


CROSSWORD

Read inside the issue to solve
the hints for the crossword.

BACK PAGE



BEAR WITNESS



CLASS CURRICULUM

Redefining the classroom

MILA WINDELL
Student Life Editor

As the Campbell Union High School District (CUHSD) prepares to implement a mandatory Ethnic Studies course by 2025, the class has sparked controversy as some external parental groups expressed concerns about the curriculum.

Previous Ethnic Literature teacher and current CUHSD Teacher On Special Assignment **Michael Espinoza** has been instrumental in introducing Ethnic Studies across the district. Espinoza emphasizes that the course's intention is often misunderstood, usually by those outside of the district.

"Some of the common misconceptions are that Ethnic Studies is anti-American, that it's anti-white people," Espinoza said. "Obviously that's not the case. That's never been the intention of Ethnic Studies."

Espinoza believes misunderstandings stem from the politically charged nature of the topics discussed, including gender and the Israel-Hamas war. These subjects, while integral to the curriculum, have been especially sensitive to parents and community members outside the district, some of whom have filed public records requests to review teaching materials.

In nearby districts like Mountain View and Los Altos, where teachers talked about the Israel-Hamas war, public record re-

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local leaders

NAOMI BERGMAN
Staff Writer

The 2024 election turned many heads to the president. With over 67 million people streaming the presidential debate, viewers around the nation tuned into the race as candidates Donald Trump and Kamala Harris fought for every vote. Despite all the attention the presidents attract, people overlook who impacts their daily lives most.

Local governments, generally divided into counties and municipalities, decide on a wide range of policies, from the number of fire stations in a city to school cellphone regulations.

Though individuals often credit their state or national government for the regulations affecting their lives, the actual determiners are closer in proximity than they think.

In a poll surveying 9th-11th grade Branham students, 62% voted that the national and state governments make decisions that impact them the most. In contrast, 54% of seniors voted the same.

With varying sources of information, forming individual opinions may feel overwhelming. For young voters, many turn to social media to get accessible information. Senior **Chris Zhao** warns against forming opinions based solely on social media.

"With so many different perspectives and different things about the functions of [the government], it's a chore to figure out who's telling the truth," Zhao said.

According to a survey conducted by Deloitte, a financial consulting company, 65% of 18-24 year olds listed one or more social media as their preferred news source. Zhao thinks that using social media as a news

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JUGGLING THE DRUG PROBLEM



Naomi Bergman/Bear Witness

As the administration continues to fight drug use on campus, students express worry over potential punishments. Administrators maintain that their goal is to help students rehabilitate, but some students are still scared to come forward. | See **pages 8 and 9**

NEWS

ETHNIC LITERATURE | Classroom controversy

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quests and complaints were filed and escalated into legal lawsuits. “Teachers had to give up their cell phones and their text messages because they wanted to see if the teacher was antisemitic,” Espinoza said. “We just don’t think that’s even possible and that’s the extent it’s gone to.”

Last year at Branham, some Ethnic Literature students filed an official complaint questioning the content during a discussion regarding the Israel-Hamas war.

“There was a video that was shown, and they did a Public Records Act request and they saw things that could offend students,” Espinoza said. “When PRAs come in, you’re not allowed to know who’s requesting, but they were upset about what we did and what we talked about, and they filed an official complaint.”

Since then, when it comes to discussing the Middle East situation in class, Espinoza recommends that teachers avoid the topic. This was not mandated by the district, but rather from conversations amongst teachers.

“Quite frankly, we’re staying away. [We asked ourselves] ‘Do we really want to go there? Is that something that we want to approach?’” Espinoza said. “It’s bad enough that people don’t like talking about race and gender. But this particular topic is a really hot topic.”

The fear of potential lawsuits, losing their jobs or getting sued has made teachers hesitant to approach controversial topics like this.

“It’s scary,” said Espinoza. “We’re just not equipped right now to approach that in a way that we could be sure that we’re not going to lose our jobs.”

This cautious climate is fueled by concerns that teachers may be accused of imposing their personal opinions on students. However, Ethnic Literature teacher **Olivia Tejeda** believes these fears are based on a misunderstanding.

“There’s a misconception that teachers are indoctrinating students and only teaching them their viewpoints,” Tejeda said. “I focus on keeping my biases out of the classroom and really pushing the focus of the student voice. For teaching controversial topics, that’s important.”

Tejeda acknowledges that guiding discussions over polarizing topics, such as the presidential election or immigration policies, can be difficult. However, the importance of creating a judgment-free and supportive environment in her classroom where students feel comfortable and empowered to share their opinions without the fear of judgment. Tejeda uses community circles to invite more meaningful conversations.

“I didn’t have that safe space when I was going to school, so there were a lot of questions unanswered, or there were a lot of things that I never talked about,” Tejeda said. “[With] Ethnic Literature, you have to have those relationships [with the class] built before. Otherwise, it’s like you can have these conversations, but they’re not real.”

For students, like senior **Analisa Ruiz-Garcia**, the environment has been welcoming, especially since there are guidelines in place to maintain respect for one another and prevent students from speaking over one another in community circles.

“The real beauty of Ethnic Literature is that we have this freedom to say whatever we want and to really be honest and open with our classmates,” Ruiz-Garcia said.

Through these open conversations, Ruiz-Garcia adds that this class has allowed her to make more personal relationships with her peers, allowing her to reflect on other’s perspectives.

“[Ethnic Literature] is a really personal class,” Ruiz-Garcia said. “It’s helpful because it shows us perspectives that we might not have thought about before or encourages us to think differently



Mila Windell/Bear Witness

Tejeda leads a discussion with Ethnic Literature students in a community circle.

and critically.”

Additionally, Ruiz-Garcia finds that the class has given her a space to feel seen and connected to her heritage, which has been especially meaningful when discussing topics like the Latinx immigration experience, a subject that isn’t deeply talked about in traditional, Eurocentric-focused classes.

“It’s made me really happy to feel seen in a lot of these things that we’re doing in class. For me, it’s been a great experience to learn about the Latinx immigration experience, which is something my family went through a few generations ago,” Ruiz-Garcia said. “It’s really meaningful to be able to have a class with so much representation that I haven’t seen as much in other classes.”

Senior **Gayeong Song**, who is also taking the class, observed that the class has allowed her to expand her knowledge of different perspectives.

“Being in this environment helped me build a community and learn more about other people’s perspectives,” Song said. “Not just from an Asian perspective, but also [from] Hispanic people and seeing how they are affected [similarly], having to be living in America and adapt to American culture.”

This experience has made Song more aware of how deeply ingrained racial assumptions can shape people’s lives and identities, often in ways that aren’t immediately visible. Yet through the course, she learned to challenge those stereotypes and view them

from a critical perspective.

“Recently, we were watching a play called Zoot Suit, and it showed how the people had to go through assimilation, and had to adapt to American culture,” Song said. “Even though they were adapting to American culture, they were still discriminated against.”

Song shared how learning about other people’s stories has helped her understand and contextualize personal experiences with racial stereotypes.

“It made me realize that some past experiences I had were a form of racism. I didn’t really think of it as racism [at the time], because it was so normalized,” Song said. “Even saying that Asians are smart, like typically smarter than other people, is a form of stereotypes, and just having to live with that stereotype is difficult.”

As the district moves forward with implementing Ethnic Studies, Espinoza and Tejeda plan to still reinforce having difficult conversations and welcoming different perspectives while keeping a level of respect.

“We are not debating in this class. We’re having conversations. Sometimes those conversations will be hard. Sometimes people will have beliefs that you feel are directly antithetical to who you are as a person,” Espinoza said. “We need to seek to understand and that goes a long way.”

GOVERNMENT | The local government affects students

From PAGE 1

outlet can be dangerous since algorithms are designed to feed users information that they want to hear.

“Most of the news [students] hear comes from social media,” Zhao said. “Not a lot of people watch the news, so they hear what they see on TikTok on Instagram and form their opinions there.”

Zhao said that keeping an open mind and assessing multiple sources is most important to get credible and unbiased information online.

“Don’t always listen to sources that align with your views,” Zhao said. “Get a new perspective. It will help you form a firm stance and understand the opposite stance.”

Social science teacher **Kirk Selfridge** says that most people aren’t knowledgeable about the local elections.

“People pay more attention to the national stuff and only get motivated to participate in national elections,” Selfridge said. “States can call elections for a proposition or a special election, but they typically have lower voter turnout.”

Considering that sources can be biased or spread misinformation, students may find it challenging to know where to get credible information. Selfridge said that utilizing agency websites with published information on meetings and discussed topics is a good place to start.

“[Students] have to be a self-starter and have the initiative to [learn more about the government] themselves,” Selfridge said.

With the overturning of Roe v. Wade, many people believed this would end access to a woman’s right to an abortion. Despite this, many people do not know the local government represents the constituency determin-

ing the rules surrounding the availability of reproductive care.

For Campbell Union High School District, the Board of Trustees make political decisions that most directly impact Branham students. Board of Trustees President **Jason Baker** leads the board, making policy decisions that influence the way schools provide education to students.

“We set policy on curriculum and standards and decide how the school’s district budget is spent,” Baker said.

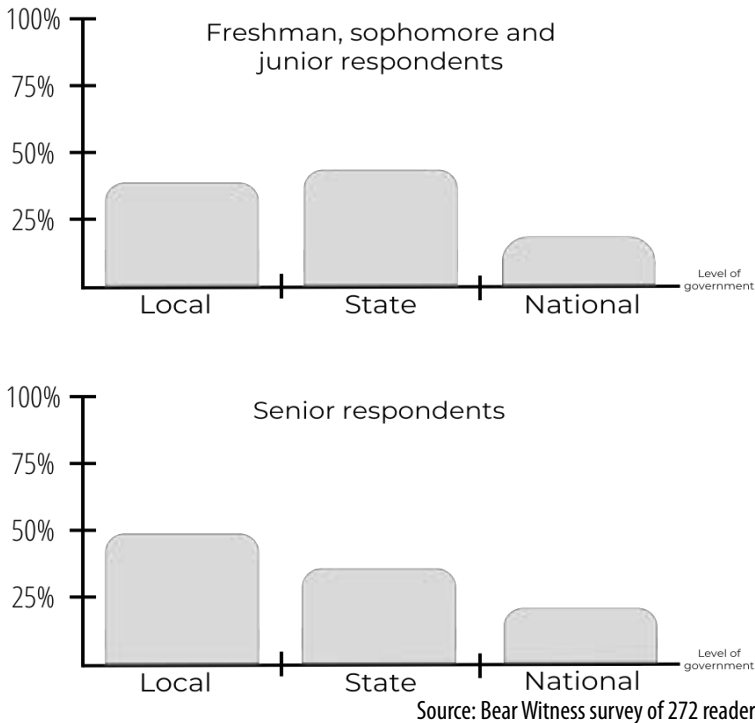
The Board of Trustees is responsible for the decisions that students and teachers can see in and out of classrooms. According to Baker, the decision-making process consists of discussions that set the policies’ directions. One of the decisions the Board of Trustees made was putting Measure P on the ballot, which will change the layout of schools in the future.

“[Measure P] will raise an estimated \$474 million over the life of the bonds that would be issued to change classrooms and upgrade science rooms to make a tremendous number of changes to the physical layout of schools that students will be learning in for decades to come,” Baker said.

Baker said that the Board of Trustees also focuses on improving the learning environment for all students in order to give all students equal access to education—decisions that will impact students and their education directly.

“The focus is closing the equity gap,” Baker said. “We want to invest resources to make sure that we help close that gap between students who are less served.”

Government level impacting students the most



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Mission Statement:

The Bear Witness is committed to providing accurate, timely coverage of local and world news while connecting these events to the lives of our diverse student body.

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NEWS

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Backstage Bruins debuts “Christmas Carol: A Ghost Story”
Theater teacher **Jennifer Sorkin** and co-producer **James Kopp** based the play on the 1843 “A Christmas Carol” by Charles Dickens. The play follows a wealthy, grumpy man named Ebenezer Scrooge who hates the spirit of Christmas. Kopp believes that the production has allowed the cast to improve their acting and technical skills and showcase their progress.

“If you come see the show, you’re gonna see the weirdest, most unique Christmas carol you might ever see,” Kopp said.

— *Alyx Yoon and Emmett Spear*

Bionic Bruins hosts a robotics competition
The Bionic Bruins hosted a robotics competition for students from across the Bay Area, where around 100 students and 25 teams built their robots, aiming to collect as many rings as possible in the matches. The competition began with preliminary matches and later transitioned to elimination matches. The competition participants see robotics as a way of

learning about different careers and their interests, such as junior attendee **Jean Yoo**.
“I am really interested in going into engineering as a career,” Yoo stated. “It’s an opportunity for me to look into my future career path and see, is it the right fit for me?”
The Bionic Bruins will be hosting another event twice the size in early February of 2025.

— *Abigail Medeiros and Hailey Steed*

The Bear Witness receives a Pacemaker
The Bear Witness received the National Scholastic Press Association (NSPA) Pacemaker Award for the November 2023

issue, which reported on the impact of the Israel-Hamas war on Branham. The award, granted to 19 student publications across the nation, annually recognizes preeminent newspapers.
For Editor-in-Chief **Ava Stark**, receiving the award reflected the effort and appreciation for journalism from the Bear Witness staff.
Opinion editor **Aryella Finkel-Hozer** values the recognition the Bear Witness received.
“Stay humble,” Finkel-Hozer said. “This [award] goes to show that hard work will get an outcome. Your work is honored and will get recognized.”

— *Yujin Cho*

ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR

CONFLICT CONTINUES

The Oct. 7 war beginning in 2023 continues to impact communities

ARYELLA FINKEL-HOZER
Opinion Editor

The Israel-Hamas war in the Middle East continues to affect people globally, since the beginning of the war. Students at Branham affected by the conflict have continued to search for their cultures and find community.
Oct. 7, 2023, marked the beginning of the recent Israel-Hamas war when Hamas, a Palestinian military group occupying the Gaza Strip and West Bank, carried out a terrorist attack upon Israel on Shabbat, the weekly day of rest for the Jewish people. There have been over 1,500 Israelis and 44,000 Palestinians killed and 117,000 injured, according to the Gazan Health Ministry.
The 13-month war continues to escalate with Israeli forces killing the Hamas leader, Yahya Sinwar on Oct. 16, 2024. Sinwar took over after the previous leader, Ismail Haniyeh, was killed in July of this year. Throughout the war, civilian lives continue to be affected.
Junior **Tamar Maysel**, who grew up in Israel and moved to the United States at seven years old, experienced violence from the tensions between Israel and Hamas. As a child, she found herself constantly exposed to wake-up calls, urging her and her family to find bomb shelter.
Today, Maysel surrounds herself with those connected to Jewish roots, a comforting place during times of war at her home. Due to her Israeli heritage, Maysel is determined to foster a strong Jewish community, which she does so through being president of Jew Crew, Branham’s Jewish club, and being involved with B’nai Brith Youth Organization (BBYO).
“BBYO gives me a strong Jewish community, and I feel that [with] any problem I encounter, there’s someone there that I can talk to about it [with],” Maysel said. “Whether it’s something that happened at school or something I’ve encountered online, I know I have someone to rely on.”
Maysel has been able to surround herself and engage with her Israeli and Jewish identity following her immigration to America. At Branham, she noticed the difficulty that Jewish people faced.
“We were facing a lot of discrimination,” Maysel said, “People were pointing fingers at us. People were laughing. Me and my co-president were appalled at the amount of anti-semitism.”
Following the beginning of the war, finding a community with shared experiences and a strong support system became more important, which Maysel was able to find through Jew Crew and BBYO.
Senior **Avishawd Yarisai**ed has created similar groups, such as the Persian Club for Middle Eastern students, specifically those of Iranian descent, who are impacted by the war.
“I feel safe being a Persian at Branham,” Yarisai said. “I feel very supported. Different Iranians and different students who were interested in learning about what’s going on and still is going on in Iran.”
Due to her personal connection to the war, creating a community at school is important for incorporating her culture outside of her home.

