PHOTO

David Letterman's dry comedy failed at the 1995 Oscars Award Show.

co-hosting of the Film Independent Spirit Awards with Nick Kroll in 2017, Mulaney proved to have some of the most consistent humor. When hosts lack this understanding, you end up with Koy's Barbie and Taylor Swift jokes.

Ultimately, in a world full of unoriginal and unpredictable comedians, these two factors mark the difference between a night to remember and a slap on the wrist on Twitter. Or, in the worst case, a slap in the face. ♦





Graphic by NICOLE LEE

## Spanish teacher balances teaching career and co-running startup Mexican food restaurant

By KathyWang  
& AndyZhu

In recent months, Spanish teacher Stephany Marks has added something new to her daily plate of preparing for classes and grading: helping run Kito's Taco Shop, a restaurant in Marin County that she co-owns with her boyfriend Tommy Guerrero and best friend Billy Vela.

At times, she has been making the 1.5-hour commute to the restaurant in Corte Madera right after the school day ends, essentially forcing her to balance two demanding jobs and stranding her in her car for hours each day.

The restaurant opened in October and was named in honor of Guerrero's grandmother, "Gramma Kito."

The Spanish cuisine served is credited to head chef and co-owner Vela, who develops traditional Spanish dishes.

Marks said some of the restaurant's most popular dishes include the Baja Fish Tacos, Shrimp Tacos and Carne Asada Quesadilla. Through a combination of fresh, home-made ingredients and Vela's own innovative twists, Kito's aims to provide delicious and nourishing meals to their customers.

### Marks values the local community her restaurant serves

While helping run the restaurant, Marks places heavy emphasis on customer service and makes an effort to remember all her customers' names. Because of the welcoming community in Corte Madera, she also enjoys involving the restaurant in various local charity events.

"We reach out to doctors' offices and

high schools to find ways to sponsor schools and teams," she said. "In April, we are going to sponsor a big bike race by donating money and sports equipment. By doing this, we get our name out, hopefully enabling us to do more community events in the future."

One of Marks's most memorable experiences working at Kito's happened in early January when Vela's family brought in a Rosca — a type of Spanish and Portuguese sweet bread — so that the customers could participate in the Rosca tradition, in which everyone breaks off a piece of the bread and whoever receives a small plastic baby inside their bread must host a tamale party.

"I kind of put on my teacher hat and explained to the customers what the Rosca was, and they all came up and cut a piece of it," Marks said. "For me, that was kind of combining my teaching with the restaurant."

### How Marks balances her job as a teacher and restaurant co-owner

Until December, Marks had been spending every afternoon at the restaurant, making her days extremely long and hectic. Because Marks lives in Half Moon Bay, she spent almost three hours every day commuting between the school and Kito's.

After arriving to school at 7:30 a.m., she worked until 3:30 p.m. followed by a 1.5 hour drive to the restaurant.

After closing at 10 p.m., Marks either drove back to Half Moon Bay or booked a hotel, where she drove directly to school the next day.

"[With such an overwhelming schedule] I didn't have any balance in my life, and it was really hard," Marks said. "I felt like I was in the car probably three hours a day, work-



Marks



Courtesy of KITOSTACOSHOP on INSTAGRAM

One of Kito's most popular dishes are the tacos wrapped in corn tortillas, grilled Gulf Shrimp with cabbage, cilantro, red onion, lime crema, roasted tomato salsa, and fresh guacamole.

ing two jobs and not sleeping much."

Luckily, after a few months of hard and toiling work, her daily help has not been needed as much.

Currently, she works at the restaurant mostly on weekends, allowing her to dedicate more time to teaching and maintain a healthier work-life balance.

"I feel like I should be there every day because then Guerrero's the only one managing it, but [I need to prioritize] my mental health and focus on teaching," Marks said.

Mark's ultimate goal for the restaurant is to provide good food and a "homey feel"

for the customers.

Though she is only focusing on the current restaurant as of now, she and her co-owners hope to franchise a second restaurant in the future.

Marks is also considering taking a year off of teaching at some point in time, but not anytime soon. Even with her heavy responsibilities as a restaurant co-owner, she still wants to focus on her teaching career.

"I love Saratoga High and am really connected to this community, so I'm not planning to leave in the future," Marks said. ♦

## Riding low: Freshman in biker club starts local business offering modest bike-fixing services

By WilliamCao  
& KathyWang

During the pandemic, freshman Dylan Zuo — then a sixth grader — spent his afternoons biking around his neighborhood on his 2021 Giant Fathom 1, enjoying the sunset view of blue and purple skies mixing behind the far-away mountain peaks and looming trees.

"[During that time], I found that [bike riding] was really calming and relieved my stress," Zuo said. "I could see nature and just enjoy life."

However, due to the overuse of his bike, Zuo described the bike's conditions as "ancient" and "beat up," which only worsened after he learned how to perform tricks on his bike like wheelies and riding without hands. Because Zuo didn't want to spend hundreds of dollars paying for a repair that could take up to weeks on end, he decided to learn how to fix the bike himself by watching YouTube tutorials.

After a month of watching the tutorials, Zuo punctured the rear wheel of his bike, giving him the perfect opportunity to utilize his newly acquired knowledge. He recalls struggling for half an hour to figure out the mechanics of the wheel, taking the rear tire and inner tube off the rim of the wheel. Zuo spent three hours installing the tire on the

wheel and the wheel onto the bike, only to realize that he installed the rear tire backward, leading him to spend another two hours reversing the order.

"It was a lot easier the second time after I fixed my bike," he said. "I felt like I was on top of the world: independent and accomplished. I didn't tie this into any engineering interest; fixing bikes is like therapy to me. It's satisfying when I finish working on a [rusty, beat-up bike] to a completely brand-new finished bike."

In the last four years, Zuo's passion for bike riding and fixing has continued to grow, inspiring him to establish his own unofficial bike-fixing business over the summer of 2023. In addition to running his own business, Zuo also serves as the current vice president of the school's bike club with junior president Han Yeung.

"I always thought that [my passion for bikes] was a kind of niche thing that only specific people like me had," Zuo said. "But then I got introduced to Han, and we started talking and eventually formed a bike club earlier this [school] year."

As of now, Zuo's business is still a "small scope" activity where he advertises on WeChat or Discord for service to any of his friends, individuals in his neighborhood or family friends. If the service is relatively mi-



Photo by DYLAN ZUO

Freshman Dylan Zuo deftly removes the rear wheel to do a deep clean on the bike's cassette.

nor, such as cleaning a bike for around 10 minutes, Zuo won't charge anything. But if the service takes longer — removing wheels, deep cleaning parts or repairing broken chains — he charges \$20 an hour. So far, Zuo's maximum price for any service that exceeds two hours is \$40, and he has made \$120 since creating his business.

This year, Zuo hopes he can expand his

business by advertising on social media. Once he gains more popularity, Zuo also looks forward to teaching the 15 members how to fix their own bikes.

"Biking has many benefits," Zuo said. "It's rewarding both physically and mentally knowing that as I conclude sessions with the biking club, I've contributed to my community by tackling the task of fixing bikes." ♦



Graphic by AMY MIAO

By BeverlyXu

Note 1: All AP Test pass rates were recorded at SHS in 2019. Rankings are calculated by taking the average of the five criterion, and may not be representative of all students.

Note 2: Difficulty statistics were randomly sampled from students who may or may not have voluntarily taken the poll, based on the discretion of the teacher distributing it, and therefore may not be representative of all students.

With the several science classes students have the option of taking each year, it is important to know what each course demands in order to make an informed decision for course selection.

The Falcon polled students in all science classes excluding AP Biology (AP Biology teacher Cheryl Lenz declined to distribute the survey) — receiving 254 distinct responses — and these are the breakdowns of all the courses, by median hours spent on homework, memorization and conceptual understanding. Additionally, for AP courses, the SHS AP test pass rates, all recorded in 2019, were noted.

### The breakdown:

#### AP Environmental Science:

Homework (hours per class): 0.625  
Memorization (hours per class): 0.375  
Conceptual learning (hours per class): 0.24  
Number of lectures understood on first exposure (of 10): 10  
AP Test Pass Rate: 77%

Pro tip: "APES is really just memorization, and it has a few labs and daily notes which can be done during tutorial," — senior Ameya Saund.

