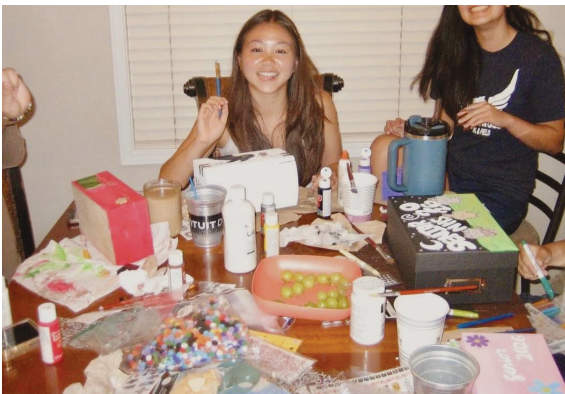


Editors Column

Senior Year Sleepover: “Studying” Until 4 A.M.



Audrey Park
Grade 12
Northwood High School



Soon after the dinner table was cleared of lunch, we got our hands busy working on senior boxes.
[Source: Author, Audrey Park]



During the Senior Sleepover, one of the activities that took a large chunk of time was making personalized senior boxes.
[Source: Author, Audrey Park]

As my friends and I were awoken by our obnoxious alarms, the truth slowly set in: this would be the final school year to hear the annoying jingles and breeze through morning rituals as high school students. Shifting in the air mattresses, my friends and I, members of the Class of 2026, reminisced about how we made senior boxes, drew on senior shirts, and played a variety of group games the night before. Later in the morning, we would fondly talk about the activities over lightly burnt pancakes and cereal.

This year, I am a senior at

Northwood High School. In front of my friends, I still act like an unsupervised freshman. In the eyes of my teachers, I demonstrate capabilities that exceed standards. To my parents, I’ve simply never grown up. Given all these perspectives, I’m left as speechless as my elementary school self would have been when imagining this milestone.

I’m not alone in these feelings, however, as my friends also share fragments of the same thoughts. As a result, we decided to hold a sleepover at my house a few weeks before our first day of senior year, to collectively pro-

cess what these next few months would have in store for us while surrounded by sugary drinks and boxes littered with juvenile stickers. Days prior, we compiled a list of activities we would engage in: personally curated slideshow presentations, video game sessions, Uno: No Mercy, and shared skincare routines. Despite this extensive preparation, the actual day of the sleepover held many surprises for the group.

For one thing, we breezed through lunch and the presentations quicker than expected, miscalculating how slow some of the other activities would be. By 4:30

PM, we started our senior boxes. The dinner table was cleared to welcome the presence of the stickers, paint, Mod Podge, and brushes we brought. Our boxes would hold lots of senior year memorabilia and written messages, acting as a time capsule. The outside would boast this fact through text that read “Senior @ Northwood, 2026” or “Class of 2026 at Northwood.” These decorations took three hours to prepare, ending the activity near 8:00 PM.

Despite this huge block of time devoted to one project, this didn’t discourage us from completing the other listed elements. After a quick snack, we busied ourselves with various games, saving senior shirts and skincare routines as a late-night activity. After check marks filled each box on our list, it was 4:00 AM. We had broken trust through the merciless rounds of card games. We had practiced undisturbed concentration when sewing patches onto our shirts. We had bonded over toner pads and face masks late into the night.

In those late-night moments, we weren’t just preparing for senior year. We were already living it.

Student Reporter

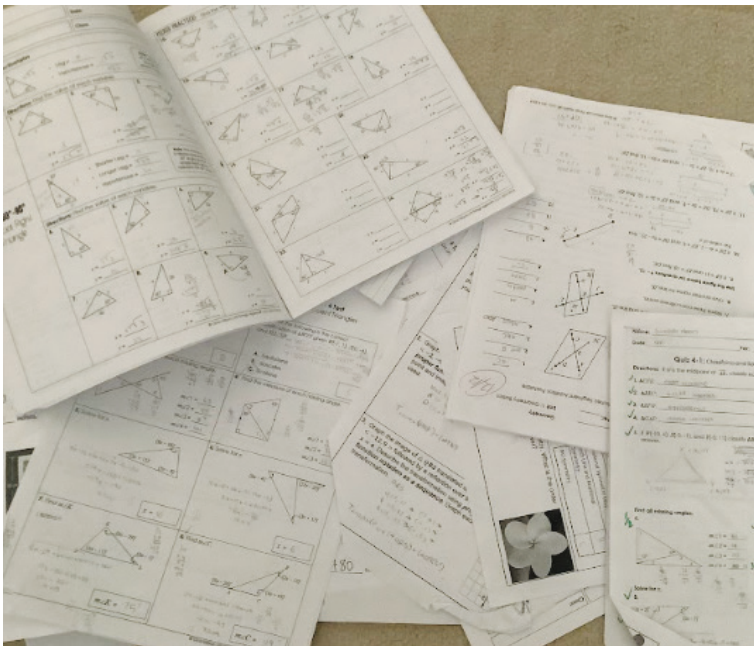
STA - An Academic Preparation for High School



