

SPORTS

New Bruins United program requires athletes to attend other sports' games and participate in community service.

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TIGHTENING FEDERAL CONTROL

Constitution Day and Charlie Kirk's assassination raise questions over government overreach in schools.

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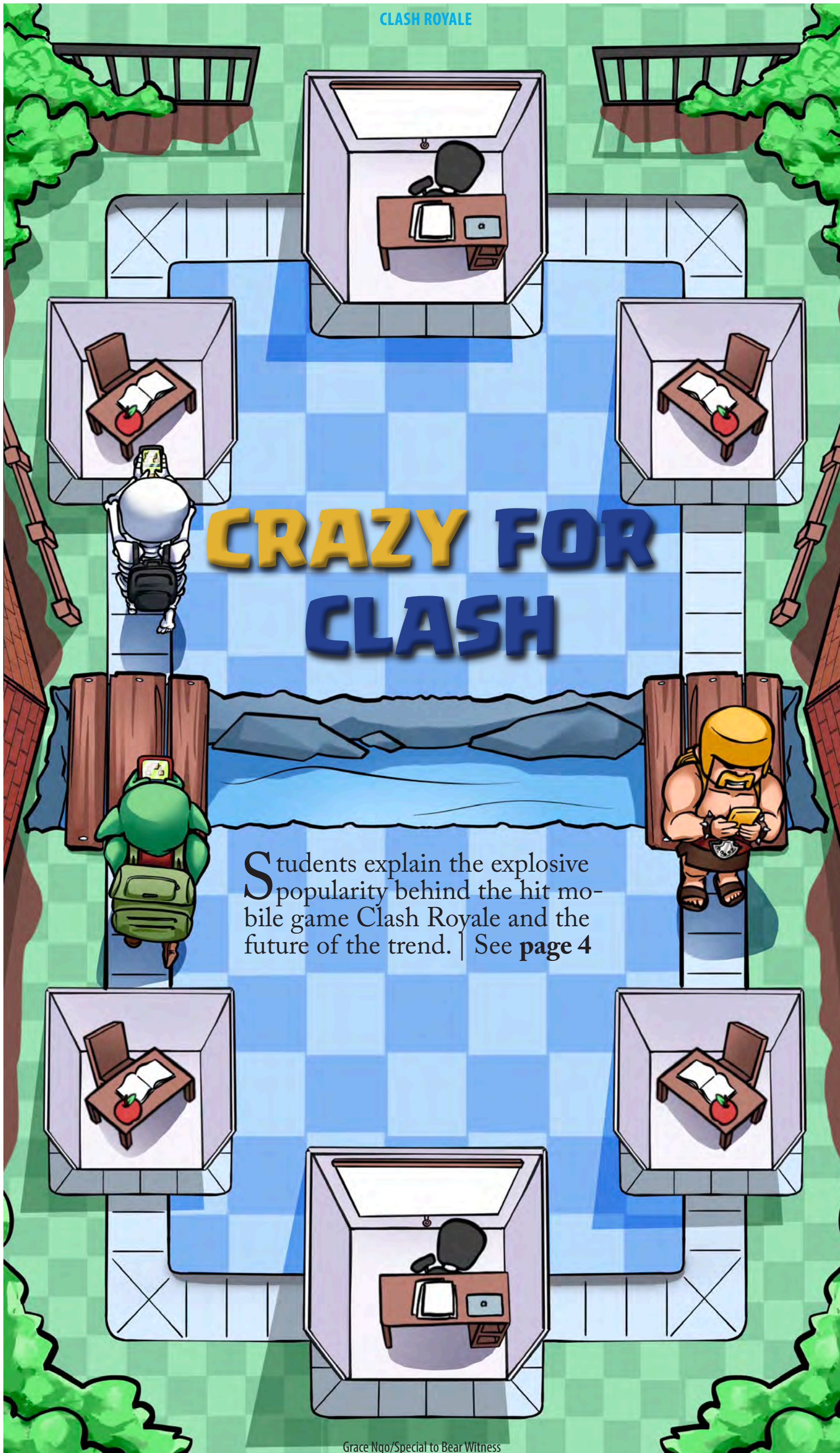
BEAR WITNESS



NOVEMBER 2025

BRANHAM HIGH SCHOOL

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CLASH ROYALE

CRAZY FOR CLASH

Students explain the explosive popularity behind the hit mobile game Clash Royale and the future of the trend. | See page 4

Grace Ngo/Special to Bear Witness

ALLERGIES

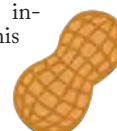
A recipe for safety

New law requires chain restaurants to list allergens on menus

NITHYA KARAMBAKKAM
Guest Writer

Senate Bill 68 — officially known as the Allergen Disclosures for Dining Experiences (ADDE) Act — is a new measure requiring allergen disclosures on the menus of chain restaurants. Signed into law on Oct. 13 by California governor Gavin Newsom, it will go into effect on July 1, 2026.

The law aims to make restaurant dining more accessible for individuals with allergies. This measure will significantly impact the local dining environment, as major restaurant chains near Branham — such as Starbucks, Chipotle and McDonald's — will be required to comply with the new requirements. Starting in July, food facilities with 20 or more locations will be mandated to provide a written notification of the major food allergens that are contained as ingredients in each menu item. If restaurants choose to utilize a digital format, they must also offer an alternative format for individuals who don't have access to technology. The law forces chain restaurants to explicitly disclose the presence of the nine major food allergens: milk, eggs, fish, crustacean shellfish, tree nuts, wheat, peanuts, soybeans and sesame.



Health clerk **Ana Yescas** said that while students should take responsibility for their actions and health, allergens are abundant, and restaurants and eateries can benefit many people suffering from allergies by disclosing the irritants present in their food.

"Allergies are very serious. They can be life-threatening," Yescas said. "It is important that everything is well-labeled, so that when we go to these places, we know that what we are eating can keep us healthy."

Currently, many restaurants do not have a standardized method of listing allergens, making it difficult for students who suffer from food allergies to dine outside of their homes. Junior **Solei Lao**, who is allergic to sesame seeds and nuts, has struggled to identify allergens in many restaurants in the past.

"[Some] restaurants are nice because they have separate menus that show allergens, which is convenient," Lao said. "In some places they will just say, 'I don't know.'"

Without a uniform identification system, restaurants can sometimes even provide wrong information that can result in dire outcomes.

"A lot of places don't have any ingredients, or they don't include the basic allergens," Lao said. "For most foods, and even in the cafeteria, I have to ask in case they have any sesame seeds or nuts. I can't really share food with other people unless I'm 100% sure it doesn't have nuts."

Currently, eating at restaurants requires lots of effort and prior research from students who have food allergies, and even after taking many precautions, it can be risky to eat outside the house. Senior **Tamar Maysel**, who has celiac disease, said that finding restaurants while traveling is an especially arduous task.

"When I was younger, my body was not tolerating [gluten], and it was really hard to go out for food," Maysel said. "I had to learn how to make a bunch of food by my-



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NEWS

ALLERGIES | New allergen visibility bill

From PAGE 1

self. Eventually, I learned how to do research. When we traveled overseas to Europe for the first time, we looked into a bunch of restaurants and hotels with food that can accommodate me.”

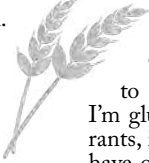
Maysel said that over time, restaurant practices have not changed significantly. Instead, she and other students have been forced to have more accountability and do extra research in order to be able to eat out.

“The experience has become better because I’ve been able to do more research,” Maysel said. “Not necessarily because there’s more gluten-free food available, but because there is more knowledge about [allergies].”

Maysel and other students still eat at restaurants when they can, but they largely remain cautious. The development of apps such as AllergyEats and Spokin have made the task of searching for restaurants less difficult, but the nationwide problem still exists.

“I use those apps,” Maysel said. “Sometimes it goes my way. Other times they just lie about the kind of food they have, but the apps are really helpful.”

Even with students conducting more research and utilizing innovations such as helpful apps before eating at restaurants, the issues of accessibility and safety remain. Having food allergies doesn’t just impact



students’ health — it can heavily affect their social interactions.

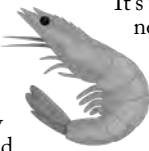
“I always have to tell my friends that I have to order last because I have to tell the server I’m gluten free,” Maysel said. “With some restaurants, if you do your research ahead of time, you’ll have options, but having it be designated and explicitly put into words for everyone to see and not just for me to do my research on is really helpful. You don’t have to feel embarrassed because it’s out there anyways.”

Increased awareness resulting from the new policy could be especially beneficial for kids suffering from food allergies, as they have less knowledge about which allergens they should avoid.

“It’s very scary, especially for kids, because they’re not always cognizant of what is happening,” Lao said. “If you have a really bad allergy, it makes it a little harder to live normally, compared to most people.”

The new law can benefit many individuals, including students, who are affected by allergies and have a widespread impact if enforced diligently.

“It will definitely be beneficial if restaurants are actually following it if they enforce the rule,” Lao said. “It’ll definitely help and make it a lot safer for people like me to eat out, especially for kids who aren’t always aware of their allergies or don’t remember to check.”



Allergens

Nine ingredients must be explicitly disclosed on chain restaurant menus by July 1, 2026: milk, eggs, fish, crustacean shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat, soybeans and sesame.

Examples of chain restaurants with over 20 locations

- Vons Chicken
- Mountain Mike’s
- Chili’s Grill and Bar
- Panera Bread
- Chick-fil-A



News highlights

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Backstage Bruins debut their Romeo and Juliet play

The Backstage Bruins debuted their play, “The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet,” this October. Shakespeare’s romantic tragedy details the lives of Romeo Montague and Juliet Capulet, whose feuding families come between their unfettered love and result in their untimely demise.

In a twist on the classic drama, Backstage Bruins incorporated an 80s theme.

Senior **Lauren Quimby** expressed her excitement about playing the role of Juliet, who is a main character.

“I really enjoy being a character that gets to be more dynamic,” Quimby said. “I get to be really happy and cute like I’m in love, and then super sad, and then I get to [be] like, ‘Oh, I’m going crazy, I’m going to kill myself.’”

Sophomore **Andrew Everett** found the play has connected the cast and fostered the growth of new friendships.

“It’s been really sweet seeing the community come together and all of the people that were new to the program coming closer to everyone,” Everett said. “It really is a team, and it’s nice seeing everyone get to know each other and enjoy spending time with everyone.”

— Emmett Spear and Catherine Carter

New Bruin Athletic Leadership Council tries to bring more spirit and attendance to games.

The newly formed Bruin Athletic Leadership Council gathered different student-athlete perspectives from different sports. Its main goal is to encourage the student body to actively participate in more sports games.

Led by Branham Athletic Director **Kaleb Lane**, the council holds meetings every other week during tutorial to discuss and brainstorm participation and attendance in sports games.

“It’s meant to serve students and the community and give kids a sense of belonging somewhere outside of school,” Lane said.

Sophomore council member **Tammy Nguyen** joined the new establishment and noticed that football games tend to receive the most attention and attendance in comparison to other sports.

“If we are only going to our football games, then what does it tell us about us?” Nguyen said. “It’s important that everyone has that equality for just overall school spirit for athletes to perform and want to be athletes.”

— Amy Gunaseelan and Enoch Shin



Alyx Yoon/Bear Witness

Middle schoolers do strides on the track after a run through the neighborhood.

Branham cross country partners with middle school teams for joint practice.

Branham’s cross country team hosted a joint practice with various middle school teams, allowing future high school athletes to experience an average cross country practice.

Sophomore **Zachary Im** is an athlete who participates in cross country at Branham and saw the practice as a way to show middle schoolers what high school cross country practice looks like.

“It gives us a perspective of what we have to work for because middle school and high school have such different aspects of what running looks like,” Im said. “It shows the differences between how we do it from each grade level.”

Cross country coach **Craig Lee** views the meeting as a way to bridge the gap between the middle and high school students and encourage the younger members to pursue cross country when they come to Branham.

“If we can connect with them and help teach them a little bit more about running, maybe it’ll help them become better athletes and better students in general, and then give them confidence that these high schoolers have gone through the same thing that they’re going through now,” Lee said. “They’re doing great, so they have something to look forward to.”

— Kailey Fu and Alyx Yoon

TIKTOK

SELLING CONTENT

President Trump signs executive order to buy TikTok from Chinese owner

CAIN CHENG
Staff Writer

President Donald Trump and Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent reached a deal with China on Oct. 26 to officially transfer majority ownership of TikTok to News Corp owner Rupert Murdoch and Oracle co-founder Larry Ellison, according to The Guardian.

Former President Joe Biden first initiated a ban of TikTok in April 2024 before Trump enacted the executive order transferring ownership of TikTok to U.S. investors in September of this year. However, the deadline of banning TikTok was repeatedly pushed back by Trump before signing the executive order. According to The Guardian, Trump signed the executive order and Bessent carried out the deal.

Trump said he intended to “make TikTok 100% MAGA” if he could in a press interview after signing the executive order to buy TikTok, expressing his intention to control the app’s algorithm to align with his ideologies. However, Vice President JD Vance said in a press release that the U.S. government will not have any influence over what the platform puts out after announcing the executive order.

TikTok has 82.2 million U.S. users active daily. Junior **Alessandro Mendoza** fears that allowing Ellison, who has political ties to Trump and the Republican Party, to have oversight over the U.S. algorithm could turn into something the users don’t end up liking.

“[They] start minimizing [and] micromanaging what you see, what you hear, and they start censoring your freedom,” Mendoza said. “[The investors] start turning into a dictatorship. They start controlling everything you say, everything you hear, and that’s really bad.”

On X, a social media platform formerly known as Twitter, 115,000 users deactivated their accounts the day after Elon Musk took over according to NBC News. If the algorithm ends up in political controversy similar to X, Mendoza remarked that people could leave the app like during the TikTok shutdown.

“I’ve seen before when TikTok first got shut down for either a week or a few days,” Mendoza said. “People immediately started switching to other apps like Instagram or even YouTube.”

Junior **BeEmnet Amare** will switch from TikTok to a different platform if Ellison makes changes that have a political bias.

“If he truly takes over the app, I will be moving from it, or I’ll be deleting it,” Amare said.

With 1.6 billion users active per month worldwide according to Statista and 170 million users in

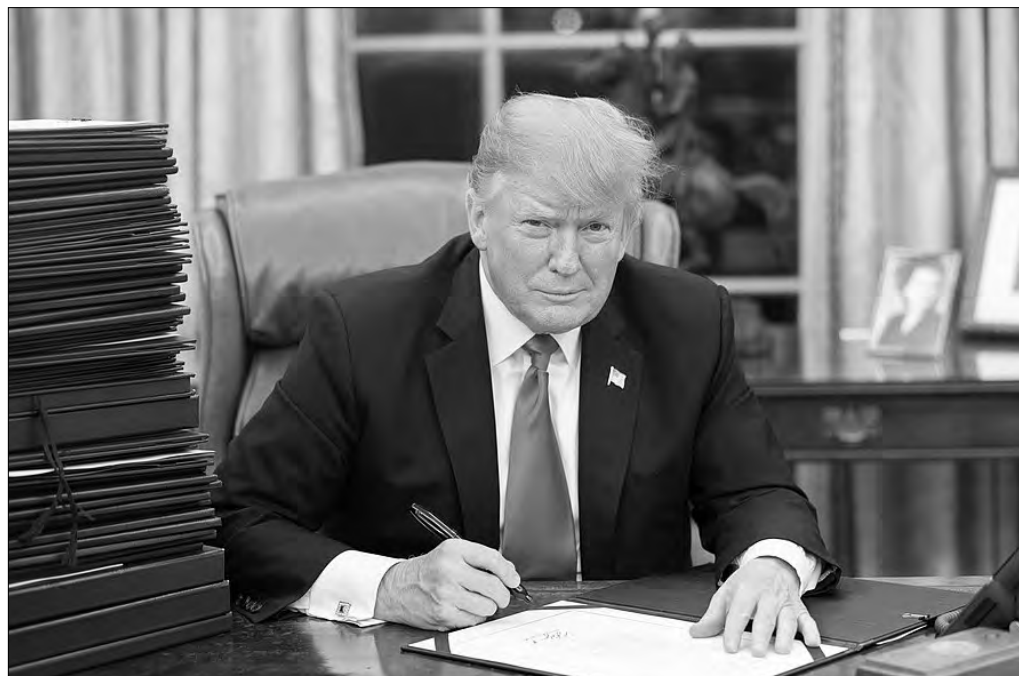


Image from White House

President Trump signs executive orders at his desk in the Oval Office.

America according to TikTok’s data base, Amare explained that changing TikTok’s algorithm would ruin the very thing that keeps people in the app.

“I really like the fact that TikTok is diverse and has a lot of different demographics of people and beliefs,” Amare said. “But I truly do believe that after [Trump] fully integrates himself into TikTok, I’m gonna start to see [him] weighing a lot more on one side than having diverse things.”