#### Earth Science:

There were not enough responses to

create a four-quartile distribution, or any valuably reliable average.

Pro tip: "There were a lot of misconceptions I had with certain earth systems like the difference between hurricanes and typhoons and tornadoes and twisters ... But if I had a choice, I'd take bio in freshman year because apparently I can learn all of this in APES [AP Environmental Science]. I'd be doing the exact same labs in Earth Science — I remember Mrs. Thompson [the APES teacher] coming in to take labs from Mrs. Cochrum's [the Earth Science teacher] room and Mrs. Cochrum would explain to the class that 'she takes labs from me,'" — sophomore Ashwin Kotti.

#### Regular Chemistry:

Homework (hours per class): 1  
Memorization (hours per class): 1  
Conceptual learning (hours per class): 1  
Number of lectures understood on first exposure (of 10): 6.5

Pro tip: "The workload is reasonable and the curriculum is slowly paced, so you just need to stay on top of your work," — junior Vera Fung.

#### Regular Biology:

Homework (hours per class): 1  
Memorization (hours per class): 1  
Conceptual learning (hours per class): 1  
Number of lectures understood on first exposure (of 10): 5

Pro tip: "Freshman biology isn't that hard in comparison to AP courses, but it is a pretty big jump from middle school. Definitely feels more like an Honors biology class if you have Cochrum," — junior Grace Liu.

#### Regular Physics:

Homework (hours per class): 0.35

Memorization (hours per class): 0.4  
Conceptual learning (hours per class): 0.5  
Number of lectures understood on first exposure (of ten): 8

Pro tip: "Even though it's a regular class, don't think of it as easy and push it to the side. Stay on top of the units and also don't forget to apply the basics when you're learning harder concepts," — junior Shreya Raghuvanshi.

#### AP Physics C:

Homework (hours per class): 0.35  
Memorization (hours per class): 0.4  
Conceptual learning (hours per class): 0.5  
Number of lectures understood on first exposure (of 10): 8

AP Test Pass Rate: not offered in 2019

Pro tip: "The class format reflects the Physics 1 & 2 class format, and homework doesn't take very long unless you take more time to study using the MIT workbook problems," — senior Kyleen Liao.

#### Chemistry Honors:

Homework (hours per class): 0.3  
Memorization (hours per class): 0.5  
Conceptual learning (hours per class): 0.5  
Number of lectures understood on first exposure (of ten): 6

Pro tip: "Ms. Nak was a very interactive teacher, and she utilized a lot of cold calling, which kept me focused during class, which made me retain the information better and prevented me from falling asleep during the lectures," — junior Claire Zheng.

Note: Due to limited sample size for this case, there is a sampling error of 35%.

#### AP Chemistry:

Homework (hours per class): 0.25

Memorization (hours per class): 0.7  
Conceptual learning (hours per class): 0.75

Number of lectures understood on first exposure (of ten): 8  
AP Test Pass Rate: 100%

Pro tip: "Mrs. Cahatol explains Chemistry really well so concepts are easy to understand but you need to do the Zumdahl [textbook homework problems] to pass tests," — senior Ameya Saund.

Another student's take: "The Zumdahl homework is all due at the end of the unit, so if you space it out throughout the unit it doesn't take long," — junior Sarah Lim.

#### AP Biology:

AP Biology teacher Cheryl Lenz declined the Falcon's request to poll her students.

AP Test Pass Rate: 98%

Note: "AP Bio's material is all very very similar to what we learned in freshman biology, so the information we retain is not as difficult as other AP classes may be. One big difference however, is that we do a lot more lab and lab reports, so we can have a more hands-on experience," — junior Claire Zheng.

#### AP Physics 1 & 2:

Homework (hours per class): 0.225  
Memorization (hours per class): 1  
Conceptual learning (hours per class): 1  
Number of lectures understood on first exposure (of 10): 5  
AP Test Pass Rate: 93%

Pro tip: "For physics you have a lot of conceptual and application problems, so it's helpful to have the questions sheet, but when taking tests you will have to solve problems you've never seen before based on what you learned in class. Also, the curve in physics is huge," — senior Ameya Saund. ♦

## Biology teacher Lisa Cochrum recalls her previous teaching experiences in the old science classrooms

By KathyWang

Early in her teaching career here, Biology teacher Lisa Cochrum vividly recalls jumping over backpacks while shoving students out of her way, screaming "Fire! Fire, fire, fire!" as she sprinted towards a sudden eruption of blazing flames that two of her students had accidentally started in one of their labs.

"[When I reach the students] I go 'drop it [a plastic graduated cylinder], drop it, drop it!' I don't know what she heard, but she began to pound it on the counter," Cochrum said. "Little bits of flaming material go towards the paper on the wall, the electrical outlets and towards her backpack, her hair is down and I'm like 'no, no, no!'"

Cochrum, who has taught biology here for 31 years, notes this incident as one of the "closest times [she] has ever come to a dangerous situation." She largely attributes it to the arrangement of the science classrooms at the time where lab tables faced the walls, leaving teachers unable to keep an eye on students.

Before the current science building was completed in 2002, science classes were located in the wing that is now the art building; the inadequate facilities contributed to various inconvenient incidents, including this memorable fire incident.

After the hazardous fire incident in her old science classroom, Cochrum went door-to-door in the community to campaign for a bond measure to improve campus facilities, including the construction of a building solely dedicated to science classes. The bond measure was successful and ended up receiving a majority vote.

The science building holds 10 classrooms with a long stretch of hallway in between, connecting them all. It houses every core science class in the school including Earth Science, Biology, Chemistry, Physics and Environmental science and is vastly larger than the old science wing.

On the Back to School Night following the fire incident, Cochrum said that while expressing her gratitude toward the parents for supporting the bond measure [in the old science classrooms], she recalls a parent raising his hand saying "yeah, I'm getting wet" because a pipe had broken under the sink, drenching the parent.

Additionally, Cochrum noted that every spring the old classroom — where holes littered the ceiling — would have thousands of termites fall onto the students' desks.

"It was like a swarm [of termites] and we all came screaming out of my classroom and ran down the hallway," Cochrum said. "So [in total] we had broken pipes, broken electrical, a swarm of bugs and I had this almost



Photo by KATHY WANG

A photo of the current science building, which was established in 2002, after a light drizzle.

deadly fire. I cried [of happiness] when I heard the bond measure got passed and that we were going to use the back parking lot to build the new science building."

When the science building was established, there was a debate between building it with one or two stories. However, it was later decided that a two-story building would be too inconvenient to carry heavy equipment, so they settled for a one story science building. Cochrum especially loves

the indoor hallway that stretches between the science classrooms, as it allows for convenient transportation and storage of science equipment.

"I cannot even tell you how grateful I am for this building, and how grateful we are to the parents for funding it," Cochrum said. "This building changed my entire career at Saratoga High and enabled our students to be the top scientists in the world because of it." ♦



# Beware or be (squared)<sup>2</sup>

Math teacher P.J. Yim shares his concerns on the negative effects of skipping math levels.

BY SkylerMao  
& AndyZhu

In the past decade, the number of students skipping to higher level math classes at the school has spiked dramatically — a trend that math teachers say has hurt overall understanding of the subject, especially when combined with pandemic-related learning loss.

According to the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) — an accrediting commission which regularly reviews Saratoga High — between the 2005-2006 and 2022-2023 school years, the percentage of students taking Algebra 1 has dropped from 12.7% to 4.9%, demonstrating a shift toward more students taking higher-level math courses earlier in their high school years. Math teacher P.J. Yim, who first started teaching here in 2008, recalls that prior to 2013, students almost never skipped math levels other than one or two exceptional freshmen taking Precalculus Honors.

"When I first saw sophomores in [AP Calculus] BC, it was almost certain that they were the best math students. However, that's not the case anymore," Yim said. "We have kids who don't know basic algebra taking BC and I mean — what's the purpose of that?"

