

OPINION 10

Reporter investigates California recall elections and their flaws.

SCHOOL SCOPE 16

Guidance prepares for in-person senior counseling.

SPORTS 23

Senior qualifies for U-17 national table tennis team.

THE saratoga falcon

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Saratoga High School | Saratoga, CA

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Senior Derek Hsu is thrown into the air during stunt practice on Sept. 6 in preparation for Quad Day.

FALCON // SELINA CHEN

COURT BECOMES GENDER NEUTRAL

BY SanjoliGupta
& ArielZhou

The school is changing its customary Homecoming court elections of a Homecoming king and queen to a genderless process, honoring two students of any gender as Homecoming monarchs and, in the case of princes and princesses, Homecoming royalties.

Some students interviewed by The Falcon said they agree that this change will promote a more inclusive and open environment.

"We always wanted to

make Homecoming genderless," spirit commissioner Sadaf Sobhani said. "But it never happened because there's so much conflict within the student body saying that they wanted the labels of princesses, princes, kings and queens."

This year, however, the Associate Student Body (ASB) pushed through with a new homecoming plan because, given the drastic changes made throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, students should be expectant

>> COURT on pg. 4

QUAD DAY PARTICIPATION INCREASES

BY LenaAribi
& HarshiniVelchamy

As senior Kaylie Wong stood under the awning in front of the cafeteria waiting to start the Senior All Girls' Dance practice on Aug. 14, she worried that after a year and a half of completely virtual events, people wouldn't show up. However, her worries began to ease as she saw over 50 girls stream in, armed with water bottles and eager to learn the dance by senior quad day on Sept. 24.

For the first time since the 2019-2020 school year, the

school will host quad day during the week of Sept. 20-24. Each day will feature a different grade during lunch in the quad, during which they will perform a skit, hold various dances from K-Pop to stunt and host performances by the Color Guard and Drumline.

As announced by Spirit Commission during Food Truck Fest, the theme for Homecoming is "Childhood TV Shows." The freshmen received "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles," sophomores received "Fairly Odd Parents,"

>> QUAD DAY on pg. 4

FRESHMAN Aneri Shah

"It's so surreal. Sometimes, I have to pinch myself to remind myself I'm actually on campus."

Student engages in diverse interactions

Because Shah came from Rolling Hills Middle School in Campbell, she found it difficult to find a friend group, as social circles in Saratoga are typically formed in Redwood Middle School. She noted that the Back to School Social helped her break out of her shell.

"I haven't really started to make a friend group yet," Shah said. "I've mostly been focused on surviving the beginning couple of weeks, but as time goes on, I'll try just walking up to new people."

While Shah had originally expected each grade to form their own bubble, she was

>> REACTIONS on pg. 3

Mohnike retires after 30 years

BY JonnyLuo
& ShreyaRallabandi

When assistant principal Kerry Mohnike started teaching here 30 years ago, much of present-day Saratoga High did not exist.

There was no state-of-the-art science wing. There was no football stadium, let alone lights on its field. The McAfee Center was not yet built, and there was no black-box theater. Many of the trees on the quad were young and nowhere near their current height.

In her years working as an English teacher and administrator, Mohnike saw the school grow from just 850 students with a

Caucasian majority to 1,450 at its peak with an Asian majority as the school is now closer to 1,250 students.

On Sept. 7, Mohnike retired with 20 years of teaching English and 10 years as an administrator under her belt. The previous Friday, dozens of staff members showed up to wish her well at a surprise retirement party.

"I got to a place where I was almost old enough to retire," Mohnike said. "I'm going a couple years early. It's time for new people to come in and do new things."

Mohnike mentioned that she feels

>> MOHNIKE on pg. 6


SHS will offer senior SAT, junior PSAT on campus

The school is offering the SAT to all seniors to support those who were unable to take it at a national testing site. The test will take place during the school day on campus on Thursday, Oct. 28, from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. Students can register online by Sept. 17 for a cost of \$75.

Additionally, the PSAT will be offered on Oct. 16. Unlike pre-COVID-19 years when sophomores and juniors were both able to test, this year's PSAT is only offered to juniors.

Parents can proctor the exam only if their children are not registered to take the test and if they are cleared by the district office.

— Sara Bright and Alexander Kan

District updates GPA policy for the Class of 2025

On Aug. 30, the administration announced an updated GPA policy that will be in effect starting with the Class of 2025. The updated policy will standardize GPA calculations between Los Gatos High and Saratoga High.

Saratoga's previous GPA calculation policy did not weigh honors or AP courses taken outside the district on a 5-point scale, and any accredited course could be added to a student's transcript by request.

The updated policy, however, will weigh any outside AP and Honors courses on a 5-point scale — excluding community college courses. In addition, courses taken outside of the school can now only be added to a student transcript if the course is necessary for graduation or fulfilling University of California or California State University application requirements.

— Viraaj Reddi

School investigates the Screener-19 QR code prank

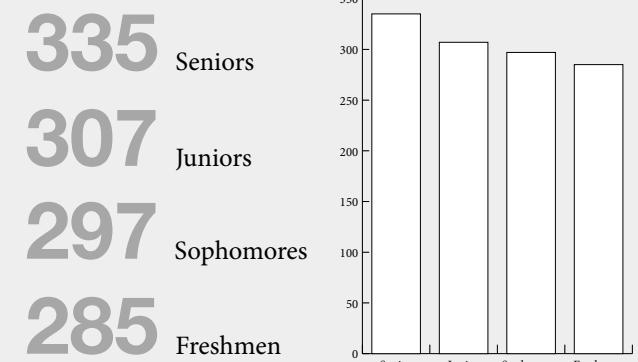
When students arrived on campus on Sept. 7 and tried to scan the Screener-19 QR code, they found themselves redirected to a photo of Remy, a cartoon rat from the classic children's movie "Ratatouille."

They soon discovered that a fake paper QR code had been taped over the laminated one.

Six English rooms in the 000's wing were impacted by the prank, according to assistant principal Brian Thompson. Science teacher Kristen Thomson also found fake QR codes posted outside the science building and the media arts building, while students reported similar incidents elsewhere. It is unknown how many total rooms were impacted.

The administration doesn't yet know who was responsible for the prank, but Thompson asked teachers to move their Screener-19 QR codes to the inside. "It's an ongoing investigation right now," he said.

— Selina Chen

>> falconfigures
School sees dwindling enrollments with each class


Club Rush | Seniors Michelle Jiang and Brooke Huynh raise signs for the Gender-Sexuality Alliance (GSA) club on Sept. 2 during the service and cultural Club Rush Day in order to attract students to join their organization.

School outlines COVID-19 protocols and expectations

by LynnDai & ShaanSridhar

When students returned to in-person instruction on Aug. 12, over 60 percent of them had not been on campus in the past year — or ever. Many were unfamiliar with the protocols put in place during the phased reopening at the end of last semester, only some of which still remain.

Now, in response to the rampant surge in COVID-19 cases due to the spread of the Delta variant, the district has developed a comprehensive set of protocols and guidelines to be enforced immediately in the event of an active case on campus.

Similar to last year, students must fill out the Screener-19 health questionnaire before periods 1, 2 and tutorial. If students receive a red check mark, either from reporting COVID-19 symptoms, testing positive for COVID-19 or quarantining with COVID-19 patients, they must immediately report to the health office.

Recently retired assistant principal Kerry Mohnike said that Screener-19's "digital record-keeping can also help [school administrators] better monitor the campus."

The school is also using E-Hall Pass, which was implemented in the spring to prevent the spread of COVID-19 by replacing paper passes with electronic ones. Mohnike said the system is being used primarily as a means to streamline the hall pass system.

"Once users get past the learning curve of using the system, [E-Hall Pass] provides convenience for things like restroom passes or text reminders for off-campus appointments and other uses," Mohnike said.

Although there were cases of infections during hybrid learning last spring, there have been no outbreaks as of early September.

The school is still enforcing an indoor mask mandate for all students — in adherence with a county-wide policy issued Aug. 2 — but the outdoor mask mandate and social distancing measures are no longer in effect, said assistant principal Brian Thompson. The California Department of Public Health (CDPH)

and the Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE) removed these requirements because of the high number of vaccinated people in Santa Clara County.

In addition to requiring mask coverings inside classrooms, the indoor mask mandate applies to club meetings and indoor sports as well, excluding athletes who are actively participating during practice and games, Thompson said.

He added that the CDPH and SCCOE guidelines were designed to "provide safety for all variants of COVID-19."

Although there were some cases of student infections during hybrid learning last spring, there have been no outbreaks as of early September.

Brian Safine, the director of human resources for the district, said approximately 96 percent of school staff are vaccinated for COVID-19 and all unvaccinated staff are being tested weekly starting Aug. 30, under an executive order signed by Gov. Gavin Newsom. Because the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine was recently fully approved by the FDA, there is also a possibility that the state will eventually mandate student vaccinations, Thompson said.

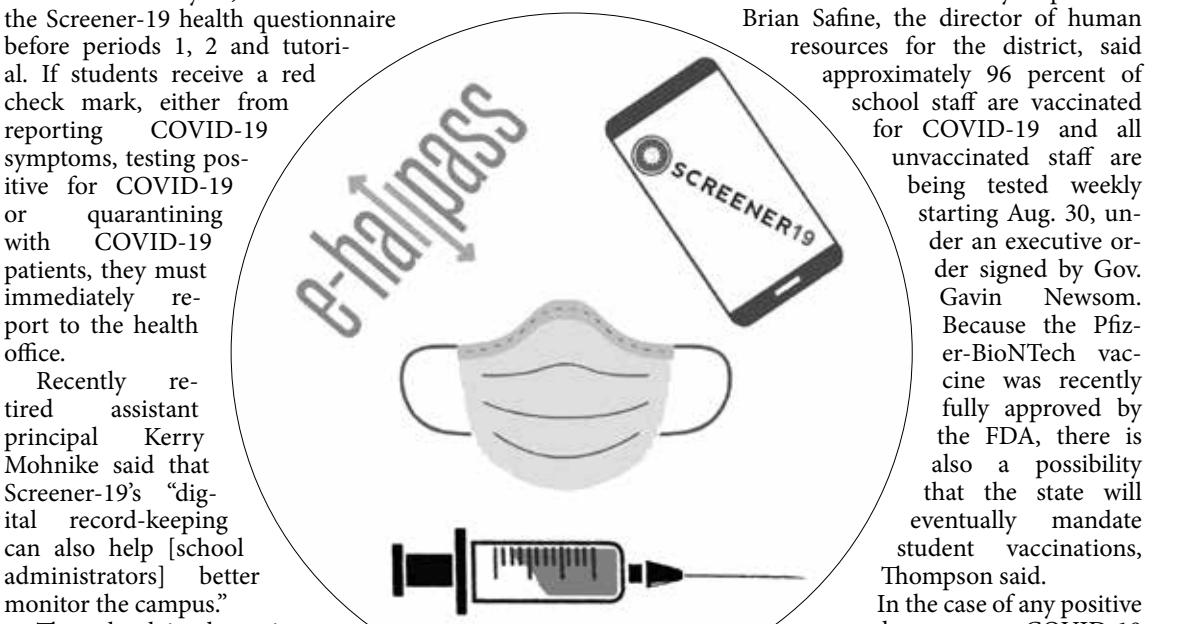
In the case of any positive or close-contact COVID-19 cases, the school is following the response protocol outlined by the Santa Clara County Department of Public Health (SCCDPH). The plan requires symptomatic students and staff to quarantine for 10 days, regardless of vaccination status.

Students who are in quarantine will communicate with their teachers and complete assignments through Canvas, while teachers in quarantine will have substitutes in class until they can return to campus.

If the school site has COVID-19 outbreaks, that data will be shared with the CDPH and SCCOE, which make decisions about school closure based on COVID-19 data within the county. If the school suddenly has a COVID-19 outbreak on campus, a short closure and temporary return to remote learning is possible, Thompson said.

In light of the rise of the Delta variant, Thompson urged students and staff to continue taking safety protocols seriously and assume everyone is not vaccinated.

"Our community has been great with following COVID-19 protocols," he said. "Our school admin is thankful to our students, staff and parents for following the COVID-19 protocols designed to keep our community safe." ♦



GRAPHIC BY VIRAAJ REDDI
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MOHNIKE

continued from pg. 1

comfortable and secure in her decision to leave now, as the school is filled with "great leadership, students and teachers," Mohnike did not feel "as needed" as she did in years past.

Replacing Mohnike on the administration team will be Abra Evanoff, an experienced administrator and former English teacher. Mohnike's responsibilities as assistant principal will be split among Evanoff and the other three administrators: assistant principals Matt Torrens and Brian Thompson and principal Greg Louie.

"Evanoff is rock solid. You guys are going to be really happy and lucky," Mohnike said. "And that's how it makes it easy to leave."

She began her career as an English and journalism teacher here in 1991. It was her first full-time job, and she immediately fell in love with the school, its students and the community.

"I'm the kind of person who really wants to dig my roots in and be a part of a school for the duration," Mohnike said. "I didn't want to go round and round back. I knew a good gig when I saw it."

In her three decades, she went on to hold numerous leadership roles and be a part of most areas of the school.

Besides teaching almost every English subject, Mohnike helped start the Media Arts Program in 2007 to give students an alternative school-within-a-school option, led the school's WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges) accreditation effort, was English department chair and participated on multiple ad hoc committees to help better students' experience.

Although Mohnike immensely

loved working at Saratoga High, her future at the school was initially not guaranteed. In the first few years, student enrollment numbers were so low — around 850 students at the time, according to Mohnike — that the school board was considering closing down the school and enrolling all Saratoga High students at Los Gatos High School. Mohnike feared she would be laid off due to the enrollment crisis, but the Saratoga community was adamant on having its own high school, the school grew and Mohnike kept her position and never looked back.

She said that she loved the collegial environment of the staff and hardworking student culture. Mohnike noted that, at Saratoga, teachers did not need to deal with issues many other public schools face, such as behavior issues and truancy; this allowed teachers to devote all their effort to teaching.

"If you come here to teach, you get to teach — you don't have to do other things like classroom management," Mohnike said. "I loved brainstorming and creating lessons with my colleagues, and then delivering lessons and then seeing the sparks go off."

"That drive among the students has always been there ever since the first day I started."

ADMIN Kerry Mohnike

Mohnike believes that Saratoga High has a "special group of students" — students who are genuinely passionate and motivated. Mohnike and the teachers have faith that these students, regardless of career path or interests,



Former assistant principal Kerry Mohnike and STEM and Chinese teacher Sara Tseng laugh in the hallway outside the wellness center during Mohnike's surprise retirement party that was hosted on Friday, Sept. 3.

FALCON // SHREYA RALLABANDI

will be successful in their years to come.

"Most of the students already have a passion for a career path or something," Mohnike said. "That drive among the students has always been there ever since the first day I started here."