A Bear Witness survey of 195 students found 85% of respondents did not realize that new owners were buying TikTok. One person that did not hear about the change is sophomore **Ezekiel Foglesong**. He believes that TikTok will not change once the sale is official, which will allow Ellison and other investors to have a controlling stake in America’s operations of TikTok.

“It doesn’t concern me because at the end of the day, they could put up as many stuff as they want about politics on social media that I watch,” Foglesong said. “At the end of the day, I’m [going to] scroll past it or say I’m not interested, and I’m just watching what I like.”

According to Foglesong, people shouldn’t fear the

impact of the new TikTok owner. He said that to avoid things you don’t like, you should just scroll past it like any other video.

“I don’t want to say I fear it. It’s not going to impact [people] too much,” Foglesong said. “It’s just a screen, so at the end of that, you could just scroll past it.”

With the transfer of TikTok’s ownership reaching a deal, Amare said that Trump’s influence will continue to grow.

“Whatever he’s letting out to the world just by talking, he will put [it] into the app,” Amare said. “Since we are so young, we believe whatever we see constantly.”

1.6 billion

active users per month on TikTok

Source: Statista



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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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Correction: In our September article about Pinterest, freshman Sophia Cummings was misquoted. She did not say she saves pins of old Redbox movies. *Bear Witness* regrets the error.

VISION ZERO

PAVING THE WAY

San Jose continues to work towards ensuring road safety citywide

VANESSA PEREZ
Staff Writer

Project Vision Zero has added high-visibility crosswalks, protected bike lanes, radar speed signs and narrowing lanes to Branham Lane and Meridian Avenue during this fall.

Vision Zero is an international initiative launched in 2015 with the ultimate goal to reduce traffic fatalities. Its foundation focuses on three components: engineering, education and enforcement.

San Jose averages at least one fatality per week according to the Silicon Valley Bike Coalition. Through Vision Zero, San Jose hopes to improve road safety and eliminate the present traffic fatalities and injuries.

San Jose's former 2015-2020 Director of Transportation **James Ortbal**, who worked to provide convenient transportation infrastructure for citizens, believes that Project Vision Zero can dramatically improve the quality of life in the city.

"Many transportation leaders across the country, particularly

local transportation leaders, said, 'We can do better than this,'" Ortbal said. "It's a pretty serious tragedy when people are dying just trying to get to school and work, so our goal was to reduce transportation fatalities to zero — a very ambitious goal which is not easy."

With the addition of the new safety features, including protected bike lanes and radar speed signs, on roads like Meridian Avenue and Branham Lane, students' safety concerns decrease. Sophomore **Amanda Stratman**, who bikes to school, has had trouble on busy roads around the school in the past due to stressed drivers who are not cautious of themselves and their surroundings.

"It's really just cars that aren't cautious about bikes," Stratman said. "[Drivers] aren't checking for bikes because we move a lot faster than pedestrians, so they don't consider us a hazard until we're right there."

A significant factor causing these collisions on the road is speeding, an issue for some Branham bikers and pedestrians who might be subject to accidents. Senior **Lauren DeWeese**, a stu-

dent who biked to school for two years, got hit by a speeding car in a hit-and-run. Left with minor injuries, she did not receive compensation in return.

"When I was crossing an intersection, a car hadn't stopped at a stop sign," DeWeese said. "They hit my front tire and right thigh. If they hadn't stopped in time, my bike probably would have been totaled."

A key factor in Vision Zero's plan is the implementation of community education in regards to road safety. The Walk n' Roll program established in 2012 is utilized to spread factual information and share possible solutions to prevent further traffic issues to elementary schoolers.

"I would say schools certainly got our priority from a safety standpoint, and I think it was appropriate to do that," Ortbal said. "You know it's a tragedy when anybody gets in an injury crash, but it's particularly tragic with school-aged children."

Beyond schools, there is a greater emphasis on educating the communities about their local projects. More specifically, projects on Branham Lane and Meridian Avenue included narrowing traffic lanes to decrease vehicle speeds. Then, Vision Zero would update and educate these communities through adult education programs.

"We communicate about upcoming projects that are aimed to improve areas of our city that have had higher than average crash rates to educate them about what's going on in this area: what we're trying to do to improve [and] what we need people to do when they're moving through those areas," Ortbal said.

With Project Vision Zero's continuous efforts, there are expectations for a decrease in traffic fatalities and injuries, improving the overall road safety for the city of San Jose.

"[In] long term, I think [the goal] is attainable, but there's going to be challenges associated," Ortbal said. "A lot of work to be done, a lot of investment to be done, a lot of behavior change to be done by motorists, bicyclists, pedestrians. It's going to take the entire community."

Proposed Intersection Improvements

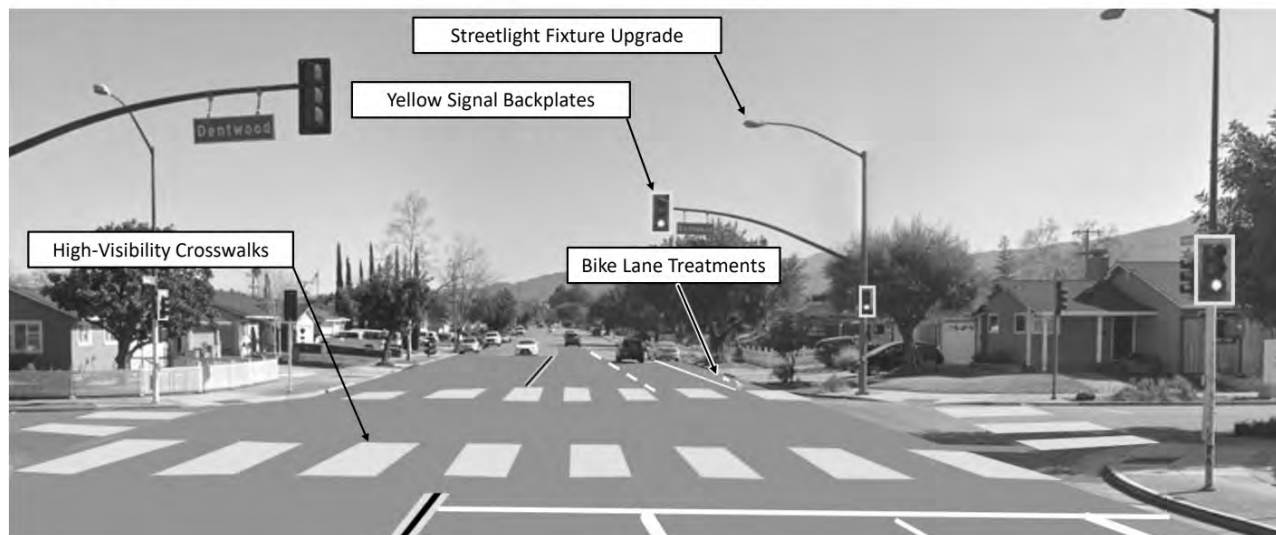


Image from City of San Jose Department of Transportation

Featured in a community meeting in June, this slide displays an example of improvements planned for Meridian Avenue that were implemented during the work that took place this September. Some improvements are still in progress, such as bike lane painting.

381

crashes happened on Meridian Avenue from 2019-2023, with 29 fatal or severe injuries.

Source: San Jose Vision Zero Crash Data

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Changing labels

California gets rid of "emotionally disturbed" labels for special education

BRIANNA GASSMANN
Staff Writer

18-year-old Suran Tugsjargal inspired the special education reform bill which was officially passed on July 18, 2024. After growing up being labeled by the state law with outdated and stigmatizing terms, she knew it was time for a change. Proposed by Assembly Member Dawn Addis and signed off by Governor Gavin Newsom, Assembly Bill 2173 changed the label for special education students from "emotional disturbance," a term often used in legal documents, to "emotional disability."

Special education teacher **Allen Tadeo** has seen firsthand how certain language and understanding of the community can shape how students view one another. When asked about the impact of the bill, he explained that while the change may seem small, it could really make an impact on the students.

"What's really huge is that it sets the tone in education," Tadeo said. "When you remove that stigma, you're treating someone with inclusivity, with respect and with fairness."

Tadeo's classroom is built on that idea. His goal is to make every student feel valued, included and capable of learning alongside their peers.

"The kids should feel welcome and safe," Tadeo said. "They can feel smarter, be smarter, and that doesn't make them different from any of the students here."

For special education students at Branham, programs like Best Buddies and integrated classes, which allow special education students to get involved in general education classes, give students the opportunities to connect. For many, those moments mean everything.

The program allows students to participate in activities that they normally might not feel welcome in due to the disrespect they feel from other students. Events like the Best Buddies football game and prom allow for the special education students to feel more included in the Branham community. Special education student **Jacob Bourdon**, a senior, said he really enjoys these events.

"We danced to the Cha Cha Slide at the football game," Bourdon said. "The prom was so amazing. [There was a] DJ booth, food and we danced a lot."

Events like these create spaces where students



Brianna Gassmann/Bear Witness

Students from Tadeo's class pose for a group photo.

feel accepted and celebrated for who they are. However, outside of Best Buddies, special education students noted having a hard time being included in general education.

Senior **Ethan Farnham** has been a part of the special education programs for most of his life and participates in the Best Buddies club.

"I stay to myself and my teacher in general ed classes. I never hang out with non-special ed at all," Farnham said. "When I hang out with non-special ed kids, I feel left out and different."

Farnham and Bourdon both said that while certain people on campus give them a sense of community, an overwhelming amount of people are still rude to them, making them feel isolated

at school.

"People directly say things to me," Bourdon said. "Sometimes they throw stuff at me. I think we should just stay away from people who are mean to us, stick to ourselves."

For many of these students, they find that one of the largest factors in being excluded is how they are labeled, a problem that the bill aims to target and one day get rid of completely. Students have called students slurs and thrown things at them for no reason other than them being special education.

Farnham found that labels often play a role in creating stereotypes, especially for special education students, and that these stereotypes are

often hard to look over.

The students believe that little changes in the community, like the changing of the label, could help reduce the stigma around special education and help decrease bullying from other students.

For Tadeo, inclusion isn't just an idea. It starts with small moments of connection. A simple greeting, a shared class or a smile in the hallway can help build a school where differences are not barriers but strengths within the community.

"The best way to live is to be all mixed up, all together," Tadeo said. "That's what I would love to see: full integration, where everyone just treats each other the same way."

STUDENT LIFE

GAMING

GAMES | Clash Royale hits the Branham arena

Branham experiences a massive boom in the popularity of Clash Royale

EMMETT SPEAR
News Editor

In recent months the mobile game Clash Royale, released by developer Supercell in 2016, saw a sweeping rise in popularity among students.

Matches pair two online opponents against one another in battles where each player must destroy their opponent's towers and win crowns. Units are placed in order to destroy towers and inflict damage, which continues until the game concludes when all three of a player's towers are destroyed or the time elapses.

A Bear Witness survey of 191 readers found that 51% of students regularly play Clash Royale. One student, senior **Jeremiah Bolton**, was introduced to the game in fourth grade and has played the game for a long time across many accounts.

"[I play] every day, every night, every chance I get to play," Bolton said. "So I'm very addicted. I have a problem."

Senior **Alex Le** finds the game equally addicting.

"20 minutes every day," Le said. "Passing periods, lunch, after school. It usually goes over 20 minutes, but 20 minutes is the average. I would say I played the most in class. I've never gotten caught — never."

The game currently contains up to 121 cards — including troops, spells, buildings and champions — granting players large freedom in determining their strategy and formatting their eight character decks. For Bolton, choosing a strategic deck is a huge benefit.

"You want to have a win condition," Bolton said. "My win condition would be Hog Rider and Giant Skeletons, and then build your deck around that. For defense, I would place Knight somewhere on the field, he's like a small tank [because] he takes a lot of damage. Then Firecracker if they have any air cards like a baby dragon."

Many students like freshman **Will De Lorenzo** find the concept of "pay to win," in which players pay real-world money for better cards, to detract from the fun and strategic aspect of the game.

"[It gets] way more difficult, especially with all those people using Mega Knight and Firecracker. The game gets so much harder because people are using cheap cards. You can buy the EVO cards and then get really good," De Lorenzo said, referring to the new evolution mechanic, which allows players to give certain characters more powerful abilities once they unlock specific evolution shards. "EVO

Skeleton Army just came out and already people are really good because they spent like \$12 [for the diamond pass]."

Yet Bolton, who has experience playing the game in both the high and low ranking arenas, finds that many of the pay-to-win players are relegated to the middle ranked arenas.

"I'd say it gets really difficult near the middle of the game because that's where all the pay to win people are," Bolton said. "If you're not pay-to-win, then you're going to suck for a while."

Recent years have seen the rapid surge of a multitude of mobile games. Late 2024 saw the huge popularity of the mobile game Block Blast, in which players connect randomly-arranged blocks into rows and columns to eliminate them and score points. According to developer Hungry Studio, Block Blast contained 40 million daily active users in October 2024 alone.

According to Google Trends data, both games generated huge demand in a matter of a month or two, and in the case of Block Blast, dropped in popularity just as quickly. Looking at trend data, Clash Royale has continued to rise in searches between September and October, with data still showing upwards player increases in the beginning of November and around over 100 million active monthly players. Despite trends and the existence of games like Block Blast, all three students foresee themselves continuing to play the game well into the future.

"It's been around for ten-ish years almost," De Lorenzo said. "I think if [it has] been popular all that time, it won't go away anytime in the near future."

Unlike Block Blast, Clash Royale has existed for about six years longer and has experienced other smaller but notable booms in early 2016, 2017 and late 2021. It's not clear whether the game will ex-



Clash Royale/Google Play Store

perience a significant decline, or in the eyes of Le — stick around for much longer.

"Those trendy games, they're only around for a certain period," Le said. "Clash Royale is forever."

WELLNESS CENTER

Wellness for the win

The Wellness Center provides many resources for students to take advantage of

AMY GUNASEELAN
Staff Writer

The Wellness Center offers many resources, such as therapists, wellness coordinators, social workers and psychologists that are readily available for students throughout the school day.

The center, which is located in the N Building, aims to provide a safe space for students where they can talk with a professional or simply take a break during the school day.

In a poll of 136 Bear Witness readers, 33% of students stated that they were unaware Branham offered these resources.

Lashonda Eagels, the Wellness Coordinator, helps with both student and school support.

"We all need a safe space," Eagels said. "[The Wellness Center] provides students a break away from the stressors. It provides a calming space for them, just a moment to take a break and reset."

There are many reasons why it is beneficial for students to meet with a mental health professional, but having someone to talk to at school specifically is particularly helpful. Senior **Leah Zemlerub**, who visits the Wellness Center multiple times a week in addition to a therapist outside of school, relies on these resources to be successful at school.

"I didn't have anyone that I could talk to in the middle of the day because my parents [would be] busy and I couldn't just text my friends in the middle of class," Zemlerub said. "I had someone to just be there."

A study conducted by NYU found that 49% of students feel a great deal of stress on a daily basis, while 31% feel somewhat stressed. Students that are stressed while feeling a variety of other emotions may result in feeling lonely, but the services offered at the Wellness Center address these struggles.

"Having that one person on campus that you feel heard by or at least seen [by] covers a multitude. It doesn't matter what you're going through," Eagels said. "[The Wellness Center] just provides that one person, at least on campus, that you can feel confident in knowing I can go to them and they will support me."

Although visiting a mental health professional is very beneficial to students, they may be hesitant in reaching out to or approaching the Wellness Center. First year school psychologist **Khalil Cury** identifies reasons that students may be hesitant.

"It can be an embarrassment thing," Cury said. "[Students] feel uncertain or unsure, or sometimes they don't want to overly share because we are always looking into the well being of students."

Another reason students may be hesitant to reach out to a mental health professional is because they were raised in an environment where

it was normalized to keep emotions in.

"Mental health is very new in terms of being more widely accepted or at least acknowledged," Eagels said. "A lot of education needs to happen about what mental health is and what mental illness is, and these services and just giving people a space to talk really help."

There are many more reasons why a student may be hesitant to reach out, but confidentiality is a large factor. However, mental health professionals understand that concerns over confidentiality may cause individuals to draw back.

"Depending on what [students] share, they feel it might get reported, but at the end of the day, they do have privilege confidentiality," Cury said. "Just know that whatever is stated within the room doesn't leave the room unless it's a concern."

Zemlerub encourages others to meet with mental health professionals as it has a drastic impact.

"Don't be hesitant," Zemlerub said. "They want you to be there. They're there for you. If you have the chance, you can [use the Wellness Center]."

All students are welcome to visit the Wellness Center. It's not targeted to a specific group of students that are experiencing specific things.

"If there's any social, emotional concerns, behavioral concerns, bullying, just anything that's involved revolving around mental health or they feel down, [students are] more than welcome to either take a break or come check in and see one of us," Cury said.

Checking in with a mental health professional or a trusted adult can be very relieving, especially for students.

"Being able to get my feelings out at the moment that I feel them is helpful," Zemlerub said.

In meetings with a mental health professional, students don't have to share if they don't want to.