When skipping classes such as Geometry and Algebra 2, students can miss critical concepts that teachers in later subjects — including Precalculus and Calculus — sometimes end up needing to reteach.

By spending a significant amount of time tailoring information to students who need more review with foundational concepts in the general class, Yim finds he loses vital class time that could instead be used to teach new concepts to the students who are better prepared to learn Calculus. Yim argues that certain courses like Calculus should have stricter and enforced prerequisites, such as having to take Precalculus in person. Too often he has seen that an A from an online course is basically a "fake A," and an in-person course is necessary to ensure that students are capable of handling the curriculum.

"I'm always rooting for my students to do their best every single time," Yim said. "I want to trust that they will be prepared for that course. But being unprepared and making bad decisions is just irresponsible."

## Pandemic exacerbates learning gaps

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic had a detrimental impact on math scores, even nationwide. An article from NBC reports that math scores in the National Assessment of Educational Progress, conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, dropped by eight points over the pandemic; a 10-point drop is equivalent to being an entire year behind in material, showing just how far nationwide math proficiency declined in K-12 schools.

SHS is not exempt from this trend — many students have suffered greater gaps in comprehension as a result of the pandemic and yet continue skipping math levels after they returned to in-person learning two years ago. Yim has seen that many students falsely overestimate their mathematical

abilities and skip to math courses that were unsuitable for them because online learning generally provided less rigorous coursework and inflated their grades.

Another major factor for the dropoff in students' math abilities was online cheating, Yim said. He said that some students would struggle their way through math courses by using online tools and outside resources for homework and take-home tests, yet they still earned good grades due to cheating and less rigorous grading.

"We have kids who don't know basic algebra taking BC."



TEACHER P.J. Yim

"I had kids in AP Calculus BC who barely could do anything and could never answer any of my questions in class," Yim said.

He commonly sees the result of this in his classes, where a substantial number of mistakes he sees on tests are not misunderstandings of advanced concepts, but rather, basic algebra mistakes, revealing incomplete mastery. And since many students base their sense of mastery on their grades during online learning, they acquire a false sense of their mathematical capability, leading them to overreach in their course selections for the following years.

This overreach also affects logistics for the school's math and guidance department since a many students drop out of difficult classes early in the fall semester. For example, in the 2021-22 school year, many Algebra 2 Honors classes experienced

a heavy drop rate, affecting the schedules of many students that didn't even request a change. During the 2022-2023 school year, 14% of Algebra 2 Honors students dropped the class.

This trend can also be observed in other math classes as well. For instance, Calculus BC experienced an astonishing 22% drop rate in the 2022-2023 school year, with 124 students initially signed and the usual number being in the high 70s to 80s. Yim hopes that overtime, the effects of COVID-hampered math education will start to die down.

Besides the pandemic contributing to skipping math levels in recent years, another

cause has existed long before the pandemic and still remains today: peer and parental pressure. Given the competitive culture in the school, many students feel that they are obligated to sign up for difficult classes. As a result, WASC reports that "students' workload may be more stressful due to taking more AP classes, tests."

## Students recall their experience skipping math levels

Junior Neha Natu is one of many students who signed up for a challenging schedule during the 2022-2023 school year. She took Precalculus Honors during freshman year after taking Algebra 2 Honors over the previous summer, being partially influenced by peer pressure. Natu described her experience in Precalculus Honors as "a breeze," but partly attributed her success to her teacher's tests being easier than expected.

"I decided to make this skip in order to fast forward through the levels of my math in high school," Natu said. "I was confident in my intelligence, so I didn't think too much about it."

By skipping Algebra 2 Honors, Natu found she didn't have the needed foundation during her sophomore year when she was taking Calculus BC; the difficulty of the course material as well as the intensity of the workload was nothing like what she had experienced before.

"It was definitely challenging, especially adjusting to the course pace and level we were going at," she said. "But these were all valuable because it taught me about overcoming challenges. I don't think peer pressure is good, as it may lead someone to further stress that they are not ready for. However, if an individual believes that they can succeed jumping forward, then they should take the challenge."

Yim thinks certain students are capable of jumping levels as long as they are fully prepared for the class curriculum. A prime example is junior Ian Kim, who took Multivariable Calculus at West Valley College

in his first semester of junior year. He skipped Algebra 2 by studying asynchronously with his math tutor during the summer between eighth and ninth grade, which prepared him for Precalculus Honors during freshman year. To comprehensively learn the material in limited time, Kim worked extensively with his tutor to maximize his practice, which he thinks is the primary difference between



Kim

him and many other students who also took summer courses but struggled afterward. Furthermore, while choosing courses for high school, Kim strategically planned the rigor of his freshman year courses by comparing the curriculum of Algebra 2 Honors and Precalculus Honors.

"The main difference was the pace of the two classes," Kim said. "I wanted to make a leap to challenge myself, so I enrolled in a course to help me with the jump."

Kim emphasizes that his decision was a personal choice and not due to peer or parental pressure.

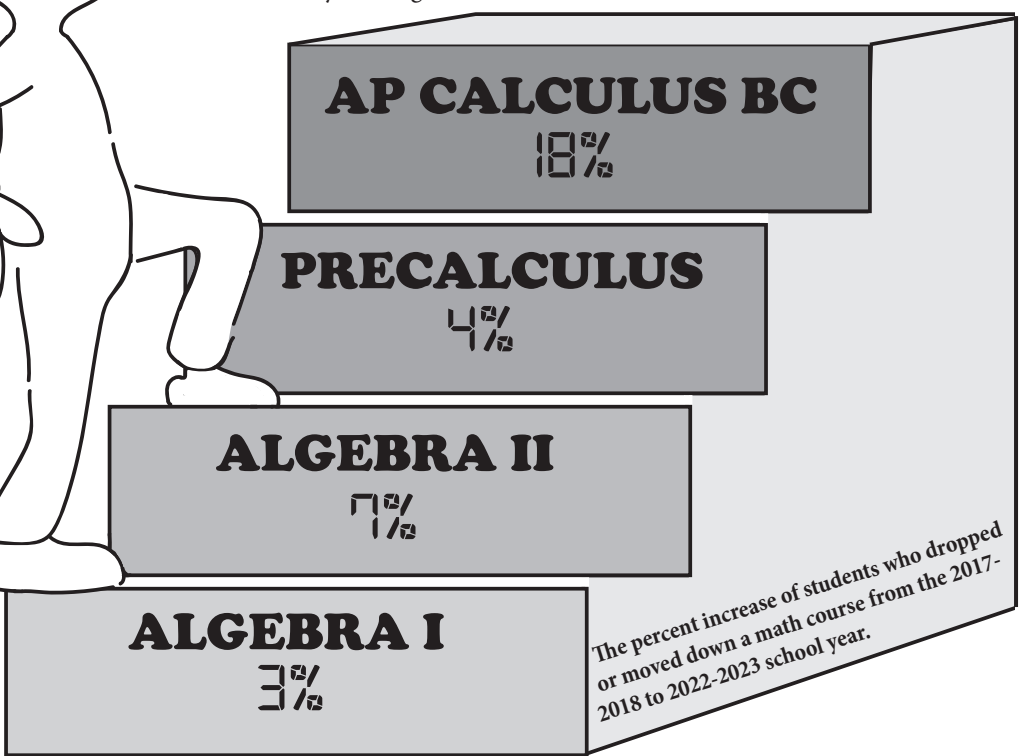


Natu

In general, Yim has seen a consistent stigma applied to those who sign up for a regular version of class. "People make assumptions like: 'You're in a regular class, and therefore you must be XYZ,'" Yim said. "I don't think like that. All I care about is how hard you're working."

Yim emphasizes the importance of listening to teachers when they recommend math courses for students. The ability to skip math classes was originally designed to challenge students who would benefit from engaging with harder courses. However, in the past decade, this system has developed into a futile competition of taking the highest classes rather than the ones that help students actually learn.

"If you're completely misplaced, I think signing up for classes appropriate for you is fine," Yim said. "But when you begin to do it because other people are doing it, that's the problem." ♦



# PARENTING ADVICE from TEENS

BY AnikaKapasi  
& JaneLee

Editor's note: In order to elicit more honest responses, all sources were granted anonymity and are referred to by grade level and gender.

