

## Editors Column

## Irvine USD Science Fair &amp; Competition Tips



**Yejoon Choi**  
Grade 11  
Northwood High School



The Award Ceremony of the Irvine Science Fair. At this fair with hundreds of participants, many brilliant innovations were showcased during the ceremony. [Source: Author, Yejoon Choi]

The 45th Annual IUSD Science Fair has officially concluded, and the finalists have been moved up to compete in the 71st Annual Orange County Science and Engineering Fair. As a school district and countywide event, it brought together countless innovative minds to make new scientific dis-

coveries and develop novel inventions. However, although there were many finalists who made it to the awards ceremony in celebration, there were still hundreds of contestants who had failed under the pressure of the workload required in a formal scientific experiment. As I competed in this

year's science fair and placed as a finalist, I will detail my experience and share advice on competing in these programs in the hopes of assisting potential contestants for the science fair.

During the scientific process, there are many pitfalls that one must watch out for. The first and most important piece of advice is to stay informed about the science fair and the organization hosting it. Although being knowledgeable about the subject related to your experiments is important, it is essential to follow the precise guidelines and rules of the science fair to ensure project completion. In fact, many of my peers failed their first projects before they could even begin, either by missing the registration deadline or not realizing a critical documented rule. It is imperative not to underestimate this process but instead to develop a firm understanding of the science fair program that you are competing in.

Secondly, it is important to keep a detailed log and notebook for your experiment, including background research, lab equipment, and the data collected. It is usually acceptable to keep a digital notebook as well if it is easier to hold information that way. When taking these notes, it

is important to set essential parameters you will use as per your conclusion. I've had experiments delayed and weeks' worth of data rendered useless because I didn't keep a documentable log of useful information. In a competition with a set deadline like the science fair, it is imperative to avoid mistakes like these so that more time can be spent refining one's conclusions, data results, and presentation of the experiment.

Specifically for the IUSD Science Fair, contestants were called up to an interview after submitting their projects. This interviewer asks about the project's whole process and how you, as a scientist, came up with the idea for this new innovation. The interview is just as important as the abstract and general research article you write, and I advise preparing a general script and flow for the interview to answer the questions asked. This way, you are prepared and have practiced, in case you get nervous.

The IUSD Science Fair was an exciting opportunity to explore the scientific process, and I hope that with these advices, many other students can enjoy science fairs as well. If you are interested, talk to your school or check it out online, as it's never too early to start preparing.

## Student Reporter

## A Week as a Junior Defender



**Yale Lee**  
Grade 9  
Science Academy  
STEM Magnet

The first time walking into a courtroom, I expected dramatic speeches and emotional witness testimonies, just like what I've seen in the shows and movies. However, by attending the Los Angeles Public Defender's Junior Defender Program, I was able to see the reality of how our court system truly operates and received a firsthand look into the role of a public defender in our justice system. This allowed me to witness the sheer amount of effort, procedure, and time that a public defender dedicates to each of the many cases they handle.

I attended the week-long Junior Defender Program at the Clara Shortridge Foltz Criminal Justice Center in Downtown LA during my winter break. Throughout the session, one of the experiences I was able to participate in was a mock trial, where I worked alongside other high school students acting as public defenders who were presenting our client's case to a "jury" (who were actually just employees at the public defender's office). With guidance from the public defenders in the office, we learned how to frame the sto-



The Los Angeles City Hall, located in Downtown Los Angeles, was where students in the Junior Defender Program spent part of their winter break. [Source: Author, Yale Lee]

ry to persuade a jury, tactics often used during cross-examination, and factors you should consider during jury selection. And by working as a group, formulating our opening and closing statements, interviewing the client, and cross-examining the witness-

es, we were allowed the ability to step into the shoes of a public defender advocating for our client, just like we were in court.

Another opportunity provided by the program was that attendees were able to observe the courtrooms in action, watching

real cases unfold and seeing the individual roles the judge, prosecutor, public defenders, and jury play in the legal system. In one of the courtrooms observed, we saw how arraignments were conducted; from how bail is set depending on the charges, the speed at which the arraignment court operates, and the interactions between a defendant and a public defender. In another courtroom, we were able to see how the prosecutor and public defender interview potential jurors by questioning their background, beliefs, and biases to determine whether they're a suitable juror for the case. Observing multiple courtrooms all at different stages of the legal process has allowed me to see the full procedure of the system and understand the role each individual in the courtroom plays in the final verdict of the case.

During my time and experience I went through in the Junior Defender Program, I gained a new perspective on the precise details of the legal process and the importance of a public defender for clients who aren't able to afford a private attorney for themselves.

## Student Reporter

## Back to School Night Builds School Community



**Jisu Wi**  
Grade 9  
New Covenant Academy

Back to School Night is an opportunity for parents to visit their child's school and explore classes. It is an event that happens at the beginning of each semester at New Covenant Academy.

As the second semester of the school year has started, my school held Back to School Night on January 22nd. When the event officially started at 6:30 p.m., all the visitors gathered in the chapel for the principal's message regarding important school announcements, including seniors' acceptance to college and the goals for this semester. Along with this, he shared his opinion on the power of micro-adjustments in life, explaining how the minor changes we make every day could have a bigger impact later in life.

Then, families were released to visit classes. During this time, parents got an opportunity to talk and interact with teachers. This allows the families to ask questions and gain a better understanding of the students' progress—what their child is learning, their behavior in class, and the school's teaching style. Moreover, they can learn about the classroom's expectations or

routines that are planned for the school semester.

