

A HOUSE DIVIDED

With a new federal administration in office, students, staff and their families look for answers to changing policies, their impacts and how these issues are dividing the country



David Tran/Bear Witness

**AMERICANIZATION
IN EDUCATION**
Branham students and teachers speak up about recent statements from the federal government on what’s taught in the classroom.

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ISSUES ON CAMPUS**
Widespread deportations and uncertainty surrounding immigration status leaves many students and their families in stress.

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With shifting definitions of what “patriotism” is, students and teachers create their own definitions.

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“From an economic standpoint, we know we're going to have inflation. So there's no one to blame for that, Democrat or Republican. We're in this as a country, nobody likes it when it happens. We just got to try to work through it as best we can, and I believe we can and will navigate through this.”
— Social science teacher **John Salberg** on the rise in food prices

“I am proud to be an American. I feel comfortable and honest saying that, but that doesn't mean I can't admit the flaws in our nation and in our history. Acknowledging flaws is one of the most patriotic things that you can do: to love a country enough to want to make it better, as opposed to turning a blind eye to problems.”
— English teacher **Barbara Arduini** on patriotism in the U.S.

“In D.C., I see so many people out in front of the buildings and they're pushing back. Don't let this go away. Keep paying attention to it. They can take a lot from us, but they can't take our unity.”
— Anonymous Branham alumnus **Jane Doe**, who works for the Department of the Interior, on recent firings of government employees

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patriotism hits the BOOKS

Analyzing Trump’s executive order reshaping American education

YUJIN CHO
News Editor

On Jan. 29, 2025, President Donald Trump signed an executive order titled “Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling.” The executive order, which was signed nine days after Inauguration Day, addressed “radical, anti-American ideologies” observed in schools during recent years.

The order addressed a variety of different aspects of “radical indoctrination” and sought to enforce compliance “with all applicable laws prohibiting discrimination in various contexts and protecting parental rights” for institutions that receive federal funds for K-12 education. The executive order initiated plans to create a future “Ending Indoctrination Strategy” employing the rescission of federal funding for K-12 schools that participate in radical indoctrination.

The executive order said, “Parents trust America’s schools to provide their children with a rigorous education and to instill a patriotic admiration for our incredible Nation and the values for which we stand.”

The executive order also alleged that K-12 education has been “imprinting anti-American, subversive, harmful and false ideologies on our Nation’s children,” which “not only violates longstanding anti-discrimination civil rights law in many cases, but usurps basic parental authority.”

Junior **Lucas Claes**, who is currently taking AP U.S. History (APUSH), has learned about various aspects of American history — both positive and negative — through the perspectives of different racial, social and cultural groups. Claes thinks that it’s important to learn a comprehensive knowledge of history in order to understand others, especially in a diverse environment.

“Knowing the background for certain events is really helpful, and it gives you a lot of insight,” Claes said. “[It] especially makes you understand other people’s perspectives, which is really important, especially since the United States is so diverse.”

Claes recognizes that although some parts of American history may reflect negatively on the U.S., it’s still important to acknowledge significant historical events.

“Especially if you’re an APUSH student, you realize that a lot of U.S. history is negative,” Claes said. “If you want to ignore that, you’re going to end up losing a large chunk of education. You can’t really ignore it.”

In Claes’ perspective, learning about history that reflects negatively on the U.S. has the opposite effect than what Trump stated in his executive order as it requires a greater effort to understand the nation and its history.

“You can even say it’s more patriotic [when] you’re putting in additional effort to understand all the negative aspects,” Claes said. “[You’re] going through additional effort to not only learn about the good stuff, but the bad stuff. It makes [you] more American.”

Similar to Claes, junior **Liam Maher** thinks that learning “negative” aspects of history provides a better understanding of how people were affected.

“It’s more important to learn about the negative aspects of history rather than the positive aspects, especially with horrible events like slavery and segregation,” Maher said. “It’s important to learn about those things because they are injustices, and they are proof that the United States isn’t always right. If you cover them up, you’re covering up a giant part of history that affected people for generations.”

English teacher **Heather Amanatullah**, who teaches history through literature in certain units, said it’s important for educators to teach students real events, regardless of its “American value.”

“We’re not teaching anything that’s not true,” Amanatullah said. “History is history, and we can’t erase [it]. Usually [in] regimes in the past that have been totalitarian, fascist or controlling, the first thing they do is they devalue and ban education and books. It’s really critical right now to support and defend the freedom to read, the freedom to have access to history.”

Amanatullah believes that all students should have the opportunity to learn about historical events in a school setting. A solution that she employs in cases where students or parents and guardians don’t feel comfortable learning about certain topics is the opt-out option, where she offers an alternative option during particular units.

“I’ve had kids have their parents opt out of ‘The Kite Runner,’ and that’s OK,” she said. “Nobody’s saying you can’t do that, but when one person or one administration speaks for everyone, where’s our freedom of choice in that sense?”

“The Kite Runner” by Khaled Hosseini is a historical fiction novel set in Afghanistan from 1973 to 2001. The novel has been challenged in schools for containing sexual violence and graphic language.

Junior **J’Ley EsparzaGomez** thinks that schools are responsible for presenting facts and history, regardless of if they foster a negative or positive view on the United States.

“It’s important that we learn both sides [of history] so students are able to pick [their] own path, and it’s not enforced,” EsparzaGomez said. “Students should [be taught] that it’s okay to have a disagreement, but it’s not okay to belittle someone because of their race, religion [or] sex.”

However, an important element for EsparzaGomez is that students can ultimately form their own opinions and take stances based on their personal beliefs.

“The school should be able to highlight and bring up [ideas] but not necessarily impact the child’s brain [and say], ‘You need to believe in this,’” EsparzaGomez said. “There [are] so many things to believe in. It’s really important that schools can bring [up ideas of views on America but] not make that decision for the children.”

In another portion of the executive order, Trump stated that “In many cases, innocent children are compelled to adopt identities as either victims or oppressors solely based on their skin color and other immutable characteristics.” Later, he added that “demanding acquiescence to ‘white privilege’ or ‘unconscious bias,’ actually promotes racial discrimination and undermines national unity.”

Amanatullah, who teaches novels that explore topics based on historical social hierarchies and inequalities, disagrees. One novel, “Beloved” by Toni Morrison, explores the repercussions of slavery after the Civil War.

“In terms of ‘Beloved,’ I don’t think my white students or myself ever felt responsible for slavery,” Amanatullah said. “Nobody’s telling children that they’re responsible for the horrors that their ancestors committed. You’re just educating people about the past through literature so that it’s not repeated.”

Maher also disagrees with Trump’s statement.

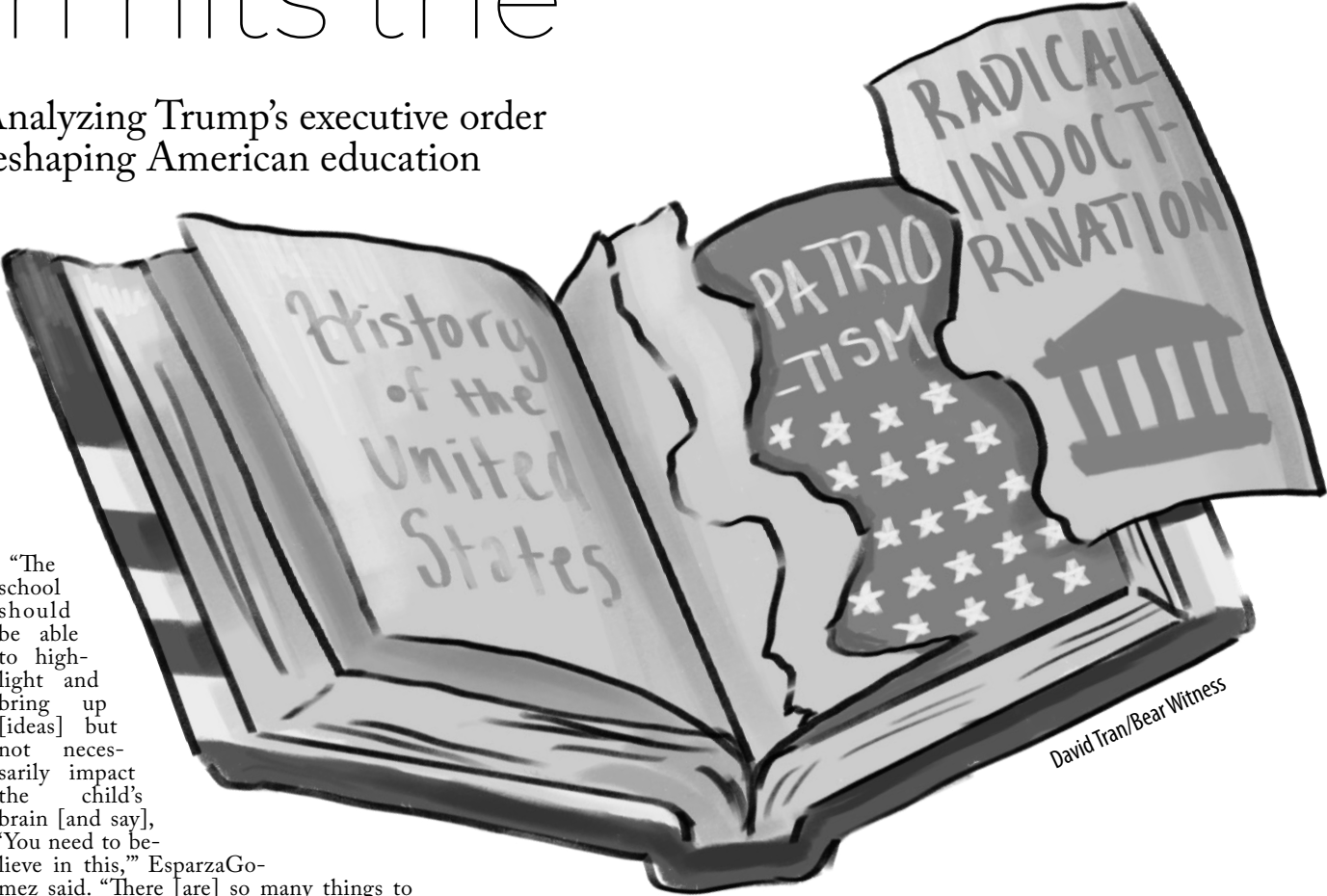
“I don’t personally feel guilty, but I would say that there’s a certain degree of humility that you have to take when talking about [historical events],” Maher said. “Even though I didn’t partake [in] those horrible events, I have to be more careful because I don’t want to be [ignorant].”

Additionally, Claes, whose mother is a refugee from the Vietnam War, has negative views on American intervention policy. However, he disagrees that learning about it in a school environment during history “indoctrinated” negative opinions or forced him to accept a “victim identity.”

“I hate American intervention policy, but that’s not because the school indoctrinated me,” Claes said. “That’s because of what happened, and it’s not like you can say it didn’t happen. The American government went to Vietnam [and] pretty much started a war, and it’s not because the school told me that’s what happened.”

In an email sent to Campbell Union High School District (CUHSD) members on Feb. 3, CUHSD Superintendent Robert Bravo released a statement affirming the district’s commitment to a safe and supportive learning environment despite the contents of the executive order.

“Our district is unwavering in its commitment to maintaining a safe, inclusive and welcoming environment for all students,” Bravo said. “Our Board of Education-approved policies remain the same, despite recent federal Executive Orders regarding immigration enforcement, diversity education and LGBTQ+ rights, and will continue to guide how we operate.”



Gender identity and LGBTQ+ education

Trump also claimed in the executive order that recent radical indoctrination in schools has created an environment where “young men and women are made to question whether they were born in the wrong body and whether to view their parents and their reality as enemies to be blamed.”

Additionally, Trump stated that “anti-American, subversive, harmful and false ideologies” include “steering students toward surgical and chemical mutilation without parental consent or involvement or allowing males access to private spaces designated for females.”

In addition to Trump’s actions against gender identity in K-12 educational settings, the Trump Administration made more moves rejecting transgender identity, such as by officially declaring two “not changeable” sexes — male and female — in his Executive Order No. 14168 and removing “TQ+” from “LGBTQ+” on the official National Park Service page about the Stonewall monument.

In response to the statements in the executive order, Bravo affirmed CUHSD’s alignment with Board Policy 5157 and Administrative Regulation 5157 — which outlines gender identity and access in Santa Clara County — in his email to district members.

“As required by Board Policy 5157 and Administrative Regulation 5157 - Gender Identity and Access, all staff have a duty to provide a safe, supportive and inclusive learning environment for all students, regardless of their gender identity or expression, including transgender, non-binary and gender-expansive students, and to ensure that every student has equal educational opportunities and equal access to the District’s educational programs and activities,” Bravo said.

Currently, Branham offers various gender identity and LGBTQ+ resources, including LGBTQ+ mental health resources on the Wellness Center website, and student communities, such as the Queer Student Union club. EsparzaGomez thinks that it’s important for students to have access to gender identity and LGBTQ+ topics at school, but it shouldn’t be enforced in the curriculum.

“It’s useful to have those resources for those who truly want it and have the urge to go and seek it, but I don’t think it should be enforced over everyone,” EsparzaGomez said. “If they don’t want to [learn about those topics], they shouldn’t have to, but those who want to should have the resources to do so.”

EsparzaGomez also thinks that providing LGBTQ+ and gender identity education at school will give all students resources, regardless of their family background.

“It’s important that parents have that conversation, but we have parents who are homophobic, so maybe their children aren’t comfortable to go to their parents and speak about that topic,” EsparzaGomez said. “If we have resources here, school would be a great escape route.”

Amanatullah said that her role regarding LGBTQ+ topics and gender identity as an educator is to provide a comfortable environment for her students, regardless of their identities.

“All we can do is provide a welcoming space where they feel included and safe for all students,” Amanatullah said. “I don’t think it’s my place to instruct them on a personal level, but if they ever have issues, I would send them to a counselor. I don’t think it’s harmful to recognize someone for who they are and honor that. It’s more harmful if you don’t because sometimes those same places are not at home for them.”

Defining a “patriotic education”

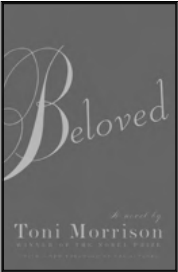
President Donald Trump defined a “patriotic education” as the following in Exec. Order No. 14190, 2025.

- “Patriotic education” means a presentation of the history of America grounded in:
- (i) an accurate, honest, unifying, inspiring, and ennobling characterization of America’s founding and foundational principles;
 - (ii) a clear examination of how the United States has admirably grown closer to its noble principles throughout its history;
 - (iii) the concept that commitment to America’s aspirations is beneficial and justified; and
 - (iv) the concept that celebration of America’s greatness and history is proper.

Santa Clara County Office of Education Board Policy 5157

The Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE) is committed to providing a safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environment for all students, including transgender students, and to ensuring that every student has equal educational opportunities and equal access to the SCCOE’s educational programs and activities. California and federal law (Cal. Ed. Code § 220 and Title IX, 20 U.S.C. § 1681) requires schools to treat transgender students equally and fairly. State and federal law and SCCOE policy require that all programs, activities, and employment practices be conducted without discrimination based on, among other things, actual or perceived gender identity, gender expression or gender. California Education Code § 201 further provides that public schools have an affirmative obligation to combat bias, and a responsibility to provide equal educational opportunities to all pupils.

Historical novels taught in English



“**‘Beloved’ by Toni Morrison:** “Beloved” is a 1987 novel set in post-Civil War America. Narrated from the perspective of a formerly enslaved person, it explores the lasting traumas of slavery. “Beloved” has been challenged in schools for sexual violence and graphic language.



“**‘The Kite Runner’ by Khaled Hosseini:** “The Kite Runner” is a 2003 novel set in Afghanistan during 1973 to 2001. The novel, which is currently taught at Branham to English 2 Honors students, explores social hierarchies and the themes of friendship, betrayal, guilt and redemption. “The Kite Runner” has been challenged in schools for sexual violence and graphic language.

