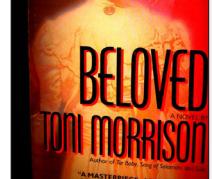




Dave Chappelle's comedy targets vulnerable communities.



Black students weigh classroom race discussions.



Local newspaper industry struggles to adapt.

# THE saratoga falcon

AN INDEPENDENT HIGH SCHOOL PUBLICATION



Friday, December 10, 2021

Saratoga High School

Saratoga, CA

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## Students and staff weigh in on potential bell schedules

BY Apurva Chakravarthy  
& Shaan Sridhar

During the district's board meeting's study session on Nov. 16, associate superintendent Carrie Bosco presented six bell schedules proposals for the school board to consider for second semester.

With consideration to the feedback from a district-wide survey sent to students, parents and staff, the five-member governing board chose schedule three drafts (A, C and F) as their favorites. The district will use the board's feedback to create a master schedule

they hope to announce and approve at the next board meeting on Dec. 14 at Los Gatos High School.

The first option (Draft A) features shortened 85-minute classes (as opposed to the current 90 minutes), 10-minute passing periods, 40-minute daily tutorials and consistent class times. It ends at 3:55 p.m. on Red Days, and 2:25 p.m. on Blue Days.

The second option (Draft C) 8-minute passing periods and inconsistent start times; there are daily tutorials that are 30 minutes on Red Days

**>> SCHEDULE** on pg. 3

## Omicron threatens travel plans

BY Selina Chen  
& Atrey Desai

When freshman Will Norwood lived in St. Albans, England, he saw his grandparents every week. He then moved to the U.S. in fourth grade and traveled back twice a year to visit them. Due to the pandemic, however, Norwood has not seen them for two years, so he was looking forward to flying back to England this winter break.

His family's plans are now veiled in uncertainty because of the emergence of the new Omicron



Norwood

variant.

The new strain of COVID-19, originating from South Africa, was first discovered in the U.S. on Dec. 1 in a San Francisco resident. A second case was discovered in Minnesota the next day in a traveler from New York City.

The threat of the variant prompted President Joe Biden to announce new strategies, such as requiring all incoming travelers to test for COVID-19 within 24 hours of departure, that are now impacting students.

**>> OMICRON** on pg. 3

## Two new COVID-19 cases prompt widespread testing

BY Selina Chen

Clutching bright pink call slips, students flocked to the health office on Dec. 3, following the school's second instance of discovering COVID-19 cases after its first record on Nov. 4.

On the night of Dec. 2, assistant principal Brian Thompson informed the staff that a student and an adult have tested positive for COVID-19, amounting to a total of five

cases — three adults, two students — thus far into the year at the school and 32 in the district, 75% of which were found at Los Gatos High School, according to the LG-SUHSD Dashboard.

The student's close contacts — seven staff members and about 150 students from their seven classes — were scheduled to take emergency PCR testing on Dec. 3 and a second time on Dec. 8. The adult had no close contacts on campus, Thompson said. ♦

## Trash taints blue bins

ZERO  
POUNDS  
RECYCLED IN  
SIX MONTHS

BY Christina Chang  
& Cici Xu

The school has not recycled any non-cardboard waste for the past six months due to waste, such as food scraps, contaminating recycling bins on campus, said maintenance supervisor Paul Weir.

"When the recycle bin is mixed with trash like food scraps, the whole bin becomes automatically unrecyclable," Weir said.

The school generates about 40,000 pounds of waste products per month, he said, and more than half can be recycled if not contaminated.

The waste ends up in the Guadalupe Landfill in San Jose.

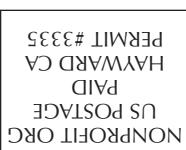
Students' habits are the determining factor of whether the school can revive its recycling program, Weir said. For instance, if stu-

dents avoid putting food in the bins, they will only contain recyclable items and be taken away for proper sorting.

According to Weir, there are 15 blue recycling bins around campus with posters instructing students about how and what to recycle: Recycle paper (newspapers, magazines and mixed paper — no napkins), cardboard (excluding lunch trays), glass bottles and jars (without liquid), rigid plastic products (plastic bottles without liquid) and metal containers (tin, aluminum and steel cans).

On Nov. 23, The Falcon randomly selected a sample of six out

**>> RECYCLING**  
on pg. 5



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## newsbriefs

### Clubs switch communications to Google Classroom

Google Classroom is replacing Facebook Messenger as the primary way for clubs to communicate.

The switch, senior club commissioners Grace Hsu and Nandini Desai said, was to have a system more similar to Canvas, the school's learning management program. Recently, ASB has had trouble receiving each club's monthly minutes, which results in clubs getting either one strike for turning them in late or two strikes for not turning in minutes at all. If a club gets three strikes, they can be cut entirely, Hsu said.

Because of the change in structure, club officers now receive notifications for every announcement or assignment created on Google Platform. The clubs commissioners use the platform to send reminders about minutes, how many meetings are required in a month and whether there are any breaks or holidays coming up.

Hsu believes that clubs weren't turning their minutes in because they were simply forgetting to do so. The Messenger chat only included club presidents; club secretaries are supposed to record the minutes, but their exclusion from the chat often led to miscommunication.

— Apurva Chakravarthy and Jason Cheng

### Outreach commission plans Speak up for Change

After the outreach commission was cut due to low interest last year, a new, unofficial commission has emerged to organize Speak Up for Change (SUFC), which will take place during the week of Jan. 24. The theme, "Stepping Forward," aims to break the stigma of mental health issues.

The previous commission was scrapped at the end of the 2020 school year because of a decrease in the number of applicants. This year, ASB decided to create an unofficial commission to take on SUFC and Red Ribbon Week. The new commission comprises a mix of class representatives and ASB officers. Thus far, commissioners have been working on gathering participants for SUFC and aim to have about six student and teacher speakers by January.

COVID-19 restrictions may require the event to take place outdoors, as opposed to the large gym where it has previously been held. According to junior commission member Allison Tan, the commission is exploring the possibility of moving the assembly to the lower field.

"We really want to make sure [that we] provide a safe space for everyone sharing their stories about mental health," Tan said.

— Atrey Desai and Avani Kongetira

### New principal's assistant eases into her new job

After Pola-Michelle Alas left her long-time position as principal's assistant on Oct. 25, Alison Montgomery took on the role as a change from her previous employment as the registrar for Silver Creek High School, where she worked for five years.

Her job as the principal's assistant requires her to be very involved in and knowledgeable about the school. Aside from organizing the requests for and assignments of substitutes, she also works with budgets and makes arrangements for graduation and other school events.

So far, the most challenging part of her job has been the increased number of deadlines and spontaneous requests, especially in regard to substitutes, Montgomery said. Often times, she will still be looking for substitutes 10 minutes before the beginning of class. Despite these challenges, Montgomery said she was able to ease her way into her job due to the school's respectful and friendly environment.

"The students here are wonderful; the ones that I've come in contact with are very polite," Montgomery said. "The staff has been very welcoming in every aspect, and have always invited me to go to lunch with them. It's been very pleasant."

— Nidhi Mathihalli

### picturethis



FALCON // SANJOLI GUPTA

**Formal Week | Sophomore Shane Timmons rushes to cover his teammate with shaving foam in a game during the festive Dec. 2 winter rally, as members of the ASB rally commission cheer on the participants.**

## Retirement community residents push back against construction proposals

BY SaraBright  
& CarolynWang

"Do you see those two trees there?" Tsing Bardin, a resident of the Saratoga Retirement Community (SRC), a senior home near West Valley College, asked as she pointed at a pair of old growth redwoods. "No more."

Shaking her head in disappointment, she turned toward a cluster of large palm and oak trees that line the front of the SRC's iconic grand, white manor.

"Gone," she said.

In order to increase the housing available for local seniors and help satisfy the new state housing requirements, Pacific Retirement Services (PRS), a group based in Oregon and hired by the Saratoga Retirement Community (SRC) to manage the senior center, submitted a proposal in 2019 that would add three buildings to the campus, totaling 52 new independent living units.

Although the plan is still under review, it has garnered strong opposition from a majority of current senior residents and some neighbors who share concerns over the proposal's implementation and are advocating for an alternative plan.

The company has defended its approach by saying it is sound both economically and environmentally and the residents' plan would not work.

But that argument has not won over residents like 88-year-old Robert Berglund.

"One of the things you'll note about entering our campus is its open space, green grass, trees and the manor building," said Berglund, who has lived in Saratoga since 1969 and moved to the SRC in the beginning of 2015 with his wife. "We don't mind having additional independent living units. Our objection is we think we have a better place to put them. [The plan] would ruin the campus atmosphere."

The manor building Berglund mentioned is the senior center's Odd Fellows Home, a unique centerpiece of the campus. It was originally built in 1912 to house aging residents by the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, a non-political fraternity that does charity for people in need. The building is currently listed on the city's Historic Resources Inventory.

If the current proposal goes through, one of the new buildings would be constructed directly in front of the Odd Fellows Home, obscuring the view of the historical manor from passersby and replacing the entrance parking lot. The other two buildings would replace the campus's bocce ball courts in the Odd Fellows Historical Park and require the removal of over 60 mature trees, 45 of which are classified as "protected," according to a website created by residents to counter the plan.

SRC executive director Sarah Stel said that the current plan meets all the financial, environmental and functional criteria needed to move forward with the city's entitlement process.

Despite this, in a survey conducted by the SRC residential council, 60% of residents have concerns regarding the

proposal's disregard for the manor, recreation area and trees.

Opposition to the plan is not only limited to seniors living in the retirement home.

"The manor building is likely the single most iconic structure in the city of Saratoga. To take a new building and build it directly in front of it is psychotic," said Jefferey Schwartz, a neighbor of the SRC, during a Nov. 16 Community Information meeting. "Suggesting that you can take down 100-year-old heritage trees and replace them with something of equal value is an insult to people's intelligence."

To counter the current plan, residents of the SRC, led specifically by a core group of seven individuals including Bardin and Berglund, have been advocating for a viable alternative in the past few years.

In their alternative plan, instead of constructing facilities in front of the manor and on the Historical Park, a larger building housing all 52 independent living units would replace the site's current Health Center. A new health-care center would then be built where PRS originally planned for its third new residential building, and the PRS's other two proposed buildings wouldn't be needed at all. Both plans result in the required 52 independent units. The difference is that the residents' plan would preserve the manor view, the Odd Fellows historical park and most of the trees, Bardin said.

The residents submitted their plan, which is currently under review, to the city in June and have continued to object to the current PRS plan. However, they feel as if they have been left unheard each time they have raised concerns.

"We think the management company has turned a deaf ear to our alternative plans and our thoughts," Berglund said.

Stel, the executive director, said the Preserve SRC counterproposal poses several challenges, the biggest being financial risk. Because it requires destroying the existing health care center before building new revenue-generating residences, the plan could be financially disastrous if market conditions shift.

In response to wildlife concerns, Stel said their plan fit the city's requirements and would plant 240 new trees to replace the 124 trees that would be removed.

Bardin countered that, saying how although the number would increase, the new trees would not compare to the magnitude of the older trees.

To raise awareness about the topic, senior residents have walked door to door in the surrounding streets to garner support from Saratoga residents. They also plan to post notices on Nextdoor, follow up with neighbors who strongly support the alternative plan, continue hosting Zoom meetings urging residents to write letters to the city and provide input during a 30-day public scoping period between November and Dec. 22 for the plan's Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

"We value the quality of life on our campus and we don't want it to be ruined," Berglund said. "That's what it comes down to." ♦



# Visitor policy reinforced due to trespassers

BY Lena Aribi  
& Meher Bhatnagar

On Nov. 22, principal Greg Louie sent an email informing the school that an individual had trespassed onto campus at around 8:50 a.m. He followed up later that day with an email stating that a second individual had come onto campus that same day without permission during third period at around 10:25 a.m.

Since then, administrators have been discussing further actions to ensure visitor policies are reinforced in order to keep the campus safe.

The first trespasser was a Class of 2012 alumna who was asked by the supervisor to leave the campus, as she had failed to check in as a visitor at the main office. The individual ignored the request and re-entered campus. She was seen walking in and out of classrooms by multiple teachers, dropping off items including an “inappropriate book” in social studies teacher Todd Dwyer’s room, according to Dwyer, and an “X-ACTO knife,” according to Louie.

Because the individual failed to leave, administrators were alerted immediately and confronted the alumna, who attempted to run away. The sheriffs were called and detained the individual, who then cooperated and was cited for trespassing, Louie wrote.

The second trespasser was a Class of 2020 Redwood Middle School alumnus who doesn’t attend the school. He arrived on campus when the first passing began, tagging along to his friend’s third-period class in media arts and photography teacher Alex Hemmerich’s room.

The student told The Falcon in an interview that he knew visitor sign-ins were required, but he just wanted to see his friends on campus.

Because he is still a minor, the administration had a discussion with his parents, who all agreed that he had created a suspicious circumstance.

After the incidents, the administration and the board discussed the possibility of putting up fencing around campus to prevent situations like these from occurring again, assistant principal Matt Torrens said. Most schools in the area have fencing, but no action has been taken to change SHS’s open campus. The cost of adding fencing would be high, Torrens said.

Fencing might also create other problems. Last year, for instance, a garbage truck caught on fire and dumped its burning contents onto the school’s back parking lot because the driver could not exit from a locked gate. After the fire, Louie said the gates should always be left open during school hours.

Assistant principal Brian Thompson has taken these concerns into consideration and is working on the school’s Safety Plan, which he will soon present to the School Site Council.

For the Nov. 22 incidents, both trespassers were cited from the sheriff’s office and suspended from entering campus for the next 12 months — including after-school hours.

After these incidents, all custodians and maintenance crews are now helping to monitor the campus, reporting back to the office if anything suspicious occurs. Just today, custodians noticed two unidentifiable people.

“Rules are stricter now more than ever,” Torrens said. “We have ensured that this incident will be talked about at faculty meetings in the future.” ♦

## SCHEDULE

*continued from pg. 1*

It ends at 3:55 p.m. on Red Days, and 2:31 p.m. on Blue Days.

The last option (Draft F) features 90-minute classes, 5-minute passing periods and inconsistent class start times; daily tutorials are 25 minutes on Red Days and 45 minutes on Blue Days. It ends at 2:20 p.m. or 3:55 p.m. with a 7th on Red Days and 2:45 p.m. on Blue Days.

However, even if a particular schedule is approved, any bell schedule that extends the end of the school day past 3:45 p.m. will require approval of the District Teachers Association (DTA), which is currently engaged in negotiations with the district over teacher compensation.

DTA approval is not guaranteed, and it’s possible there could be no schedule change at the semester. DTA president Amy Obenour declined to comment about the situation.

### Many students want to return to pre-pandemic 2019-2020 schedule

Because many students here have 7th periods, a change to the end of the day would affect them.

Junior Nathan Lim is taking seven classes, so a 3:55 p.m. ending time would make juggling school and extracurriculars more difficult, he said.

“I don’t want [my class] to interfere with going to practice or [force me] to ditch class for a soccer game,” Lim said. “The earlier school can end, the better.”

While he occasionally uses his tutorial time to catch up on homework or talk to his teachers, he said a daily tutorial is not high on his priority list for a new bell schedule. Lim mostly uses his tutorials as a break between classes, so he would rather keep tutorials every other day than change to a schedule that has daily tutorials with a later end time.

Senior Kaylie Wong prefers a new bell schedule that offers daily tutorials.

“I can see why it would be hard for people with a seventh period, but given how much I personally benefit from tutorials, I think it’s necessary to have them every day,” Wong said.



Ritchie

More than anything, Wong prefers having a schedule that has consistent break, lunch and class start times.

She said having her last period of the day end at different times has been difficult to keep track of, despite it being months into the school year.

Both Lim and Wong said they prefer the pre-pandemic 2019-2020 school year’s bell schedule in which school started at 8:15 a.m., ended no later than 3:45 p.m. and had a daily tutorial.

But this schedule poses issues due to a new California law starting in the 2022-2023 school year that requires all public high schools to start no earlier than 8:30 a.m.

If the school returned to the pre-pandemic bell schedule, a new bell schedule would need to be created for next year.

### Teachers support adding daily tutorials, oppose extended workday

English 11 teacher Natasha Ritchie, a member of the first bell schedule committee that was created five years ago, has been disappointed with the handling of the district’s discussions.

For one, she believes that the school’s leadership committee would have liked to be able to voice students and teachers’ consensus that they were — and still aren’t — willing for school to go beyond 3:45 p.m., she said.

“We’ve [already] done this process,” Ritchie said. “So I’m distressed that we’re once again talking about pushing it beyond that.”

Ritchie said she would not support any schedule that went past 3:45 p.m.

She expects the DTA to shoot down any later schedule, especially given the ongoing teacher compensation negotiations that make it unfair and “bad timing” to ask teachers to extend their work days.

Apart from the ending time, she prioritizes daily tutorials, even if that means having 85-minute class periods.

While she was initially open to the idea of having a tutorial every other day, she’s since recognized how challenging it is to not be able to communicate with students on a daily basis.

“Especially with the addition of adviso-

ry lessons, I find it to be just like a carnival, trying to figure out how to see everyone and help everyone,” Ritchie said.

However, she said she likes the 15-minute break after tutorial; in previous schedules, helping students during tutorials meant that teachers didn’t get a substantial break between classes.

Ritchie also made it clear that she would not be supportive of the addition of weekly advisories, an idea floated by the board should daily tutorials be implemented.

**“Especially with the addition of advisory lessons, I find it to be a carnival, trying to figure out how to see everyone and help everyone.”**

ENGLISH TEACHER Natasha Ritchie

“I think that would be absurd. It was always my recommendation that we have one advisory per month, and we do it really well,” she said. “We need to just be really, super thoughtful about advisory. Do a few well.”

Another controversial issue for the board is consistency between the two schools: The 10-minute passing periods, while essential to the larger campus of Los Gatos High School, have been found by many students to cause unnecessary dead time at Saratoga High.

Ritchie believes that because of how different the two schools are, the schedules don’t need to be the same.

“I’ve always been a proponent of [different schedules between campuses],” Ritchie said. “I get that because of rolling block, we should have comparable schedules, but I don’t think the exact minutes need to be the same.”

As Ritchie and others wait for the district’s decision on the new bell schedule, she hopes they will listen to the priorities expressed by teachers and students.

“Engage all stakeholders,” she said. “Don’t make decisions based on what they personally think is best.” ♦

## OMICRON

*continued from pg. 1*

“We can leave the country, but because I’m not a U.S. citizen, I might not be able to come back into the country if I leave,” Norwood said. “Our plan is still very much up in the air. The restrictions could change at any point, so it’s difficult to make a solid decision.”

Once Omicron was discovered, Norwood’s family realized they may not be able to visit their relatives for the holidays. He said that the UK, which is among the list of countries that has discovered Omicron within its borders, has just introduced rules stating that travelers must get PCR testing and quarantine for two days while they await the results, impacting Norwood’s plans because there is only two weeks of winter break.

Another student who plans on traveling during break is senior Ben Bray, who will be driving to Whistler, Canada, with his friends to ski for six days.

The group will need to fill out a lot of pa-

perwork and get tested before getting to the border, he said, so they are preparing early. He has been frequently searching up travel restrictions online and looking at Canada’s government websites for updates on stopping border crossings.

“We’re hoping for the best, but we’re bracing for the possibility that we might get stuck [at the border] and we’ll figure out what happens,” he said.