Students started with two words — "I wish" — to convey how their ideal parenting styles were different from the one their parents' raised them with. The Falcon recently explored these differences by interviewing eight students — a boy and girl from each grade.

## 1.) I wish: They were more involved in my life

Most said they wish their parents paid more attention to their internal struggles and played a more active role in their lives.

"I wish that they knew about my extracurriculars," a freshman girl said. "They just kind of financially support me and they don't really know what's going on. I wish they would show up."

One instance where she felt the absence of her parents was during her team's last competition of the season. To her disappointment, her father couldn't make it because he "didn't feel like it" and her mother decided to not attend "just because."

"[A common excuse they give is] 'I'm tired' or 'I've done a lot today, I don't want to go out anymore,'" the freshman said.

According to Psychology Today, although many parents lead

"I wish that they knew about my extracurriculars... [I wish they would] show up."

"[I wish] they would give [me] more undivided attention because they're really busy with work."

lives in order to financially support their children, being present in the activities important to their child, especially during the teenage years, is critical for development since parents influence healthy decision-making.

However, even when parents are found to be present in students' lives, numerous noted how their parents are often unable to separate their work life from their personal life, resulting in strained family dynamics. According to a study published in the National Library of Medicine, constant stress from work can lead to dissatisfaction with both family and work life.

Many students said something as simple as taking the time to sit down and have a meaningful conversation could make all the difference. "I wish they would give me more undivided attention because they're really busy with work," a junior boy said. "And because they work from home sometimes, it's even more embedded into their lives than before."

Although they plan to eat dinner together everyday with a no-screen policy, he has often noticed his family is distracted and not mindful of their time together.

A senior girl put it this way:

"I'm happy, you know? I think they think... I drag myself a little too hard. And I think sometimes they blame themselves for that. They shouldn't."

"I would give my kid more freedom at a younger age and let them fall so they can kind of figure stuff out on their own."

point where they overmanage.

Teen Rehab states that children with helicopter parents have fewer opportunities to take responsibility for their actions, leading to dependency on others during problematic encounters and a lack of empathy for their decisions.

The senior boy said: "[If I were a parent], I would give my kid more freedom at a younger age and let them fall and get hurt so they can kind of figure stuff out on their own. And then once they're really down, always make sure to help them out."

wanted to find balance in their relationship, hoping parents would understand when they overstep boundaries. According to Teen Rehab, helicopter parents are those who take a "highly active interest" in their children's lives, even to the

## 3.) Why I admire my parents' parenting style

Students with parents who encourage effective communication are grateful for it and believe that it has fostered a more comfortable environment that they find hard to fault. In fact, they plan to take inspiration from it when they raise their own children.

"I would pretty much go for what parents do for me. They are strict at times, but very supportive," a freshman boy said.

Students struggled to find

even one flaw of their parents when they realized that open communication solved most of their arguments successfully and left the dynamic between them healthier. "I think my parents really put an emphasis on communication and working with each other. I think they're very compassionate and they are willing to hear what I have to say," a sophomore boy said.

His parents acknowledged that he is more of a self-motivated individual and took a step back to give him the freedom to succeed

and hold himself accountable, while still supporting him in all his endeavors and encouraging him to "stay true to himself."

He recalled when he was in eighth grade and started losing interest in robotics — an activity he had put lots of time and effort into since elementary school — his parents didn't pressure him to follow through with it heading into high school. Instead, they let him make his own choice and allowed him to drop the extracurricular to follow what he was truly passionate about like debate and band.

TWO STUDENTS FROM EACH GRADE DESCRIBE THEIR IDEAL PARENTING STYLE AND WHERE THEIR PARENTS FALL SHORT

## 4.) I wish: They communicated openly

Additionally, instead of jumping to conclusions and putting up a barrier, students suggest that parents open up and communicate how they feel in order to bridge their generational and cultural gap.

"I wish they weren't so awkward about talking about their feelings because I feel like my siblings and I [can't] go to them about anything because it's just not going to be a comfortable conversation," a junior girl said.

Having a stronger support system was a sentiment echoed by numerous students, wishing they could have relied on their parents, instead of keeping their emotions to themselves.

"[I wish they would encourage] being more open about talking about your emotions," the senior boy said. "You're [often] discouraged from ever talking about what's going on internally and so I feel like if that narrative was changed, [I would be a] little more open towards them."

In his household, he was more influenced in the development of his character by friends and more distant relatives like cousins than his own parents.

Data gathered by the National Library of Medicine on the parental socialization of emotion concluded that when parents suppress theirs and their children's emotions, they directly harm their children's ability to communicate and socialize.

A pervasive generational discrepancy, particularly with the current generation of parents that fall into the "Gen X" age group, is an aversion toward displaying emotions — according to students, "Gen X" parents were raised to keep their feelings to themselves and bring the same style to their parenting.

These students urge their parents to reach out and offer extra support regularly as reassurance that they're willing to listen and talk. This helps establish a line of communication so that, instead of parents having to pry at the root of the problem, they can wait for their children to feel safe enough to share their struggles at their own pace.

lower feelings of self-efficacy in helicoptered children  
greater chance of anxiety in helicoptered children  
Statistics from GITHUX

## In Conclusion

The two words — "I wish" — uncovered the unfulfilled desire students have for a different parenting style than the one they have known. Of the eight students interviewed, only two said they are satisfied with their relationships with their parents.

Although parenting styles varied from family to family, the Falcon's interviews revealed that the only way students feel content with their parent-child relationships is through healthy and open communication; it is what these students, along with many of their peers, need in order to feel safe, understood and confident in navigating their challenging teenage years. ♦



# OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM INSIDE THE GYM

WHAT DO TEACHERS AT SHS DO TO STAY FIT?

Amid teachers' busy lives, juggling work with family responsibilities, personal well-being can unintentionally take a backseat. As a result, numerous teachers on campus have made a conscious effort to prioritize fitness into their hectic schedules often spending their free time to fulfill their lifelong exercise goals.

## Patel: finding joy in combining CrossFit and cardio

Under the guidance of Physical Education teacher Yuko Aoki, statistics teacher Seema Patel has been following a strict CrossFit workout regimen in the SHS Fitness Center for years.

"Last week, one of the workouts I did was five rounds of ten lunges, situps, push-ups, deadlifts and overhead presses. Aoki spontaneously comes up with a workout every day — it just depends on her" Patel said.

## "I feel better when I do Cross-Fit and have noticed my strength increase."

TEACHER Seema Patel

Patel finds time in and out of school to get her workout sessions in, sometimes conducting multiple workouts a day and working out for six days each week on average. For the days with multiple workouts, she often follows up a hard CrossFit regimen in the Fitness Center with another half-hour walk or hike in the evening after she gets home.

Leaning more into cardiovascular development, her favorite trails include a hill right above downtown Saratoga, Almaden Quicksilver County Park in South San Jose and Rancho San Antonio in the foothills of South Los Altos. Unlike her weight training and CrossFit fitness journey, she has been regularly hiking, walking and biking for around 20 years.

During the days Patel finds herself not on campus, she goes to 24-Hour Fitness for her workout sessions. Having been to both the school and outside gyms, she praises the school gym for its greater accessibility to beginners.

"Our school's gym caters to all levels of students and people rather than just the highly skilled and fit," she said. "When I go lift weights at 24 Hour Fitness, their lightest [barbell] bar is 45 pounds, whereas our school gym's lightest bar is 15 pounds, meaning you can slowly add up weight to cater towards all skill levels."

Before working with Aoki, Patel said she felt demoralized by the school's gym facility because of her relative inexperience with heavy weights.

"I was extremely intimidated by the [fitness] facility because I couldn't really do stuff," Patel said. "But, Aoki offered to work with me during my unscheduled [period] to teach me the fundamentals."

She noted that Aoki started her with weights equivalent to "sixth-grade PE standards" and taught her the proper form to do

all of the weight movements correctly. Under Aoki's supportive guidance, Patel overcame her fear that she would injure herself by lifting weights that were too heavy.