Mohnike said now was the perfect time to retire, and she plans to pursue her other interests, including the dream of selling screenplays she has written.

As an administrator, Mohnike worked long nights and had little time to write screenplays or pursue other passions, so retiring allows her the time necessary to carry out both the writing and business aspects of screenwriting, such as traveling to Los Angeles to pitch her ideas.

"In retirement, not only can I write, but I can actually do the

things you need to get a script sold," Mohnike said.

One of the first movie scripts Mohnike plans to sell is based on the life-story of the school's retired librarian, Tibor Szalay (also husband of Nada Macesic, a classified staff member), who escaped from the Iron Curtain in Hungary.

Colleagues said Mohnike leaves a big legacy as she retires, not just on the campus as a whole, but also on the individual students she taught.

Guidance counselor Eileen Allen, who was in Mohnike's junior year English class and has now been partnered with Mohnike for five years, called Mohnike a lifelong learner.

"I tell people this all the time — she was probably one of the top three teachers I have ever had. She's always been a passion-

ate teacher, and very warm and approachable," Allen said. "She fostered really interesting conversations in her classrooms."

Mike Tyler, who took over Mohnike's position as journalism adviser when he joined Saratoga High in 1996, called Mohnike a mentor for the entire English department.

"She's very student-centered, and I really appreciate that about her," Tyler said.

Mohnike said that she will greatly miss the day-to-day interactions with her colleagues and students, and hopes to remind students to learn to follow their own path without the "race to nowhere" mentality.

"Be kind to one another," Mohnike said. "Life is challenging, but if people operate out of kindness, they can go a long way." ♦

Abra Evanoff joins SHS as assistant principal

by Sara Bright & Atrey Desai

Abra Evanoff, an administrator and former English teacher with over 20 years of experience in education, has joined the school's administrative team.

She will fill the spot left vacant by the retirement of longtime assistant principal Kerry Mohnike.

Evanoff earned her undergraduate degree at San Jose State University and is currently pursuing her Doctorate in Educational Leadership (Ed.D.) at St. Mary's College. She first began working as an English

teacher in the San Lorenzo Unified School District.

"When I was an English teacher, a female assistant principal came to me and said, 'You'd be a really solid administrator — you're made for it,'" Evanoff said. "I wasn't sure at first, but she nudged me some more, and I thought, 'Okay.'"

She worked as an assistant principal from 2008 to 2013 there before transferring to Campbell Union High School District, where she served in various leadership roles including student services director, as-

sistant principal and principal.

"I love teaching but also love the other side of helping run the school, knowing that I always have the ability to step in and make sure that everyone has a safe and comfortable campus," Evanoff said. "I take pride in the public service work of this role."

Evanoff will be assisting the guidance department this year along with several other roles. Along with helping support students' social and emotional needs on campus, Evanoff's current projects also

include things like setting up the PSAT, SAT and English Learner Proficiency Assessments, she said.

The warm welcome and kind gestures she received from people at SHS made her first week here extremely exciting, especially getting to work with Mohnike for a couple of weeks, Evanoff said.

"We hit it off right away and I adore her," Evanoff said. "I know it's big shoes to fill. For my first year, I will watch and learn, then I'll see what you guys need from me. I don't know if I'm ever gonna fill [Mohnike's] shoes, but my goal is to walk right beside them." ♦

Admin team hires Cunningham as activities director

FORMER VALLEY CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELOR TAKES OVER LEADERSHIP ROLE FROM MATT TORRENS

by Nicole Lu

After working with assistant principal Matt Torrens as part of the Leadership class for the past three years, senior class president Apurva Chakravarthy felt a mixture of excitement and nervousness upon meeting his replacement, Kristen Cunningham.

When meeting her for the first time during the summer over Zoom, Chakravarthy had no idea what to expect. She had heard good things from ASB president Derek Hsu, who was part of the interview process for the role, but didn't know anything else about her. However, immediately after their first meeting, Chakravarthy knew that she would enjoy working with Cunningham after seeing "how kind,

passionate and understanding" she was.

"I absolutely loved working with Mr. Torrens, but when you've been with one teacher for so long, you develop certain ways of doing things," Chakravarthy said. "With Mrs. Cunningham, it's like 'I'm new and I don't know everything yet, so we can try new things if we want to,' which is a really nice mentality to have."

Before coming to Saratoga, Cunningham worked as both a teacher and counselor for 20 years at various schools including Valley Christian, Creston Elementary and the Los Altos Christian school. After graduating from Monta Vista High School, Cunningham went on to pursue an English degree at UC Santa Barbara before earning a teaching credential and masters in Education.

She recently began pursuing an administrative services credential through an online program at San Diego State University.

Immediately after their first meeting, Chakravarthy knew that she would enjoy working with Cunningham.

In addition to facilitating the Leadership classes, forwarding questions from students to the administration and emailing relevant ASB and class office announcements to the SHS community, Cunningham also teaches a period of Strategic Learning, an online class that teaches students learning skills like effective note taking and testing strategies. ♦

"The students are awesome and my love for event planning is definitely getting put to use," she said. "So many of the staff have been welcoming and helpful to me as I've transitioned into this new role."

Because this is Cunningham's first year as a staff member, Torrens is still working closely with her and the rest of the Leadership team to make a smooth transition. As the school year kicks into full swing and Cunningham settles into her role as activities coordinator and teacher, she looks forward to meeting more students on campus and helping student leadership reach its fullest potential.

The SHS Leadership students are a remarkable group of young people," Cunningham said. "In the few events we've held so far this year, they have worked so well together and truly have demonstrated a 'team-work makes the dream work' mentality." ♦

Construction benefits robotics

MEASURE E GENERAL OBLIGATION BOND RESOLVES LEAKS, OTHER ISSUES IN REMODELING OF 900 WING

by Atrey Desai & Hannah Lee

After entering the robotics room on a rainy day in December 2019, team members were unsurprised to see the pool of water that had collected in the middle of the floor.

For years, leaky roofs, a lack of space and poor insulation, among other problems, were unfixed due to a lack of funding — until the construction of the new robotics buildings began in 2020.

Funding came from Measure E, a local general obligation bond that raised \$99 million in 2014 for use in campus improvements at both Saratoga and Los Gatos High Schools.

Over the years, Measure E funds have been used to build the music building, renovate the basketball courts, and construct the Wellness Center, among many other projects.

Some of the changes the 900 wing underwent under Measure E include upgrading the HVAC system, adding a working sink and built-in cupboard, beefing up insulation, expanding whiteboard space and constructing new double doors.

For example, students will need to make some adjustments to their work habits, while advisers need to ensure all students are following the proper safety guidelines at all times.

Nonetheless, club members have been reacting well to the improvements.

"The new building is a really awesome privilege to the team, and the renovations were really thought out well in terms of making the best workspace," club president Sajiv Shah said. "Having our own dedicated space is a huge benefit for the robotics team, and the walls aren't falling apart now." ♦

SENIOR Sajiv Shah

The accompanying building that used to be used by robotics to store the field has been converted into a science classroom.

Despite the upsides of the Measure E renovations, the transition from a year of virtual meetings and temporary accommodations to in-person meetings at a stable location will take some time for students to adjust to.

For example, students will need to make some adjustments to their work habits, while advisers need to ensure all students are following the proper safety guidelines at all times.

Nonetheless, club members have been reacting well to the improvements.

"The new building is a really awesome privilege to the team, and the renovations were really thought out well in terms of making the best workspace," club president Sajiv Shah said. "Having our own dedicated space is a huge benefit for the robotics team, and the walls aren't falling apart now." ♦

AP

BY Sam Bai & Nicole Lu

As senior Jocelyn Li walked into class on Aug. 27, she saw AP Physics C teacher Matthew Welander preparing for a projectile motion experiment. Li was eager to finally perform in-person science labs using the PASCO SPARKvue software — a data collection and visualization application — and a Mini Launcher, a highly accurate metal sphere launcher.

"We got to use fancy equipment that we didn't use last year like photogates and projectile launchers," Li said. "It's like the AP Physics 1 motion lab except for more advanced equipment, so it was cool to build off of previous knowledge and do more advanced concepts."

AP Physics C was added as a course this year and is taught by Welander, the current AP Physics 1 and 2 teacher. The class is split into a semester-based schedule much like the other AP physics course: Physics C students learn about mechanics in the first semester, and electricity and magnetism in the second. Because this is the first time the curriculum has been taught at the school and requires knowledge in a specific area of physics, Welander had to put in extra time and effort over the summer to prepare the material and ensure the class's success.

"I'm looking forward to the class because it will be more fun than last year; if we actually stay in person, then we can do actual labs and hands-on demonstrations," Li said. "This lab made me realize that physics is very involved in the world today and that the calculations we do are surprisingly accurate." ♦

Labs and demos highlight new AP Physics C course

course, Welander compiled a list of labs that they would perform over the course of the year, started purchasing lab equipment and textbooks and began writing the lecture notes. Instead of going to a training seminar that was canceled due to the lack of participants, Welander did the first few labs by himself to ensure that the instructions were at the level of detail his students need.

Although preparing the new curriculum was a lot of work, Welander felt that it was rewarding and would set himself up for success in subsequent years.

"It definitely is time consuming and bit stressful when there's not a lot of time left for yourself, but at least you know that the time you put into it will pay off," he said.

The extra effort Welander dedicates to the class has not gone unnoticed by his students. Li especially likes Welander's approach to teaching in both physics courses, adding that it is "clear and concise." Welander typically lectures in class with slideshows and assigns free-response questions, lab handouts and textbook problems during class for extra practice.

As the school year kicks in and Physics C students begin learning about topics from kinematics to gravitation in a calculus-based context, Li is excited to learn more about the real-world applications of physics in an in-person environment.

"I'm looking forward to the class because it will be more fun than last year; if we actually stay in person, then we can do actual labs and hands-on demonstrations," Li said. "This lab made me realize that physics is very involved in the world today and that the calculations we do are surprisingly accurate." ♦



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SARATOGAFALCON
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Title IX discussion: too big for tutorial

Students may recall a wonderful feeling of freedom upon hearing the bell ring at the end of second period on Friday during the first week of school, signaling the start of tutorial.

Most students then remember the sudden drop in their stomach when their second-period teacher proceeded to inform the class that all students had to stay inside for the next 40 minutes to watch a presentation about Title IX — *what even is Title IX, many surely thought, and why is it intruding on our precious time?*

That's not the reaction teachers and administrators should want the important topics covered in tutorial lessons to have. Even given the difficult circumstances caused by the entire school's sudden return to in-person education, there's no denying that the implementation of Title IX education got off to a slow start this year.

We want to emphasize that gender equality and sexual violence prevention are extremely important topics, and the district's goal of addressing these issues through its tutorial program is commendable.

Annoyance at being forced to listen to official presentations during what should be free time can easily transfer to dismissal of the content itself: not taking policies seriously, antagonism toward faculty who are trying to combat the issue or, most harmfully, invalidating victims of gender discrimination or sexual violence.

In short, cramming students into classrooms following second period and forcing them to listen to a webinar from a lawyer in Tennessee isn't as effective as other potential approaches.

The purpose of the effort, no doubt, is to help students apply Title IX knowledge to support themselves or their peers in the event that they recognize or experience sexual harassment.

The effectiveness of the advisories rely solely on whether students who've already finished a 90-minute class willfully choose to pay attention to a lecture on Zoom for almost an hour. This is like teaching a module about intruder lockdowns without any applicable drills or practice.

Students went into the Blue Day Friday expecting the tutorial to be a relaxing break with peers and a chance to ask teachers for help — only to find they were watching a 40-minute Zoom lecture.

It's only natural that this caused resentment; instead of listening, many students were on their phones, working on other assignments or taking a nap.

As a result, only those who were already invested in Title IX issues likely paid attention to the presentations, while the other 90 percent of students — those who most need to pay attention — had no incentive to listen. It's essential for Title IX education to reach those who aren't already acutely aware of the problem and likely tuned out.

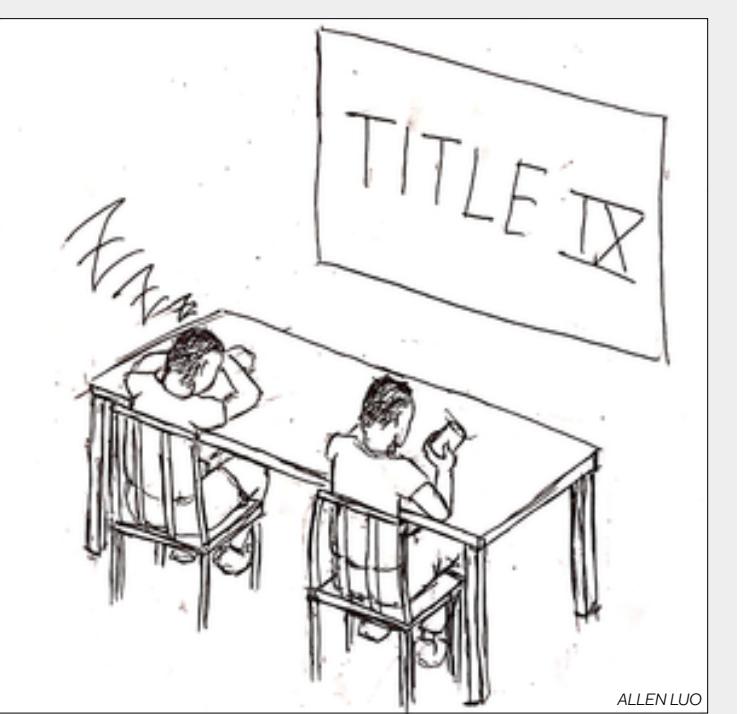
Not only does this lead to a general student consensus regarding the presentations as a chore — especially since the Title IX presentations take time directly away from tutorials — but it can also foster more antagonism against the policies being implemented in spite of their extreme importance.

That being said, these are topics for which education should be handled with extreme care — which, with the current implementation of the advisory lessons, isn't happening.

In short, cramming students into classrooms following second period and forcing them to listen to a webinar from a lawyer in Tennessee isn't as effective as other potential approaches.

The purpose of the effort, no doubt, is to help students apply Title IX knowledge to support themselves or their peers in the event that they recognize or experience sexual harassment.

Despite the shortcomings of this year's Title IX education, we see important signs the issue is being taken seriously — for one, the administration took a necessary step in the right direction by introducing a licensed therapist



ALLEN LUO

on campus this year. The importance of these efforts cannot be understated.

However, given that the school has already dedicated resources to this education initiative, it can more effectively use them by generating more sincere interest through announcements and informational posters around the school, or even conducting a Breaking Down the Walls-style school-wide activity dedicated to engaging students with deeper knowledge and equipping them with the skills to respond to this issue as it appears in their lives or the lives of their peers.

A dedicated activity of this caliber would avoid rushing through the details and provide a more intimate and constructive environment, through group discussions and lessons, for students to fully internalize the concepts. Many students will need to learn about these issues in a more immersive, experiential way to truly understand them.