Bray said along with the majority of the school, his friends have always been cautious, wearing masks and getting vaccinated to stay as safe as they can.

### The World Health Organization and the U.S. expect it to spread just like any other variant.

“If we can do a good job controlling [Omicron] quickly, then we won’t have more restrictions, but even if we do, we’ve

gotten used to that,” he said.

For Norwood’s part, he doesn’t think that at this point in time, there’s a solid answer on how dangerous Omicron is. The World Health Organization and the U.S. expect it to spread just like any other variant, but scientists are rushing to figure out how dangerous it is and whether it evades vaccines.

Locally, Norwood is concerned that the close proximity of the San Francisco Omicron case might have drastic implications for the school.

He said that the situation is “very scary,” but that the last thing students want to happen is to go back online.

The most important thing people can do in face of more variants is to get vaccinated, he added.

“It makes me sad and angry that someone wouldn’t get vaccinated,” he said. “I can understand that people are scared, but you got to take a chance sometimes, especially when risks are outweighed by the benefits. Omicron is worrying. I’d like to see my family after two years, but [if I can’t] I think I’ll struggle a bit more next semester both emotionally and mentally.” ♦



Graphic by LIHI SHOSHANI

# Quiz Bowl teams succeed at Cal Cup 1 Tournament

BY JonnyLuo  
& NikhilMathihalli

Saratoga's top Quiz Bowl team has qualified for next spring's High School National Championship Tournament (HSNCT) as the result of a second-place finish at the Cal Cup 1 on Nov. 13.

Quiz Bowl sent three teams to compete in the tournament. Members were assigned to the competitive, standard and novice teams based on prior experience and skill level.

Senior Aahaan Singh, a member of the competitive team along with senior Sidd Kamannavar and juniors Nithya Krishna, Nilay Mishra and Anthony Wang, said the team is happy to focus its goals on doing well at the HSNCT on May 27-29.

"We did better than we expected," said Singh. "NorCal Quiz Bowl teams are known to be strong, so to get second and qualify for Championships is a big win." Singh thinks it's realistic to entertain the idea of a top-10 finish at HSNCT.

Preceding Cal Cup 1 was the annual California Fall HS Novice Tournament, held on Oct. 30.

The club sent two novice teams to compete, with both tying for seventh out of 22 competing teams.

The A team was composed of sophomores Jonny Luo, Parav Manney, Nikhil Mathihalli and Aiden Ye; the B team was composed of freshmen Akshat Bora, Darren Guo, Shaan Janardhan and Agastya Vittaldevara.

Members from both teams started preparing in late August, holding weekly online practices on Saturday afternoons through Discord. In addition, Quiz Bowl began holding in-person Friday lunch meetings in early November.

**"I was actually surprised with how well we did during the competition, especially because we're all freshmen."**

FRESHMAN Shaan Janardhan

Janardhan, a member of the B team, said he was happy with his individual and team's performance during the competition.

"I was actually really surprised with how well we did during the competition, especially because we're all freshmen," Janardhan said.

"The competition took most of the day, and it was really tiring and tested my mental stamina. But, in the end, it was really rewarding for me."

Quiz Bowl treasurer sophomore Simarya Ahuja, the novice team coach, was surprised by the results of both the teams.

Quiz Bowl hopes to continue their success at Cal Cup 2, their next biggest tournament, on Dec. 18. "I can see a lot of potential in these novices," Ahuja said. "I think they will do really well in the future." ♦

# Robotics holds in-house match

## TEAM WINS SPOT IN A QUALIFIER TOURNAMENT

BY AlexanderKan  
& AllenLuo

A crackling trumpet sound effect blared from a laptop in the corner of the robotics room to alert students of the countdown. On a 12 by 12 foot tiled arena, two small robots started moving autonomously, whirling around the field and scurrying to complete various tasks for points.

The Mechanical Science and Engineering Team (MSET) Robotics Club held an in-house scrimmage on Nov. 14 for their FIRST Tech Challenge (FTC) program to determine which team would host the upcoming Saratoga Qualifier, an annual tournament put on by the club for local teams.

The scrimmage consisted of three matches between two 15-member teams, Bettafish and Jellyfish, with the Bettafish team winning 3-0. Both teams had been preparing since Sept. 18, the start of the season, for this event. The winner would have priority in competing at regional qualifier tournaments, so another team, the Cuttlefish, did not participate as they had already secured a spot.

"It was pretty good to see the culmination of all our building and programming," sophomore Bettafish team captain Mai-threyi Bharathi said.

Bharathi cited her team drivers' practice as a factor in their outstanding performance. Because they had finished their robot a week beforehand, they had ample time for sophomore drivers Rishab Melkote and Jarrett Singh to familiarize themselves with the controls and learn how to commu-

nicate with each other, she said.

For senior Jellyfish team captain Daniel Jiang, the lack of driver practice was one of the main reasons their performance during the scrimmage suffered.

"In general, we needed more time practicing driving a fully functioning robot," Jiang said. "It was apparent during the matches that we didn't get enough. The communication and synergy between the drivers just weren't there."

For both teams, the scrimmage presented a good opportunity to set goals after watching the robot in action. Bharathi said that throughout the scrimmage she found several technical improvements her team could make to their robot, such as increasing the speed of their lift and efficiency of their intake, as well as paying more attention to decrease the amount of minute errors.

On the other hand, Jiang said he wanted to focus more on organization and management of his team instead of just the robot's design. For example, a major issue during the Jellyfish matches was having to restart the robot because of differing configurations in the software that stemmed from a lack of coordination between members, according to Jiang.

"The robot worked mostly how we wanted it to during the scrimmage, but our organization and driving wasn't up to par," Jiang said. "Looking forward, those are definitely the things I want the team to focus on. Having the team go through it really helped us narrow things we wanted to focus on throughout the season." ♦

# Senior becomes finalist in science conference

## RIYA GUPTA'S RESEARCH FOCUSES ON CONTRASTS BETWEEN AUTOIMMUNE, INFECTIOUS CONDITIONS

BY SerenaLi  
& DanielWu

Over the summer of 2020, senior Riya Gupta attended Stanford's Clinical Summer Internship (CSI) program, where she listened to various keynotes led by the most renowned names in the medicinal field.

Gupta was intrigued by a particular lecture regarding autoimmune and infectious diseases presented by a Stanford professor named Dr. PJ Utz. Gupta rapidly jotted down notes and pondered how she could formulate a gene signature, a unique genetic pattern to certain conditions, to streamline the process of identifying disorders.

Afterwards, Gupta studied Utz's work and stumbled upon the Khatri lab directed by another Stanford professor, Dr. Purvesh Khatri. Gupta later applied to intern for

Khatri in August of 2020.

Beginning work that fall, she was soon doing hands-on lab work and helping the scientists.

The work led her to do a project that enabled her to become one of finalists in the virtual version at the 2021 International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF).

During her initial research, Gupta was particularly impressed by one of Khatri Lab's ongoing projects, "Healthy Immune Response Project," which aims to delineate the differences between healthy and diseased immune systems through the analysis of patient data on 23 disease groups.

Gupta was tasked with analyzing the data to find similarities beneficial for further research. Through the process, Gupta promptly noticed similarities between autoimmune and infectious diseases.

Over the course of the project, Gupta struggled with the right approach to take: statistical models or machine learning models.

"At first, I tried running multiple machine learning algorithms, but they all yielded inaccurate results, so I looked toward statistical models," Gupta said.

She found that statistical models produced more accurate results because they allowed for less variability and were better suited for finding data points deviating from the norm, compared to machine learning models that attempted to find patterns between the data points.

Following the gathering and analysis of the data, Gupta formulated gene signatures, which are useful in prognostic and diagnostic procedures.

Additionally, Gupta said she especially

enjoyed the researching process, as she was able to work with experienced mentors such as Aditya Rao, a current graduate student in Stanford's immunology program who helped guide Gupta along the way.

Gupta competed at Synopsys in March, a regional science and engineering fair, and won the grand prize for biology. In a pool of over 900 contestants, Gupta placed within the top 15 and qualified for the ISEF.

After four rigorous rounds of judging, Gupta made it into the finalist category. Looking ahead, Gupta hopes to continue her research as she heads to college and future career paths.

"Despite the fair being, sadly, online, I was able to connect to the brightest minds from around the world and tap into the knowledge from their personal projects," she said. ♦

# Service clubs spread musical joy during the holiday season

## Leo Club

Since 2018, Leo Club has organized an annual "Thankful Hearts" holiday concert at the Villas At Saratoga senior center. The event has been successful with over 20 members signing up to perform annually.

Even though the event is music-centered, Leo Club is open to accept any type of talent; in past years, they've had martial arts acts and magic shows. This year, Thankful Hearts took place on Nov. 28.

For Leo Club, the Thankful Hearts concert was a great opportunity to show their gratitude to the seniors by making their Thanksgiving a little more festive. Chen, who started this event, played the Guzheng, a traditional Chinese harp that many of the Chinese-American seniors recognized from earlier times. "Seeing their faces when they listen to my music brings back memories of our shared homeland; it's really emotional for me," Chen said.



Chen

## Singing for Smiles

Singing for Smiles — a non-profit organization senior Naisha Agarwal founded in 2020 — hopes to perform in person at the Villa at Saratoga senior center on Dec. 21 to "spread happiness to the people who need it most through singing." With COVID-19 restrictions loosening, they hope to end the year with an in-person concert.

"It has been great seeing everyone finally in person," Agarwal said. "We are reaching out to places where we've previously held Zoom performances and coordinating with them to see if we can do something in-person."

However, scheduling these events has proven more difficult than initially anticipated. "We're still waiting for people to get more comfortable with the idea of performing in person," Agarwal said. "Most still prefer Zoom, but hopefully we can have some live performances this year."



Agarwal

## Tri-M

The school's Tri-M Club, a chapter of the Tri-M Music Honor Society, provides jazz and classical music for the Bay Area community.

Their first live performance of the year is on Dec. 20 at the Sunny View Retirement Community in Cupertino.

Because of COVID-19 restrictions, there are limited performance slots, according to senior Tri-M vice president Marcus Kuo.

"Since many performance opportunities were canceled because of the pandemic, I think people appreciate that we're able to play music for a live audience again," Kuo said. In addition to spreading cheer to the senior communities, Tri-M also hosted an on-campus concert for all students and staff during the PTSO lunch for faculty on Dec. 3. ♦



Kuo

— Mitchell Chen and Jonathan Li

# Nationwide substitute shortage affects school

BY Nidhi Mathihalli

On the morning of Sept. 4, assistant principal Matt Torrens found himself hustling to Social Studies teacher Todd Dwyer's 2nd-period World Geography classroom. Twenty minutes earlier, he learned he would be needed as an emergency substitute teacher for this class.

In his more than 20 years at the school as both a teacher and administrator, Torrens has never seen such a shortage of substitutes, and he and other staff members are having to fill in when the regular classroom teacher isn't able to come to class because of sickness or other reasons.

**"Due to COVID, many schools across the country are experiencing a lack of available substitutes."**

ADMINISTRATOR Matt Torrens

"This is mainly because they don't want to go into a school with thousands of kids that they don't know," Torrens said.

If the school can't find a substitute, the administration will attempt to ask other teachers within the department to fill the role as they are familiar with material. If they fail to find a department sub, the next best bet is another teacher on campus who is free during the period. Administrators and other staffers are the third line of defense and sometimes have to step in and try their best to follow the teachers' lesson plans.

"The problem is not our teachers, because the teachers are very organized and very well planned," Torrens said. "If they

know they're going to miss their class, they make sure to write the instructions, which are usually amazing. The problem is we just don't have a pool of people we can call."

In order to combat the problem, Torrens and the administration have been looking at options to increase their access to substitutes.

One possible solution, according to Torrens, is to attract substitutes with a higher salary rate, which the district is actively working on. Until recently, the Los Gatos Saratoga Union High School District (LG-SUHSD) paid \$175 per three block period day. This was less than Fremont Union (\$200), Campbell (\$210 during the pandemic), Los Altos-Mountain View (\$180) per day and Palo Alto (\$185). However, the district has recently increased this value to \$210 per day.

"Per day, that's not a lot of money, so we're pretty competitive," Torrens said. "However, our district has seen that we need to increase our competitiveness, so they're going to put a proposal together to try to raise our sub salary."

The district is also reaching out to retirees to see if they would be able to. These retired teachers are sometimes open to substituting these classes, many of which they have taught before. According to Torrens, the district is paying the retirees a higher rate; it is a better alternative to usual subs because they know the campus, the software and the curriculum of many classes.

An alternate idea the district is looking into is hiring a permanent roving substitute. This person would be available to sub on campus on a daily basis.

"We are still looking for ways to get a bigger pool of substitutes," Torrens said. "Right now, there is a higher chance than usual that a teacher won't be able to find a substitute, and we are hoping to reduce that as soon as possible." ♦

# District buys new furniture



FALCON // DANIEL WU

Students in Seema Patel's Statistics class work in pod arrangements using new furniture.

BY Alexander Kan  
& Daniel Wu

Jason Friend's class, described the environment as "innovative and welcoming." Haque said that the newer furniture has allowed him and his peers to be more productive and focused.

"My favorite aspect would be that the chairs are detached. It's such a simple change yet makes a huge difference," he said. "Moving around in chairs is much more efficient than bringing an entire desk along with you."

**"Comfortable chairs make a big difference when it comes to focus and productivity."**

SENIOR Ayaan Haque

With the benefits of collaborative furniture proven, many teachers want to upgrade aging desks and chairs for the new furniture. MAP and English 10 teacher Marcus Cortez has requested to upgrade his furniture to the new modular system but is still on the waitlist.

His classroom currently has the older two-seater desks, which he said occupies too much space and doesn't allow for efficient classroom arrangements.

"Collaborating effectively is tremendously valuable both in terms of education as well as preparing for post-school and work environments," Cortez said.

His teaching style aims to incorporate group work as much as possible, exposing students to different peers and challenges through the means of activities such as Socratic Seminars and debates.

"Tables are a way for students to bounce ideas off each other and display different views because once they go into the 'real world,' that's going to be an expectation," Cortez said. ♦



## RECYCLING

continued from pg. 1

of the 15 bins on campus. When reporters dug through and examined the contents, they discovered that all six bins were contaminated with non-recyclable materials.

One bin, located in front of Room 602, contained one tray of grease, three batteries, one rock-hard pizza, two greasy plastic wraps and two plastic bottles containing liquid. In the second, located in front of the office, two juice bottles with unfinished liquid, one chocolate-tainted Starbucks cup, one greasy plate and one greasy tin foil were found.

Other recycling bins were fouled by a greasy sandwich, unfinished Cheez-Its, chocolates and other food items and drinks.

To combat the problem, a school-wide campaign, Green School, is being planned by the School Site Council.

This developed after junior class vice president Ishir Lakhani presented a draft of green initiatives devised by senior Green

Team president Cici Xu to the council on Nov. 18.

"We have to promote things like recycling around the classroom and around campus, while trying to minimize waste as well."

**"[Green initiatives] are something we've been trying to push."**

JUNIOR Ishir Lakhani

To measure progress, the maintenance staff will weigh correctly sorted recyclable trash every week to track the school's recycling success.

"Guadalupe Landfill only has a limited space to store trash," Weir said. "The Earth only has a limited capability to process methane gas pollution from landfill. What will Guadalupe Landfill do when they can handle and bury no more trash? We need to find a new landfill somewhere, but where's that space going to be?" ♦

## Panel offers student perspectives

BY Brian Sheen

During the 2020-21 school year, principal Greg Louie created the Principal Student Advisory Panel to help him grasp student perspectives on topics such as school climate and the logistics of being in-person or staying home.

This year, an expanded panel includes six students from each grade level — some new, others returning — who meet in the campus community room once a month during lunch. Along with Louie, Chair Lisa Fung and Vice Chair Shaan Sridhar guide meetings to create a dialogue between students and the administration.

In addition to Fung and Sridhar, the panel includes freshmen Nathan Lee, Timothy Leung, Liliana Liu, Aneri Shah, Anthony Shen and Kathy Wang; sophomores Simarya Ahuja, Zeyneb Kaya, Cameron Nguyen, Vidur Sanghi, Varun Sreedhara and Aidan Ye; juniors Samika Agarwal,

Lucas Dennis, Channie Hong and Kayla Steele; and seniors Benjamin Bray, Macey Hartmann, Caroline Keogh, Marcus Kuo, Pooja Manapat and Anouk Yeh.

"The panel is very much a conversation," Leung said. "There is a lot of back and forth and student-led presentations."

So far, the panel has discussed the debate over aligning classes and policies between SHS and Los Gatos, the new bell schedule and academic integrity. Additionally, the panel reviewed the school theme of "TOGA-ther We Can," with Leung and Manapat creating artwork for the logo.

Louie said the panel is a place for both immediate feedback and concerns that need to be followed up on, such as about advisories taking away tutorial times.

Applications to be on the Principal Student Advisory Panel were opened through a Google Form starting last spring. The form asked students to explain why

they were applying, what campus groups they represented and how they could contribute to the panel. As such, many panel members are students who participate in multiple school activities.

"I wanted to see more of what went behind running the school and Mr. Louie's and the school's processes for making policy decisions," Kuo said. "I felt I could provide valuable input on the student perspective from my involvement in orchestra, athletics and various clubs."

Members of the Principal Student Advisory panel hope to ensure student voices are heard in order to ensure better school policies.

"I wanted to be on the Principal Student Advisory panel to help make positive change to Saratoga High School," Hartmann said. "And that's by discussing important topics with representatives from different grades, who all bring in various viewpoints." ♦

# Past Editors-in-Chief transition from online to college campus

ROHAN KUMAR DISCUSSES ACADEMIC RIGOR, TIME MANAGEMENT

By Christina Chang  
& Arnav Swamy

As an electrical engineering and computer science (EECS) major, Kumar scrolled in awe through the UC Berkeley website during course shopping season.

"There are so many classes — I spent two days just trying to decide which classes I might take," Kumar said. "I think I'm probably not even going to be done with all the interesting classes by the time I'm a senior."

Of the five classes Kumar is taking, two are fully online; two are in a hybrid model with online lectures and in-person discussions and labs; and one is fully in-person.

Kumar said that while he likes how in-person classes force him to attend lectures, pay attention and allow him to ask questions, he prefers online lectures for their flexibility, especially when he is tight on time.

In terms of grading policies, he's found that professors teaching courses covering basic foundational concepts often grade harder, while those covering more specific, complicated topics have graded more leniently, as students would not take those classes if they lacked a genuine interest in it.

**"There are so many classes — I spent two days just trying to decide which classes I might take."**

ALUMNUS Rohan Kumar

Kumar added that the biggest challenges he's faced in college thus far are midterms. While he was able to cram for high school exams, he's had to study more for college midterms that have proven to be much more difficult with heavier grade weightage.

Although Kumar still uses Google Spreadsheets to track his schedule as he did in high school, he has also begun using Google Calendar, which he said has become a necessity for college life.

"[In college] your classes are at completely random times, and they could be interspersed throughout the day. So you'd go there, you'd come back home, then go out later for a different class," Kumar said.

"So, I have a calendar full of everything I need to go to and all my meetings. I didn't need that in high school, but now in college you really need a calendar to stay on top of things."

In terms of coursework, he typically completes each week's homework over the weekend, giving him more free time to explore his interests outside of class curriculums.

Kumar created a folder on his browser bookmark bar with a collection of website and textbook links, and he goes through them to "just watch a couple of videos or read a little bit" whenever he's bored.