“I have a lot of family in Iran. I only have a small portion of my family here in California. I have family members that will be affected by the war,” Yarisai said.
With Branham students having relationships to the conflict, either through family, ancestry or friends, the opportunity for students to educate themselves in a school setting is valuable. History teacher **Madeline Fama** senses the impact learning about global conflicts at school has on students.
“I can see both sides [of the conflict],” Fama said. “I’ve had students who are Palestinian and students who are Jewish. They both have very strong opinions. They feel certain ways about the topic. You have to make sure you’re respectful of their learning, but also give them a chance to learn about these things.”
The spread of hate speech across social media has become very present since the continuation of the conflict. Learning about the Israel-Hamas war at school offers various viewpoints and helps minimize the amount of harsh words and graphic images that can be seen online, allowing students to learn about the war transparently.
However, Maysel has noticed that people online tend to react

quickly and impulsively as the news publishes stories about the conflict.
“No one has time to process anything. People think very irrationally. They just want to say what they want to say. They want someone to feel hurt by what they’re saying,” Maysel said.
Many people look to social media as a culprit of this, demonstrating the issues many Middle Eastern civilians are facing due to the war.
“Antisemitism, Islamophobia—the general discrimination that all of us are facing,” Maysel said. “It’s because of social media [where] all people hate on people. At this point, it’s really without a point. They’re hating on people to hate on people.”
Fama says it’s valuable to inform students about credible sources when researching complex topics such as the Israel-Hamas conflict.
“We as human beings tend to look for information that agrees with our bias,” Fama said. “We can’t help it, so in our class, when we [learn about] current events, I run them through a media bias chart. Social media is a big part of [students’ lives], but if you look at a new source, you can see where their bias lies.”



Courtesy of Tamar Maysel
Junior Tamar Maysel and Central Region West (CRW), a Jewish teen movement throughout Northern California and the Bay Area, members group together at a BBYO convention

504 PLANS | Accommodations aren’t always met

ABIGAIL MEDEIROS
Staff Writer

Created by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 504 plans ensure a student has equitable access to a learning environment by legally protecting individuals from discrimination based on their disability. However, 504 plans do not always work effectively.
In classrooms, they provide safeguards and support for students with disabilities or impairments. 504 plans may entail different accommodations depending on the student and their needs, with some plans including extra time on exams, assistive technology and preferential seating.
Despite their purpose as a learning accommodation for students, varying responses from teachers can prevent 504 plans from effectively serving their intended function. Junior **Patrick Wilson** has a 504 plan for his ADHD and has experienced teachers refusing him his accommodations.
“One teacher told me that they would be flexible with my seating,” Wilson said. “When I asked about it in class, they did not let me.”
Wilson is not the only student with a 504 plan who has experienced teachers not accommodating their plan. 63% of 75 Branham students with 504 plans said they didn’t feel like their teachers accommodated their needs.
In addition to teachers who do not always support the accommodations, some teachers give too much unnecessary attention to the 504 plan, such as by spending excessive time on it or singling a student out, according to junior **KaiAnne Hart-Robertshaw**. She is one of many students at Branham who has a 504 plan that supports her in her classes.

“There are some teachers that do too much,” Hart-Robertshaw said. “Too much where [I want to say] ‘You’re just in my way.’”
Another struggle students with 504 plans face is in the application and renewal process. 504 plans can be hard to obtain and even harder to change them after time has passed. Parents must first write a request letter, then send it to the school coordinator and go through the school’s review process.
“It’s hard to get them without really knowing what you’re looking for,” Hart-Robertshaw said. “It’s hard to change them. You have to talk to a lot of people, and let them know everything you want.”
But science teacher **Dionysus De La Cruz** says his responsibility to students with 504 plans goes a step further than just listening at some of those meetings.
Instead of waiting for his students to approach him with requests, he makes an effort to reach out and check in with them individually so that he can figure out how to best support them. Conversations during meetings, depending on how comfortable students are, might not reveal the full picture.
“When I talk directly, one on one with students I have a good relationship with, they’re willing to express more, making clearer what they truly need, than in a meeting setting. That’s why I take it upon myself to be able to attend or give my input as much as possible, because I can tell when the student is being more open or honest and comfortable.”
De La Cruz hopes that all teachers can take the initiative into their own hands by talking to students one-on-one, getting their input directly.

“All teachers and adults could work to help their students to make them more comfortable and be able to express everything they need,” De La Cruz said. He continues checking in with students throughout the school year about their individual accommodations and support.
“That’s when I kind of go on to have a conversation about the specificities that are just unique to that student and trying to see, well, how does that work best for you? Or how often do you feel the need? Is this going to be something that we should check in regularly and see? Are you actually getting those needs met?”
That being said, some teachers have begun to see 504 plans as an opportunity to help all students lower their stress levels and guide the classroom expectations.
“Because every student is different, the best approach for myself and for all teachers would be to unify, to have a universal design that already meets the needs of the majority of students,” De La Cruz said.
De La Cruz said that being proactive in meeting students’ needs, regardless of if they have a 504 plan or not, will allow all students to feel supported in their learning environment.
“Classrooms aren’t innately designed to already meet [student] needs,” De La Cruz said. “This pushes teachers that don’t already have the structure to meet it because I haven’t had to change how I teach or what mythologies or pedagogies I follow already. But there’s some particulars that come up that I hadn’t experienced before that challenges me to say, ‘Oh, how could I restructure not just for this one student, but for any student that may not have a 504 but could benefit from that strategy.’”

63% of 75 Bear Witness readers with 504 plans say that their 504 plans do not feel accommodated by their teachers

Obtaining a 504 plan
504 plans vary by state but generally follow this process.

Submitting the request: Request a 504 plan to the school’s 504 plan coordinator.
Review: The school will review the student’s medical records and evaluation. The student’s schoolwork, report cards and other performance data are assessed. Students are observed in a classroom or other school setting.
Creating the plan: If the student is qualified, a plan is reviewed and communicated with the school.

Source: Understood.org

OPINION

COLLEGE
CROSSROADS

AVA STARK
Editor-in-Chief

Many seniors spend their first semester making their college applications near perfect so they get into the most prestigious college possible. However, the ranking of a person’s college is not the most important factor for students’ success in life. Arguably, having internal motivation and drive can be more important than going to the most esteemed college. Getting accepted into a prestigious college may not formulate the best conditions for a person to grow and find opportunities in. Yes, more prestigious colleges tend to have more resources to better your education, such as research institutions, faculty mentorship or more rigorous curriculum. However, the environment may not be suitable for obtaining these resources. If a college student feels drained by the student culture, physical environment, food, location or lack of student organizations geared for them, then they may not be able to create motivation for themselves to succeed. According to Michigan State University, students who are involved in on-campus activities are more likely to graduate and create stronger bonds with teachers or students to acquire resources for their future. This can include joining clubs, being active in sports and finding work and internships, which can be important for students’ resumes. Additionally, prestigious colleges are not free. Top Ivy League schools, according to College Vine, can cost a total upwards of \$70,000 a year, which is more than the average student can af-

ford, especially if a student isn’t receiving much help from their family or financial aid. While Yale might be a high school student’s dream, it may just not be financially realistic, making it a poor option for them since it could set them up to struggle with debt after graduating. While this is true, there are still significant reasons to go to a more prestigious school. One reason is that these schools have higher graduation rates. For example, Harvard has a graduation rate of 98%. Another benefit of prestigious schools like this is they typically have more resources and funding for students, which can help students get ahead of their peers at other colleges. They also typically have more recognized programs, which employers do notice. This can also put students ahead just because of the school name on their diploma. That being said, the resources offered at these schools are not always geared towards all of their students, and the schools may not have the best programs that help the individual student succeed. For example, according to Time, the U.S. News college rankings are not fully representative because they don’t include the top Black colleges and universities, which include Howard University, Morehouse College and Spelman College. This means that while the U.S. News college list says a certain group of colleges is best for a student, in reality, there might be better options that would help students succeed in ways that are more beneficial to them.

At the end of the road, seniors realize their efforts aren’t always effective while applying to prestigious schools.



Grace Ngo/Special to Bear Witness

8
Branham students in the past four years went on to an Ivy League school.

Getting accepted into a prestigious school for high school seniors might feel really good and show that you’ve worked hard the past few years. However, there shouldn’t be as much pressure to go to these schools. Students should commit to schools that they feel like they can succeed in and that meet their individual needs because every student thrives in a different environment.

AUTOTUNE

Support beyond the mic

Lip sync, backing tracks, autotune: today’s singers overuse their vocal toolkits

DAVID TRAN
Staff Writer

Attending and participating in musical performances such as concerts is a crucial part of our culture and zeitgeists of our time. But the spirit and quality of performances has been threatened by the diminishing quality of performers’ singing capability. Concerts have always been popular among younger generations. In recent years, media of concerts online is very widespread, especially on social media. With these surges of recordings of live performances, well-known artists like Beyonce, Mariah Carey, and Katy Perry have been caught using lip synching, heavy backtracking and autotune. This raises the question of whether or not it is worth it to attend these performances if they aren’t completely live, especially if the ticket prices have increased significantly in recent years. During the Jamaica Jazz and Blues Festival in 2015, Mariah Carey, known for her vocal talent, found it difficult to remember her lyrics and stopped singing during her performance, making it obvious she was lip-synching. Tickets for festivals like the one she performed at cost as much as \$80 for general admission and \$150 for a VIP day pass. While the overuse of tools like backing tracks can diminish the quality and overall experience of the performance, there are valid reasons artists may use them, such as vocal rest or supporting their vocals to enhance movement or dance-based performance. Audio engineer Matthew Borland from Soundscape Mastering finds that artists may use autotune to enhance their vocals, especially pitch, and create a more polished sound. In the production of her hit song, “Toxic,” Britney Spears used autotune to add an element that makes the song catchy. It may be more permissible for an artist to use autotune in a more stylistic way that adds to their performance and music rather than degrading it. However, an intense amount of autotune may produce a more unnatural, robotic-like sound because of the note-correcting aspect of autotune to help artists stay on key. During Coachella2024, South Korean girl group LESSER-

AFIM received heavy backlash for the poor quality of their vocals, which had to be sung live. However, on the second day of their performance, they improved their vocals, leaving fans to speculate about their use of a backtrack. This caused more controversy among fans as Coachella is an event meant for pure live music. Speculation that rising star Sabrina Carpenter used a backtrack on her “Short and Sweet” tour led her to snap back at the negative comments and get rid of her backtrack completely as a sign to her fans of being authentic. On the other hand, some fans of Taylor Swift, who has also been reported of using backing track on tour, defend Swift, saying it is physically impossible to be singing all the time and emphasizing the need for vocal rest. According to St. Olaf College, the build-in of vocal rests is crucial for singers to deal with high vocal demands and avoid medical issues such as vocal nodules, which are common in singers. While many artists have made the switch to autotune or other

supporting technologies, some have not. With the recent release of the movie “Wicked”, a film rendition of the musical made over 20 years ago, the official media account of “Wicked” released a video revealing that everything performed by the actors was live. The cast and director, Jon M. Chu, were in full agreement that the effect of singing live was immersive to the audience. Behind-the-scenes clips revealed the actors dancing and executing stunts, all while they were singing.

Many other singers such as Bruno Mars, Chappel Roan and Ariana Grande avoid using autotune during their live performances as a sign of authenticity. The regular usage of autotune can be deceptive and unfair to an audience. It should be used as a tool to uplift a singer in the case of vocal rest or support for other performance opportunities such as dancing, not to completely transform a singer’s voice. Artists should find a middle ground to be transparent with their fans while still maintaining high-quality performances, as fans pay money to see them live. Critical fans may also take up a part in being more understanding and consider extraneous factors or reasons as to why artists may be using these tools.



BITE-SIZED
OPINIONS

Minor problems,
minor solutions



Problem: There are leaves everywhere because it’s fall, and the windy weather ruffles them up, making the leaves get in peoples’ eyes.
Solution: Create wind bubbles to shield people from the wind
— Abigail Medeiros



Problem: It gets too cold during the wintertime, so I’m super groggy in the morning and never want to go to school
Solution: Have a 3-month break in the middle of winter for high school students to go into hibernation.
— Yujin Cho



Problem: Cars always almost hit me when I’m crossing in front of the school. They’re not paying attention!
Solution: Build a bridge across all the streets around the school.
— Emmett Spear



Problem: Students sometimes forget to return loaner Chromebooks and chargers from classrooms, leaving none for people who need them.
Solution: Install GPS trackers on Chromebooks and chargers to track down students who take electronic devices.
— Noa Muyal



Problem: We have too many finals before breaks.
Solution: Everyone should pass their finals.
— Kianna Sanchez

NEW SPORTS

More sports, more needs

With the recent addition of girls' flag football and the possibility of lacrosse coming to Branham, students are excited to have the opportunity to explore new sports and test out their interests.

However, there remains one issue— the field.

Branham has only one turf field, which holds practices, meets and games for most teams on campus. Many of our teams are successful enough to make it past their season to Central Coast Section Playoffs (CCS), which results in tight scheduling for the limited field time available.

Editorial

The opinion of the Bear Witness editors

Scheduling practices can be grueling, with sports having to practice as late as 10 p.m. For student-athletes, it's almost impossible to get a quality night's rest with late practices constantly on the agenda.

For years, students have requested that the school make room for a new turf field or another practice field. The current "practice field" is the rough patch of grass next to the turf field, but the quality of the practice field is poor. There needs to be a solution.

A brand new field would allow the school to split game times and practice slots accordingly, ensuring athletes have earlier and more frequent practices. Additionally, a new field would allow the athletic department to schedule more home games and practices at more convenient times for athletes, coaches and parents.

Private schools like Archbishop Mitty and Bellarmine College Preparatory have and maintain multiple turf fields. Even public schools like Leland have three turf fields. For Branham to get their new field, the student body must make it clear to the district that they need a new turf field.

The bond (taxes collected from the surrounding families and households) that goes to the district must be allocated for the construction of the field. Students and parents should show the district that a new turf field should be a priority by sending emails to board members or speaking during their meetings.

The turf field would be beneficial not only for student-athletes but for the student body as a whole. A new field would allow more sporting events to happen, free up practice times and most importantly provide the utmost efficiency for both the students and the school.