Now, Patel feels more at ease lifting the gym's free weights, which rely entirely on her body for support, rather than a machine. In fact, her deadlift started from 25 pounds and has since improved to around 95 to 110 pounds.

Patel reiterates her belief that getting exercise is beneficial for one's physical and mental health.

"It's good for your mental health to work out [and] it doesn't matter what [type of workout it] is. I feel better when I do CrossFit and have noticed my strength increase," Patel said. "My main goal is to continue increasing weight but not get hurt while doing so."

## Vierra: swimming pool sanctuary

Ever since she developed an interest in swimming at age 5, speech-language pathologist Ronda Vierra has continued it as a lifelong hobby. At 14, she swam on the Almaden Cabana Club swim team and joined her high school's diving team. In college, she swam in the pool to keep in shape.

Even now, swimming is still her preferred form of exercise. On every Blue Day during lunch and sixth period (her unscheduled period), Vierra swims in the school with Health and Driver's Education teacher Amy Obenour. In the past, they would also swim with Spanish teacher Stephany Marks, who also had the same unscheduled period.

"I think it's super important for teachers to practice self-care because there's a lot of stress involved with our job. One of our luxuries is the privilege to have such a nice facility and a beautiful pool to keep us in shape and manage our stress," Vierra said.

Vierra is a workout veteran, having exercised for close to 20 years in the school's swimming pool. She noted that over those years, her increased accessibility to information from online sites and forums has made planning out her workouts easier.

One of Vierra's past swim workouts consists of a 200-yard warm-up, progressing to a ladder 1,000-yard swim (swimming paces alternate between being faster and slower), followed by a roughly 400-yard pull and 800-yard kick for 45 to 50 minutes.

She notes that, along with swimming, she used to weight train at the Court-side gym's San Jose Campus. Vierra has shifted from lifting weights at Courtside to weight training at home with small, easily accessible weights like dumbbells.

From weight training at home to swimming with Marks and Obenour, Vierra is passionate about maintaining her fitness — all while enjoying the facilities available to her at school.

"For teachers to have access to a swimming pool, especially because many affordable gyms don't have pools, we don't take it for granted. It's one of those things that, if we weren't able to use the pool for self-care, it would detract from our job on this campus," Vierra said.

## Laws: shifting to weight training after gymnastics and soccer career

Growing up as a two-sport athlete, playing soccer and doing gymnastics, English teacher and yearbook adviser Megan Laws found her body unable to handle the vigor of both sports.

After suffering a knee injury, Laws quit gymnastics at the age of 17 as it was the higher impact sport but continued playing soccer in a club at Saint Mary's College.

After quitting soccer a couple years after graduating college, her husband suggested that she start weight training with him, which Laws continues to do regularly. Her typical schedule consists of 1-1.5 hour workouts on Monday, Wednesday and weekend afternoons.

Laws has four muscle splits that she alternates throughout the week: push, pull, legs and abs/cardio. Push and pull mostly focus on the upper body and consist of dumbbells, pulley lifts and deadlifts.

Her leg days focus on isolating her lower body muscles with squats, leg extensions, hip thrusts, weighted lunges and calf raises.

In between the heavy lifting days, she tries to sprinkle in a 10-15 minute ab workout or a 20-30 minute cardio workout that often includes running, spinning or a high-intensity interval training (HIIT) workout from YouTube.

After establishing a routine, Laws experienced a multitude of benefits from exercising apart from seeing herself grow stronger and healthier.

"I get an energy boost and it helps me maintain my focus while I'm at school or home," Laws said. "I have ADHD and if I don't work out, my ability to focus is gone and I often find myself walking around in circles in my kitchen, unable to remember what I'm doing."

However, even with the benefits, obstacles arise discouraging her to workout.

Long days of teaching as well as unpredictable sciatica — pain that travels along the lower back to legs — flare ups from a tense gymnastics career present challenges as she is often faced with the difficult decision of whether to push through the exhaustion and pain, or to give her body a break.

Laws has been weight training since graduating from college and sees herself continuing in the future, occasionally switching up her workout plan to keep it new and exciting.

"I'm constantly looking for new ways to change up my routine when I feel like something isn't working for me or when I'm bored with the lifts that I'm doing," she said. "But I still think that maintaining a strength training program is important."

## Orre: completing marathon encourages the start of CrossFit

Science teacher Kristopher Orre, who is also a Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) helping other teachers, also puts his physical activities and fitness life as a high priority, despite being heavily immersed in his career and roles as husband and father.

From cutting firewood to throwing heavy weights in the Highland Games (an international competition held in Scotland), he participates in a wide array of physical activities that benefit his health in different ways.

## "I think it's super important for teachers to practice self-care because there's a lot of stress involved with our job."

TEACHER Ronda Vierra

Orre regularly attends CrossFit classes where he trains a mix of weightlifting, cardio and gymnastics movements like handstands and ring dips to make up the core of his fitness.

Orre keeps a structured routine of doing at least three days of CrossFit weekly to help him maintain consistency. Typically, his workouts take place for one hour on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. However, this consistency took a long time for Orre to establish. When his uncle challenged him to run in the Santa Cruz half marathon alongside him 15 years ago, he said it seemed unimaginable. Orre ended up signing up for the race, training for it and finishing it on his own. Not long after, his friend introduced him to CrossFit.

Orre used the courage he gained from completing the half marathon to take the leap into CrossFit.

"I really liked the community aspect of working out with other people and being coached," Orre said.

As a result of his consistent training, Orre began to see results that he says have not only positively impacted his health, but also improved his outlook on life and shaped his identity.

"My stress levels are mitigated and I become more patient and focused, which influences my ability to do my job and interact with students and colleagues," Orre said.

Given his hectic schedule involving his home, school and work life, Orre finds that establishing set times every week dedicated to CrossFit classes is extremely beneficial to balancing out all his duties.

Ultimately, Orre feels that pushing himself in his exercise has made him a more resilient person and a key factor in building both his physical and mental tenacity.

"I have come to realize that my strength is one of my greatest assets, and not just physically, but mentally persevering through difficult workouts has trained myself to deal with challenging life events," Orre said. "That coupled with all the widely known health benefits has given me a lot more confidence, resilience and joy and helps me a lot in my roles as a husband, father and teacher." ♦

—William Cao, Jessica Li, Amy Miao, Eric Shi

All graphics by Amy Miao

## CHEER

# First place at CCS shines light on new era of success

By DerekLiang

Shaking off their pre-performance nerves, the 11 members of the school's cheer team rushed onto the main stage of this year's CCS competition, held at Independence High School on Jan. 20. Two minutes into their nearly 3-minute routine, the team pulled off the pyramid, one of their most challenging stunts: Every member contributed to lifting up junior flyer Lucie LeToquin and senior flyer Riley Alves as the two flyers hit a series of poses, filled with enthusiasm and smiles.

The team ended up winning first place in the cheerleading novice non tumbling small division. The team also "hit zero," meaning they achieved all of their stunts successfully without point deductions from the judges.

This first-place finish was the highlight of a high stakes season filled with back to back competitions and intensive training sessions.

Junior base Annaliese Shab recalled how the team had no high hopes for the CCS competition due to the tight time frame and fierce competition.

"When we didn't get called for second place at CCS, we all thought that we didn't place," Shab said. "But when they called on us for first, we all jumped up in excitement. It was a surreal moment for us because of all the work we put in this season and the improvement that we've had since we started."

The following weekend, the team went to JAMZ (an independent cheer organization) school cheer nationals in Las Vegas



Courtesy of MARIE KERLOU

The team performs the pyramid stunt at JAMZ Showdown at the Bay tournament on Jan 13.

after qualifying in December. They placed seventh out of nine teams. While the outcome was not what the team had hoped for, Shab believes the experience was still very rewarding.

"Being in the same room as really impressive teams was intimidating, but everyone was really supportive and the energy was nice," Shab said.

On Jan. 13, the week prior to CCS, the team also performed at a more local tournament, the JAMZ Showdown at the Bay, placing second out of seven teams.

For many members, the leadup to com-

petitions like these was incredibly stressful, but after stepping on the stage and performing, their nervousness quickly subsided.