Within more free time in college, Kumar has chosen to focus on learning more about the subjects that interest

him. He even decided to say goodbye to his Cararra fans on the YouTube channel he made in high school, as his college activities have taken priority.

Regarding his social life, Kumar said he doesn't go to any of the school-organized events. Instead, he often goes to his friends' dorms to hang out and pursue activities like hiking and rock climbing.

Kumar lives in an apartment with his older brother, Class of 2018 alumnus Rahul Kumar. Through his brother, he's forged new friendships. He's also kept in touch with many friends from high school and alumni who are now attending Berkeley, like Class of 2021 alumnus Oliver Ye and his friends.

Reflecting on his high school experiences, he said the competitive environment at SHS prepared him well for college academically. He described that he "went from a Saratoga environment to another Saratoga environment," as both

schools stress academic rigor.

"In general, it was really good to have that competitive nature," Kumar said. "I know not many people will agree with me, but I think going to Berkeley doing EECS, the [Berkeley environment] is simply a step up competitively from SHS. It's nothing new."

However, Kumar acknowledged that the competitive environment at SHS pressured him to "do a ton of clubs and just get involved in as much stuff as possible." By his senior year of high school, Kumar held an officer position for five SHS clubs, was a president for Science Bowl and Redwood Middle School's math club as well as being a top editor for The Falcon.

In college, he said, extracurriculars are not as important as they were in high school. He is currently in Synthetic Bio Club, a com-

puter science mentor for his peers

and an academic intern.

"I think it's good that I didn't get involved in too many extracurriculars; that's a mistake I made in high school," Kumar said. "Now that I'm in college, I'm going to be a bit more careful with which extracurricular I get myself into and just try to do stuff that I'm interested in."



KAITLYN TSAI ENCOUNTERS VAST ARRAY OF SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

2021 alumna Kaitlyn Tsai's mind raced as she sped to an AirBNB on the outskirts of Boston on a late October evening. She was headed to her first board retreat with Harvard's Asian American Women's Association (AAWA), where she would discuss Asian American identity on campus with fellow female Asian students.

"It was honestly incredible; I truly felt like I had found a home here. I had found people who are people and not just high-functioning robots," she said. Tsai is currently serving as AAWA's freshman delegate on the organization's Dialogue Committee, which hosts discussion events to engage the community in addressing issues affecting Asian American women at the school. Moving from the so-called Saratoga bubble to Harvard with people stemming from every academic corner and all over the world presented Tsai with a dizzying array of aca-

and clubs began to pick up and I was starting to get burned out. I had to realize that dropping some activities does not translate to me being a failure," Tsai said. She noted that at Harvard, impostor syndrome constantly pressures students to pursue activities that may not suit them. Tsai is working to create a balanced schedule by dropping activities that aren't meaningful to her.

"I'm learning to be kind to myself; placing my wellbeing first allows the rest of my activities and plans to fall into place," Tsai said. "Smart students challenge themselves but know their limits and allow themselves room to breathe."

As Tsai finishes her first semester, she said she gained a better grasp of what she wanted to spend her time on. She currently serves on AAWA, the Institute of Politics' Education Policy program (which is commissioned by Mental Health America to do research on mental health screenings this year), and works at Harvard's Lamont Library, among other activities. As a former editor of The Falcon, she hopes to continue to pursue her passion in journalism through landing a position on Harvard's student magazine, Fifteen Minutes.

Tsai has been working to put aside the cutthroat competitive mindset prevalent in SHS, and said that the competition at Harvard is far different than what she experienced here.

"At Harvard, everyone is extremely motivated and independent toward their own goals," Tsai said. "The notion of competition is much healthier here since everyone is charting down a different path, so you feel far more supported by your peers."

**"I'm hoping for college to teach me who I am as an individual."**

ALUMNA Kaitlyn Tsai

Although Harvard does not allow students to declare majors until their sophomore year, Tsai hopes to major in government and minor in psychology. The school's course policy for freshmen allows Tsai the time to fully scope what the college has in store for her.

"In freshman year, you're only allowed to take four classes, with each one being around 75 minutes long," she said. "We only meet a few times a week, so I suddenly had to manage so much time on my plate. Understanding how I want to partition it among everything I wanted to do was a new challenge." Tsai's classes are all in person, and she said she is fortunate to be able to finally attend school without relying on a screen.

"Physically sitting down in a lecture hall makes the material far more engaging than Zoom. Just being around faces instead of black squares with names on them makes me want to learn," Tsai said.

Tsai has chosen to participate in multiple extracurriculars with her newfound time. She found it particularly difficult to shake off the high school mentality to commit herself to every activity available.

One of the biggest challenges Tsai encountered when entering Harvard was experiencing burnout from overloading her schedule.

"In late September, classes

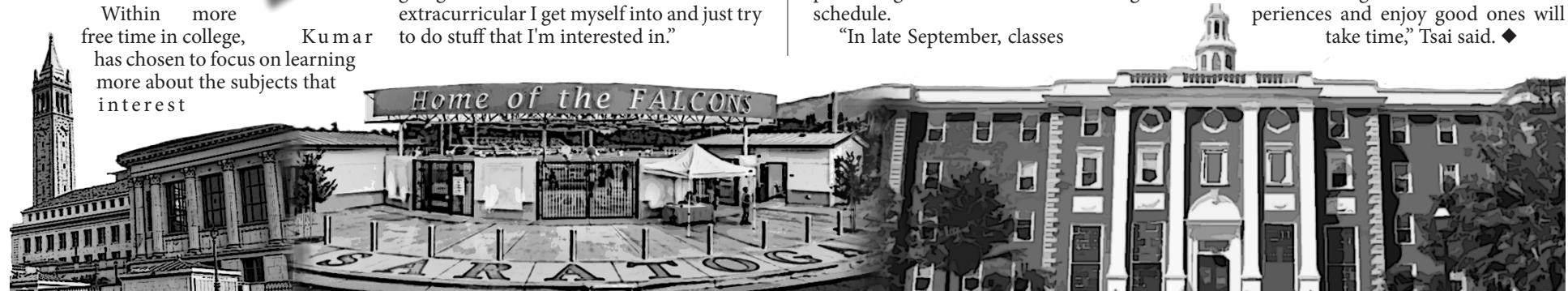
Though she is aiming to detach certain mindsets she learned in high school, Tsai is thankful for many of the skills she gained. For example, she has noticed the importance of English skills in her coursework and found that the English curriculum, especially English 11 Honors with Amy Keys has proven invaluable.

Tsai also feels that the rigor of SHS courses translated well to Harvard.

However, with the last 14 months of her high school years remote, Tsai believes that she has room to grow socially. She is careful to expand her social life slowly rather than diving headlong into such a new environment like college.

"I prefer sitting in the back and observing things and getting to know the moment. That's something that doesn't really just happen in two months of college," she said. Tsai is close with her roommates and has been venturing into clubs to expand a social circle based on common interests. Ultimately, she feels that it is best for her to operate relatively alone in the first phase of college.

"I'm hoping for college to teach me who I am as an individual. There's a learning curve both academically and socially and understanding how to hurdle bad experiences and enjoy good ones will take time," Tsai said. ♦



All graphics by JONNY LUO, NIKHIL MATHIHALLI and ARIEL ZHOU

## FOURTH PERIOD

## STAFF POLICY

The Saratoga Falcon is published 12 times per year by the Advanced Journalism classes of Saratoga High School, 20300 Herriman Ave., Saratoga, CA 95070. Views expressed in The Saratoga Falcon are those of the writers and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the administration, faculty or school district.

## MISSION STATEMENT

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

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The Saratoga Falcon welcomes all signed letters of opinion, which are subject to editing for length, accuracy and grammar. Please send them to [apurva.chakravarthy@saratogafalcon.org](mailto:apurva.chakravarthy@saratogafalcon.org) and [preston.fu@saratogafalcon.org](mailto:preston.fu@saratogafalcon.org). For ad information, phone (408) 867-3411, ext. 222.

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## opinion

## In this unusual year, let clubs use tutorials

Before the pandemic, students were free to meander through classrooms during 35-minute lunch periods — enough time for club members to participate in activities and finish eating. Club officers encouraged prospective members to join meetings through free pizza and snacks.

Now, under the COVID-19 indoor mask mandate, many clubs are struggling to survive.

After students wait in the lunch line, eat their lunch outside and rush to a classroom, only 15 minutes remain for the meeting. In academic clubs, this is barely enough time to go over a theory and a short demo or example; in many cultural/service clubs, it's only enough time for a short slideshow, video, discussion or game.

For club members, attending meetings means sacrificing a comfortable lunch. According to a survey of 15 presidents of a mix of both academic and cultural/service clubs, membership has dropped from a pre-pandemic average of 19 students to

the current 15.

Traditionally, underclassmen are eager to try a variety of clubs, while upperclassmen tend to narrow their focus to a few clubs, especially those they have a chance to lead. But this year, due to unfamiliarity with club culture in online learning, underclassmen make up only one-third of club membership. Several surveyed clubs have no underclassmen, which threatens the clubs' ability to survive in the next few years.

To solve the club crisis: Use the solution agreed upon by 87% of surveyed club presidents. Allow clubs to meet during the 40-minute non-advisory tutorials, with meetings included in the school's required instructional minutes.

This proposal would also seem to satisfy the requirements for California instructional minutes. According to the Los Angeles Unified School District, activities "under the immediate supervision of a properly credentialed teacher ... with their attendance recorded and reported as part of the daily program schedule" are considered instructional activity. Provided that club officers and teachers carefully keep track of tutorial attendance, club meetings during tutorial should qualify as legitimate instructional minutes.

The proposed tutorial club meetings would be able to last up to 40 minutes (or even 50 if they cut into the following break period), allowing clubs to organize far more meaningful meetings than pre-pandemic clubs could.

Longer meetings would enable more in-depth lectures and activities or the possibility of larger-scale projects, such as the Art Club's proposed mural. They would also facilitate greater participation in events during the school day, such as guest speakers, which tend to occur as after-school or weekend events



for clubs such as TEDx and Economics.

Club attendance is sufficient enough to warrant consideration under the school's instructional minutes requirements. From a poll of 96 students, more than three-fourths of students typically spend tutorials doing activities that don't require adult supervision, like homework or talking to friends. Surely, it's possible for both students and teachers to be available for club meetings during the 40-minute block.

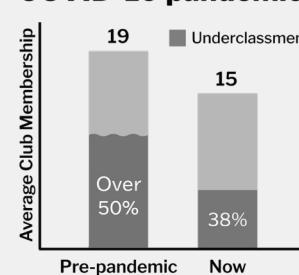
A possible concern is that some teachers are already busy during tutorial, and particularly chaotic days (e.g. shortly before a test) would not allow for club meetings. But during typical tutorials, when demand for teachers is relatively low, leaving their rooms open is fairly low-commitment. After all, in the current

system, many teachers check in briefly with officers but don't attend their lunch meetings.

Furthermore, tutorial meetings could also indirectly improve student and teacher engagement in club culture. Less than half of the student body are members of this year's student Facebook group, where the vast majority of club-related announcements are posted, compared to around three-fourths in 2018-19. Organizing tutorial meetings could potentially spark more interest, and teachers would also have a better sense of the status of their advised clubs through more regular attendance.

Clubs are crucial to the high school experience. One solution is to broaden the list of what activities can occur during tutorial and give clubs the chance to thrive again. ♦

## Club participation dropped 21% due to COVID-19 pandemic



**40% of surveyed clubs had difficulty finding an advisor this year**



Graphic by PRESTON FU

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The Saratoga Falcon staff voted 26-0 in favor of this article.

## Life influencers' only perpetuate unfeasible lifestyles

BY Shaan Sridhar

As a student in the thick of junior year, I find it almost impossible to stay organized. You can be as prepared as possible, but you'll still be stressed. You can be as efficient as possible, but you'll never be done with *all* of your work.

The grind is never-ending, and with that follows a disastrous lifestyle. For some of us, it's controllable or manageable.

For most of us, myself included, it's a catastrophic nightmare.

But that doesn't mean I want the imperfections of my schedule shoved in my face during my limited leisure time.

**Most of these influencers do nothing but post these videos day and night.**

That leads me to social media "life skills" influencers — people like @texasbrownie, @emilymariko and @aatraining on TikTok.

The bottom line is that they are not a fair standard to compare

## perfectlife

Gigachad

Follow

61 Following 101K Followers 6.3M Likes

17 | SHS '23

Prodigy in Progress

Being perfect is my Lifestyle

🔗 <https://www.youtube.com/wa...>

Graphic by MICHAEL FOK

ourselves to — and it's all fake anyway.

These influencers post videos of themselves waking up at 5 a.m., making a nutritious breakfast, going to a coffee shop to work distraction-free while sipping a goat milk latte, making a kale salad for dinner and miraculously going to sleep at 9 p.m.

I'm also talking about the people who manage to reorganize their entire house every day. And, the people who somehow keep their bodies in peak fit condition at the same time.

But let's face the truth: Most of these influencers do nothing but

post these videos day and night. Their entire lives revolve around having a perfect schedule, aesthetic house or workout routine.

They earn their living by showing off their desirable lives.

If I was paid to sleep on time and had no other responsibilities, I would. If I was paid to workout every day, I would. If I was paid to keep all my clothes perfectly folded and labeled, I would.

But I'm not.

My full-time job is being a high-school student with a mountain of expectations from parents, classes and colleges. That job does not include perfect schedules, or

organization skills or workout routines; oftentimes, it works *against* these things.

Frankly, the only thing I've ever gained from watching these videos is an unhealthy dose of self-recrimination.

I kept wondering: If these people can organize their lives so well, what's wrong with me? The answer is that nothing was wrong with me, and nothing is wrong with most people.

To be fair, I can probably work on being more productive and more organized. I can probably achieve more of my goals if I prioritized things differently.

But that's independent of the "perfection" that life skills influencers preach. And most people don't even *need* these perfect life skills — it's OK if your closet is a little messy, or if you miss a gym day.

To all people who watch these videos, remember the difference between the influencers and you. Remember it's not your job to appear perfect. Remember that everyone's daily life is drastically different, and it's impossible to have a perfect daily life. And make sure to stop holding yourself to the standards of those whose primary job is to have that perfect daily life. ♦

# To be an ethical consumer, reject TikTok fashion trends and embrace your own style

BY Sarah Thomas

2021 has seen numerous clothing trends from brightly colored floral dresses to patchwork jeans to variations of the House of Sunny Hockney Dress.

However, the most surprising trend was the return of low-rise jeans. After years of people swearing by incredibly high-rise jeans, it was surprising to see how quickly people replaced their wardrobes with low-rise jeans.

This transition isn't shocking, though; fashion trends tend to repeat every 20-30 years. However, as apps like TikTok became more and more popular, this trend cycle has started to shorten, with many negative results.

TikTok has over 1 billion users, with around 60% of TikTok's users between 16-24 years old. The rise of microtrends is directly related to TikTok, while these trends existed before, the combination of short, captivating videos and an influx of influencers make TikTok the perfect place for microtrends to grow.

Most of these clothing trends start with celebrities and influencers. For example, after supermodel Kendall Jenner wore the Hockney Dress, dupes could be found on fast fashion websites like Shein, Romwe, Yesstyle and even Amazon. Predictably, these trends are often short-lived, fizzing out in a matter of weeks. By that time, however, hundreds of people have bought the dress and it is soon discarded in favor of the next trendy item.

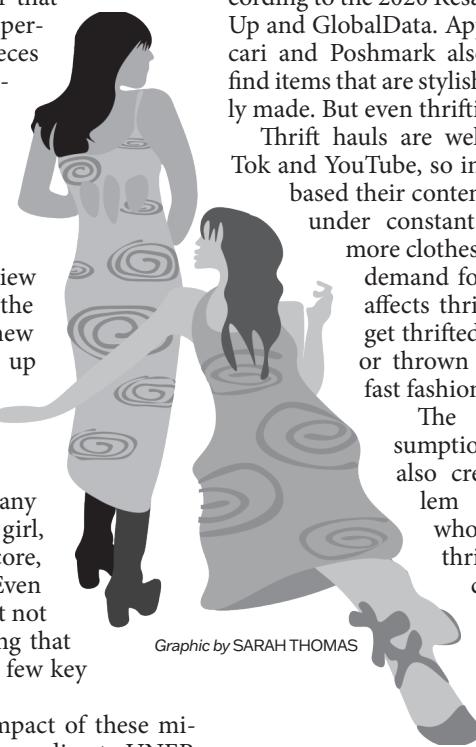
There's an easy solution to this for teen consumers: Stop buying things just because they are trendy. Whether that means finding your own personal style or buying pieces that are timeless, rejecting the whims of TikTok trends and consuming less has incredible benefits.

Shein Chief Marketing Officer Molly Mio admitted in an interview published by Forbes that the store drops 700-1,000 new styles daily just to keep up with the ever faster trend cycle.

Just in the past few years, TikTok has cycled through so many aesthetics — the VSCO girl, the e-girl/e-boy, cottage core, dark academia, etc. Even though these styles might not have one piece of clothing that defines them, each has a few key pieces associated with it.

The environmental impact of these microtrends is enormous. According to UNEP, "if demographic and lifestyle patterns continue as they are now, global consumption of apparel will rise from 62 million metric tons in 2019 to 102 million tons in 10 years."

Some people have tried to combat this by turning to thrifting and buying clothes second-hand. The second-hand apparel market



Graphic by SARAH THOMAS

was worth around \$28 billion in 2019 and is expected to reach \$64 billion in 2024, according to the 2020 Resale Report by ThredUp and GlobalData. Apps like Depop, Mercari and Poshmark also help followers to find items that are stylish, cheap and ethically made. But even thrifting has downsides.

Thrift hauls are well received on TikTok and YouTube, so influencers who have based their content on these hauls are under constant pressure to thrift more clothes to keep up with the demand for content. This also affects thrifting — pieces that get thrifted can be abandoned, or thrown away as quickly as fast fashion clothing.

The issue of overconsumption at thrift stores also creates a large problem for poorer people who actually depend on thrift stores for their clothes. What happens when someone needs an affordable coat, but they've all been sold to someone who will throw it away after wearing it once?

In her book "From Goodwill to Grunge: A History of Secondhand Styles and Alternative Economies," Jennifer Le Zotte writes that thrift stores, the organizations that run them and consumer interest all reveal "an increasingly intricate relationship between

industrial capitalism, social welfare and mass culture."

Thrift stores originally gave more people access to newer fashions, benefiting immigrants, minorities and low-income shoppers who existed on the margins of the consumer world. But as clothing production sped up in the 20th century, thrift stores became places where Americans discarded used clothing for newer items.

"What this accomplished, even back a century ago, was to constantly accelerate the demand for new clothing," Le Zotte said in an interview with Vox. "The impetus to get rid of clothing is often charitable, but the more clothing that is contributed and viable, the more fashion cycles speed up."

If people continue to thrift with the trends and do massive hauls, any good that comes from not buying fast fashion will be offset by the amount of waste created.

So what is the ethical path to follow? Keep and reuse your existing clothes in imaginative ways. Instead of throwing out that old hoodie, break out some bleach and water and paint a fun pattern on the back of it. Or offer it to your friend or a sibling, or donate it to a local charity.