So while the sentiment behind the current Title IX presentations was admirable, the school can be more effective in addressing these issues.

The way to educate students isn't through a vaguely procedural recorded lecture — we've already had enough of Zoom to last a lifetime. Ultimately, these issues — pertaining to our generation's fundamental understanding of respect and equality — are of the utmost importance, and the school should dedicate the time and effort necessary to reflect that. ♦

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The Saratoga Falcon staff voted 69-3 in favor of the article.

New bell schedule inconsistent and confusing

By Ethan Lin

This year, the school board elected to change the bell schedule in order to shore up the instructional minutes at both Saratoga and Los Gatos, among other reasons. Although well-intentioned, the new bell schedule limits productivity and instead creates a new set of issues: most notably, inconsistencies across Red and Blue Days and irregular passing times. (Blue Days are periods 2, 4 and 6; Red Days are periods 1, 3, 5 and 7.)

The previous in-person bell schedule had more regularity; 5th and 6th period ended at the same time — a far cry from the post-COVID-19 bell schedule, where periods do not align. Inconsistency in the schedule between different days leads to trouble for many students who participate in extracurricular activities or who hold jobs after school. School days not only end at different times (a 30-minute difference between the end of 5th and 6th across Red and Blue Days), but

the 5-minute break is also non-existent, as students must use that time to get to and prepare for

their next class. In the end, the time between 1st and 3rd is wasted; students would be better off if some of the tutorial time on Blue Days was allocated to Red Days so that both days would have a proper tutorial.

Inconsistency in the schedule between different days leads to trouble for students who participate in extracurriculars.

Additionally, the 10-minute passing between every period, as opposed to the previous 5-minute passings, are illogical. Although the district's rationale for the 10-minute passing is attributed partly to the needs of Los Gatos students, who need the extra 5 minutes to get to class due to the size of its large campus, SHS students do not need that extra time to get to class. ♦

PRO: Draft tests put emphasis on learning

by Michael Fok

In the stressful era of online learning, the novel rough/final draft testing format has revolutionized test-taking.

In this system, students take the test during class as a rough draft graded on completion; they then revise their rough draft with an open-book policy to be submitted as a final draft for test credit.

When they were presented with easy opportunities to cheat, many students unfortunately took it without a second thought, especially those in competitive schools such as Saratoga High.

This new form of testing is, without a doubt, better than the standard, closed-book form. It prioritizes learning rather than grades, and gives students more chances to do well.

The rough/final draft system allows students who want to genuinely learn the content to prove their understanding, while also offering a second chance to those who don't test well under pressure and prefer to do a test at their own pace in a more comfortable setting.

This format undeniably reduces the difficulty of testing; it gives an easy out for people who don't understand the content. Those who instantly write off the new format miss the point: this system is supposed to reduce testing difficulty. Tests and grades are implemented to reflect a student's ability, but in most cases, it doesn't just end there. Grades, and by extension, tests, determine the college someone goes to and the kind of life they get to live.

For that reason, it's complete nonsense to use traditional testing as a way to measure future success, especially because test taking is far from an equitable way to determine competency.

Testing should not be the primary factor in determining someone's success in life, so giving more people a chance to succeed is a good thing.

Students still have to attempt to complete the test in class, and for the students who write nonsense and then do it all at home, they probably won't do well on AP tests and other standardized tests.

High schools have to lead the way by being open-minded to a new mode of assessment — one that encourages self-motivation and a genuine interest in learning.

Some colleges may eventually get on board but change takes time. This is the perfect place and time for us to start. ♦

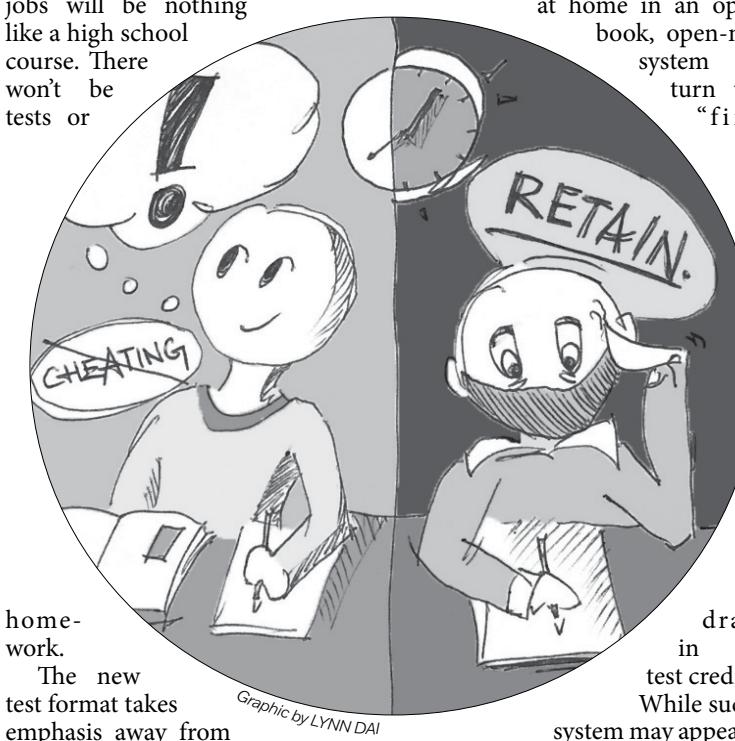
CON: New testing format harms students in long run

by Nilay Mishra & Benjamin Li

With in-person learning beginning to resemble what school looked like before the pandemic, it would be expected that testing would revert to normal, closed-book testing.

Several math teachers in AP Calculus AB and AP Statistics, however, are now adopting a rough/final draft system for tests in order to ease the transition between remote and in-person learning.

Students complete a "rough draft" of their test in class for participation credit, and have the opportunity to revise this version at home in an open-book, open-note system and turn that "final



The new test format takes emphasis away from

grades and puts it back on learning, a worthy goal. With a solution at hand, there's no sense in rejecting just because previous generations of students didn't get this improved system.

Students still have to attempt to complete the test in class, and for the students who write nonsense and then do it all at home, they probably won't do well on AP tests and other standardized tests.

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Not many of us enjoy being late to school, especially if it happens regularly. But it's so much worse when you leave 30 minutes before school starts, only to be delayed by flawed traffic laws favoring those from a different part of town.

Buckle up for some metaphors and allow me to explain. It's story time.

When Greg's light finally turns green, he discovers a dire situation: Only two cars managed to turn left because cars turning right backed up the entirety of Herriman. When space finally opens up, Greg hurriedly attempts to turn onto Herriman. But Kyle — a student from the right-turning part of town — speeds onto Herriman and leaves Greg in his dust. Greg is stuck with no option but to move as close to Herriman as possible, blocking the intersection.

Picture this scenario: A typical hard-working, sleep-deprived junior named Greg lives far up on Pierce Road and leaves well before school starts. He turns onto Saratoga-Sunnyvale Road and drives

into the slow-moving left turn line to get onto Herriman Avenue, the only point of access to the school's parking lot.

As Greg patiently waits for the traffic signal to display a green left arrow, cars from the opposite direction turn right and spill onto Herriman Avenue. That line is also long, but it continuously moves as each car aggressively manages to shove themselves onto Herriman.

I've seen this scenario play out twice this year already, and it's been less than four weeks since school started. Those turning left have to leave their homes ridiculously early in order to get to the school parking lot at a reasonable time. Traffic officials should place a "No Right Turn on Red" sign at the intersection of Saratoga-Sunnyvale and Herriman Avenue.

Those turning right don't have to leave early; instead, they can abuse their ability to squeeze onto Herriman to loot prized minutes of extra sleep.

The effects will be a bit drastic at first. Those turning right might suffer from some traumatic shock;

demonstrate a sufficient mastery of the material.

Furthermore, many of the topics in classes such as AP Calculus AB and AP Statistics are fundamental concepts that are used throughout higher studies of math and science.

For example, most natural sciences use many concepts from statistics to analyze data collected from experiments.

Additionally, students require a solid understanding of calculus to progress in math and physics in many technical college majors.

While many students scored high on the actual AP exams despite tests during online learning being open-book, students need to solidify their knowledge and be prepared for the usual rigorous closed-book tests.

The rough/final draft system could result in students not fully benefiting from the class's content and earning lower AP scores in May.

Despite these risks, some teachers believe that by reducing the stress and pressure of exams, students will be able to appreciate the subject more and learn for the sake of learning itself.

Often, learning the subjects is a last priority for students, and they are not able to delegate a sufficient amount of time to the class.

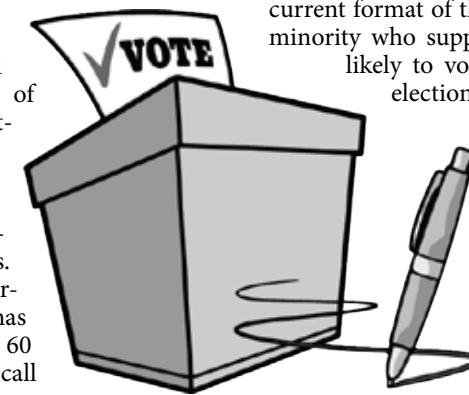
Hence the new testing format itself does nothing to enhance the learning experience. It just provides them an excuse to do less work for a given class.</

California recall system flawed

By Nilay Mishra

California governor recall elections, such as the one Newsom faced on Sept. 14, are simply political maneuvers by a minority of overzealous conservatives in a predominantly blue state. Given the ease of starting a recall, they occur with astonishing frequency. Not only does this repeatedly distract the incumbent governor from running the country due to the risk of being removed from office, they also impose a significant cost on both the state and the governor.

Regardless of individuals' opinions on the incumbent governor's policies, he was elected to as governor in a fair, democratic manner. The same cannot be said of the upcoming recall election, regardless of its result. At its very core, the election is unjust and unconstitutional in spirit if not in fact.



First, starting a recall election in California is too easy — organizers of the recall need the signatures of only 12 percent of voters from the most recent election, which is far less than the percentage required in other states. In fact, every California governor who has served over the past 60 years has faced a recall effort. A total of 55 governors have faced a recall election, and there have been a total of 179 recall attempts against publicly elected officials in California.

Despite the anti-Newsom feelings stemming from his controversial handling of the pandemic and his supposed hypocrisy, we should consider whether this was enough cause for a recall effort. Most removals of an elected public official, such as the president, can only occur if the official commits a crime relating to their duties in office.

By making recall elections easy to start, the state continually puts its officials at se-

rious risk of being removed from office for what are generally mild infractions. It is difficult for an incumbent governor to have 88% support — no governor has avoided a recall since its introduction in 1917.

As an analogy, imagine if the president could face an impeachment trial if only 12 percent of U.S. voters want them replaced. Even presidents such as Abraham Lincoln, and George Washington never had more than 88 percent approval from the public. The existence of political factions and parties makes it difficult for any candidate to have nearly unanimous support.

While most governors leave office unscathed, recalls should be saved for situations where the governor has clearly abused his position of power, committed a serious crime or both.

Additionally, voter turnout is always relatively low in off-cycle elections. The current format of the recall is such that the minority who support the recall are more likely to vote, which will skew the election disproportionately in their favor.

Furthermore, voters in off-cycle elections generally skew older, whiter and more conservative, a recent study led by the University of California, San Diego, found. These issues are inherent to any off-cycle election, however, and cannot be easily remedied.

The frequency of recall elections also distract the incumbent governor from dealing with more pressing issues that have been plaguing California for decades, such as homelessness and a high cost of living. Instead of doing their job, their attention and tens of millions of dollars are diverted to winning an election. Regardless of the outcome, this is inefficient.

One solution to these issues would be to reduce the frequency of recall elections by increasing the percentage of voter signa-

tures required to put the recall into motion. States such as Kansas and Louisiana require 40 percent and 33.3 percent, respectively, and have far fewer recalls.

Another issue is the format of the recall. Voters first must decide whether the incumbent governor should be removed from office. If so, they then select one of the several candidates seeking to replace the incumbent as the next state governor. On Tuesday's election, there were 46 potential candidates. As long as a majority of voters cast their ballot to remove him, the candidate for replacement with the most votes on the ballot among the remaining becomes governor.

Voters not being allowed to select the incumbent governor in the second question is a crucial flaw. Despite the fact that some voters plan to try and bypass it, the rule that the incumbent candidate's name cannot occur in the second question is outlined in the official rules of the recall election.

Already afflicted by a lack of voter turnout, the election only requires candidates to gain the support of a minority of voters in order to oust and replace the incumbent governor. In a way, the election is always a challenge for the incumbent before any votes have been cast.

Winning a recall election is too high a bar for a governor to achieve, even democratic ones in a largely blue state with 64 percent of votes in the 2020 election going to Biden and Harris. Instead of defeating any individual candidate, he or she must defeat all of the potential candidates combined.

There is an incredible power imbalance, with anti-recall votes being as much as six times as powerful as recall votes. The cornerstone of any democratic election is to value the thoughts and opinions of each voter equally. This is being neglected in the recall election. In fact, that would make the election extremely unconstitutional. The Supreme Court Case *Wesberry v. Sanders* ruled that all votes must be considered equally when electing a representative to the Congress.

In a way, the recall election is just a power grab by Republican minorities to undermine Newsom's influence and power. At



nearly every level of the recall system, the organizers of the recall gain an advantage.

Due to inherent flaws in the California recall system, it's highly possible that an incumbent is removed from office and replaced with another, less popular governor. And provided that no crime was committed, replacing an incumbent with a candidate that far fewer people have voted for through the recall process is undemocratic and, at its core, unconstitutional. ◆

All Graphics by TIFFANY WANG

#FreeBritney: Conservatorship, a civil rights issue

By Tara Natarajan

In 2007, pop superstar Britney Spears shocked the world when she suffered a series of public mental breakdowns. Spears' erratic behavior included spontaneously shaving her head, driving with her infant son in her lap, smashing a paparazzi's car with an umbrella and refusing to surrender her children in a police stand-off.

Various media outlets publicized her mental health crisis, which went down as one of the most notorious celebrity scandals of the era. By the end of 2008, the singer's father, Jamie Spears, successfully petitioned the court for a temporary conservatorship over his daughter's financial, legal and personal affairs due to her unstable condition. The conservatorship, which granted Jamie Spears and his co-conservators almost complete control over his daughter, was extended indefinitely soon after and has been in effect since.

In 2019, the #FreeBritney movement gained traction online. Thousands of fans advocated for Spears' freedom through social media campaigns and a Change.org petition that received over 300,000 signatures, and in 2021 The New York Times released the explosive documentary "Framing Britney Spears." Spears finally spoke out about the situation this year, requesting a judge to end the conservatorship. She was granted



the ability to choose her own lawyer, and the case against her father was set in motion. Although her father resigned as conservator of Spears' personal affairs in 2019 and has recently stepped down as her financial conservator, Spears still isn't free of her conservatorship — her father was replaced with care manager Jodi Montgomery in 2019 and Spears will be appointed a different financial guardian, who is unknown at this time.