"I always tell them it's their right if they want to share, or if they want to talk about something else, or they just want to sit in silence," Cury said, "I normally get students to talk, but I don't force them. I let them guide me there, and I support them."

Additionally, Cury emphasizes the importance of letting students hear themselves first.

"At the end of the day, they already have their idea in their head. They're going to do what they want to do," Cury said. "So why not support and suggest in a healthy and appropriate way?"

The Wellness Center is available for students to access throughout the school day, and students are encouraged to utilize its resources and acknowledge their feelings.

"We're not robots," Cury said. "We're meant to feel. It's okay to have feelings and be a human for once."



The interior of the Wellness Center contains a waiting area where students can wait and take breaks while surrounded by plants and lava lamps. Amy Gunaseelan/Bear Witness

BATHROOMS

PUFF PASS

Students are frustrated with those who vape in the bathroom stalls

NOA MUYAL
Engagement Editor

Inhale and exhale — a routine calming strategy. Inhale your Blue Razz Ice vape; exhale your frustrations when someone is hogging the bathroom pass for their smoke break.

From a Bear Witness Instagram poll of 256 readers, 55% of respondents indicated that they see other students smoking during class time and breaks. Additionally, out of 258 readers, 76% of students indicated that they are annoyed when their peers take the bathroom passes to vape in the bathrooms.

Students like senior **Aliyah Dumo** are often irritated to see others occupy bathroom stalls to smoke. Dumo gets annoyed when people take their time with the pass during class time while she has to wait for her turn.

“I hydrate a lot in class, and so when those drinks all pile up and I really need to use the restroom but someone’s gone for 30 minutes because they are in the bathroom vaping, it makes me frustrated,” Dumo said. “It just happens so much that I think it can make other people frustrated too.”

Dumo says she doesn’t try to judge others’ habits, but she cannot use the bathrooms while others are smoking due to sensitivity issues.

“I have a really sensitive sinus issue. [Smoke is] not something I want to necessarily be around all the time because it gives me headaches,” Dumo said.

Similarly, math teacher **Meredith Allen** also notices her students are often annoyed when their peers take the bathroom pass for long periods of time. However, the situation is also frustrating for her because there is not much she can do once students exit her classroom.

“If they leave for more than half a class period, I’ll mark them truant,” Allen said, adding that this doesn’t help the situation. “Oftentimes, those students who receive truancies don’t actually care about them.”

Most of the time, Dumo notices students huddling in the accessibility stall together or trying to squeeze into the smaller stalls. Some even stand on the toilet for more room.

“It’s a waste of space, and it’s not even something we’re supposed to be doing anyway here, so I don’t see the need to take up space where [the stalls] can be used,” Dumo said.

English teacher **Stuti Arora** mentions one of the reasons students smoke is due to social pressure.

“If you have friends that vape, it’s really natural to do it yourself because sometimes it’s easier to say yes than no,” Arora said. “Then you just can’t help it if you do it often enough. It becomes a habit just like anything else.”

Allen offers a similar perspective with kids who are going through personal situations and turn to vaping as a solution. It reduces her students’ ability to concentrate in class.

“It’s a cyclical problem. Students often have personal stuff, and then they’re self-medicating, and it increases the problem of focus. Students might already have issues with focus, but this



Grace Ngo/Special to Bear Witness

exacerbates it,” Allen said. “It’s a symptom of a bigger issue of escapism and having vices to be rebellious.”

To reduce this problem, Allen said schools could educate students on the impact smoking has on young adults. Additionally, she suggests starting groups where students can help decrease the amount of students smoking.

“Education is a big piece of the puzzle [and] trying to educate kids about how [smoking] impacts them and creating lots of fun spaces for all students to be substance-free,” Allen said, adding to the ways schools can prevent underage smoking. “Building strong relationships with the adults on campus can make a difference.”

Arora suggests keeping track of students while they’re outside the classroom digitally. Students would log into a program to ensure that both the teacher and the office have a record of when they leave their class. This electronic hall pass could also allow more students to go to the bathroom at the same time since there wouldn’t be a physical pass holding them back.

“[When] they’re signing out on a physical paper, then only [the teacher is] aware of [the student leaving],” Arora said. “If there’s

a kid who goes to the bathroom all the time or at the same time every day, there would be a way to keep track of it.”

Assistant Principal **Todd Harrison** sent out an email outlining the Branham administration’s new policy. Teachers officially discussed this policy during advisory on Nov. 7. The policy listed certain times throughout the school day that specific bathrooms are open in hopes of decreasing overcrowding and misuse.

“Closing select restrooms allows staff to better monitor student movement, ensure safety, and maintain restroom facilities in proper condition,” the email said. “This measure is intended to promote accountability, reduce disruptions, and restore appropriate restroom use. Restrooms will be reopened once consistent, respectful, and safe behavior is demonstrated.”

While both teachers say schools could do more to decrease the amount of students smoking, Allen points out that the best staff can do is provide a safe space for students rather than vaping.

“I’m not sure if it’s possible to prevent it. There’s not one solution. There’s just many ways that we can try to support kids and help them make better choices,” Allen said.

COLLEGE

College tug-of-war

College competitiveness changes the way students form college applications

EMILIANO GONZALEZ
Staff Writer

Branham students are feeling the heat as college competitiveness has intensified over the years due to the growing standards that applicants are expected to meet.

Students tailor their extracurriculars to stand out against the large application pool, setting the standards for applications to be higher. For example, the University of California had 10 campuses and over 100,000 first-year students in fall 2024. UCLA, one of the more selective schools in the UC system, received 146,276 applications, but only 13,114 were admitted.

This can create unrealistic expectations of college perfection for students. As college competitiveness rises, so does students’ fear of rejection by their dream schools.

Senior **Dristi Roy**, who is applying to Ivy League schools and UCs for computer science, expresses her concern about how the standards and validity of college applications have risen due to this competitiveness.

“Over the years, being a freshman, sophomore, junior and now senior, I see that even something such as having three [or] four research projects or internships is kind of mundane,” Roy said. “If they have these experiences, they’re qualified to be at an Ivy League school that is major, but these days, you can’t be sure.”

Roy believes that the media has contributed to this sense of competitiveness by only presenting extraordinary students.

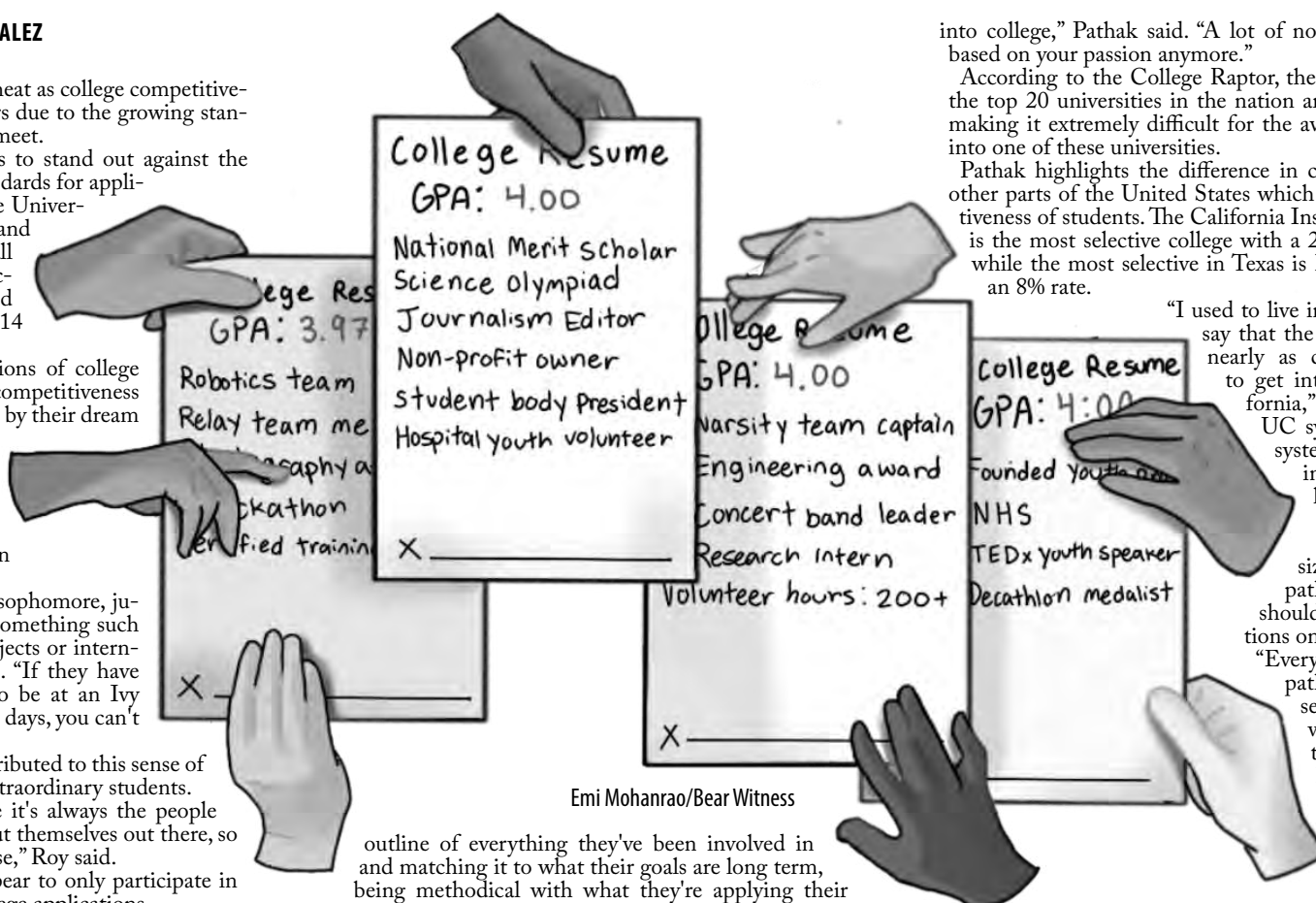
“The media belittles people because it’s always the people with the highest achievements that put themselves out there, so you don’t really get to see anything else,” Roy said.

She believes that some students appear to only participate in clubs as a means of padding their college applications.

“[These students] only went to two club meetings the entire year,” Roy said. “But people are really desperate to show that they have a full resume, even if it means that they haven’t attributed enough time to each.”

Counselor **Isabel Magaña**, who creates college application workshops for students, advises students to outline effective extracurricular activities.

“In their sophomore and junior year, if they start creating an



Emi Mohanrao/Bear Witness

outline of everything they’ve been involved in and matching it to what their goals are long term, being methodical with what they’re applying their time and energy,” Magaña said.

Junior **Maurvi Pathak**, who intends to apply to out-of-state and international schools as a biology major, says that the nonprofit abandonment of her peers reveals that college competitiveness pushes students to pursue performative activities for acceptance rather than their genuine interests.

“I have a lot of senior friends who started nonprofits, and then they completely shut them down right after they got accepted

into college,” Pathak said. “A lot of nonprofits aren’t really based on your passion anymore.”

According to the College Raptor, the acceptance rates for the top 20 universities in the nation are around 3% to 7%, making it extremely difficult for the average student to get into one of these universities.

Pathak highlights the difference in college acceptance in other parts of the United States which affects the competitiveness of students. The California Institute of Technology is the most selective college with a 2.6% acceptance rate, while the most selective in Texas is Rice University with an 8% rate.

“I used to live in Texas, and I would say that the colleges there aren’t nearly as competitive or hard to get into as those in California,” Pathak said. “The UC system is a very hard system of colleges to get into, with all of them having a lower acceptance rate.”

Magaña emphasizes that all college paths vary and students should not place expectations on each other.

“Everybody has their own path, so giving themselves grace, especially when they’re trying their first AP or first honors class, is important,” Magaña said. “Also [students should accept] that a C is a passing grade and it is also a college-bound acceptable grade.”

Magana says the way students speak to each other plays a huge role in college competitiveness among students.

“Learn to just [shift] the way that we talk to each other, so that way it’s more encouraging and not distracting and discouraging,” Magana said.

SPORTS

COMMUNITY SERVICE

TEAMWORK

BEYOND THE GAME

Bruins United program redefines team spirit at Branham and challenges athletes to engage beyond their own sports

TAYLOR URQUHART
Staff Writer

Bruins United — a new program at Branham that requires every team to both attend another sport's game and participate in a community service project together — is reshaping what it means to be a student-athlete.

The program was first proposed by athletic director **Kaleb Lane**, who noticed a dearth of support between teams and wanted to encourage student-athletes to show up for one another beyond their own sports.

"For example, flag football or field hockey might not be as big of an allure as a football game, but guess what? They're still Branham Bruins, and they're still out there playing, and they need to have support too," Lane said. "They need to know that all the athletes got their back."

Senior **Lark Brownie**, a field hockey player whose sport is often underattended, attests to Lane's reasoning behind the program.

"I think that it really builds us up and allows us to perform even better," Brownie said. "It's really important that all sports get equal recognition, especially in a community that prides itself so much on sports."

Both the girls and boys water polo teams chose to participate in the Bruins United program by attending a field hockey game at the start of the season. Brownie appreciated having support at her games beyond the usual crowd.

"It felt great," Brownie said. "They even made posters and were doing chants for us, and I just thought it was really sweet. It makes our sport feel more welcome in the sporting community at Branham."

Cross country runner **Aaron Tsai**, who went to a flag football game with his team in compliance with the new program, thinks the experience was beneficial to both the team they were supporting and his own.

"It's cool to cheer on other people," Tsai said. "Even simple conversation like 'good job' and 'good luck' makes it feel like there's some sort of connection. As long as conversation is happening between teams, it's going to evolve into something more."

For senior cheerleader **Reese Hickey**, who attended a volleyball game for the first time as part of Bruins United, watching other teams perform changed her perspective on her fellow athletes.

"It's interesting to see people in their element doing what they love and what they're good at," Hickey said. "This is what they've been doing when they say 'Oh, I can't hang out' or 'Sorry I have practice.' You see what they've been working for, and it's really impressive. It shows their character and their integrity."

For Brownie, the program shifted her perspective in a different way, noting that teamwork can extend beyond individual sports and connect all the teams.

"We're all working together as one big team," Brownie said. "We're all supporting each other."

In addition to requiring teams to attend other sports' games, Lane implemented community outreach to encourage teams to support the Campbell community as well as the Branham community.

"I wanted to give teams full reign to do any community outreach project they thought was important," Lane said.

Tsai helped lead a community outreach project with his team for middle schoolers as part of Bruins United, which included teaching the younger athletes more comprehensive training and giving them basic knowledge on sleep, recovery, diet and nutrition.

"By showing that we care as a cross country team, they're more likely to participate in high school," Tsai said. "If they're between school zones, they're more likely to choose our school because we've already reached out and welcomed them onto the team."

Although the reaction to the new program has been largely positive, students like Hickey have concerns with the additional time commitment beyond daily practices.

"Any second that I'm not doing something that I'm required to do, I'm doing my homework," Hickey said. "The thing with balancing all this is you have to put in 100% where you are at that moment."

Brownie acknowledges the struggle to balance school and sports but also recognizes the importance of showing up for other teams.

"You receive the support you give out," Brownie said. "It's really easy to just show up for even 10 or 15 minutes. A little bit of support is better than none."

Every year a meeting is held for athletic directors, at which the same question is always dis-



Alyx Yoon/Bear Witness

Varsity cross country athletes **Amen Fekadeselassie**, **Asha Kumar**, **Daniel Cheyer** and **Aaron Tsai** (12) lead a joint practice with middle schoolers as a Bruins United community outreach effort.

cussed: What is the purpose of athletics?

"Every year you get different answers," Lane said. "But at the end of the day, [the purpose] is to have a sense of belonging in your high school. When you show up as a team for another team,

you feel like 'Oh, I'm supposed to be here. I might not know everybody on the field or anybody for that matter, but I'm still here to support them because they're Branham Bruins, and so am I.'"

SPORTS FUNDRAISING

Crunching numbers

Sports Boosters use the snack shack to fund sports

KENDALL LADD
Staff Writer

With many sports to account for, the Branham Sports Boosters has organized several programs to help raise funds for athletics — one of those programs being the snack shack.

Sports Booster volunteer **Judy Cubiss** says that raising necessary funds can't be attained with one method, but rather a combination of several strategies.

"The events that we've done would also raise money for sports," Cubiss said. "People sometimes donate directly and match through their companies."

However, with the abundance in sports, donations alone do not raise enough of the desired or needed funds. To satisfy the needs of many teams, the Sports Boosters call on parents and students to volunteer at organized events like the snack shack. The snack shack has been a staple at school sports games for several years, building community, encouraging engagement and aiding in the initiative to fund sports on campus.

"It's more community building, and the money's almost a bonus," Cubiss said. "[The system] is very volunteer heavy."

According to junior **Aaron Jewall**, the shack takes volunteers, starting from age 13, to help run food, barbecue and fulfill other responsibilities during specific sports events. Like many others, Jewall initially found it appealing because it guaranteed \$20 to be donated to any sport of his choice; however, he stayed because of the community of volunteers. Although some view this as a chore, Jewall looks forward to the work.