According to freshman flyer and backspot Dezi Lencioni, the tight time frame between competitions also added pressure onto the team. Between each competition this year, the team had been tweaking their routine to adhere to different rules organizations may have had while increasing the difficulty and competitiveness of their performance.

Competing in the varsity non-tumbling category, which scores teams based

## DANCE

# Team soars through competitions despite limited practice

By ShirinaCao & JessicaLi

Whispering words of encouragement to each other, the 14-member dance team reviewed their choreography and completed last-minute preparations for their first jazz routine at Valley Christian on Jan. 20 before their performance. The air was thick with a blend of adrenaline and nerves, intensifying as the start of the competition neared.

After learning their routines in the first semester, the team has confidently charged into competition season with three full team dances — jazz, hip hop and pom — as well as a lyrical small group with six members. At their first competition hosted by West Coast Elite (WCE) at Valley Christian, the team placed second out of three teams for jazz, third out of six teams for pom, third out of four teams for hip hop and fifth out

of seven teams for lyrical. At their second competition hosted by United Spirit Association (USA) on Jan. 27 at Homestead, the team placed second for pom, while the rest of the places were not disclosed, given that only the top half of placements in each category are announced.

Captain Annalyn Bui said that, although she is proud of their results so far, the team is still looking to improve throughout the remainder of the season. The team has two final regional competitions on Feb. 10 and Feb. 17 hosted by the USA at Lincoln, before nationals in Anaheim from March 22-23. (The Falcon was unable to cover the Feb. 10 competition due to printing deadlines.)

"We've been listening to our judge's comments after each competition, implementing corrections and making small changes to the dances when we need to," Bui said.

Although the team holds three 2-hour practices a week, this schedule has signifi-

cantly fewer practices than in previous years due to conflicts in Strout's schedule. As a result, the team has been missing the Wednesday and Saturday practices that would have given them an extra boost during competition season.

## "It's around this time of year that we are harder on ourselves to not slack off."

SENIOR Erika Andersson

The short one- to two-week intervals between competitions leave little time for the dancers to make large changes to choreography, but head coach Toni Strout has made it a priority to strive to improve their scores, no matter how small the difference is in results after each competition.

Although the team holds three 2-hour practices a week, this schedule has signifi-

cantly fewer practices than in previous years due to conflicts in Strout's schedule. As a result, the team has been missing the Wednesday and Saturday practices that would have given them an extra boost during competition season.

"With fewer practices, it's even more crucial to use the time we have wisely," senior captain Erika Andersson said. "It's around this time of year that we are harder on ourselves to not slack off."

Andersson has noticed how the whole team has started to take practice more seriously. With Strout's emphasis on synchronization as a team and stylized movements, the members are glad to have learned the choreography early on in the year so that they have more time to refine the details.

"All we want is to improve a little each time and keep the whole thing fun for everyone," Andersson said. ♦

# Equestrian vaulters find community while competing at high level

By KathyWang

Clutching tightly onto the saddle of her galloping horse, senior Maddie Hubb focuses her eyes on a point while kicking her legs up to lock into a steady handstand position, holding it for a few seconds before returning to a steady stance. As the horse continues trotting, Hubb swings her arms to coordinate a graceful leap on the horse, landing with her arms spread in a T-position to maintain her balance.

Hubb, who started Equestrian vaulting at 4 years old, is one of the few students in the school who compete in vaulting—commonly described as gymnastics on horseback. Vaulters like Hubb and senior Vidhi Patel, who compete as partners, have dedicated their time to competing in this sport in various local and national competitions.

Hubb started equestrian vaulting after her preschool teacher—a vaulting coach at the time—introduced her to the sport. Af-

ter participating in a "demo day" at a school club, Hubb discovered that she enjoyed watching others perform tricks on horses.

"As I got older, it was a way for me to be involved in a community and build really close relationships with the girls who were on my team," Hubb said.

Currently, Hubb vaults competitively at the Mount Eden Vaulting Club in Saratoga and has competed in various international and national competitions, such as the 2023 USA National Championships, both individually and as doubles with her partner, Patel. From August 2022 to January 2023, Hubb trained intensively in Denmark with world-renowned coach Lasse Kristensen in preparation for the 2023 FEI Vault-

ing World Championships, which selects a vaulting pair from each nation to represent their country to compete. Unfortunately, Hubb injured her foot shortly before the World Championships, which sidelined them from qualifying.



Hubb

However, they were both able to compete in the 2023 USEF/EVUSA national championships in August, where they placed first in the doubles category.

Though Hubb enjoys vaulting as a fun childhood sport, she doesn't see herself pursuing it in the future due to the difficulty of establishing riding as a steady profession. However, she plans on coaching vaulting at Mount Eden Vaulting Club in the next few years.

Patel, who also vaults at Mount Eden, started the sport in fifth grade after attending a horseback riding camp. She enjoyed gymnastics, but she didn't want to pursue it as a sport. However, Hubb vaulted at the time, so she began to pursue it too.

"I like the community there, my coaches and my team," she said. "I like being able to work with them and I've already built a relationship with them."

In the past year, she has competed in various local competitions such as Woodside Vaulters Spring Fest, Garrods Spring Classic

and CVI Pacific Cup where she placed top five for both individuals and doubles.

Patel and her teammates are working on building a freestyle routine.

"My most difficult move right now is a handstand, but I think my favorite is this move where I stand backwards and jump forward [on my horse while it's moving]," she said.

Due to the difficulty of performing gymnastic-like movements on moving horses, Patel said mental blocks are challenges to overcome for all vaulters. When training for different techniques, she has found ways to combat the mental aspect, as she always practices on a stationary horse before actually practicing on a real horse.

Aside from the technicalities of vaulting, Patel feels that she has also formed a much stronger bond with her partner Hubb.

"We've traveled a lot together because of vaulting, and it has made us closer," Patel said. ♦

Patel



GIRLS' SOCCER

Small roster hinders performance

BY AnikaKapası

When the girls' soccer team led 2-0 during their Jan. 23 home against Santa Clara, it was an unfamiliar feeling: It was the first time in four games that the Falcons had been ahead.

But it didn't last. They were punished when they made three unfavorable mistakes in open play, going down 3-2 with 15 minutes left to go. Freshman winger Claire Chen then slotted the ball into the back of the net for the equalizer, but it wasn't enough. The Falcons ultimately lost 4-3.

"We weren't playing to our full potential [in the second half]," senior captain and midfielder Kate Oberhauser said. "We lost composure [after the opposing team's first goal] and everything just spiraled out of control. No one was in the right headspace and [the Bruins] became way more threatening than they should have been on the attacking side."

"We have to be able to work to our strengths — we just have to be flexible."

COACH Andrew McRobbie

After a 6-0 loss to Los Gatos on Feb. 8, a 6-1 loss to Mountain View on Feb. 6, a 3-0 loss to Homestead on Feb. 2, a 2-1 loss to Palo Alto on Jan. 30 and the disappointing result against Santa Clara, the team stood at sixth in the De Anza league. With one game left to go against Los Altos on Feb. 13, the team held a 1-10 record as of Feb. 9. (The Falcon couldn't print the result of this game because of printing deadlines.)

BOYS' SOCCER

Team makes last effort to improve

BY DerekLiang

After stealing possession of the ball in the backfield, senior striker Jeremy Krainin ran downfield with the ball, passing far up behind multiple of Milpitas's defenders.

Junior midfielder Aidan Smith sprinted upfield and received the ball, laying it off for sophomore right winger Akash Gupta right behind him. Gupta took the difficult shot at the top right corner of the goal from outside the 18-yard box.

This Feb. 7 home match against Milpitas ultimately ended with a 3-1 loss. Although the team was able to converge for an impressive goal in the first half, junior center back Itamar Shoshani said the team lost their momentum in the second half, unable to converge on multiple key possessions.

The Falcons' loss against Milpitas was just one result amid a string of disappointing defeats. As their season approaches an end, the team has a record of 1-7-1 as of Feb. 8.