A HOUSE DIVIDED

red, white and
REDEFINED

Once a symbol of unity, American patriotism now reflects a deep political divide, generational shifts and a redefinition of national pride and personal identity



David Tran/Bear Witness

ANABELLE WALKER AND MILA WINDELL
Managing Editor & Student Life Editor

American patriotism has long been embodied by symbols like the bald eagle and the national anthem. The Oxford dictionary defines patriotism as “love for one’s country,” a sentiment that historically united a diverse population under a shared identity.

Traditionally tied to conservative values such as honor, loyalty and bravery, patriotism has undergone a cultural shift. Once a unifying force, it is now increasingly contested, redefined by political divides and personal experiences.

According to a 2022 Gallup study, 59% of Republicans, 34% of Democrats and 36% of independents say they are “extremely proud” to be an American.

Junior **Luke Choi** observes how this rift plays out among young Americans.

“One side is being like, ‘I think patriotism is growing because we have Trump as our new leader,’ and the other side is losing their sense of identity in America,” Choi said.

For Choi, the loss of identity comes from a place of distrust, which he often sees reflected across social media.

“I’ve seen [others say] online, ‘I’m going to Canada,’ or ‘I’m leaving this country.’ People only say that if they feel like they’re in a place of discomfort or place of distrust,” Choi said. “That’s where patriotism is falling off with this other half of the population. They lost trust in the government because of the Trump administration.”

A Pew Research Center study from 2021 found that social media has contributed to increasing political polarization and altered how people engage with national values and identity.

English teacher and department chair **Barbara Arduini** also points to technology and social media as a major force shaping modern patriotism.

While the internet has enabled greater exposure to different beliefs, she believes it has also made it harder to define a cohesive set of patriotic values.

“[Although] there’s an openness to different values,” Arduini said. “I think that there’s also a lack of coherent American values that can make what it means to be an American more polarizing among different groups.”

Junior **Olivia Tran** has felt these larger societal shifts on a personal level, after an ICE raid took place near her old home. Her mother, who had rarely discussed politics before, suddenly began researching immigration laws and naturalization. This experience left Tran anxious and unsettled.

“I would say, in recent years I’m not patriotic,” Tran said. “How America is taking place in the world, on the stance that we’ve taken over [certain] topics, it doesn’t make me as proud to be an American.”

From the proposed renaming of Gulf of Mexico to the “Gulf of America” to debates over official language status and disputes over gender definitions, Tran finds that patriotism is increasingly being weaponized as a mechanism of exclusion rather than unity.

“Changing from the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of America shows the intent of this administration,” Tran said. “They’re not really trying to make a positive change. They’re forcing America to be the center of the world, the center of attention and making everything about [us].”

Both Tran and Choi argue that patriotism isn’t about blind allegiance, but about reconciling personal identity with national pride. Choi believes patriotism should make space for cultural heritage as diversity is the very foundation of America.

“I speak Korean, and if, suddenly [Trump] says, you can only speak English, that [would] hurt me,” Choi said. “I want to be an American, but keeping my own culture is one of my biggest priorities.”

To Choi, cultural identity isn’t something that should be sacrificed in exchange for national pride — it’s something that can coexist with it. He sees no contradiction in holding dual identities.

“Holding an American citizenship doesn’t make me less Korean,” Choi said. “I still speak Korean. I still like to celebrate my Korean culture.”

However, even despite political polarization, Choi believes that shared traditions and values as something that can hold Americans together.

“No matter what people say about the current political stance, we’re still going to be American. We still hold true to our values,” Choi said. “We’re not going to suddenly stop celebrating Thanksgiving because suddenly Trump is president.”

For Arduini, patriotism means not just pride in a nation, but also taking responsibility for its flaws.

Having lived abroad in Eastern Europe, Arduini compares Bulgarian patriotism, which is shaped by resistance to oppression, and American patriotism, which she argues has been influenced by the country’s lack of occupation since independence.

“There’s a clear sense of what the culture is of that place, because [Bulgaria] is not as diverse,” Arduini said. “Whereas in the U.S., I think diversity is part of the culture — that’s part of what makes America.”

To Arduini, this diversity, while a source of strength, also contributes to a more fragmented national identity. She believes that American democracy empowers individuals to hold differing views while still participating in national pride.

“The power of a democracy is that we all have the right to have our opinions, and we vote for who we want to see in office and whose policies we support,” Arduini said. “I can find policies problematic and still be proud to be an American.”

Yet she is careful to distinguish patriotism from nationalism — a line she feels is increasingly blurred in public discourse.

“There’s a difference between patriotism and nationalism,” Arduini said. “There’s a nuance there about being proud of where you’re from versus believing because of where you’re from, you’re somehow superior to other places.”

Choi echoes this belief. She predicts that as political tensions rise, public displays of patriotism will grow louder — not out of genuine pride, but as a means of self-protection. She suggested that while people may outwardly express patriotic views, many

will privately disagree and feel discontent.

“Half of America has become increasingly more unpatriotic,” Tran said. “In the extremes, I’ve seen people saying we should [start] a revolution. [There’s] a lot of people saying, ‘I want to move out of the country,’ [or] ‘We should prepare for the worst.’ And on the other side, they’re saying, ‘Wow, we’re making America great again.’”

Despite this fragmentation, Arduini still sees core values that persist — like individual freedom, a strong work ethic and enduring hope of the American Dream, especially among immigrant communities.

“Americans value their individual freedoms, the idea of the American work ethic, certainly,” Arduini said. “I think the American Dream is a big part of that. I think that’s also the immigrant’s dream.”

The shift in the “ideal America” has shifted the preconceived idea of a diverse country. Arduini suggests we’ve moved beyond the “melting pot” ideal.

“In the past, people looked at the U.S. as a melting pot, and you all melted together,” Arduini said. “I think that now we try to look at things more as a salad bowl, where people retain their individual identity, within the larger goal of America.”

Despite these differences, both perspectives reveal a nation grappling with its identity. This polarization highlights how patriotism can mean vastly different things to different people, often shaped by personal experiences and political beliefs.

Yet, even amongst this divide, there’s a shared thread — a desire for change.

“I am proud to be an American. I feel comfortable and honest saying that, but that doesn’t mean I can’t admit the flaws in our nation and in our history,” Arduini said. “Acknowledging flaws is one of the most patriotic things that you can do: to love a country enough to want to make it better, as opposed to turning a blind eye to problems.”

79%
of 112 respondents in a Bear Witness poll have noticed a shift in American patriotism in the last few months.

59%, 34% and 36%
of Republicans, Democrats and independents say they’re “extremely proud” to be an American.

home of the brave

Trump administration allows ICE to conduct enforcement in schools

ALYX YOON AND NEVAEH GUTIERREZ
Staff Writers

Newly elected President Donald Trump has established many executive orders, including Executive Order 14148, also known as Initial Rescissions of Harmful Executive Orders and Actions. This order nullified several of Biden's executive orders, including some relating to the government's role in managing immigration.

On the first day of Trump's second term, acting Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Benjamine Huffman issued a directive that allows the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to conduct enforcement in formerly protected and "sensitive" areas such as hospitals, religious settings and schools.

One of the ways ICE is enforcing immigration laws is by deporting immigrant students in schools. While ICE can conduct enforcement in schools, ICE officers cannot enter a school without a warrant signed by a federal judge, the consent of a school employee, or a subpoena — a legal order typically issued by a court.

ICE has begun to detain students. Scholars at prestigious institutions such as Georgetown, Columbia and Brown have faced deportation efforts.

Mahmoud Khalil, a Columbia graduate and pro-Palestinian activist, was arrested and detained for deportation under what President Donald Trump characterized as "un-American activity." However, Khalil holds a green card and is a U.S. permanent resident. Another Columbia University student who participated in pro-Palestinian activities, Yunseo Chung, is suing President Trump and administration officials after immigration officials tried to arrest and deport her on March 31.

San Jose Mayor Matt Mahan and Councilmember Peter Ortiz also confirmed that there was an ICE operation near South White Road, Tully Road and King and Story Roads on Jan. 26, sparking fear amongst local immigrant families.

Anonymous immigrant student **John Doe** said the constant worrying about the possibility of ICE raids makes it difficult to focus at school.

"Knowing that friends, neighbors or even classmates could be taken away at any moment is heartbreaking," Doe said. "There's always that lingering worry — what if someone I love is next?"

Due to the stress and lack of focus, maintaining grades has become a struggle for Doe.

"Sometimes, I find myself losing sleep over these thoughts, and when I'm tired, it's even harder to understand what the teacher is saying. My grades have taken a hit because I'm always preoccupied with the fear of raids and the uncertainty of my future here," Doe said. "It feels like I'm not just fighting for good grades. I'm also fighting for a sense of safety and normalcy every day."

Despite the mental impact of the fear of ICE, Doe feels encouraged to go against immigrant stereotypes.

"ICE raids affect my motivation and future plans. They make me question if I will ever truly belong or if all my efforts to succeed could be taken away in an instant," Doe said. "At the same time, they push me to work even harder — to prove that I deserve to be here, to fight for those who can't and to show that immigrants are not the enemy."

Some individuals perceive immigrants as a threat to America, influenced by stereotypes suggesting they take jobs from citizens, rely on government assistance and contribute to crime.

Prominent Republicans, including President Trump, have espoused these claims. However, many undocumented immigrants pay taxes. In 2022, immigrant households paid \$579.1 billion in taxes, including \$35.1 billion in taxes paid by undocumented households, according to the American Immigration Council. These taxes funded social services for low-income families and contributed to some programs that undocumented immigrants cannot claim benefits from, including Social Security and Medicare.

Additionally, the National Immigration Law Center says that most federal aid programs, including Medicaid and Supplemental Security Income (SSI), are unavailable to undocumented immigrants. Even legally residing immigrants are generally ineligible until they have lived in the U.S. for at least five years.

Before the 2000s, immigrants helped build America by expanding the labor force, contributing to taxes, increasing consumer spending and making innovations. Historically, immigrants created railroads, developed alternating current electrical systems, invented the telephone and more.

"It feels like no matter how hard we work or how much we contribute, we're still seen as outsiders or threats," Doe said. "It creates a feeling of isolation because sometimes it's hard to talk about these fears with people who don't understand what it's like to live with this uncertainty."

According to The New York Times, if citizens lost jobs to immigrants, countries would experience economic decline as their populations grew. However, the opposite occurs. According to American Immigration Council analysis, the immigrant population in the U.S. contributed to \$1.6 trillion in economic activity in 2022. This is because immigrants not only expand the

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Previous policies

In 2011, ICE Director John Morton issued the memo "Enforcement Actions at or Focused on Sensitive Locations," which told ICE to generally refrain from conducting enforcement at schools, hospitals, places of worship, public demonstrations and public ceremonies such as weddings and funerals.

The Biden administration expanded the list of protected areas to include places like healthcare facilities, social services establishments and disaster and emergency response sites. It also told ICE to avoid conducting enforcement "near" protected areas.

Current directives

Department of Homeland Security Secretary Benjamine Huffman issued an unreleased memo on Jan. 20 that permits ICE to conduct enforcement in formerly protected areas. Executive Order 14148 repealed multiple of Biden's executive orders relating to immigration.

Plyler v. Doe

In this 1982 case, the Supreme Court ruled that states cannot deny undocumented students access to free, public K-12 education.

Sources: The White House, National Immigration Law Center, NBC News, CBS News, CNN

EDUCATION

labor force but also drive demand for goods and services, ultimately contributing to economic growth.

Ethnic Studies and U.S. history teacher **Stefanie Menera** said illegal immigration is being seen as a more serious offense than it actually is.

"A harmful rhetoric that I'm starting to see is undocumented [immigration] being framed as a dangerous, even violent, criminal offense," Menera said. "I have fears that's going to start to impact the perspective of students who might not be directly affected, to start to exclude compassion and empathy from the way that they view these communities."

The national crime rate dropped by 60.4% from 1980 to 2022, even as the immigrant population more than doubled since then, according to the American Immigration Council.

In response to Trump's executive orders regarding immigration, Superintendent **Dr. Robert Bravo** sent out an email reassuring families and students about campus safety.

"I want to remind the community that our district remains committed to keeping our schools safe spaces for all students and families regardless of citizenship status," Bravo wrote.

He said that immigration authorities cannot freely enter campuses.

"If federal law enforcement was to come to campus, or if federal law enforcement was to ask for any information about a student or their family, we're not going to just hand those things over," Bravo said.

In accordance with California Education Code 234.7, school officials in California do not collect information regarding students' or their families' immigration status. Therefore, if immigration authorities request entry to a campus, the school has no immigration status information to report.

"It doesn't matter what the status of your family is or isn't. If you're under 18 in our country, you should have a place in school," Bravo said. In 1982, the Supreme Court ruled in *Plyler v. Doe* that states cannot deny undocumented students access to free, public K-12 education. "Everybody's entitled to an [education], and we want schools to be placed where people feel that they can safely come and learn and develop."

Additionally, Branham staff have been trained to not allow immigration enforcement onto campus.

Jada Chiu, communication and engagement coordinator, said in an email that the district's top priority is ensuring the safety, well-being and educational access for all students.

"We have been actively conducting refresher training with staff on board policies, protocols and federal student data privacy protections," Chiu wrote. "We have also been proactively equipping students and families with resources, educational materials and information about their rights to ensure they are well-informed and empowered."

Menera said the district is aware and vigilant of what's happening. She said the administration has been clear about how teachers should react to the "shift" in the community and how it could potentially impact the campus.

"The district has been clear in emphasizing to us that our schools are safe places for all students, regardless of immigration status and at Branham," Menera said. "I'm appreciative of our administration and that they've shared these resources and they've taken time to participate in training."

Despite the fear of ICE, Bravo encourages students to remain in school.

"I hope students will do everything they can on their part to



persist in their studies because falling behind academically isn't going to help," Bravo said. "I understand the anxiety, I hope they get informed [and] if they need access [to] counseling resources they [can] talk to staff. We're going to be monitoring school attendance and looking for cases where we're concerned that somebody's not coming to school."

According to NBC News, there's been a decrease in student attendance since immigrant families have been pulling their children out of schools in order to protect them. In Denver, Colorado, Denver Public Schools has reported the attendance rate has dropped by 10% since Feb. 5.

"[ICE] increased fear and uncertainty around what it means to be an undocumented student, as well as their families, especially around issues related to deportation and access to education," Menera said.

Students already face stress from assignments and exams, but those concerns are compounded by the anxiety and safety issues created by the threat of deportation. Menera said the stress and worries stemming from this threat create barriers to students' learning and overall well-being.

"It can be challenging to focus on something like coming to school or completing a math packet when your safety and well being is at risk," Menera said.

Menera said that in her classes, she encourages students to engage in critical discussions about both historical and current immigration issues, fostering a compassionate approach to the topic.

"As a teacher, I feel a personal responsibility to do my part in making sure that schools remain to be places that stand firmly against this kind of dehumanization," Menera said. "Education has always been a powerful tool in creating and when students learn history, they gain knowledge and courage to recognize and push back against injustice."

The fundamental purpose of school is to educate, and the fear of potential ICE raids is actively inhibiting some students' learning.

"Schools should be a place where we can focus on learning, not a place where we live in fear of ICE raids," Doe said. "Real people are affected by this. Families get separated, kids are scared to go to school and entire communities live in fear. If we don't talk about it, nothing will change. More people need to understand what's actually happening so we can push for better solutions."