"I really love doing it," Jewall said. "I wanted to help raise more money for [the soccer team] as well."

Moreover, Jewall works hard to balance programs like theater alongside the snack shack.

"I'm actually sad because I can't do any of the other football games this year because I have theater," Jewall said.

When it comes to the majority of students, finding free time is not always a given. The snack shack performs well because it is a way for nonvolunteers to directly help raise money.

"You get something in return," Jewall said. "You get a food item or a drink item, and you're helping support a team and that makes you feel more inclined to purchase."

In terms of where that money goes once it's granted, girls varsity soccer head coach **Erich Rabago** gives some insight.

"We got new uniforms this year, and boosters helped out. We just requested the money, and then they voted on it," Rabago said. "That money has been allocated to help out for senior night, so that's another driving force for me to do it because senior night's a special night to me, and I want to make sure that it continues to be special."

For someone like Rabago — who is in a coaching position — being able to connect with his players is not just important, but also a motivation to volunteer.

"Working at the snack shack is a chance for me to connect with the players," Rabago said. "[It] gives me a chance to give back to Branham and just connect with the parents and the faculty."

Although volunteers don't receive the proceeds directly, the desire to volunteer comes from a want to help and bond.

"It's simply for the love of the kids and love of the school and to support all the kids playing sports," Rabago said.



Kendall Ladd/Bear Witness

Girls soccer varsity head coach **Erich Rabago** works the snack shack during a football game to raise funds for the soccer team.

SPORTS INJURIES

OUT OF SORTS
OUT OF **SPORTS**

Sports injuries impact student athletes' mental health

SIENNA MOSS
Staff Writer

Injuries impact athletes more than just physically — they can affect them psychologically. According to Nebraska Medicine psychologist Andrew Ahrendt, “The more your identity is tied to being an athlete, the greater the impact.”

When student athletes who dedicate countless hours of time to their sport face a sudden injury, their usual routine is completely disrupted. They go from practicing daily, chatting in the locker room and feeling the adrenaline rush during games, to sitting on the sidelines, watching their teammates play and wishing that was them.

For many students at Branham, being an athlete means more than just playing the sport: It means being a part of the Bruin community. Once the ability to play is taken away, it can take a serious toll on students' mental health, and they can become disconnected from their identity.

Sophomore **Madilyn Murdock** plays for both club and school teams for soccer and flag football. She tore her ACL in September, which has significantly altered her active lifestyle. After her surgery in November, her estimated recovery time was a year, and she has been participating in physical therapy leading up to it. Although this therapy aims to assist recovery, it can be very difficult. Murdock has been struggling with the process.

“It made me feel worse because I realized how I can't do simple things. I can't straighten my leg or lift it,” Murdock said. “I thought it would make me feel better, but it's just embarrassing because I can't do it, but I know that [physical therapy] will help me.”

Murdock's coaches still want her to attend practices and games to support the team. Although this can help to keep students involved in their sport, Murdock has been struggling on the sidelines.

“You have to stand there and watch everybody do something that you love, knowing you can't do it,” Murdock said. “And you have the fear that you're not gonna come back 100%.”

James Vu, a senior Branham athlete, got injured at the end of his sophomore year and was out for his whole junior year when he got hurt again. He competed on the football, track and basketball teams but has returned to the football team for this fall season.

“When I first got hurt, I was like, ‘I'm probably never gonna play again,’ but [returning] made me a lot happier,” Vu said.

Vu was out of sports for almost two years of high school, ultimately separating himself from his form of expression and enjoyment. He admits he had a hard time sleeping and experienced a fear of missing out.

Vu has struggled with numerous concussions throughout his high school sport seasons, which can impact athletes' brains and mental state as well as cause mood swings, anxiety and irritability.

To reduce further damage, **Brady Och**, Branham's

athletic trainer, provided Vu with advice for recovery.

“He gave me tips on what to do and what not to do. For example, like not going on my phone in the dark [is] something to help with sleep,” Vu said.

Och assists student athletes with small complications and long-term injuries in his office and on the sidelines. He also trains a small portion of students to learn physical training skills, and they help tend to injured athletes. As a trainer, Och has observed countless injuries and recognizes their psychological impact in students at Branham.

“It can be tough to see yourself in the same light that you normally would when you're not doing that thing that you put so much time and effort into,” Och said. “It can sometimes lead to a bit of an identity crisis, and [you] have trouble figuring out what you should be doing with yourself.”

Although Och can't entirely aid players who require surgery or outside resources, he always tries his best to bring a sense of lightheartedness to campus.

Every athlete's recovery process is unique, but finding tools and strategies to cope can make the journey less mentally taxing. Murdock has connected with other student athletes who have been impacted by a similar injury to hers, and she says it helps to have people to relate to and who can understand her.

“Talking to [other athletes] makes me feel like I'm not the only one who's going through this, and everybody has their own struggle,” said Murdock.

Having a strong support system can also remind athletes that there are people willing and open to helping them. Murdock has found this both on the Branham campus and at home.

“My coaches always find a way to include me now that I can't play. They always say they're gonna be here for me. It makes me feel loved,” Murdock said. “I think [what has helped is] everybody around me telling me that they're gonna be here for me, and the reassurance from all my friends and family.”

Similarly to Murdock, Vu found that maintaining a sense of community provided him with strong support during his recovery. In advising other future injured athletes, he emphasizes finding ways to maintain involvement.

“Even if you are hurt, still stick with the team, still talk to your coaches, see what you can do to help out your team,” Vu said. “Emotionally supporting is better than just not being there at all. You're not physically playing, but you're mentally there.”



Cain Cheng/Bear Witness
James Vu (12) plays football. After experiencing five concussions throughout his sports seasons, Vu returned to football this fall for the first time since sophomore year.

Francisco Pham/
Bear Witness Archives
Madilyn Murdock (10) plays soccer during the 2024 season. Murdock tore her ACL in September, and her expected recovery time was one year. Two in every 10,000 female soccer players experience an ACL tear.

SPORTS CLUBS

Ready, player?

Sports that don't have official teams at Branham form clubs instead

BRAYDEN GASSMANN
Staff Writer

At Branham, some sports have teams that don't compete officially and instead are represented in clubs. These sports include ice hockey, surfing and chess.

Junior **Yannick Fandli** participates in both Branham's Hockey Club and the joint competitive team with Leigh.

“At Branham, I don't feel included,” Fandli said. “All these sports are being mentioned and talked about, but there's never anything about hockey. If there was a hockey team, I'd definitely be glad to feel represented, and it would be nice to be fully a part of the school.”

He says forming an official Branham hockey team would require generating more interest within the student body.

“We'd need to advertise the sport because I feel like it's very unpopular, and there's not too many people that play at Branham,” Fandli said.

Senior **Maayan Grinstein** is the president of the Surf Club at Branham. He presents about surfing at club meetings, but he wants members to have the opportunity to experience surfing in real life.

“Surfing is in the Olympics, which helps to gain a lot of recognition,” Grinstein said. “I do wish we could take the Surf Club to the beach one day.”

However, at Branham's Chess Club, members play both physical and digital forms of the game. Senior **Owen Smith**, president of Branham's Chess Club, en-

joys the atmosphere of the club.

“Everyone here is pretty knowledgeable about chess, and it's a very chill environment,” Smith said. “No one here is heavily competing, and if we are, it's for a good game, so it's a lot of fun.”

Additionally, Smith provided details in relation to how the club is already successful with its current practices, sharing how being a small person group is impactful.

“Having a smaller, more fun group that likes to do chess every Wednesday is better than a big tournament between different schools because then it becomes forced to play so often, rather than doing it for fun,” Smith said.

However, for students who play other sports, Smith shared optimism for allowing them to compete as Branham athletes.

“I know tons of friends who want to do ping pong, hockey, archery, fencing, all sorts of other sports that they have to do outside of Branham,” Smith said. “If that were to be incorporated in Branham, it would get a lot of people to join.”

Heather Votava serves as Branham's Surf Club adviser. She shared optimism for students to continue creating clubs relating to sports.

“There is a club for everyone here at Branham,” Votava said. “I love that about our community. If there isn't a club, create that space for yourself and your friends.”

In addition, Smith shared how he thinks clubs could eventually adopt a competitive aspect, carrying a coach and players on the team.

“[The clubs would need] funding and a lot of students to be interested in playing,” Smith said. “I definitely see other other sports starting out as clubs, but then becoming an actual sport.”

Over time, more sports clubs and teams will continue to emerge, though it leaves room for wondering what is to come in Branham's future.

“When someone is passionate about something [and] when people feel that sincerity in their passion, it's contagious,” Votava said.

“At Branham, I don't feel included. All these sports are being mentioned and talked about, but there's never anything about hockey.”

Junior Yannick Fandli, a Hockey Club member

SPORTS BRIEFS

FOOTBALL
After a solid season, the team narrowly secured a CCS appearance thanks to strong individual performances across the Mt. Hamilton league. Quarterback Andrew Ho leads the league in passing yards (1,793). Wide receiver Brayden Hodges is first in receiving yards (709).
Record: Varsity 5-5.

VOLLEYBALL
After a strong season, the girls volleyball team made it to CCS but were eliminated in the quarterfinals. Libero Kaci Nguyen is second in the Mt. Hamilton League in digs (338), and middle Katelyn Kiratsous ranks second in the league in hitting percentage (.338).
Record: Varsity 16-16.

FLAG FOOTBALL
In just their second season, the flag football team made an impressive run to CCS, advancing all the way to the finals before falling short.
Record: Varsity 15-9-1.

BOYS WATER POLO
The boys water polo team faced a challenging season, finishing fourth in the league with a .231 win percentage.
Record: Varsity 3-10.

GIRLS WATER POLO
Despite a winless season, the team continued to show resilience in every match, laying the foundation for growth in future seasons.
Record: Varsity 0-9.

FIELD HOCKEY
The field hockey team finished fifth in the league, narrowly missing a spot in CCS. Goalie Talia Heneghan led the Mt. Hamilton League with 207 saves, anchoring the team's defense.
Record: Varsity 4-12-2.

GIRLS TENNIS
The girls tennis team had a solid season, making CCS. The team showed consistency and strong performances across the lineup throughout the year.
Record: Varsity 16-8-2.

GIRLS GOLF
The girls golf team finished the season with a mix of wins and losses, showing steady effort and competitive play throughout the year.

CROSS COUNTRY
The boys varsity team finished second in the Mt. Hamilton division and girls varsity team finished fourth. Alijah Murillo broke the course record at the 2.74-mile Montgomery Hill Park course Dhriti Ravioloan and Gemma Cervone set new school records to rank third and fourth all-time on the course.
Record: Boys 7-0 | Girls 4-3

—Compiled by Taylor Urquhart

IN DEPTH

PUSHING FORWARD



Cain Cheng/Bear Witness
Outside of Branham's main office, the American flag hangs half-mast on Nov. 6 for the death of Dick Cheney.

CHARLIE KIRK

HALF-MAST



FOR KIRK

Branham lowered flags for Charlie Kirk in accordance with Trump's executive order

On Sept. 10, President Donald Trump issued an executive order for all flags at public buildings and grounds to be flown at half-mast in honor of Charlie Kirk's death. At Branham, the flag outside of the main office was flown at half-mast after Trump's order.

Kirk, founder and CEO of the conservative nonprofit Turning Point USA, was a right-wing political activist known for debating college students. Kirk was a controversial public figure, due to his comments regarding abortion, immigration and LGBTQ+ rights. Junior **Charlotte Homer** explains how she feels about what Kirk and the administration preached.

"I don't believe that what ideals Kirk and the administration preached were within my beliefs," Homer said. For example, reproductive freedom — I believe that no matter what, it should be the person's choice to have the child."

Kirk was assassinated on Sept. 10 at Utah Valley University while hosting a Turning Point event. Flags were kept half-mast until sunset on Sept. 14.

The government is very selective when deciding who to lower the flag for. The honor is usually reserved for the deaths of military officers, government officials and victims of tragedies.

"It upsets a lot of people because if you put the flags at half-mast in a way that is deeply memorable of Kirk, people could also be like, 'There's been hundreds of school shootings in our country over the past year. There's been so many children that have died as well. If we put so much emphasis or praise onto one person, what about everyone else that died that people don't seem to care about?'" Homer said.

Senior **Brady Clark** argues the impact Kirk had on the youth and in politics necessitated lowering the flag in his honor.

"The political impact that Charlie Kirk had was significant enough to lower the flag because he was really able to connect with youth, especially college students," Clark said. "Lowering the flag for him was understandable."

When the government wants the flag to be lowered for someone, the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) receives the order, and it is their responsibility to lower the flag accordingly. ROTC is a college-based program that gives participating

students military readiness training. Silbergeld receives a notification but does not have control over lowering the flag.

Company commander of ROTC **Aiden Gulo** described the process for raising and lowering the flag when orders are received.

"The first couple of people who arrive at school sometimes put up the flags before 7:45 a.m., and when school finishes after seventh period, we have three to four cadets lower them," Gulo said.

On the same day that Kirk got shot, a school shooting occurred at Evergreen High School in Jefferson County, Colorado. Senior **Alexi Bentford**, Personal Affairs Officer for ROTC, notes that while there was a school shooting in Colorado on the same day of Kirk's assassination, the flag was only lowered in his honor, which raises the question of what the government chooses to memorialize.

"I feel like the government, people are just glossing over [the school shooting]," Bentford said.

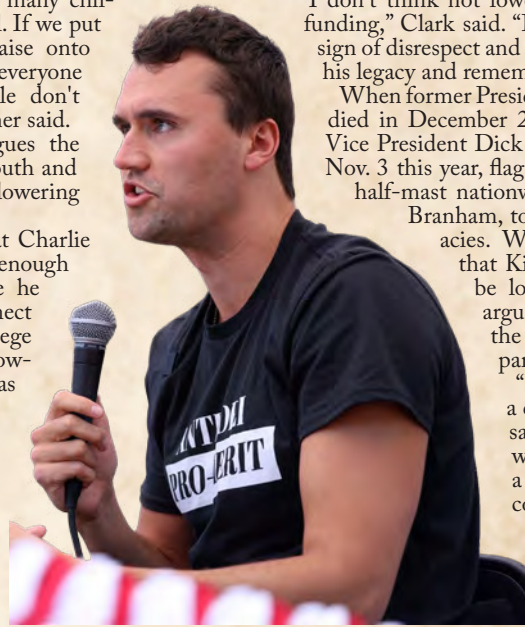
Telling public schools to bring their flags to half-mast demonstrates the government controlling schools through funding when they imply that they want certain announcements. Clark thinks that while the federal government has power when it comes to financial means, the directions they give can be taken by schools how they wish.

"I don't think not lowering the flag would revoke funding," Clark said. "I just think it would show a sign of disrespect and a sign of not willing to honor his legacy and remember who he was."

When former President Jimmy Carter died in December 2024 and former Vice President Dick Cheney died on Nov. 3 this year, flags were lowered to half-mast nationwide, including at Branham, to honor their legacies.

While some believe that Kirk didn't deserve the flag to be lowered for his death, Clark argued that his relationship with the current president had some part in it.

"I think [lowering the flag] is a case-by-case scenario," Clark said. "The president was close with Charlie Kirk, and he had a big impact on the whole country, so I think it was deserved for him."



Gage Skidmore, CC BY-SA 2.0
Charlie Kirk speaks at Florida State University.

1956

2004

Congress and President Dwight D. Eisenhower proclaimed the week of Sept. 17-23 **Constitution Week**. At the time, Sept. 17 — the day the Constitution was signed in 1787 — was observed as Citizenship Day, and it was previously named "I Am an American" Day before 1952.

Senator Robert C. Byrd from West Virginia sponsored legislation to designate Sept. 17 as **Constitution Day**. The Consolidated Appropriations Act of Fiscal Year 2005 began requiring public schools and government offices to promote programming about the Constitution for the day.

In high schools, liberal bias has drawn attention from Montgomery County's nonprofit that promotes beliefs on school

R PATRIOTISM

New implementations of Constitution Day and reactions to Charlie Kirk's death fill the hallways

by **Aryella Finkel-Hozer** and **Andrew Ho**
Illustrations by **Emi Mohanrao**

Constitution Quiz

How well do you know the Constitution? Signed on Sept. 17, 1787, it's the oldest surviving national charter of government in the world.

How many words does the Constitution have?

- a. 3,581
- b. 4,643
- c. 3,500
- d. 4,400

Who did not sign the Constitution?

- a. Roger Sherman
- b. Thomas Jefferson
- c. John Adams
- d. James Wilson

Which Founding Fathers needed assistance signing the Constitution?

- a. Benjamin Franklin
- b. John Rutledge
- c. John Jay
- d. John Dickinson

How many days did it take to actually frame the Constitution?

- a. 1-50 days
- b. 50-100 days
- c. 100-150 days
- d. 150-200 days

Who was the youngest person to sign the Constitution?