The Falcons also lost 3-0 to Monta Vista on Feb. 2, and tied 0-0 against Lynbrook on Jan. 31, who they previously beat 6-1 on Jan 10.

Despite the team's high hopes



Photo by ANGELA TAN

Senior Katelyn Fritz dribbles the ball against Los Gatos on Feb. 8.

Oberhauser has noticed that in numerous games, while the Falcons' starting lineup has been able to match up to opponents in regards to style and execution of play, far too many games have quickly shifted out of favor and become difficult to even tie. She attributes this to a lack of depth in the roster, as the team members have varied levels of experience.

She recalls in the game against Palo Alto on Jan. 2, the opposing team was able to sub out almost all their starting players midway through the second half and thus were able to maintain the same level of play, an opportunity that the Falcons do not have.

On the bright side, with junior Sofia Cintra stepping up as goalkeeper midway through the season, the team has found consistency in its starting lineup and has been able to play through three formations — 4-3-3, 4-4-2 and 5-3-2 — and switch between them depending on which teams they play.

In games where they know they have a higher chance going forward, they play with four defenders in the back instead of five,

while in games where the Falcons need more support in the defensive line, they play in a 5-3-2 formation. Assistant coach Andrew McRobbie finds that playing with five defenders "gives [their] creative players the opportunity to still do what they do from a solid base."

"We have to be able to work to our strengths, while trying to nullify the opponent's chances — we just have to be flexible [in formation to try and] get results out of games," McRobbie said.

From a coach's perspective, while he feels the team has not earned the wins that their work deserves, he recognizes it is part of the reality of playing in the upper division with 7 underclassmen in a 17-man roster. He acknowledges that inconsistencies in execution have also played a problematic role in results.

"There have been times that we have shot ourselves in the foot and not maximized what we've got," McRobbie said. "On the other hand, we've been proud of how everyone's fought till the end and the performances have definitely overall improved in games." ♦

WRESTLING

Athletes draw on past experiences for success

BY WilliamCao  
& NikhilMathihalli

Seven wrestlers on the wrestling team competed against 30 teams at Wilcox High on Feb. 2-3 for the Santa Clara Valley Athletic League (SCVAL) Finals. JV boys and girls competed on Feb. 2, while varsity boys hit the mat on Feb. 3.

Many hoped for a bid to CCS: The top seven contenders in each of the boys' divisions qualified, and the top five wrestlers in each of the girls' divisions qualified.

In the end, freshman Quinn Bossow was the only member to qualify. Despite being eighth in the boys 106-pound weight class division, a wrestler above him in rankings declined to participate, giving him a slot.

Three members of the team missed qualification to the CCS by just one match, including Quinn's older sister, junior Rebecca Bossow, who placed sixth in the girls 120-pound weight class division, sophomore Jayden Kwong, who placed eighth in the boys 165-pound weight class division, and freshman Suzy Xie, who placed sixth in the girls 135-pound weight class division.

Among the team's top performers many are multisport athletes who feel that participating in other sports has improved their performance in wrestling.

According to Bossow, his success this year is partially due to his experience playing water polo, which helped him develop greater strength and endurance.

Kwong has also applied the knowledge and skills he's gained from playing football on the school's varsity team to wrestling. Since starting wrestling this year, he has found that the physical and mental aspects of both sports have been very similar. Football

helped shape his drive to succeed, and the athleticism football required has helped him be more aware and explosive in wrestling.

"You're forced to stay in a wrestling stance for hours at a time, so being able to build your legs in football [has helped me in matches]," Kwong said.

Junior Keion Ashjaee-Marshall, who participates in the 190-weight class division, has seen that athletic experience translates across multiple sports. Like Kwong, he's found his wrestling experience to be instrumental in his football journey.



Ashjaee-Marshall

"Wrestling definitely helps with your tackling form," Ashjaee-Marshall said. "With your increased strength, you're not as susceptible to injuries and it gets you in shape."

As Ashjaee-Marshall competed in a large bracket with fierce competition, he was unable to qualify for CCS.

Still, he is optimistic for improvement next year and a larger wrestling team. Coach Bianca Adams is currently hosting clinics at Redwood Middle to help bolster team numbers and increase the team size in future years.

At the same time, volunteer coaches Julian Garza and Hayley Aguilar and paid assistant coach Paola Ramirez have continued to help the team grow throughout the season. As many of the volunteer coaches have experience as high school and collegiate wrestlers, Ashjaee-Marshall said the experience was "surreal."

"The season was way better than anyone expected," Ashjaee-Marshall said. "We held our ground and put up good numbers against state and regional contenders. We developed way more this year than in the past years, and it's a huge step for the wrestling program." ♦

The Saratoga Falcon  
February 16, 2024

BOYS' BASKETBALL

Electric 53-47 senior night win caps off final home game

BY NealMalhotra

With 20 seconds left in overtime, boys' basketball head coach Mike Davey tapped his head, signaling to senior guard Bryan Wang to execute an isolation play. Wang then drove to the top of the key and sank a jump shot to put the Falcons up 50-47. After a foul by Monta Vista, Wang made one out of two free throws. After another foul by the Matadors, senior center Varun Ganesh sank the final two free throws before the packed crowd rushed onto the court to celebrate the victory on the Falcons' Feb. 8 senior night.

Their 53-47 win was highlighted by Wang's excellent overtime performance; he scored 12 points in overtime without missing a shot.

Before Wang's and Ganesh's overtime shots secured their victory, however, it was a tense game; the team wavered between pulling ahead and falling behind Monta Vista throughout the game. During the first quarter, the Falcons secured a 9-point lead, but Monta Vista's full court press eventually overwhelmed the Falcons as they struggled to score in the second and third quarters and went into the fourth quarter trailing by 4.

According to Ganesh, the Fal-

cons' struggle to score during the second and third quarters was partly due to the absence of senior forward Kali Duvvuri — the team's second leading scorer averaging 11 points a game.

In the fourth quarter, the team eventually shortened the gap to one point, with 20 seconds left in the game. Wang scored a clutch layup to take the lead but Monta Vista evened the score after making two free throws after a blocking foul on the Falcons. Ultimately, Wang's overtime performance sealed the victory for the Falcons.

The team had a rocky journey to qualify for CCS, with close games throughout their season.

On Jan. 20, the team lost 40-37 to Cupertino, the top team in the El Camino League. Since then, they have won four of their last five games — including a 55-43 away win against Santa Clara on Jan. 30, which qualified the team for CCS.

They stand at a 7-4 record as of Feb. 9 and are third in the league.

Ganesh said the team's mid-season loss against Cupertino galvanized players, causing them to work harder during practices. Specifically, players on the defensive end improved their work ethic to put full effort onto the court.

"Everything begins from the defensive side," he said. "It gives us time to slow down and reposition ourselves on the offensive end."

Earlier in the season, the team also significantly struggled with turnovers, and the switch to a slower-paced offense allowed them to make "smarter passes and plays," Ganesh said.

"The biggest thing that helped us play better is making sure we start strong," Ganesh said. "The first part of the game really gets us going and we are able to feed off that energy for the rest of the game."

In addition to frequent lunch meetings to review game film, the team also has shoot-arounds where they go over specific plays they want to run against upcoming teams.

To close out the season, the team will play at Cupertino on Feb. 13, hoping to avenge their close loss earlier in the season. (The Falcon could not cover this game due to printing deadlines.) The team also has high hopes for CCS, which will start on the weekend of Feb. 16.

"I think we have a good shot to win CCS based on some of the teams in our division," Ganesh said. "I think we can compete with all of them and if we keep playing the way we are, I think we have a really good chance." ♦

GIRLS' BASKETBALL

Seniors leave team to promising underclassmen

BY EmmaFung

Senior captain Zineerah Ahmed swiftly dribbled the ball across the court during a game against Milpitas on Feb. 7. The crowd and coach Manny Steffens cheered as she successfully scored a shot. However, the Falcons' high from this basket did not last; the team ultimately lost 34-22.