While Spears' diagnosis is undisclosed, a court can only grant conservatorship upon identification of a serious physical, psychiatric, developmental, intellectual or age-related disability. A conservatorship places the individual under partial, or in Spears' case, complete control of their designated guardian.

According to ACLU disability rights attorney Zoe Brennan-Krohn, Spears' father and his co-conservators restricted almost all aspects of his daughter's autonomy. It helps

the individual retain their rights while receiving the help they need. This option has been gaining popularity as a safer alternative to conservatorship. Other options include powers of attorney, joint bank accounts, healthcare surrogacy and community living.

All of these arrangements encourage autonomy while simultaneously providing necessary support. Limited conservatorship should be an absolute last resort. There is no real excuse to trample an individual's rights due to their disability; it places them in a dangerous situation that is extremely difficult to escape and imposes a subhuman status upon them.

Conservators are given the benefit of the doubt as the system assumes benevolence and goodwill on the guardian's part, which oftentimes is not the reality. Disabled individuals are already four to ten times more likely to be victims of abuse or neglect — placing them in a situation where they have no autonomy is dangerous and unnecessary. The disabled often are denied basic freedoms on the basis of their condition.

When every aspect of a person's life is controlled by another, self-advocacy is overwhelmingly difficult, which is why Britney Spears' public bid for freedom counts for more than just herself.

It shines a spotlight on upwards of a million disabled individuals living under harsh conservatorships and conservator abuse.

Bringing the previously ignored problem into the public eye has the potential to lead to increased activism and pushback against conservatorships, especially for those who have neither the publicity nor the resources available to Spears. Britney Spears' fight is not an isolated celebrity issue — it should be a milestone for civil liberties for disabled individuals, an even more important movement. ◆

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lifestyles

By Jonny Luo

Whenever I think about astrology, I always envision Professor Trelawney from Harry Potter. I imagine an old, tremulous woman rambling on about crystal balls, then looking into a cup of tea leaves and telling me that I have the Grim (insert spooky voice).

What a disappointment. In the following week, I settled into a routine: I would read my horoscope in the morning, go about my day, then read it again at the end of the day, taking notes of what came true and what didn't.

Professor Trelawney taught Divination, but it's close enough to astrology, which is the study of celestial bodies and how they reflect in our lives.

Like Harry and Ron, I had a very shallow knowledge of astrology, but like any curious Ravenclaw, I was willing to give it a shot.

I decided to try out horoscopes, a branch of astrology that attempts to predict the future.

For an entire week, I read my daily horoscope on Vice.com, and I found that its predictions were — at best — only somewhat true.

I first started reading my daily horoscope on a smoky Sunday morning. According to that day's horoscope, I would better understand my need for rest, "connect with my roots" and, best of all, have some "flirtatious fun."

To my surprise, the horoscope was somewhat accurate. I rested and "connected with my roots"

One horoscope said that, during my day, "easy energy flows around" — what does that even mean? I could think

it immediately: an 8-hour shift, opening and closing the store with two other technicians.

The ring from the primitive work handset pierces the silence in the back of the house. I press the green button twice: once to answer the call and again to put it on speaker. I set the handset next to my magnetic screw mat and begin to speak: "Thank you for calling uBreakiFix, what can I fix for you today?"

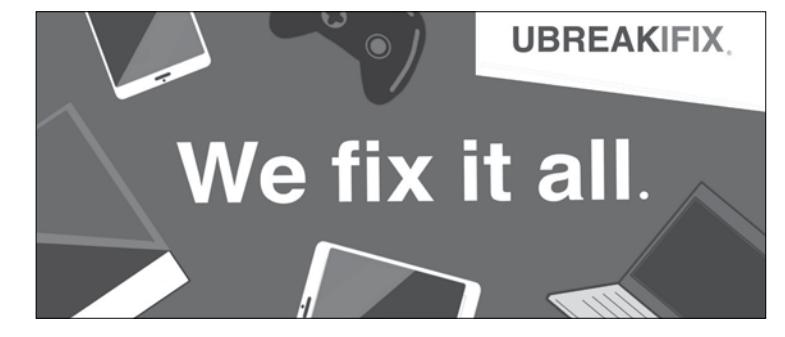
This summer, I worked as a technician at uBreakiFix, a chain of tech repair shops in the Bay Area. I had wanted to work at the shop for a while but never had the time, so as soon as AP tests wrapped up, I scheduled an interview.

When every aspect of a person's life is controlled by another, self-advocacy is overwhelmingly difficult, which is why Britney Spears' public bid for freedom counts for more than just herself.

It shines a spotlight on upwards of a million disabled individuals living under harsh conservatorships and conservator abuse.

Bringing the previously ignored problem into the public eye has the potential to lead to increased activism and pushback against conservatorships, especially for those who have neither the publicity nor the resources available to Spears. Britney Spears' fight is not an isolated celebrity issue — it should be a milestone for civil liberties for disabled individuals, an even more important movement. ◆

It was thrown into the thick of



of plenty of different interpretations of that.

It could mean that I hang out with some easy-going friends, or I can go easy on myself and relax during the day. The horoscopes simply predicted a wide variety of things in hopes that one would come true.

On most days, only one or two predictions came true, while the rest were completely off. And on the days where the horoscopes were shorter than usual, they generally failed to make a single accurate prediction.

Many of the horoscopes held some truth to their predictions, which I attribute to the Barnum effect — the tendency to accept information as true, even though the information is so vague that it becomes entirely worthless. I'm sure we've all experienced that when taking online personality tests.

But I found that reading my horoscopes at the end of each day helped me recap the day's events and think about all that happened.

It was sort of like journaling, but faster and easier, with a baseline to bounce the events of the day off of.

In the future, though, I don't think I'll be reading any horoscopes again; astrology is definitely a pseudoscience.

But who knows, maybe someday I'll have that "flirtatious fun" I was promised. ◆

BY Bill Yuan

The ring from the primitive work handset pierces the silence in the back of the house. I press the green button twice: once to answer the call and again to put it on speaker. I set the handset next to my magnetic screw mat and begin to speak: "Thank you for calling uBreakiFix, what can I fix for you today?"

For a screen replacement, the two screws at the bottom need to be removed before the screen can be pried up. Unscrewing 1 or 2 metal brackets reveals the flex cables that connect the screen and battery to the motherboard, which can be unplugged like separating two legs.

The new screen can be installed by simply reversing the entire process: Plug flex cables back together, screw in metal bracket, close screen and finally screw in screws at the bottom.

Not only did the work seem to align perfectly with my interests, but two of my friends also work there.

Luckily, I got the job, and on my first day of work, I walked into the shop excited to start working on phones but nervous about interacting with customers.

The idea of working 8-hour shifts seemed brutal at first, but to my surprise, my first day of work flew by. So did the second, and so did the third.

Although, on slower days, I'd be glad for the free time, a part of me would always be dismayed at not being able to top double digits that day.

Plus, it helped that I had amazing coworkers, all with similar interests. I liked the job so much that I'm staying on for the school year part time.

If you happen to drop by for a tech repair, do me a favor and be one of those customers who's actually nice. ◆

All the while I was making around \$15 an hour.

Helping customers at the front desk, however, quickly grew tiring.

It was frustrating to have to drop everything that I was doing, holler "we'll be right there" to the customer waiting and have to talk to them.

Occasionally, I'd help the odd customer who was friendly and a pleasure to talk to, but there were not enough of those interactions to make working the front desk enjoyable.

Despite this, fixing phones became therapeutic for me; keeping my hands busy really made the time fly.

I kept all of the boxes for the parts I used in a pile next to my work area to keep track of how many phones I fixed each day.

Depending on how busy and what kind of repairs I did, I fixed anywhere from four to 12 phones a day.

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Plus, it helped that I had amazing coworkers, all with similar interests. I liked the job so much that I'm staying on for the school year part time.

If you happen to drop by for a tech repair, do me a favor and be one of those customers who's actually nice. ◆

Horo-scoping out my future Senior's high school survival guidelines

By Harshini Veluchamy

utes late to practice today).

Naps are like a drug: Once you take a hit, you won't be able to quit. So this advice is really only helpful if you can consistently wake up to alarm clocks.

Tip #3: Buy an alarm clock or set alarms on your phone.

Another fun fact about me: I'm always late. Getting tardies has become an 8:30 a.m. ritual; every single morning, I walk into class and hand my teacher a pink slip.

At this point, my first and second period teachers have come to expect less from me.

But the thing about being late is if you do it enough times, you're going to get a detention. And I will say, detention is not fun.

I'm only partially joking. The secret to coasting through high school, but I still have nightmares about the seemingly endless hours spent in Mr. Dwyer's detention room from my underclass days.

I hate sitting still and doing nothing. It stresses me out. I need to constantly be writing or working or studying; detention was my personal hell.

Imagine three hours of doing nothing in tense silence, all alone with your own thoughts and Mr. Dwyer looking at you like a Marine drill sergeant.

Long story short: If you're going to be late, make sure you limit it to five tardies to avoid getting detention on your sixth.

But a word of caution: This approach could either make or break your high school career. I cannot count the number of times that I've slept through a sports practice or a work shift or a speech and debate meeting (I showed up 30 min-

utes late because if I've survived, you will too. ◆

STYLE

Seeing triple

POSTCARD

A turbulent night at the airport

Jason-chasin flights**Jason Cheng**

It was supposed to be a pleasant family vacation: a 10-day visit to Pittsburgh, where my older brother attends college at Carnegie-Mellon University.

Flying to a side destination on our way back to California, we made our way to the last destination: Texas. Unfortunately, the unbearable 100-degree heat and stifling humidity hindered our ability to enjoy adventures in the jam-packed cities of Austin and Dallas.

By the time our Texas trip was over, we were looking forward to our 8 p.m. flight home — homesickness and heat exhaustion had settled into all of us throughout our vacation.

After a final meal under the piercing Dallas heat, we drove our rental car over to the airport.

We quickly realized that we shouldn't have taken the toasty weather for granted — what started as an unexpected drizzle erupted into an enormous downpour. Cars slowed to a halt on the highway, but our Honda Civic trekked forward

through the tempestuous conditions.

Luckily, we made it to the airport just in time for our flight — or so we thought.

After a quick glance at the flight



Junior Jason Cheng's visit to Texas was hindered by bad weather conditions.

schedule, we saw that our flight had been delayed, along with numerous other flights to and from Dallas.

We strolled through the security checkpoint and settled down at our gate for the evening.

We knew it would be a while before our flight took off, but we thought our situation wasn't too bad — at least our flight hadn't been canceled entirely.

We were wrong.

A cacophony of nervous chatter exploded as passengers frantically rushed to the already mile-long line to reschedule their flight. We immediately scanned our phones for the next flight — all of which were fully booked.

A sense of panic and hopelessness flooded over us as we sunk into our chairs. We were essentially

stranded in Dallas: no flight, no hotel, nothing. Despite the setbacks, we eventually devised a master plan.

After an all-nighter at the airport, we set off on an Uber at 6 a.m. to a nearby rental car center, with none available at the airport.

As the doors were just opening to customers, we burst in and secured a rental car.

We hurried back to Austin in just three hours, and my parents rotated in the driver's seat to catch up on sleep. Every so often, we checked on Austin's weather — it was looking promising.

We had booked a new 2 p.m. flight back home, and when we arrived at the airport, we had faith in our plan.

Austin had a much calmer group of travelers, not distressed by the cancellations and delays in Dallas.

At last, our plane arrived. To say that we were relieved is an understatement. After a night of chaos, we finally boarded our flight and returned to the comfort of our home.

Of course, we hadn't planned for all these setbacks. Still, reflecting back, I'm glad that it happened to me. I've gained a newfound appreciation for what I call home, and plus — I know exactly what to do the next time I get stranded at the airport. ♦

After a final meal under the piercing Dallas heat, we drove our rental car over to the airport.

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POSTCARD

Cycling through Switzerland

Sin(ic) cycling**Sina Salehi**

For mountain bikers, their first time riding a flowtrail, a constant downhill ride usually containing technical switchbacks (i.e., hairpin turns), is a harrowing experience. Attempting it in Switzerland is a step further.

In the beginning of summer, I was introduced to mountain biking by friends who encouraged me to join them on rides. Despite not owning a proper mountain bike, it took just three rides for me to get hooked.

I soon saved enough money from a part-time job to purchase a dual-suspension, carbon-frame mountain bike from someone selling it on Craigslist.

When my family traveled to Switzerland over the summer, the opportunity to bike in such a mountainous country was too great to pass up. Af-

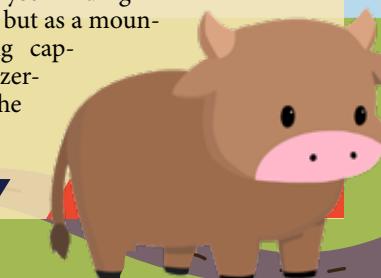
ter a couple days in Zurich, a 3-hour train ride to Zermatt took us to the foothills of the Alps. Upon our arrival, we stopped at a bike shop, where I promptly rented a Specialized Enduro bike, which was even better designed for terrain than my own.

It was only after I made the climb to the flowtrail trailhead that I realized that cable cars were making the journey to the top of the trailhead for a small fee. While the climb was instrumental to obtaining a better layout of the land, it took up riding time, a valuable commodity.

The flowtrail at Sunnegga is one of the most popular flowtrails in the world. Upon entering the trail, I understood why.

At every turn, the foothills of the valley gave me the impression of narrowly clinging onto the edge of a cliff.

While the cycling trip nearly involved getting overrun by cattle, it was arguably the most captivating ride of my life. I'm unsure of where I'll find myself riding in the future, but as a mountain biking capital, Switzerland is the metric. ♦



By the time I reached the end of the trail, I decided that I would be spending the two days I had left in Zermatt riding. By the time the next morning had come, I had adjusted my tire pressure, bought a cable ticket and made my way to the top of the trail intersection.

POSTCARD

A Disney miracle: reminiscing on 'It's a Small World' and traveling through time

Ci-sees Disney**Cici Xu**

brant colors. Some dolls were holding hands.

Some were skating. Some were playing their instruments, others waving at each other, standing on the same platform. Every doll was proud and joyful.

Gradually, the dolls blended into one serene image, which left me in shock. I found myself swallowing hard and trying to digest what I saw. At that moment, I realized that I completely forgot about the possibility of peace in the past two years.

Though it was my sixth time riding the attraction in Disneyland, those 15-minutes triggered one of the deepest revelations that I've had in my 16 years.

This trip to Disneyland was my family's first one since the pandemic began, and we hoped the outside world would not have changed much.