STREAMING SERVICES

STREAM-FLATION

Increasing prices of streaming services each year harms the consumer

ELLIOTT YAU
Science & Health Editor

Streaming prices seem to keep on climbing. Over the past few years, popular streaming services like Netflix, Hulu and Disney+ have repeatedly raised their subscription costs in a struggle to accomplish their goals of achieving profitability and attracting users.

Streaming started out as a low-cost alternative to cable television. Instead of paying high prices each month for a set number of channels, consumers could choose one streaming service, gaining access to a large library of entertainment anywhere with Internet access. Yet as these companies' user bases have multiplied, their pricing has also skyrocketed.

In 2010, Netflix, a DVD rental company at the time, launched its first streaming-only plan for \$7.99 a month, letting customers with an internet connection instantly watch unlimited episodes or movies without ads. Netflix's prices have nearly tripled in the past 14 years: its cheapest plan, Standard with Ads, costs \$6.99 a month while its Premium plan costs \$23.99 a month.

Shows on Netflix like "Stranger Things," "Outer Banks" and "Squid Game" reached millions of viewers. In their first 91 days, Wednesday and Stranger Things 4 garnered 252 million views and 140 million views, making them the most popular English-language shows on Netflix. Its most popular series, "Squid Game," received 265 million views and 2.2 billion hours of watch time.

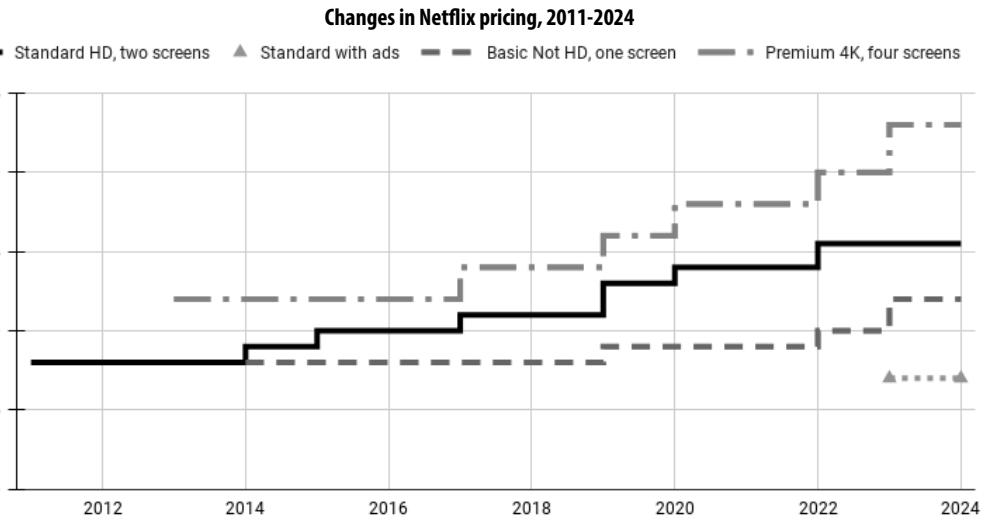
Before the advent of streaming, most households watched cable television. Cable television uses coaxial or fiber optic cables to transmit signals, rather than broadcasting to satellite dishes or antennas, according to TCL. Invented in 1948, cable television rapidly gained popularity with its many channels, adding new premium channels and pay-per-view or on-demand options. Currently, Xfinity charges about \$56.70 a month for its cheapest

cable plan, Limited Basic, which includes 10 or more channels, an X1 TV box, 20 hours of Cloud DVR and Streampix. Xfinity's Ultimate Plan, with at least 185 channels, goes up to \$122.70 a month.

Streaming services like Netflix clearly offer much cheaper options, but that is changing. Despite the massive amount of people watching its content, Netflix has continued to raise prices, partially in response to competition from many other companies looking to replicate its success and partially to compensate for slowing subscriber growth.

For much of the past decade, such companies prioritized attracting new subscribers and building a large customer base, but they are now shifting towards making money, according to Consumer News and Business Channel (CNBC). Disney reported its first profitable quarter for its three streaming services this year after more than doubling its original plan's pricing and introducing ad tiers like most streaming services.

Consumers bear the brunt of this "streamflation," partly because many subscribe to multiple streaming services to watch different



Compiled by Elliott Yau with information from The Verge

shows. Even bundles introduced by companies like Disney can't completely make up for this.

Although companies' desire for profit is understandable, adding advertisements to streaming was not a good choice. Many consumers originally switched to streaming services to cut down on costs and avoid the constant deluge of ads on cable channels, yet they're now dealing with the same issues that streaming promised to solve. Even as new streaming services pop up and promise ad-free, low-cost, high-quality entertainment, inevitably they revert

TICKET PRICES

Costly concerts

KIANNA SANCHEZ
Staff Writer

Concert ticket prices are increasing rapidly, making these once-in-a-lifetime experiences less accessible to younger audiences.

The steep increase in ticket prices alters the concert experience, so teenagers are less inclined to get them.

According to Marketplace, a business news website, concert ticket prices have shot up by 23% since last year, having already risen 19% since the COVID-19 pandemic. Since most students don't have the flexibility to spend large amounts of money, this uprise prices them out of the experience.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused most events to pause operations, including concerts and shows.

This caused many performers in the concert business to lose money due to the absence of events for a period of three years. This led to a rise in concert ticket prices because the more money they lost, the more money they needed to gain back, limiting their availability to a wider variety of people, primarily those who can afford such high prices.

According to TSE Entertainment, the high ticket prices are also influenced by the artist's marketability. This can include the artist's recent success on charts, promotional efforts and an album or tour scheduled. Most of the time, albums or social media advertisements are used as a way to pull people in and interest people, also causing an opening for the price range to widen even further.

Teenagers can view advertisements for concerts on social media as an invite for a once-in-a-lifetime experience and are often disappointed by the high prices. Take pop artist Lana Del Rey, for example. Her concerts only happen every few years, while her popularity on Spotify is around 58 million monthly listeners. According to TicketSmarter, Del Rey's ticket prices often range anywhere from \$700 to \$7000.

Many ticket marketplaces such as Ticketmaster, will also add fees onto the tickets original price. These fees include service fees, order processing fees, and delivery fees.

According to the Los Angeles Times, a report made by the Government Accountability Office found that the fees on the initial ticket sales added a whole 27% to the original cost. This just piles onto what teenagers would already have trouble purchasing.

Taylor Swift's resale tickets averaged \$3,800 for one ticket, according to Business Insider. A mother in Jersey City claimed to have sold four Swift tickets for \$20,000 in an article done by Slate. This amount of money is unattainable for the average teenager, as most of them depend on their parent's income for average

Exorbitant cost of concert tickets ruins the experience for teenagers

purchases

People also buy a lot of concert tickets just to mark-up the ticket prices and resell them online. Bots or scammers tend to scoop up all of the tickets, limiting the opportunities to purchase them directly from sites and allowing the resellers to make a profit.

Many purchases can add up while being blinded by the enjoyment of the concert. This can be especially true for teenagers, due to their lack of income. As fewer people can afford this activity, this can affect the excitement of concerts. Different audience groups should be considered when creating the number on the price tag.

As consumers, we cannot do much about the harsh reality of these absurd ticket prices. However, we can voice our opinions to these ticket companies and advocate for change to allow teenagers to enjoy live music for a secure and reasonable price.

\$204

is the average price for a seat at Taylor Swift's Eras Tour, which sold out 10.1 million seats and every one of its 149 dates.

\$1,640

is the average price for a seat at the Levi's Stadium stop of the Eras Tour, the 10th most expensive show of the tour.

\$2,077,618,725

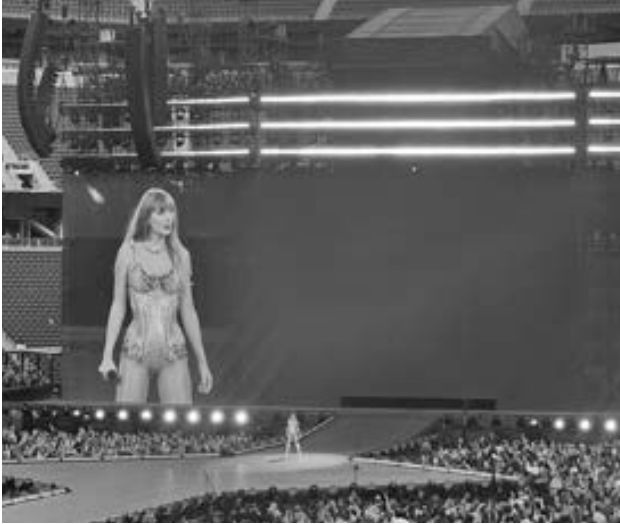
sold in tickets by Swift's tour, double what any other concert tour in history has ever made.

Source: The New York Times and Victory Live



Aryella Finkel-Hozer/Bear Witness

Zach Bryan performs at the Oakland Coliseum in May.



Anabelle Walker/Bear Witness

Pop singer Taylor Swift performs at Levi's Stadium.

SCIENCE & HEALTH

COMMUNICATION

#GETTING

THE

MESSAGE



Google Pixel 9

- Android 14
- \$799
- 12 GB of RAM
- 4,700 mAh battery
- Google Gemini AI
- Rear cameras: 50 MP Wide, 48 MP Ultrawide
- Front camera: 10.5 MP



Apple iPhone 16

- iOS 18
- \$799
- 8 GB of RAM
- 3,561 mAh battery
- Apple Intelligence
- Rear cameras: 48 MP Fusion, 12 MP Ultra Wide
- Front camera: 12 MP

Sources: Google and Apple
Images: Best Buy and Verizon

New Apple updates look to connect Android users

EMMETT SPEAR
Staff Writer

Since the commercial release of the Android mobile operating system in 2008, the company has held a competitive rivalry with Apple’s own brand of smartphones, the iPhone. This rivalry has been amplified by the exclusivity of much of Apple’s software, including that of iMessage, that leaves many Branham students divided between Apple and Android users. Yet, updates made by Apple in recent months might increase compatibility between the two systems.

12% of Branham students use Android phones, according to a Bear Witness poll of 317 students.

A majority of students claim that Android users face challenges such as lower image quality and inability to add people to group chats when messaging Apple users. On Apple devices, messages from non-iPhone users appear in green bubbles with white text, in comparison to a blue bubble of text used for messages between iPhone users. Sophomore **Sophia Liu**, an Android user, dislikes the green bubble, believing it contributes to a negative perception of Android users.

“People discriminate [against] me for having an Android. They [ask], ‘Why is the text green?’” Liu said. “Why do you have to differentiate between having an iPhone and an Android? The colors are just plain discrimination.”

According to an antitrust suit filed on behalf of the district of New Jersey, the green bubble is a method used by Apple to encourage the switch from Android devices to Apple by adding difficulties to using Android devices. Tools like the green bubble signify lower quality in Android smartphones, despite the fact that the degraded user experience could be attributed to Apple.

Junior **Aaron Tsai** also had problems as a previous Android

user, citing peer pressure and distrust in Android devices as his reasons for switching to an Apple iPhone last year.

“My Android broke a little bit too fast,” Tsai said. “[My cross country teammates] wouldn’t invite me in the group chats until I got blue text.”

These issues with compatibility have been noticed globally as well. The European Union’s Digital Markets Act, a measure introduced in 2022 to uphold fairness and contest in digital markets, has pushed Apple to open up their exclusive ecosystem and make apps like Messages more seamless across different platforms.


This includes the introduction of support for Rich Communication Services (RCS) on select iPhones in September’s iOS 18 update. RCS, the current messaging standard used on Android operating systems, supports higher quality image and video sending between platforms as well as easier support for read receipts and group chats. Students, such as junior **Erica Kim**, an Apple user, find these updates inconsequential.

“With my Android friends it’d be easier to text them,” Kim said. “But I don’t think it’d [have] that much of a huge impact in my life.”

These features will not completely integrate Apple and Android services. For one, Apple will keep the green bubble and will not support the end-to-end encryption offered to Android users by RCS.

For Android users like Liu, these limitations negatively impact how she sees the implementation of RCS.

“The fact that they have to differentiate it with the green and the blue is so weird,” Liu said. “There’s no need to have that differentiation. If they’re able to make messaging easier with group chats and stuff, then I don’t see a reason why they would keep something that’s easy to change, that’s just the color.”



12%
of Branham students use Android phones, according to a Bear Witness poll of 317 students.

Some students with both Apple and Android see the adoption of RCS as a step in the right direction towards a higher level of connectivity while recognizing that more could still be done.

“Not everyone can spend the money for an iPhone, and then obviously Android users might get excluded,” Tsai said. “It’d be better for them to make it more inclusive, because then those who are not able to afford iPhones can also be part of those group chats.”

To Liu and Tsai, Android continues to offer viable alternatives to Apple, with both listing many benefits to owning an Android smartphone. Even with the new implementations of RCS switching to an iPhone still seems preferable to Liu.

“I would want to switch [to an iPhone] if I was given the opportunity to,” Liu said. “Just because I don’t like the fact that it kind of sets me apart, and it’s just difficult for me to message people.”

With RCS, students continue to share the sentiment that Apple might not have completely good interests in mind when it comes to accommodating users of other platforms. They feel RCS is not doing enough to change the vision they perceive students have of Android users.

“They just want to sell more iPhones,” Liu said. “At the end of the day, I think if people had a choice between Androids and iPhones, they would most likely still pick an iPhone just because socially, that is more acceptable and is easier to use to communicate with other people, unless you’re a diehard Android stan.”

RECYCLING

Trash or treasure?

Limited recycling at Branham unintentionally tainted by students

NEVAEH GUTIERREZ
Staff Writer

Recently, the California attorney general sued ExxonMobil – the world’s largest producer of polymers – for spreading misinformation about the process of recycling. ExxonMobil released a series of advertisements that implied that plastics are completely recyclable even though they are not. The advertisements only focused on the positives of recycling and failed to mention the impact it has on the environment.

Many companies, such as ExxonMobil, focus on the information that is easiest to sell to users, AP Environmental Science teacher **Kori Reynolds** said. But the conversation surrounding recycling is much more complicated than just the advantages and disadvantages.

“Unfortunately, with environmental systems and with big industry systems, there’s a lot more complexity than that. There’s this big idea that mining is bad, recycling is good,” Reynolds said. “There’s also the other argument [that] recycling is not really that good or beneficial because there’s pollutants tied to it. But the deeper conversation behind that is you have to compare the difference between an original source product and a recycled source product.”

The recycling process for plastics uses a lot of energy because it has a lot of steps. First, the plastics must be collected and sorted through, then it is washed in preparation of getting shredded. After the plastic is shredded into small pieces it is melted. Then the plastics quality is tested before it is turned into a usable product for consumers. While recycling has numerous benefits, such as reducing landfill waste and decreasing the need to mine new materials—which would increase air pollution—it still has its drawbacks. Reynolds said that there is a misunderstanding that recycling doesn’t have any disadvantages.