Think twice before buying a new piece of clothing, or wait a few weeks to make sure that you're really interested in the piece before the purchase. Alternatively, you could limit yourself to a small number of purchases a month. If we all did this — and rejected the ever-changing TikTok trends — it will have an incredibly positive impact on the planet. ♦

## Please stop using the word 'smart' in the wrong context

IT CAN PROMOTE NEGATIVE FEEDBACK LOOPS AND STOP PEOPLE FROM CHALLENGING THEMSELVES

BY Carolyn Wang

If you've ever walked past a group of students nervously ranting about an upcoming difficult math test, you've probably heard this phrase of reassurance uttered a million times: "You're smart. You'll do fine."

The term smart is often put on a pedestal. Being smart is equated to excelling academically and obtaining high grades without much effort. It's equated to the ultimate golden ticket: acceptance to the most prestigious schools.

Among parents, the word is often thrown around as a form of compliment, as if having a smart son or daughter instantly denotes a promising future.

However, imposing the "smart" label on students as a means of reassurance or praise often has the opposite effect of the original intention. Not only can it increase stress levels, it also labels academic success as a fixed measure of intelligence.

As a disclaimer, I unintentionally use smart too. But in most situations, the word can have unintended, detrimental consequences if utilized in the wrong way.

In 2007, Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck coined the terms growth mindset and fixed mindset. People in the former category believe they develop and grow their skills and knowledge through hard work. People in the latter believe talent and intelligence are fixed, measurable and unchangeable quantities one is born with.

Surely, the growth mindset seems like common sense: There's no way anyone could know calculus the minute they start kindergarten. They have to spend years learning and developing their math skills through hard work to achieve that peak.

Saying that a student got good grades because they are smart perpetuates the fixed mindset by implying that they have the tangible trait of intelligence, whereas others lack it. This kind of thinking completely invalidates other factors that play a much larger role in academic success, including study strategies, habits, time management, dedication, hard work and family environments.

In fact, the numbers show that this idea of smart more or less doesn't exist. Because 95% of the population has an IQ within two standard deviations of the average score, the majority of the population does not have enough variation in natural levels of intelligence to be significant in contexts like schools.

Moreover, studies have found that self-control and the ability to deal with failure are more reliable predictors of GPA than pure IQ, which brings me to my next point.

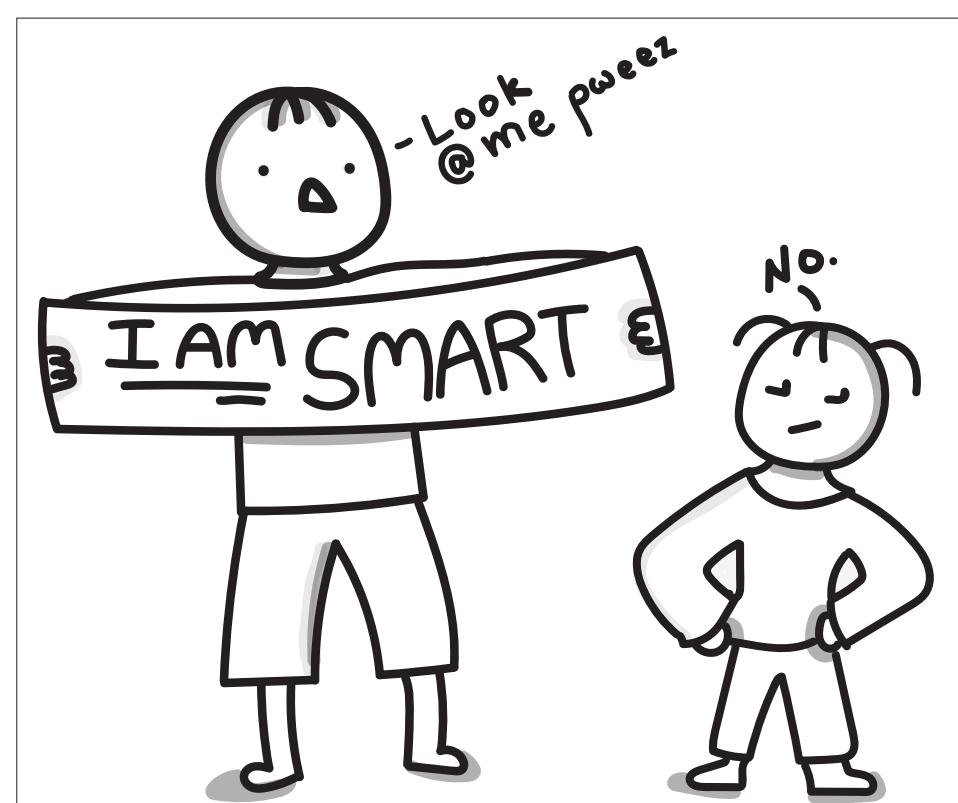
When a person is conditioned to be extrinsically motivated by the look of their grades and reputation rather than intrinsically motivated to learn through constant praise for their intelligence, they begin to fear failure.

**The numbers show the idea of smart doesn't exist. 95% of the population has an IQ within two standard deviations of the average score.**

Just imagine: If you are the person who's fallen into the trap of wanting to be known for being the smart kid at the school, wouldn't you want to maintain that reputation? What worse way to tarnish your reputation than to look stupid by failing horribly?

This is one of the biggest consequences of putting the word smart on a pedestal: Some people may begin to associate failure with stupidity, the antithesis of intelligence, even when they are far from the same thing.

I do want to note that not everyone is necessarily affected by this in equal measures. For many high-performing, intrinsically motivated students, failure is a source of motivation and a means of improvement. But for some lower-performing students who may feel insecure about their own aca-



demic success, the desire to be labeled smart instills a fear of challenges because it increases this chance of failure. They may opt for easy shortcuts like cheating because it maintains their desire to look smart to their peers or parents, pushing them further from academic success.

Lastly, few of us have the authority to call someone smart in the first place. In most scenarios, it's merely an assumption based on a limited amount of information. Just like an assumption about someone's background based on their physical appearance is rarely accurate, an assumption of their performance on a particular assignment or test can be wrong. Everyone has their personal strengths and weaknesses; categorizing people based on smartness fails to consider them as holistic, human beings.

Of course, in most situations, people

don't mean to use the word smart with ill intentions — usually, they are just trying to congratulate or compliment somebody for an achievement, or reassure someone when they feel insecure. But if used repeatedly as a label, the word loses all of its intended meaning and promotes these unhealthy mindsets.

Instead of praising intelligence as the underlying reason for an achievement, people should praise the process that led to the achievement in the first place along with the achievement itself.

In the long run, being smart simply doesn't mean as much as hard work, dedication and an ability to deal with failure. Pushing students to try and take risks enables students to thrive in a supportive environment based on their own goals, regardless of others' perceptions of them. ♦

# The ‘metaverse’ shouldn’t be Meta’s next big thing

BY TaraNatarajan

“Desktop to web to phones, from text to photos to video. But this isn’t the end of the line. The next platform and medium will be even more immersive, an embodied internet where you’re in the experience, not just looking at it,” Mark Zuckerberg said to viewers during the virtual Facebook Connect 2021 keynote on Oct. 22. “We call this the metaverse.”

After announcing Facebook’s rebranding as Meta, Zuckerberg spent the majority of the hour-long keynote exploring Meta’s plan to usher in a new internet era: a resplendent space of unfettered human interaction in a virtual world packed with features to match our physical one.

In the speech, Zuckerberg failed to address the dangerous issues that have plagued his company over the past few years. Buried in a Congress investigation, leaked internal reports and whistleblower testimony for user data abuse, Facebook has lost its credibility due to its deception and indifference to the consequences of its policies and actions.

Enter Meta, a strategic rebranding effort that rises to take Facebook’s place, and introduces the metaverse in an attempt to divert attention and resources from the problems at hand.

The company’s sudden emphasis on the all-encompassing virtual space shows yet again that Meta aims to exacerbate its platforms’ progressively disastrous effects on young users over the last decade. The most glaring problem with Meta’s plan to further the extent of internet usage is its impact on the physical and mental wellness of today’s youth as well as subsequent generations that will develop a dependence on the internet.

Whether it’s sex abuse or mental health issues, the data all point to a single, insidious conclusion: Facebook hasn’t done enough to keep children on its platform safe, choosing astronomically high profits over the safety and well-

being of its most vulnerable users. And that begs the question: Why is it a good idea for users to trust the rebranded company with introducing an immersive, VR world when they have failed to solve existing problems?

Meta’s shift to virtual reality (VR) has arrived at a time where they are losing a key demographic of internet users: teenagers. Young people are increasingly gravitating away from Facebook in favor of apps like TikTok and Snapchat — while Instagram is still relevant among younger users, most of Meta’s ad revenue comes from the Facebook platform.

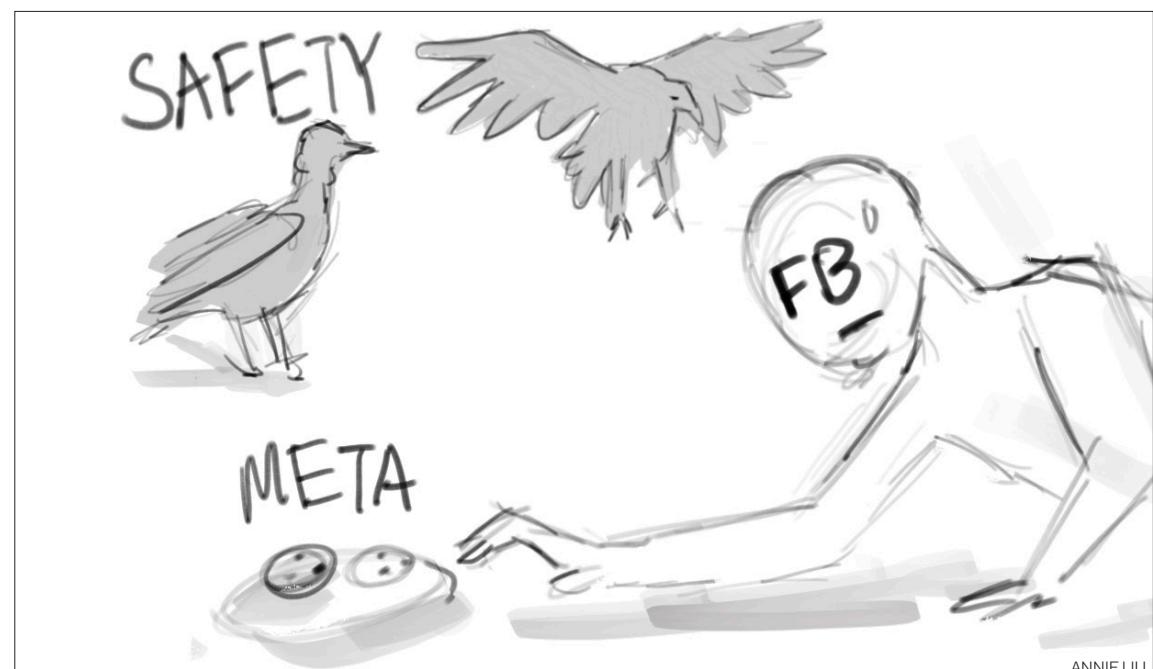
However, an overwhelming majority of teenagers have demonstrated in surveys that they would look forward to using virtual reality (VR) platforms regularly. Based on current user statistics, it is logical that Meta would use the allure of a VR platform to entice younger demographics into using their products.

Meta touts the idea that the amount of time we would spend in their all-immersive metaverse is actually beneficial — in Meta’s hour-long promotional video, Zuckerberg claimed, “This isn’t about spending more time on screens. It’s about making the time that we already spend better.”

This is an easy thing to say for a company whose multi-billion-dollar profit model is based on how much time users spend on their platforms. For the users themselves, however, the effects are often adverse.

For far too long, ethical considerations have taken a backseat in tech. Whether it’s a child trafficked because of Facebook’s relaxed security measures, or white supremacist violence fomented by failure to execute their own anti-hate-speech policies, there are ugly consequences.

Whistleblower Frances Haugen revealed the scale of harm Meta’s platforms have caused to vulnerable minors, notably that Meta knew of these effects but chose not to act on the knowledge to protect children. For instance, Haugen re-



ANNIE LIU

leased information showing that Facebook researchers were aware of these dangers from an internal study where 32% of teenage girls surveyed reported that when they felt bad about their bodies, their Instagram feeds made them feel worse — inevitably leading to higher rates of eating disorders among the demographic.

A report by the industry watchdog Tech Transparency Project (TTP) showed that Facebook chose not to filter ads that involved the promotion of drug and alcohol use, disordered eating, online dating and other high-risk activities. The study concluded that these ads reached up to 3 million teens. The company’s appalling lack of safeguards revealed that its priorities lay with ad revenue instead of safety.

The company has also exhibited a dangerously lax approach in preventing the sexual exploitation of minors online. A different analysis by the TTP reported that between 2013 and 2019, there had been 366 different federal criminal cases — child pornography, grooming and soliciting minors and sex trafficking initiatives — that took place on the platform. Despite Meta’s pledge to eradicate the rampant sexual exploitation, data from the Justice Department shows that the cases are steadily increasing rather than decreasing.

Possibly one of the most alarming incidents of Meta’s indifference occurred when the company vehemently fought against legislation that could help protect minors on its platform — the 2017 FOSTA-SESTA acts that would hold the company liable for knowingly facilitating sex trafficking or exploitation of minors. That year, the company spent over \$3 million more on lobbying in opposition to the bipartisan bill.

## For far too long, ethical considerations have taken a backseat in tech.

The inevitable advancement of VR is only going to bring up a new set of ethical and safety issues. A paper by Mary Anne Franks, president of the Cyber Civil Rights Institute, for example, indicates that abuse is far more potent and traumatic within a VR space than through a screen. If a child can be groomed over a screen without ever seeing the face of their abuser, it would subsequently be much easier and more gratifying for the abuser to groom them in a space where they can interact “face-to-face.”

The same spaces that could serve as virtual workplaces could also serve as virtual meeting places for far-right groups forming cross-country coalitions. The ease of meeting in VR would pose an even greater danger — especially considering the rise of teenagers falling into alt-right internet pipelines.

These issues aren’t exacerbated due to VR itself — rather, Meta’s disgraceful lack of an ethical compass is the culprit. If VR spaces were well moderated with user safety, privacy and well-being at the forefront of a company’s priorities, these problems would be much less prevalent.

Meta, however, is a company that has constantly ignored the importance of keeping vulnerable users safe in favor of increased ad revenue.

VR is undoubtedly going to be a big revolution in technology. It will have its own benefits and pitfalls. But the difficult questions aren’t about what problems VR, in general, will hold. They are about who we want to trust with our safety, privacy and wellbeing all at stake in a rapidly-changing technology scene. Based on the underlying issues with Facebook that have recently been brought to light, the answer to those questions is resoundingly clear: It should not be Meta. ♦

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### LGSUHSD BOARD: START LISTENING TO TEACHER AND STUDENT VOICES AND TAKE MEANINGFUL ACTION

*The following letter has been lightly edited by The Falcon for clarity and brevity.*

Plastered around our entire school is the phrase, “America’s Best High School.” Until a few months ago, it was a phrase that I very much believed in.

At no other high school in the country will you find more dedicated teachers and staff. Even walking through our schools late into the evening, you will find lights turned on throughout our campus with our teachers hard at work. You will find teachers willing to spend their lunch break reteaching a lesson. You will find teachers that go out of their way to have a conversation in the hallway even if it means a shorter break for them. You will find teachers willing to hold extra office hours over Zoom over the weekend even though they are as sick of the screen as the students. You will find teachers that gave up countless hours of their Thanksgiving weekend to listen and provide detailed feedback to

close to eighty students taking the challenge to audition for All-State.

Instead of investing in our current students and teachers, the district pours their money into an emergency “reserve” fund.

The real emergency is happening now.

Our school is only as good as its teachers and the experience, quality and commitment they bring. But other schools have leadership that truly value them, both in competitive compensation and respect.

The caliber of the teachers will be lost because of this school board’s incessant need to treat our school budget like revenue instead of the purpose it was meant for: running our schools now.

It is disappointing to see our district’s continual ignorance about the real problems that affect our staff and faculty every day. The voices of a loud minority have skewed our district’s decision-making to the point that those that it represents are no longer truly represented.

Rather than defending our staff, fac-

ulty, and students, I see a group of people who stand idly by as our community members call students “lazy” and teachers “greedy” for wanting Wednesdays off for their mental health during the pandemic.

I see my Board members telling me that our students and staff are simply not worth it. I see a group of people who will listen to those who are loud and disrespectful over those who want what is best for our school. I see a Board that schedules meetings at 8 a.m. to hide behind a Zoom screen and ignore those they represent. I see a Board that “happens” to schedule a group photo picture at the same time that teachers are supposed to voice their concerns and ignore the repercussions of their decisions and policies.

I sit here writing this letter even though I know the Board will ignore it. There is a silent majority in our community who agrees with this sentiment. The only reason they are silent is because of the lack of knowledge. Open communication and transparency are skills that seem to be lost on our district leadership. The loud minority of those who support the Board’s

decisions have scared away those who hope to speak against this climate.

It is so sad to know that alumni teachers who loved our school and district so much that they came back to teach are now considering leaving — not because of the students or the staff, but because our Board would rather save up for a “Rainy day” than retaining our best teacher talent.

## Our school is only as good as its teachers and the experience, quality and commitment they bring.

“America’s Best High School” is a title that this school would never have had without its teachers. Today, we are unfit to bear such a title — much less hide behind its mask and pretend that everything is ok.

— Nikhil Kapasi



Kapasi

## Immigrant celebrates Chinese New Year

Mun-chen on holiday feasts

Selina Chen

Hanging an up-side-down fú on the door for good fortune, making dumplings and watching the Spring Festival Gala used to be the staples of every Chinese New Year for me. Although my immediate family — my parents, my brother and I — lived in Beijing while the rest of our relatives were scattered across other provinces, our most cherished holiday saw festivity in every corner of China.

Coming to the U.S. at age 11 with my mom — my younger brother joined us six months later — we spent our first few U.S. Chinese New Years with my mom's old college friend in San Jose. At the time, I struggled to connect with their American-born children because of the language barrier and a cultural divide; instead, I spent my time sitting silently, listening to the adults' chatter.

Things changed as my mom and I made friends of our own in Saratoga, and Chinese New Year has taken on new meanings.

The "family" with whom we celebrate the holiday is different each year, but as the day approaches — usually in February, but it varies according to the lunar calendar — red ornaments pop up all around the house. My family is particularly fond of fish(yú)-shaped trinkets because they are a play on the celebratory phrase "yú" that roughly translates to "prosperity in the new year," and my Chinese name "yú," meaning "fisherman."



As night approaches, the doorbell hails the arrival of family after family. The living room becomes filled with high-pitched squeals from children, and the backyard crowded with husbands discussing whatever it is that stuffy engineers and older IT-dudes talk about.

The stars of the show are the aunts, who always come bearing food for the potluck. They religiously compliment each others' cooking using the most flowery language that could put seasoned politicians to shame. Once this elaborate ritual is completed, they crowd around the kitchen island to make dumplings, dividing themselves into little groups for the two tasks: flattening the dough or shaping the dumplings.

I join them because my skills deserve to be shown off to the aunts whose dumplings can be, well, not so flattering. Perhaps dumpling-making is ingrained in my blood, passed down from the generations of Northerners on my mother's side (I got my penchant for white rice from my Southern-born paternal side). If I'm in the mood, I'll add a flourish and make a row of unique S-shaped dumplings for "Selina." Regardless, I'm proud of the impeccable ones that sit primly, similar to my mother's but with their own idiosyncrasies.

It doesn't take long for the freshly made dumplings to finish their foamy tumble in the boiling pots and make their way onto the table.