- a. Jonathan Dayton
- b. Roger Sherman
- c. Robert Morris
- d. George Clymer

What grammar/spelling error(s) occurs in the Constitution?

- a. "Democracy" instead of "Democracy"
- b. "Penslyvania" instead of "Pennsylvania"
- c. Incorrect capitalization of "four" in "during the Term of four Years"
- d. Misuse of the contraction "it's"

Answers:
1D, 2B&C, 3A&D, 4C, 5A, 6B&D

CONSTITUTION DAY

LAW OF THE LAND

Branham made an announcement about Constitution Day as required by federal government

On Sept. 17, Branham students and staff members received a loudspeaker announcement about the celebration of Constitution Day.

Principal **Beth Silbergeld** began fourth period by acknowledging holidays such as Constitution Day, Hispanic Heritage Month, Mexican Independence Day and the anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks. Section 111 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2005 (Public Law 108-447) states that all federally funded schools must make an announcement acknowledging Constitution Day.

"I've been a principal for 14 years, and this is the first time we have mentioned something about Constitution Day," Silbergeld said. "[The requirement] had been in place for 12 years and hadn't been implemented until this year."

Junior **Charlotte Homer**, founder and president of the Branham Political Association Club, believes that there is a reason why this requirement was suddenly pushed for. "The current administration [is] making decisions that sometimes are getting out of hand in the sense that [it] isn't following the Constitution," Homer said.

All the schools in the area were notified by the Under Secretary of Education to make an announcement about Constitution Day. The type of announcement was left to each school to determine.

"[The schools] were given very broad directions on how to make the announcement," Silbergeld said.

In an email sent out to teachers and faculty the day prior to the announcement, Silbergeld alerted staff about the upcoming holiday.

"All educational institutions receiving Federal funding need to follow requirements," Silbergeld wrote.

Public schools like Branham rely on federal funding. According to the Public Policy Institute of California, \$131 billion was allocated for K-12 public schools from the federal government, state and other sources. "It's the implication that you have to do as you're told because you're being funded," Homer said.

Other schools, including those in the San Jose Unified School District and Campbell Union High School District, chose slideshows, Kahoots and loudspeaker announcements to celebrate Constitution Day. However, no schools in the area chose not to make the announcement, according to Silbergeld.

"There are certain risks not worth taking for the benefit of the community I serve," Silbergeld said.

Senior **Luke Choi** believes that the announcement could remind students of the United States' foundational values.

"I think that this is going towards a foundation because these [holidays] are to remember what we lost and what we gained," Choi said.

Although there are no direct risks in not making the announcement, if one school decides not to make it for whatever reason, Choi believes it can have negative impacts over time.

"Disobeying the government feels like breaking the social contract that we, the citizens, have with the government," Choi said. "Once we start disobeying them for something like this, we will continue to disobey and create a domino effect."

Silbergeld hopes that educators, who are role models to the students, can take initiative in teaching students about things such as the Constitution.

"We can choose to ignore things, but as school educators, we're state employees, and my hope is that we're democratic institutions," Silbergeld said. "We want to also represent the important values of a democratic nation."

While the government does have the power to take away funding, fully taking action on this opportunity is not likely. Still, Homer believes that this sets a worrying precedent.

"Our president has shown that he is capable if he wants to disregard the Constitution through his choices," Homer said. "I feel like that's something that has no limit, just based on who he is and what he's done in the past."

"Every school leader could make a decision to resist a directive, but that might put our jobs at risk and our school at risk."

Principal **Beth Silbergeld**

2012

2017

2024

2025

ol, **Charlie Kirk** wrote an essay criticizing as in high school textbooks, attracting from the media. With businessman Bill y, he founded Turning Point USA, a at promotes conservative politics and hool campuses.

Notable policies from President **Donald Trump's** first term include restricting immigration, reversing environmental regulations and cutting spending towards welfare programs. His campaign slogan "Make America Great Again" became a rallying cry for the modern American conservative movement.

Turning Point USA has become extremely successful. A key fixture of their social media presence is videos where TPUSA members debate with students about political topics. These videos often featured Kirk himself. According to Form 990 filings made available by ProPublica, TPUSA generated \$85 million in revenue in the 2024 fiscal year alone.

Charlie Kirk was assassinated at a Turning Point USA event at Utah Valley University on Sept. 10. During Kirk's memorial service on Sept. 22 attended by over 90,000 people, President Trump stated that "our greatest evangelist for American liberty became immortal. He's a martyr now for American freedom."

ARTS & CULTURE

MINI REVIEWS

MOVIE



Black Phone 2
Directed by Scott Derrickson

What is it: After the events of the previous movie, Finney is haunted by his past with the Grabber while Gwen battles her increasing nightmares and sleepwalking. At a camp, the two work together to unravel the mysteries behind Gwen's dreams and Finney's past.

Liked: It had a satisfying ending where most loose ends were tied. It was wholesome as characters stand up for themselves and rid themselves of their demons.

Disliked: I felt it wasn't as scary as I was predicting it to be, since it's marketed as a horror or thriller. Yes, it had a few jumpscars, but the concept wasn't as disturbing as I thought. It is still a decent movie though as it's exciting and action-packed.

— Kailey Fu

CONCERT



The Addison Tour
Addison Rae

What is it: The Addison Tour is Addison Rae's first tour for her debut eponymous album. On stage, she is accompanied by a group of backup dancers who take part in intense choreography and costume changes.

Liked: I enjoyed the colorful and dramatic lighting. During "Money is Everything," they launched paper money with Addison's face out of giant cannons into the crowd, and for the last song, "Diet Pepsi" fireworks showered behind her. The choreography made the performance exciting to watch.

Disliked: The concert staff didn't hand any fans in the crowd all the paper money that fell in front of the barricade.

— Sienna Moss

ALBUM



The Life of a Showgirl
Taylor Swift

What is it: Taylor Swift's 12th studio album details her time on the Eras Tour, which spanned for almost two years. Her songs focus on her personal experiences, newfound contentment and maturity.

Liked: The promotional pictures looked nice and explored the "showgirl" life.

Disliked: Her lyrics were boring and didn't offer anything new to music. Her songs were nothing like the "showgirl" life that she advertised.

— Noa Moyal

CONSUMERISM

WASTED SPIRIT

Consumerism during the holiday season increases waste production

ANYA GUPTA
Staff Writer

As major holidays approach, people tend to purchase more and more goods, increasing consumption and negatively impacting the environment.

Advertisements, whether it is a social media post or a TV commercial, peak during the holiday seasons. According to PBS News, purchases typically increase 3.8% during the last three months of the year. This promotes the purchasing of goods like decorations, costumes and candy. During these times, companies put out many themed products, like pumpkin spice lattes or Santa bed sets. Although fun, these items tend to be set aside or thrown out during the spring and summer months.

Students Promoting Awareness of Recycling and the Environment (SPARE) club social media manager **Livia Roder** recognizes how these temporary items can harm the environment.

"When fall comes around or when Christmas comes around, it's new pillows, new blankets and new items that we need to get," Roder said. "That means more stuff in our houses, which eventually means more stuff to get rid of and more stuff that ends up in landfills."

English teacher **Olivia Tejada** has a similar perspective. She believes the fall and winter seasons are more concentrated with major holidays such as Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah and New Year's, which leads to a significant amount of waste over a short period of time.

"The fall time is more like a time of giving," Tejada said. "There's a lot more promotion during these times that make people want to buy more and waste more."

During the holidays, Roder finds that people are also held

to higher expectations of consumerism, driven by social media to purchase more each year.

"When you go into any single store, there's this pressure from companies that want people to buy more stuff," Roder said.

Tejada believes that the holidays cause people to be more oblivious to the environment. People may find it hard to relate the magic of the holidays to the significant amount of damage it causes.

"When you're tying it into a happy feeling, you take the negativity away from it," Tejada said.

Roder believes that the holidays have a very shiny and comforting superficial image which hides the detrimental effects of consumerism.

"People never see the process of the items going into the landfills," Roder said. "What they're concerned about is the holidays and the traditions that they want to keep alive instead of being more sustainable."

Concentrating on the comfort that people find in these traditions, biology teacher **Rachel Basore** explains how traditions can be a consistent, stable pattern which can link people to joyful memories.

"Traditions give you something that connects you to your past, whether it's your childhood or a family tradition that's always been done for years," Basore said. "Especially in times of chaos or uncertainty, it can help people feel grounded and have a sense of normality."

In order to find a balance between participating in traditions and being environmentally aware, Basore believes that there are alternative options to excessive consumerism and ways that can preserve finite resources.

"You can still have your traditions and be mindful about reducing the amount you buy or what you do with stuff when



Grace Ngo/Special to Bear Witness



Irene Yoon/Special to Bear Witness

TEACHER SPOTLIGHT

Mr. Nalls in the concert halls

Band director Chris Nalls frequently performs outside of school

ELLIOTT YAU
Managing Editor

Band director **Chris Nalls** can't get enough music. In addition to teaching four band classes — Concert Band, Symphonic Band, Wind Ensemble and Jazz Band — and working with the marching band, Nalls also performs outside of school.

Now 67 years old, Nalls has 57 years of experience with French horn, his main instrument. He plays in groups like Halkins Brass, Brewers Brass, Ohlone Symphonic Band and Cambrian Symphony. Nalls has also played for various other performances, such as musicals.

A recent performance with the Palo Alto Chamber Orchestra reminded Nalls of his two most important values — showing up early and being prepared.

"I was super busy and didn't get a chance to look at the music before the first rehearsal. All of it, with the exception of about five bars, no problem," Nalls said. "But those five bars were one of the most difficult solos in all of classical literature for my instrument, and I was not prepared to play that solo."

Nalls knows that being prepared is crucial to giving a good performance. In both of his rehearsals before the performance, he messed up. However, Nalls was still able to play the song correctly during the actual performance.

"If I don't play for a day, I notice it. If I don't play for two days, my wife notices. If I don't play for a week, everybody notices," Nalls said.

Playing daily is essential for keeping his muscles in shape. However, Nalls took a decade-long break from music during his career at Apple, where he worked his way up to product management.

Although he liked the salaries Apple paid, Nalls,

who holds a music degree and taught music after college, felt called to go back into music.

"The whole time in my heart, I was a music teacher," Nalls said. "The way I have said it to folks before is I got tired of saying that I was a musician with a day job, and I just wanted to be a musician full time."

After a brief stint as Leigh band director, Nalls worked for Symantec, a software company. Then, he taught at Santa Clara University and Sacred Heart Cathedral Preparatory before coming to Branham in 2018.

Outside of teaching, he's been hired for many performances. For one gig, he performed at Mardi Gras in New Orleans with travel, lodging and food included. More locally, one of his favorite memorable concerts was a two-hour performance of "The Little Mermaid" at Cabrillo College in Aptos. Despite not having any rehearsals before, Nalls played well.

"90% of the time I don't have to practice because either the music's easy enough that I can just play it, or they have rehearsals, and there's enough time in the rehearsals to get the music down," Nalls said. "Playing for that long, you get pretty good. Either you've played something before, or you just look at it and you go, 'Yeah, I can play that.' The exception being, every once in a while, I get one where I am taken by surprise because I didn't take the time to look through the music beforehand closely enough."

However, Nalls recognized that having a lot of practice and experience won't guarantee getting gigs.

"Most of it's social," Nalls said. "Nobody wants to work with a jerk, so if you're nice, you'll get hired again, and you play your part."

One of his most rewarding and surprising experiences happened locally in San Francisco.

"After the concert, two people came up to me and

you're done," Basore said. Tejada also believes that people can pay more attention to what they're purchasing and where it will really go when they're done with it.

"When [my grandma] would give us our gifts, she would wrap them in newspaper or magazines that she had in the house," Tejada said. "It makes me think going forward — how could I use things that are in my house already without having to go buy harmful packaging wrappers?"

Tejada believes that when celebrating holidays, people can focus on the family aspect rather than materialism, which can essentially reduce waste production.

"I think of the Grinch and his quote: 'Maybe Christmas doesn't come from a store. Maybe Christmas means a little bit more,'" Tejada said. "By truly sitting down and thinking about the holidays that we're getting together for, what is meaningful about it, it takes away from these other superficial, materialistic things."

said that they thought I just sounded beautiful," Nalls said. "That kind of reinforcement just feels really good."



Elliott Yau/Bear Witness

Chris Nalls plays the French horn at a show with the Ohlone Symphonic Band on Oct. 19.

SCHOOL DANCE

NOCHE DE BANDA

Branham introduces new school dance celebrating Hispanic culture

DANNA TRIANA
Staff Writer

On Oct. 18, Branham celebrated Hispanic Heritage Week with its first Noche de Banda dance dedicated to Hispanic culture.

The headline event of this spirit week was the dance, Noche de Banda, which featured a performance by La Distintiva Banda, a local band. It was the first dance at Branham to play banda, a genre of regional Mexican music that features brass and percussion instruments with vocalists.

The plans for Noche de Banda started last year when ASB students pitched a dance similar to Homecoming, but specifically for students to engage with Latino culture. Activities Director and Noche de Banda's organizer **Victoria Raineri** reached out to the Latinx Student Union (LSU) to collaborate. In order to commemorate Hispanic Heritage month and increase ticket sales, LSU worked with ASB members to organize and decorate for the spirit week.

LSU adviser and English teacher **Olivia Tejeda** appreciated how the dance attendees engaged with the music. Dancing to banda music involves rhythmic side-to-side hip movements and quick steps with a partner.

"I saw students trying to teach one another how to dance banda music, allowing themselves to look silly but putting in the effort and just having fun," Tejeda said. "I heard students practicing the language to interact with the announcer of the band in front of all of their peers."

Freshman **Anya Desai** believed the most unique element of the dance was that it involved students who don't know much about Hispanic culture.

"It's fun because it's different from what we normally do, so it gives everyone a new perspective," Desai said. "Normally people are just jumping. They have different steps."

Raineri said that compared to other schools, the style of music played during Noche de Banda changed the way people danced with each other.

"Typically, I only see partner dancing at homecoming or prom during slow dances, so it was cool to see that type of dancing," Raineri said.

Raineri also said that banda may be incorporated into more dances.

"I have not worked with and paid live musicians for our dances, so that was really cool and unique," Raineri said. "Students ask for banda-style music at our dances, and it's not always played as often."

LSU president **Mia Valencia** finds that representation at Branham is important, especially during a time of political turmoil.

"We're welcoming people into our culture, especially in a time where a lot of things are happening with immigration," Valencia said. "[Banda is] something positive."

Sophomore **Laura Valderrama** believes the dance has given the Latinx community the representation



Danna Triana/Bear Witness

La Distintiva Banda, a local band, plays music at Noche de Banda.

they deserve on campus.

Although Valderrama and Valencia both agreed on the importance of the Latino community being recognized, Valderrama thought the next dance could be made for a wider variety of Hispanic communities.

"The people [at Branham] come from different types of Hispanic cultures, but the one that has had the greatest impact on this dance has been Mexican culture," Valderrama said. "I thought that I was going to see more styles of music."

Valderrama was unfamiliar with the type of dance, since the band's performance of traditional genres, such as rancheras, zapateados, norrañas and corridos, didn't resonate with her part of Hispanic culture.

"At one point, I decided to ask one of [the band members] if he could play another type of music, the kind we usually dance to in Colombia and Venezuela, and he told me he didn't know any," Valderrama said.

Valderrama suggests some genres could be played at future dances so that more people can resonate even more with the music.

"Each region has its own style and culture, but they haven't played salsa, carranga, merengue, vallenato or anything I normally listen to," Valderrama said.

Desai mentioned the main struggle that Noche de Banda dance had was advertising.

"A lot of people didn't know about it, especially because it's the first one," Desai said.

Raineri agreed with Desai.

"With new events, it's always hard to educate people on what the event is [and] what they can expect," Raineri said.

Due to concerns expressed by students, ticket prices were reduced from \$20 for students and \$15 with ASB to \$15 for students and \$10 with ASB, according to Tejeda.

Raineri encourages people to give feedback on any occasion or dance. Tejeda reassures them that they have multiple ideas to develop a more inclusive environment for future Banda dances.

"For example, fundraising for tickets, changing the day of the dance so that students can attend, making sure the dance isn't on the same night as any other big ticket events either at Branham or in the community, maybe having a day care area for small siblings and also having the night be half-banda and half-DJ," Tejeda said.

Community Liaison **Beatriz Espinoza** suggested that ASB and LSU collaborate for future events to encourage greater Hispanic events.

"They both have really great ideas, so collaborating and trying to make events or make them more schoolwide, instead of just focusing on one club, would be very helpful, and they would gain ideas and help each other out," Espinoza said.

Tejeda has a positive look out into the future of the banda dances.

"Are there things that could have gone better? Yes. Is a goal for next year to ensure we have a bigger turnout of students at Noche de Banda? Yes," Tejeda said. "But for the first ever Hispanic dance at Branham, I think it was a huge success."