“There’s definitely harm that comes from the recycling process, from the chemicals used [and] the amount of energy it takes,” Reynolds said. “It takes a lot of gas and coal to create the electricity through the whole process. There’s a lot of pollutants in the wastewater that comes out of that.”

According to Reynolds, recycling at Branham is very limited since the only organizer of recycling is Branham’s environmental club SPARE (Students Promoting Awareness on Recycling and the Environment). SPARE’s recycling coordinator **Noah Noland** said that the club has been facing some roadblocks, such as the contamination of recycling with non recyclable materials and the shortage of recycling cans in classrooms.

“A problem we’ve been dealing with is not all teachers have re-

cycling [cans], so we actually need to supply some [to them],” Noland said.

The lack of recycling cans in classrooms inhibits SPARE’s ability to effectively deal with the recycling issue at Branham. SPARE takes recycling out of the classrooms every Tuesday after school. Members of SPARE sign up for what classes they want to cover, and they then bring the recycling out to the recycling bin in the parking lot. Noland said this would be easier with more SPARE members.

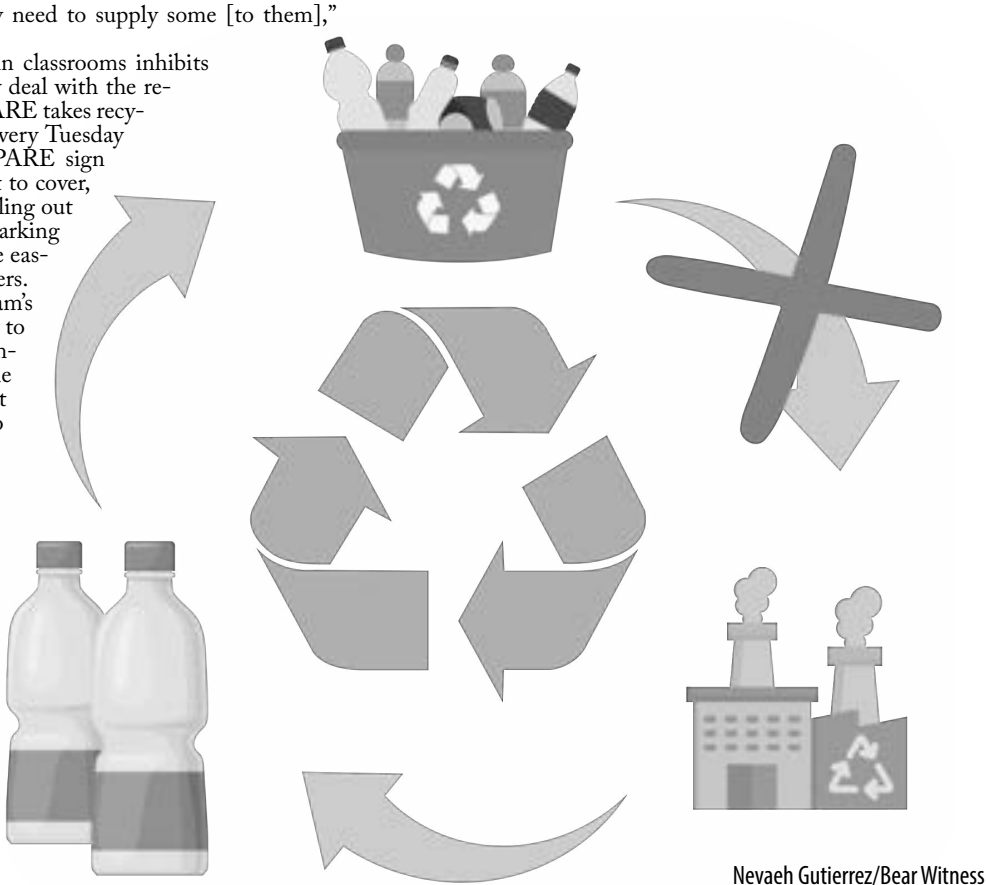
Both SPARE and Branham’s custodial staff are working to improve recycling at Branham, but they are having some difficulty. Branham’s plant manager **Vinny Ramos**, who oversees the rest of the custodial staff, isn’t confident that Branham students care about recycling.

“There’s some cans out there that have double cans. One says trash, the other one’s got a smaller hole in it for recyclables, and I’ve never seen it used since I’ve been here nine years, and we’ve never had success with [them],” Ramos said.

The custodial staff separates the trash from the recycling before throwing them out into separate bins in the parking lot. But separating everything isn’t a simple task.

“Once anybody throws any trash in any recycle bin, it’s automatically trash. [The City of San Jose] will not even take pizza boxes [or] things like that because they say that it already is contaminated,” Ramos said.

Reynolds’ AP Environmental Science class previously found that there are three or four times as many trash cans as recycling cans on campus. Another issue is that most trash cans on



Nevaeh Gutierrez/Bear Witness

campus are blue, which people associate with recycling. Reynolds wants recycling at Branham to be more effective than it is now, and is confident that is a possibility.

“We have a lot of areas of improvement, but we have a lot of good ideas on this campus between students and our staff,” Reynolds said. “We have a lot of good minds on campus that can help come up with an actionable solution.”

SCIENCE & HEALTH

SCREEN TIME

50.4%

of teens had at least four hours of daily screen time

1 in 4

of those teens experienced anxiety or depression

Source: National Health Interview Survey



David Tran/Bear Witness

NO END IN SIGHT

Excessive screen time takes a toll on students' mental and physical health

NITHYA KARAMBAKKAM
Staff Writer

Large amounts of screen time is a constant for students and teachers at Branham with most academic activities being completely digitized.

A study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) last year found that more than 50 percent of teens spend more than four hours a day on their phones. While online resources and platforms can help them academically, they can also cause health problems. According to a study published in the PLOS One Journal, teens can also develop mental and physical health issues because of excessive screen time.

Sophomore **Elina Park** spends a lot of time online, for both personal activities — such as gaming and social media — and school.

"It's a lot of screen time, but it's unavoidable as well because a lot of work nowadays has moved online," Park said, citing AP tests' shift to digital formats.

Dr. **Mary Ann Shui**, optometrist and professor at the UC Berkeley School of Optometry, agrees that students spend a lot more time online now than they did when paper assignments were prevalent in schools. Much of the homework assigned in school has become digital, meaning that it's a necessity for students to be online.

"I grew up in a time where we didn't really have computers. Computers were something that was only at the school or at a business office," Shui said. "When we finished our schoolwork, we generally wanted to go outside, more [than kids do now]."

The increased amount of screen time that students face can hurt, rather than help, students' academic performances, said English teacher **Heather Amanatullah**.

"[Phones are] definitely negatively impacting their attention spans and their ability to work through problems on their own because they have quick access to easy answers," Amanatullah said. "I have definitely seen an impact on their intellectual curiosity and their ability to be resilient academically."

Shui especially stresses the severity of the damage that an excess of screen time can wreak on a person's eyes.

"If a child is constantly looking at something really up close while the eyes are developing, they're going to [become] more nearsighted. The eyes will grow longer than they need to be, and then the person ends up with higher nearsightedness," Shui said. "We're seeing patients starting to wear glasses earlier and earlier. Before, they used to [get glasses] in junior high or later, but now we're seeing kids in early elementary school getting nearsighted."

Shui has also noticed her patients developing eye strain, a condition associated with screen time. When the human eye focuses on a particular object

or spot, it doesn't blink as much, causing the surface of the eye to dry up more. She said that people can experience irritation to their cornea, as well as general eye fatigue, if they are staring at the computer for too long.

Amanatullah, who has two teenage daughters, has witnessed a similar phenomenon firsthand and expresses concern about the physical and psychological effects of being on the computer too much. Like many students and teachers, Amanatullah struggles to make a decision on the appropriate amount of screen time that teens should have.

"If you take phones or technology away, you're putting [students] in a socially awkward spot where they don't have access to the same thing that kids their own age have," Amanatullah said. "It's a difficult dilemma. I let my kids have technology, and I try to be on top of reminding them to take breaks."

Along with seeing this in her personal life, Amanatullah recognizes the strain it has on education through teachers and students.

"I think [technology] has ruined education," Amanatullah said. "The pressure [students] have is always there. You can't get away from your work. It's always there [online]. I feel that as a teacher as well."

Despite the obvious negatives, there are also some benefits to going digital. Park, who takes content-heavy classes including AP World History, applauds the convenience and organization that comes with digital education systems.

"We use a lot less paper when we use computers, which is good because we're not cutting down a bunch of trees for paper," Park said. "[Also,] sometimes having a bunch of folders and papers in your bag can build up a lot of disorganization. By having it all comprised in a Chromebook, it makes it easier for people to find certain things, or to carry things around in their bags."

Computers and the Internet can be very useful to students, and can have definite organizational and environmental benefits when used at a healthy frequency. However, Shui hopes that patients will consider the consequences of using screens too much.

"Moderation is always the key. You don't want to do everything on the computer," Shui said. "The biggest harm that the devices do to teens is that they have [resulted in] students losing some of the ability to interact with each other on a face-to-face level. I think sometimes that hinders them."

Effects of screen time include anxiety and depression as well as other effects listed in the eye chart to the left.

Source: Aspen Healthcare and Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

EYE STRAIN AND FATIGUE PLUS WORSE SLEEP AND NEARSIGHTEDNESS!

Eye charts The Snellen eye chart is used for measuring visual acuity. Patients stand 20 feet away and read the letters, which get progressively smaller.

SCIENCE & HEALTH BRIEFS

Global plastic treaty fails to pass
The world produces almost half a billion tons of plastic each year, but only 9% of that is recycled, according to United Nations estimates. To address the problem, 175 countries have been working on a world-first, legally-binding treaty aiming to tackle plastic pollution. But after two years of negotiations, delegates failed to finalize the treaty in the last round of talks. Disagreements over whether to impose limits on plastic production, whether to phase out harmful chemicals used in production, and disagreements over how to bear the cost divided representatives. Several powerful petroleum-producing nations, including Saudi Arabia and Russia, strongly opposed measures to curb plastic production, arguing that dealing with pollution matters more than restricting production (most plastics are petroleum-based).

Toxic chemicals found in black plastic kitchen utensils
A recent study found that black plastic kitchen utensils may contain toxic chemicals that can contaminate food when cooking. Recycled plastic from e-waste is the source of these chemicals. Many electric and electronic products contain high concentrations of flame retardants, which are associated with health concerns like carcinogenicity, endocrine disruption, neurotoxicity and more. The study looked at over 200 products, finding flame retardants, including one that causes cancer, in 85% of the tested products. Styrene-based plastic, commonly used for electronics, contained significantly more flame retardants than polypropylene and nylon. Under heat, these chemicals can leach out and contaminate food. The researches estimated that users exposed to BDE-209 would have a median intake of 34,700 ng per day, higher than estimates for intake from dust and diet. Alternatives to plastic kitchen utensils include stainless steel, silicone, bamboo and wood.

Bird flu found in raw milk
California recently detected bird flu in raw milk from Raw Farm, the largest raw milk dairy in the nation, and paused distribution of the company's raw milk products. Unlike raw milk, which makes up less than 1% of total U.S. milk sales, most U.S. milk is pasteurized, meaning that it's heated up to eliminate bacteria and pathogens as well as extend shelf life. Bird flu, also known as avian influenza, has infected almost 500 dairy herds in California and many more in the U.S. since March. Although no humans have been known to contract bird flu from drinking raw milk, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said cats have died from consuming it, and rats that drank raw milk got infected in a study this year, adding to evidence that suggests consuming raw milk isn't safe for humans. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has advised against drinking it and started a national bulk milk testing effort.

\$300 billion climate agreement reached at UN summit
Delegates at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP29) met in Azerbaijan, a major producer of oil and gas, finalizing a non-binding agreement for developed countries to contribute at least \$300 billion a year to developing countries by 2035. However, that sum falls far short of the \$1.3 trillion that independent experts say must be invested in developing countries' energy transitions to keep average global temperature change below 1.5 degrees Celsius. But according to a United Nations report, even if countries fulfilled their current climate pledges, the Earth would still be on track for about 2.7 degrees Celsius of warming because many nations have been slow to follow through on commitments. At last month's summit, debates over which countries should be considered "developed" and pay more, deliberations over what a second Trump administration would mean for U.S. climate policy, and more conflicts divided delegates. Next year, Brazil will host COP30.

—Compiled by Elliott Yau with information from the New York Times and Reuters

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STUDENT USE

STRIVING

FOR

SOBRIETY

Students who have overcome addiction with drugs share their perspectives on Branham's programs

ALYX YOON
Staff Writer

Drug usage in teens has become an overwhelming problem in schools across the country. Because of this, Branham has made long strides to counter drug usage on campus.

Drugs can impact a user's health by damaging vital organs such as the liver, kidney and heart. Drug abuse can also lead to mental health disorders like anxiety and depression, according to Better Health Channel. It also affects students by making them more prone to lower grades, attendance and increases the chances of dropping out of highschool, according to Green Hill Recovery. Non drug-using students can be exposed to secondhand smoking and have an increased possibility of getting lung cancer and heart disease as stated in the National Center of Drug Abuse.

According to the National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics, 6.9% of 12th grade students use marijuana daily and 43.7% have tried marijuana in their lifetime. According to American Addiction Centers, two thirds of high school seniors in the U.S. have tried alcohol too.

To protect students from abusing these drugs, Branham has tried mitigating student drug use through the partnership with Tobacco Use Prevention Education (TUPE), which provides curriculum adopted by the district for teachers to teach drug and alcohol safety in P.E.

P.E. teacher **Abby Harris** said TUPE is a helpful method for making safety information easier for teens to understand.

"TUPE tries to get [students] to understand negative consequences and give them the information that they'll understand instead of overwhelming them with too specific information, like how [drugs and alcohol] affect them now versus how it's going to affect them in the future," Harris said. "Kids this age don't really look into the future and long term consequences. They relate more to things that are happening to them in the present."

Harris thinks it is important for students to be educated on drugs and alcohol and understand the consequences, especially when addiction and overdose becomes a fatal risk.

"It's important to bring awareness of those real time consequences," Harris said. "You can try fentanyl one time and overdose. There's no coming back from that."

During the drug and alcohol unit, teachers present a slideshow and show videos, informing students on the effects of different drugs and how it alters the brain. The students take notes and reflect with writing activities.

"It's important for [teachers] to get the information out there to let them be as informed as they can be before choosing to do something," Harris said. "If we give them one statistic that's really going to stick with them before trying it, then we have already done our job. They have to make choices for themselves as these kids are growing up to become adults."

Anonymous student **Jane Doe** has maintained sobriety from drinking alcohol for two years and has recently gone through recovery. Doe believes that despite the efforts provided by the school, the P.E. presentations do not serve their purpose.

"It is useless because no one listens to it," Doe said.

"When [the school] catches people, it stops them [in the short-term]," Doe said.

Anonymous student **Betsy Poe** is currently recovering from their nicotine and marijuana addiction. Poe said the lack of connection from drug educators impede their efficacy.

"I don't think people pay attention," Poe said. "I know so many kids who vape at school and they're not going to stop from a teacher [saying], 'Don't do drugs.' They need someone who can deeply connect with them to get them help and to get them to stop."