The meal is a true culinary medley, with traditional Chinese cuisine mixed with dishes like spaghetti or tortilla soup. The dinner, however, is only a warm-up to the main event: the talent show.

We go about a regular day before and have a regular day afterward. We do the same things with the same people on Mid-autumn Moon Festival, Thanksgiving, Christmas or a birthday.

But here on the other side of the world, thousands of miles from where we, our parents and grandparents grew up, we've found families beyond blood — and I'd say that's pretty special. ♦



Chen's family enjoys a tasty feast on Chinese New Year.



## Hanukkah: The most wonderful time of the year for fun celebration

Zin-manifesting through life

Zachary Zinman

The smell of delicious Latkes fills my house every year around December as mesmerizing, bright candles burn slowly on the dining room table. My family has nothing but smiles on our faces as we celebrate the beloved holiday of Hanukkah.

There is no other feeling like waking up the morning of the first night of Hanukkah. I am full of anticipation for my favorite holiday throughout the whole day. As my family and I gather around the Hanukkah candles during the first night, I don't want it to end.



Hanukkah is the most wonderful time of the year for me along with many other Jewish people. The holiday is about being proud to practice Judaism. Despite the religion's long history of strife, the holiday reminds me how glad I am to be a Jew.

The holiday remembers the Jews' perseverance over Greek-Syrian oppressors. As the story goes, King Antiochus IV Epiphanes banned



Zinman's family celebrates Hanukkah together.

Jewish practice and ordered the destruction of the Second Temple of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. In response, a small army of Jewish people called the Maccabees, led by Judah Maccabee, rose up against this persecution and defeated the larger army of Antiochus.

But when the Maccabees returned to the temple, it was in shambles. Through all of the debris there, they found a small container of oil, which they thought could only light the menorah for one night. When the light lasted for eight nights, it was a miracle for the Jewish people, thus creating the idea of the eight days of Hanukkah.

This year, Hanukkah starts on Nov. 28 and ends on Dec. 6, which is quite unusual because Hanukkah almost always begins in December. This is because Hanukkah follows the Hebrew calendar, which says that Hanukkah is on the 25th day of the month Kislev and ends on the second day of the month Tevet.

On top of receiving a gift for every night of Hanukkah, there are also delicious delicacies that come with the celebration.

My favorite food is Latkes, fried potato pancakes. These classic warm Jewish delights, often accompanied with applesauce and sour cream, make my entire year. Eating a freshly made crispy Latke made just right is the pinnacle of human existence.

Sufganiyot, jelly-filled donuts, are also a treat on Hanukkah. The blanket of sugar on top of these donuts isn't healthy, but it inspires joy.

As Jewish families display their menorahs on their windowsills, it showcases the pride they have in their religion.

Even though it is quite rare to spot a menorah through a window, the sight genuinely fills me with joy and reminds me that there are others who love Hanukkah as much as I do.

Hanukkah reminds me what I value in life.

As our family gathers around the light of the candles, I am reminded of how grateful I am to have a family to celebrate this special holiday with. ♦

## Fabulous Festivities

### The festival that brightens my life

San-jolly during Diwali

Sanjoli Gupta



Gupta's family celebrates the festival of lights.

The smells of spices such as turmeric, garam masala and cumin fill the air while pink, orange and tan sweets line the dinner table. Incense burns in the corner and small candles in diyas — decorated clay pottery — burn in every room. In the living room, I hear family friends laughing and the sizzle of puris, a type of deep fried bread, frying in the kitchen. Outside, my younger sister and her friends play with sparklers in the cool night air with my house glittering with four different strings of lights behind them.

Diwali is one of my favorite holidays. In November, a general air of happiness permeates my house, but my favorite aspect of the holiday has always been the lights.

When I lived in India, we got a week off from school to celebrate Diwali. Every year, we looked out our apartment window to see the surrounding windows filled with lights in contrast to the dark night sky. Each apartment window had its own unique flair, with some residents lining their balconies with diyas, and others hanging

stairs to join hundreds of families outside lighting sparklers and setting off firecrackers. I'd joke around with my friends, make shapes with the glowing colorful sparklers and terrify my sister by playfully aiming the fiery sparks toward her.

The entire apartment complex buzzed with chatter and clouds of thick smoke from the firecrackers, while crowds of children ran around in roads blocked off from cars. In the middle of the closed off freeway in front of the complex, firecrackers exploded in green rings of smoke that danced through the dotted white lines.

Having been born and brought up in the U.S., where Diwali is typically a quieter holiday celebrated with close friends, I was astounded by the huge celebrations when I moved to India at age 9. At the time, it seemed like the entire world had come alive in lights and fire.

I would watch the lights and play with sparklers till late in the night. On this particular Diwali, there was so much smoke from all the firecrackers that I was practically in tears.

Diwali means a time to relax and be with friends, as well as enjoy simple things like good food and stunning lights.

Even if the lights aren't nearly as impressive here, I'm happy I can hold a sparkler and remember the crackling and laughter from my time in India. ♦

After praying and eating, we walked down-

bright strings of lights. We would frame our doors with fairy lights, lining the balcony with orange, red, green and blue.

Inside, the table was covered with puris and potato curry with channa (black chickpeas), sa-mosas (a crispy outer shell filled with potatoes) and halwa (a flour-based dessert).

After praying and eating, we walked down-

The abundance of hot pot restaurants in the Bay Area and their bustling crowds speaks to the popularity of hot pots in celebrating special occasions. Though restaurant-made hot pots are often delicious, they are nothing like the special kind my mom makes: the wild mushroom hot pot, a food native to my mom's hometown of Kunming, made with her own unique flair.

We don't have access many of the ingredients for wild mushroom hot pot, like boletus

edulis, collybia albuminosa or others types of mushroom, so my mom uses easy-to-find oyster or king trumpet mushrooms to replicate and capture the freshness of the original soup base.

On the day of Christmas Eve, my mom prepares her soup base by boiling chicken broth with the mushrooms. Each member of my family has their own soup base preference, so we combat our diversifying opinions in taste by using one special type of pot: the Yuanyang pot.

The Yuanyang pot is an aluminum pot split down the middle with a curved separator. My mom puts the mushroom base on the side, and based on the majority vote, adds either the Mala or San Xian flavors in the other.

Wild mushroom hot pots are usually eaten with wild mushrooms only, while traditional hot pots include a variety of meats, vegetables, seafoods and soy products.

Due to the lack of species of mushrooms here, my mom innovates by mixing in the traditional ingredients in order to enrich the flavor.

After the preparation comes the best part: gathering around our round dinner table and devouring the feast.

Lettuce and raw meat line the Yuanyang pot, which is placed on top of a portable stove in the middle of the table, as well as live shrimps, thinly sliced rice cakes, tender tofu pieces, dried mushrooms and fresh fathead fish.

Wisps of white smoke curl on top of the Yu-

anyang pot, and the mushroom soup base looks as if it is covered by a thin layer of golden gauze.

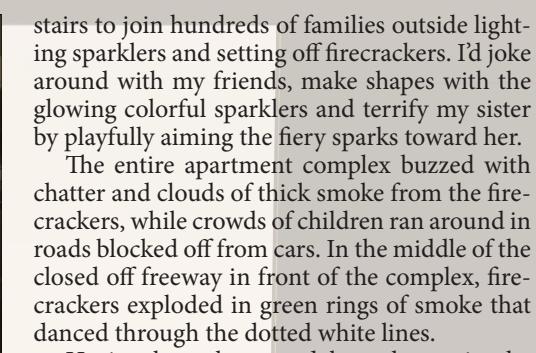
With a slight stir, mushrooms, ginger, garlic and scallions float to the top, embellishing the soup.

With the never-ending laughter-inducing conversations is the essence of Christmas for me.

Hot pot, aside from the delectable taste, signifies family.

The reunion with my uncles, aunts, grandparents and cousins during Christmas is always the most delightful part of my year.

For them, it's the memory of their childhood in Kunming; for me, it's the comforting and warm atmosphere of a family gathering. ♦



FALCON // SERENA LI

Li-eave the Hot Pot to me

Serena Li

Note: I suggest listening to "Hot Pot Soup Base," an upbeat Sichuanese rap song, as you read the story.

The classic roast turkey with a side of cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes with mouthwatering gravy and apple pie are dishes that have never appeared on my family's dining table during the holidays. Instead, we serve a traditional Chinese dish when celebrating Christmas: hot pot.

Hot pot, or huo guo, is eaten by dipping raw

vegetables and meat into flavorful soup bases,

which come in a variety of styles like Sichuan Mala, a spicy and tangy soup (or painful one, if your spice tolerance is low like me), San Xian, a creamy mix of seafoods with an umami taste that explodes on the palate and many more.

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anyang pot, and the mushroom soup base looks

as if it is covered by a thin layer of golden gauze.

With a slight stir, mushrooms, ginger, garlic and

scallions float to the top, embellishing the soup.

My chopsticks instinctively reached toward

the center of the table, filling in my bowl with

soy sauce and peanut butter (a typical dipping

sauce for hot pots), as well as the mushroom-in-

fused ingredients.



## Paparazzi laws: Balancing the First Amendment and privacy

BY Nilay Mishra

In 1997, Princess Diana's driver sped away from an onslaught of paparazzi vehicles, eventually crashing the car and killing everyone in the car but her bodyguard.

In 2009, Italy's self-described "King of Paparazzi" Fabrizio Corona was imprisoned for blackmailing several high-profile Italian celebrities by taking unflattering photos of them and "selling" them to the targets before the press could publish them.

In 2021, the story is no different.

Bands of photographers and sensationalists embed themselves in the personal lives of the famous, hoping to snatch the compromising photo that will earn them praise and pay from tabloid magazines and shows. Celebrities such as Justin Bieber, Kylie Jenner and Mariah Carey have lashed out at the paparazzi following them, but are often criticized for doing so.

Fundamentally, the issue regarding paparazzi regulation involves trying to balance First Amendment rights while protecting the privacy of individuals. While the First Amendment grants photographers and journalists the ability to publish the photos they take, there are limitations on their behavior such as slander and libel, as well as the fundamental privacy rights of others.

There are many instances in which people are prohibited from taking photos whenever they want: At police crime scenes, for example, such photos could interfere with the accused's ability to undergo a fair, speedy trial; at a public restroom, taking photos is a violation of basic privacy and

could likely result in legal consequences.

Above all, paparazzi should be regulated to maintain celebrities' basic sense of privacy. Any act that would not be acceptable under the laws or societal norms if the target was not a celebrity should not be acceptable.

Current paparazzi laws maintain a stance similar to that of slander and libel — as long as it is not affecting celebrities directly by representing them falsely in a bad light, publishers can continue to print tabloids full of details about the intricacies of the private lives of the famous.

While these laws are highly important in order to ensure that celebrities' reputations are not damaged by maligned comments and pictures, the focus should be on the intent of the paparazzi rather than just the effect of their actions. Keeping this in mind, there should be three additional regulations on paparazzi to ensure that the celebrities lead relatively normal lives.

First, there should be laws punishing paparazzi who are continually invading celebrities' privacy in the hopes of taking a compromising photo that they can later publish in the press or use as blackmail.

It is unreasonable to expect any celebrity to constantly keep their guard up around a group of bloody-hungry, profiteering and uninvited people. It is human nature to eventually make a minor mistake, but this is compounded when that mistake is distributed across the press or recorded in a compromising manner. Staying alert and professional, even in the supposedly private comfort of home, is a highly stressful and unreasonable burden to place on famous

people.

Additionally, paparazzi with the intention to capture images of minors should be strictly prohibited and punishable by law. Minors do not have the ability to evade and confront photographers. As a result, they generally have to rely on their parents to shield them from public exposure. It is unethical to create an environment where the public invades the privacy of young children, regardless of who their parents are. As such, this should be prohibited by law.

Finally, there should also be additional enforcement of existing and potential laws regarding paparazzi.

Without stringent enforcement, the celebrities themselves are forced to take their privacy into their own hands and lash out at them, slapping, punching and beating them.

Whether or not this is justified, it is indisputable that it is the responsibility of the justice system and law enforcement to be taking care of this and protecting the rights of the famous.

Furthermore, as the frequency of celebrities showing up in newspapers or tabloids increases, their fame skyrockets along with these appearances. This exacerbates their public exposure and leads down a slippery slope where celebrities end up losing more privacy.

By increasing enforcement, such as convicting more intruding paparazzi and increasing the penalties for behavior that crosses boundaries, the influence of the paparazzi can be contained.

Despite these three additional laws, however, there should still be room for the First Amendment. When the famous engage in serious wrongdoing, it is all the more newsworthy and important to inform audiences about.

There is a fine line between legal investigative journalism and invading the privacy of the individual for human and profit interests. This makes setting laws to distinguish between them relatively difficult.

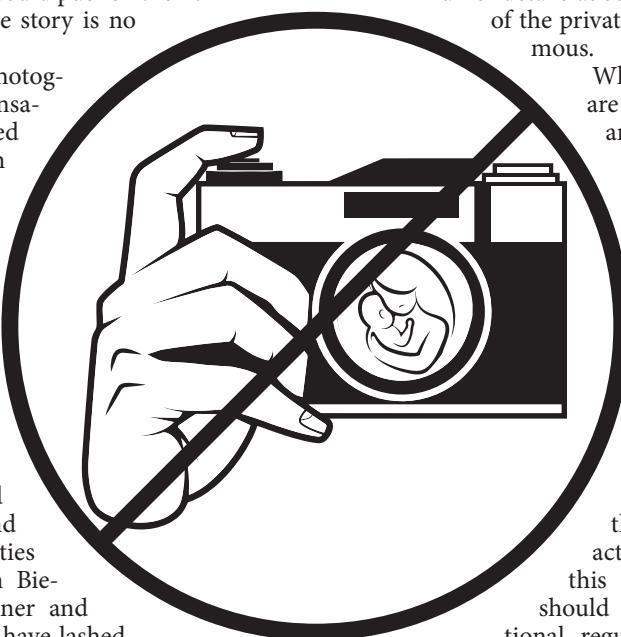
Though it may be difficult to ascertain definitively, one prime difference between these scenarios is that of intent. The investigative journalist wishes to seek out wrongdoing for the general good of society,

whereas the paparazzi wish to publish compromising and possibly inaccurate information about a celebrity.

One of the most effective ways that intent can be measured is the notion of probable cause.

Law enforcement requires a reasonable threshold of evidence to proceed with an investigation or arrest; civilians who are prying and investigating the lives of others should be held to the same standards.

**One prime difference between legal investigative journalism and invading the privacy of the individual is that of intent.**



## No, not funny: Dave Chappelle's border-pushing jokes should convey sensitivity toward vulnerable communities

BY Benjamin Li

Known for his stand-up comedy shows, comedian Dave Chappelle has received major backlash for his Netflix special, "The Closer," which premiered on Oct. 5. While Chappelle built his career on boundary-pushing offensive jokes, his recent digs at the LGBTQ+ community have been pinned by critics for going too far.

Despite this backlash, Chappelle has not backed down or apologized. In fact, he did the opposite: In a 5-minute video on Instagram, he stated that he was willing to meet with the LGBTQ+ employees at Netflix, but he would not take back his jokes or even apologize for them.

As someone who began his comedy career in the early 2000s, Chappelle developed his style in a time where there was far less criticism for discriminatory jokes. His skits have included jokes about almost every

race, class and community; being African American allowed Chappelle to get away with making the fun of the Black community more than he would be able to if he were another race.

**Such dehumanization contributes to a climate of discrimination and violence.**

However, since Chappelle identifies as a cisgender, heterosexual male, he is not a member of the LGBTQ+ community. Chappelle lacks understanding of their community and fails to realize that his jokes play into existing stereotypes which damage their reputation. This contributes to an environment in which people believe certain jokes about the trans community are ac-

ceptable, when in reality they are offensive. In addition, his jokes fail to acknowledge the hardships people of the LGBTQ+ community have endured.

Because Chappelle developed his career around cracking jokes about his own community, it is perhaps easy to see why Chappelle thought it acceptable to target the LGBTQ+ community.

But the problem with his approach is that such jokes and such dehumanization contribute to a climate that fosters discrimination and violence against this group. Of course, expecting someone to change after nearly 20 years is a lot to ask for, especially since he fears he may lose his audience if he changed his style.

Regardless, Chappelle should be considerate of the rapidly changing LGBTQ+ community: While he shouldn't change his comedic style revolving around his own community, he should tread carefully

around subjects that he isn't fully educated about if he wants to continue his successful comedic career. ♦



All graphics by CICI XU

# School witnesses major increase in iPad usage

BY Jonny Luo  
& Nikhil Mathihalli

When students walk into Calculus BC teacher PJ Yim's math class, they see him writing on his iPad instead of writing on the whiteboard.

After transitioning back to full in-person learning this fall, teachers like Yim, in addition to his students, continue to use iPads and similar electronic devices because of their convenience.

Over quarantine, many teachers like Yim used iPads while doing lessons online. The tablet made the online teaching process easier because of better screen-sharing and organization.

**"Using the iPad is so much more convenient for me. It's easier for me to stay organized."**

SOPHOMORE Michelle Wan

iPad sales rose by over 31% during the pandemic, largely due to remote work and learning trends, such as students using tablets for schoolwork. iPads cost anywhere from \$300 to \$2,200, and the Apple Pencil, a stylus, costs \$100.

Yim started using an iPad to teach around four years ago. Using an app called Notability, he could easily scan his work into PDF form for students to reference.

Yim feels that iPads aid in stu-

dents' learning. When students have questions, Yim can quickly add to his notes so that all the information is in one place for students.

Before quarantine, Yim said he had one or two students per class who used iPads, but now, roughly four to five students use iPads in his classes.

"Even though I prefer to write on a piece of paper because I feel like I have more control, using an iPad has become super convenient for exporting PDFs for students to view," Yim said. "It made it easier for me to switch to online learning, as exporting PDFs for students has become the norm during COVID-19."

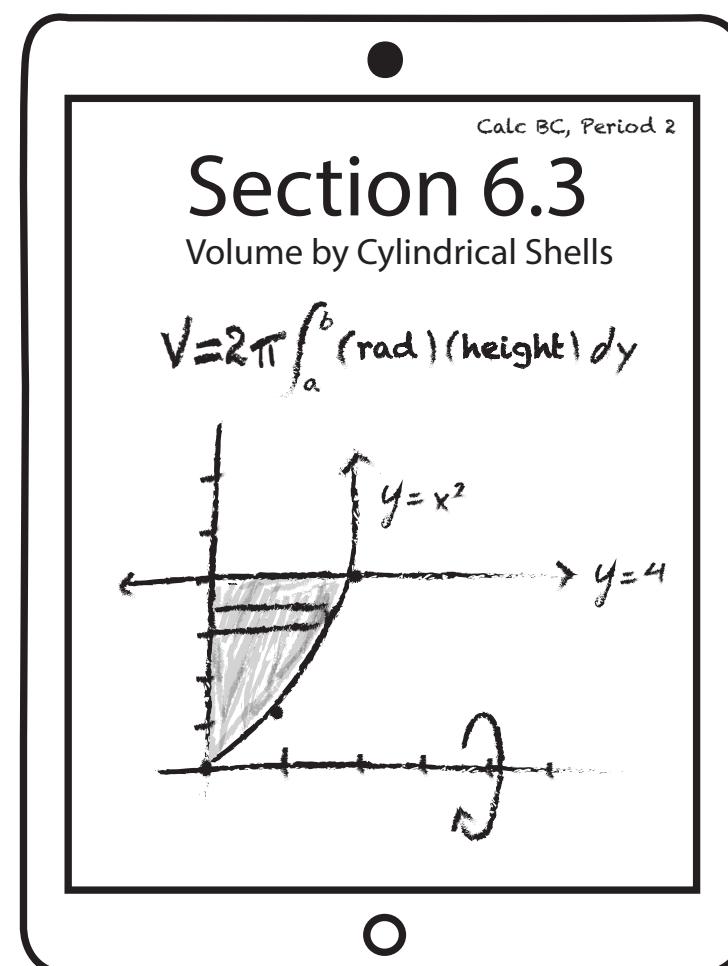
Precalculus Honors and Calculus teacher Kristen Hamilton also uses her iPad to teach her classes. She wrote a grant for the math department in 2019 to fund the purchase of iPads, Apple Pencils and Apple TVs to screen share to classroom projectors, and they received the iPads in November 2019.