INTERNET DRAMA

Cultivated conflict

Branham community discusses how celebrity drama influences the music industry

CATHERINE CARTER
Staff Writer

Over the past few years, celebrity feuds have become an ever present force in the music industry, catching the attention of people everywhere. However, these conflicts do not leave the same effect as they used to.

Most recently, celebrity rappers Nicki Minaj and Cardi B have reignited existing tension during a dispute on social media platform X. It all began with the release of Cardi B's sophomore album "Am I the Drama?" During its week of release, Minaj commented "4.99," a remark that some X users connected to Cardi B's album, which was being sold at a discounted price to increase sales. However, the conflict escalated from there, with the two going on to insult each other's kids and families. The feud led to a spike in Google searches for the two rappers.

Spanish teacher **Jessica Martinez** thinks that these conflicts are exactly what artists want — they draw attention to themselves, regardless of whether it is positive or negative.

"There is a trend of when something blows up, it's kind of that sense of any publicity is good publicity, which I don't necessarily agree with," Martinez said.

Junior **Audriana Aguilar** finds that these feuds help grab the attention of people who might not normally listen to

their music, diversifying their popularity. She specifically connected this effect to the Drake and Kendrick Lamar controversy.

"When it started popping up on social media and [I realized] 'Oh my gosh, this lyric means this, and this lyric means this.' That made me want to listen to their music, so I started listening to their music more."

On the other hand, junior **BeEmnet Amare** believes that because celebrity disputes and controversies are so normalized, the effect they have on things like the number of an artist's

listeners or followers is decreasing.

"Viewers are just so used to it by now," Amare said. "It doesn't really affect the viewer's stance on them as a person or their music."

Similarly, junior **Alex Wray** finds that celebrity feuds, like the Drake and Lamar beef, have become so oversaturated that these conflicts do not have any effect on how people view the artists.

"I don't think beef affects anything. Everyone was against Drake, but he drops 'Nokia' and everyone forgets," Wray said.

Martinez feels that it is challenging to decipher whether the tension is real or staged as many figures in pop culture often organize publicity stunts.

"Especially as women, we're always pitted against each other, and for the audience it's super entertaining, but for me it's not appealing," Martinez said. "The more I hear about it, the more I don't think it really matters in the broader sense of things. It doesn't make me want to listen to their music."

Additionally, Wray finds that celebrities who are constantly feuding are not positive role models for their kids or fans.

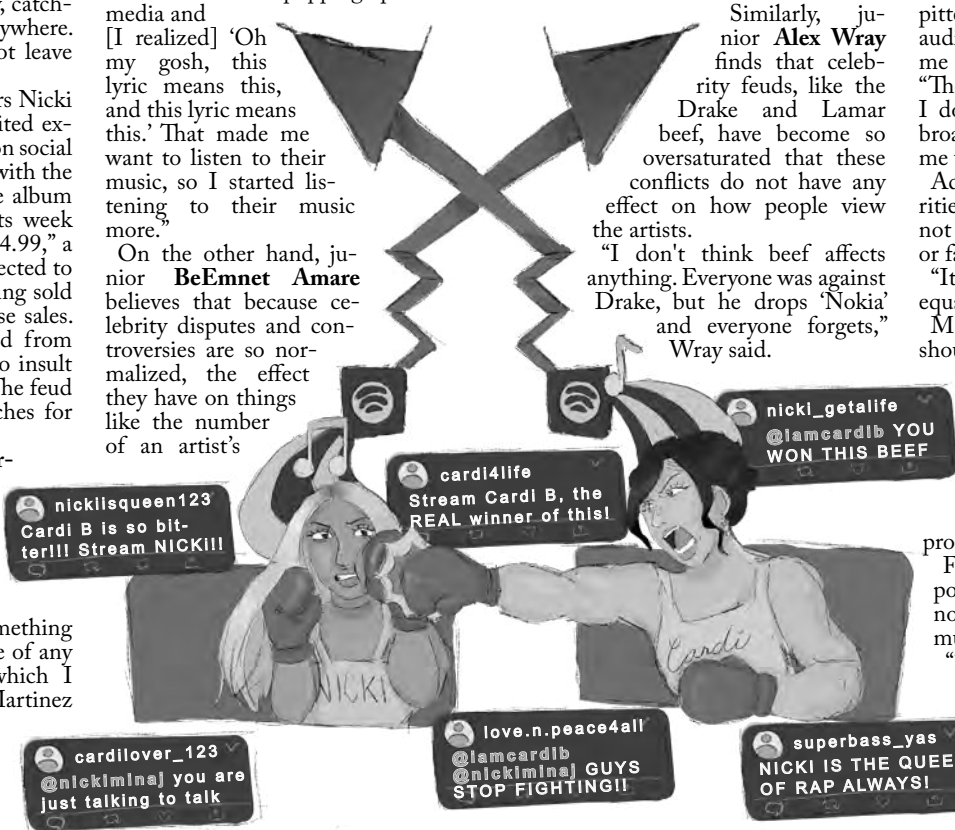
"It sets an example that pettiness equals fame," Wray said.

Martinez agrees that public figures should not be using their platforms to tear each other down, but rather to lift each other up.

"[Celebrities] have a lot more that they can do for us [because] they're in the public eye," Martinez said. "They have a much bigger voice in that way, so it's not productive."

Finally, Martinez believes it is important to look beyond the drama and not lose sight of the true purpose of music — to feel.

"The point of having [music] is to feel something and to feel a human sentiment, which would be hopefully kindness, hopefully love, hopefully sadness," Martinez said. "I don't think it should be hatred."



Kailey Fu/Bear Witness

ARTS CALENDAR

MOVIES

Wicked: For Good

Nov. 21

Directed by Jon M. Chu

What is it: Following the release of "Wicked" in November 2024, "Wicked: For Good" is the second installment of the hit Broadway show that fills in the blanks of what happened before and after Dorothy arrived in Oz. The movie will detail the second act of the Broadway show.

Avatar: Fire and Ash

Dec. 19

Directed by James Cameron

What is it: "Avatar: Fire and Ash" is the third movie in the "Avatar" series. The movie continues the story from "Avatar: The Way of Water," with more conflict on the planet of Pandora as Jake and Neytiri's family encounter the aggressive Na'vi tribe called the Ash people.

Zootopia 2

Nov. 26

Directed by Jared Bush and Byron Howard

What is it: Zootopia 2 follows the events of the story from the first movie, starring main characters Judy Hopps and Nick Wilde. Similar to the first movie, Hopps and Wilde team up to find a missing animal in Zootopia.

SHOWS

Stranger Things: Season 5

Nov. 26

Directed by the Duffer Brothers, Shawn Levy and Frank Darabont

What is it: "Stranger Things: Season 5" is the highly anticipated final season of the hit Netflix series that first aired in 2016. The season will follow a familiar group of teenagers who must fight against evil forces in order to save their town of Hawkins, Indiana. The show will be released in three parts on Netflix, with the first four episodes being released on Nov. 26.

ALBUMS

Finally Over It

Nov. 14

Summer Walker

What is it: "Finally Over It" is the upcoming third studio album by Summer Walker. The album's lead single was released on Oct. 25, titled "Heart of a Woman." The album is R&B centric, featuring artists such as Playboi Carti, Latto, GloRilla, Sexyy Red and Mariah the Scientist.

CONCERTS

The Hit Me Hard And Soft Tour

Nov. 22 & 23

Billie Eilish

What is it: Billie Eilish's "Hit me Hard and Soft" tour is coming back to the Bay Area for two nights at the Chase Center in San Francisco. The alternative pop and electropop setlist includes popular songs such as "Bury a Friend," "Happier than Ever," "Lunch" and many more.

An Evening With...Pink Pantheress

Nov. 12

Pink Pantheress

What is it: Pink Pantheress's "An Evening with...Pink Pantheress" tour is coming to San Francisco's Masonic Auditorium on Nov. 12, 2025. The setlist includes hit singles such as "Illegal," "Boy's a Liar pt. 2," "Tonight," and more. The tour follows the release of her remix album "Fancy Some More."

—Compiled by Anya Gupta, Emiliano Gonzalez and Enoch Shin

SCIENCE & HEALTH

AUTISM

Amelia Martorano/Bear Witness



UNFOUNDED CLAIMS

Misrepresentation of autism heightens worries in Branham community

COLIN KALANGES
Staff Writer

When **Natalie Vasquez** heard about the recent claims made by the Trump administration and Secretary of Health Robert F. Kennedy Jr. promoting the unproven link between the use of the drug acetaminophen — commonly sold as Tylenol — during pregnancy and autism in children, it stoked fear and anxiety in her.

Vasquez, a senior, was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) when she was just two years old. Having autism has influenced how she interacts and communicates with others, making real-world situations more complicated to navigate. And yet, despite the challenges she faces every day, many people are unaware she has it.

Vasquez does what's called "masking," meaning she camouflages into society. The mechanism allows her to interact with her peers without any fear of standing out. Vasquez is on the low to moderate end of the autism spectrum, which defines the amount of support individuals with ASD need on a day-to-day basis. After receiving support or therapy, individuals on this end of the spectrum can blend into society with little to no additional difficulties.

However, the distinction of low to more severe autism vanishes with the recent claims President Trump has made regarding ASD. In a statement made ear-

lier this year, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. claimed that autism was an "epidemic" growing at an alarming rate, prompting the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to investigate the environmental causes of autism.

The mischaracterization of ASD by the current presidential administration has incited fear in Vasquez for how she and others like her may be perceived for having autism.

"I've been distraught on the amount of claims and the people supporting these claims without it being scientifically proven or medically confirmed," Vasquez said. "I don't want to be seen as different or someone with special needs. Autism comes in a variety [of forms]."

The claims made by the Trump administration have also concerned **Jessica Iwamoto**, a parent to a Branham student and a behavioral therapist for families with children on the spectrum. When she heard about the claims made by President Trump last month conflating the use of Tylenol during pregnancy with autism in children, she immediately worried about how this misinformation could affect pregnant women.

"I am very, very concerned about this," Iwamoto said. "If mothers decide not to take Tylenol because they're afraid their child is going to have autism, it could lead to other things during her pregnancy that are far more harmful than any Tylenol would have been."

For her, the Trump administration's claims about ASD hurt especially more as it impacts how families process their child being diagnosed.

"In many cases, the hardest thing for parents is to accept the reality of what their child's future might look like because of this autism diagnosis," Iwamoto said. "This diagnosis, while it's not a [life] sentence, sometimes parents can perceive it that way."

Now more than ever, Iwamoto fears consequences for how those claims can feed into misconceptions about people with autism and families with autistic children.

At Branham, battling misconceptions and prejudice around ASD has also been an issue for **Kahkiti Foyn**, a special education aide who provides support for students — many of whom have ASD — who require additional help during class.

"The people that are saying these things are trying to make it seem more harmful than it is," Foyn said. "It's been around forever. We just never had a name for it."

Foyn disliked the way the President and his administration characterized ASD negatively and used rhetoric that promotes fear rather than providing useful information.

"It almost feels like they've never experienced people with it, so they're just creating their own narrative and scaring the population," Foyn said. "It's not something to be feared."

SCIENCE & HEALTH BRIEFS



In Mexico, killer whales take down great white sharks

Drone recordings show killer whales, or orcas, attacking great white sharks and eating their nutrient-rich livers at the Gulf of California near Mexico. The killer whales flipped the sharks onto their backs to paralyze them, then ate their livers, leaving the rest of the body behind. The killer whales in Mexico targeted juvenile sharks, unlike orcas in South Africa that were observed to target larger great white sharks. Scientists predict that global warming is increasing the likelihood that orcas and great whites interact with each other due to changes in migration patterns, potentially increasing the likelihood of attacks again near Baja California.



Vaccine skepticism rises among pet owners

The number of anti-vaccine pet owners is growing, a phenomenon that has begun to affect the health and well-being of their animals. According to a 2023 survey, 52% of pet owners expressed concern about the safety, importance and efficacy of pet vaccination. While these fears are largely unfounded, declining rates of vaccinations will make more pets susceptible to leptospirosis and rabies, which can spread between people through bites and scratches. The rise in anti-vaccine sentiment among pet owners is attributed to vaccine skepticism that emanated from the Covid-19 pandemic, and has been perpetuated by online influencers and Secretary of Health Robert F. Kennedy Jr.



Possible link found between melatonin and heart failure

A recent observational study found a correlation between long-term use of melatonin supplements and heart failure. The study states that adults with chronic insomnia who took melatonin for a year or longer had a 90% higher change of heart failure over the five years that followed in comparison with similarly afflicted adults who did not take melatonin. Yet, this connection shouldn't be an immediate cause for worry. The study failed to prove a cause-and-effect relationship between supplements and heart failure and lacks peer reviewing. Despite this, doctors warn that melatonin supplements are not held to the same level of scrutiny as other drugs due to its classification as a dietary supplement, and some supplements may contain significantly more active ingredients than advertised, with potentially harmful effects.

—Compiled by Amelia Martorano, Emiliano Gonzalez and Emmett Spear with information from The New York Times and CNN

FATIGUE

Balance with burnout

Students struggle with burnout's effect on the body

AMELIA MARTORANO
Staff Writer

Stress, exhaustion, skipping a meal or two — these are all common symptoms of burnout in the average teenager. Burnout has increasingly become a physiological phenomenon among teens who are constantly pushing themselves toward success. According to a Bear Witness poll of 161 readers, 83% of students have experienced severe burnout.

According to the World Health Organization, burnout is an occupational phenomenon, included in the 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases. It is a result of unmanaged stress, leading to physical and mental exhaustion and a more negative attitude towards work.

According to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), increased competition and expectation within work and school environments leads people to overwork themselves to the point of burnout.

Senior **Lauren Quimby** says that college expectations continue to rise every year, increasing competition for students. The feeling of needing to achieve more leads students to sign up for too many things they are unable to manage.

"Nowadays getting into college is so hard. People have to keep adding more and more things so that they look impressive," Quimby said. "Then no one has time for anything."

In addition to college expectations, junior **Charlotte Homer** says that current conditions for teens, such as anxiety and social media culture, create even more pressure on students.

"We should have so much energy in youth, and it's really hard because burnout and all the expectations we take on and deal with are affected," Homer said, adding that she sees burnout often in her peers, and some experience depression because of it.

According to the Office of Population Affairs, teens are experiencing emotional development that is difficult to manage in a complex environment with expectations from parents and peers.

Biology and anatomy teacher **Ryan Matthews** says that teens become emotionally dependent on proving their identity in school performance and social life, causing them to push themselves to the point of burnout.

"In the teenage years, you're focusing on many different facets of life," Matthews said. "Then everything that you're focusing on is a really big stressor."

According to Matthews, the increase of cortisol released in the HPA Axis, the endocrine system that

regulates the body's stress response, leaves the body in constant fight or flight mode, driving a decreased appetite because of the overwhelming physical stress.

"We will actually push away fueling ourselves and will actively say, 'I'm not hungry right now because I need to deal with this,' because our body really can only digest when it's in a parasympathetic state," Matthews said.

According to the Physicians Associate Foundation, a poor diet and lack of nutrients can increase the likelihood of having difficulty regulating one's mood and lack of energy.

The physical impact of stress and lessened appetite can cause nausea and fatigue as well. Quimby mentions she drinks Red Bull often to cope with exhaustion.

"When I end up finally doing all the things that I need to get done, I'm exhausted and really sad," Quimby said. "Sometimes I just get really dizzy or tired. I just need to sit down."

Sophomore **Maya Seminiakin** recalls feeling numb and sick during burnout.

"I feel so drained, and I feel almost limp," Seminiakin said. "I'm just tired all the time."

Seminiakin says stress from burnout and having so much to do leads to a lack of motivation and procrastination.

"You feel so overwhelmed to the point where you just feel like you can't do anything instead of going at it step by step," Seminiakin said.

Similarly, Homer says burnout makes her feel mentally exhausted, making school and extracurriculars even harder.

"I feel so discouraged, and when I feel like I'm slipping or I have too many things to do, then I turn towards procrastination," Homer said.

Additionally, Seminiakin and Quimby say they have increasingly experienced migraines as a result of stress and exhaustion, impacting their ability to focus in school. Quimby explains that her migraines have increasingly been occurring due to having multiple AP classes and extracurriculars.

"It usually happens when I get really stressed out and [I'm] not getting enough sleep [or] not eating



Amelia Martorano/Bear Witness

enough," Quimby said.

Matthews says that the causes for burnout in students, such as social pressure and outside expectations, are much different than adults. The way teens cope with burnout now forms habits that will impact them later in life. Therefore, it's important to deal with burnout efficiently rather than continuously letting it impact the body.

"[Stressful events] take away a lot of energy from other systems," Matthews said. "So if you're at high levels of stress for a long period of time, that's going to put a heavy strain on your cells because they're constantly active."

As the cells in the body are strained and lose energy, the immune system and its cells are weakened, decreasing the body's ability to fight infection.

"That's typically why a student might run themselves in the ground getting ready for finals week, and then immediately after they get sick," Matthews said.