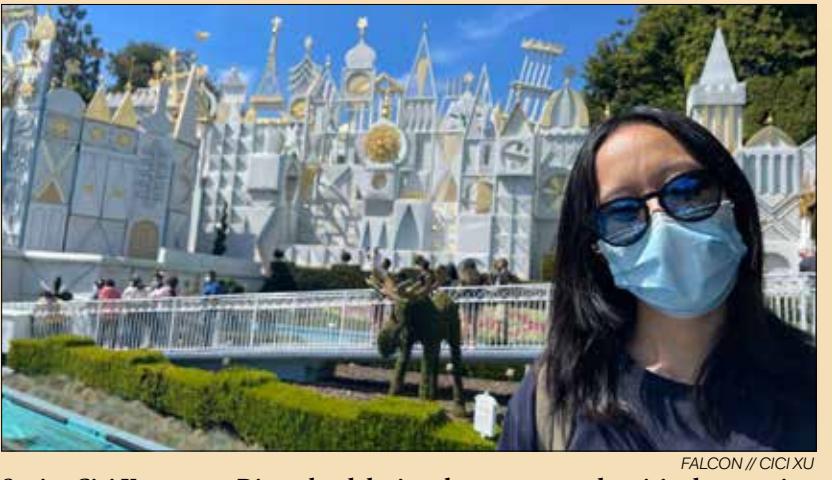
Although I tried to attain this long-awaited sense of normalcy, truthfully, nothing was the same anymore, including the meaning behind "It's a Small World."

After 40 minutes of standing in line, I stepped into a cabin that slowly began to float me through rooms filled with vi-

Everything seemed to be falling apart.

The painfulness of every tragic headline made me resilient, but also emotionally numb.

It would be an understatement to say it was depressing that while we can be "dancing" together in unity, people were kneeling on the ground behind police cars, struggling to



Senior Cici Xu went to Disneyland during the summer and revisited memories.

breathe, breaking windows, sending dehumanizing comments on social media and begging for food and water.

Rather, it resembles the hope from childhood that many of us have forgotten — one that we desperately need in order to face life once again after the pandemic.

"There is just one moon

And one golden sun

And a smile means

Friendship to everyone

Though the mountains divide

And the oceans

are wide

It's

a small

world

after all." ♦

"It's a Small World" is more than

Travel Checklist

"It was really fun being able to go travel to new cities and visit colleges this summer. Especially after being stuck in lockdown for so long, seeing new places was so much fun and a great change of pace!" - Emily Eckerman (12)

"It was wonderful to see so many people outside and enjoying themselves again. I also noticed that a lot of people from Saratoga went to Hawaii, and I even saw a couple people I knew!" - Samik Paltanayak (10)

"It was definitely fun to get a beautiful change of scenery after spending a year staring at Zoom screens. I was a little overwhelmed by the amount of people there though." - Luke Wang (11)

Junior expands love for digital art through non-profit

DRAW FOR A CAUSE: SHANNON WANG HOSTS ART COMMISSIONS TO PROMOTE CHARITY DONATIONS

BY LynnDai

Before the pandemic, junior Shannon Wang barely had the motivation to pursue her interest in animation and digital art, much less imagine that she would be teaching it to other people.

Now, she has transformed her passion into Draw for a Cause, a nonprofit that fundraises for various causes through art commissions.

The organization launched its website on Aug. 3.

While Wang has been drawing traditional and digital art for six years, she didn't find the courage to reach out to others who shared her passion until the COVID-19 lockdown.

"There are so many people who have different talents and different interests. It's hard to find someone who has the same passion as you," she said. "But because of COVID, I had the motivation to experiment with art online, learn to be more responsible and interact with more people."

Wang founded Draw For A Cause after her sister, class of 2019 alumna Cheryl Wang, now a junior at Wellesley College, encouraged her to participate in more extracurriculars and develop leadership skills.

She recalls her sister waking her up at 2 a.m. and reprimanding her to finish her artwork.

Since then, Wang has developed her nonprofit to sup-

port causes that she cares about, such as Girls Who Code, the Animal Humane Society, The Trevor Project, Bread for the World and Black Lives Matter.

Draw For A Cause allows clients to commission artists over Discord after agreeing on a cause to support. The commissioner first pays Wang, who keeps the money until the artist finishes their artwork. After the artwork is finished, art-

ists are paid 15% of the commission and the rest of the commission profit is donated. In case any issues arise, Wang keeps a record of receipts, which allows clients to be refunded.

Wang said the most common pieces of art so far are original characters, or OCs, which are characters modeled after the commissioners themselves or a digital character they like.

Although most of the pieces showcased on the website are digital anime, there have also been commissions for semi-realistic or realistic artworks.

One of the earliest difficulties Wang faced was spreading the word about her nonprofit. Despite her busy schedule with in-person learning, Wang is thankful for her organizers, who help her manage the nonprofit and social media sites.

After she had finished setting up the website, Wang started reaching out to people she had met online through art and animation related Discord servers to help ad-

vertise the nonprofit. Wang said she put a lot of trust in the people she'd developed close relationships with online, which was vital to the progress and growth of her organization.

So far, Draw For A Cause has five co-founders who go by Sofa, Lyra, Beanie and Tsuri, along with Wang, whose alias is Alyelle on the website.

Junior Cindy Chang joined as an artist, and senior Shani Chiu and juniors Panisa Kachinthorn and Minsui Tang have applied as artists.

Because the website only recently launched, there are still over 25 open positions for artists.

Despite her busy schedule with in-person learning, Wang is thankful for her organizers, who help her manage the nonprofit and social media sites.

Additionally, Wang and the officers have organized a cause of the month to bring more awareness and support to current issues.

This month, Draw For A Cause is donating 80% of its commissions to the Afghanistan Emergency Fund in light of the recent Taliban takeover in Afghanistan.

"It's very, very severe. A lot of people are getting hurt, people are getting taken away from their families," Wang said. "I take that cause really seriously and I'm really hoping to raise money for the cause."

Presently, two of the eight commissions for OCs have been completed so far, raising over \$100 worth of charity funds.

Wang is hoping to raise \$1,000 within a year, a goal she deems attainable based on current trends.

"We still have a lot to figure out," Wang said. "You never know if the website may die down, but since we're at a strong start, I'm hoping we can achieve that goal."◆



Guidance counselors transition to in-person meetings

BY NicoleLu
& SarahZhou

After his first meeting of the year with guidance counselor Frances Saiki on Aug. 16, senior Nikhil Kapasi exited her office feeling as if a weight of uncertainty had been lifted from his shoulders.

"COVID-19 took away a lot of agency for all of us, and I feel like it's my job to help provide space for students to reclaim as much independence and agency as possible," Satake said. "Feedback forms from other people in their lives, parent statements, reflection questions, resumes — all of these help us provide accurate information about our students."

Though unconventional, the online nature of last year allowed students and counselors alike to have more flexibility with meetings.

"Even last year, I loved having remote meetings with kids," Satake said. "They got to decide when they wanted to see me, and I felt like I got to glimpse through a window into their at-home lives. I've definitely taken meetings with kids who are in the car on the way to an extracurricular or having a late lunch at the Burger Bar."

This increased accessibility, both online and in-person, has helped the guidance counselors address new challenges seniors are facing with the college application process.

Due to continued low standardized testing center availability, some colleges decided to go test-blind or test-optimal when the pandemic first hit.

Though some colleges only made this feature available for applicants in the 2020-2021 application cycle, others have become permanently test-optimal, a phenomenon that Satake believes is "great and important work."

Because of this, many students are now deciding to apply to schools that they usually



Guidance counselor Monique Young works in her office on Aug. 31 to prepare for a meeting.

"I remember the senior check-in easing my stress because I was assured that there's someone I can just walk to and ask questions about anything."

SENIOR Nikhil Kapasi

For the Class of 2022, counselors have been making up for the lost interaction by providing options to meet in person to discuss the college application process, like scheduled in-person appointments, while also maintaining an online presence.

ly wouldn't consider, causing a considerable increase in the number of applications at most universities.

As seniors continue to check in with their respective counselors, the general sentiment among them is that the help of their counselors has greatly alleviated the stress and confusion caused by the upcoming admissions process.

"It was just nice knowing that there's someone there who's willing to help you," Kapasi said. "I know our counselors have always been there for the past four years, but it's nice to have someone who you can turn to for questions and be your second set of eyes on things. It's helpful to just know that someone is there."◆

The guidance counselors have adjusted their application strategy accordingly, with each counselor urging their students to apply broadly and include choices other than the same 25-30 top schools that seniors here

tend to gravitate toward.

Their efforts have not gone unnoticed: As seniors continue to check in with their respective counselors, the general sentiment among them is that the help of their counselors has greatly alleviated the stress and confusion caused by the upcoming admissions process.

Some like Harvard University had to delay admissions release dates, while others like UC Berkeley and Purdue University struggled to find sufficient dorming and class offerings.

The guidance counselors have adjusted their application strategy accordingly, with each counselor urging their students to apply broadly and include choices other than the same 25-30 top schools that seniors here

Teachers implement course modifications to combat pandemic inflicted learning gaps

BY ChristinaChang
& MartinXu

grade weights. By keeping the 5 percent increased participation grade weight from remote learning, Yim hopes to reduce student grade stress and encourage students to participate more in class, which will help them build mastery of the material.

Junior Luke Wang, who is currently taking Yim's AP Calculus BC class, said the modifications Yim has implemented into the course have made the transition smoother. He said that the daily quizzes encourage him to fully internalize the material and review daily, as opposed to his usual habit of studying last minute for assessments.

"Online learning made me forget I actually had to pay attention and focus in class instead of dozing off," Wang said. "It also made me forget the difficulty and course load of a regular school year since online tests and course loads were much easier than in-person learning."

Likewise, AP Calculus AB and AP Statistics teacher Jennifer Mantle has adopted testing procedures from remote learning into his in-person curriculum. He believes a quick one or two problem quiz on the most recent class material may make feedback more accessible and, in some cases, even replace a big chapter test.

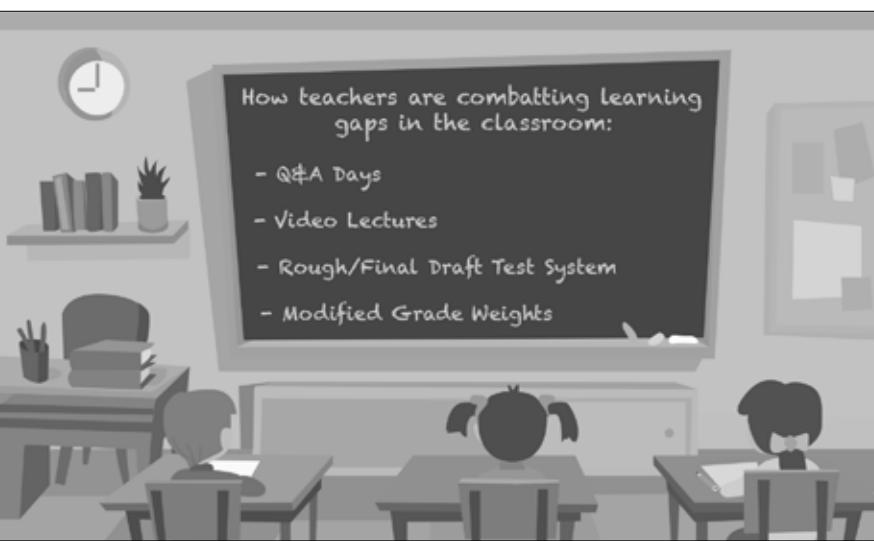
Besides modifications to testing procedures, Yim has carried over another portion of online learning to improve student performance: video lectures.

To accommodate for last year's shortened online learning periods, Yim created video lectures and assigned students to watch them for homework to maximize the use of class time, and he plans to continue doing so in-person.

"If you teach the introductory portion online, almost everybody can get that squared away, so I'm able to just focus on really intricate and hard examples in class," Yim said.

Another modification Yim carried over from remote learning is his class's modified

Because of learning gaps, teachers have had to work harder to get students ready for current courses.



"We wanted to try to reduce the stress of high-stakes testing, so we decided to continue the same procedure that we used last year," Mantle said. "We intend to use these modifications all year."

Teachers like Yim and Mantle are willing to give these modifications since scores on the AP Statistics and AP Calculus AB and BC tests did not decrease last year.

Yim said that, with the exception of two students, all of his AP Calculus BC students from last year earned a 5 on their AP tests, which is on par with results from previous years. Junior Thea Fernandes, who is taking Mantle's AP Calculus AB class, said she felt confident and prepared coming into the course this year, and even more so with the rough and final draft system for tests.

Although she prepared for the course over the summer by looking through textbooks, solving practice problems and utilizing online resources like Khan Academy, she says the current system plays an integral component in her learning.

"I appreciate the rough/final draft system because it gives you a chance to go back and

see what you did wrong," Fernandes said. "I feel like you get a better understanding [of the material] due to having another chance to see what you did and figuring it out yourself."

However, she said the testing procedure modification doesn't seem fair for other students in classes operating in the typical manner, as she would be complaining if another class got this opportunity and she didn't. Nonetheless, Fernandes feels lucky to have the rough draft and final draft testing format, as it helps her fully learn the course material.

Despite some students thinking certain learning modifications are unfair as the modifications haven't been uniformly implemented across courses, for the time being, teachers and students alike have reached the consensus that these course modifications have served useful in slowly filling in learning gaps created from online school last year.

"I'm just doing what works," Yim said. "Maybe two years from now, we'll go back to how the course was taught pre-COVID."◆

Talkspace provides free online therapy to school

STUDENTS AND TEACHERS NOW HAVE UNLIMITED MESSAGING AND ONE MONTHLY VIDEO THERAPY SESSION

BY VictoriaHu
& BrianSheen

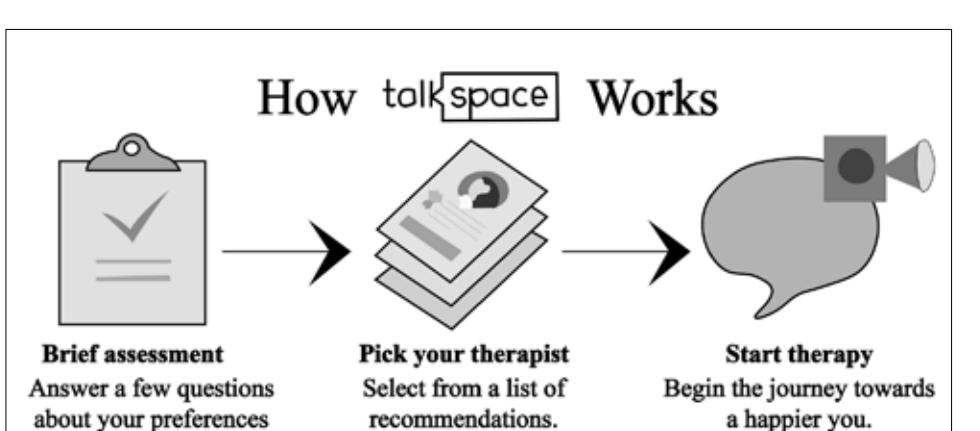
In the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) administered last December, about 33 percent of Saratoga High School students reported feeling chronically sad or hopeless to the point of stopping their normal activities, while 13 percent said they had seriously considered attempting suicide.