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supermarket SPIKE

Current inflation and trade wars are causing stress in the grocery aisles

FOODS EXPECTED TO BECOME MORE EXPENSIVE
BECAUSE OF RECENT TARIFFS

- 1. Seafood
Sources: Chile, India, Indonesia and Vietnam
- 2. Coffee
Sources: Brazil and Colombia
- 3. Fruit/produce
Sources: Guatemala, Peru and Costa Rica
- 4. Alcohol
Sources: France, Italy, Spain, New Zealand and Australia
- 5. Beef
Sources: New Zealand and Australia
- 6. Rice
Sources: Thailand and India
- 7. Cheese
Sources: Italy, France, Spain and the Netherlands
- 8. Nuts
Sources: Vietnam, Ivory Coast, Brazil and Thailand
- 9. Chocolate
Sources: Ivory Coast and Ecuador
- 10. Olive oil
Sources: European Union, espically Spain, Italy and Greece

60%
of 158 students in a Bear Witness poll said that rising food prices are affecting them

A TARIFF TIMELINE

- Jan. 26:** A 25% tariff threat is given to all Columbia exports
- Feb. 1:** A 25% tariff for all imports is placed on Canada and Mexico with an addition 10% tariff placed on China
- Feb. 4:** China retaliates U.S. tariffs with tariffs of their own on goods such as agri-cultural machinery, large-engine cars and crude oil
- Feb. 13:** Trump announces that more tariffs will be placed on other countries outside of Canada, Mexico and China
- March 4:** The 25% tariffs for Canada and Mexico go into place and the tariffs on China get bumped to 20%, while China bumps its own tariffs to 15% for U.S. agricultural products in particular
- March 6:** Trump pauses the 25% tariffs on Canada and Mexico until April 2
- April 2:** Trump announces a 10% baseline tax on all imported goods from all countries, with several countries having higher tariffs. This includes a 34% tax on imports from Chi-na, a 20% tax on imports from the European Union, 25% on South Korea, 24% on Japan and 32% on Taiwan.
- April 6:** The 10% baseline tariff takes effect
- April 9:** Trump suspends many of the higher tariffs for 90 days, with China being the exception. The administration instead raised China’s tariffs to 145%.

ENOCH SHIN
Staff Writer

With steadily increasing inflation and new economic plans from the federal government, food prices have been rising and are expected to continue to rise in the U.S. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the food market in the U.S. has increased prices since 2020, with a 1.2% price increase in 2024. Additionally, animal products have been rising in price. In the U.S. alone, beef prices have increased 3.2%, pork increased by 1.2% and eggs have risen in price by almost 41.1% since the beginning of the year. During her usual grocery trips, sophomore **Rebecca Burstein** has noticed a fluctuation of prices for certain foods. “It’s definitely made me have to pay more attention to what I’m buying when shopping and making sure that I’m keeping within the budget,” Burstein said. “It’s a lot harder now to keep within the budget just because I still need the same things.” Specifically, Burstein has noticed the expenses of products such as eggs rise. “[Egg prices] have been a continuous problem,” Burstein said, “but it’s also been recent, with the bird flu.” Recently, the outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), otherwise known as the bird flu, has contributed to the increase in the price of eggs. The strain has not only impact-ed birds, but also dairy cattle, wild cats and many other species around the nation. The Trump administration has made conflicting decisions on how to tackle the virus. While there have been efforts to reduce its spread, which consists of a five-point strategy to provide \$500 million for biosecurity measures, \$400 million in financial relief for affected farmers and \$100 million for vaccine research, ac-cording to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. However, gov-ernment scientists researching it have also been fired in the past few months. Similarly to Burstein, social science teacher **John Salberg** has also noticed an increase in prices for eggs throughout the years. He believes part of this is because of how industries buy from fewer and larger farms now, according to Food & Power. “They’ve consolidated ownership, and they have more control over supply, and therefore they have more control over prices,” Salberg said. Aside from the rise in egg prices, new tariffs placed by the Trump administration have contributed to rising prices

for various other foods, especially produce and seafood. Trump’s current 25% tariffs on Mexico and Canada is also a contributing factor to the increase in grocery prices. The tar-iff excludes goods that are a part of the United States-Mexi-co-Canada Agreement (USMCA). There has also been a 145% tariff placed on China, which was a retaliation to the 125% tariff China placed on the U.S., mocking the trade war the U.S. has been instigating. This has the potential to increase prices on goods such as seafood, coffee and nuts. The frequent changing of tariffs being placed have made gro-cery prices difficult to predict, leading to stress and uncertainty for consumers. Salberg thinks that the goal of these tariffs is to put the country in a better position for trading and control, but is unsure if it will also help to reduce prices. “I believe that tariffs are being used as a political strategy to try to negotiate, putting us [the U.S.] in a powerful position,” Salberg said. “If they go through, those prices will go up.” Salberg also believes that the main demographic that is most hurt from the rise in food prices is middle and lower class Amer-ican families, mostly households with multiple children. “I have three active kids, and healthy food is a very important part of our diet,” Salberg said. “I’ve seen [the price of eggs and other goods] take up a larger portion of my budget in the last three years than I’ve ever seen in my entire [life].” Science teacher **Juan Fernandez-Maculet** believes that anoth-er demographic that is heavily affected by rising food prices are school teachers. “I believe the most affected would be young teachers that have lower salaries, and then families in which the salaries don’t keep up with inflation,” Fernandez-Maculet said. Fernandez-Maculet has also seen higher prices impact students. “I’ve seen the students that ask me how to apply for a free lunch,” he said. “So because of these rising food prices, some students are finding it hard to afford food.” Salberg also points out that while the prices in the grocery store increase very quickly with tariffs and inflation, people’s wages do not. “It’s not as though people’s wages rose proportionally to the rise in prices from inflation,” Salberg said. “Those things rise imme-diately, and our wages do not rise immediately. They always lag behind. So there’s always a struggle.” Despite the economic struggle right now, Salberg believes that a lot of the current inflation that contributes to higher food prices is still a lasting effect from COVID and that instead of pinning the blame to one party or another, the country should aim to work together more. “If you just look at it from an economic standpoint, we know we’re going to have in-flation,” Salberg said. “So there’s no one to blame for that, Democrat or Republican. We were in this as a country, nobody likes it when it happens. We just got to try to work through it as best we can, and I believe we can and will navigate through this.”



A HOUSE DIVIDED

the basic economic PROBLEM

Analyzing Trump’s proposed tax cuts and ongoing tariff dispute

FRANCISCO PHAM
Sports Editor

Scarcity — limited resources paired with unlimited wants. The goal of most economic policy is to balance the scales and to find the equilibrium between those resources and wants. The purpose of any president’s policy is to find a way to balance that scale. This goal is nothing different from that of President Donald Trump.

Trump’s economic policies are heavily focused on aggressive tax cuts and tariffs intended to bring jobs to America and reinvigorate the idea of an American-first economy.

To that end, Trump has introduced tariffs on Canada, Mexico and the European Union, all of which are allies of the United States.

Trump states the intent of these policies is to boost U.S. manufacturing and increase revenue as a whole. So far, the markets have seen a significant drop with the S&P 500 (an index tracking the performance of the 500 largest companies) dropping 8% since Feb. 17, equating to \$4 trillion in market value. The unstable market has posed the question of whether a trade war is sustainable for the country.

Many doubt these policies will help Trump achieve his idea of an “America first” economy. Economics and U.S. Government teacher **Kirk Selfridge** believes that the reality is a trade compromise.

“I don’t think there’s a win,” Selfridge said. “I think it will lead to some form of a compromise between the U.S. and other countries that promotes some form of better trade relations.”

Beyond an impact on the market, these tariffs have created tension between the U.S. and Canada, Mexico and the E.U.

Canada has responded to Trump’s tariffs by announcing that they will place 25% tariffs on the U.S., with the E.U. imposing similar tariffs on American goods as well.

Junior **Lucas Claes** believes these tariffs are doing more harm than good to the nation.

“It is important to maintain good relations with the world,” Claes said. “Trump’s saying he wants to put America first, but due to how much we export it’s almost like shooting ourselves in the foot.”

On the other hand, senior **Cassia Huang** believes that these tariffs, although do damage relations with Canada and Mexico, will in the long run work to promote American industries.

“These tariffs incentivize companies to stray away from international exports and focus more on creating jobs for Americans,” Huang said.

The concept of an American production-driven economy is open for discussion, as there is much concern regarding how plausible it truly is. Selfridge believes that it’s improbable to expect American businesses to immediately stop importing their goods.

“The idea is that if businesses are saving money they will use that to invest in themselves to grow. However, that is highly unlikely due to the costs to move and set up shop in America,” Selfridge said. “There could be faces that could entice that to move more or they could simply pay the tariffs and continue their production offshore.”

Similarly, tax cuts play a major role in contributing to growing American corporations. In this instance, Trump proposed the

cuts to the Republican-led Congress which prompted them to enact a budget reconciliation, essentially a fast-tracked way that bypasses the Senate filibuster to pass legislation designated in the budget resolution.

Trump’s total tax cuts are valued at around \$4.5 trillion for both individuals and corporations. The first part of these cuts is the federal portion which proposes to lower corporate tax rates from 20% to 15%. Huang believes these corporate tax cuts will create more jobs in American industries.

“The biggest thing that Trump is trying to do is uplift American producers and employ more people within America,” Huang said. “He wants people to realize that America is the big trading house that it once was.”

Comparatively, there are concerns about whether these corporate tax cuts are improving the American economy. Claes believes that moving production to America is a positive decision, but questions whether these tax cuts will achieve their intended purpose.

“It’s hard to tell a company where to invest,” Claes said. “You don’t know if they will put that into research or other aspects to boost their revenue.”

The second part of these tax cuts is the ones focused on the middle class. Trump’s platform was built on the promise of extending the Tax Cut and Jobs Act of 2017, which cut individual taxes for a limited period, scaled back estate tax and lowered taxes on pass-through income.

However, with a tax cut of any kind, the money used to fund those cuts has to be taken from other programs. In a speech to the public, House Speaker Mike Johnson said these funds can be equated through eliminating federal waste. However, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) believes that without cutting Medicare, Medicaid or CHIP, only \$381 billion is available — much less than the \$4.5 trillion estimated.

As a result, there have been questions about whether social welfare programs will be cut.

Huang believes that the distribution of these programs will be left up to the states and their criteria.

“It comes down to what individual states decide to do, making sure who needs Medicaid gets it,” Huang said. “However at the federal level, they’re not going to give out money to those who don’t need it. That’s the wasteful spending that they are talking about.”

On the flip side, Claes believes that these welfare programs should remain completely untouched and not a part of the question regarding program spending cuts.

“Government welfare is good for all classes,” Claes said. “Not everyone has access to corporate insurance programs and such, so these programs are put to good use to help those people out.”

With much of Trump’s economic plan yet to be put into place, there is much unknown about the direction of the American economy and how the country will look in four years.

“At the end of the day, we don’t know. We’re not going to see any major impact until down the road,” Selfridge said. “This trade war could last [up to] two, four years, or possibly even more. There is a lot left unknown.”



\$4.5 trillion is the total amount of taxes that the Trump administration wants to cut.

131,000 federal employees have been laid off by the new Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), according to estimates by The New York Times as of April 8.

the land of “OPPORTUNITY”

Federal job cuts cause distress within families in the Branham community

ELLIOTT YAU
Science & Health Editor

Ever since visiting Yosemite National Park in middle school, **Jane Doe** knew she wanted to work outdoors and take care of the environment. Doe, a Branham alumnus, chased her dream and found a position at the Department of the Interior — which preserves America’s natural resources and cultural heritage — after graduating from college.

But now, she’s uncertain if she will keep her job. Being unable to log in to her computer could be the only notification she receives.

Across the federal government, tens of thousands of employees were laid off en masse or offered voluntary separation packages as the Trump administration and the Department of Government Efficiency, created by an executive order, seek to reduce the size of the government.

The New York Times estimates that over 131,000 federal employees have been dismissed. About 56,230 employees were cut while around 75,000 took buyout offers as of April 8. Courts have ordered temporary reinstatements of many workers, but the government plans to lay off at least 146,000 more workers, according to The Times.

Probationary employees — those in their first or second year on the job, or those who were recently promoted — were targeted, likely because they lack appeal rights and can be terminated quickly as long as their superiors provide a performance-related reason for firing them.

Even though nonprobationary employees have more appeal rights, many have been removed from their positions through reductions in force.

It’s a worrying situation to Doe, who fits the bill of a probationary employee that can be let go on a moment’s notice.

“I don’t think I’ve had a good night of sleep since Inauguration Day,” Doe said, adding that she doesn’t have any family or community in the area because she just moved. “I might be losing my source of income and my job that I’ve wanted to do since I was in high school. I worked hard. And the fact that it could just be swept out from underneath me at any time is scary.”

Doe knows people who have gone to work only to be fired by 10 a.m. with just an email notification.

“Every time I hear the Outlook sounds that come through my computer, I jump, because it could be that, ‘Oh, by the way, you’re no longer employed in the federal government’ [email],” Doe said.

The looming possibility of losing her job has forced Doe to prepare job applications, save money and consider moving back home.

As a probationary employee who makes about \$40,000 a year, Doe said the idea that the average federal employee makes \$100,000 annually is a misconception.

She has turned down multiple offers to leave the government, refusing to quit her job voluntarily.

“I’m not leaving until they make me,” Doe said. “But I plan on staying on. What I do is important, no matter what anyone else says. Our public lands are worth defending, and I commit to defend them until they say I can’t anymore.”

According to Doe, while the government has offered little information or reassurances and even censored what can be posted on the department’s official social media, members of the public have expressed positivity and support when they interact with her.

“About four or five times a week, I get a ‘Thank you for being here. We’re so sorry for what is happening. Thank you because you need to tell these stories. Thank you for not backing down,’” Doe said. “To me, that means a lot more to me than some bureaucrat or high ranking official telling me that I’m not worthy of the government’s funds.”

Considering the randomness of the firings, Doe doesn’t value the government’s opinion of her.

In her department, two people — who were in the same exact position as her and who were hired the same way — lost their jobs while she didn’t.

Jane Doe’s sister, **Betsy Doe**, commented that the American public needs to understand the randomness of the dismissals.

“[The government has] been saying a lot that it’s performance issues, and that’s who they’re firing,” Betsy said. “But that’s not

the truth. It seems very randomized, and people need to realize that, push back a little more against it and not just be complacent in the whole situation.”

Betsy, a current Branham student, said that the situation was frustrating and sad, especially since she’s witnessed her sister’s perseverance and dedication to her dream throughout high school and college.

“I’ve seen how hard she worked to be able to get to this point,” Betsy said. “For her to [potentially] lose her job for no reason when she hasn’t done anything wrong, it’s just not right.”

Others within the Branham community are also feeling the effects of the firings and budget cuts.

Student **Regina Roe**’s mother worked at a nonprofit that helped challenged individuals get jobs and finish their education. In 2023, the company received 80% of its funding from the federal and state government.

After sweeping budget cuts, the program was eliminated in February, and hundreds of employees were laid off, including Roe’s mother.

Though Roe said her family was not severely impacted, the people served by San Jose Conservation Corps lost access to resources and grants.

“A lot of people got grants in order to support their family and support themselves through colleges, so that just all goes away,” Roe said. “Part of her program’s job was to give money to people who needed it to get through college, so taking that money away takes [away] their opportunities to go to college.”

With more layoffs and budget cuts on the horizon, more Americans will be affected. Many are protesting against these reductions on the streets and in the courts, with unions and federal workers bringing numerous lawsuits and advocacy groups coordinating nationwide protests, and federal judges have repeatedly ordered the government to immediately reinstate employees.

“In D.C., I see so many people out in front of the buildings and they’re pushing back,” Jane Doe said. “Don’t let this go away. Keep paying attention to it. They can take a lot from us, but they can’t take our unity.”

How does coach turnover affect players and teams?