Another way Branham spreads awareness about drugs is through Red Ribbon week, or anti-drug week. This year, Link Crew led the events and set up activities such as the pledge wall to stay sober, relay races, scavenger hunts and planned spirit days. However, school activities may not accomplish their intended purpose.

"I feel like it makes [drug users] embarrassed of what they do and also [people] are just saying 'anti-drug week' but they don't follow-up with anything," Poe said.

Poe said the school sending an informational video about the risks of drugs and recommending resources for students, as well as connecting with someone who had a personal experience with recovering from drugs would help.

According to Poe, the Wellness Center programs allow students to work through their problems privately without parent involvement, which can be helpful.

"[Addiction is] a sickness like any other sickness," Poe said. "It doesn't make you a bad person."

To further educate students about the harmful effects of drugs, Harris said she wants to see the district bring back year-long health classes where topics such as drug use were taught. Branham used to have a health class around 10 years ago, but was removed due to budget cuts.

Even without a health class, Harris observed a decline in vaping due to staff monitoring restrooms. This trend has not been limited to Branham students, as nicotine vaping decreased by 2.9% for 10th graders and 4.1% for 12th graders from 2022 to 2023, according to the National Institutes of Health.

However, vaping is still an issue on campus. When a student is being suspected of vaping, often when the fire alarm is triggered, students and their bags are searched by the administrative staff. Poe was searched for being suspected of vaping since the fire alarm went off while she was in the bathroom.

"[It feels] humiliating," Poe said. "I didn't have anything on me. I wasn't doing anything. I was just going to the bathroom. They took me to the office in one of the rooms. They shook my backpack and left everything there. They just leave you to pick up the mess."

Poe believed this was not the best way to handle it and said they should politely remove everything out of people's bags and put them in a neat pile.

"If you're making the mess, the least you can do is clean it up after humiliating them like that," Poe said.

Poe said people who use drugs are stereotyped negatively since it seems drug users are purposely hurting their body; however, that is not the case.

"You did something bad and you got addicted to it; it doesn't make you any less important than you were before," Poe said. "You're still you."

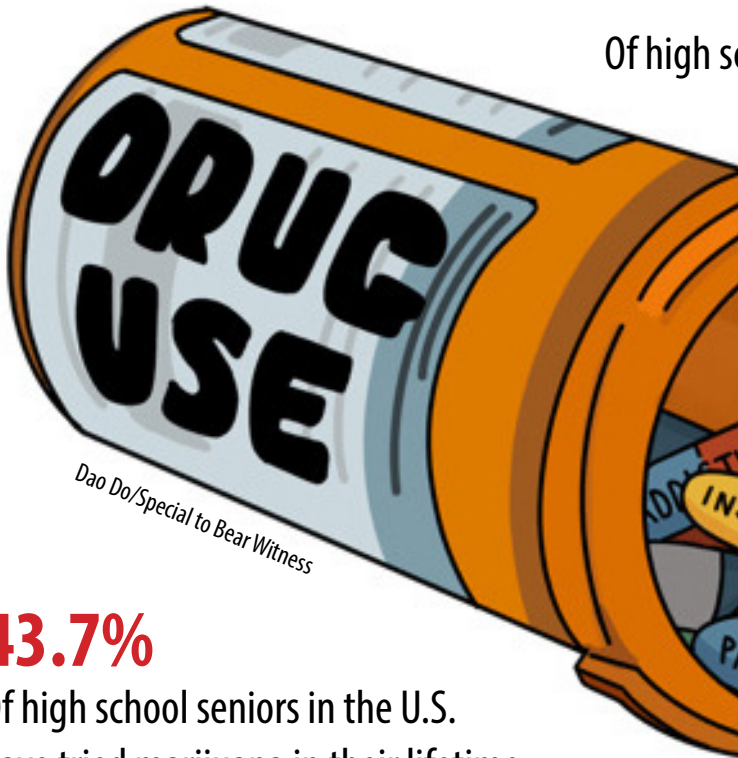
From vaping in the bathrooms to usage after school, drug use is a major issue at Branham. Many teens struggle with addiction and potentially creating an unsafe environment. Bear Witness is an effort to help students on a personal level.

107,543

Is the total number of deaths in the U.S. from drug use

20%

Of high school seniors in the U.S.



Dao Do/Special to Bear Witness

43.7%

Of high school seniors in the U.S. have tried marijuana in their lifetime

2/3

Of high school seniors in the U.S. have consumed alcohol

24.46%

Is how much more likely teenagers in California are to use drugs than other teens in the U.S.

Source: National Institute of Health



VAPING



A vape is another word for an electronic cigarette. Vaping simulates smoking but instead of inhaling smoke, the user inhales vapor. This vapor still contains nicotine and is highly addictive because of it. In the short term, vaping can cause coughing, shortness of breath, headaches and a dry or irritated throat or mouth. In the long term, vaping can scar lungs, cause anxiety, harm brain development in youth and can potentially cause lung or cardiovascular disease.

ALCOHOL



Alcohol is a fermented or distilled beverage that is made up of hydrocarbons, also known as ethyl alcohol or ethanol, which can make the user drunk. During usage, alcohol can cause hangovers, alcohol poisoning, risky behaviors and lowered inhibitions. Over time, alcohol can potentially lead to liver disease, heart disease, high blood pressure, lowered immune systems, memory issues and depression.



THE HIGH

ADMIN INVOLVEMENT

Alcohol, drug use on campus has been an ever present problem and its use on campus, hurting their health. Because of this, Branham administration is making an effort and make Branham a safer campus.

by Aidan Weiler and Alyx Yoon

ANSWERING TO ADDICTION

To counter drug use on and off campus, administration tries to connect with students on a personal level

AIDAN WEILER
Arts & Culture Editor

Addressing drug use among teenagers is a complicated, emotionally fraught issue. Branham has expanded their options to best address this problem.

According to Addiction Prevention Counselor **Veronica Velasco**, the best method of addressing use at Branham is not to punish students, but to support them in getting help. Velasco works hands-on with students in the Wellness Center and personally talks to students struggling with substance use in order to support them and assist their journey to recovery.

“[We help students] set goals for themselves,” Velasco said. “Once you create the space, you can see what is going on and help those students.”

One way that Velasco assists students in their recovery is to educate them on the effects of drug use and potential issues that may occur, including overdose or even death.

“One of the things that we offer is a brief intervention,” Velasco said. “We do some worksheets and we explore [the issues with drug use].”

According to Velasco, drug use can lead to a decrease in focus and memory, while also increasing mental illness symptoms such as anxiety.

For students struggling with substance use, finding enjoyment outside of substances can help build relationships, which can be a vital step for recovery. If they are distracted or focused on other parts of life, they are less likely to relapse.

“One thing is to feel connected to others,” Velasco said. “Do things that are fun that do not include substances.”

Even when recovery is reached, relapses are a battle former substance users face. Because of this risk, those with previous drug use should avoid proximity to drug users.

“Seeing others use it is a big trigger,” Velasco said. “One way to manage [addiction] is to reduce exposure.”

According to the National Institute of Health, 70% of drug users relapse and start using drugs again.

Branham offers direct help for students struggling with substance use in the Wellness Center. The Wellness Center has confidentiality policy when addressing drug-related conversations with counselors, meaning that any information shared is private, and will not be reported to administration unless there is a serious threat of harm to oneself or others.

“I have students that come here a lot and have never been referred,” Velasco said. “You can walk in and say, ‘Hey, can I talk to someone?’ And we’ll be here for you.”

English teacher **Jeannine Black** has noticed that students can be hesitant to get the help they need in the early stages if they are scared of the repercussions.

“Kids aren’t going to be open about it, unless they’ve had an addiction or an arrest,” Black said.

As a teacher, Black makes sure to give any students facing substance use problems the support they need. She thinks that teachers should work to support these students.

“I had a student last year who was actually in a Narcotics Anonymous program,” Black said. “When I found out about it, I gave this student more support. I checked in more often to make sure that they were still on track for graduation. I tried to show that I cared.”

Black encouraged students to get help from their teachers or other trusted adults on campus and utilize the resources offered at Branham.

“I hope [students] feel that they could talk to the counselors or to trusted teachers,” Black said. “If a student were to come to me, I would certainly do all I could to help.”

Assistant Principal **David Levy** advocated for helping students

who need support rather than enforcing punishments, such as forming connections with students and helping them go into counseling.

“Punishment has limited effectiveness in this situation,” Levy said. “We want students to be safe and successful in school. I’m not sure punishment is effective in meeting those goals.”

According to the Gateway Foundation, punishing students can lead to them being less likely to seek help. This is why Levy claims the administration tries to have the best interest for students and avoid obstructing students’ path to academic success. He believes the best way to approach helping students with addiction is through building real connections with the students.

“We’re generally looking to find alternatives to suspension whenever possible,” Levy said. “It’s about building relationships with students where you can help support them. Whether it’s through some of the programs we have other various alternatives, a teacher can be a student’s trusted adult on campus.”

While coming forward about a loved one’s addiction can seem like the wrong thing to do for many, Levy still encourages students to urge their friends that might be struggling to come forward, even if it can be difficult.

“No one wants to narc on a friend, but we’re not looking to get anybody in trouble,” Levy said. “We just want to help students make different decisions.”

Additionally, drug use on campus can affect students indirectly, making it a safety risk for students who may not use substances themselves. According to the National Center for Education, about 22% of students reported that some form of illegal drugs was made available to them on their high school campus.

“If you’re a student and need to use a restroom, and you walk in and you see [drug use], it might make you feel uncomfortable being there,” Levy said.

According to Black, there are several steps teachers can take to address student substance use. She recommends engaging with students through conversation in order to remind them of other ways to find fulfillment or direct them to professional help, such as therapy.

However, Black points out that if a student came forward to her she would still have to report it. Unlike the Wellness Center, teachers and administration are mandated reports, meaning that they would be forced to report anything.

“Because these are minors in our care, we would need to call the attention of the administrators,” Black said. “I would also tell the student that their parents will be involved.”

Even though the school tries to avoid it, in some cases, punishments will have to be handed out.

“For example, with a nicotine vape, it’s generally a conversation and confiscation of the device,” Levy said. “We will always inform parents of the situation. If it’s a repeat thing, we might hold a brief intervention.”

In extreme cases, harsher punishments might occur.

“If it’s more serious, it can result in suspension,” Levy said. “If it’s very serious, [such as] suspected selling, it could result in contacting the police department.”

Even so, anything told to counselors in the Wellness Center is confidential, and Velasco urges students to get help, regardless of any doubts these students may have.

“Don’t wait to get in trouble,” Velasco said. “Come to the Wellness Center. I’m here, I listen. It’s confidential. It’s a safe space with access to support. You don’t need to get in trouble.”

Still, in order to foster a positive community within Branham, Black believes that teachers must support students, including when it comes to substance use issues.

“Here at Branham, there is a culture of warmth and safety,” Black said. “There is more openness about mental health issues and acceptance.”

om drug use in 2023

chool students had ridden with an intoxicated driver

22

Teens in the U.S. die of an overdose per week

cohol in their lifetime

to use an illegal drug

CANNABIS



Cannabis, or marijuana, is a drug from the cannabis plant that contains active chemicals called cannabinoids, which can send this drug-like effect that a user experiences through the body. While there are positive effects of marijuana particularly for medical purposes, there are also many negatives. In the short term, marijuana can lead to anxiety, impaired attention and difficulty in problem solving while “high”. In the long term, marijuana usage can lead to lung inflammation from smoking, memory or attention issues and addiction.

SEEKING HELP?



The Wellness Center is a good option for students because they are not required to report what students say and will provide help. The Wellness Center provides one on one counseling for those who might be struggling, which includes drug awareness education and forming solid goals. Anything said to the counselors in the Wellness Center is confidential, meaning the admin will not be informed.

STUDENTLIFE

SHUFFLE

US History teacher Stephanie Menera has an eclectic taste in music, always open to exploring different genres. While she's drawn to indie and alternative music, she enjoys everything from the upbeat energy of pop to the heartfelt emotion of a sad ballad.

- Compiled by Mila Windell

Frank Sinatra: "My Way"
"It's a classic. My Way has a very inspirational vibe. It's uplifting and helpful to listen to when you want to feel invincible, powerful, and confident. It is probably the OG confidence booster song. That's why I like it. I also like his vocals. Hearing that song for the first time as a 12-year-old was life-changing and there's a reason it is so respected and revered. It's an iconic song. Frank Sinatra is an iconic musician, so hearing it as a child stands out to me as a formative experience. I don't listen to it as often now, but I hold a lot of respect for it as a body of work and a piece of music."

The Who: "Baba O'Reilly"
"It's got a really cool, edgy, funky vibe. It's very much classic rock. The Who was doing something innovative with music at that time, and "Baba O'Reilly" is the best representation of what was a fresh, new sound in rock and alternative rock. It's funky, fun, and definitely a mood booster."

The Cranberries: "Linger"
"I definitely heard it on TV, probably in some 90s soap opera, playing in the background. It's one of those iconic songs that you don't even remember the first time you heard it. When you sit down and listen to it, it already feels familiar because the likelihood of having heard it before is very high. It's very autumnal and fun to listen to. The Cranberries are just a silly, great Irish group. They're very nostalgic and it's very 90s. Just a feel-good song."

Amor Eterno: "Rocio Ducal"
"I'm Mexican, and this song means a lot to me because it translates to "eternal love." The lyrics express sadness about not having the person in your life anymore, but the love for them being eternal, regardless of their loss. I heard this song a lot growing up when a family member or even a celebrity from my culture would pass. It makes me think of my family, even though I'm lucky to still have them. But it reminds you to have gratitude for who you still have because it is such a painful and gut-wrenching declaration that she's making about feeling like she can't do anything to have them return."

Tchaikovsky Symphony Orchestra: "Waltz of the Flowers"
"Dance was a big part of my life when I was growing up. My mom danced, specifically ballet. So this was playing in my house around the holiday season. Waltz the Flowers is a very lively, very bright and spirited kind of classical music, which I don't think people are used to, but it just kind of gets you. It gives you the feeling of putting up your Christmas decorations all in one day and kicking your feet-feeling."

Ray Charles: "Georgia on My Mind"
"It's got that very vintage feel to it. Ray Charles is someone who's famous for his voice. His voice, specifically, has that almost dusty, crinkly, record sound. It's very warm and very lived in. And 'Georgia on My Mind' is him speaking about a woman named Georgia who is just always on his mind. So it's a love song, which I think love songs are always beautiful. It makes me feel warm and cozy."

TEETERING ON-TIME

With multiple responsibilities, students have to decide how to juggle work with academics

TAMARA RESTREPO
Staff Writer

Imagine waking up after just four hours of sleep, drained from a late-night study session for a test. As the morning rush begins, you pack your books, Chromebook and notebooks for school, along with your cleats and shin guards for soccer practice and your uniform for work. For many students at Branham, this demanding routine is an everyday reality.

In California, the legal working age is 14, and many students seize this opportunity to begin working. Once students have a part-time job, they must balance work with academics and extracurriculars, causing additional stress and leaving them with little free time. This was senior **Sahasra Makamchenna's** experience as she juggled five AP classes while working as a tutor at Kumon.