As a way to combat the concerning proportion of students struggling with their mental health, the district contracted with Talkspace starting this year to provide all students with free online access to a licensed therapist. In addition, staff and their students ages 13 and up can use the service.

The service includes unlimited text, audio and video messaging in addition to one 30-minute live video session per month with a therapist.

"CASSY is a great place for resources if the situation is temporary, but Talkspace can be better for other issues."

SOPHOMORE Esabella Fung



they will be prompted to enter their employer and personal information.

Students should enter "LGSUHSD students" under employer information while staff and their dependents should enter "LGSUHSD employees." After signing up, users will answer a brief set of questions about their preferences and needs, which are then used to suggest therapists.

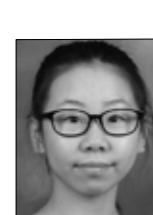
Talkspace users are provided with information such as a therapist's experience, state and license, area or areas of expertise, clinical approach and user reviews with which to make their decision.

All Talkspace therapists have been accredited by the National Committee for Quality Assurance and average seven to ten years in experience providing therapy.

Once the user chooses a therapist, they may then communicate with the therapist to work out a schedule and begin therapy. Users may also choose to switch to a different therapist at any time.

Support in creating a Talkspace account can be found at the school's Wellness Center. An FAQ is also available on the Talkspace website.

"I believe that every high school in the country is experiencing significant increases in mental health challenges among its students," Rocha said. "Our hope is that Talkspace provides an alternative with greater anonymity and access to a licensed therapist 5 days a week, as opposed to having to wait for a weekly in-person session with CASSY."◆



Fung

According to Heath Rocha, the district's head of student services, the use of Talkspace is a response to results of the California Healthy Kids Survey as well as the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) survey administered last March.

Sophomore Esabella Fung thinks Talk-

Where influencers buy, teens follow

BY NIDHI MATHIHALLI

When she started high school, Samika Agarwal, now a junior, remembers wondering why so many of her friends were obsessed with Urban Outfitters.

For one thing, all of its products were seemingly overpriced.

Then she began going there on shopping sprees with her friends — and saw herself genuinely liking Urban Outfitters. She's not sure if it was from her own innate interest in it or peer pressure.

This phenomenon of teens being lured to buy from brand-name stores like Urban Outfitters has become especially intense on social media. Logging into their accounts, they often find themselves in the crosshairs of highly targeted corporate campaigns on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, and the overheated marketing shows no signs of abating.

Social media use has exploded over the past decade, with the United States having almost 80 million people on TikTok and 107 million people having Instagram accounts.

"It's not that I necessarily need them, but other people look cool and fancy in them, which makes me want to buy clothes from those stores."

JUNIOR Samika Agarwal

as YouTubers Emma Chamberlain, with 9.88 million subscribers on the platform, and Hannah Meloche, with 2.05 million subscribers trends, a notable one being the VSCO Girl.

The VSCO Girl trend was popularized by social media influencers in mid to late 2019. They deemed a certain style of dressing as VSCO, playing off the name of a popular photography app for mobile devices. VSCO girls often wore name-brand items such as Hydro Flasks, Pura Vida bracelets and Birkenstocks.

Not only did this trend increase the popularity with social media influencers like Chamberlain and Meloche, it also greatly increased sales in these items. One of the biggest sales increases was orchestrated by Hydro Flasks, whose sales increased by 239 percent in 2019 according to the Daily Mail.

Vasudev has seen the effect of these influencers' popularity in boosting sales of items.

"Sometimes you see a certain clothing trend or brand that a TikToker will pose in, and all of a sudden, a bunch of people want to buy clothes from that store and dress like these influencers," Vasudev said.

These ads are not cheap, though. As of 2021, TikTokers can earn anywhere between \$200 and \$20,000 for a branded video.

What is so effective about these influencers? Agarwal and Vasudev point to how these ad campaigns work at a subconscious level. Friend groups often buy the same items as each other in order to fit in and as demand grows, it results in steeper prices for the clothing.

As noted in a study done by the Asian Journal of Home Science, adolescents tend to have their buying behavior more affected by social and cultural values, many of which have a significant tie to the ideology of their

peers.

Agarwal said this constant appraisal of certain brands from social media and friends has contributed to her buying more clothes from trendy shops such as a recent Brandy Melville sweatshirt that she bought for \$60.

"It's not that I necessarily need them, but other people look cool and fancy in them, which makes me want to buy clothes from those stores," Agarwal said.

According to analysis from the University of Arkansas, social acceptance is what makes some brands so effective. Teens often think that a certain style or brand is what allows them to be part of a community.

Additionally, not wearing clothes from a certain store could be a cause for friends making a nonconformist an outcast from their group or even bullying them.

Many stores have done brand sponsorships with influencers like Charli D'Amelio and Addison Rae Easterling as well as having their own social media pages.

One example of this is Dunkin' Donuts. Dunkin' Donuts partnered with D'Amelio in September of 2020, adding an item to its menu nationwide called "The Charli." This coffee is a Dunkin' Cold Brew with whole milk and three pumps of caramel swirl. Following this news, the Dunkin' company saw a 57% increase in daily app downloads, 20% sales boost for all cold brew coffees on its debut day, and the following day, saw a 45% increase in cold brew sales.

Just having a simple thing such as her coffee order allowed Dunkin' to greatly increase its revenue. Given the power that these influencers hold over their followers, it is no surprise that brands are so willing, and often desperate, to reach out to influencers in order to increase their sales.

Another example of trend setting due to social media influencers is Starbucks, well known as a highly popular teen hangout. In part, the cool factor of Starbucks comes

from its sophisticated use of social media.

"Starbucks has become a go-to meet-up place," Agarwal said. "When trying to choose a place to meet up with my friends, it's one of the first places we look at, especially since it's known as a teen coffee place."

Agarwal also mentioned that when she goes off-campus during lunch or after school, she often finds that Starbucks is a popular option, not just with her peers, but also with many other juniors and seniors.

Even if I leave school just as lunch starts, I will walk into Starbucks and find a line of people who also go to SHS standing in line, she said.

The effects of social media advertising that targets teens are something society will continue to sort through. And this trend has only just begun.

"I sort of feel a sense of alienation from people my age if I don't follow popular trends," Vasudev said. "However, I hope people realize that trends don't last forever, and that we should instead be thankful for what we have." ♦



Vasudev



"It's not that I necessarily need them, but other people look cool and fancy in them, which makes me want to buy clothes from those stores."

JUNIOR Samika Agarwal

Senior Maya Vasudev said social media influence has contributed to her buying habits, specifically through exposing her to new trends and popular teenage fashion.

"These trends have pressured me to buy things that I'm probably not going to use three months later," she admitted.

Vasudev has observed new trends appear every couple of months and students feel obligated to follow them even if they do not feel personally attached to that particular style. Vasudev and Agarwal have seen the effect of these influencers' popularity, such



Popular social media influencer Emma Chamberlain casually tells her followers to buy her limited merchandise on Instagram.

falconfigures

4.14

Urban Outfitters' revenue, in billions of dollars, for the last 12 months

27.1

Starbucks' revenue, in billions of dollars, for the last 12 months

44.5

Nike's revenue, in billions of dollars, for the last 12 months

21.8

H&M's revenue, in billions of dollars, for the last 12 months

Statistics from MACROTRENDS.NET

Locally owned restaurants bounce back after pandemic

BY VICTORIA HU & SARAH ZHOU

Since California's June reopening, downtown Saratoga has transformed from its previously deserted state to a brightly lit and lively business area, with restaurants like Hachi Ju Hachi bustling with activity.

Hachi Ju Hachi, located on Big Basin Way, specializes in traditional Japanese cuisine. It was hit hard by the pandemic — fears of virus transmission exacerbated by rising anti-Asian sentiment were likely factors in a sharp decrease in business.

According to research from the JPMorgan Chase Institute, although sales for small businesses suffered a roughly 50 percent decrease in activity, those owned by Asian Americans dropped by 60 percent.

"Lots of customers just stopped showing up," said junior Emerald Suzuki, whose fam-

ily owns the restaurant. "Some were scared to catch COVID-19, while others straight-up racist." As a result, Hachi Ju Hachi closed for a few weeks in April. It was also forced to lay off all its nonessential workers.

However, business quickly returned after the reopening, and Hachi Ju Hachi was able to rehire a few employees as reservations picked up.

Despite possible concerns about the new Delta variant, Hachi Ju Hachi has seen that its bottom line is remaining steady.

By juggling her time between school, the restaurant and extracurriculars, Suzuki is able to help around Hachi Ju Hachi a few times per week by performing tasks like cleaning dishes and helping in the back.

Phở Hà Nội, which specializes in Viet-



Nguyen

nese cuisine, is a local restaurant owned by sophomore Alicia Nguyen's family. The family opened its first restaurant in San Jose in December 2016 and later opened another location in Cupertino. Despite decreasing in-person dining at the beginning of the pandemic, the business was able to stay afloat with a large influx of takeout orders, she said.

The restaurant actually did pretty well, because we advertised a lot on social media, to a point where our go-to sales were meeting goals that we would have had without the pandemic," Nguyen said.

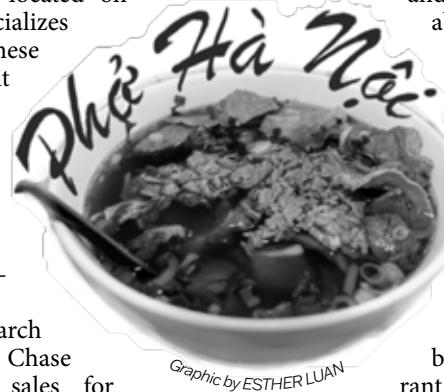
The restaurant's Instagrams (@phohanoisan-jose and @phohanoicupertino) each have several thousand followers, with some video posts generating over 1.5

million views.

Besides focusing on their own business through increased advertising, outdoor dining options and delivery services, Phở Hà Nội also regularly donates food to help out other local businesses and workers, a task that Nguyen occasionally helps out with. Two summers ago, when Phở Hà Nội was donating meals to hospitals, Nguyen also helped out by packaging and making the food.

Though she does not have time to help out at the restaurant on a regular basis, Nguyen has been exposed to the pressures that come with owning a business, especially during hard times.

"I can see the stress in my parents if business isn't doing well, so it definitely has an impact on me," she said. "My parents owning a restaurant just helps me appreciate a lot more of what workers do." ♦



Graphic by ESTHER LUAN



Graphic by ESTHER LUAN

BY SHREYA RALLABANDI

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The effects of social media advertising that targets teens are something society will continue to sort through. And this trend has only just begun.

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her to flourish in ballet — an activity she had pledged her life to. One of her other priorities was to explore Catholicism and try to develop a personal relationship with God.

She didn't consider herself particularly religious at the time; she believed in the idea of a God, but was skeptical whether her idea of God aligned with traditional Christian beliefs.

Still, she was interested in learning more about Catholicism. It's a faith that's not only close to her family, but has also had a "massive impact on history."

She believed immersing herself in it would bring her closer to the self-image she wanted to achieve.

"I was trying to become a good, Catholic, ballerina girl. I told myself I was going to get all As, and I was able to do all of that," Panidis said.

During her freshman year, Panidis and her classmates took religion classes for 90 minutes two to three times a week. In this required freshman course, students studied biblical text and Catholic history and knowledge.

When she was younger, Panidis went to Christian and Catholic events with her family in Italy feeling as if she could not name or talk about God flippantly. However, the community at Mitty allowed a much more casual attitude toward Catholicism, which pleasantly surprised her.

Panidis remembers sitting in her first religion class and being shocked at how casually students and teachers talked about Jesus.

"At Mitty, it was like, 'Let's talk about Jesus today! God's my best friend!'" Panidis said.

In particular, Panidis said she enjoyed learning about the Old Testament, as the stories were comforting and interesting "like bedtime stories."

Seeing hidden hypocrisies

Despite enjoying her courses and activities, Panidis thought that Mitty's disciplinary policies contradicted what the institution taught about God and Catholicism. The dress code, she said, was extremely strict and seemed to target girls: no shorts, no tank tops, no "extreme" makeup or piercings and dresses more than 6 inches above the knee.

Panidis was also alarmed by Mitty's strict policies on drugs and alcohol. During her first semester of freshman year, she walked through the hallway after class and saw a girl huddled at the side of the hallway, sobbing.

Held by her godfather, Panidis gets baptized at 4 months old, accompanied by her paternal grandmother and older sister.

Panidis was also alarmed by Mitty's strict policies on drugs and alcohol. During her first semester of freshman year, she walked through the hallway after class and saw a girl huddled at the side of the hallway, sobbing.

Making the move to Mitty

When Panidis applied to Mitty during eighth grade at Redwood Middle School, she sought access to better education, a private school experience and a space for

togatalks

Is religion beneficial to society?

"Religion doesn't leave room for being open-minded, and causes people to shirk responsibility."

junior Kiana Compeau

"While religion does provide structure for a given society, there are also historical implications."

English teacher Erick Rector

"On an individual level, religion helps people find direction and purpose, so it's often helpful."

senior Christian Li

SEARCHING FOR FAITH

Graphic by TIFFANY WANG

The girl had just been expelled after the school found out she had vaped, Panidis said.

"I thought Catholic people were supposed to be forgiving," Panidis said. "And you're expelling this poor girl because she's vaped, sure, once? It's just so contradictory — it's like, 'Mitty! All are welcome, we love you but you can't wear a durag, or you can't make any mistakes — you have to be perfect.'"

Panidis does not know if her experiences at Mitty reflect problems with Catholicism or the school itself, but the hypocrisy she observed was a significant factor in her eventual rejection of Catholicism and departure from the school.

Early-on exclusions

During her time at Mitty, Panidis looked to strengthen her relationship with God but found her faith slipping.

Because she was unable to solidify her belief in God, Panidis felt like an intruder in her school's majority Catholic community despite her efforts to participate in the faith. Friends would even point this out to her, occasionally saying things like "You're not even Catholic" while at mass.

"I felt like an outsider," Panidis said. "I thought religion was supposed to be welcoming, I didn't find that at all."

Despite feeling excluded within the Catholic community itself, though, Panidis found herself agreeing with the morals taught in Catholicism and at Mitty — primarily, the concept of always giving. She said that Mitty constantly organized volunteer opportunities and outreach programs, regularly encouraging students to give back to the community.