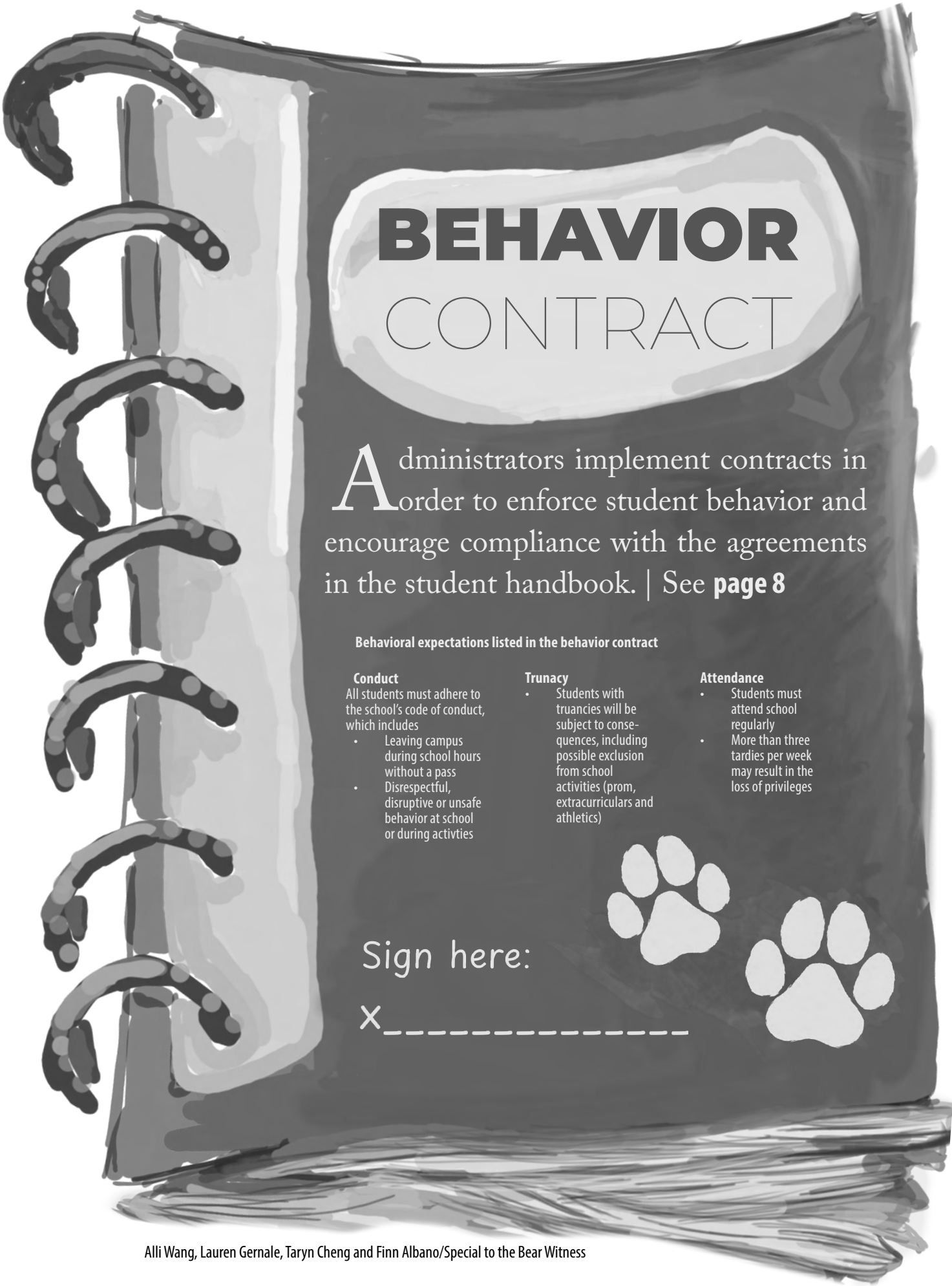
**SUSTAINABLE
STYLE**

A guide to affordable and sustainable clothing.

BACK PAGE

Explore the effects of easy access to over the counter medications.

BEAR WITNESS



Alli Wang, Lauren Gernale, Taryn Cheng and Finn Albano/Special to the Bear Witness

BEHAVIOR ENFORCEMENT

Bruin behavior

Administrators introduce behavior contracts

KIANNA SANCHEZ
Staff Writer

Aiming to enforce student behavior at Branham, administrators are using contracts and assemblies to remind students of expectations. The new tactics have forced students to adjust in order to improve their behavior. In late January, juniors and seniors were asked to complete a “Behavior Expectation Form.” The form, which references expectations cited in the student handbook, enforced certain agreements,

such as attendance and student discipline. The form served as a reminder for the “high expectations” in place for students “in order to participate in second semester events, including prom and other extracurricular activities,” according to an email from the administrators. According to Assistant Principal **Todd Harrison**, the new methods of enforcement, including the contract, are reminders of pre existing agreements rather than new stipulations. The agreements in the handbook, according to Harrison, aren’t just to enforce student behavior,

they are there to influence their future attendance by building good habits. “When you start a new school year, [students and their] parents are expected to sign the student handbook,” Harrison said. “It’s just a reminder of what the expectations are on a daily basis.” Referred to in the contract and handbook, Branham staff have also begun to change the consequences they impose on students. Recently, they’ve moved away from giving out detention

RAISING FUNDS

Bringing in the dough

Branham organizations address fundraising efforts and effectiveness

EMMETT SPEAR
Staff Writer

Throughout Branham, many groups on campus, from clubs and sports to the Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) and ASB host a variety of programs that require funds. With a multitude of fundraising methods, some forms of fundraising are more successful than others. According to PTSA President **Susan Smith**, Branham’s PTSA generates most of the money it uses from donation forms sent out in flyers and newsletters such as the Branham Bulletin, the exception being PTSA’s Grad Night Committee which turns to other methods for fundraising, such as the dining night out. This money mainly contributes towards funding school expenditures that aren’t covered by other groups throughout the school, such as sports and music boosters, teacher and student grants and organizations like Link Crew. “We set aside the money, and then people request it and we follow our procedures to make sure it is appropriate spending for that category,” Smith said. “We don’t pay for parties or student clubs or things like that. We have certain rules on what we [spend for].” For groups like ASB and Grad Night, providing funds for their projects and events require more grassroots efforts. Within ASB, each grade is responsible for conducting fundraisers each semester in order to raise money for events such as rallies and Homecoming. ASB Executive Treasurer **Lan Legentry** delegates the ASB budget, a lot of which comes from fundraisers such as dining night outs when not from ticketed events like dances. “The fundraisers from restaurants really help a lot because that way we can have more money for each class,” Legentry said. “That will help contribute to having successful events at Branham.” Dining night outs are partnerships with local restaurants and chains in which a percent of proceeds goes to the partnered organization when customers request the fundraiser while ordering. The choice in partnership is often based on the restaurant’s effectiveness in garnering support. “Right now, Chipotle is very popular for people,” Legentry said. “Some pizza places are very popular too, but you have to choose a restaurant that’s most popular to people, so then more people will come.” In a survey of 109 Bear Witness readers, 61% of respondents said they had participated in a Branham-affiliated fundraiser before. According to Smith, the popularity of hosting these fundraisers and their widespread support are due to their effectiveness. She added that these fundraisers are capable of raising between \$50 and \$100 dollars. “The music boosters do them, [and so does] grad night and sports boosters, everybody does them,” Smith said. “It’s a way to support these programs. The restaurants like it, because then it’s free advertising. In a way, it’s a symbiotic relationship.” Senior **Adam Orenstein**, who took part in Grad Night fundraisers at Yogurtland and Eric’s Deli, said he believes dining fundraisers are highly successful, especially when promoted on Instagram. Additionally, Orenstein believes that more students participate when they recognize that supporting fundraisers is necessary for events such as Grad Night to happen.

NEWS

CONTRACTS | Student behavior enforced through contracts

From PAGE 7

as it has become an ineffective way of preventing bad behavior. “Kids are going to push boundaries,” Harrison said. “To get their attention, we’ve said [that] you’re going to lose privileges like prom and other activities if you don’t follow the rules.” Harrison explains his hopes of the results of the behavior enforcements. “Hopefully it builds a sense of showing up on time and being responsible down the road.” In addition, less students are leaving campus during tutorial. Rover **Ivan Bergman** fulfills a variety of different roles on campus, including managing the front office and monitoring campus security responsibilities. He has found students’ behaviors improved as a result of the enforced policies since the beginning of the year. The introduction of FlexiSched and assigned parking spots have enforced student attendance. Bergman says that these notions for better behavior will better Branham as a whole by improving everyday actions.

“[This will help Branham grow],” Bergman said. “When you really cut down on the number of kids that are not doing what they’re supposed to be doing and when they really understand it, [it helps].” While senior **Alex Xiao** noticed improvement in some parts of student behavior, he believes that there are still ways that enforcement can be improved. During the senior assembly, administrators went over the details of the contract and other overall behavior expectations. However, Xiao noted that some elements of the contract weren’t communicated well to the students. “It wasn’t very clear on whether or not there were going to be actual changes to people who broke the rules,” Xiao said. “They kept using vague language, like ‘might’ or ‘may’. When it came to prom tickets they were [said things] like, ‘If you break the rules, you may or may not have consequences.’” In addition to ambiguity, Xiao also felt that some issues, such as vaping, have not improved after the contract.

“I follow the behavior guides because that’s the way I was taught,” Xiao said. “I’ve learned to ignore those [who] break the rules, but it’s really inconvenient in life [when others don’t follow the rules].” Xiao explains the disruption of the students who do not follow the rules. “I try to go to the bathroom and there’s a bunch of [students] vaping in [the bathroom], so I go to the other bathroom, and then there’s more [students] vaping,” Xiao said. “It’s really inconvenient to students that aren’t vaping in the bathrooms.” Harrison urges students to take advantage of opportunities, including sports, activities and events, by behaving in the correct manner and avoiding consequences like exclusion from events and dances. “You only go through high school once,” Harrison said. “So make the best of these four years.”

FUNDRAISING | The effectiveness of fundraising strategies

From PAGE 7

“It’s not only the person who is planning’s responsibility to make sure that the event is a good event,” Orenstein said. “It’s also the senior classes’ responsibility to show support for each other, in order for us to have an exciting event at the end of the year.” Since September, parent **Jessica Tolerba** has been helping to manage and raise money for the Branham Grad Night Committee in order to ensure sufficient funds for the event. To cover all of the expenses for the activities included in Grad Night, the committee needs to raise roughly \$40,000, according to Tolerba. Nevertheless, Tolerba says that such fundraisers, especially that of dining night outs, have not been able to cover expenses for Grad Night as needed. A dining night out at the Barbeque Pit that took place on March 5th was only able to raise \$90 dollars according to Tolerba, a small fraction of the necessary cost for the event. “It’s hard to advertise, and it’s hard for people to get out of their house and want to go and get the food or remember the day it’s on,” Tolerba said. “Even if it’s posted, it depends how many people are following the Grad Night Instagram account and then the ASB account. And if we can get it on ASB, it depends how many people remember.” Tolerba also attributes fundraising issues to

lack of participation from both parent volunteers and participants. According to her, more volunteers to help reach out to more people would make fundraisers like dining night outs more effective and help make bigger contributions toward events. Smith agrees, adding that next year she plans to further spread awareness of events like dining night outs and other fundraisers, a solution which she says may help many organizations solve their shortcoming in funds and earn new supporters. “The Branham community is very generous,” Smith said. “[It has] a lot of great people, but they’re really, really busy, and capturing their attention so that they know about things is actually the hardest part, because if they knew what we did and they understood the need, I think they [would support these causes,] and that’s why I’m not as



FOOD PANTRY

Pop-Up Pantry on the move

The Branham Pop-Up Pantry relocates to the Almaden Hills United Methodist Church

YUJIN CHO
News Editor

The Second Harvest Pop-Up Pantry, which was previously located in the Branham parking lot, moved to the Almaden Hills United Methodist Church this month. In addition to the location change, the Pop-Up Pantry changed from a drive-through set-up to a market-style distribution center, where clients walk through after registering at the front desk. **Hollie Parker-Winzenread**, who was formerly the site leader at the Branham location and is now the Almaden Hills United Methodist Church site leader, said that a variety of factors lead to the location change. “We had cars that would line up in the parking lot, and that sometimes got problematic with when



Yujin Cho/Bear Witness

Second Harvest volunteers Sumin Choy (11) and Brandon Hong (9) help distribute fruits and vegetables.

there was a sporting event or kids getting out at the same time that we had a food distribution,” Parker-Winzenread said. “The concern was the amount of space, but also the safety for the clients and for the students and staff.”

The new format and location also expanded the selection of food from roughly five different items to now 10-12 items for clients, according to Parker-Winzenread. The items, received directly from Second Harvest, include vegeta-

bles, fruits, dry goods, beverages and more. For junior Second Harvest volunteer **Sumin Choy**, another aspect that has changed is client interaction. “Doing [the market-style distribution] is better than the cars since you could actually directly interact with these individuals who come through and get food,” Choy said. “If I don’t have [interactions], it just feels robotic, but this feels like I’m doing something meaningful.” Although client participation initially took a dip on the first day at the new site due to the location change and heavy rain, Parker-Winzenread remains hopeful that the new location will attract more community members. “We expect that the numbers will start to rise as we become known in this community,” she said. “Not only our Branham clients that we love and we honor and we want to serve, but also clients that also may not have been able to get to Branham and are closer to this area. It’s serving an even broader neighborhood.” The Pop-Up Pantries take place on the second and fourth Wednesday of the month. For more information, visit www.shfb.org.

News highlights
visit @bhsbearwitness

Annual World Language Banquet celebrates culture
The World Language Banquet was held March 7 to mark the last day of Multicultural week. Students from clubs and world language classes were able to share food from their respective cultures in a buffet-style while various hosted a club rush. After plates were filled, world language classes and clubs performed. Sophomore **BeEmnet Amare** who did taichi and danced to “Macarena” and “Los Pollitos Dicen” said it brought people together. “I got to see a bunch of my classmates come together and have fun and dance and not really care what other people are thinking,” Amare said. “That’s really nice to see.” One of the emcees, junior **Grace Ngo**, emphasized the importance of gathering people to share culture. “America is a diverse country, so when we celebrate multicultural night, we celebrate that diversity and also our heritage and cultures that have been passed down through many generations,” Ngo said. — Alyx Yoon

Branham color guard finishes off their winter season at championships
On April 29, the Branham Color Guard scored a 77.6706 in the California Color Guard Circuit Championships. Their show was titled “Decisions Unraveled” and explored the difficulty of decision-making, according to instructor **Austin Sugai**. “I wanted to do something a little bit more abstract, something that required a bit more maturity and handled complex emotions,” Sugai said. “Just something that everybody experiences that is just a part of life, but not something that people tend to think about.” Performances included “All Falls Apart” by Polyphia, “FAR AWAY” by Tiffany Day and “Tracing that Dream” by YOASOBI. Guard captain **Alexis Tea** appreciated the challenge of her last performance. “We all got out of our comfort zone,” Tea said “We definitely improved in that aspect. I truly enjoyed every single moment of the season. I felt really, really happy just to show up to rehearsal every single day.” — Elliott Yau



Elliott Yau/Bear Witness

Color guard members set for a toss in the last movement of the show.
The Bionic Bruins host the annual Hackathon
On March 23, the Bionic Bruins robotics club hosted the sixth annual Hackathon at Branham. This year’s coding prompt, financial technology, encouraged students to use their skills to produce a project in 12 hours. It was the first year that children as young as ten years old were included in the Hackathon. It inspires students to pursue coding from a young age. Senior **Kevin Toren**, the Director of Outreach of the Bionic Bruins, knows how valuable these types of experiences can be. “We’re breaking away from the mold,” Toren said. “Our Robotics Club has achieved a ton of success, and now our Hackathon is achieving success, and it’s all just been student-run.” — Abigail Medeiros and Noa Muiyal



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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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COACHES

THE COACHING CAROUSEL

The effects of coach turnover on student-athletes

MILA WINDELL
Student Life Editor

For many sports, a coach serves as the backbone of any team, as they are in charge of shaping the culture, setting expectations and building relationships amongst the players.

However, across Branham athletics, frequent coach turnover has become a challenge for student-athletes. This year alone, Branham's athletic department hired five new head coaches for baseball, flag football, girls basketball, boys basketball and badminton.

Junior **Dante Rosati**, a current Branham varsity basketball player, has had a different coach each of his three years. To Rosati, the constant coach turnover has made it challenging to maintain a strong relationship with the coach.

"[Constantly changing coaches] changes the way the program runs. They're obviously all very different," Rosati said. "It's hard to gain trust with each one of them and that just makes it hard to manage."

For this particular season, Rosati felt that a healthy team environment was hard to establish especially with the frequent change in leadership.

"It took us basically the entire season for us to finally get together," Rosati said about the adjustment to a new coach this year.