Before using iPads, Hamilton used a document camera called ELMO.

However, one major downside that Hamilton encountered with the document camera was that students would sometimes see her hand rather than what she was trying to show them, a problem easily avoided with an iPad.

"I think that the iPad is super clean and easy to use, and you can easily export your work as a document for students to access on Canvas or Google," Hamilton said.

One problem Hamilton has with her iPad is that she finds it



challenging to draw straight lines with the existing technology, so she often finds herself going back to her ELMO when teaching subjects such as geometry.

Overall, however, she still uses her iPad as the main tool for teaching purposes.

Hamilton also bought an iPad for her daughter in the summer

of 2018, before her daughter's senior year. Hamilton's niece, who had come over from Germany, had used solely an iPad for taking notes when she was in medical school.

"I was astonished and thought that this technology was awesome, so I bought it for my daughter," Hamilton said. "And when the

pandemic hit last year, she literally did everything on her iPad."

Hamilton's experiences closely mirror students who have transitioned to iPad usage, such as sophomores Arjun Raje and Michelle Wan.

Wan mainly uses her iPad to take notes in her Spanish 4H class — her other teachers only allow hard copies in class. She transitioned to using an iPad during quarantine because she had always wanted one and she disliked the hassle of constantly printing out papers.

"Using the iPad is so much more convenient for me," Wan said. "It's a lot easier to annotate PDF documents, and it's easier for me to stay organized."

Similarly, Raje mainly uses his iPad to do math homework for his Calculus class through the Notability app; afterward, he exports his homework and submits it to Canvas for grading. He also uses his iPad to study for tests.

Raje prefers using his iPad to using the traditional pencil and paper because it's easier for him to stay organized, and he finds it easier to draw clean lines and graph functions using Notability. After finishing, he uploads the PDF of his homework to Google Drive, and he can easily submit this PDF through the Canvas app on his iPad.

Though the iPad and Apple Pencil were expensive for Raje to purchase, he doesn't regret his purchase.

"I'm so glad I got my iPad," Raje said. "Things would've been much worse if I wasn't able to use it." ♦

# Technology wizard keeps classes running smoothly

BY Nilay Mishra

It's 7:30 a.m. and district IT technician Larry Jens sits in his Library Tech Office, getting ready for a day of fixing tech problems. Four white Macbooks are lined up across his desk and three large cardboard boxes fill the left side of his secluded workspace.

Jens's primary job is making sure that instructional technology runs smoothly and efficiently. His roles include helping teachers and students with technology issues, preparing computers and getting audio visual systems ready for use. He also looks after the Adobe tools and licensing for the entire district, and restocks classrooms with new tech equipment.

"There's rarely a day I don't have something new to do," Jens said. "My job involves a lot of problem solving. Every day is different, and it requires constant learning."

Jens is in the process of transitioning to a different role as a Senior Computer Specialist with the district, and the school is looking for someone to help fill his shoes here. No one has been hired yet.

Before joining the school district, Jens was an Engineer and an Engineering Manager for over 21 years. After retiring several years ago, he worked on app development, creating content for the Apple app store.

While Jens did not originally intend to utilize his skills in school districts, the opportunity presented itself when the Saratoga Union School District asked him to take care of the technology problems at Red-

wood Middle School, Saratoga Elementary School, Foothill Elementary School and Aragonaut Elementary School.

Although Jens has lived in Saratoga for 25 years and is a parent of two SHS alumni, it was the first time that he was directly involved in school operations.

"It was meant to be temporary," Jens said. "But just as that was tailing down, the high school needed help."

After a few years working at the high school district, his temporary position evolved into a full-time job. Classes Jens is more involved with include journalism,

MAP, science and engineering: Journalism and MAP classes often need help with Adobe licensing, and science and engineering computers often need specialized software installed on computers to aid in labs.

Students and teachers typically ask Jens for help with their problems by stopping by his office inside the library; students can also send tech requests to [techsupport@lgsuhisd.org](mailto:techsupport@lgsuhisd.org), an email provided by the district.

Jens is one of the most valuable support staff on campus, someone all teachers have learned to rely on when some piece of technology isn't working.

Because he often gets multiple requests at the same time, Jens determines who to help out first by considering which issue impacts the largest number of people. He typically prioritizes students and teachers over other requests. He also has a special phone number reserved for emergency re-

quests only. Akitabox is a system for staff to request technology, custodial and maintenance help. It is another way the tech department receives requests from staff.

"Some of the issues I face are really straightforward and can be resolved in five minutes," Jens said. "It varies though. Some can take hours or even days."

For example, while fixing issues with students' Wi-Fi may only take a few minutes, setting up Adobe licenses and preparing the new computers with the software is a long term project that takes months at the beginning of each year.

His greatest challenges have been streamlining the rapid change to online instruction forced upon students and teachers due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the return to in-person schooling.



Jens

## The pandemic and its challenges

After instruction moved online in March 2020, Jens and his team had to deal with an influx of technological challenges that came with the quick transition to online school. Chief among these were students needing access to various technological equipment and teachers needing new software and strategies to maximize the efficacy of their classes.

"We had to handle the increased amount of document cameras being used by teachers all of a sudden," Jens said. "We also had to make sure that Google Meets and Zoom were working smoothly for all the teachers."

Additionally, the school district had to loan out Chromebooks to students who did not own a functioning computer so that they could attend online classes. This is something many schools throughout the nation also did during the pandemic.

To get a computer from the school, students needed to fill out a request and come to the office to pick it up. Jens supervised this distribution and ensured that the com-

puters were set up properly. Jens also had to streamline the transition of the Adobe tools and licenses in the entire Los Gatos Saratoga Union High School District for classes that depended on them. During the pandemic, Jens was able to get licenses for students to use the software at home, instead of depending on class computers to access applications such as Photoshop and InDesign.

"The transition of licenses was a bit of a challenge," Jens said. "It was quite a bit different from the model we had been using earlier."

Because such a large number of students left and entered classes that use Adobe licenses, Jens was forced to remove or add their Adobe license manually each time these schedule changes occurred.

## The 2021-22 School Year

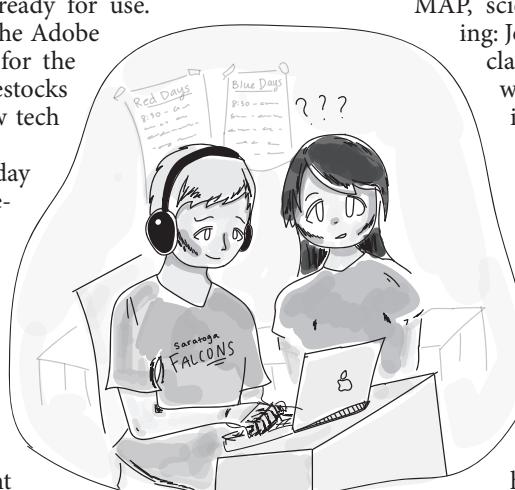
As students return to classes in-person, the school's increased reliance on technology has exacerbated some of the district's pre-existing problems, such as a general lack of understanding of how to use various forms of technology.

"Each teacher has had to accept new teaching methods that involve technology," Jens said. "Many were reluctantly forced into it."

Jens said that while some teachers are reverting back to traditional teaching, many have embraced the integration of technology in their classrooms, incorporating it heavily into their classes this year.

For example, AP U.S. History teacher Faith Daly has continued to use Kami, an online tool for annotating texts digitally, for all classwork assignments.

"There's no going back to how it was before because teachers have definitely taken a few steps forward," Jens said. "It's a lot busier than normal for this time of year. It's never been like this in previous years." ♦



# Larger Mock Trial Team preps for second season over zoom

BY VICKY BAI  
& JONNY LUO

For her day job, Class of 2013 alumna Ashwini Velchamy works as a pretrial attorney in Louisiana helping inmates on death row.

For the second year in a row, her volunteer night job is to be the attorney coach for the school's mock trial team. Again this year, she is doing this work remotely on Zoom.

Mock Trial aims to simulate real-life courtroom situations by pitting prosecution and defense teams against those of other schools.

The team has been meeting for two hours every Monday in the student center in preparation for its competition season in January, according to club president senior Nicole Lu. Students spend the first hour on call with Velchamy, learning how to write questions and draft answers. Afterward, club members separate into small groups to work on direct and cross examinations.

Assistant principal Matt Torrens is serving as the team's adviser, a role he has held several times in previous years. He stepped in to do the role when the team could find no other faculty adviser.

During the first semester, attorneys and witnesses formulate arguments and familiarize themselves with a singular case, which varies from year to year depending on the

competition. The yearly court case this year centers around the fictional character of Jamie Cobey, who is charged with the murder of his landlord Erik Smith. Students take roles such as attorneys, witnesses and defendant to act out a court simulation, often splitting up into two teams during club meetings: defense and prosecution.

**"Without the effort of everyone on the team, Mock Trial would not be as successful as it is today."**

SENIOR NICOLE LU

Lu has watched the club grow tremendously. In her freshman year, the club had no adviser or coach, and in her sophomore year, the membership count dropped to three. Last year, 16 members participated remotely, and now, 22 members participate in fully in-person meetings.

"It's beyond wonderful to see [Mock Trial] grow to the group it is now," Lu said. "I never thought we'd be able to get as much member turnout as we did last year, but the enthusiasm and energy each team member

brings to the table has far exceeded my expectations."

Mock Trial studies a predetermined fictional court case to prepare for pre-competition scrimmages with schools like Burlingame and Los Gatos in late December and for competition season in late January. The team competes in four rounds over a course of two weeks and will continue to compete if they advance.

Unlike traditional competitions that were hosted at the Santa Clara County Courthouse, this year's will be held virtually through Zoom just as it was during the last school year.

"The strength of our club comes from our members," Lu said. "Without the effort of everyone on the team, Mock Trial would not be as successful as it is today."

According to junior Mock Trial treasurer Arshi Chawla, the club is currently writing out arguments and questions for witnesses and opening and closing statements in preparation for practice trials. They also are planning to hold a club movie night or fundraiser in the second semester.

"It's a little bit difficult using this hybrid system, but we're so grateful that we have a coach and that we'll be able to compete again this year," Chawla said. "It's exciting because we have a lot of participation this year and with in-person practices, we get to have more of a team atmosphere." ♦

## MOCK TRIAL MEMBERS

### PROSECUTION

Pretrial	Emily Eckerman (12)
Lead Attorney (Opening)	Nicole Lu (12)
Attorney (Middle)	Karthik Sangameswaran (9)
Attorney (Closing)	Shaan Sridhar (11)
Attorney Understudy	Neha Natu (9)
Sheriff Garrett	Gloria Pan (11)
Dr. Dunn	Lena Aribi (10)
Angel Russell	Christina Chang (11)
Terry Edwards	Ritisha Byri (11)

### DEFENSE

Pretrial	Arshi Chawla (11)
Attorney (Opening)	Ryan Heshmati (9)
Attorney (Middle)	Jennifer Sheng (12)
Lead Attorney (Closing)	Harshini Velchamy (12)
Attorney Understudy	Aarushi Sharma (9)
Jamie Cobey	Caitlin Stoiber (9)
Francis Yazzie	Cassidy Coghlan (9)
Dr. Clay	Ananya Seth (11)
Dani Emling	Elizabeth Stoiber (11)
Clay/Emling Understudy	Aadhya Naveen (9)
Cobey/Yazzie Understudy	Becca Bossow (9)

Graphic by PRESTON FU

# Black students see good and bad of classroom race discussions

BY AVANI KONGETIRA

Before the start of the Black Lives Matter movement, junior Nadine Cobourn often saw casual racism directed at African Americans. From pushing harmful stereotypes to using the N-word outright, instances of racism were not unusual around Cobourn, who grew tired of attempting to correct her peers.

"I would try so many times and nothing would work so I just completely gave up," she said. "It was exhausting to continuously tell people to stop when no one ever listened."

Since the BLM movement gained attention in June 2020 due to a large number of protests against racism and police brutality after the murder of George Floyd, the importance of these topics has been brought to light, particularly for younger generations. Students are also gaining exposure to these kinds of issues in the classroom.

A major part of the curriculum for the English 11 Honors and MAP courses is the "Slavery and Its Legacies" unit, which dives into the works of various Black artists such as Toni Morrison, Octavia E. Butler and Steve McQueen. It introduces heavy topics surrounding Black history, such as the N-word, Jim Crow laws and implicit racism.

The goal for the unit is to teach students about the complexities of slavery and how they go deeper than physical enslavement, said English 11 Honors teacher Amy Keys.

Through a variety of approaches, such as close-reading, Socratic Seminars and essay writing, Keys aims to emphasize the weight of slavery in the American experience.

"It's not just about the labor economy," she said. "It's about sense of self and that it's lasting. People can see how the reverberations of enslavement didn't end the moment that we elected a Black president."

Discussing race in an academic setting is especially important for Black students like Cobourn, who often have to endure the burden of their classmates' ignorance.

"[Classroom discussions] allow me to see that others are fully comprehending and understanding why the N-word is such a serious situation, and why it's not a joke that can be constantly spread throughout the school," Cobourn said.

Cobourn believes that discussing these difficult topics in the classroom allows students to comprehend the history and meaning of racism, especially as some families never address this subject at home. According to Cobourn, the classroom is a safe space for people to express opinions and ask questions without being judged.

Cobourn said she is uplifted by discussions that educate herself and her peers about racism; however, being one of the few Black students in the community has often made her feel singled out.

"There are times when people have mentioned African Americans, and it feels like all eyes are on me in the classroom," Cobourn said. "It's kind of awkward when people discuss it, but I've definitely felt a lot more com-

fortable in class these past few years."

Like Cobourn, junior Taylor Wilson experienced similar discomfort in whole class discussions about race. After moving to Saratoga from New York in sixth grade, Wilson was used to a diverse learning environment. In Saratoga, however, he is the only Black student in most of his classes.

During a "Loaded Language" discussion, for which English 11 Honors students read and discussed several articles about the origin and use of the N-word, he was reluctant to speak up because it was one of the first heavy-hitting discussions he had participated in.

"It's never easy to talk about race problems," he said. "I've tried to come to [friends], but they don't really understand, and it's not their fault."

Despite them being difficult conversations, Wilson said he believes that classroom discussions are the most effective way to educate students about race and racism, as opposed to advisory modules, which students tend to not take seriously.

He also noticed that maturity plays a big role in how students react to racial issues. Reflecting on the "To Kill a Mockingbird" unit in Redwood Middle School's eighth-grade curriculum, Wilson recalled how difficult it was for him to take in, content-wise.

"My teacher would read it and just say the N-word like it was just another word, and while I didn't do anything to stop them, I still knew it was bad," he said. "I remember I would always hear giggles and feel peo-

ple's eyes on me. In eighth grade, people just don't care. They're still immature."

One of his first experiences with blatant racism in Saratoga occurred in his sixth grade math class, when he borrowed a pencil and lead from his classmate and returned it after a few days.

"I thought it would be over but then after that, he lost the lead, and he blamed me for it. So he called me the N-word for a month straight," Wilson said.

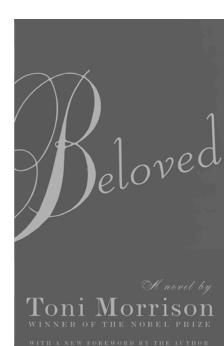
The classmate tried to justify his actions, wrongly assuming that Wilson could not afford his own pencil lead and had to resort to stealing because Wilson is Black. As a sixth grader, Wilson did not fully comprehend the weight of the slur, but since then he has grown to understand its severity.

"I saw it as just another word," he said. "As I learned more about it, I realized that it wasn't acceptable. Now, if I ever do hear it for whatever reason, I'll shut it down."

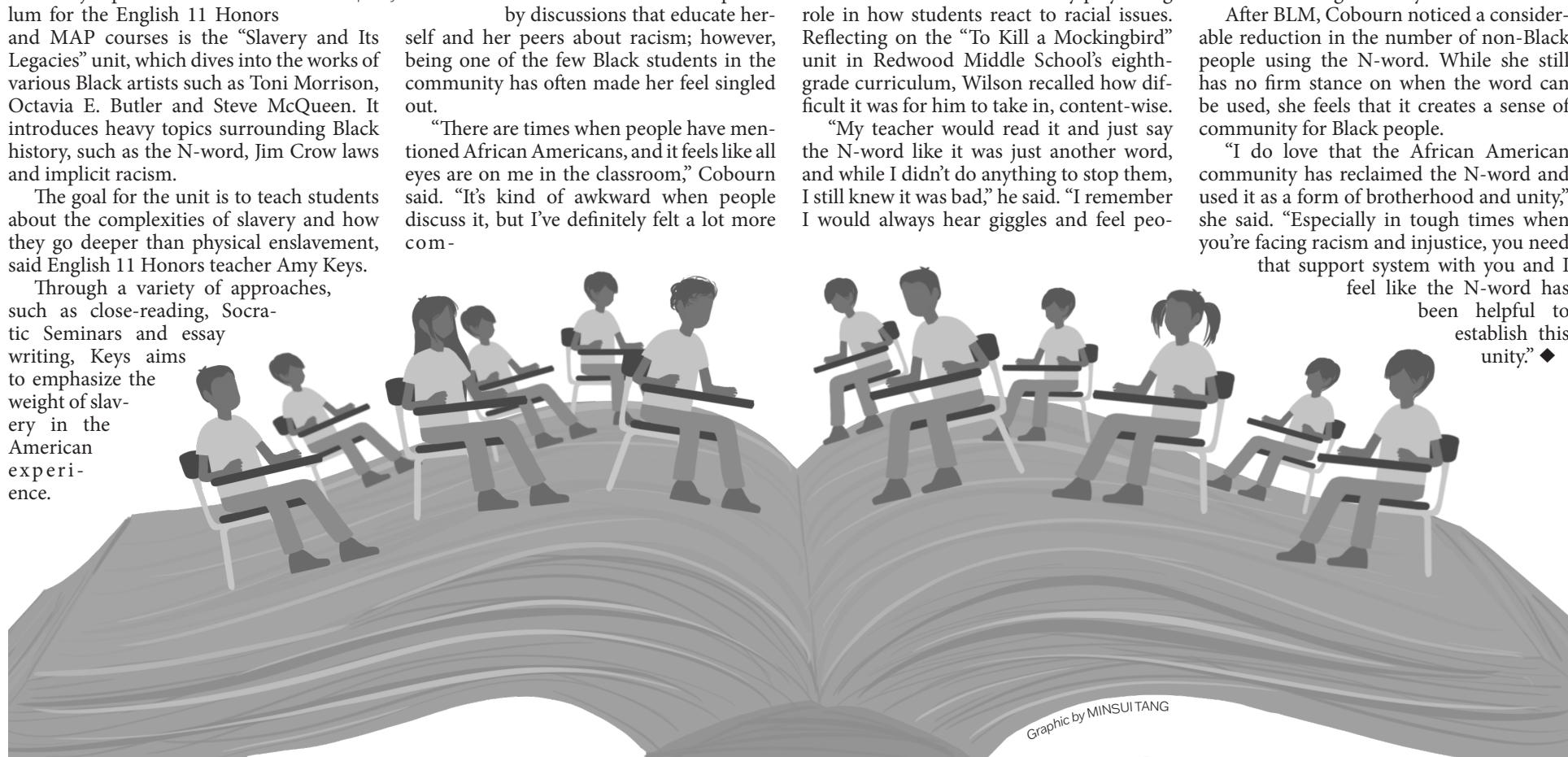
Recently, both Wilson and Cobourn said that the amount of racism they have faced has decreased significantly.