"By the time I finished all my work it was like 2-2:30a.m., and it just carried over to the next day," Makamchenna said. "The entire week, I was exhausted."

Even while students are maintaining a job, academics remain a priority for them. Junior **Aubree Rosenblum** worked as an event coordinator and a soccer coach. She shared what she would do when she needed to put her schoolwork first.

"If I had too much homework, I would sometimes call off work to get it done," Rosenblum said.

Parents also influence their children to begin working so they can contribute financially. This was not the case for Makamchenna.

"My parents didn't want me to work because they wanted me to focus on my education," Makamchenna said.

As Makamchenna and Rosenblum started working, they both noticed an increase in their stress levels as their jobs began affecting their academic performance.

"I could definitely see the amount of effort that I could have put was way less and sometimes it impacted my grades," Makamchenna said. "The time I could spend studying for a test and

"I could definitely see the amount of effort that I could have put was way less and sometimes it impacted my grades. The time I could spend studying for a test and me getting a bad score might have correlated to my working schedule."

—senior Sahasra Makamchenna

me getting a bad score might have correlated to my working schedule."

Makamchenna reflected on what her priorities were and figured out what changes she needed to make in her life to reduce her stress levels. She decided that work was not her priority and recently quit her job as a tutor.

"I needed to take that seven hours back and focus on myself, school, my college essays and my extracurriculars," Makamchenna said. "I have so much going on in life that I regret getting a job because I feel guilty that I couldn't fulfill their commitment."

Spanish teacher **Cesar Chavarin** shared his struggles of working over 24 hours a week throughout college. He believes students should cherish their freedom and not overload themselves with their work.

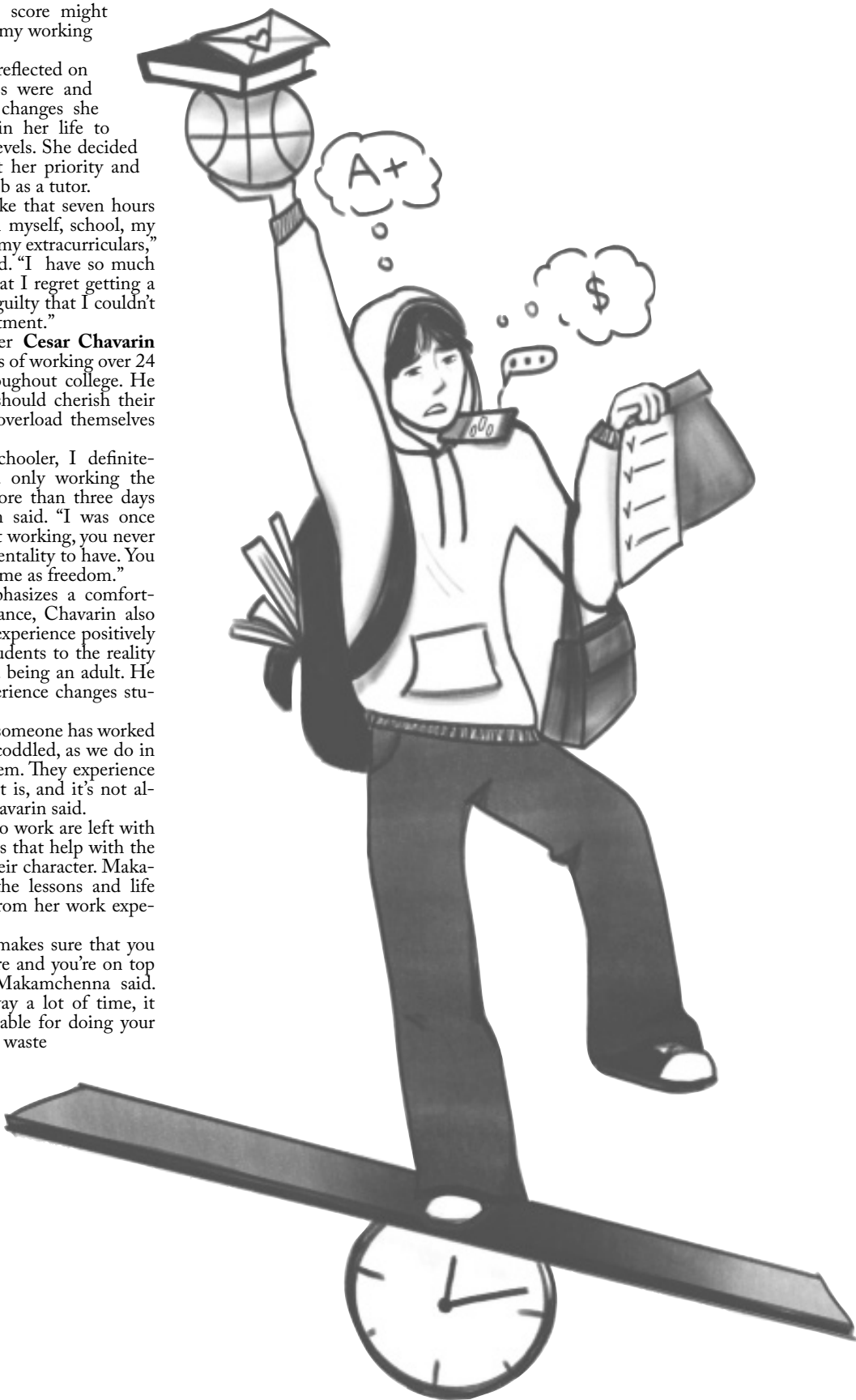
"As a high schooler, I definitely do recommend only working the weekends – no more than three days a week," Chavarin said. "I was once told, once you start working, you never stop. That's that mentality to have. You should have that time as freedom."

While he emphasizes a comfortable work-life balance, Chavarin also shared how work experience positively helps introduce students to the reality of growing up and being an adult. He believes work experience changes students.

"It's clear when someone has worked and has not been coddled, as we do in the education system. They experience the real world as it is, and it's not always pleasant," Chavarin said.

Students who do work are left with valuable life lessons that help with the development of their character. Makamchenna shared the lessons and life skills she gained from her work experience.

"Having a job makes sure that you do your stuff before and you're on top of your things," Makamchenna said. "Since it takes away a lot of time, it keeps you accountable for doing your stuff, and you don't waste time."



Irene Yoon/ Special to Bear Witness

WAYS TO RELIEVE STRESS

Mindful breaks: Make sure to take breaks to recharge. Engage in activities that bring you joy, like playing with a pet, readiWng or watching a favorite TV show. Taking time for yourself can improve mental clarity and focus.

Workout: Exercise is a powerful stress reliever. Regular physical activity, whether it's a quick workout, a jog or even a walk, helps release tension, boosts your mood and refreshes your body and mind.

Set boundaries: It's okay to say no when you're overwhelmed. Protecting your time and energy by setting clear boundaries with your workload, social events and other obligations is very important.

TIME MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

The Pomodoro Technique: Work for 25 minutes, then take a 5-minute break. This method helps maintain focus and prevents burnout by balancing work and rest.

Time Blocking: Allocate specific time slots for different tasks throughout the day. This keeps you on track and ensures you dedicate time to your most important priorities.

The Two-Minute Rule: If a task will take two minutes or less, do it right away. This prevents small tasks from piling up and cluttering your to-do list.

Source: Harvard Division of Continuing Education
—Compiled by Mila Windell and Tamara Restrepo

STUDENTLIFE



JOB RESPONSIBILITIES

CARDS TO CASH



Senior Nick Fagin has turned his hobby into a career

YUJIN CHO
News Editor

While most high school students typically work conventional jobs—retail, restaurants or babysitting—some have found other ways to make money. That is the case for senior **Nick Fagin**, who has turned his hobby of collecting sports cards into a profitable business. Card trading at a large scale involves purchasing cards in large “lots.” Purchasing cards most commonly takes place at card shows, where thousands of individual card collectors and large companies meet to purchase, sell and trade cards. After negotiating with the dealers and purchasing the cards, the cards are logged in the inventory into a master spreadsheet with prices and quickly sold with an increased price percentage to maximize profit. Once sold, cards are shipped to the buyers in large packages or directly flown to the buyers’ offices.



Nick Fagin/Special to the Bear Witness

began to invest \$20 into buying and trading cards. “[Card trading] started in my house, then it grew locally, going to local shows,” Fagin said. “[Over] time, I started to go to shows out of the state, and I’m looking to go internationally soon.” As his investment and dedication to card trading has grown, Fagin now works for Boosted LA, a California-based card trading company, and regularly travels domestically to attend card conventions, with the largest and most frequently attended ones being the Sports Card Expo in Toronto, the Dallas Card Show and the Front Row Card Shows throughout the West Coast. His day-to-day responsibilities include buying more than 1,000 cards a week, entering them into an inventory sheet and communicating with a clientele of card buyers. “There’s so much nuance in the cards,” Fagin said. “There’s a lot to learn, but if you really spend the time, you can definitely learn and crack into the business.” With his distinctive job, Fagin experiences different freedoms that most students cannot, such as flexible schedules. Additionally, by attending conferences throughout different states, Fagin has the opportunity to attend different professional sporting events, explore cities and meet new people. During his senior year so far, he traveled to New York City and Dallas. “The nice thing is I’m not paid hourly, so I could technically take a week or a month off and still make money,” Fagin said. “I’m not bound by a certain hour requirement or have hours left to work at a job. I also like that I get to travel and explore and see different parts of the country while working.” Despite his adaptable schedule, Fagin’s job responsibilities for managing spreadsheets coincide with school at times. Although it can occasionally affect his time dedication to school, he has learned the importance of balancing and managing his work and school life. “[Card trading] definitely makes [school] more difficult,” Fagin said. “You need to be more on top of your things and be proactive. I have to be able to do things more efficiently to leave the necessary time to do the card business.” Another challenge for Fagin stems from being a high school student in a business surrounded by adults. The people he works with are predominantly older than he is and have more free time to dedicate to the business, with only a few being in high school. “In the beginning, it was really hard [to be a part of the card trading business]. I was looked down upon for being younger, and I didn’t have the respect like other people had just because of my age,” Fagin said. “I’ve learned how to approach situations to appear more professional or mature and started to gain respect and handle those interactions.” Throughout all his experiences in the card trading business, Fagin has learned valuable lessons from more experienced mentors and adults in the business who have taught him to work his way up in the industry and expand his network. One of his current inspirational figures is his boss at Boosted LA, who has shown him that balancing life with work is possible. Fagin hopes to apply these lessons from the business to other aspects of his life moving forward.



Nick Fagin/Special to the Bear Witness

“One of the biggest things I’ve understood is just humility and understanding. There are always people above you. There’s always people better than you, pushing you,” Fagin said. “Work hard and don’t ever get too confident in your abilities. Then, you can get better and compete against yourself.” With the income he has earned from his job, Fagin currently invests in the stock market. He looks forward to accumulating wealth over time and exploring other investment opportunities like such estate. Although Fagin is not yet sure if he wants to continue working or expanding in card trading after college, looking ahead, he wants to contribute his current knowledge and connections to starting his own business in a market he is not yet certain about. “Right now, I’m learning as much as possible and picking up all these connections to people who could possibly invest in my business in the future or have skills to share their unique and diverse experiences,” he said. “With all this information, I want to eventually start my own business and be the CEO and run something with an impact.”

SCHOOL SPIRIT

School spirit fades away

School spirit has significantly decreased in the last four years

LUCAS SESTER
Staff Writer

Branham has long prided themselves on the enthusiasm and spirit of their students at rallies and events in previous years. However, this year, many students believe things have taken a turn. In a recent Bear Witness Instagram poll, 88% of the 284 respondents noticed a visible dip in school spirit, citing less energy and attendance at Branham events. Senior **Ginevra Rossi** has noticed a decrease in school spirit over her past four years, with her junior year being a high point before dropping significantly in her senior year. She attributes this shift partly to the departure of last year’s senior class, who she noticed were particularly active in their participation in school activities. “The seniors last year had a lot of school spirit, and they were very united as a class,” Rossi said. “I think the seniors last year were louder [about their school spirit], but this year I think [our senior class] is more divided and quieter.” For Rossi, the lack of enthusiasm at school events has been disappointing. “At football games and rallies, it’s just less fun considering we’re not bringing the spirit like the class of 2024 did,” Rossi said. Rossi noted that this drop of energy doesn’t just impact the seniors. She worries that the freshmen may not have the chance to experience the lively, spirited environment that made Branham feel unique in previous years. Rossi said younger students might miss out on the excitement that defines high school life. “I feel bad for the freshmen because they’re experiencing kind of a lower school morale and won’t get the full experience of Branham school spirit,” said Rossi. Senior **Ethan Foss** echoed Rossi’s concerns, highlighting how attendance, promotion and enthusiasm contribute to the overall high school experience. He stressed the importance of maintaining a positive environment for incoming students. “For school spirit, I feel like the younger kids need to look at it and have a good experience throughout their four years,” Foss said. “I, for one, have had a good experience, but I hope all the

freshmen coming in have the same opportunity to see school spirit like I did when I first came here.” Sophomore **Brayden Gassmann** expressed his view of the decrease in school spirit from a different perspective. Gassmann said that many students seem hesitant to fully embrace the excitement of rallies and events, fearing judgment or criticism from peers. “Right now, Branham’s spirit is kind of at a low,” Gassmann said. “It feels forced, and people are too nervous or afraid of being judged to fully embody the hype. But you see moments of it, especially at football games.” Gassmann remains optimistic that Branham school spirit can grow with the right efforts from students and ASB. He emphasized the importance of having people consistently dedicated to planning and promoting events, noting that the enthusiasm of leaders can inspire the student body to engage more actively. “You need people that just are fired up all the time. You need people that are going to plan these spirit days, and you gotta hype them up,” Gassmann said. With the efforts of Link Crew this year and their bonding events for the freshmen, Gassmann has noticed an increase in the class’ enthusiasm, pointing to it as a promising sign. He hopes that the underclassmen can set the foundation for a stronger, more united school spirit in the next few years. “The freshmen at the homecoming rally were super fired up, and they loved every single moment,” said Gassmann. “That’s the potential you want to see as a leader on campus.” Though many students think school spirit has decreased, both Rossi and Gassmann think there are ways to revive it. Rossi feels more inclined to attend school events if more people participate in events. “If more of my friends show up, then I’d rather go,” Rossi said. “If people start showing up to events or showing up with more energy, then we can revive it.” Gassmann agreed, emphasizing the importance of high school spirit in not only creating a fun environment but also building connections. “Having school spirit builds up the chemistry between people. If you look at the football games, people come together so much when they’re dressed out and they look goofy, or they’re just being themselves,” said Gassmann. “That’s super important to a school’s chemistry and how students see each other.”