Athletic director **Kaleb Lane** acknowledged that while change is sometimes necessary, it can be a hurdle for both players and the teams.

"Having a new coach will always bring change. Sometimes the change is embraced, sometimes the change is pushed back on," Lane said. "But no matter what, anytime there's anyone new in any position, especially one that's as influential as coaching. There's always going to be some mixed feelings about it."

While Branham's athletic department goal is to establish long-term coaches, turnover is sometimes an inevitable thing. Some coaches,



like longtime boys' soccer coach **Danny Keita**, stay for over 20 years, while others leave after just a season.

"We always want to establish long-term partnerships with coaches," Lane said. "But coaching requires hours of work that not everyone realizes, and sometimes life circumstances change."

Rosati recognizes the vital role a coach plays off and on the court and the impact on the team's overall performance that the disconnect between coaches and players impacted their team's record.

"It can impact your whole passion for the sport," Rosati said. "It could affect the whole team and how you play and how you react, and

act with the team. [Coaching] affects everything."

Rosati said the team struggled to connect with their new coach this season. He described an environment where mutual trust was lacking, which led to a disconnect that persisted throughout most of the season.

"He didn't trust us and we didn't trust him. It was kind of just back and forth between me and other people on the team," Rosati said. "There were bad relationships and we could never get around that."

For sophomore **Annika Jain**, her experience with coach turnover has been different. Jain has played badminton for two years and has experienced two different coaches, each with distinct coaching styles.

Unlike Rosati, Jain believes that while the transition brought changes, it did not disrupt the team's overall dynamic. She explained that many of the senior players and captains have stepped up to ensure stability in their team culture.

"We have the players actually helping them. So a lot of the captains step up," Jain said.

During the coaching recruitment process, Lane emphasized that the athletic department looks for coaches who can cultivate an inclusive and uplifting environment.

"The most important quality [to coach] is being able to understand how to work with teenagers and learning how to build a fun, healthy, fun, team environment," Lane said. "It's the most important aspect."

To help players adjust, Lane encourages athletes to communicate openly with their coaches and advocate for themselves.

"Before you come and talk to me as an athletic director, you need to talk to your coach first," Lane said. "In high school, you're a young adult. You're going to be going into the workforce, and you need to learn how to talk to someone in charge without fear of reprisal."

SENIOR SPORTS

Better late than never

Students who join sports senior year find community, confidence and unexpected opportunities.

TOMER VARDI
Staff Writer

In his senior year at Palo Alto High School, Mark Schultz decided to join the wrestling team after previously dedicating himself to gymnastics. Despite his late start, Schultz's commitment paid off. He won the California State Wrestling Championship that same year, launching a career that ultimately led him to become a three-time NCAA champion and an Olympic gold medalist.

Though not everyone will achieve Schultz's level of success, his experience resonates with many high school students who discover the rewards of joining a sport later in their high school careers.

Senior **Matthew Nguyen** stepped onto the football field for the first time this past fall, inspired by friends who encouraged him to give the sport a try.

Upon discovering he'd made the team, Nguyen described feeling "thrilled and surprised."

To prepare, Nguyen regularly went to the gym, trained alongside friends, and watched workout videos online. Despite joining later than most of his teammates, he said comparisons to other athletes who had been part of the program for years never crossed his mind.

"I just had fun, made a lot of friends, and was happy for everyone's success," Nguyen said.

"When I got injured, everyone had my back— it was like a brotherhood."

Senior **Emma Lee Rowe** had a similar experience when she began playing girls flag football during the team's first-ever season.

"All of my senior friends started playing because of PowderPuff," Lee Rowe said. "They said, 'Now that there's an official team, you should start playing.' So I did, and it ended up being fun."

Unsure how to prepare, Lee Rowe initially focused on general fitness, increasing her running and gym time before tryouts. Early on, she found herself comparing her skills to more experienced teammates, but eventually realized everyone was learning together.

Rick Stanton, who has coached tennis at Branham for four years, regularly welcomes upper-classmen new to the sport. Stanton acknowledges that while tennis is competitive, older students joining late still reap significant benefits.

"I love having new players because tennis is a great sport for their lifetime," Stanton said. "Even when their high school career is over, whether or not they play in matches, they can still play tennis."

He explained that while beginners might find varsity-level competition challenging, Branham's large roster allows new players to grow alongside



Francisco Pham/ Bear Witness

Lee Rowe (far left) poses for a photo with her fellow seniors during their flag football senior night ceremony.

teammates at their own skill levels.

"They can play and practice with players at their same skill level and still get a good experience," Stanton said. "They're really good teammates and supportive. They've always helped build our team culture rather than bringing it down."

Lee Rowe encourages others considering joining a sport later in high school to put hesitation aside, emphasizing the opportunity to create

lasting memories.

"It's your last year," Lee Rowe said. "It's really fun getting to know people you might not have known before."

Stanton agrees, emphasizing that sports offer benefits beyond competition.

"Even if they don't become starters, older students can still contribute positively," Stanton said. "There's value in being part of something."

ATHELTE PREPERATION

Readying rituals

The Pregame rituals of Branham athletes

ARYELLA FINKEL-HOZER
Opinion Editor

Left shoe on first. 15 jumping jacks done. Pregame hype song played. Now ready for the game. Whether they are preparing for a cheer competition or a volleyball game, many

athletes have rituals that can affect their performance.

Pre game rituals are more than just the physical act of getting ready. It is a moment of mental preparation that allows an athlete to focus on performing at their absolute best

Senior **Amy Barrientos** acknowledges the value of her pregame tasks that help her succeed when it comes to the first whistle of the match.

"I give myself a little speech, but it's not really motivational," Barrientos said, "It's like, 'you need to do this.' It's more [of a] demand. Those games I don't do [it], I feel like I play bad."

Pregame rituals can look very different depending on the person and team. Sophomore **Winston Middlebrook** notes that his consistent stretching and eating habits before playing on the court are able to create the game ready mindset, helpful for when it comes time to perform.

"It puts me in the mode that I am in for games. It changes the way I think, from regular time to

sports," Middlebrook said. "It affects the spirit and the connection we have on the court."

In some cases, superstitions start as merely something for fun and turn into habits dictating one's performance in their sport. Junior **Reese Hickey** demonstrated how teammates can create these rituals, inspiring the whole team.

"This year, one of the seniors, would come and give us a pat on the shoulder. It was a good luck pat, we called it our shimmer. It released our tight chest, releasing the nerves," Hickey said. "We'll just do it for fun, and then we'll do good afterward then we have to keep doing it."

The effect that these rituals have goes beyond the physical taking a toll on the mental as well.

"It will start as one physical mistake, and then it turns into a whole mental thing that I just get into my head," Barrientos said. "So I start making wrong decisions and I just don't play well, and then I think it transfers back into a physical form."

An athlete's performance is tied to their confidence. There may not be a logical explanation behind a ritual or superstition, but if an athlete believes that it helps them perform better, then it just might.

"When you do it, you feel confident that you're putting it into the universe that you're going to do good," Hickey said. You already have that anxiety taken care of, then you can be more confident in how you're going to play," Hickey said.

"When you do it, you feel confident that you're putting it into the universe that you're going to do well."

Junior **Reese Hickey**, a varsity cheerleader

OPINION

YOUTUBE FAMILIES

BEHIND THE SCREENS

The dark truth behind family vlogging

TAMARA RESTREPO
Staff Writer

The camera rolls as a little girl spins in her new dress, her mother's voice singing in the background, "Say cheese!" A perfect shot for their millions of subscribers. But once the recording stops, the smile vanishes from the little girl's face. "Again," her mother snaps back, barely glancing up from the analytic dashboard tracking their revenue.

Behind the perfectly curated vlogs of morning routines and family vacations lies an industry built on clicks, exploitation and a desperate hunger for profit — one where childhood innocence is just another monetized asset.

A well known example of this is the YouTube channel, "8 Passengers." The popular family vlogging channel ran on YouTube for several years, reaching 2.5 million followers at its peak.

The vlogs published on this channel followed the lives of Ruby Franke, her now ex-husband and their six children.

The channel's goal was to portray a perfect and wholesome suburban family.

BBC News wrote that Franke "edited a window into her life, showing a typical Mormon suburban family, home-schooling, cooking, eating and chatting away together."

Franke's disciplinary techniques shown in her videos were controversial, such as taking away her son's bed for months and restricting food as punishment.

On Aug. 30, 2023, Franke was arrested and charged with six counts of aggravated child abuse, four of which she has pleaded guilty to. Franke was caught when her 12-year-old son Russell Franke escaped their house in Utah. He went to the nearby neighborhood and began asking for food from neighbors. One of the neighbors opened the door and called the police due to the boy's severely malnourished appearance and the visible wounds on his wrists and ankles.

Following Franke's arrest, many viewers went back to the "8 Passengers" YouTube channel to look for signs of the alleged abuse.

Viewers felt that Franke's vlogging was an invasion of her children's privacy. She posted videos documenting her daughter's first time shaving or buying her first bra.

Despite her children's visible discomfort in being documented

8 Passengers- A family vlog channel that followed a mother, father and their six children. One of their most popular videos is "First Time Shaving." They gained 2.5 million subscribers over the course of eight years.

Piper Rockelle- Created in 2016, this channel documented Piper's life with many of her friends. She filmed many videos that acquired lots of attention across social media and grew her channel to 12.1 million subscribers.

in front of a camera, Franke continued the channel as their her main source of income.

According to Forbes, the channel brought in over \$100,000 per month.

In February of this year, Hulu released a documentary series called "Devil in the Family: The Fall of Ruby Franke," which included testimonies from her two oldest children as well as her ex-husband about the abuse that went on behind the scenes. Franke's oldest daughter Shari, stated in the documentary that "our entire schedule revolved around YouTube, and that's where I started to have issues."

For many viewers, these family channels seem to cross a line.

Similarly, child influencer Piper Rockelle's mother Tiffany Smith has faced exploitation allegations.

In January 2022, Smith was sued by 11 teenage content creators who were frequently featured on her daughter's YouTube channel.

According to NBC News, Smith was accused of abuse and exploitation. The creators said in their complaints, "[the teenagers] endured physical and emotional injuries from 'harassment, molestation, and abuse.'" The case continued for over a year, and eventually the parties reached a \$1.85 million settlement.

For years, Rockelle's social media accounts, managed by her mom, were criticized for the content that was published.

Labeled as not age appropriate, many people felt the clothes that she would wear was an attempt to oversexualize her and bring more attention to the account.

An analysis by The New York Times found that many accounts featuring young girls had high percentages of male followers. In particular, many accounts with over 100,000 followers had a male audience of over 75%. The Times also discovered that many male followers were adult men who "openly admit on other platforms to being sexually attracted to children."

Because many mom influencers are aware of the large number of male viewers on their accounts, they take extra measures to protect their children's privacy. Maia Knight was a popular influencer on TikTok with over 7 million followers. For a time, her account revolved around her toddler twin daughters, but after receiving negative attention from male followers that compromised her daughters' safety and privacy, Knight rebranded her social media platforms and took her daughters out of the public eye.

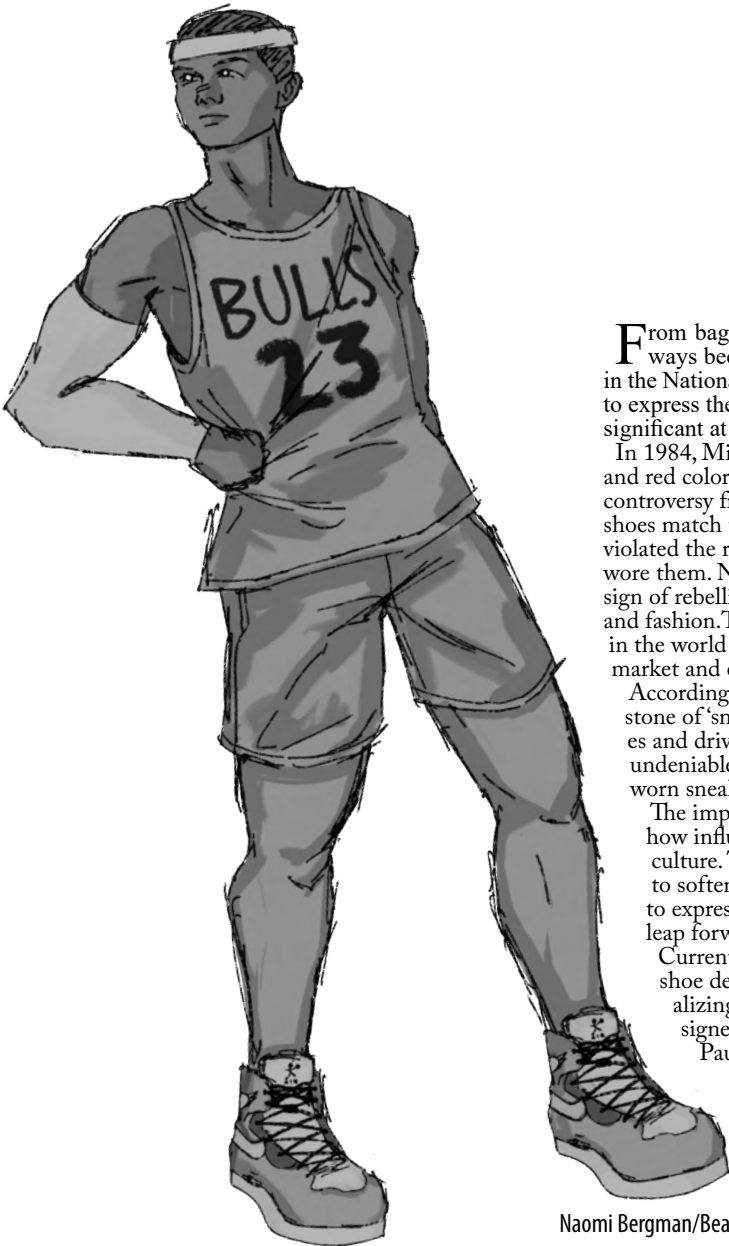
Parents should not be able to monetize their children on any social media platform. Many people are too easily influenced by greed to not turn to questionable invasions of their children's privacies. Social media companies need to place more regulations on content involving minors in order to protect them.

SPORTS FASHION

Fashion Forwards

Accessorizing influences NBA athletes and their fans

TIBAULT THOEN
Staff Writer



Naomi Bergman/Bear Witness

From baggy shorts to shooting sleeves, accessories have always been at the forefront of professional sports, especially in the National Basketball Association (NBA). Athletes use them to express themselves on the court. Accessories may not seem so significant at first, but it is a core piece of NBA culture.

In 1984, Michael Jordan released the Air Jordan 1 in the black and red colorway, making waves for its unique look but drawing controversy from the league as NBA uniform rules mandated all shoes match team colors and be predominantly white. His shoes violated the rules and he was subsequently fined each time they wore them. Nike covered each fine and marketed the shoes as a sign of rebellion and a new era of self expression in both sports and fashion. This sign of rebellion was ultimately a turning point in the world of professional sports, changing how athletes could market and express themselves for the better.

According to Forbes, the controversy "became the cornerstone of 'sneakerhead' culture, with fans queuing up for releases and driving up resale values. Its impact on the NBA was undeniable, with the Air Jordan becoming one of the most worn sneakers in the league during the 2018–2019 season."

The impact of the Air Jordan 1 on the NBA goes to show how influential accessories can be to the game and popular culture. The controversy of the Air Jordan 1 led the NBA to soften their uniform rules and pave the way for players to express themselves further on the court. This was a big leap forward in changing the NBA for the better.

Currently, over 30 NBA players are signed to signature shoe deals, designing their own colorways and personalizing the accessories for themselves. Notable athletes signed to a deal include Jason Tatum, LeBron James and Paul George, all signed to the Nike or Jordan brand.

The expansion of signature shoe deals demonstrates the positive strides players have made in changing the game through expression.

Common accessories including sweatbands,

shooting sleeves and compression leggings all have risen to prominence in the last 40 years of the league and have become staples of the game.