After BLM, Cobourn noticed a considerable reduction in the number of non-Black people using the N-word. While she still has no firm stance on when the word can be used, she feels that it creates a sense of community for Black people.

"I do love that the African American community has reclaimed the N-word and used it as a form of brotherhood and unity," she said. "Especially in tough times when you're facing racism and injustice, you need that support system with you and I feel like the N-word has been helpful to establish this unity." ♦



Graphic by PRESTON FU



# INFRASTRUCTURE AND JOBS ACT

## BIDEN'S BIG BILL WILL FOSTER LOCAL IMPROVEMENTS

BY Daniel Wu

On Nov. 15, President Biden signed the Bipartisan Infrastructure Framework (BIF), known formally as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, into law, marking the nation's biggest investment in infrastructure in over a decade.

After months of political infighting and cost reductions, the bill was passed at a total of \$1.2 trillion, short of Biden's original \$2 trillion plan.

According to the White House, the infrastructure bill aims to improve existing physical infrastructure like roads, bridges, high-speed broadband and public transit while tackling climate change and enhancing America's economic competitiveness.

Saratoga city council member Rishi Kumar — who unsuccessfully challenged congresswoman Anna Eshoo's seat in the U.S. House of Representatives during the 2020 election — highlighted the importance of the bill.

**"Silicon Valley needs a huge investment to ensure that we remain the innovation capital of the world."**



COUNCILMEMBER Rishi Kumar

"America's cities, towns, and villages — including the communities of Silicon Valley — urgently need investment to maintain critical infrastructure," Kumar said in an interview with The Falcon. "We need to invest in our future."

### What's the point of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Framework?

According to the American Society of Civil Engineers, the U.S. received a "C" grade in infrastructure in 2020 and needed an approximate \$2.59 trillion in investment to address various issues ranging from crumbling roads and bridges to environmental protection.

America's infrastructure spending has fallen behind rival nations such as China, which spent approximately \$8 trillion in infrastructure in 2020 — equivalent to around 5.6% of its overall Gross Domestic Product (GDP). On the other hand, the U.S. spent a mere \$146 billion directly on infrastructure in 2020, less than 1% of its overall GDP.

Kumar said the severity of the issue is exemplified by the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA), which plans and operates the country's road and transit network and "has been called out as one of the most inefficient services of the govern-

ment, losing about \$9.30 per rider."

The BIF is aimed at updating the nation's crumbling infrastructure for future needs.

### What percentage of funds will be allocated to California, and which sectors will be allocated to?

According to CNBC, California will receive around \$44.56 billion in funding — the most of any state. Per capita spending will be about \$1,250 per resident, with \$34.8 billion in funding allocated to highways and public transit alone.

For highways, the bill aims to improve and repair aging and crumbling roads, with the White House detailing a goal of fixing 20,000 miles of decaying roads and restoring over 10,000 bridges.

"Investments will rebuild community transportation projects, make streets safer, improve bridges, expand broadband infrastructure, develop digital equity and cybersecurity, expand water infrastructure projects, strengthen wildfire mitigation, flood prevention, watershed protection, ecosystem restoration and grid resilience," Kumar said.

The majority of funds allocated to California by the framework are apportioned to transportation, wildfire prevention and drought resistance. An additional \$34.8 billion will be spent to improve highways and public transit systems like Caltrain, which is apportioned \$1.1 billion to fix local rail networks.

### What are some of the local effects of the bill in Saratoga and surrounding areas?

The bill utilizes earmarks — provisions inserted by politicians that direct money to projects in their district or state — ensuring that funding allocated toward a project will not be lost through the chain of bureaucracy.

"Silicon Valley needs a huge investment to ensure that we remain the innovation capital of the world," Kumar said. "We need a plan to address our traffic woes and a water infrastructure plan to ensure we get through these recurring droughts. California needs a better plan than repeated failures of PG&E and recurring fires. It is very important to expand our broadband and to make it readily accessible."

According to the L.A. Times, Eshoo — Saratoga's congressional representative — earmarked \$1.2 million for a pedestrian walkway in Saratoga (the specific location of the walkway is unclear).

Other local earmarks include \$6.5 million for the Golden Gate Physical Suicide Deterrent System Project, around \$11 million for improvements to Highway 37 in the North Bay, upgrades to Caltrain crossings and BART renovations in the East Bay.

Many transit projects that have been put on the back burner for the past couple of years are also receiving new funding, such as an extension from San Jose to Santa Clara for BART, the high-speed rail network running across California, as well as regional expansions of highway networks, including the relocation of Oakland's I-980 freeway, which has infamously divided the city.

### What other benefits might help California?

The bill includes many other provisions, many of which are not specific to California, but will likely help the state indirectly.

Paul Bledsoe, a former Clinton White House climate adviser now with the Progressive Policy Institute, said the bill will help transition the nation away from fossil fuels.

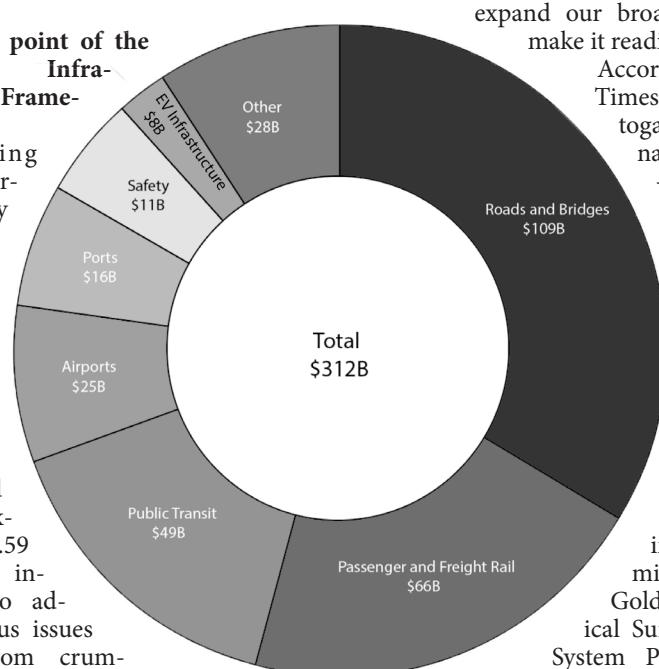
"Electrifying America's cars and trucks, creating a nationwide smart grid, expanding electricity storage to allow more renewable energy, establishing universal high-speed internet — all of these are intended to boost the productivity and competitiveness of the economy, while also cutting emissions," Bledsoe said to CNBC.

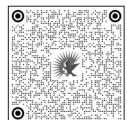
According to the New York Times, the bill aims to replace 50,000 diesel public transit vehicles and 20% of school buses with vehicles that run on alternative forms of fuel.

The bill has also allocated \$150 billion for clean energy and climate change protections, including protection against wildfires, which have marred California in recent years.

Kumar believes that the bill has arrived at the right time.

"We must make Silicon Valley increasingly accessible and affordable, attracting the best talent of the world — without wrecking our quality of life issues," Kumar said. "Such a plan will be a step in the right direction. An efficient transportation plan will aid our supply chain and improve our quality of life, [allowing] Silicon Valley [to] continue to be the world leader in innovation, attracting the best talents to benefit our economy." ♦



**INTIMIDATION FACTOR:** WHAT ELEMENTS MAKE ONE DESERVE RESPECT AND AWE?

Graphic by MINSUI TANG

**MILLIONAIRE ALUMNA:** AFTER PAST FAILED INVESTMENTS, CLASS OF 2021 ALUMNA MAKES \$1 MILLION FROM BITCOIN

Graphic by SHAAN SRIDHAR



Graphic by SHAAN SRIDHAR

**NEW HOBBIES:** SOPHOMORES BALANCE SCHOOL WITH NEW QUARANTINE HOBBIES

Courtesy of MINH DO



# Local News Struggles

BY Carolyn Wang

AN INSIDE LOOK AT THE BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

## MERCURY NEWS SHIFTS MAIN FOCUS ONLINE



Courtesy of ETHAN BARON

Baron and photographer Aric Crabb cover the 2020 fires in the Santa Cruz mountains for the Mercury News.

Nearly three decades ago, San Jose Mercury News business reporter Ethan Baron regularly left his office to meet interviewees, attend interesting events and chat with locals to find noteworthy content. Nowadays, Baron spends a large portion of his day making phone calls, signing up for email newsletters and scrolling through Twitter.

"The best stories I've done in terms of impact, comprehensiveness, quality and me enjoying writing the story are almost exclusively when I've gone out and met people face to face," Baron said.

According to a study in 2018 by the Pew Research Center, 20% of American adults get their news primarily from social media, a number that surpasses the 16% of the population that primarily seeks newspapers as a main news

source.

To keep up with this change, most news outlets have put a greater emphasis on online content, increasing the pace and flow of stories posted there.

"There's a real risk of putting out inaccurate info because it all happens so fast," Baron said.

The new emphasis on online speed has made it harder for reporters to not only engage with the people they are covering, but also maintain the quality of their stories.

"When you're going and interviewing someone at a location, you're gathering all these details about what's around them, the people they interact with and the environment they live or work in," Baron said. "A big challenge

is trying to get that level of detail into your stories when you're reporting a lot of it digitally."

General assignment reporter and editor John Woolfolk noted an even larger structural change within the newsroom.

Twenty years ago, no one showed up at the newsroom before 9 a.m. or 10 a.m. Reporters had a deadline in the afternoon and evening, with people working later hours.

Now, reporters arrive at work around 8:30 a.m. and finish their stories by mid-afternoon. The night layout and copy editing crew, like the newsroom generally, has only a sliver of the people who used to work there because of the economic hardships in the news business and other trends. ♦



Baron

## Reporters warn and encourage journalists

Despite the challenges newspapers face, both Baron and Woolfolk don't regret going into the field for their careers, and believe that the industry still has much to offer.

"When I got into the business, everybody was telling us there's no job," Woolfolk said. "But if you're interested and like what you do, you'll get a job and continue to get raises, so don't let that discourage you."

Although the scarcity of jobs and low pay are inescapable realities and "your chances of getting rich are very slim," according to Baron, there's reason to hope.



Woolfolk

Particularly promising new areas and forms of journalism, including social media journalists, are gaining much more traction. Having expertise in a particular area can also be an asset.

What's more, Baron said, is the field's tremendous importance and its unique opportunities.

Baron remembers covering the fires at Big Basin Redwoods State Park in Boulder Creek in 2020 and the role of robots in Amazon warehouses.

"I walked five miles to get into Big Basin with a photographer and we were the first ones to

bring photos out of there," Baron said. "All over the country, people were wondering whether the trees survived or everything was destroyed, and we were able to shed [details] like that."

**"It's fun and exciting in ways that other jobs can never be."**

REPORTER Ethan Baron

In the robot story, he had the chance to go into an Amazon warehouse and speak with work-

## Newspaper industry faces lower revenues

Local newspapers have traditionally relied largely on subscriptions and advertising. In 2020, however, digital advertising made up 51% of all advertising revenue of the Bay Area News Group, according to Michael Turpin, the executive vice president and chief revenue officer of the company.

Traditional advertisers in local newspapers have flocked to national publications or tech platforms like Facebook due to their larger audience and exposure.

"Advertisers want to be on the landing page of Google," said Baron, the Mercury News business reporter. He added: "The Mercury News staff has shrunk and stabilized mostly since I've been there, and I hope it's at the point where there aren't going to be any more cuts."

Towns across the country are rapidly losing access to local news as those outlets die out due to an increase in what researchers call "news deserts."

Baron has also seen changes in what a bigger paper like the Mercury News is able to cover. He used to be able to drive over an hour to speak to one person and obtain a high-quality interview; now he is expected to make six phone calls and online research in the same amount of time instead.

Another consequence of this staffing shortage is a decrease in the number of topics covered

by news outlets. When the Mercury News shifted their news operations to focus more on COVID-19, other important topics were uncovered.

"Readers, viewers and listeners need to know what's happening in their schools, local governments, their transportation commissions and their hospitals. This is the information people need to become effective participants in democracies," Baron said. "Tons of other important elements are getting very little of the reporting that they need."

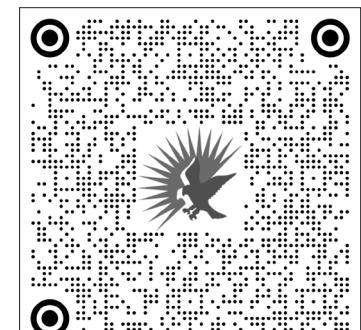
In order to remedy the decline in local news coverage, small and fully-digital news organizations such as the Milpitas Beat, Santa Cruz Local and San Jose Spotlight have begun filling the holes.

At the Mercury News, Turpin said the primary advertising strategy now consists of three

main components: not giving up on print advertising, relying more on subscriber revenue and continuing to find new digital opportunities. He said the Mercury News has struggled to attract employees who prioritize digital marketing over print advertising.

"We actually reach more people with our journalism now than we did when we were print only," Turpin said. "But the world has changed dramatically since the internet, mobile phones and social media." ♦

**Want more? Read the full story online by scanning the QR code:**



# The road not taken: Rejecting college sports

BY Jonathan Li

Each year, thousands of high schoolers reach out to college coaches in hopes of being recruited. There are 460,000 athletes in the NCAA right now. Provided the opportunity, most student-athletes will look to accept a recruitment offer in order to pursue their sport in college.

For others, however, being a student at the university of their choice trumps the chance to play a sport at a school that is less attractive to them.

Senior Parsa Hashemi is one of these students.

He started playing soccer, lacrosse and football as a freshman. Hashemi had hoped that he would be able to receive football offers from large Division 1 schools that he aspired to join.

Although a number of Division 3 schools have reached out to him about alternative admission processes that would lead to admission, Hashemi turned each of these offers down.

"They were a little too small for me," Hashemi said. "I'm looking for the college experience."

Hashemi hoped to attend larger schools with more school spirit and a more competitive athletic environment. Despite his efforts, he did not receive any football offers from schools he was interested in attending.

"I've wanted to pursue a collegiate career since middle school," Hashemi said. "I'm a little disappointed in myself."

With this in mind, Hashemi plans to apply to college through the normal application process to see where he ends up.

While Hashemi hasn't been interested in the schools that offered him athletic opportunities so far, senior water polo captain and



Courtesy of MARCUS KUO

**Senior Marcus Kuo rises for an open shot against Monta Vista in a 15-7 win for the Falcons.**

swimmer Marcus Kuo's reasons for pursuing the standard application process stemmed from wanting to focus on enjoying his sport rather than stressing about the recruitment process.

Kuo began playing water polo as a toddler at the De Anza College Aquatics (DACA) water polo program. In 8th grade, he switched to the Stanford Water Polo Club (WPC) for better visibility in front of college coaches, as the club was recognized nationally for its performance in competitions.

"I guess I started thinking about recruiting in the beginning of 8th grade," Kuo said. "Even then, it seemed like people were already playing just for college recruiting and that getting a spot on a top team was their number one goal."

Kuo quickly found success, working his way up to 14A (the most competitive team for athletes under 14) and receiving med-

als consistently in tournaments such as the Junior Olympics. At the same time, he said that he still made time for schoolwork and his other interests such as music that populated his schedule.

"I tried to keep a healthy balance of athletics and academics," Kuo said. "I remember telling my parents when I switched to Stanford WPC that if I were to get an early commitment to a college team with admissions support, I wanted to know I belonged at that school and was equally qualified as non-athletes in my academics, too."

For Kuo, that meant juggling practices, extra training, lifting weights and schoolwork. Despite the time commitment, Kuo said he does not regret any of the efforts he expended.

During the summer, he ultimately decided that getting recruited for college was not the right path for him. Due to the expectations of coaches and recruiters, Kuo felt constant stress to perform at practices and

tournaments.

"I dealt with a lot of anxiousness and pressure around feeling I always needed to perform my best at practices for playing time and tournaments in case coaches were watching my game," Kuo said. "I'd already been experiencing that with the increased competitiveness at Stanford WPC, but this summer was at another level."

Instead, Kuo plans to apply as a regular student, leaving open the chance to play on the team later.

Being a student athlete can be physically and mentally exhausting. With hours of practice each day and flying across the country for games, their schedules are completely packed to the brim.

Kuo knew that balancing a high-quality education and a sport is incredibly difficult, and wanted to first determine his other commitments before having to dedicate himself to four years of grueling practices.

**With hours of practice each day and flying across the country for games, their schedules are completely packed to the brim.**

Regardless, the schools he had been talking to have already assured him that he will have a spot on the team should he attend and choose to play. For Kuo, this has allowed him to enjoy water polo without the stress and pressure of the recruitment process.

"That focus on always playing for someone else took away a lot of the fun from water polo," Kuo said. "I don't regret choosing not to pursue these opportunities." ♦

# Four-year varsity athletes gain leadership experience

**SENIORS REFLECT ON THEIR EVOLUTION FROM YOUNG PLAYERS TO LEADERS ON RESPECTIVE TEAMS**

BY Anjali Nuggehalli

During senior power forward Giulio Morini Bianzino's sophomore year, the varsity boys' basketball team took a trip to Santa Barbara, where they were woken up in the middle of the night by a blaring sound. With a summer league game just hours away, the athletes crowded around the fire alarm, jostling with each other to try and turn off the obnoxious noise at the break of dawn.

"It took 10 Saratoga athletes to figure out how to turn it off, and we ended up just breaking it instead," Morini Bianzino said. "Memories like these just show the community we have, which is one of my favorite parts about being on the team."

Morini Bianzino is one of the few senior athletes who have been on a varsity team for all four years. With two upperclassmen brothers, Morini Bianzino said he was already friends with a lot of the players when he joined in freshman year, which made adjusting less intimidating.

While Morini Bianzino quickly adapted to such an intense level of competition, he felt that he was still treated like a "little kid," and had to adapt to being surrounded by older players both on and off the court.

"Being able to grow up with the seniors every year was a really interesting and unique opportunity for me," Morini Bianzino said. "I wanted to compete at the highest level possible, and having upperclassmen guide me through it was

really cool."

As a captain on the varsity basketball team this year, Morini Bianzino hopes to be a mentor for younger players.

"Throughout the years, I've grown into myself physically for sure, but I've also matured a lot," Morini Bianzino said. "It was a really interesting challenge to start as a small guy, which is something I want to help younger players with."

Senior midfielder and co-captain Lauren Yarrington is also a four-year varsity athlete and has played on the girls' soccer team throughout high school. Despite having experience in an elite level of club soccer, Yarrington didn't know what to expect trying out for the team during her freshman year.