The team held a 2-8 record as of Feb. 9, putting them in fifth out of eight teams in the El Camino League. While the team initially had high hopes of qualifying for CCS, they did not secure the six wins needed to do so. For the final few games of the season, the team has been putting more time and effort into their practices, Ahmed said. Their season will end with a home game for senior night against Gunn on Feb. 9 and an away game at Cupertino on Feb. 13. (The Falcon was unable to cover the results of these games due to printing deadlines.)

"We've been losing by as little as three points against teams that are around our skill level, so we really need to lock in," Ahmed said.

Despite the results on the scoreboard, the players say their positive attitude has not faded, which Ahmed attributes to strong team chemistry and compatibility.

She noted that last year's team dynamic was "pretty rough," but this year she has found the team to be more strongly connected.

As Ahmed and senior center

Priyanka Meduri prepare to graduate, younger players are focusing on how to improve for next season. According to junior co-captain Urvi Iyer, they hope to achieve a better ranking and record.

"This season was an integration — we had to adjust to coach Steffens and a completely different group of people," Iyer said. "Next year, we'll be able to build off of a familiar game plan and get a better head start."

"Next year, we'll be able to build off a familiar game plan."

JUNIOR Urvi Iyer

On Feb. 13, the team will play their final home game against Cupertino, celebrating Ahmed and Meduri during their senior night celebration. (The Falcon was unable to cover this due to printing deadlines.) Ahmed anticipates it will be a bittersweet moment, as they have both been playing on the team since their sophomore year. They are confident that the underclassmen will be able to hold the team together in the future.

"I really care about this team, as they look up to me and Meduri because we are the only seniors," Ahmed said. "I hope that they can accomplish a lot of great things in the future." ♦

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snapshots



Senior girls practice for their upcoming Bombay in the Bay performance on Feb. 17 and 18.

Junior Daniel Jadali and senior Kali Duvvuri discuss the next play during their Senior Night against Monta Vista, which they won 53-47.

Seniors Nathan Zhang and Owen Chang pose as presidential candidates in AP Government teacher Margarita Morelle's fifth period class.

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The Saratoga Falcon Charcuterie Board Beatdown

KNIVES OUT AND BOARDS ABOUT – WHICH CHARCUTERIE BOARD ASSEMBLER CAN IMPRESS THE JUDGES THE MOST?

The five contestants — Derek Liang, Anika Kapasi, Beverly Xu, Kathy Wang and Tara Natarajan — had full creative freedom and were judged upon three different categories: presentation, creativity and taste. Each category was worth 10 points with a maximum total of 30 points.



The talented charcuterie board assemblers

**5. Derek — a "Classic Board":**  
Because I've always loved the flavors of traditional charcuterie boards, I decided to do a classic take on the charcuterie board with tiny changes. My board consisted of pita crackers, salami, pickles, cheddar cheese, grapes and brownies, totaling out to under twenty dollars.

I switched out the classic crackers for pita crackers for a better taste, added the pickles for a diversity in flavors with its sour note and added the brownies for a hint of sweetness to pair with the savory flavors surrounding it.

In the process of making the board, unfortunately, I chose a wooden board that was too small. The lack of space on my board limited the artistic control I had over it, causing my design to look too tight with everything piled together.

To my dismay, even with my brownies on the board, my Neal score was a bit frowny (ahaha). Admittedly, the visual of my board was not the best — but the flavors were high quality and classic, which should have at least pushed my score to a passing C.

I definitely underestimated the seriousness of this competition, but that won't be happening again.

**Judging Notes:**  
-Pickles + brownies = :(  
-Rustic board looks good  
-Brownie with apple + grape slaps

**Final Score: 19.5**

**4. Beverly — "I put my heart on this chopping board" board**  
The last thing I want judg-

es to feel when they see my charcuterie board is "board." So I chose to create a cohesive, Valentines-themed board, featuring sweet and salty food combinations, with a few light and refreshing add-ins.

I first added a layer of popcorn — with chocolate drizzled on — then carved out hearts from wafers (they broke my heart whenever they broke) and roses from strawberries. To top it off (and show my infallible love for newspaper), I cut "NEWS" out of strawberry wafers.

To add another layer of decadence, the chocolate wafers were dipped in chocolate, and a bowl of strawberry yogurt finished off the board.

**Judges' Notes:**  
-Yoghurt ruins the cohesion  
-News spelled and the flower roses get bonus points  
-Chocolate syrup ties wafers and popcorn together

**Final Score: 24**

**3. Anika — my "s'more than meets the eye" board**  
Inspired by the diverse spreads for "board nights" that I've seen on TikTok, I wanted to create something just as unique. I added fruits — grapes, strawberries, raspberries, blueberries and blackberries — for a twist to the basic ones on my ForYou page.

Considering the mountains of chocolate and marshmallows that overflowed from the plate, the rainbow array of fruits helped make the board look a lot more vibrant, healthy and less

like the taste-taster was going to get diabetes.

I honestly had no expectations for how my board was going to turn out as I had never made one before. For \$18, I think it definitely was a success even if my judges — Neal, Kavya, and Victoria — placed me third. Totally not salty about the loss by 0.5 points (I am).

**Judging Notes:**  
-The smore blended very well  
-Hershey was a nice touch  
-Blackberries + marshmallows were surprisingly good

**Final Score: 25**

**2. Kathy — not-so-basic board:**  
After spending hours scrolling through charcuterie board ideas on Pinterest, I came across galleries of classical charcuterie boards filled with the typical assortments.

Nothing seemed to catch my attention until I caught sight of something spectacular: a pristine rose constructed from slices of folded salami.

After conducting some very serious research, I discovered a life hack on how to make a salami rose — you can layer and fold them onto the rim of an upside down cup.

I ended up constructing a basic charcuterie board with cotton candy grapes, pretzels, cracker sheets, mozzarella cheese, ferrero rocher chocolate, apricot jam and of course,

my finishing touch: the salami rose.

**Judging Notes:**  
-Didn't like the box but salami circle looks amazing  
-Marmalade was amazing  
-Unique ingredients were subtly addictive

**Final Score: 25.5**

**1. Tara — "I spent way too much money on this" board**  
In typical Tara fashion, I had forgotten about the contest till the day of and as a result, I found myself perusing the shelves of Safeway at the crack of dawn.

I ended up buying multiple cured meats (prosciutto and three different types of salami), cheeses (brie, aged cheddar and provolone), spreads (fig, tangerine, raspberry and apricot jams), and toppers (olives, sweet peppers, and tomato basil dipping sauce). But something was missing — the board needed a main attraction.

I decided to go overboard (literally) with a platter of deconstructed bruschetta, layering slices of vine-ripe tomatoes with fresh mozzarella and basil, topped with a sweet balsamic glaze. The experience taught me two things: One, I'm the GOAT. Two, sometimes, the best plan is no plan — my last-minute board beat the competition and I was rightfully crowned the Falcon's charcuterie champion.

**Judging Notes:**  
-Looks like a 5 course meal  
-Wide variety of dips  
-We ate a LOT  
-Sauces and jams elevate it

**Final Score: 29 ♦**

**topten**

NON-ANIMATED KIDS TV SHOWS

**10** "K.C. Undercover." Any show with Zendaya in it is a yes — especially if she's a spy with a black belt.

**9** "Girl Meets World." My friends and I also were obsessed with the "will they won't they" romance between Josh and Maya.

**8** "Shake it Up." Zendaya strikes again. But this time, instead of doing martial arts, she's dancing!

**7** "Wizards of Waverly Place." The TikTok dance to the theme song is forever ingrained in my head. Alex Russo has also continued to be an icon years after the show first aired.

**6** "Good Luck Charlie." A childhood classic, but I am confused how someone could ever name their son TJ.

**5** "Mighty Med." One of the most underrated shows... Sometimes, even the saviors need to be saved.

**4** "Liv and Maddie." When I found out that Dove Cameron played both of the twins, I felt like my entire life was a lie.

**3** "Jessie." A hilarious show with the only Indian representation (more like internalized racism) I had ever seen pre-2015.

**2** "Kickin' It." Jack and Kim are, hands down, the best slow burn Disney couple. My friends and I would wait to see what would happen next in their love lives.

**1** "Lab Rats." "The next generation of human beings"... no better theme song has ever existed.

>> Kavya Patel