Basketball accessories have since become a staple in everyday wear, regardless of the person participating in the sport or not. An example of this is the Converse All Star. Released in the 1950s, nearly every NBA player was wearing them when the league was first created as the All Star was the first shoe of its kind to be made especially for basketball.

In the 1960s, the underground surf and skate scene took hold of the basketball shoe, turning it into the accessory of their choice and cementing it into their style.

According to Man Of Many, "the Chuck Taylor All Star is pop culture's great unifier. Designed for athletes, adopted by outcasts, and embraced by the underground, the sneaker (much like the enigmatic character behind it) has lived a thousand lives."

Over the course of time with sports fashion, it was not exempt from its fair share of controversy and discourse between fans. Some fans view it as a detracting from the game and playing dress up while other fans acknowledge its importance and influence to the game.

The art of expressing oneself through accessories will continue to be a core aspect of popular culture, specifically through connecting sports and society. As a society, expanding and preserving self expression in sports is crucial in keeping creativity and individuality.

"The Chuck Taylor All Star is pop culture's great unifier. Designed for athletes, adopted by outcasts, and embraced by the underground, the sneaker (much like the enigmatic character behind it) has lived a thousand lives." —Man of Many

BITE-SIZED
OPINIONS

Minor problems,
minor solutions

Problem: When it rains the roads are really slippery and slick.
Solution: We should make the roads waterproof so water doesn't affect driving.

— Lucas Setser

Problem: The weather keeps on changing drastically in the middle of the day so I never wear the right clothes to suit it.
Solution: The school should have lockers big enough to fit closets so people can change their clothes.

— Alyx Yoon

Problem: The school year is not ending fast enough, and it feels like we are stuck in an endless cycle of homework and tests.
Solution: Invent a time machine and travel to the future where the school year is already over and we can enjoy summer.

— Missy Keralapura

Problem: People don't pay attention in the hallways and everyone runs into each other in the crowd.
Solution: There should be lanes in the hallways, like on the road, so people have to stay in their own lanes.

— Kianna Sanchez

Problem: All I hear these days is stuff about college admissions and it's getting a tiny bit annoying.
Solution: All seniors should just get to choose what college they want to go to so no one gets rejected.

— Ava Stark

BEHAVIOR CONTRACTS

Behavior contracts need to go

Editorial

The opinion of the Bear Witness editors

The new behavior contracts required by admin to be signed by upperclassmen have brought much controversy among the student body.

These “behavior contracts” were put into place in hopes of controlling students’ rampant tardies and absences. Not turning in these contracts means not being able to attend prom.

While the intent of these contracts may seem good-natured, their ineffectiveness, as students remain lacking with their attendance, and the harsh repercussions of not turning them in have troubled students.

There was no prior warning of these contracts as they were placed upon the senior class in a meeting during tutorial. This immediate im

plementation has raised concerns about not only the validity of these consequences but the validity of their reasonings.

Students feel that these arbitrary guidelines for attendance and absences present an unrealistic expectation of control over them.

While many students have turned them in, many do not truly agree with the guidelines

that follow it. Forcing students into threatening to take away prom only creates contempt and anger within the student body.

If administrators truly want to ensure attendance and timeliness, these behavior contracts are not the correct solution. These contracts would only create contempt and anger within the student body.

Additionally, tardies are not always students’ faults. Whether it is familial or transportation issues, it is unfair to punish people for events that can be out of their control. After only three tardies in a week, upperclassmen will have their privilege to attend prom revoked.

Many students have been looking forward to prom for a long time. For many, prom is one

of the most important high school events. To hold school attendance over students’ heads and threaten to instantly revoke it is unnecessary. Administrators should look to more proportional punishments if they want to effectively curb attendance problems.

While it is understandable that administrators would want to solve potential truancy problems, it is unfair to include tardies or have prom attendance be what is at stake.

There should be a more open discussion and process regarding fixing attendance issues. Instead of punishing students by removing vital events from their high school experience, there should be more emphasis on conversations between students and adults.

GOOD NEWS

THE POWER OF POSITIVITY

A balance of good and bad news is better than a focus on bad news

ABIGAIL MEDEIROS
Staff Writer

In a world full of seemingly bad news, it’s important to find the positive in everyday life. The prevalence of negative stories can make it difficult for people to see the good in the world around them.

While staying in touch with reality is important, to remember there is still good news is a necessity to uplift spirits even in hard times. Many people are also struggling to grapple with the amount of news that is available to them.

According to The Washington Post, about 70% of Americans are overwhelmed by the amount of news being produced and about 56% of American adults claim that the news they consume causes them significant stress.

Various news outlets have created a presence in purely negative news, yet there are some sources that have made it their goal to harbor positive information. These outlets have gained popularity on social media as they provide an alternative to the negativity in other news.

One of these sources is called the Good News Network. Founded in 1997, this network is dedicated to creating a positive escape from constant negative news with its archive of over 20,000 stories. They create stories to entertain and lift spirits like the story, “The Old Man and the Stork: An Unlikely Friendship That Captivated a Nation.”

It’s also important to think about why the news is so negative. If there are entire networks committed to good news, why are many media outlets so focused on the bad when they should be promoting a balance?

In an article by Vox.com, it stated that the proportion of nega-

tive news headlines grew while the proportion of neutral headlines decreased since the 2000s. This could be due to a human’s likelihood to favor negative news over positive news. News consumers are supposedly “doomscrolling,” a term coined by news writer Karen Ho, which means that they are looking at more and more negative news, overshadowing any good news they might consume. This is why news sites give more bad news; it sells better.

Although it may seem trivial, positive news can be monumental when it comes to changing a person’s perspective on current events.

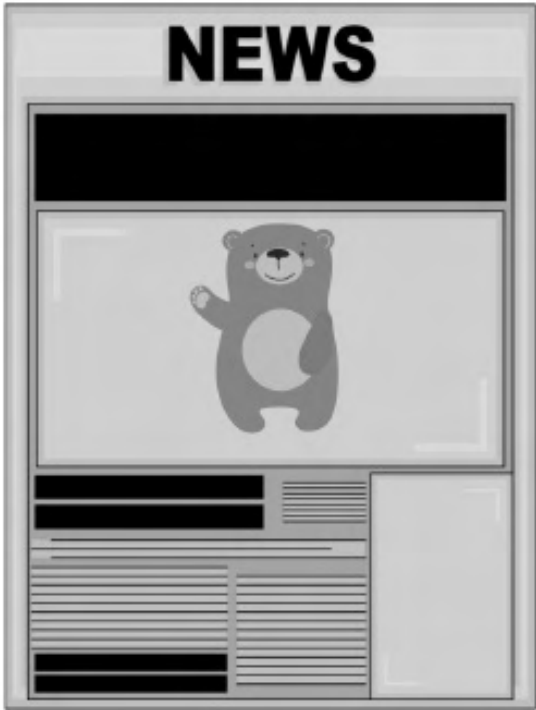
In a study done by The Washington Post, positive news is a much needed break from the widely experienced news fatigue, or restlessness from constant negative news, and stated that it would make you “feel better about the world.”

Another news outlet that covers good news is Positive News. Their mission is to offer a positive outlook on the world that allows people to have a more rounded perspective on reality.

Good news can be more than just fun since the mental health effects like increased positivity go much deeper. Negative news can be disappointing to people who already struggle with hopelessness surrounding positivity.

Although negative news can be overwhelming, it is important to be aware of what is going on in the world in order to be opinionated and informed.

The reality of life is that bad things happen, and that cannot be ignored. But a balance between good and bad is more necessary than it’s ever been in today’s increasingly negative world.



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MEDIA CONTROVERSY

Provocative publicity
Celebrities use controversy to stay in the spotlight and profit

MISSY KERALAPURA
Staff Writer

In today’s media-driven world, controversy has become a tool celebrities exploit in order to remain relevant.

A striking example of this unfolded on the 2025 Grammy red carpet, when Bianca Censori, a model and wife of American rapper and record producer, Ye, made headlines for a bold and disputed fashion choice.

As she posed for the cameras, she shocked the media by dropping her fur coat to reveal her outfit — a completely see-through mesh slip, with nothing underneath.

The style choice instantly sparked an online storm, with people across all platforms commenting and reposting her viral video in a matter of minutes.

As consumers of the media, it is important for Branham students to be mindful about their media consuming habits. In our desire to stay connected to societal trends, we obsessively focus our attention and energy on celebrity controversy. This gives these celebrities more influence and power due to the spotlight we give them.

A couple days after the event, Censori became the most “Googled person in the world,” and had a higher number of searches than any of the Grammy winners, according to Google Search Trends.

Censori’s fashion choice is a vital example of how the entertainment industry often thrives off of controversy — particularly through shock value, which is when a bold action sparks a strong reaction and generates buzz.

Celebrities use bold statements, fashion choices and actions in order to stay high profile, earn more revenue and further their careers.

While controversy has been an integral part of celebrity culture for decades, social media has drastically changed how it spreads and it expanded on the role once held by tabloids and magazines as the primary outlets for celebrity gossip.

Celebrities are now able to go instantly viral and ignite a media frenzy. Images, videos and tweets now spread at lightning speed and reach even broader audiences.

According to Forbes, this rapid spread is fueled by the attention economy, where every scroll, click, like and share is a transaction of the world’s most valuable currency — our attention.

Social media platforms strategically capture and hold our at-

tention in a short time frame by tailoring content to our interests through algorithms and enabling features like autoplay, sharing options and explore pages, according to the Berkeley Econ Review.

Celebrity controversy spreads faster, reaches a larger audience and engages with more viewers due to the rise of the attention economy. Media outlets are looking for stories that generate ‘clicks’ and keep users on the app, making celebrity controversies perfect for this purpose. This is why these incidents repeatedly appear in our feeds and recommended page. Once they get to that level of attention, the celebrities’ relevance can be maintained.

However, the recognition celebrities gain from launching such attention grabbing controversies not only helps them maintain relevance but fuels their own profit.

Whether it be a controversial fashion choice or a jaw-dropping statement, controversy translates directly to financial success. These celebrities are able to generate more traffic to their personal social media pages which allows for more revenue. Additionally, they get the opportunity to increase their earnings through better brand deals, sponsored content, career opportunities, and from their own personal brand due to the heightened visibility.

For example, Ye has been the center of many controversial actions, most notably his infamous Taylor Swift 2009 VMA incident and his repeated antisemitic comments praising Hitler.

However, his shocking and outlandish remarks have been key to helping him build his multimedia empire.

According to Hollywood Branded, many of Ye’s tweets have preceded the launch of a new album, which skyrocketed his name across every major media network to help promote his new album.

Additionally, Ye’s shoe brand, Yeezy, was promoted and generated impressive revenue due to the media attention he was getting.

We, as consumers, feel the need to still purchase their products and listen to their music in order to stay in the mix of what is happening with them.

As a society, we are afraid of feeling out of touch. But as consumers of the media, we need to be aware that what may seem harmless and entertaining is calculated to keep us engaged to boost celebrity revenue and visibility — often at the expense of our attention and



Irene Yoon/Special to the Bear Witness

val-
ues.

Celebrities have immense power over the public and the controversial statements they say for the sake of relevance are harmful and can easily influence people in a negative way.

It is important we start to break free from this cycle and reduce our obsessive engagement with viral celebrity moments and be more aware about what we choose to direct our attention on.

SCIENCE & HEALTH

MEDICINE

A DOSE OF INDEPENDENCE

Students hold strong opinions about the effectiveness and long-term impacts of over-the-counter medication

NITHYA KARAMBAKKAM
Staff Writer

Over the counter medications, or OTCs — such as Tylenol, ibuprofen and Benadryl — are available without a prescription to students.

Students commonly use them to mitigate the symptoms of minor ailments. In a 2018 Innovations in Pharmacy paper by Abraham et al., study findings suggested that 57-78% of adolescents reported using OTC medications within the previous month.

In the same study, the U.S. Poison Center reported that adolescents’ medication misuse — including taking an excessive dose, using it more often than directed, combining the medication with other substances or using it to alter one’s state of consciousness — accounted for 48% of all OTC medication-related poisonings and emergency room visits.

Most of the damage caused by OTCs is because of a lack of literacy on the subject. Many adolescents do not have adequate knowledge of the possible side effects.

The study also stated that adolescents scored an average of about 44% on an OTC medication knowledge survey, suggesting that parents or guardians of those minors also possess limited knowledge.

Yet adults and adolescents are still allowed easy access to OTCs. At Branham, several groups of students, including athletes, use OTCs. Sophomore **Gemma Cervone** occasionally uses Tylenol when she has headaches or inflammation.

As a track and cross country athlete, she also uses Biofreeze — a topical pain relief medication — after strenuous workouts, just like many other athletes.

“I see a lot of people using Biofreeze and Icy Hot,” Cervone said. “I get where they’re coming from, they need fast pain relief. But I feel like there’s other ways you could relieve pain, maybe ice or naturally let it heal.”

Sophomore **Arieana Liang** also chooses to take common alternatives to OTCs because of her personal beliefs.

“You can drink honey water to cure cough,” Liang said. “That’s more natural and not based on chemicals. It’s more natural for recovery.”

Cervone also favors more natural methods of healing over taking OTCs.

“The drawback is that it might be a little less effective, but the benefit is that you aren’t putting chemicals in your body,” Cervone said.

Liang has never taken OTCs for pain relief or illness. She said that the drawbacks of using OTCs outweigh the short-term benefits because the medications present a synthetic method of targeting bacteria and viruses.

“These chemicals are really not great for you. It’s bad for your immunity, because your body is leaning on these medicines instead of naturally recovering,” Liang said. “If there [are] other, natural ways to recover, I would rather take that route instead of the chemicals.”

Sophomore **Simra Hameed** also thinks that medications could have a long-term negative effect if used irresponsibly.

“When you take them often, [they will have negative effects]. They’re still drugs, at the end of the day,” Hameed said, adding that she only takes them at the prescribed times.

According to a 2020 article by the University of Louisville Health, certain antihistamines are widely known to have side



Dao Do/Special to the Bear Witness

effects such as jitters and drowsiness, and other OTCs also commonly have side effects.

As stated by the previously referenced European Review for Medical and Pharmacological Sciences paper, the most common side effects experienced by consumers are vomiting, nausea and stomach pain.

Additionally, addiction can be a concern if patients consume OTCs at an abnormal frequency, as according to the UofL Health article.

They are meant to be taken over a short period of time since minor ailments typically have a short duration.

“[Selling OTCs to everyone in pharmacies] could be a problem, because there are people out there who could overdose,” Cervone said. “They could take more than they’re supposed to, and that might be really harmful to their health.”

Furthermore, sustained use of OTCs could also cause the medication to lose effectiveness over time.

According to a 2023 study published by Wahid et al., overuse of topical nasal decongestants — such as Afrin decongestant —

may result in rhinitis medicamentosa, or rebound congestion. Instead of clearing a person’s nose, it results in worsening irritation.

Overuse may also potentially mask a serious underlying health problem, since OTCs are often designed to combat symptoms. A patient could misdiagnose themselves and fail to consider the possibility that they were suffering from a major illness.

Despite being aware of these potential negative outcomes, most students continue to use such medication, as it’s an accessible and convenient resource available to them.

“It’s a good option to have. It really depends on your preference,” Liang said. “There are always extreme situations, and you probably need [OTCs] at some points in your life when [symptoms] get really bad.”

Overall, Hameed thinks that the benefits of taking OTCs responsibly outweigh the possible side effects.

“The short term benefits are worth it, especially when you take them as carefully,” Hameed said. “I really do think they should [be sold in pharmacies], but they have to be smart with it.”

RECYCLING

Trash talk

Single-use plastics remain prevalent on campus

LUCAS SETSER
Staff Writer

Single-use plastics are commonly used in school cafeterias to seal food and utensils.

However, most of these plastics are only used once before being discarded, generating significant amounts of waste.

Plant manager **Venero Ramos** estimates that trash from the cafeteria makes up about 75% of Branham’s total trash — around 90 to 100 bags of trash are thrown away every day. There are also approximately 100 blue trash cans around campus, emptied at least once a day.