Grace Ngo/Special to the Bear Witness

SPORTS

SPORTS BRIEFS

FOOTBALL
The football team had a historic season, making CCS the one-seed, but ultimately, it fell short of Sacred Heart Prep in the semi-finals of CCS. Senior defensive end **Thomas Nguyen** broke the school record for sacks with 11.5, leading CCS. The team will finally try to overcome the championship-sized hump next season.
Record: Varsity: 8-4; JV: 4-6

FLAG FOOTBALL
In their inaugural season, the flag football team won the league championship. Senior quarterback **Carla Granados-Perez** recorded a historic 52 passing touchdowns and 3294 passing yards, adding 440 yards and 8 touchdowns on the ground.
Record: Varsity: 16-2

GIRLS VOLLEYBALL
The Bruins lost in the semifinals of CCS Division 1 to Salinas after placing fourth in the league during the season. They will look to continue their dynastic run and make yet another push at CCS next season.
Record: Varsity: 26-7; JV: 13-11; Freshmen: 13-7

GIRLS TENNIS
The Bruins finished the season out strong, winning 8 out of their last 10 matches. Juniors **Missy Keralapura** and **Jillian Hom** were the first pair in Branham history to win BVALS League Double Championships.
Record: Varsity: 20-13

BOYS WATER POLO
The team struggled in a higher division this year, recording one win on the season. They look forward to using their experiences from this setback and returning stronger next season.
Record: Varsity: 1-15

GIRLS WATER POLO
The girls' water polo team finished the season with an even .500 record and look to make a push to CCS next season.
Record: Varsity: 5-5

CROSS COUNTRY
The Bruins finished a historic season where three runners — freshman **Dhrithi Ravilochan**, sophomore **Gemma Cervone**, and junior **Alijah Murillo** — made it to the CIF State Championships.
Record: Boys 4-3; Girls 5-2

GIRLS GOLF
The team finished a tough season, losing games by single-digit scores. Senior **Gina Shim** placed 5th in the league overall, recording the lowest strokes on the team.
Record: 3-6

—Compiled by Francisco Pham

SPORTS FANDOM

WHERE LOYALTIES LIE

The factors behind a sports fan's loyalty

FRANCISCO PHAM
Sports Editor

From the crowded stadiums of National Football League (NFL) teams to the packed environment of a high school basketball game, there is a common denominator—the fans. The group of loyal individuals who dedicate their time and effort to supporting their favorite teams.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, loyalty is “a strong feeling of support or allegiance.” In the context of sports, it is expressed with the support they show for their favorite teams.

Location and proximity is a common cause of loyalty to a sports team. Social Science teacher and longtime Bay Area sports fan **Kirk Selfridge** attributes his affiliation to Bay Area sports teams because he grew up in the area. He believes fans should only support their local teams.

“We didn’t have cable. You only got the baseball games of your local teams, and you only got to see the Warriors play basketball or on the radio, so that was really the only option you had to watch sports,” Selfridge said.

In addition to location, family tradition plays a key role in shaping the loyalty of sports fans. In a survey done by Project Play, an initiative focused on connecting kids and sports, 45% of kids say they support a team because their parents do. Senior **Rocco Dressler**, a long-time 49ers fan, attributes his loyalty to his dad.

“My dad’s worked for the 49ers as an athletic trainer for around 25 years now, so ever since I was a kid, I’d go out to some of the games with him and cheer them on,” Dressler said.

On a broader scale, the NFL, the National Basketball Association (NBA) and Major League Baseball (MLB) are businesses aimed toward receiving revenue. According to marketing agency Brandtastic, athletes’ marketability indicates their transcendence beyond sports as global figures, particularly with the rise of Jordan Brand.

In addition, the frequent trading of players makes fans follow their favorite athletes to new teams. This is commonly

known in sports as being a “bandwagon,” which is essentially a fan who jumps from team to team based on their success.

Selfridge attributes the bandwagon effect to the recent rise in fantasy football and player props. Fantasy football is a game where you draft players from different teams and create your own team. Scoring is based on the player’s stats, and the platforms put together a mock “league” where you draft your own players and compete amongst your peers. Sports betting apps are similar in the way that they function off people putting bets on a player to get certain stats in a game or for the season.

“Today, people lack real loyalty to their teams, whether it be fantasy football or PrizePicks,” Selfridge said. “It takes a way from the

loyalty aspect. When you have all these players from different teams that you want to be successful, you don’t care about the team as much anymore.”

Additionally, the rise of streaming platforms and national television has led to fans watching games beyond what’s available on local televisions. NFL+ and NBA League Pass allow fans to watch all games. Selfridge attributes the new opportunities for watching games as a reason for fans who don’t support their local teams.

“Kids like to follow winners. It’s easy for younger people as they don’t have that historic connection to the teams,” Selfridge said. “Seeing the games on the internet and different channels allows them to go outside their local communities and pick teams that are winners. There’s a reason you don’t see many Browns or Bears fans. Kids don’t pick losing teams to support.”

A team’s winning record plays a great deal in fan loyalty. Prolonged playoff droughts or a lack of meaningful wins can put a toll on fan’s loyalty. For Dressler, the



NEW SPORT

Lacrosse takes the field

COLIN KALANGES
Staff Writer

With the success of flag football in its first year, there has been some consideration amongst students and coaches in introducing lacrosse as a new spring sport at Branham.

Varsity field hockey coach Sarah Pereyra has been working with JV field hockey coach Nat Mohn on the possibility of lacrosse being offered as a new sport. Pereyra said that she was prompted to contact the athletic director, Kaleb Lane, on the possibility of it being a new sport after many of her field hockey players expressed interest in playing lacrosse.

“Some of the girls on the field hockey team mentioned how they wished Branham had a lacrosse team and how they would love to play,” Pereyra said. “They also mentioned how many of their friends on campus wanted to play as well.”

According to the Professional Box Lacrosse Association, lacrosse is currently one of the fastest-growing sports in the US. Its fast-paced style and wide appeal to a large range of people have contributed to its rise in popularity. Additionally, its similarity to other field sports like soccer and football makes it an appealing option to people who play those sports and want to play a sport in the spring.

Junior Xiarah Reyes, a member of Branham’s soccer and flag football teams, has been an avid supporter of the sport coming to Branham. She says that she is open to giving it a chance despite never playing the sport before.

“The idea of trying new sports sounds fun,” Reyes said. “I feel like so many other schools have lacrosse and just the idea of having more girls sports, that’s just better. They have more options, and you can try new things.”

If the team gets implemented, Reyes is concerned that the team may not get enough time for practice.

“That was an issue for our girls flag

football team,” Reyes said. We didn’t get enough field time, or if we did, we had to share with band. I feel like if we’re gonna implement new sports, we should incorporate the same attention as our old ones.”

Pereyra says that the amount of demand is more than sufficient to field an entire girls team, and there is enough interest to have a moderately sized boys team.

Branham considers adding lacrosse to spring sports

If the team were to see approval by the district, they would have to play for a season in “club status” before being eligible for the Blossom Valley Athletic League, which is the conference that Branham is in. Club Status would show that Branham can sustain lacrosse with a full roster and be competitive against other schools.

The addition of lacrosse would make

them among five other schools with both boys’ and girls’ teams in the Blossom Valley Athletic League. Its addition would give students another opportunity to participate in athletics at Branham.

“Both [Coach Mohn] and I have experience playing lacrosse and loved it, and [we] want to be able to help grow the sport more,” Pereyra said.



Courtesy of Khai Chen

BVAL Rival's Leland and Pioneer play in a lacrosse match. Branham would be on their schedule if it adds lacrosse.

SPORTS

RIVALRY

A WANING RIVALRY

Reviving the energy of the Branham-Leigh rivalry

TOMER VARDI
Staff Writer

For decades, Branhams' rivalry with neighboring Leigh High School has brought together students, staff, and the community in a spirited competition. The annual games are celebrated events, drawing large crowds who share the camaraderie and energy of Campbell Union High School District's longest-standing high school rivalries.

However, recent trends have raised concerns that the rivalry might lose its intensity as student attendance at these events has significantly declined. Coaches, athletes and students alike are now considering what's at stake if this tradition begins to fade.

The Branham-Leigh rivalry has been about much more than sports. It represents a shared legacy, binding generations of students and alumni who vividly remember key moments, such as Branham's dramatic 26-20 victory over Leigh in 2014, ending a six-year losing streak.

Steven Johnson, head coach of the varsity football team and a former Branham alumni, reflected on the school's sports culture. "When I was a student, going up against Leigh felt monumental. It was something we aspired to every season," Johnson said. "Now, we're seeing less of that energy in the stands. Without the support, we risk losing one of the best parts of our school's sports culture."

For Johnson and many others, the rivalry isn't just about winning. It's about uniting the school community in shared pride and spirit. Branham seniors share Johnson's enthusiasm for the rivalry and see each game as the culmination of their high school careers, such as defensive back Chris von Barloewen.

"It's the most important game of the year," von Barloewen said. "That's the game everyone wants you to win. It's the one where you look into the stands, see both schools there, and feel the pressure to deliver."

The atmosphere of the rivalry game brings heightened energy, which von Barloewen believes drives players to give their all on the field.

"When you hear the band playing and the student section cheering, it gets you hyped," von Barloewen said. "We feel the support on the field, and it's like our energy doubles."

The sense of rivalry and competition is not universally felt across all sports at Branham, as the school's flag football team has yet to establish a comparable rivalry. Senior Emma Lee Rowe, an athlete on the team, shared how the absence of this type of competition has affected her experience.

"It's not the same without a big rivalry game to look forward to. When you're on the field with a large crowd cheering, it gives you a rush and a reason to play your hardest," Lee Rowe said. "We



Tomer Vardi/ Bear Witness

Tight end Jimmy Scibetta (12) hypes up the crowd by waving the Branham flag at this year's edition of the rivalry game.

don't have that same moment or feeling, and it feels like something is missing."

Lee Rowe feels the absence of a rivalry limits the sense of community that sports often foster at Branham and leaves the team without a defining matchup to motivate them.

Attendance or match-up issues aside, the legacy of the Branham-Leigh rivalry endures, with athletes and coaches hoping to keep it alive for future players.

Branham defeated Leigh 42-13 in their 2024 matchup on No-

vember 8th. Johnson remains optimistic that students will recognize the unique experience that attending these games offers and that they will continue to fill the stands for years to come.

Johnson says this rivalry represents more than a game. It's a celebration of school spirit, a reminder of shared history, and an essential part of the Branham experience.

"I'd really like to see both student bodies come together and make it just an incredible atmosphere unlike any other," Johnson said.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Bell to Bruin

ANABELLE WALKER
Managing Editor

Georgetown University. University of San Diego. Air Force Academy. Three division I offers for football.

Initially focused on basketball, senior Zayne St. Laurent joined Bellarmine College Preparatory with aspirations of excelling on the court. However, encouragement from a friend led him to try out for the football team, a decision that would alter the course of his athletic career.

"I wasn't supposed to play [football]. I was a basketball player," St. Laurent said. "I went into Bellarmine playing basketball, and I was supposed to play basketball there, but one of my friends there told me to try out, so I just decided to."

While his parents hoped he would remain a basketball player, St. Laurent discovered a new passion on the field.

After being pulled up to varsity in his freshman year, St. Laurent recalls the passion he initially felt for the sport. His initial success

Senior Zayne St. Laurent recieves three Division I offers for football

came to a halt during his freshman year when a collarbone injury sidelined him.

"I was doing what I was supposed to do. I was gonna play in CCS," St. Laurent said. "Then, on the last practice before the game, I went up for a ball, came down, and landed on my shoulder."

This injury not only impacted his football ambitions but also limited his ability to participate in basketball, prompting him to reconsider his future in sports.

"I went back sophomore year. I tried it out. I made [the basketball team]," St. Laurent said. "I just didn't feel the same [as football]."

Upon transferring to Branham, St. Laurent embraced football fully. He quickly made an impression, securing offers from notable programs, including Georgetown, the University of San Diego and Air Force Academy on a full ride scholarship.

"After freshman year, I was able to show recruiters that I could be good," St. Laurent said. "From there, I was [in my] head about playing in college."

This season, St. Laurent has emerged as a vital player for Bra-

nam, contributing to a team that has surpassed expectations. He would end his senior season (not including playoffs) winning the receiving triple crown in Mt. Hamilton, leading the league in yards (883), touchdowns (10), and receptions (63).

"This year is completely different from Bellarmine," St. Laurent said. "Branham is better. We definitely proved a lot of people wrong coming into the season."

He credits his growth to the guidance of head football coach Steven Johnson and the coaching staff, whose support has been pivotal in his development and recruitment.

"Without [Coach Johnson], I don't honestly think I'd have my offers," St. Laurent said. "He really helped me send my film out and in the game."

With college football on the horizon, St. Laurent remains open to his options and is eager to take the next steps in his athletic career.

"I haven't committed to [a school] yet, but I'm excited wherever I go."



Tomer Vardi/ Bear Witness

Senior receiver Zayne St. Laurent celebrates aftering scoring a touchdown against Leigh during the rivarly game. He would finish the season leading the team in all receiving categories with 73 receptions, 1006 yards, and 13 touchdowns.



GEORGETOWN
UNIVERSITY
Location:
Washington, D.C.
Team Name:
The Hoyas

AIR FORCE
ACADEMY
Location:
Air Force
Academy,
Colorado
Team Name:
The Falcons



UNIVERSITY OF
SAN DIEGO
Location:
San Diego,
California
Team Name:
The Toreros

ARTS & CULTURE

MINI REVIEWS

MOVIE



Wicked

Directed by John M. Chu
Universal Pictures

What it is: Based on the 2003 Broadway musical, *Wicked* tells the story of Elphaba, a young witch who grew up ostracized because of her green skin. She forms a friendship with Glinda, another witch. Together they face a series of obstacles attempting to fulfill their deepest desires.

Liked: The songs interwoven within the movie contain very powerful vocals from the whole cast, showcasing their singing ability. The message of the movie is also very powerful in representing our society.

Disliked: The plot is quite slow and it ends on a cliffhanger since the story is split into two movies.

—David Tran

ALBUM



Chromakopia

Tyler, The Creator
Columbia Records

What it is: *Chromakopia* is the eighth studio album by rapper Tyler, The Creator. It was released on Oct. 28, 2024, and debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard 200.

Liked: All of the songs on the album are extremely catchy, and the rhythm sticks with the listener. It's hard to not get the songs stuck in your head.

Disliked: Some of the songs are more unique, so it takes some time to get used to them and really appreciate them.

— Tamara Restrepo

CONCERT



Cigarettes After Sex The X's Tour

What it is: American dream-pop band Cigarettes After Sex are on an ongoing tour in support of their third album, titled "X's". The band is known for their ethereal and often dream-like musical style, with lyrics often based on the themes of romance and love. They're performing in the Americas, Europe, Asia and Africa for a total of 64 shows.

Liked: There is a very calm and entrancing energy throughout the show, captivating those who attended. The visuals and lack of color also made the experience feel intimate and even more enjoyable.

Disliked: A lot of people left after the band played their most popular songs, which caused some disruption while they continued performing. The band only played three songs from the tour's name-sake album, making some feel disappointed the tour didn't live up to what it was marketed for.