Summer Moon
Grade 9
Granada Hills Charter High School

With the new school year around the corner, there are ways to prepare yourself for the upcoming academics you will encounter. In Granada Hills Charter High School, the largest charter school in the U.S., there is a mandatory event for rising freshmen to attend. STA, or Summer Transition Academy, is a graduation requirement where students come together for 3 weeks to warm up on their scholarly activities.

There are two classes, English language arts and math, spanning two hours each. Classmates are put into cohorts to familiarize peers from different middle schools. Additionally, enrichment assemblies are provided, resulting in an opportunity for students to bond and reflect with one another. These gatherings all revolve around the core topic of community. The first assembly embodies communication. Volunteers in the crowd are selected to participate in a balloon popping activity, where students practice teamwork and sportsmanship to pop the most balloons. On the other hand, the last assembly talks about Rachel’s Challenge, a nationwide advocacy about school violence. We learned how the organization was founded to memorialize Rachel Joy Scott, a



A pile of geometry packets throughout the six-week course, emphasizing the number of math problems students had to work on.
[Source: Author, Summer Moon]

victim of the Columbine school shooting, along with others who had the same experience. Before her passing, she was inspirational, illustrating her passions through multiple journals. She aspired for others to be kind to strangers, projecting understanding and care to those who are struggling.

Before summer break, students had the choice to attend accelerated algebra or geometry, adding 3 extra weeks of math with 2 more hours of school during STA. After a quick placement test, only a small percentage are recommended for classes, resulting in a useful academic boost.

I had the opportunity to learn

geometry over the summer; the entire course being reviewed over 6 weeks. As I walked into the classroom on the first day of math, the atmosphere was awkward. Some students nervously shifted their positions, and others started chattering loudly with their friends from middle school. The teacher introduced himself and immediately began to teach us the basic topics of the unit. I eyed my friend and swallowed hard. This was going to be difficult.

The workload was immense. We crammed two units of math per week, resulting in two quizzes and two chapter tests within 5 days. Hours passed, my mechanical pencil resiliently scribbling formulas, graphs, and shapes, mumbles of confusion erupting throughout the classroom. Packets and worksheets filled my backpack, weighing me down as I heaved it over my shoulder. I recall days when all-nighters were frequent, frantically scrambling to study before passing out from exhaustion. This experience was extremely tedious; however, it was a core part of my upcoming journey into high school.

STA assisted me in strengthening my cooperation, teamwork, and my overall academic knowledge.

Student Reporter

Lighting Growth and Empowerment at CASC



Emily Lee
Grade 11
Sunny Hills High School

This summer, I stepped into a role that pushed me far beyond my comfort zone: serving as a counselor intern at the California Association of Student Councils [CASC] summer leadership conference.

I had attended this camp as a delegate two years in a row, always leaving more confident and less introverted than I started. CASC was a place where I could grow freely and feel inspired. This time, however, I was to provide that same experience for others. The thought of leading high schoolers by myself for a week was pressuring, and it weighed heavily on me as the camp approached.

The first day of CASC was the most difficult. Counselors sang and danced to energizers in the middle of a massive circle formed by the nearly 200 delegates, which intimidated me as someone not used to leading large groups. Later, I met my seven delegates and led their first council session. That session was my first time teaching them the leadership-building curriculum, and it was nerve-racking because I not only had to explain thor-

oughly, but I also had to ensure that I was embodying what I was teaching. Despite these early challenges, fellow counselors, as well as gammas, who are in charge of counselors, walked me through the curriculum beforehand, allowing me to build confidence in my presentations. They taught me that leadership develops through collaboration and support, not isolation.