Senior **James Ford**, who eats school food twice a day, noted that while some foods like pizza come with minimal packaging, other foods like sandwiches or salads come in plastic containers, which contributes to more waste.

“Usually, [trash] is just tucked away behind trees or just around the trash can because people miss and don’t actually put it in,” Ford said.

Although Ford acknowledged that these plastic containers keep food fresh, he doesn’t like seeing so much litter on campus.

“It makes me really sad because I care about our planet so much,” Ford said. “It’s sad to see that people are just trashing our planet.”

Ford questions if using plastic is necessary, especially because of the environmental cost and trash.

“If it’s necessary, it’s necessary, but it leads to a lot of waste around campuses in general,” Ford said. “I don’t think [using plastic] is the best way.”

He is in favor of using alternative materials for food packaging and utensils, with the exception of paper straws.

“If they found a way to make it sustainable and still preserve the food, it would be a great way to preserve our food and maintain sustainability

without affecting the quality,” Ford said.

Ramos also voiced his concerns about students caring about waste on campus. Although the district has proposed a new recycling system, Ramos does not have high hopes for it since previous efforts to improve recycling have not worked.

“It hasn’t gotten better, it hasn’t gotten worse,” Ramos said. “Even though we try to [recycle], it always ends up about the same.”

Although using plastic is convenient and easy for schools to enclose food and utensils, it leads to a lot of waste around campus.

Junior **Alijah Murillo** also sees a lot of trash around campus. He expressed similar concerns about the food packaging at the lunch carts.

“I’m not really a big fan of using plastic to conceal food products,” Murillo said

The district currently uses double black cans, which have receptacles for both trash and recycling. The new system that the district has proposed is separate, color-coordinated trash cans for recyclables, compost and trash.

“They’re going to try to do the color coordinating things, which might be a little bit better,” Ramos said. “But I just don’t see anybody making an extra step.”

“I care about our planet so much. To see that people are just trashing our planet makes me so sad.”

Senior James Ford

SCIENCE CLASSES

Physics problems

Few students continue on to AP Physics 2

COLIN KALANGES
Staff Writer

AP Physics 2 is one of the least taken classes at Branham. With only 26 students this year, the class consists of a single period taught by **Ioanna Theodosopoulou**.

On the other hand, there are a total of four periods dedicated to AP Physics 1.

Despite the high demand for the prerequisite class, few students who have taken Physics 1 continue to Physics 2 the next year because of the difficulty of AP Physics 1, according to Theodosopoulou.

“The majority of students who come for AP Physics 1 don’t have prior knowledge in physics and they dive into deep waters. Without prior knowledge, you find any topic very difficult,” Theodosopoulou said. “They have a hard time with AP Physics, [so] they say, ‘Enough is enough.’”

When compared to other AP classes, Physics 1 is considerably more strenuous for students. According to College Board, the international pass rate of the exam was 47% this past year.

Senior **Sungmin Lee**, who is currently taking Physics 2, agrees with Theodosopoulou that AP Physics 1 is a challenging class that discourages students from taking Physics 2.

“It’s confusing. All the concepts are hard. It’s hard to think about because it doesn’t make sense logically,” Lee said.

The class’s formal title is AP Physics 1: Algebra Based. According to the College Board, the class introduces students to physics concepts such as kinematics and dynamics — the study of motion and the causes of motion — as well as basic overviews of topics like rotational dynamics and fluids.

Lee also points to the vast amount of pre-

requisite knowledge AP Physics 2 demands of students. Lee says that students entering AP Physics 1 need to have a strong understanding of algebra in order for them to do well in the class, however AP Physics 2 requires students to have knowledge in multiple different concepts for them to succeed.

“For Physics 2, you have to have a strong understanding of math, some understanding of chemistry or some sciences, as well as a bit of engineering or circuitry,” Lee said.

Junior **Marilyn Aalami-Ho** is currently taking AP Physics 1. She said the class is difficult, but she is determined to take AP Physics 2 next year.

“Ms. Theo is a really good teacher. Having her this year will help me next year grasp concepts and do well in her class,” Aalami-Ho said, adding that she wants to go into engineering, which requires physics, in college.

Aalami-Ho said that the people who want to take the class are in the minority and that very few students are taking AP Physics 2 in senior year.

“I only see people who either really like physics currently,” Aalami-Ho said. “A lot of kids would rather take a different AP like [biology] and [chemistry], which they perceive as being easier.”

According to Aalami-Ho, the appeal of the class comes from the opportunity it provides for students to learn more about their interests and passions.

“I don’t think anyone attends that class and thinks, ‘Yes, this is an easy A.’ You don’t take the class for an easy A,” Aalami-Ho said. “You take it either because that’s what you’re going to want to major in or because you just genuinely have an interest in physics.”

ARTS & CULTURE

STREAMING SERVICES

STREAMING STRUGGLES

Increased number of streaming services can cause confusion and frustration

HAILEY STEED
Staff Writer

With the steady increase of streaming services all with different plans, selections and payment methods, many are struggling to find ways to watch their favorite movies and shows without paying an arm and a leg.

As of 2024, there are nearly 200 different streaming services in the world, with Netflix being the most popular. According to Forbes, Netflix contains nearly 7,500 titles, and is seen as the pioneer for streaming services across the world.

Streaming services like Netflix have experienced constant changes to their media libraries, as they have to adhere to their expiring licenses, or other assorted causes. For watchers, this means shows and movies frequently disappear from the platforms.

Many new streaming services have also been produced, or are on the horizon, for example, the upcoming CNN streaming service.

This rising amount of services is because they are seen as the primary form of television consumption due to a streaming-focused shift in the television industry. This has resulted in many looking to reap the financial benefits.

Sophomore Ace Trevethan cites confusion and displeasure due to this reorganization and spread of services.

"It gets really expensive to keep all of them," Trevethan said. "There should be two main ones. Streaming services are hard [to manage] when they all fluctuate prices."

According to Deloitte's 18th annual Digital Media Trends report, an article from Deloitte Insights, American households saw a 27% increase in amount spent monthly for streaming services from last year, reaching an average cost of \$61 for four services, the average amount of services per household.

To science teacher Juan Fernandez-Maculet, the amount of services had become overwhelming.

"You start accumulating services, like Disney plus, Hulu, Max and etcetera," Fernandez-Maculet said. "You end up spending \$50 a month, not including the excessive purchasing within the streaming ser-

vices."

The introduction of premiums within paid subscriptions has resulted in the further rising of prices. These premiums can take the form of ad-free tiers, access to specific networks (for example, Hulu's showtime), or options to rent or buy movies.

For some, such as Trevethan, these premium additions have negatively affected their enjoyment of streaming services.

"On Hulu, I was watching Family Guy and I got five ads in a row," Trevethan said. "I asked my parents 'Do we have Hulu? Is this not premium?' It was a premium on top of a premium, on top of a premium, which is really annoying."

Hulu consists of four primary plans. Ad-supported, which costs eight dollars a month; ad-free, which costs 18 dollars a month; ad-supported with live tv, which costs 77 dollars a month; and ad-free with live tv, which costs 90 dollars a month.

Confusion is not the only problem found in the premiums of streaming services. According to sophomore Naima Chetverykoba, the volatility of streaming services take away the convenience they were once meant to provide.

"Some [services] change which shows they have," Chetverykoba said. "Netflix had 'The Office', and then it took it off, and now it's on Peacock."

Chetverykoba mentions bundling programs play a role in choosing streaming services. The bundling programs package together multiple streaming services which could be consumed separately or in the bundle plan for consumers. There are many specific plans, seen in a package that includes Disney+, Hulu and ESPN+. This is often seen as more cost effective to consumers.

"A lot of them could collaborate more," Chetvery-



Grace Ngo/Special to the Bear Witness

koba said. "Condensed services would definitely be a better deal."

Trevethan expressed that services' libraries are lacking in value, and that their cost should be supported with quality content.

"Companies care too much about adding quantity over quality," Trevethan said. "I wish quality kind of came into play, because there are so many streaming services that focus on the same thing. They should focus on what they have and improve from there, instead of just switching new things out."

Trevethan cites a Danish movie his family couldn't watch due to Max's lack of an English translation, emphasizing that improving such content would enhance consumer satisfaction.

The public, which is filled with many consumers, should have their satisfaction met, as many individuals share the same sentiments.

Fernandez-Maculet emphasizes the importance of consumers' and streaming services' relationship, citing consumer feedback as essential.

"Consumers are the drivers of these services," Fernandez-Maculet said. "If the consumers are not happy, then the services are not going to succeed."

MINI REVIEWS

MOVIE



Snow White
Directed by Marc Webb
Walt Disney Studios

What is it: In this live action remake, Snow White goes on a journey to escape her evil step-mother by fleeing to the forest, where she befriends a troop of dwarves, among other creatures.

Liked: The visuals, set, and costumes were stunning. There were powerful vocals and the storyline strayed slightly from the original in a positive, feminist way.

Disliked: Although this movie was good, it did not keep me on the edge of my seat. It felt unoriginal or even boring at times, hence why I think it would have been better for the director to experiment with a more complex plot line.

— Missy Keralapura

ALBUM



I AM MUSIC
Playboi Carti
Interscope Records

What is it: Playboi Carti's new album released this month. The album comes after years of anticipation from fans.

Liked: I liked the features with Kendrick Lamar and others, and they show Carti's strong connections built through years of being in the rap scene.

Disliked: I did not like the first few songs as I felt like they were mostly abstract noise rather than song.

— Naomi Bergman

BOOK



I Am Not Jessica Chen
Ann Liang
Harlequin

What it is: After making a wish to be more academically successful, high school student finds herself in her valedictorian cousin's life — and her old self slowly disappears, until the only person anyone remembers is her cousin. She learns about the power of perspective, and the dangers of "the grass is greener on the other side."

Liked: I like the writing style and the plot. I think a lot of readers can relate to the main character and her quest for academic validation.

Disliked: I dislike some of the more fantastical parts of it, such as how the faces on the main character's paintings start disappearing once she switches lives. The book is not meant to be realistic fiction, but it should only have a touch of fantasy, not a lot of it.

— Nithya Karambakkam

PHYSICAL MEDIA

Spin or stream?
Some still collect physical media in age of streaming

DYLAN COLLISSON
Staff Writer

In the age of streaming platforms like Spotify or Apple Music, the Branham community has seen some students and teachers turning back to physical forms of media.

In recent years, the music industry has seen a resurgence in analog methods of listening to music. These physical medias refer to the tangible objects that contain sound, such as a CD, cassette tape or vinyl record. Most popularly, a vinyl record is a thin, circular piece of PVC pressed with a spiral groove that contains playable music if used on a turntable. According to Luminate data, vinyl records have become the driving force for the physical media push, seeing a 300% increase in sales since 2016.

For music enthusiasts, owning a physical album is more than just a means of listening to music. Band director Christopher Nalls believes that there is an important difference between streaming and vinyl.

"There is a real visceral feeling of accomplishment when you're actually handling the albums," Nalls said. "Vinyl is the best audio reproduction that's been created."

In comparison to physical music, an exact replication of a recording, Nalls believes the rise of streaming has drawbacks. The loss of audio quality, for example, which reproduces sound from a series of numbers first, then converts it back to analog to be played digitally through a streaming service.

"The transition to digital away from analog has resulted in lower quality," Nalls said. "Everybody is used to listening to audio on the low quality, little speakers in a cell phone that is so far from fidelity. It's just unimaginable."

Social science teacher and record enthusiast Stefanie Menera has also noticed a difference in sound quality between streaming and physical media. She believes that streaming services fail to do musicians' work justice.

"I don't think that being able to just stream something over cellular data with Bluetooth is going to deliver the same exact quality that a producer or an artist might have intended," Menera said. "Especially with some of the older albums—things that would have been originally released on vinyl."

Nalls believes that the difference between digital and analog is vast.

"If you've ever seen 'The Wizard of Oz,' it starts off in black and white, and then when she gets to Oz, she opens the door, and it's this beautiful world of color," Nalls said. "That's what it's like when you listen on decent gear to a good recording."

Even though she has a fondness for vinyl, Menera recognizes why streaming has become the main form of listening to music. It takes significantly more effort to place a record on a turntable than it does to press play on a phone.

"We're all on the go and there is an element of convenience," Menera said. "Sometimes, you have to throw in air pods and call it a day."

Junior Ismene Potens has collected vinyl since 2020. She believes that the ease of using streaming changes the way people engage with music.

"With streaming, you can just pick what song you want to listen to," Potens said. "When you actually buy it on vinyl, you can't skip a record of every single song."

Potens feels streaming does not compares to own-ing physical media.

"Buying albums physically is a whole experience," Potens said. "Some records come with picture books or posters so being able to hold the album creates a special connection and I feel like a true fan."

Not only has streaming shifted the way people engage with music, it has also impacted the amount of money artists make for their work. Nalls criticizes the streaming shift, commenting on the lengths artists must go to in order to make a living. According to One Submit, artists get paid about \$0.003 to \$0.004 per stream on apps like Spotify.

"If you're going to make any money as an artist, you have to tour, you have to sell merch, and that favors a successful artist," Nalls said. "If I'm consuming digital audio, I'll buy it on Apple Music, because I know that the artist gets more from it."

While vinyl can be expensive, Menera values this aspect of buying physical media, recognizing it changes the cultural phenomenon of overconsuming music catalyzed by streaming services.

"What is special about collecting vinyl is it forces you to slow down and it forces you to really listen to an entire album," Menera said. "There's something really special about being able to slow down and especially step away from technology."

Menera also believes physical media creates something streaming fails to replicate. It allows someone to take ownership.

"Sometimes there are albums and songs that you love so much that listening isn't enough," Menera said. "You want to literally hold it in your arms and I that's kind of the experience that vinyl gives. It's art."



Courtesy of Stefanie Menera
Menera's top five favorite records in her collection

STUDENTLIFE

STUDENT LIFE CALENDAR

visit bhsbearwitness.org and [@bhsbearwitness](https://twitter.com/bhsbearwitness) for updates on student events

SCHOOL EVENTS

De Anza Priority Application Workshop: April 16 & April 30

De Anza will be hosting an application workshop for Branham seniors at the College and Career Center on April 16. There will be a following orientation for students on April 30. The workshop is mandatory for students who plan to attend De Anza.

Battle of the Classes week: April 20 to April 25

From April 20-25, ASB will be hosting Battle of the Classes. The week will be full of dress-up days, lunchtime powerpuff games, a masked singer event and will end with the BOTC cheer, dance and rally. This week is meant to bring together classes and compete against each other.

Election Week: April 28 to May 2

Throughout the week, candidates will campaign for executive positions, and at the end of the week, students will cast their votes to elect the ASB Board Members for the 2025–2026 school year. Don't miss your chance to have a voice in our school's leadership.

Staff Appreciation Week: May 4 to May 9

From May 4 to 9, various lunchtime events will be held to show appreciation towards Branham teachers and staff members. This week is meant to acknowledge the hard work staff members put into Branham.

West Valley College Cilker Art & Design EXPO and STEM EXPO: May 15 to May 17

West Valley will be hosting special events related to art and STEM for students to learn new concepts and what West Valley has to offer. The STEM EXPO will be open for self-guided tours through student demonstrations and work. This event is meant to recognize West Valley Students' work and showcase what incoming students can be part of.

Mental Health Awareness Week: May 11 to May 16

In recognition of Mental Health Awareness Month, students will be able to participate in lunchtime events to raise awareness of mental health conditions.

— Compiled by Noa Muiyal

COUNSELORS

COLLEGE COMPLICATIONS

Students contemplate receiving college application help from paid tutors



Francisco Pham/Bear Witness

AIDAN WEILER
Arts & Culture Editor

Approaching deadlines, endless essay writing and consistent anxiety about the future; for many, college application season is one of the most stressful periods of a high school career.

To ease the struggle, Branham's counseling department provides resources designed to make the process go smoothly.

These include support in aspects such as filling out forms and essay review. Still, some students find it beneficial to find help elsewhere.

One such student was senior **Kaelyn Ladd**, as she paid for an outside counselor to help her with college applications and receive more personalized guidance.