**"The energy she brought to the team is still inspiring me to be a good leader and play well as a senior."**

SENIOR Lauren Yarrington

When she made the varsity team, Yarrington said she felt both "relieved and bittersweet," as she wouldn't be playing with most of the other girls in her grade. However, she quickly came to appreciate being one of the youngest on the team. ♦

"As a freshman on varsity, I learned so much, both on and off the field," Yarrington said. "The upperclassmen were so helpful, whether it was giving advice on which classes to take, or teaching me how to be an effective leader."

Yarrington specifically remembers looking up to Class of 2019 alum Sasha Pickard, whom she described as "just incredible."

Through both her exceptional leadership skills and high quality of play, Pickard consistently displayed the qualities that Yarrington wanted to develop throughout high school.

"Everyone loved Sasha, and looked up to her so much," Yarrington said. "The energy she brought to the team is still inspiring me to be a good leader and play well as a senior."

While Yarrington described herself as "pretty quiet," she tries to lead by example in hopes that younger players will learn from her technical proficiency, understanding of the game and overall skill set.

Because she knows how intimidating being a young player on varsity can be, she hopes to foster an uplifting environment where every player feels encouraged to improve.

"I want to create a community that revolves around lifting everyone up collectively, and not leaving anyone behind," Yarrington said. "We only play with each other for a few months out of the year, so it's so important that we create a tight bond, and really enjoy the time we have together." ♦



Courtesy of GIULIO MORINI BIANZINO

**Senior Giulio Morini Bianzino shoots a layup in warmups before a varsity game during his sophomore year in front of his coach and teammates.**

## BOYS' BASKETBALL

# Led by Li, Falcons gain tight victory over Homestead

BY Jonathan Li

With the varsity boys' basketball team trailing the Homestead Mustangs by just one point, senior point guard Christian Li cut toward the hoop and wrapped around a screen for a 3-pointer. Nothing but net.

The Falcons started their preseason strong with a number of victories. They beat Newark Memorial 60-52, and defeated Homestead in their first home game 58-53 on Nov. 31.

In the first half of the game against the Mustangs, neither team was able to secure a substantial lead, and the game remained back-and-forth until the third quarter. Senior point guard Chris Liu said he believes they did not perform as well as they were expecting to.

"The game was a lot closer than it should have been; Homestead's solid, but based on the way we played over the summer, we know we're much better than them," Liu said. "I'd definitely say that was one of our worst games, just because the season started, so everyone's getting back into it."

Throughout the game, there were a number of turnovers and miscommunications on both sides of the court, and both teams



Courtesy of ISABEL LEE

**Junior Niveydh Pai surveys the court for a pass against Homestead during first home game.**

were missing easy shots.

"We need to execute on offense," Liu said. "We have a lot of plays, but we need to have a leader to call out the plays and execute."

Despite these setbacks, the Falcons were able to pull away during the third quarter. Senior small forward Som Teymouri and Li led the team in scoring, with 20 points and

15 points, respectively.

Li made several 3-pointers during a close stretch of the game, pushing their lead to eight points. Coupled with the Falcon's fast-paced, full-court defense, the team held off Homestead for a narrow victory.

"In the second half our defense turned up, and a lot of steals and transition gave us

a solid lead that we kept until the end of the game" Li said. "It was definitely key to see that our defense could keep us in the game since it's our biggest threat this year."

Homestead's team was significantly taller than the Falcons, which contributed to the tough match. With several players standing well over six feet, the Mustangs were able to pull down a number of offensive rebounds for quick putbacks.

Despite this, the Falcons excelled on defense. Their fast-paced full-court defense placed constant pressure on the Mustangs, and opened multiple opportunities for easy layups. According to Liu, teams are "scared of the Falcon's full court press."

"Our stamina on defense started with the offseason because all of us got gym memberships," Liu said. "In practice too, we're just constantly running without that many breaks."

Liu added that the team hopes to win more dominantly in the near future, and is looking to win League Championships and CCS Championships.

"This won't affect our season much because once our shots start falling, everything will fall in place which will lead us to our goal of winning CCS," Li said. ♦

## BOYS' SOCCER

# Dominant win boosts team's confidence for season

BY Benjamin Li

Ten minutes before their match with San Jose High school, senior captain Aidan Costello looked around at the nervous boys soccer team. They had improved a lot since last season, with many of their players improving in the offseason due to club play, but this would be the first meaningful game they would play together as a team. 20 minutes into the match, those worries faded.

"Once we started playing we just absolutely dominated them," Costello said. "We were stringing together passes really well and our team morale was good."

As the game progressed, the team only played better. As the timer hit zero in the

second half, the Falcons found themselves up 4-0 with their first win of the season.

The team was hyped over their win, Costello said, the win boosted their confidence by a good margin, and they felt much more comfortable playing with each other. With San Jose being one of the stronger teams they would face this season, the win gave them a sense of where the team stood in terms of skill.

One of the reasons the team was able to perform so well are the new players that filled the holes in last year's team. Junior Luke Wheeler, sophomore Mohit Gandluru, and junior Taylor Wilson playing wing, midfield, and wing respectively all made significant contributions during the game.

Besides the few new additions that helped boost the team's performance, the team remains largely unchanged since last year. This has allowed them to retain their chemistry, without having to adapt.

"The coach is the same, the team is the same, so we're able to play together very well," Costello said. "Our coach knows how good we are so he's there to push us to play to the level we should be at."

The team hopes to continue their strong start throughout the season and win CCS.

"I'm excited for the upcoming season because I think all the other teams have dropped in level, but we've improved," Costello said. "I think this is the year when we can win league and even CCS." ♦



Courtesy of SHAHEEN MASOUMI  
Saratoga and San Jose soccer teams show sportsmanship after the Falcons won 4-0.

## GIRLS' SOCCER

# Senior co-captain reflects on self-growth after ACL tear

BY Nidhi Mathihalli  
& Anjali Nuggehalli

As the whistle blew to kick off the girls' soccer game against Los Gatos in January of 2020, Emma Foley couldn't shake off her nerves. In the second game of the varsity season, Foley was starting at center back, a position relatively unfamiliar to her.

As she sprinted to defend in the first 10 minutes of the game, Foley was clipped from behind by an opposing player, feeling her knee twist before she toppled over.

"I heard a pop and was in denial for a week because I could walk, and even run," said Foley, a senior who is now the team's co-captain. "I was trying to convince myself that it was fine, but I was lying to myself."

Despite the original swelling reducing as the days went by, Foley's knee buckled with certain movements, and she sometimes felt it was "going to give out." A week later, Foley got an MRI. She had torn her ACL.

Upon getting the news, Foley, who has played the sport since age 8, said she was "really overwhelmed," and scared because the sport was a big part of her life.

"In the beginning, [the recovery process] was really hard for me because if you do something for all your life, it's just built into your schedule," Foley said. "I just expected it to be there all the time but suddenly, it wasn't there anymore. It was a lot to take in at one time, and was extreme distressing."

Following her surgery, she was in recovery for a year, doing physical therapy exer-

cises frequently to rebuild her mobility and strength. For the three weeks following her diagnosis, she was in a brace, unable to exercise frequently. After these weeks, Foley slowly regained her range of motion, which she said was difficult due to fluid buildup.

Eventually, Foley was able to take her brace off, and started walking and running regularly. Since she was not allowed to play contact sports, she kept up her fitness by doing cardio and sharpening her technical skills with the ball. She also gained a deeper understanding of fitness and nutrition.

"As an athlete, I was running at least 5-6 miles a day, so I could eat whatever I wanted," Foley said. "I burned a ton of calories. But now, I had to worry about what I was eating and drinking. In the end I came out better, but it was really rough mentally."

Though Foley tried to stay optimistic as the months went by, the drastic changes were a lot to cope with. For instance, she was considering college recruitment for soccer, but, after her ACL injury, she decided that this path was no longer a viable option.

However, the intensive recovery process allowed Foley to create goals for herself rather than be stagnant at home, a grueling mindset that she found similar to her experience playing competitive soccer.

"While doing PT, we never dwelled on things for too long. There was always another goal," Foley said. "There was always more progress to be made, which helped me feel like I was moving towards getting better."

At the beginning of the soccer season in



Courtesy of EMMA FOLEY  
Senior Emma Foley rehabilitates on her hospital bed after a grueling two hour ACL surgery.

fall of 2020, Foley was cleared to return to play. To relearn the basics, Foley did individual drills during practices that focused on the weight of her touches. She trained on her own time, such as juggling challenges, to re-familiarize herself with the sport.

As a co-captain for her final year on varsity, Foley said she is looking forward to being a mentor for younger players now that she is fully recovered, and developing a sense of community that she felt was absent

over the pandemic. Along with being a vocal leader on the team, she also helps bridge communication between the coaching staff and players, and leads pre-game warmups. She also acknowledged the mental growth she had during her recovery journey, and the role it played both on and off the field.

"Resilience, diligence and patience have been my biggest takeaways," Foley said. "That's something I'm really happy to be going out my senior year with." ♦

# Workout jams: Comparing music styles in the gym

BY Jason Cheng

On a recent Saturday afternoon, I swung open the Los Gatos Swim and Racquet Club gym door to a chaotic scene of weights clanging, unnecessarily loud lifting grunts and worst of all, the most obnoxious music blasting through the gym speakers. As I rummaged through my bag, something was missing: my AirPods. I sighed — I'd have to suffer through an entire workout with deafening gym music.

Music has a significant effect on exercise: Fatigue and exertion depend greatly on whether you're shrouded in music or sitting in dead silence, giving you an extra pump for hitting that final rep.

Not only that, the type of music can influence your energy levels — for example, listening to chill songs is not ideal when you're working out.

As such, I decided to test my hypothesis that music choice affects exercise by curating several different playlists.

**I decided to test my hypothesis that music choice affects exercise by curating several different playlists.**

#### No. 1: Electronic Dance Music (EDM)

I started the week off with a bang. I took on the challenge of listening to stereotypically irritating gym music in the form of EDM, broadcasted endlessly to its victims on loudspeakers.

As I readied myself, I could tell I was in for a long ride. After only 15 minutes of stretching and warming up, the music had

burrowed into my head. The soulless, repetitive genre practically dissolved into piercing white noise.

Throughout my workout, I painfully listened to the most indistinguishable songs I had ever heard, and by the time it was over, my body was completely sore — including my ears.

To be fair, EDM actually works for a lot of people, since it supposedly pumps them up and gets them moving. Maybe I'm just an outlier, but I know for a fact that I can't stand another second of EDM without going crazy.

#### No. 2: Pop

I'm aware that pop isn't exactly a genre, but with Spotify's highly-accessible "Happy Hits!" playlist, I figured I'd give it a shot.

The song choices were astronomically better than those in the previous day's playlist, although many of the songs were still very basic.

That isn't necessarily a bad thing though; we're not trying to find the best underground hit here — we're trying to find the perfect background music for working out.

And essentially, pop music does the job: I'm able to exercise while listening to

high-energy music that isn't repetitive.

The playlist contains songs from a variety of genres, ranging from hip-hop to R&B to indie, so it's great for those with a diverse range of music preferences, including artists such as Doja Cat or Bruno Mars.

While some of the songs have been overplayed to oblivion, you can cater towards your preferences by choosing genre-specific pop playlists.

#### No. 3: Lo-Fi Beats

I'm not entirely sure why I thought this was a good idea,

since the playlist's name explicitly states, "beats to relax/study to," but it was for the experiment.

Unfortunately for me, my lo-fi trial didn't work out (no pun intended).

I wouldn't advise listening to sleepy music while trying to lift heavy weights — it acts as a sort of sedative rather than a pump of energy.

Between sets, I found myself slowly drifting away into the daydream realm, and afterward, I noticed that I had spent an extra 15 minutes in the gym — not ideal when you're in a time crunch.

So what's the final verdict?

That's hard to say — everyone has their own preferences when it comes to music. Our brains all function differently under certain circumstances, and ultimately, the decision is up to each individual.

Even so, I'd strongly suggest for you to listen to my preference, high-tempo pop, but whatever you choose, please keep it to yourself: The gym's already hectic enough without everyone hearing you blast music through your speakers. ♦



Graphic by ANNIE LIU



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Saturdays (Cupertino)	9:00am - 6:15pm

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# snapshots



FALCON // LENA ARIBI



FALCON // SANJOLI GUPTA



FALCON // SANJOLI GUPTA



FALCON // SANJOLI GUPTA

Seniors Leslie Robinson, LJ Tuba, Emma Robinson, junior Dragon Neal and sophomores Vivienne Brooks and Ryan Cagliostro act during the fall production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" on Nov. 18.

Senior Nathan Zaragoza serves a cross to his teammates during a varsity boys' soccer practice drill on Dec. 1.

Senior Bill Yuan checks in outside the health office to do a voluntary COVID-19 test during school on Nov. 16.

The dance team synchronously performs their routine to "Tap In" during the Winter Formal rally on Dec. 2.

# My strange, uncurable addiction to Altoids

## Jaltoids



Jason Cheng

It all started when I tasted my first "Curiously Strong Mint." The moment the peppermint-flavored pellet graced the surface of my tongue, I was instantly hooked. Nowadays, I can't go a day without Altoids, and from sunrise 'til sunset, I'm shoveling boatloads of Altoids into my mouth with no regrets.

As a passionate Altoids connoisseur, I've tried flavors from far and wide: original,

smalls, arctic, peppermint, wintergreen, spearmint and cinnamon.

If I'm feeling spicy, I'll pop open my can of original peppermint Altoids and absorb the minty kick. If I'm in a more laid-back vibe, I'll resort to my trusty arctic wintergreen Altoids, stashed in the corner of my desk.

Altoids consumption has many possibilities, too. For a drawn-out process of enjoyment, you can take your time sucking on its smooth edges. If you're feeling rebellious, a quick bite splits an Altoids in half — two pieces means double the fun.

Plus, who said you had to stick to one Al-

toids at a time? Efficiency is key.

I take a prescribed dose of three Altoids after waking up to cure my morning breath. Throughout the day, Altoids will be by my side whenever my mouth is in need of refreshment. And best of all, who needs dessert when you've got your sweet, cinnamon Altoids?

I can proudly say I'm in a long-term relationship with Altoids. I've talked to my mint tins on numerous occasions about our future together, and we've come to the consensus that we're in it 'til the end. As long



Graphic by SINA SALEHI

as I continue craving my beloved Altoids, I'll be ordering a monthly batch of Altoids off Amazon — with free, two-day shipping.

The haters tell me to let off on my addiction: Gum tastes better, they say snootily. This is a jailable offense; if you're into chewing a gooey stick of blandness for hours upon hours, be my guest. You don't even consume it anyway, so what's the point?

Whenever I'm feeling down, Altoids will always be there for me. Even in the depths of APUSH notes or English readings, I'll be encompassed by the warmth of my Altoids. It's an endless cycle: consume, restock, repeat.

Am I ashamed of my unconventional relationship? Absolutely not. Altoids are my first and final love, and until the day I die, I'll never let them go: We're perfect for each other. ♦

# A day in the life of a Saratoga student

**JUNIOR MAKES UP TYPICAL STUDENT TO POKE FUN AT THE DROWSINESS, NEVER-ENDING HOMEWORK AND PROCRASTINATION OF HIS CLASSMATES**

## Shaalie Jenner



Shaan Sridhar

I'm a walking contradiction.

I say I'm smart, but I barely manage to finish my homework. I tell myself I have good music taste, but I only listen to BTS, Taylor Swift and Polo G. And I want a partner sooo badly, even though I have no game.

I'm a typical student at Saratoga High. Welcome to 24 hours of my life.

The day starts at 7:55 a.m.

My alarm has been going off every five minutes for the past two hours — I was supposed to get up early to finish my math homework, but it's too late now.

I jump out of my bed and quickly brush my teeth. I try putting on my contact lenses, but the first one rips, so glasses it is.

I open up my closet and try to find something to wear, but I forgot to do my laundry last night. I guess it's gonna be another freshman class T-shirt and jeans day.

I sprint out the door and to my car, a white Tesla Model Y that my parents gave to me after they upgraded to a red Tesla Model X. Before I leave, I make sure to complete my Screener19 so my second-period teacher knows I'm coming to

school.

When I get to campus, I grab a mask out of my car's glove compartment and dash to class, which is located all the way in the science wing. I rush to the main entrance, where Mr. Thompson shoos me away — I have to enter through the pool entrance. He ends up making me late, adding to tardies that will eventually land me in detention, where Mr. Torrens will make me build desks.

I arrive at my second period, where my class greets me with a standing ovation. For the first time in two weeks, I am only a minute late. I end up learning about composting moldy food and recycling Amazon boxes, amidst a slew of complaints from my teacher about my class being "too sleepy" in the morning.

Then the bell rings and my sacred tutorial time begins. I still have a bunch of pre-calculus homework to finish, so I am shocked when my teacher informs me that my time will be wasted on "team bonding activities" instead.

Advisory strikes again.

The rest of the day has its ups and downs.

I get to take a nap during my fourth period after we watch the same historical documentary for what seems like the eighth time in a row. But I'm fully awake by the time the sixth period rolls around, which is my favorite class because my teacher likes me.

When the final bell rings, I breathe a large sigh of relief. School is done for the

day, so I go home and start relaxing on my couch. But then I remember that I have a Zoom meeting with my college counselor to discuss my future plans.

During the meeting, I hear a mouthful about things I should be doing. Write a research paper — about what? Start a club — that's different from the 60 existing ones? Study for the SAT — I'm actually taking the ACT, but OK. Get better grades — I'm trying! To cap it off, she friendly reminds me I likely won't get into any of my dream schools — ouch.

Once the meeting ends, I check my watch: 3:42 p.m.

This leaves me three minutes to get ready for my sport of choice — ComedySportz. I used to do cross country, but I ultimately decided that running for fun wasn't for me.

When ComedySportz finally ends, I drive myself back home again and collapse onto my bed, desperate for a break. I recount the homework I have to do: Read a chapter of a freaky ghost story, and speed through my Spanish VHL homework (with some help from Quizlet). But before I can start, I fall asleep.

My afternoon nap extends into the evening. By the time I wake up, it's midnight. I trudge in the darkness to my room, and begrudgingly finish my homework, which turns out to be much harder than I expected. When I finish, I swear to myself that I'll never let this happen again.

But then I wake up at 7:55 a.m. the next day, and the cycle starts again. ♦

## top ten

### WEIRDEST LYRICS EVER

- 10** There's vomit on his sweater already, mom's spaghetti. The execution here was as messy as mom's spaghetti.
- 9** Don't be scared, 'cause I'm your body type. Thanks, but why would I be scared that you are my body type?
- 8** Beat's so big, I'm steppin' on leprechauns. When the beat goes hard, stepping on leprechauns would not be the first thing that comes to mind.
- 7** If you wanna be my lover, you gotta get with my friends. That will make for some awkward holiday conversations.
- 6** That girl is a uckers. When the ting went quack-quack-quack, You man were ducking. No words.
- 5** This hit, that ice cold Michelle Pfeiffer, that white gold. Why is the white gold so darn cold?
- 4** When we're on the phone and you talk real slow 'Cause it's late and your mama don't know. Talking slowly ≠ talking quietly.
- 3** This love will make you levitate ... like a bird without a cage but down to Earth. Apparently birds levitate.
- 2** Before you came into my life I missed you so bad. How do you miss someone you've never met them?
- 1** She's indecisive. She can't decide. Clearly, you were a little indecisive/couldn't decide.

>> Apurva Chakravarathy