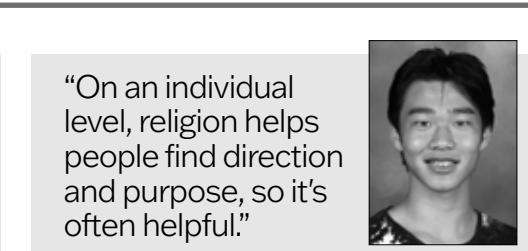
Inspired by the school's teachings, Panidis ended up volunteering at a local Goodwill and helped serve firefighters food for a period of time.

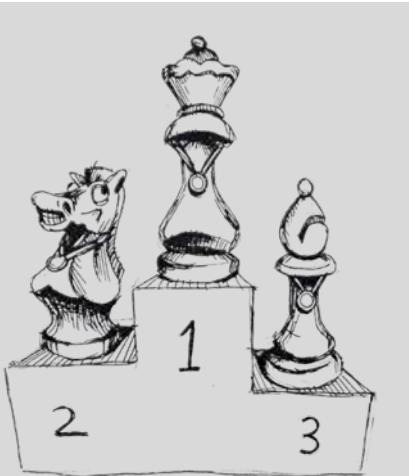
Everything happens for a reason

As COVID-19 rolled around, Panidis found herself spending much more time at home with her family. One day, she and her mother struck up a conversation about religion. Her mother mentioned how her grandmother back in Italy still says that their family is blessed to not have contracted the coronavirus.

"It's like, what? Does God condemn certain people and give them COVID-19?" Panidis said. "COVID-19 or not, there's no reasoning behind it, and that's what I believe."

"Aside from the staunch Catholics and private school kids," she added. "I guess I just didn't really like it, and I wanted to explore different things." ♦





Chess is not an Olympic sport

BY Andrew Lin

Imagine a swimmer cutting through water with his arms, taking deep breaths between each submersion. Imagine the ringing echo of the starting pistol, runners' shoes striking the dusty track.

Now imagine two old men wearing suits and ties, quietly sliding small plastic statues across a board. What do all of these have in common? According to the International Olympic Committee, they are all sports.

Since 2019, there has been talk of including chess as a demonstration sport (a sport played at an event to promote it) in the 2024 Paris Olympics. However, the Olympic Committee's verdict in deeming chess a sport is flawed: Chess isn't a sport, and should not be featured in the Olympics.

According to Oxford Languages, a sport is "an activity involving physical exertion and skill in which an individual or team competes against another or others for entertainment."

In Olympic sports, there should be a direct relationship between the physical ability of athletes and the competitive aspect in whether they win a gold medal, but this correlation isn't present in the game of chess.

Some may say the mental strain of playing chess manifests physically in the form of sweating and strain. This interpretation of the definition would also consider academic competitions and videogames sports as well.

The Olympic Committee also does not consider other board games — like the ancient Chinese game of Go (or weiqi) — as sports. Go is at least 500 years older than chess, and by all accounts more difficult: It wasn't until 2016 that Google's AI AlphaGo was able to beat one of the best Go players, Lee Sedol. In comparison, the then-reigning chess world champion Garry Kasparov was defeated by the AI Deep Blue in 1997. It doesn't make sense that chess is the sole board game recognized as a sport.

Historically speaking games similar to chess have never been featured in the Olympics. Looking at a list of Olympic demonstration sports starting in 1908, you see that most of them are regional variations of wrestling, handball or football. Deviations from the norm are still physical activities: Canoeing, gliding an unpowered aircraft and dueling with war bullets.

Additionally, there is simply too small of an overlap between chess and sports fans. Most impressive moves or game-ending blunders would simply go over spectators' heads.

By basing their verdict on a misinterpretation of a dictionary definition and not considering other board games like Go as sports, the International Olympic Committee weakens their credibility in declaring chess a sport. Going as far as to feature chess as a demonstration sport in the Olympics is out of the question. ♦

Graphic by ANDREW LIN

Reporters review 2020 Olympics

BY Jonny Luo
& Nikhil Mathihalli

The Tokyo 2020 Olympic games showcased the achievements of many athletes. Spectators saw their favorite athletes win gold, and record-breaking performances took the internet by storm.

After a one-year delay due to COVID-19, the 2020 Olympics began on July 25 and concluded on Aug. 8. Spectators weren't permitted to attend due to pandemic regulations; however, fans still cheered on their favorite athletes' accomplishments from afar.

Team USA took home 39 gold medals, the greatest number out of all competing countries.

This year's Olympics heralded new events: the mixed gender 4x100-meter relay, softball, baseball, skateboarding, surfing, karate and sports climbing.

Baseball, softball and karate, which will not appear in the 2024 Olympics, were added this year due to their popularity in Japan, as the Olympic Committee now allows host countries to propose added sports. The Olympics heralded nine new mixed-gender events in seven sports, which were popular with gender equality advocates.

Team USA took home 39 gold medals, the greatest number out of all competing countries for the third consecutive Olympic games. Headlining this showcase of American talent was swimmer Caeleb Dressel. Dubbed the

"heir to Michael Phelps," Dressel led men's swimming with five gold medals in the men's 100-meter butterfly, 100-meter freestyle, 50-meter freestyle, 4x100-meter medley relay and 4x100-meter freestyle relay events.

Team USA female swimmer Katie Ledecky also excelled. Expected to be the top swimmer in all her events, Ledecky concluded her Olympic run with two gold medals in women's 800-meter and 1500-meter freestyle, and two silver medals in women's 4x200-meter freestyle relay and 400-meter freestyle. Since her debut in 2012, Ledecky has dominated women's swimming.

Unlike the success of other USA teams, two-time defending FIFA World Cup USA soccer team lost to Canada 1-0 in the semi-final round and won the bronze medal.

The team should've increased playing time for younger players as older members were slow in adjusting to new coach Vlatko Adonovski.

Aside from Team USA's Olympic dominance, athletes from other countries also showcased talent, including Quan Hongchan, a 14-year-old Chinese diver, who was barely old enough to qualify. She took the world by surprise with her two perfect dives and one close to perfect, culminating in a record-breaking performance.

Despite a rocky start, the Team USA basketball teams showed out, with the women's team winning their seventh straight gold medal and the men's team winning their fourth. The men's team lacked chemistry due to little practice time following the NBA's end-of-season less than a week prior.

This issue was prominent when the men's team lost two of three exhibition games to Nigeria and France. However, the Kevin Durant-led team came together to take home gold over a French squad led by Rudy Gobert.

For most of the Olympics, the USA and China were neck-and-neck in the gold medal race, ending with Team USA winning by one gold medal with the Women's Volleyball Gold Medal win over Brazil. Ultimately, the Olympic did not disappoint, and the one-year postponement didn't detract from performances.

The next Olympics will be held in 2024 in Paris, with big names such as Dressel and Ledecky returning and more great performances to reach. ♦



Graphic by JONNY LUO

SHS student athletes identify with Simone Biles' mental health struggles

BY Anamika Anand
& Anjali Pai

Biles, it was her mental health that took the top priority this past summer.

Biles dropped out of the all-round competition and three of the final events due to suffering a case of the "twists." This poses the risk of the gymnast landing on their head or neck, possibly resulting in serious injuries like paralysis.

Thus, Stoiber resonated with Biles' reason for dropping out of the Olympic events. In addition to the twists, Stoiber said she has also faced self-worth issues.

"I started doing gymnastics so often that I valued my self-worth based on how I was doing in the sport," Stoiber said. "This sounds bad to say, but I was used to winning at first. But when I went to the Junior Olympic (JO) program, I wasn't anymore, so it was stressful."

Junior tennis player Arshi Chawla also identified with Biles' struggles, and was impressed that "Biles put her own well-being ahead of any titles or awards."

Similarly, tennis player Naomi Osaka withdrew from the French Open in Summer 2021 for the same reason.

Chawla, a fan of Osaka, had followed the

renowned tennis player when she withdrew from the French Open, so her decision was less shocking to her.

"I supported Osaka's decision entirely," Chawla said. "It really just showed me how demanding sports are."

Chawla has also struggled with the mental demands of being on the SHS varsity tennis team. She recalls that when she plays an unsuccessful match, thoughts of what went wrong consume her mind.

While Biles' and Osaka's decisions shocked and disappointed some, they inspired many who struggle with mental health. Chawla said famous athletes who speak out about mental health play a vital role in destigmatizing the discussion of the topic.

"In our competitive environment, many struggle with mental health issues but either don't know how to seek help or are unable to," Chawla said. "When famous athletes are transparent about their struggles, it humanizes the effect of mental health and allows people to talk about their issues because they know it isn't something to be ashamed of." ♦



Stoiber

CROSS COUNTRY SET TO MAKE A STRONG COMEBACK



TALISMAN / SAACHI JAIN

Girls' cross country seniors compete at the 2.23-mile-long Lynbrook meet on Sept. 7.

bonding.

"I just want them to enjoy running," Kathy Tippets said. "That's the goal — to push these kids to become lifelong runners."

The girls team ran their first meet at Lynbrook high school on Tuesday Sept. 7. The boys ran their first meet at San Francisco's Lowell Invitational on Saturday, Sept. 11. ♦

— Sarah Bright and Carolyn Wang

Head Coaches: Danny Moon (girls) and Ian Tippets (boys)

Last year's record: The team did not run any official meets.

Recap: The girls and boys cross country teams ran together in a shorter season last year due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Key Meets: League Meet at Crystal Springs on Nov. 2

Star Players: For the girls, sophomore Sara Bright, junior Elizabeth Stoiber, junior Elsa Blom, junior Isha Goswami and senior Amoli Vanavadiya; for the boys, senior Harrison Dance, sophomore George Hu, junior Anand Agrawal, and junior Wasil Khan

Key Additions: Freshman Anisha Rahut and Hillary Gonzalez (girls), Caleb Yu and Pranav Rajan (boys)

Key Losses to Graduation: Kristen Hung, Charlotte Shewchuk (girls), Niyanth Rao and Bryan Young (boys)

League: De Anza

Prognosis:

"We have a really solid team this year, especially on varsity," said junior Elizabeth Stoiber, another one of the girls' co-captains. A majority of the juniors who made CCS in freshman year, including Stoiber, junior Elsa Blom and junior Isha Goswami, have returned this season.

On the boys' team, star player and co-captain Harrison Dance continues to lead by example. Dance placed third for the 1600 meter with a time of 4:12 during the 2021 track season's CCS Finals.

New key additions to varsity like sophomores Sara Bright and George Hu, who ran cross country during the restricted 2021-22 seasons, and freshmen Anisha Rahut, Hilary Gonzalez, Caleb Yu and Pranav Rajan (boys)

Key Losses to Graduation: Kristen Hung, Charlotte Shewchuk (girls), Niyanth Rao and Bryan Young (boys)

League: De Anza

Prognosis:

After a shortened season last spring without official meets, the cross country teams are enjoying a fresh start this 2021-22 season. Coach Danny Moon will lead the girls' team, and Ian Tippets will continue to coach the boys' team.

Currently, girls' practices involve a mixture of 3 to 5-mile runs, including core workouts. Boys' practices have implemented weight training and 7 to 9-mile weekend runs.

"We had races inside the school last

to get faster," said Kathy Tippets, the assistant boys' coach. "A lot of them have put in the miles over the summer and you can already see that."

To get athletes back in shape, work on speed through interval workouts is a priority for both teams.

Both teams anticipate masks to be recommended during meets for anyone not actively participating in races.

They are also continuing to host combined team nights, to encourage team

BOYS' WATER POLO TEAM LOOKS TO BE REPEAT LEAGUE CHAMPIONS

Head Coach: Michael Fleming

Last year's record: 8-4

Recap: League playoffs were canceled due to state-mandated COVID-19 restrictions. With a short-staffed team, starters were forced to play without much rest time and did not perform as well as they had liked.

Key Matchups: Wilcox, Lynbrook

Team Captains: Seniors Marcus Kuo and Kendal Jarvis

Star athletes: Seniors Marcus Kuo, Kendal Jarvis, Jaime Fernandez De Ponte, Chris Wu, Kian Kwa and Andrew Hong

Key losses to graduation: Dylan Overby

League: El Camino League

Prognosis:

Coach Jerome Chung had been the boys' coach during the 2019-20 season, playing an essential role in the boys' success.

Many athletes who participated in swimming, a Season 1 sport (non-contact or minimal-contact sports that the district allowed to resume first during the pandemic), were forced to participate in back-to-back seasons with only one week

in between, meaning less time to recover and rest.

At the same time, it also meant more conditioning and preparation, which allowed the players to get a head start on the season, senior co-captain and league MVP Marcus Kuo said.

During the 2019-20 season, the boys won league championships and made CCS for the first time in five years, but were eliminated in the first round.

They are looking to make another appearance in CCS this year while also repeating league championships.

"This year we have more time and we'll be able to incorporate a lot more into what we're able to do as a team," Wu said. "For example, we have been bringing back many of the plays as well as general team synergy that we had with Jerome."

— Jonathan Li

GIRLS' WATER POLO TEAM IS OPTIMISTIC DESPITE CHALLENGING SEASON AHEAD

Head Coach: Alex Hsueh (new)

Last year's record: 14-2

Recap: The unexpected death of coach Jerome Chung before last year made it especially challenging. However, the team ended up winning most of its games.

Key additions: Freshmen Leena El-Ashawi, Ava Sadeghi and Cassidy Coghlan, sophomores Medha Ravi and Adeena Kadire

Key Matchup: Fremont

Star Players: Senior Morgan Bettinger, ju-

nior Fiona Feng and Rosie Kline, sophomores Ryder Gangemi

Key losses to graduation: Grace Stuart, Grace Green, Morgan Bruun-Jensen and Amanda Andary

League: El Camino

Prognosis:

The team started the season with a 6-4 win against Santa Teresa on Aug. 31, a 11-6 loss against Milpitas on Sept. 7 and a 12-1 loss against Fremont on Sept. 9.

The low numbers on the varsity team

have raised concerns: With only 10 players, team members have had to adapt to all positions, and starters have had to play continuously with few breaks.

Achieving the same 14-2 record as last season — where the team only lost two league games — will be a challenge.

"The team has no established goalie for varsity," said sophomore Ryder Gangemi. "We often have to switch people out of the goal, especially people that never really trained to be in that position."

— Mitchell Chen

FIELD HOCKEY TEAM BONDS, WORKS ON IMPROVING TEAM CHEMISTRY

Head Coach: Jatin Sharma (returning)

Last year's record: 6-3

Recap: The team had a small roster of 12 players after losing players to other sports while seasons overlapped last spring.

Key Matchups: Los Gatos, Palo Alto, Homestead

Star Players: Seniors forward Rima Christie, left full back Olivia Kinoshita, goalie Nandini Desai

Key losses to

Athletes return to sports after having a year off

by Jonathan Si
& Minsui Tang

When she was an underclassmen, senior Mahi Ravi had anticipated her junior year to be one of the busiest years of her high school career.

However, after opting out of water polo after the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Ravi found her junior year schedule unexpectedly bare.

"Coming home felt empty, since water polo had been with me for so long and it just wasn't there anymore," Ravi said.