"[My outside counselor] reduced my stress level significantly," Ladd said. "All the questions I had were answered. She helped me pick colleges that were good for me. Half the schools I applied to, I probably wouldn't have even known that they existed."

Ladd believes that there was more that the in-school counselors could have done, such as further support when filling out applications.

"[The counselors] should have had at least one extra meeting [with students]," Ladd said. "I didn't even know Common App existed. I didn't know that the UCs and CSUs were on different applications. I had no clue."

According to Branham counselor **Samantha Hickey Blum**, students are required to meet with their counselors twice per year, once at the beginning of the year and one at the end.

"[At the beginning of senior year] we walk through Naviance, letters of recommendation, things like that," Blum said. "We offer additional support throughout the application process. For example, a lot of my students will come and have me read their essays."

Since Ladd believes these meetings aren't enough, she suggests that anyone who can afford to should talk to an outside counselor.

"[My outside counselor] was super helpful," Ladd said. "She definitely gave me way more help than any of the [in-school] counselors would have."

In contrast, senior **Nolan Mascarenhas** thought that his Branham counselor was extremely helpful with many aspects of the application process, such as filling out the Free Application for Federal Student

Aid (FAFSA) or helping build his application.

Mascarenhas pointed out that students need to initiate the first move in order to make the most out of all of their available resources.

"You have to take that step to actually go in and say, 'I'm gonna use your help,'" Mascarenhas said. "They always offer help, time and resources, but you have to go in and actually take advantage of them."

Blum mentioned that the in-school counselors are always willing to help students for free. She believes that while outside counselors can be helpful, the cost can be prohibitive. Outside counselors cost on average between \$100 to \$300 per hour.

These free resources include essay and financial form support, especially in the College and Career Center, led by Chen Liu, a former private counselor.

"Between all the counselors here, we have probably 50 years of college application experience," Blum said.

Senior **Kelly Zhang** found that while the counselors were helpful, she relied on other resources, such as her peers and teachers.

Zhang mainly worked with her friends to complete her applications.

Blum also thinks that feedback from other students can be helpful, but that applicants should keep in mind some of the variance of student experience.

"Reach out to peers, but remember that their college experience may be super different from yours," Blum said. "Comparison is the thief of joy."

To improve the college application process, Mascarenhas recommended meeting with one's counselor as soon as possible. Mascarenhas thinks that it is important for counselors and students to build real connections.

"It definitely helps when you have established that relationship earlier on," Mascarenhas said. "They see you develop. They learn about your personality traits, or what courses you've taken."

Blum echoed a similar sentiment.

"I try to build a good rapport with students," Blum said. "When you don't know who you're asking for help from, it can be intimidating, and you don't necessarily fully trust the help that they're giving if you don't have that relationship beforehand."

However, Ladd found it difficult to form this connection with her counselor, as her conversations with them were brief.

Another aspect creating a disconnect between stu-

dents and their counselor is staff turnover.

Seniors with last names starting with Sn through Z have had five different counselors over their high school careers, with three in the 2024-2025 school year alone.

Zhang recalled the large amount of confusion and frustration present among the senior class when former counselor Hector Salgado left during the height of college application season — right when counselor letters of recommendation were due.

"It was frustrating," Zhang said. "I remember I had something due that week. Everyone was complaining. [They were saying things like], 'how can you leave when it's so close to the deadline?' It's not fair to us."

Seniors who were affected by Salgado's leave were not notified before they were switched to a new counselor, affecting the letter of recommendation process.

Students were divided across several different counselors that they were unfamiliar with, creating complications.

Still, Blum thought that the seniors handled this change well. She encourages anyone with questions to come talk to her, regardless of their last name.

"[Seniors] have taken every change in stride," Blum said. "Just because you aren't in our specific alphabet doesn't mean we can't help any student."

Both students and staff are looking to the future to improve the process and make it easier for seniors. Mascarenhas thinks that one thing the counseling staff could improve on is their support for students while actually writing their college essays.

"A lot of students, just search up sample college essays, but that's not personal to us and our story," Mascarenhas said. "If [the counselors] have the time and the resources to do so, [they should help] the individual person shape their application."

Blum also thinks that increased essay support, such as writing workshops, would be beneficial.

Ladd made sure to remind students that regardless of how they apply, or what schools they get into, things will work out in the end.

"If a college doesn't want you, then that's just not where you were supposed to go," Ladd said. "At the end of the day, people go to colleges all over the world, and all those people have great experiences. If you don't get into that one college, the world is going to continue spinning, and you are going to get a great education."

Razzle Dazzle

EMMETT SPEAR AND ALYX YOON
Staff Writers

The Backstage Bruins are lighting up the stage with the musical "Chicago: Teen Edition" on March 20-22 and March 26-28.

"Chicago" follows the story of a young married woman named Roxie Hart who murders her secret lover when he attempts to walk out on her. When her husband rats her out to the police, Hart must compete with inmate Velma Kelly to get a lawyer who can prove her innocence in court.

A live orchestra will play music during the performance. Choir teacher **Barbara West** has been conducting the pit orchestra and working

with the chorus and solo singers since January.

"I usually do vocals and Mr. Nalls does orchestra," West said. "Doing both is really interesting because you [get to experience both sides]. We have a combination of students and professionals, so there's a lot of people [with] a lot of experience playing professional shows, and that's really fun for me."

Sophomore **Emma Liewer**, who plays Roxie, said performing with a live pit is a fascinating experience.

"Something challenging was putting our show together with the orchestra. It took a few tries to get timing correct, but it ended up being so rewarding," Liewer said.

Junior **Ismene Potens**, a Tech Theater sound

mixer, also found working on the show to be an excellent learning experience as it helped her work on new skills like audio mixing.

"I have to mic everyone before the show, and then I have to mix their voices with the band. So I have to make their levels sound all good and make their voices match and go in sync with the bands [to] make it sound good," Potens said.

West said the musical exemplifies the hard work and experience of many of the actors, but it also helped her recognize the talent that many of the less experienced actors possess.

"It's a fantastic show," West said. "The costumes are amazing, the choreography is amazing, the songs are amazing. I hope everybody will come see it, because we [have] a great group."

MUSICAL

Backstage Bruins present "Chicago" the musical



Emmett Spear/Bear Witness

Lawyer Billy Flynn, played by Zach Reinie (12), puppets Roxie Hart in "They Both Reached For the Gun."

SCOUTING AMERICA

BEYOND THE BADGE

Students at Branham share their experience as part of Scouts

NOA MUYAL
Staff Writer

Despite declining teen memberships in Scouts, Branham students still find time to balance both Scouts and their high school lives.

Girl Scouts, Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts are youth organizations marketed to help kids build courage, confidence and character through leadership and skill-building activities like camping, navigation and teamwork.

Although recently, Boy Scouts rebranded as Scouting America in efforts to be more inclusive.

Some students, such as senior **Parker Miles**, have been a part of Scouts since kindergarten. Miles initially connected with Cub Scouts — which lasts from kindergarten to fifth grade — and decided to continue into Boy Scouts.

“The things that kept me in Boy Scouts were the camping and outdoor experiences,” Miles said. “We do a lot of unique experiences that not a lot of people have access to. I had a really fun time doing them.”

Scouts offer unique activities, like camping, shooting ranges and long-distance backpacking.

For Miles, these activities were the highlight of his Boy Scout experience.

“When I was 13, [my troop] went backpacking in New Mexico at the High Adventure Base,” Miles said. “There’s a lot of different opportunities to learn a great mix of camping and backpacking, mixed with scouting skills.”

To fund these trips and activities, Boy Scouts sell popcorn, wreaths and pies from third-party independent parties, while Girl Scouts sell a variety of cookies given to them by the Girl Scout Council.

Sophomore **Emily Ives**, who has been a member of Girl Scouts since second grade, said selling cookies is still a fun experience and has allowed her to develop essential Scout skills.

“Selling cookies can help with inventory and money management,” Ives said. “It’s a lot of good experience.”

Despite the many unique experiences, a majority of Scouts drop the program after entering high school due to commitments and extracurriculars. However, Miles, who takes AP classes, is on a sports team and had the added stress of applying to college this year, still found a way to participate in Scouts.

Miles said that many find leadership positions to be too much of a commitment. Subsequently, others might lose interest with badge competition or the pressure to rank up.



Courtesy of Emily Ives

Emily Ives (10) and the rest of her Girl Scout team traveled to Yosemite National Park.

In addition to dropping out because of competition and stereotypes, the decline in Boy Scouts is also due to other factors.

In 2020, participation in the youth programs dropped 43% because of the pandemic and an increase in recharter prices.

“People quit mainly because they don’t find it entertaining or they don’t find it fun enough to stay a part of the program,” Miles said. “The badges are fun because you’re discovering passions.”

Many people are still conflicted about earning badges because they see it as a job rather than a hobby.

“That kind of discourages [people] because they get that mindset of ‘This is just a lot of work,’” Miles said. “They just don’t see it as worth their time.”

Former Girl Scout member and sophomore **Natalie Murphy**, who was a Scout for six years, quit because she didn’t feel she fit into the social aspect of the program offered. Although the COVID-19 pandemic pushed Murphy to quit, she mentioned it was mostly due to her introverted behavior.

“I wasn’t really friends with many of the girls in my troop,” Murphy said. “The only reason I was in the troop for so long was because my mom was one of the leaders [and] I felt bad for quitting when she [was] the head of the troop.”

Although her mom made being a Girl Scout less lonely, if it weren’t for her mom’s role in the troop, Murphy says she would’ve quit sooner.

“I hung out with my mom [during activities] and I would be sitting next to her [while] everyone [was] having fun,” Murphy said. “It wasn’t a bad experience, and I think it could be good for some people, but it wasn’t my thing.”

However, the Scout experiences like making new friends are also why people like Miles and Ives continue participating.

The annual summer camp trips, for example, are a big part of Miles’ passion for Boy Scouts, because they kept him engaged within Scouts while also being able to make new memories and friends.

Other factors like becoming an Eagle Scout, which is the highest rank attainable in the Boy Scouts program, is also what motivates Miles to stay active in Boy Scouts. This rank is seen as a

symbol of a Scout’s dedication, leadership and commitment to serving their community. To become an Eagle Scout, a Scout has to complete the Eagle Project, which is something Miles is currently focusing on. To complete the project, scouts have to find a beneficiary, or someone they want to support, and make something to assist them.

The Eagle Project is one of the last things Miles is striving towards in his last year in Boy Scouts. Miles’ original plan for his project was to create a trail, which turned out to be difficult due to county outreaches. However, a new idea came about when he switched back to his beneficiary choices and decided to give back to a community that supports his troop.

“[I decided] I’ll give back to the church that we meet at because they’re giving us their facilities for free,” Miles said. “I reached out to them, and they said, ‘Hey, can you build us a title sign for the church?’ because everything got vandalized and blown over. So I’m working on building them a title slot, sign and kiosk for them [as] my project.”

Similarly, Ives continues to participate because of new experiences and friendships. But her mission to her community has grown stronger over the years.

“Seeing the older girls help out other people in that community [inspired me to join],” Ives said. “I want to stay [in] Girl Scouts because I want to make a difference in communities and help younger Girl Scouts.”

130 million

youth members have participated in Scouting America’s youth programs since 1910.

Source: Scouting America

FOUND FAMILIES

Diverse spaces, open spaces

Branham students foster community through the use of safe spaces around campus

NEVAEH GUTIERREZ
Staff Writer

Branham has a diverse culture of clubs and communities that cater to people’s different interests and identities. In these spaces, people can find a sense of belonging within a community that shares their identities or interests.

One such club that provides a safe space for students part of marginalized groups is the Queer Student Union (QSU), also known as QSU. Club president **Wycoff Higgins** says that the goal of the QSU is to provide a space for all Branham students, regardless of sexuality, and to have a safe space to share their experiences.

“Safe spaces on campus are so important because everyone has an opportunity to express themselves exactly as they are with no judgment,” said Higgins.

A survey taken in 2024 by the Trevor Project, an organization dedicated to crisis prevention for queer youth, says that 49% of LGBTQ+ students ages 13-17 reported being bullied in the past year. Visual arts teacher **Kyilo Hulton** believes that safe spaces are important and a way for students to exist without fear of judgment.

“I do my best to make [my classroom] a nonjudgmental space

where anybody is welcome. It’s consistently open,” Hulton said.

Hulton said he has students in his class from 8:15 a.m. to 2:45 p.m. when he leaves. He believes that consistently keeping his room open helps make a comfortable space for students.

“This [space] is very organic,” Hulton said. “I’m not required to have my room open at lunchtime or break but I know keeping it open is a huge part of creating this space.”

Communities at Branham can provide an organic or natural space for people of similar interests, beliefs and identities to gather together and express themselves. Several other clubs on campus serve a similar purpose for this like the QSU, such as Multicultural Club, Best Buddies and Days for Girls. Students can also create spaces for themselves.

“In the queer community, there are many people who have either been rejected by their parents or generally society,” Higgins said “So coming together and sharing these queer traits that we have creates a deeper bond than the bond of blood.”

QSU builds community through the sharing of common queer experiences. Many queer people feel rejected by their families because of their identities, whether that be for religious or personal reasons. Sophomore **Alex Shields** feels that bonds between

friends are often stronger due to shared experiences.

“We’re not always going to be born into the best family, and a lot of times, the people you choose to be around are a much better family in terms of getting along with them because you generally are choosing people who have the same ethics and morals or drive a direction that you have,” Shields said.

Having these spaces open for students enhances Branham’s unity and community.

“The opportunity to keep finding these groups of people is very important, whether it’s sports clubs or open classrooms,” Hulton said.

49%

of LGBTQ+ students ages 13-17 reported being bullied in a 2024 survey.

Source: Trevor Project

THE BACKPAGE

Reuse, REWEAR, re-Imagine

—Compiled by David Tran and Ava Stark, illustrations
by David Tran

With fast fashion on the rise, shopping sustainably becomes all the more important, not only because it's good for the environment but because it's cheaper too. If you want to get into the thrifting and upcycling trend, here's our quick guide to help you get started.

How to shop sustainably:

- Shop locally - reduces shipping and transportation costs, plus can give opportunity to small business owners
- Clothing swap/exchange - delays clothing from entering landfills, allows people to get full use of clothes
- Thrifting
- Buy better quality products
- Buy from sustainable brands - real sustainable brands have little waste in the process of their production, are made from recycled/organic materials and the brand is transparent about its production
- Upcycling - takes old clothes and fabric that would normally end up in the landfill and turns it into something usable

Where to buy from in San Jose

- Savers
- Moon Zoom
- Crossroads
- Unicorn Thrift Shop
- Black and Brown
- Goodwill
- Plato's Closet

Sustainable Brands

- Pact
- Tentree
- Fair Indigo
- Etsy
- Reformation

Unsustainable Brands

- Amazon
- Forever 21
- Uniqlo
- Shein
- H&M
- GAP
- Zara

Bruins' tips and tricks:

"Thrifting is way cheaper and more affordable, especially because I buy my own clothes. You want to make sure the clothes aren't dirty, and I always stretch them and make sure they're tough. I like to go to the men's section and grab an oversized tee, and you also have to look in places you wouldn't think of, like one time I found a shirt in the book at Savers." — **Angeli-na McCormick** (11)

"I usually look in places you wouldn't really suspect good clothes, like the little boy section. Once I found one half of a Juicy Couture track suit at one store and then the other half in another store within six hours apart, so take your time and stay there for a while and look everywhere." — **Halen Yanez** (12)

"I donate to Goodwill, but mostly my mom and I donate to Sacred Heart, which is a homeless shelter. [For thrifting,] if you know that you're not in the mood to thrift, and you're not gonna be there for very long, then that's not the day to do it, because it's gonna take a long time to get into the nitty gritty. You can't really find good stuff until you keep looking." — **Sage Oblander** (12)

"I love the chase of finding the one good item in the store. It makes me feel accomplished. I would recommend to get stuff from a thrift that is a little more unconventional and make it into something useful, I love making bags and clothes out of stuff I wouldn't usually use." — **Jules Reyes-Mohassel** (11)