From then on, the week became smoother. The curriculum sessions began to flow more naturally, and I realized that my job was less about perfection and more about helping my delegates feel capable and valued. They learned the components of a strong leader and how to utilize those skills to positively impact their community from council groups; they engaged in team-bonding games like tower building in cluster groups (some council groups combined); and they heard from motivational speakers and watched the inspiring I Am Greta film in general sessions.

Watching all of the delegates open up in group discussions, share personal stories, and challenge each other’s perspectives



Author Emily Lee (left), wearing her CASC staff t-shirt, stands and smiles with other counselors during a cluster group.
[Source: CASC]

filled me with joy. It showed me that to foster leadership, I have to create safe, open spaces for others. One of the most memorable moments was the candlelight ceremony on the final night. Holding a candle, I stood among counselors and delegates and reflected on the week’s growth and the friendships built. I had entered camp unsure of myself, but I left with a sense of confidence, inde-

pendence, and connection.

Overall, the CASC summer leadership conference pushed me in ways I never expected. It forced me to step up and face my doubts. Most importantly, I learned that leadership is not about being fearless, but about moving forward despite fear. This, along with the friendships and memories I made, is something I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

Student Reporter

KCON LA Celebrates Culture and Community



Caroline Lee
Grade 12
Beverly Hills High School



Hoshi X Woozi (HxW), a sub-unit of K-pop boy-group Seventeen, performs songs like “ECHO!” for KCON Day 3, August 3, 2025.
[Source: Author, Caroline Lee]

Held from August 1 to August 3, this year’s KCON LA introduced 37 different artists throughout the event. KCON LA, often taking place at Crypto.com Aarena and the LA Convention Center, is an annual summer convention that invites all K-pop fans to celebrate Korean culture and enter-

tainment. By inviting a plethora of artists, whether they be rising rookies or seasoned professionals, this event gives American fans a chance to meet their favorite singers and connect with fellow fans. Each day started at the LA Convention Center, where partici-

pants would venture into the halls and partake in different activities. Partnered this year with Olive Young, a prominent beauty retailer in Korea, many rushed in to try different products exclusive to the pop-up. Many other K-beauty companies introduced their products and offered samples. Other events included the dance stage, an event where fans could partake in a random play dance, or rush to dance to their favorite songs. Also, there were many photo opportunities, especially with featured photo booths and interactive raffles, one being the Asiana Airlines-sponsored ticket raffle to South Korea. Alongside my friends, we ventured outside to buy albums from vendors and saw opportunities to write messages to certain K-pop groups. Within the convection center, the X Stage introduced the crowd to freshly debuted artists, like HITGS and ifeye, who covered various well-known songs to unite different fans. The artist stage, however, generally featured more established artists, including HXASA and Roy Kim, and gave fans a more intimate concert-like experience. The MCOUNTDOWN Stage, also known as the main stage, took place at night and allowed artists to showcase their intricate

dances and perform three to five songs. Each night, one new group was selected to cover a popular song for the K-pop Generation Stage, with artists like JO1 covering Seventeen’s “Fear” on Day 2 and MEOVV covering Brown Eyed Girls’ “Abracadabra” for Day 3. Many also took this opportunity to reveal future plans, with artists like KEY and Jackson Wang announcing their American tour, and groups Kep1er and NEW-BEAT teasing their new songs. As performances continued, some became intrigued by new groups, while others, like my friends, waited anxiously for their favorite artists. As fan favorites appeared, audience members fervently screamed the lyrics while swinging their lightsticks—and some even seemed to hold back tears. With the ending performers, like NCT 127, Monsta X, and HxW, there was also an opportunity for fans to stand on the big stage and dance alongside K-pop idols through the Dream Stage, an audition-based experience, where people are selected on the day-of to perform with these established artists. As the concert came to an end, all of the singers came out to greet the audience and left many, including myself, excited for next year’s KCON.