Like many other SHS student athletes, Ravi opted out of the 2020-21 season for fear of contracting COVID-19. As a result, she saw her physical fitness deteriorate.

"Since I didn't have practices, my only form of exercise came from some swimming laps in the pool and following some YouTube exercise videos every once in a while," she said.

Likewise, another athlete who opted out, junior Maithili Kulkarni, found it harder to keep up in practices this fall. Kulkarni returned to the girls' cross country team.

"Like for any sport, if you miss a certain period of time and come back late, it's hard to get back into things," said Kulkarni.

Students who took a break from their sports during quarantine also felt an impact



Courtesy of LORI TIMMINS

The football team lines up defensively against San Mateo during their home opener game.

on their mental health, causing a decrease in work efficiency and motivation.

Ravi said she had trouble focusing since she had much more time at home, and — counterintuitively — found her sleep schedule pushed back by almost three hours because of increased procrastinating.

FOOTBALL

Varsity team starts off their season with three tough losses

by Nilay Mishra
& Shaan Sridhar

The Falcons fell in their three opening games of the season, with losses on Aug. 26, to San Mateo (34-0), on Sept. 2 to Willow Glen (14-0) and on Sept. 9 to Westmont (48-14).

San Mateo routs Falcons in home opener

After the opening football game at home against San Mateo, senior wide receiver Parsa Hashemi was left in tears, disappointed that his senior year season had gone off to such a bad start against a team they used to beat in preseason scrimmages.

"I've been used to losing," Hashemi said. "But I hoped that this season would be more promising. [The game] was very demoralizing. It was not OK."

The team has suffered from a lack of players at the start of the season. Junior backup quarterback Ethan Kung was unable to play due to personal circumstances. Junior lineman Aarav Badani was involved in a car accident earlier in the day and could not play in the game (Badani did not suffer any serious injuries). To make matters worse, two of the five linebackers — senior Ryan Ho and junior Jack Burgess — were injured and replaced by receivers.

Hashemi said that the team underestimated San Mateo's skill and took their previous scrimmage wins against the opponent for granted. In anticipation of their upcoming games, he said that the team needed more mental preparation.

"We thought we would win the game," Hashemi said. "I don't think we realized that there are other teams out there that are doing the same thing we're doing. They're being coached too. We need to know what we're up against and stop thinking we're the best team in this league."

Willow Glen prevails at home

Senior lineman Parker Smith said the "score should have been 8-0" in the team's away loss to Willow Glen.

"I think we played super well defensively," Smith said. "But we slipped up and let them score again in the second half."

However, Smith said the team continued to struggle offensively due to a lack of players, similar to the situation in their opening game against San Mateo.

FOOTBALL

Varsity team starts off their season with three tough losses

"We just need more players," Smith said. "We were missing a bunch of offensive linemen due to injury and a lack of practice."

Ho and Burgess missed their second game this season due to injuries, forcing the team to place wide receivers on the offensive line.

"We can't run the ball without a solid offensive line," Smith said. "It's really messing our offense up."

Smith also said the team's quarterback, sophomore Shane Timmons, is still "trying to get his bearings." The team's backup quarterback, Kung, was still unable to play.

Despite the team's loss, however, Smith thought they played better overall compared to their first game against San Mateo.

"I think we played much better; we didn't go into the game thinking these guys were bad," Smith said. "We went in thinking they were solid competition, but they tried harder and they won the game."

Smith said the team would continue to "really focus on the little things, especially on offense," in order to put some points on the board in their next game against Westmont on Sept. 9 — which they did.

Navarro scores two touchdowns but team loses to Westmont at home

Junior running back Paolo Navarro scored two touchdowns in the Falcon's loss to Westmont.

Badani said that the team did well during the first quarter, when the score was tied 7-7, but "everything went downhill from there" — the team's defense especially worsened from the previous two games.

Badani said the Falcons and Westmont were equally strong, but Westmont had significantly more players, allowing the team to be rested and ready to play through all quarters of the game. Ho, Burgess and Kung all missed their third games.

The team lost two key travel players to graduation last season: Jane Loo and Ananya Sekharan. They have been replaced by freshman Sarah Lim (#1) and junior Ananya Seth (#6).

Lim is a valuable addition, as Gragnola expects the freshman will "be a top ten player in the league this year." Lim regularly competes in tournaments and is a prolific player who shot up to the number one starting position during tryouts.

Looking toward the team's next game away against Aragon on Sep. 17, Badani said the team wants to work on their offense and defensive scheme, making blocks, not drawing penalties and limiting errors.

Despite the team's loss, Badani said he was still happy with the game.

"At least we got points on the board," he said. ♦

GIRLS' GOLF

Senior looks forward to final season



Courtesy of SAVANNAH LIN

Senior Savannah Lin hits a shot from the fairway of the first hole at the team's home course.

by Avani Kongetira
& Tara Natarajan

After a condensed season in February due to the pandemic, the girls' varsity golf team has reunited for the current fall season, with an abundance of new players and fewer veterans. This season will be used for rebuilding, according to head coach David Gragnola, as most of the team is unaccustomed to playing competitively.

Gragnola will be more cautious about the team's performance in upcoming games. According to him, the team has many inexperienced players, which will mean a few high scores during matches.

The team lost two key travel players to graduation last season: Jane Loo and Ananya Sekharan. They have been replaced by freshman Sarah Lim (#1) and junior Ananya Seth (#6).

Lim is a valuable addition, as Gragnola expects the freshman will "be a top ten player in the league this year." Lim regularly competes in tournaments and is a prolific player who shot up to the number one starting position during tryouts.

Looking toward the team's next game away against Aragon on Sep. 17, Badani said the team wants to work on their offense and defensive scheme, making blocks, not drawing penalties and limiting errors.

"I'm happy that we all get to be together for the second time this year after February's season," she said. "I think we're definitely more bonded as a team."

Lin said that the team's main goal this year is to beat Los Gatos. The two teams have

a running rivalry, and Gragnola makes it a regular point that defeating Los Gatos is an important goal. Most of the other matches will prove to be a challenge for the newer members of the travel team. Palo Alto and Lynbrook are elite teams that will probably win against Saratoga this year. This year is a "rebuilding year," during which many newer players will develop their game, Gragnola said.

"Beating Los Gatos is the one thing we absolutely have to do," Lin said. "Most of the travel team is relatively new, and that's going to be troublesome for at least the first few matches."

As a senior, Lin is looking forward to team bonding events much more than actual matches.

"I'm happy that we all get to be together for the second time this year after February's season."

SENIOR Savannah Lin

"All of my teammates from freshman year have graduated, so it's just me now. But I'm most excited for the team-bonding, because seniors get to plan most of it," she said. "Things like Secret Buddies and senior banquet are really the highlights. I've played with the team for four years and I'm very lucky to have done so." ♦

Lin

Table tennis star qualifies for U-17 national team

by Preston Fu
& Allen Luo

Crack.

Senior Henrik Zhang arced the small white ball across the table, whizzing past the net by mere millimeters. He shouted triumphantly as his opponent returned the shot too wide, ripping the ball just past the edge of the table and concluding a hard-fought 23-ball rally.

"Objectively, I've been pretty bad for most of my career until a few years ago," Zhang said. "In my first tournament, I played pretty badly and probably got eliminated in the first round."

Rather than getting discouraged by such performances, Zhang instead learned to use these failures as an opportunity to analyze and focus on areas of improvement. He dedicated himself to chasing higher caliber players, especially Nikhil Kumar, a fellow student at STTC and 2020 Olympic table tennis team member.

"Even though my opponent and I were running around the table, ripping wide shots against each other, I wasn't even thinking about being tired," Zhang said. "I was just like, 'Yo, this is fun.'"

Zhang went on to win the match, ultimately finishing in 5th place with a 7-5 record and qualifying for the eight-member national U-17 team.

For Zhang, his main goal is to increase his playing speed as his table tennis experience has allowed him to develop a solid foundation in basic techniques. He attributed much of his success to his physical gameplay — footwork, strength and ball placement — which he developed through rigorous summer training regimens.

In 2018, Zhang trained for three weeks at a table tennis base in Hubei, China — a huge gym devoid of air conditioning, crammed with over 100 players around or above Zhang's skill level. Daily playtime often exceeded eight hours, with two to three hour breaks for lunch and dinner. Players adhered to a strict training schedule, consisting of running, footwork and fundamental drills. For example, tables were combined together so that players had to cover double the usual distance.

Zhang estimates he has placed in 100 events spanning 55 tournaments in his career, winning around \$5,000 in prize money. Although most of the tournaments he participates in are regional or local, Zhang has also traveled to places like Florida, Las Vegas, North Carolina and New York. He is currently ranked 68th in the nation among all males and 11th among those under 17.

Zhang's recent achievements have been a result of practicing table tennis consistently for almost nine years. He began playing when he was just 8 after his father, an avid recreational player,

pushed him to start playing the sport.

Initially, despite enjoying the sport and joining the Spartans Table Tennis Club (STTC) in Santa Clara, he lacked the motivation to compete in tournaments.

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snapshots



FALCON // SELINA CHEN



FALCON // ANDREW LIN



FALCON // MINA YEAP



TALISMAN // SAACHI JAIN

Seniors Bill Yuan and Aidan Costello practice stunts on Sept. 6 for their Quad Day performance. Homecoming will be on the week of Sept. 19, and the seniors will be performing on Friday.

Senior Kamakshi Shandilya promotes the Crafting Club stand during Club Rush on Sept. 2. Academic clubs made their pitches on the first day, while the second day was for cultural and service clubs.

Parent volunteers distribute hamburgers and hotdogs at lunch during an All-School Barbeque on Aug. 20.

The girls' cross country team runs during a meet on Sept. 7 at Lynbrook High School to kick off the competitive season.

A very cool trick to never have to smile for pictures

Christo-grapher



Chris Chen

I thought we had left behind introduction slides in 2020, but evidently not: I was surprised when the first assignment for two of my classes was to do an intro slide.

Easy points to pad my grade, right? Maybe it would have been, but as I scrolled through my camera roll, I realized that I had no (recent) photos of myself with my mask off — but honestly, I don't regret it.

Unless I'm eating, I've had my mask on in all of my photos, even if my parents or some other adult has asked me to take it off. It might seem a little silly, but it's mainly because my ability to smile for the camera might as well be non-existent.

But my amazing smile-dodging technique still has a couple flaws I've yet to work out. With a mask on and with my bangs acting as a natural eyepatch (though they poke

my eyes), whenever I neglect brushing my hair out of my eyes, there's practically none of my face visible. And with my slouch as well, I end up looking like an edgy little gremlin.

When some girls at summer camp forgot my name, they referred to me simply as "Emo." Definitely humiliating, but I probably deserved it. Even aside from the name calling, a noticeable drawback is that if everyone takes their masks off for a photo and I don't, I end up standing out even more — the opposite of what I intend.

There's also the slight issue of my solution being rather temporary. Maybe, eventually when COVID-19 ends — if it ends — I won't have masks to protect me anymore. (And, of course, if it doesn't, at least I'll have that as my silver lining).

So, maybe the moral of the story is that it's time for me to finally get a haircut and get some sunglasses instead to block my eyes from the terrible, blinding light of cameras and the horde of paparazzi following me around everywhere. But while it lasts, I'd prefer to hide behind my mask a little longer. ♦



Graphic by MINSUI TANG

Living as my older sister's doppelgänger

EVER SINCE I CAN REMEMBER, I'VE BEEN COMPARED TO AND MISTAKEN FOR HER

Knock knock, Hu's there?



Victoria Hu

When my 5th grade self went into the Saratoga library to find my older sister Dora, I found her with her friends. Her friends took a moment to observe my appearance, and then commented, "You guys look so similar!"

"No, we don't," we replied.

"Yeah, you do," they retorted. We facepalmed in unison.

People seem to universally agree that my sister and I, despite our 3-year difference, look extremely alike. It's understandable, considering our shared genetics, signature ponytails and black glasses.

Sometimes teachers will instantly recognize that we're related. Sometimes Dora's classmates ask her if she has a twin sister. Once, when I walked down a hallway, a stranger walked past and said "Hi, Dora!"

It doesn't help that I also share the same extracurricular activities with her. I wasn't forced into her footsteps — my interests in math, music and art just also

happen to be Dora's interests.

Nonetheless, it can be tiring to live in her shadow as her doppelgänger: Dora has handed me down clothes, parental expectations and even teachers who occasionally call me by the wrong name.

Since she has graduated, there is now only one of us on the SHS campus. However, if you run into us at some point in the future and cannot tell us apart, please help me avoid an identity crisis by using this simple, handy guide to differentiate between us.

People universally agree that my sister and I, despite our 3-year difference, look extremely alike.

#1: Check our height.

I'm taller. It's taken Dora a year to finally admit that she won't catch up.

#2: Compare our hair.

Her hair is mostly straight with slight ripples, while mine is wavier and bushier. Dora has nice radio wave hair, while my hair is more like gamma rays — and just as lethal when it comes to brushing out

tangles.

#3: Check for moles.

Dora has a number of conspicuous moles on her face, while I have none.

#4: Test our memory.

My sister has a great long-term memory, while I don't. She still remembers the polyatomic ions that she memorized three years ago for chemistry, whereas I forgot them a few days after taking the quiz. Since I have the memory of a blue tang fish, my family calls us Dora and Dory. Simply ask what we ate for breakfast two days ago.

But beyond these superficial differences, I am thoroughly my own separate person from her. I'm a bit more extroverted. I play piano and I dance. I can sketch still-lifes that are far more realistic than my parents' expectations ever will be. I can inhale novels along with the breakfasts that I forget about two days later.

Hopefully, this list I've compiled will help any well-meaning (but confused) people quickly distinguish between me and Dora in the future.

Though I will probably spend my first year on campus as "Dora's sister," I'm confident that my personality and individuality will allow me to step out of Dora's shadow and cement my own identity here. ♦

top ten

WAYS TO AVOID COVID-19

- 10 **Become an introvert.** Instead of contracting viruses in real life, use them to end humanity in Plague, Inc.
- 9 **Hold your breath.** You can't inhale any viruses if you're not breathing, right?
- 8 **Move to Alaska.** Maybe you might finally bump the population into the double digits.
- 7 **Stay away from 5G.** The faster download speeds will make you more susceptible to a COVID.exe installation.
- 6 **Build your 123Movies collection.** Going maskless in a theater is out of style.
- 5 **Cut off all your friends.** Ceasing interaction will ensure that you won't get any virus transmissions.
- 4 **Wear your mask.** A piece of cloth is more comfortable than plastic tubing in your nose.
- 3 **Report a runny nose.** Screener-19 will immediately send you back home.
- 2 **Ingest Ivermectin.** You'll also get rid of any parasites you may have contracted from horses.
- 1 **Get vaccinated.** Jokes aside, actually get the shot.

>> Preston Fu and Allen Luo