— Noa Muyal

ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

CRACKING THE CASE OF TRUE CRIME

The genre's global rise in popularity raises ethical questions

ENOCH SHIN

Staff Writer

In recent years, the genre of true crime has increased in popularity, especially with youth, with shows, movies and podcasts gaining a following of devoted watchers.

As a genre, true crime recounts real life murders, disappearances and other crimes. According to a study done by YouGov, 50% of Americans enjoy true crime, and 35% watch it at least once a week.

Junior **Kaela Imasa** has noticed a large increase in interest for true crime in recent years. She cited the popularity of the Jefferey Dahmer case as evidence of how society often romanticizes crime.

"There was a whole wave of people who suddenly had an idolized version of Dahmer, which was weird," Imasa said. "The fact that these people, so many years after the Dahmer case, had this obsessive interest in him was weird."

Imasa said this recent rise in popularity can be attributed to personal connections audiences have with the material.

"People watch true crime because they can't ever fathom themselves doing something like that," Imasa said. "When you see the extremes that people do, you find yourself interested in that."

Streaming services, such as Netflix, have contributed to this popularity by producing true crime shows such as "Monsters: The Menendez Brothers," "American Murder: Laci Peterson" and "What Jennifer Did," among others.

English teacher **Elizabeth Kile**, who wrote "Haunted San Jose," a collection of 36 San Jose ghost stories, sees a correlation between entertainment and fear and how this relates to true crime's popularity. Kile said that this desire to experience emotions that aren't easily felt in day-to-day life is what brings people to true crime.

"There is a psychological attraction to being frightened," Kile said. "[People] can read about frightening things in a safe context but still vicariously experience a thrill or fear."

Sophomore **Natalie Murphy** has a more negative view of true crime in TV shows and videos on the internet.

"I don't think that true crime entertainment is ethically correct," Murphy said. "I don't approve of it."

Her viewpoint on true crime shifted after seeing online content creators exploit a real case for money.

"I saw a lady who started selling pictures of a dead



David Tran/Bear Witness

child's autopsy on her Patreon," Murphy said. "I thought that was unethical and not considerate, especially towards the family, because it was a very recent death. That made me feel grossed out about true crime as a whole."

Popular shows focusing on murders such as those carried out by Jeffrey Dahmer or the Menendez Brothers have received backlash for the perceived exploitation of real tragedies. Murphy points out that these shows did not receive consent from victims' families.

"They didn't ask any of the families if they could make this series," Murphy said. "I know it was harmful to a lot of families, and they were hurt by it. Since it's such a big corporation, they made so much money off of it."

Netflix's show about Jeffrey Dahmer proved to be the third-most popular show of all-time on Netflix. It proved so popular that Netflix released a second

season two years later about the Menendez brothers. "Monsters: The Lyle and Erik Menendez Story" received lots of backlash after its release. This series is based upon the story of the Menendez brothers, who murdered their parents, depicting the crime and subsequent trial.

The show has been criticized for dramatizing the case, adding untrue details that changed the narrative. "One of the biggest things about the show's unpopularity and controversy is because of how they dramatize the [events]," Imasa said.

Imasa believes that truthfulness is a vital quality in true crime media.

"It's really important when you're retelling a story that you keep the facts straight," Imasa said. "It might not be the most interesting thing, but that's what happened in real life. Out of respect for the people who are impacted, nothing must be twisted."

HOLIDAY TRADITION

Bruins in the Park

Classes and clubs at Branham decorate trees at Christmas in the Park

NOA MUYPAL

Staff Writer

Every year, groups from around San Jose decorate a Christmas tree at the annual Christmas in the Park (CITP) event. These groups include several of Branham's programs, such as the Royal Alliance Marching Band, Backstage Bruins, Black Student Union and the Bear Witness.

Christmas in the Park is an annual nonprofit event held during the holiday season in downtown San Jose at the Plaza de Cesar Chavez Park, that relies mainly on volunteers and sponsors. Its events include programs like the Enchanted Forest, where people can purchase a tree in the park and decorate it however they want. According to board members, these events attract approximately 700,000 visitors a year.

President of the Board of Directors of CITP **Brian Pulliam** mentioned how these limited high-demand trees can be hard to attain in time, as there are only 600 each year.

"We sell out every single year," Pulliam said. "If [people aren't] quick enough to purchase one, we can run out."

Communities have free reign to decorate trees to whatever theme they like, regardless of the Park's theme. Pulliam mentions there are no limitations to the tree design as long as it fits the size and safety requirements.

"[The Board] lets them decorate and be as creative as they want," Pulliam said. "Everybody gets to do the tree how they want."

Chris Nalls, band teacher and chair of the Performing Arts department,

enjoys participating in the Enchanted Forest and getting to show off the band department and its students.

Although they are not participating this year, Nalls shared the band department's plan for the previous year, which consisted of showcasing the students.

"We got pictures of everybody, and hand-drawn pictures for anybody we didn't have a picture of [for the tree]," Nalls said.

According to Backstage Bruins member **Olivia Clima**, the club, which decorated a "Shakespruce" last year, uses this opportunity to bond with each other.

"It's a fun community thing we do with the club," Clima said. "We can get to know all the people in the club better."

Part of this bonding experience goes into the planning part. Similar to the marching band, Backstage Bruins meet up prior to the decorating day and decide on their club's theme.

Clima also pointed out that even though the club has a design planned, they still let themselves be a little creative during the decorating process.

"We just did whatever we wanted to," Clima said. "If we thought an ornament looked good on a branch, then we said, 'Wow, this is a great branch, go crazy.'"

Nalls also noted how the effort he and his students put into their tree helped to create a sense of positivity in the world.

"[It was a way for people to] become aware of us if they didn't know about it before," Nalls said. "Everybody who walked by was able to share that pride that we have in our group."



Courtesy of the Backstage Bruins

The Backstage Bruins pose with their tree at Christmas in the Park.



ARTS&CULTURE

CONCERTS

WILD NIGHT, WILD FANS

Some students worry about unsafe conditions at concerts

DYLAN COLLISSON
Staff Writer

A common issue many in the Branham community have identified in attending concerts is a lack of environmental awareness from the audience. The atmosphere a concert creates can often cause people to lose control and abandon unspoken rules and etiquette.

Concerts can be one of the most memorable moments in a person's life. They can allow a person to indulge in their favorite artists' music and socialize with their friends, all while connecting with their community. However, Brahnam students said it is important for people to be able to recognize when the line blurs between simply having fun and being disruptive to others at these experiences.

Junior **Lindsay Dixon** has witnessed many examples of misconduct at the shows she attends.

"I have seen people who are obviously very intoxicated, especially at some of the smaller venues," Dixon said. "Sometimes they throw alcohol in the air, or there will be annoying couples."

To Dixon, this type of behavior distracts from the overall experience and enjoyability of the show.

"If people are getting too crazy, it can get past the point of just having fun," Dixon said. "They're being disruptive to other people who just want to listen to the music, or dance and not get shoved or pushed the whole time by intoxicated people."

According to a survey conducted by American Addiction Centers, over 57% of musical event attendees admitted to using substances. Math teacher and music fan **Dianne Viernes** experienced this problem firsthand at a Harry Styles concert last year.

"There were people on the floor," Viernes said. "They drank too much, and some even had to get escorted out because they were throwing up."

Viernes also has a hard time focusing on the show while being distracted by poor crowd behavior.

"It ruins what you've waited for for so long," Viernes said. "It ruins the atmosphere."

But the issue of concert etiquette goes much further past intoxication as it can include physical interactions. According to Dixon, activities in the floor area of the concert regularly attract a rowdy crowd.

"Some people can get very crazy when they want to get close to the barricades," Dixon said. "People will start pushing or shoving, or if you scoot back even for a second, three people will shoot forward ahead of you."

Viernes has also noticed this, pointing out that the floor area can leave people in a dangerous situation if overcrowded.

"I have seen videos of people pushing past security guards and filling up the main area," Viernes said. "That seems really dangerous because they only have



Irene Yoon/Special to the Bear Witness

a limited amount of space."

Viernes believes that concert venues need to do a better job at trying to control this problem.

"The reason they have a certain amount of tickets is because that's the capacity of the stadium," she said. "What they don't understand is that they only sell a certain amount of tickets on the floor for safety reasons, such as for stampedes."

As sophomore **Emiliano Gonzalez**, who recently attended a Beabadoobee concert, points out, being caught in an overcrowded and disorderly group of people can lead to discomfort.

"At Beabadoobee, everyone started a mosh pit to 'She Plays Bass,'" he said. "Everyone started jumping and it seemed kind of unnecessary."

Gonzalez suggests that before the concert had even begun, better precautions should be taken.

"The venue should have spread [info about concert safety]," Gonzalez said. "That would've really helped. It would let people be actually able to enjoy the concert and have fun."

Additionally, Dixon advocates for better treatment of fans by security, citing examples such as concert staff handing out water bottle to attendees. However, Dixon recognizes that it is not solely the venue that

has these responsibilities, but the artist too.

"The performer should not be ignorant. They should know when to shut stuff down with their security, or security that's willing to help people," Dixon said. "Especially for bigger artists, the artists should try to have a disclaimer of how you should be acting during the concert."

Dixon referenced the aftermath of the crowd surge at Travis Scott's 2021 Astroworld concert, where 50,000 crowd members got crammed together, resulting in around 300 injuries and 10 deaths due to what medical examiners called compression asphyxia.

"I remember with that situation, there is a video where you can see a girl had climbed over the barricade and near the stage to tell the cameraman and the security that people were dying in the crowd," Dixon said. "They did not even acknowledge her."

Viernes believes concertgoers shouldn't have to worry about their safety when attending an event.

"You're going to a concert to have fun, and for you to have to think that you might be put in a scary situation, that's insane, right?" Viernes said. "The venue and management should be working together to make it safe and enjoyable for everyone."

NEW PLAY

A Paranormal Christmas Carol

"A Christmas Carol: A Ghost Story" comes to Branham

HAILEY STEED
Staff Writer

On Dec. 5, the Backstage Bruins opened their production of "Christmas Carol: A Ghost Story," a unique, horror-themed take on Charles Dickens' classic story "A Christmas Carol", in the Performing Arts Center.

The play was adapted by theater director **Jennifer Sorkin** and her husband **James Kopp**, and it is being performed for the very first time this year. Along with co-writing the play, Sorkin is also serving as the play's director, producer, technical director and showrunner. "All of this information already exists as a novella that



Alyx Yoon/Bear Witness

Yebin Ahn (9) as Ms. Squires, Zach Reinie (12) as Scrooge, and Joelle Zanchi (11) as Ms. Pocket

is public domain, so anyone can write their own version of this classic tale," Sorkin said. "Our adaptation of 'A Christmas Carol' focuses on the ghost story aspect. It is just a matter of writing it in a way that is unique and works for your purposes."

The playwriting process required careful thought to make the play work for the Branham stage.

"Writing a play requires a lot of important considerations," Sorkin said. "There are so many components that matter in creating effective storytelling."

Sorkin explained that the show will be similar to an episode of "The Twilight Zone." IMDB describes it as a show depicting ordinary people who find themselves in extraordinarily astounding situations, which they each try to solve in a remarkable manner. The tone of the Backstage Bruins' production will match the supernatural horror aspects of "The Twilight Zone", with the lead character being scared into saving his own soul.

As stage and production manager, junior **Eli Pak** handles communication between the director, tech, and actors, while also making sure that every deadline is met.

"[The production] is an entirely new kind of aspect that you're bringing to [A Christmas Carol]," Pak said. "It's really amazing to be able to see how the project comes to life because we get to see all the different stages."

Sophomore **Kamala Smith**, who plays Carol Cratchit, thinks that their experience had its share of ups and downs.

"It's a very personalized show for us," Smith said. "It's harder because there isn't a specific version of this specific play we can base off of performance-wise."

Smith says that Kopp acts as a dramatist, which includes assisting actors with character work, providing insightful decisions and tips.

"We're really lucky to have a director like Sorkin, because she can make these productions happen," Pak said.

ARTS CALENDAR

IN SCHOOL

Backstage Bruins

Christmas Carol: A Ghost Story

Dec. 5-7, 12-14,

Branham High School PAC

What it is: Branham's theater program will bring to life the classic "A Christmas Carol," which follows Ebenezer Scrooge as he finds the true meaning of Christmas. Featuring newly retold elements by director Jennifer Sorkin, the play is sure to give the audience a chill.

OUT OF SCHOOL

Movies

Y2K

Dec. 6

Directed by Kyle Mooney

What it is: Y2K, released by A24, takes inspiration from the general public's fear of what would happen once the date went from 1999 to 2000. The story follows two high school students in 1999, whose night becomes flipped upside down once the clock strikes midnight at a New Year's party celebration.

Mufasa: The Lion King

Dec. 19

Directed by Barry Jenkins

What it is: Shining a new perspective on the beloved Disney classic "The Lion King", this film tells the backstory of the king himself prior to Simba's birth in a new musical drama. Utilizing new CGI technology, the movie is set to expand the world of the Lion King, adding on to the 2019 movie adaptation of the 1994 film.

Sonic the Hedgehog 3

Dec. 20

Directed by Jeff Fowler

What it is: Following in the footsteps of the first two movies of the trilogy, "Sonic the Hedgehog 3" continues the speedy adventures of Sonic as he faces new challenges. In this movie, Sonic must find a way to take down the evil Shadow, created by professor Gerald Robotnik, and reunite with friends Knuckles and Tails.

Nosferatu

Dec. 25

Directed by Robert Eggers

What it is: "Nosferatu", a new horror film, tells the story of a young woman who becomes haunted by a curious vampire. The film is a remake of the 1922 film of the same name, which in turn was heavily inspired by "Dracula." The story twists and turns as it tells of a gothic nightmare between movie star Lily-Rose Depp and Nosferatu himself, played by Bill Skarsgård.

Music

GNX

Kendrick Lamar

Nov. 22

What it is: A surprise release with zero promo, GNX is Kendrick Lamar's sixth studio album. It is the rapper's first release since the highly publicized drama taking place earlier in the year, between Lamar and another famous rapper, Drake. Combining genres of R&B, Soul, and Rap, Lamar utilizes his classic sound to create an unforgettable work of art that adds on to legacy as a hip-hop legend.

Balloonism

Mac Miller

Jan. 17

What it is: Mac Miller's 7th studio album, Balloonism, is anew posthumous project containing old songs and concepts. Recorded before the rapper's passing in 2018, the album was first teased during rapper Tyler, The Creator's Camp Flog Gnaw and will be released next year.

—Compiled by Dylan Collisson

A CHILLY **CROSSWORD**

1. Cell phones, drugs, caffeine, etc.
2. An option after highschool
4. Showing school pride
5. What 504 plans provide
8. Something you get to start your career
10. Part of a deck
11. Branham's main rival
13. Class taught by Ms. Tejeda
15. Most popular streaming service
17. The opposite of unfaithfulness
18. Important political event

3. A sport involving a stick and a ball
5. One of the biggest tech brands in the world
6. Collected by SPARE
7. A show where musical artists perform
9. Nick Fagin's trading card company
12. Something that you raise
14. Mobile operating system used by 12% of Branham students
16. Using a phone
19. Ex: Leigh vs Branham