Like Matthews, Seminiakin expressed that getting through finals and finishing the semester is a time when burnout is the most prominent.

"At the end of the school year, I was so burnt out to the point where it was a struggle to just get out of bed. I just did not want to go to school and do any basic things," Seminiakin said.

According to Homer, dealing with burnout requires strength and focus, and it's important to pursue passions and actively work against the consequences of burnout despite setbacks.

"Every person is capable of achieving what they want to achieve in high school," Homer said. "You shouldn't feel discouraged from pursuing something just because of burnout."

ENGAGEMENT

FOOD REVIEWS

FOOD FRENZY

Students submit food reviews of restaurants around San Jose

Maya's Cafe
2616 Union Ave, San Jose, CA
95124
—**Emmett Spear** (11)

My meal at Maya's Cafe was wonderful, and I found the quality of the food offered to be of note. The banana soda, an unexpected contender, came out to be the highlight of my meal at Maya's Cafe. While not prepared in house itself, the flavor profile turned out to be outstanding; it combined a perfect level of sweetness with the taste of a circus peanut -- a delectable treat in of itself. So too did the baleada, a Honduran dish consisting of a tortilla with cheese, cream, and refried beans that turned out to be delectable. As someone who is not often a fan of dishes containing large amounts of cream and cheese, I was apprehensive, but the dish tasted like of a big warm hug. The arroz con leche was slightly watery but had a flavor profile much beyond that of a grocery store rice pudding. For my main dish I chose a Honduran specialty, the yucca con chicharrons, which did not pair up to the rest of the dishes I tried. It was undeniable that the dish was good as the chicharrons were cooked remarkably well and delectably at that. Instead, the grievance that I took away from this dish was its seeming lack of what I would call 'oomph.' The yucca

carried little in the way of flavor, as did the chicharrons, and I found the sauce to be rather lacking in flavor. While the dish was not bad or one that I could not eat, I found it to be one that I would pass over in the future due to its blandness, especially in comparison to other dishes I had at the cafe. Yet, Maya's Cafe is indeed deserving of at least 4 stars given that the dishes were wonderful and only held back by the yucca con chicharrons.

Pho Luc Lac
1705 Branham Ln Ste B3, San Jose,
CA 95118
—**Audrey Duncan** (12)

It is absolutely, hands down, the best pho I have ever had. It is the best pho in town, in my opinion. The flavor of the broth is one of my favorite parts, and the noodles are the most perfect consistency. They have amazing service and the food comes out super quick

even when they are at their busiest and all tables are full. All the employees are very kind. As someone who has tried lots of phos, this place has my favorite broth, noodles and meat. Sometimes I've had this pho three times in ONE WEEK. That's just how good it is.

The Cheesecake Factory
925 Blossom Hill Road, San Jose,
CA 95123
—**Sarah Osband** (12)

The Impossible Burger at The Cheesecake Factory was genuinely impressive for a plant-based option. The patty had a convincing texture, and my own family was concerned it was real meat. It didn't feel like a "substitute"; it felt like its own satisfying entrée. The only slight drawback was that the portion was small and the toppings didn't stay on for long, since they were too big for the patty. Solid 4 out of 5 stars.



Noa Muyal/Bear Witness

Vietnamese restaurant Pho Luc Lac on Branham Lane, subject of Duncan's review.

BRUIN ON THE STREET

What is your opinion on Taylor Swift's latest album, "The Life of a Showgirl"?

"I like it. It's pretty good. The lyrics are not as good as her other ones but the production is amazing. It's very much Sabrina Carpenter-influenced. My favorite is 'Elizabeth Taylor' and 'The Fate of Ophelia'; it actually kind of scratches an itch for me. I think that everyone should listen to it."

—**Brianna Zimmer** (12)

"Most of it is good. It's definitely not her best album, but it was still nice to listen to. It's not one of those albums that's deep, it's just fun. You can just dance to it without thinking about it or being sad. It definitely took a while to grow on me. But the more I played it, I liked it more."

—**Molly Alvares** (12)

"It has this attitude that's kind of different. It does feel a little repetitive and stale. Her past albums just felt more colorful and fun, and the new one's kind of just talking."

—**Aleah Schlachter** (11)

"I really like Taylor Swift. However, she's trying to be too much like Sabrina Carpenter and trying to have those little innuendos in her songs [as] a middle-aged woman. As much as I respect her and how she has grown in her career, I think that she's trying to appeal to an audience that doesn't quite agree with the things she's saying based on her age. There are some bops in the album. The album has really good music, but I think the lyrics need work."

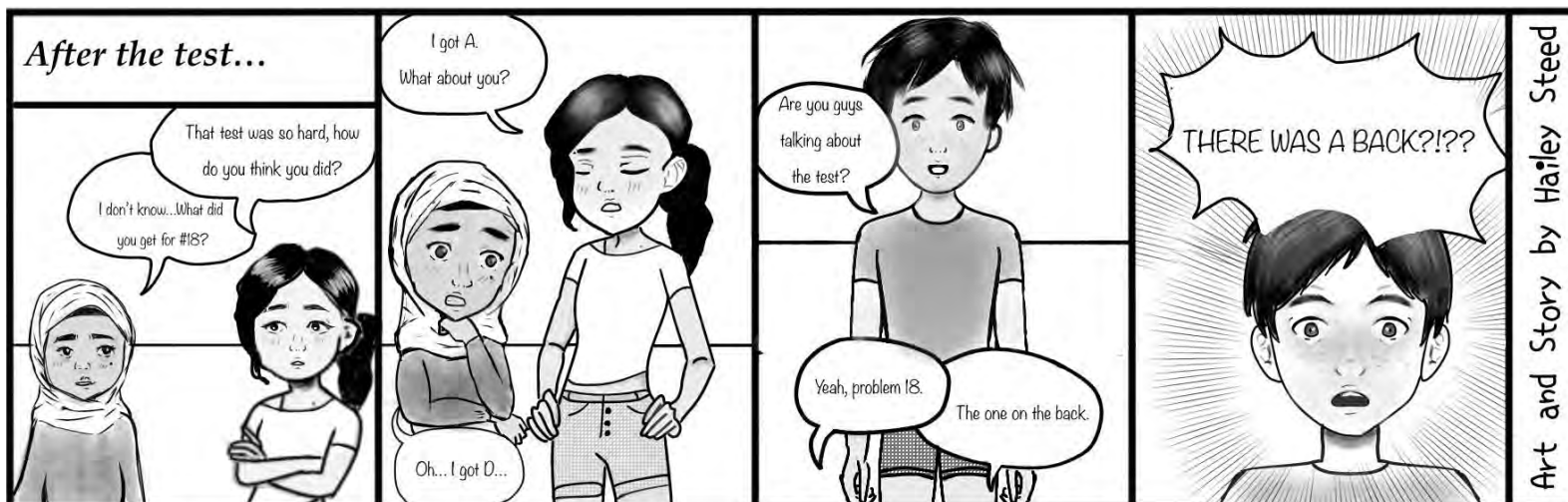
—**Ely Sowers** (11)

—*Compiled by Alyx Yoon*

THE FUNNIES

Comic feature

"Test Troubles" by Hailey Steed



COMPETITIONS

Night owls

Here are the student winners of our second photography contest



Ethan Tran/Special to Bear Witness

The Bruins stand for the anthem before their game against Lincoln High School.



Marcus Lyngar/Special to Bear Witness

Michael Murphy celebrates after scoring a touchdown against Lincoln High school during the Dig Pink game.



Irene Yoon/Special to Bear Witness

A taxi passes through the streets of Kyoto, illuminated by glowing signs.

—*Compiled by Dylan Collisson*

OPINION

CLASSWORK

DON'T DELETE, ERASE

Paper assignments are better than online assignments for learning

ENOCH SHIN
Staff Writer

High school students are exposed to various types of assignments due to different teaching methods, yet digital assignments seem to be becoming more common in middle and high schools. However, even with new developments in online educational platforms, paper assignments are better for learning than online assignments.

Students constantly have to keep track of if an assignment is on paper or online and take pictures of their paper assignments, which can often be confusing for students.

Although it is reasonable to understand that assignments will vary by teacher based on the courses and instruction methods employed by each teacher, paper assignments have many more benefits compared to online assignments.

Online assignments can be problematic due to the platforms that host them. From Oct. 19 to Oct. 20, Amazon Web Services had a system outage that affected many platforms including Canvas and AP Classroom. Due to this outage, students across the nation could not access their work online.

Education should not stop due to technical issues within a company. Outages like these, even when lasting one day, can keep classes from progressing with a topic. Especially with fast-paced classes such as AP or honors classes, students cannot have any type of delay. With paper assignments, outages would not pose an issue.

According to a study by the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in January 2024, the brain takes in more information while writing assignments and problems, with participants from the study taking in 98% of information while writing compared to the 67% of information they took in while typing.

This not only proves that writing is efficient for memory, but it can also be efficient in time management, with students not needing to review material as much due to longer-lasting memory of a certain topic.

Online homework can also distract students who need electronic devices to do assignments.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, over 50% of teenagers aged 12 to 17 years old have a screen time of 4 hours

and above, with the 15 to 17 year old demographic, the age where teens are starting and in high school, having the most screen time.

Students already face problems regarding online time management. When students associate screens with their education and entertainment, staying focused on online assignments can be hard.

Paper assignments are also always available for students. Students who have trouble accessing a strong Wi-Fi connection at home may struggle with researching and doing online assignments.

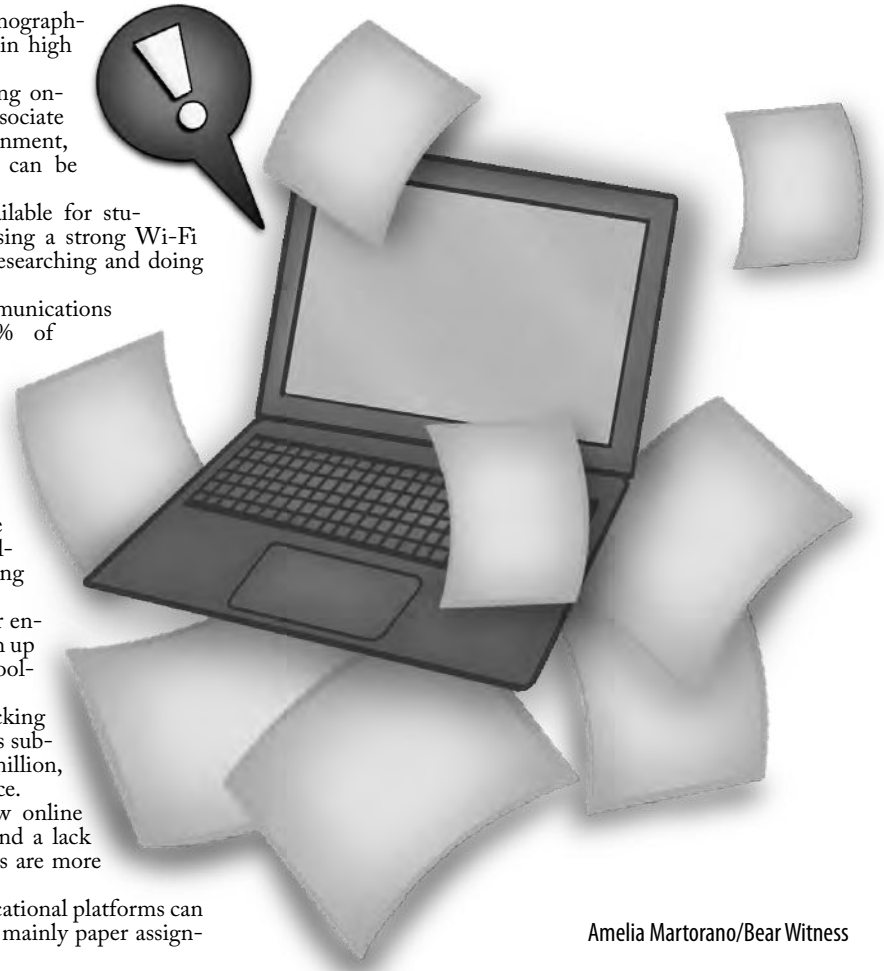
According to The National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 18% of households in the United States have trouble accessing Wi-Fi or the internet. This statistic also mostly includes minorities that have historically not had as many resources for education given to them, such as the African American community. Having paper assignments allow students to interact with the same material and content without the possibility of unstable access to the internet among students.

Online assignments also create an easier environment for students to cheat and search up answers from past students for their schoolwork.

According to Turnitin, a plagiarism checking platform, one out of every 10 assignments submitted to their platform, totaling 200 million, has been caught using artificial intelligence.

Due to the rise of generative AI, new online cheating methods, possible shutdowns and a lack of focus on the screen, paper assignments are more reliable than online assignments.

Although the accessibility of online educational platforms can help some students, teachers should give mainly paper assignments.



Amelia Martorano/Bear Witness

ACADEMIC OPPORTUNITY

Unlocking academic potential

Branham and CUHSD need to offer more AP and Honors courses to challenge students

REBECCA TOCHILNIKOV
Staff Writer

Branham offers 19 Advanced Placement (AP) and five honors courses, a significantly lower amount than other schools like Palo Alto High School, which offers 26 AP and 31 honors courses. The number of advanced classes should be increased to enhance the CUHSD's range of curriculum.

According to the 2025-2026 CUHSD course catalog, English 2 Honors, Computer Programming JAVA, Data Structures & Algorithms, Software Engineering and Korean 4 Honors are the honors courses that Branham currently offers. Additionally, other schools in CUHSD — including Westmont, Prospect and Leigh — also have a limited array of honors courses, with Westmont offering 4 honors courses and Prospect and Leigh each offering six honors courses.

Honors courses are a bridge between an on-level class and a college course and can help prepare students for AP courses. Students going straight from an on-level class to an AP or college course may struggle without honor classes as a transition. Offering more honors classes would help students build stronger study habits, critical thinking skills and confidence before transitioning into harder, faster-paced courses.

According to the Center for Studies in Higher Education, the limited availability of honors courses not only affects students' immediate academic experiences but also causes implications for college admissions. This makes it harder for students to stand out among peers from schools with more opportunities as colleges are looking for students who challenge themselves.

This gap in academic opportunities extends beyond honors courses and into AP offerings, as the district's limited selection of AP classes further resists students' academic development.

Branham offers fewer than half of the College Board's 41 AP classes. According to a study describing limiting factors of on-level courses by the University of California, Berkeley, gaps in understanding, uninspired teachers and restricted learning opportunities can later impact students' abilities to challenge themselves to a further level and cause academic gaps in their education when they advance to college.

Within CUHSD, Westmont offers 20 AP courses, Prospect

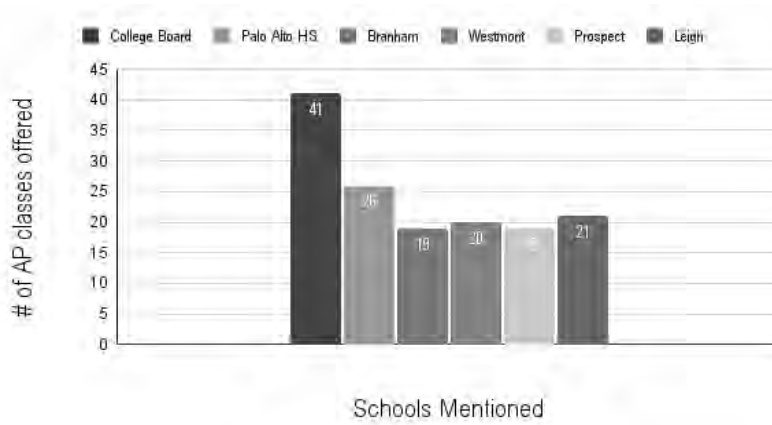
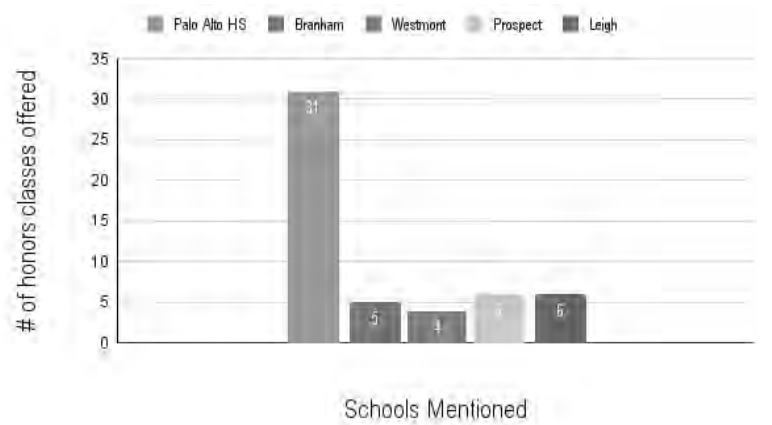
offers 19 AP courses, and Leigh offers 21 AP courses — similar ranges that represent only a fraction of the APs available. Increasing AP options across the district would promote greater academic equity, ensuring that all students have access to advanced learning opportunities regardless of their school.