Student Reporter

Figuring It Out: One Student’s Journey



Yebin Lee
Grade 11
Bergen County Academies



Kacey Lee, a college student pursuing PharmD, shared her summer experience of working at a pharmacy and how to pick the path that is right for you.
[Source: Author, Kacey Lee]

What will my future look like?—This is an unresolved question many students often ponder, but no one seems to have a clear answer. For those eager to preview the next chapter of their lives, Kacey kindly invites us to her summer as a college student pur-

suing a PharmD at Rutgers University. Her journey leading up to mastering the rigors of PharmD provides a lingering insight into choosing the right career path. On July 13th, despite her demanding schedule, Kacey generously made time to share her experience at a

cafe near the Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy. First, when asked what her summer schedule looks like, Kacey answers, “I am currently working in a CVS Pharmacy as a technician, so it really depends on my work schedule, which changes every week. Typically, on weekdays, I start my day at 9 AM at CVS and work until 5 PM. After I work at CVS, I also tutor high school students from 8 PM to 10 PM.” Although working long hours at CVS is physically exhausting, to her, the opportunity to work in her desired field excites her. Not only that, but the chance to meet the professionals who have already taken the rigorous path of becoming a pharmacist motivates her further: “I’m glad to have my work crew at CVS. They are all my mentors! They always try to help me with important decisions I have to make for my future career. I wish I could carry on these relationships even after I leave at the end of the summer.” When asked what concerns she has as a college student, she replied, “I still am not sure what exactly I want to do and what I should do after I graduate from college. This has been my concern

since high school. I haven’t been able to break free from this loop of uncertainty.” Further, she shares her advice to high school students struggling to choose their future career: “I chose Pharmacy because I thought it was an easy way to escape from all the surrounding pressure that kept chasing me to decide on one, straight career path. But it was only the beginning of the journey. Right now, I have to decide whether I want to work at a pharmaceutical company or in a pharmacy, whether I want to be a researcher or a pharmaceutical businessman, whether I want to continue the six-year program or take a different course, and more. See, it’s an endless battle between yourself. I think the best way to handle this is to know yourself better. Listen to the voice coming deep down from your genuine heart.” To those investigating what path will fit the best, Kacey’s message makes it clear: let your heart be the compass, nothing else. When surrounded by a world where we often feel pressured to choose the “right” path, remember her story, which holds the key to surmounting the everlasting bout.

Student Reporter

Orange County Leadership Summer Camp



Ellie Kim
Grade 10
Portola High School

Now in its 63rd year, Orange County Leadership (OCL) has become one of the most expansive and established summer leadership programs in the US. Participants are from all around Orange County, California: elected and appointed ASB members from 36 participating OC schools are eligible to attend this event-packed and exciting 4-day residential leadership program at UC Santa Barbara (UCSB). The first night, after my school group arrived at the UCSB campus, we received our dorm keys and took a group photo. Then, we played our first round of volleyball. At OCL, each school participates in a volleyball match, just one of the many team bonding games for which prizes are given out on the last day. Although we lost our first match, the winning schools would keep playing against other winning teams until first, second, and third places were determined. After dinner on that day was the first pep rally. Taking place in UCSB’s enormous gymnasium, the opening ceremonies began with representatives from each school marching out with their school flags. This one moment summarized my entire OCL ex-

perience. What made OCL so unique was that there was never a moment of silence. For example, we were constantly cheering—whether it be a coordinated chant rallying up school spirit or just random screaming and whooping at games. We were constantly encouraged to be loud, not only to cheer someone on, but even while everyone waited for the opening ceremony to begin. My ears rang with the thunder of hundreds of voices and the deafening pounding of thousands of feet stomping vigorously on the bleachers. The next two days followed a busy schedule with two activities between each meal. The morning was spent together with each group’s own school, attending various conferences and activities. At a SLAM conference, representatives from each school gathered in one of UCSB’s theater rooms to present one unique activity in their ASB plans, all in under three minutes. Some of the other workshops were job-specific. For example, as service projects commissioner, I attended a workshop where an ASB advisor spoke about how her school planned a philanthropy project aimed at giving back to students from lower-income families with-



Decked out in their school color, Portola High School’s ASB gathers together for their OCL group picture!
[Source: Author, Ellie Kim]

in their school community. After dinner, a dance followed the routine pep rally. With a new dress-up theme every night, from 8:30 to 10:30, a small outdoor area on campus was transformed into a lively space with booming music, lights, and hundreds of students coming together. Even though my feet ached, my ears were ringing, and I was exhausted afterwards, it was worth the excitement and energy-filled experience. The final day concluded after breakfast and our last pep ral-

ly-closing ceremony—where the awards were presented for the talent show, volleyball games, and other team-building activities. To say OCL bonded ASB members would be an understatement. Spending four days competing, celebrating, and growing together built a level of trust and friendship that made everyone feel like family. The memories and relationships cultivated through OCL made us stronger leaders, so that we can overall create a more connected and spirited school community.