According to the National Society of High School Scholars, preparing for college is one of the most important parts of high school; it is what the district prepares students for. However, according to Branham's mission statement, the school aims to develop students' confidence levels and prepare them for their future, even if it's not college. AP courses help build specific skills to gain academic confidence and intelligence, preparing them for a successful future, even if it does not mean going to college.

Despite Branham's attempts to expand APs by originally offering 22 courses for the 2025-2026 school year, AP Studio Art: 3-D Design, AP Computer Science A and AP Computer Science Principles were cut due to a lack of student enrollment.

Limited honors course options can also affect students' readiness for AP course rigor. This can affect students' chances of being admitted to a competitive college.

Expanding AP and Honor availability would allow students to engage in more challenging coursework, promoting further excellence within CUHSD and giving students like myself more confidence in being admitted to a college of their choice. The district should ensure that every student has an equal chance to excel in college and beyond.



BITE-SIZED OPINIONS

Minor problems, minor solutions

Problem: Around the school, there are barely any trees and plants, and if there are, they are super generic.
Solution: Add exotic and large trees and plants in the middle of every room that are bright and colorful in order to create a rainforest-like school environment.
—Emiliano Gonzalez

Problem: There isn't enough time at night for me to catch up on sleep
Solution: School starting time can be flexible. School should start after everyone wakes up, no matter what time.
—Anya Gupta

Problem: Nobody knows how to express themselves without saying the word "cooked" anymore (myself included), and we all sound dumb!
Solution: Introduce a new unit in all English classes about how to eloquently articulate our collective sense of frustration and hopelessness.
—Elliott Yau

Problem: Too many people push their way through the lunch line, and it gets so violent.
Solution: Install traffic lights in the lunch line to manage the crowd.
—Emmett Spear

Problem: People start decorating for Christmas and listening to Christmas music on Nov. 1, completely skipping over Thanksgiving!
Solution: We should write a Thanksgiving song and put up turkey decorations!
—Catherine Carter

ROADWORK

Ridiculous roadwork

Road disruptions are a common source of the most passionate drivers' road rage, and a pet peeve to the average driver, but despite who the driver is, they are unlikely to enjoy disruptions to their drive.

This past month, roads were repaved and repainted on and around Meridian Avenue this past month, restricting traffic movement. What should have been a quick process turned into a weeks-long ordeal, disrupting both students and staff.

During the two to three week working period, lanes were outlined with various chalk markings, all contradicting each other. These hazardous lines brought out the worst drivers in the dumbest people. People drove in whatever lanes

Editorial

The opinion of the Bear Witness editors

benefited them at the highest speeds possible.

Common sense was completely thrown out the window. Drivers need to be retested on their driving skills every two years once they reach the age of 35. The bar for stupidity has reached an all-time low.

But it's important to remember that what may be an inconvenience for a few weeks could end

up saving lives in the long run.

Despite the long-lasting disruptions, Branham students will ultimately benefit from the situation as new lines were painted, bike lanes were added, higher-visibility crosswalks were painted, and speed radars were installed.

The right lanes used to be wider than the left. However, now, part of the right lane has turned into a new bike lane.

This is thanks to San Jose's Project Vision Zero, an initiative seeking to help the community around Branham in numerous ways, ensuring safety for students and helping less experienced teen drivers navigate the road more easily.

Because these changes are at the forefront of conversation, it is a gentle reminder to be cau-

tious when driving, especially near schools.

There is a long history of vehicular accidents on Meridian Avenue, with a lot of them taking place near Branham. There have even been Branham students who have been involved in accidents, which shows the need for change despite any drawbacks.

Though the changes on Meridian Avenue may be annoying for some drivers, as time goes on, evidence of the Project Zero initiative saving lives will make the annoyances worth the change.

SUPER BOWL

BUNNY IN THE BOWL

Bad Bunny is the best person to perform at the Super Bowl LX halftime show

REESE RICHARD
Staff Writer

The Super Bowl halftime show is one of the most anticipated performances in the United States every year. Last year's halftime show reached 133.5 million viewers, according to Billboard. As the nation continues to be divided on the increase in ICE raids, the 2025 Super Bowl halftime show is the best platform for the artist Bad Bunny to make a political statement.

When Bad Bunny performs at Super Bowl LX, it can be more than just a concert. Bad Bunny intends to make a strong statement that unites, inspires and represents the people of the United States. "What I'm feeling goes beyond myself," Bad Bunny said in a statement on the NFL website announcing his performance. "It's for those who came before me and ran countless yards so I could come in and score a touchdown. This is for my people, my culture, and our history."

In a crucial time when Latinx communities are facing political tension and real-life threats of deportation, the Puerto Rican superstar's presence at the Super Bowl is more than just inspiring — it is a statement. In a statement published on the NFL website, he said, "Ve y dile a tu abuela, que seremos el HALFTIME SHOW DEL SUPER BOWL," meaning "Tell your grandmother, we're going to be the Super Bowl halftime show."

The announcement of Bad Bunny's performance has already caused controversy, with some people calling for a different performer that promotes "American values." The organization Turning Point USA announced its first "All American Halftime Show" to run during Bad Bunny's performance. With a conservative organization announcing its own halftime show, it's almost like the organization is trying to take attention away from Bad Bunny. The comparison could not be more stark, with one artist telling his people to enjoy themselves and an opposing organization reasserting a different version by saying their show will be full of "American Values."

At a time when artists are often asked to play it safe in the public eye to avoid being cancelled before the super bowl, Bad Bunny chooses to do the complete opposite. On Saturday Night Live, he cut to the point and discussed the criticism of his halftime show spot. Bad Bunny also addressed the ongoing rumors of why he has not yet performed in the U.S.

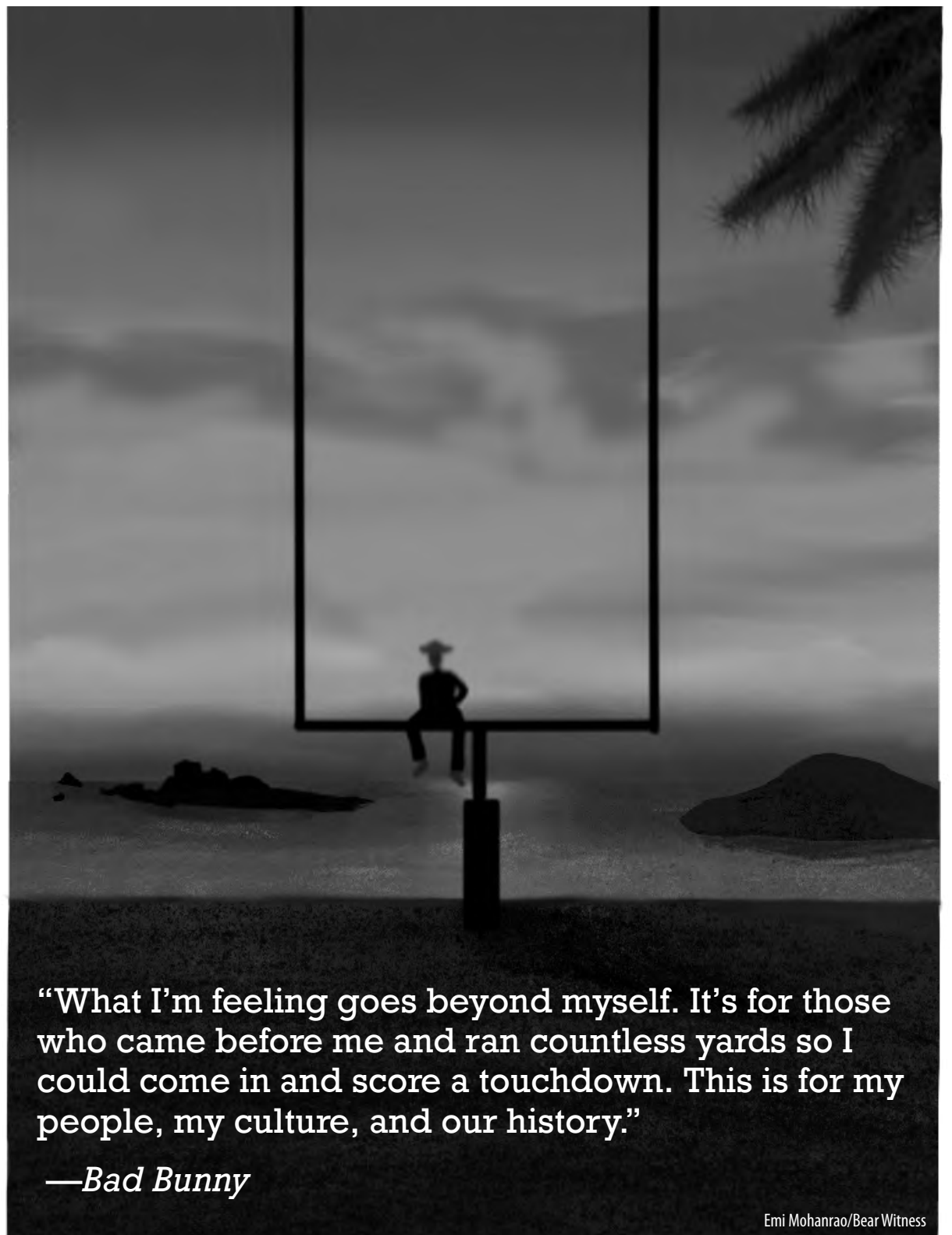
In an interview on CNN, Bad Bunny said, "There were many reasons why I didn't perform in the U.S, but none of them were out of hate. All of the [past shows] have been successful. All of them have been magnificent. I've enjoyed connecting with Latinos who have been living in the U.S."

Instead of celebrating the visibility of one of the most globally recognized Latin artists of this generation, some of America rejects him. It is crucial for Bad Bunny to perform this year specifically because of how Americans treat their fellow citizens with disrespect. If Bad Bunny was Caucasian, would this be a different story? Definitely.

"What [Bad Bunny] has done and continues to do for Puerto Rico is truly inspiring," Jay-Z said in a statement as the CEO of Roc Nation, the company producing the halftime show.

There is no question that the Halftime Show will pull extraordinary numbers in viewership, but numbers aren't exactly the point; instead, representation and symbolism are. Putting a proud Puerto Rican artist on the Super Bowl stage after ICE raids, travel fears and ongoing culture wars is refreshing.

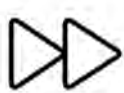
In a year filled with political division, Bad Bunny reflects America more than what people are criticizing him for. Bad Bunny is not just going to the Super Bowl with music. He is a mirror for America, which reflects diversity, pride and resistance.



"What I'm feeling goes beyond myself. It's for those who came before me and ran countless yards so I could come in and score a touchdown. This is for my people, my culture, and our history."

—Bad Bunny

Emi Mohanrao/Bear Witness



Problem: I hate when people take forever to get to their point when they're telling a story.
Solution: Create a fast-forward remote that speeds up people's talking speed.

—Noa Muyal



Problem: School days are too long, I am so tired by the end of the day.
Solution: Make all school days optional. If you are feeling really tired, you won't have to go to school!

—Aryella Finkel-Hozer



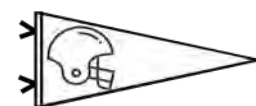
Problem: Having different temperatures in every classroom makes it impossible to pick the right clothes to wear for school.
Solution: Make every class set temperatures at around 70 degrees — except for last period classes, which should blast the AC.

—Sienna Moss



Problem: There are too many clubs on campus, and it is hard to decide which ones to join.
Solution: Make a club dedicated to deciding which clubs to join. From there you should be able to decide.

—Hailey Steed



Problem: I don't like it when teachers have a favorite sports team and put banners and posters of them on the walls of their classrooms.
Solution: Posters of sports affiliation should be banned at school as they are offensive to students like me.

—Colin Kalanges



Problem: People who text "K" instead of "Okay" bother me because that feels abrupt and dismissive.
Solution: Install a mandatory "K" filter on all smartphones that automatically transforms "K" into animated GIFs of polite, nodding gentlemen.

—Yeonwoo Oh

THE BACKPAGE

FALL A Slice of Life



With fall vibes at their peak, Bruins share their favorite ways to celebrate the season.

—Compiled by Yujin Cho, Abigail Medeiros and Hailey Steed
Illustrations by Kailey Fu

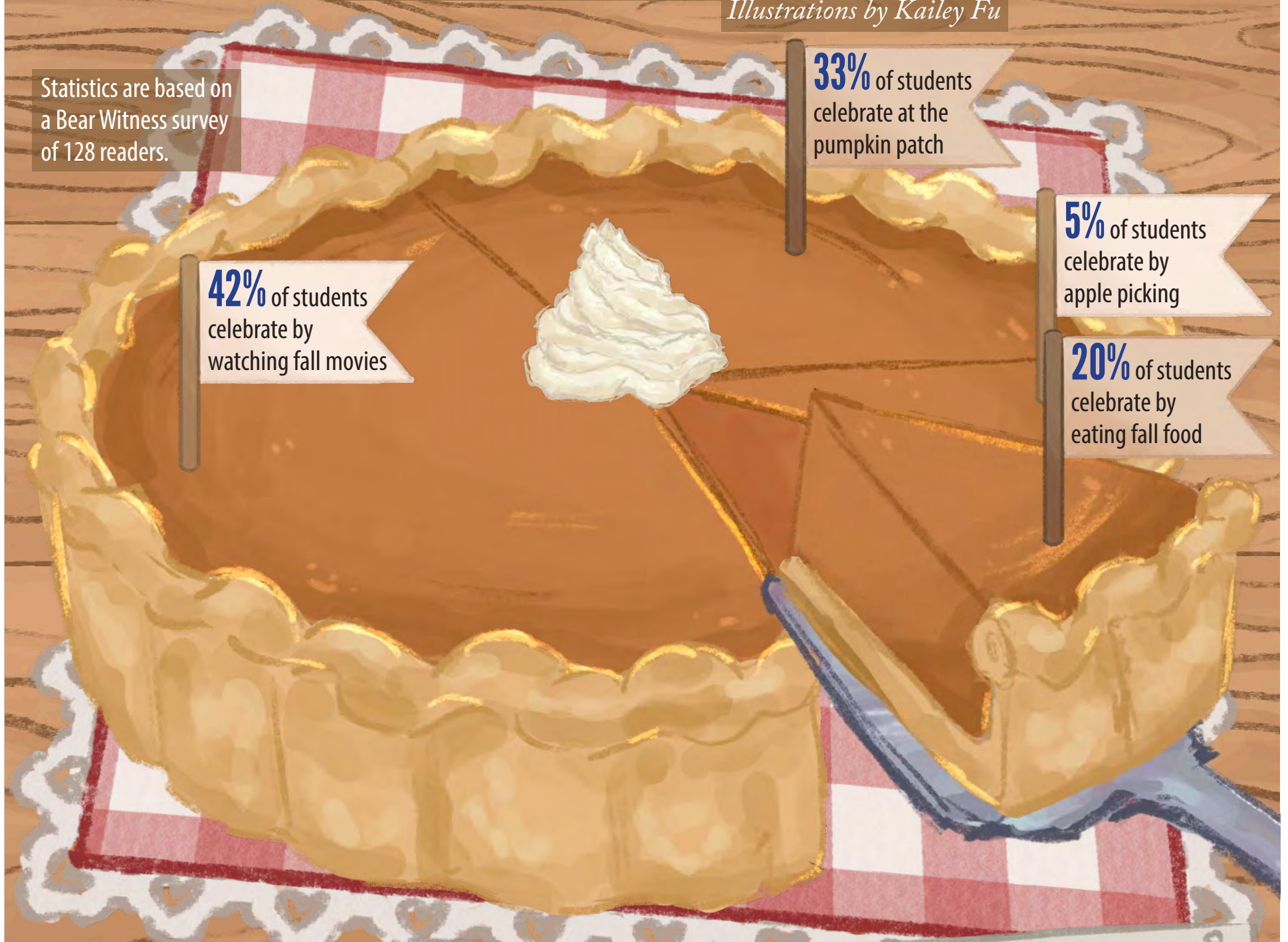
Statistics are based on a Bear Witness survey of 128 readers.

33% of students celebrate at the pumpkin patch

42% of students celebrate by watching fall movies

5% of students celebrate by apple picking

20% of students celebrate by eating fall food



“I usually stock up on sweaters, jackets and fall clothing. I really like dressing up for fall because **it’s such a nice season to express yourself.**”
Sanviti Amarnath (11)

“I like to hang out with family, friends [and] loved ones. The activities are fun, but **hanging out with people is really the highlight.**”
Jack Madronio (9)

“**My whole family gets together at my grandparents’ house,** and we all carve pumpkins and have a big dinner.”
Taylor King (11)

“I like to do seasonal stuff. For example, **go to Starbucks and get the seasonal drinks,** go to pumpkin patches or cook a lot of seasonal food including pumpkin.”
Natalia Ponce De Leon (9)