Each class was well-decorated with topics related to the topics taught in it, serving to intrigue visitors. Some of the favorite decorations include the works of the students, especially posters and projects, and textbooks that will be used throughout the semester. Seeing their child's work displayed in the classroom gives the parents a sense of pride, as not all of the students' works are shown. Most are also surprised at how well their child works. During this time, parents are busily taking photos of their child's work, as well as looking through the works of the other students.

My family visited the Social Studies class first and talked with the Social Studies teacher the most. While waiting to talk with her, I saw the project that I did last semester, which I put my best efforts into, looking at that paid off the hardship that I faced while doing the project. When I noticed my work, I excitedly showed it to my family, and they were all very proud of me since mine was the only project that was presented in my grade. When it was finally



Parents talking and asking questions to the teacher, which is the core part of Back to School Night. [Source: Author, Jisu Wi]

our turn to talk with her, she complimented my work as well as my behavior in class. This let my family see how I am doing in school.

Back to School Night not only allows parents to interact with the teachers, but also with other parents. In particular, the parents of the same grade greet each other and build connections. This event is a time that allows stu-

dents' families and teachers to gather as a community and start with a fresh mindset. In addition, the event provides valuable time for families to address concerns and helps everyone work together toward a successful school year. It creates a welcoming and supportive environment and sets a positive tone for the rest of the school semester.

Editors Column

## Weight Training's Impact on Distance Running



**Kaylyn Yu**  
Grade 11  
Chantilly High School



The distance team at Chantilly High School utilized numerous types of gym equipment to strength train. [Source: Author, Kaylyn Yu]

"You need to learn how to diet from that cross-country kid."

It is a common stereotype that long-distance runners, endurance athletes, and cross-country runners are all parallel in build. A picture instantly comes to mind—a lean, slight form and joints with

almost twig-like features. Along with their appearance, they are also assumed to behave accordingly, typecast as physically weak. Although it is true that many distance runners exhibit lower body fat and lighter weight compared to other athletes, it does not nec-

essarily correlate to their strength.

As a track athlete who has been running since my freshman year of high school, I have learned that it is crucial to maintain a solid base in order to perform at my greatest potential. Since a distance runner constantly exercises the same muscles by running long distances over a long period of time, the muscles and tendons are prone to grow overworked and fatigued over time. The stress caused by overtraining is the main source of injury in distance runners. To minimize the risk of injury, one can intentionally build power in advance. Besides leg training, adding muscle in other areas of the body will also improve speed and power for racing.

My goal to extend my strength training was beyond met this winter season as my coach introduced a new training routine into our practices: weight room sessions. As this was a new concept for many of our athletes, the team started slowly by learning simple lifts. The team practiced the goblet squat using manageable weights with the bar, working the quads. Bent over rows engaged our arm and back muscles. We used simple five-pound weights to perform "fives" with arm swinging movement.

As the season progressed, the runners added new lifts to their in-

ventory of exercises, trying more complex steps than before. The team trained on pull-ups on bars, utilizing bands for assistance. We improved our strength by maneuvering deadlifts, starting lightly but gradually increasing the weight throughout the season. We also targeted arm strength with arnolds, carrying dumbbells in a two-step compound exercise. Our coach emphasized the importance of supersets—performing two separate exercises back-to-back and alternating in between. The team was able to save time and improve the endurance and strength of our weight room sessions through supersets.

Eunseung Choi, a sophomore at Chantilly High School's Varsity Cross Country and Track, stated his opinion on strength training's effect on distance runners. "Strength training prevents injuries and allows me to perform better, especially in shorter mid-distance events where speed is required. My personal favorite workout is explosive back squats because it improves my top speed, which is my weakness."

By lifting more this track season, I reaped so much more fruit in both progress and performance, especially in my times. I would definitely recommend any endurance athlete to invest in weight training!

Student Reporter

## Uni at U. of I. ICE Protest



**Irene Kim**  
Grade 11  
University Laboratory High School

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (U. of I.) registered student organizations arranged an anti-ICE walkout at 2 P.M. on Jan. 30, participating in the National Shutdown. The National Shutdown was started by student unions at the University of Minnesota for the withdrawal of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents from their state and for the abolishment as a whole. At the U. of I., the protest began at the Alma Mater statue and progressed to a traffic blockade, accumulating over 1000 protesters during that time. People waved banners and flags, shouted call-and-response chants, and speeches were made by a few of those using a megaphone at the center of the crowd.

The protest was not only a big deal for students and staff at the university but also for those at University Laboratory High School (Uni), located right on its campus. Multiple Uni students walked out of class to join the walkout and protest, while some teachers arranged alternative class activities to incorporate the protest.

Uni's multimedia journalism class traveled throughout the



Protesters filled the U. of I.'s busiest street on campus, chanting with banners. [Source: Author, Irene Kim]

campus to cover the protest. The students carried cameras and phones to take pictures and videos of the scene, as well as interview community members, using the opportunity to practice political journalism. Afterwards, students created a variety of journalistic media ranging from captioned photo galleries to audio reports.

Uni's 10th-grade global history class, currently on their democracy unit, also walked around

the campus in observation of the protest. Teacher Andrew Wilson said he hoped that this could be a learning experience for students. "[The class] was going to be a current issues discussion. So I was like, well, 'Why sit in this classroom and talk about current issues when we could just walk three blocks and go see current issues happen in real life?'"

During the trip, students were always in close proximity, where

Wilson could see them, and they were not allowed to join the traffic blockade as the crowd moved from the statue onto the streets. "I was explicit. I was like, 'We're not going to protest. We're observing, like looking. This is civic engagement,'" Wilson said. He explained that the class returned to the classroom after the observation to discuss protesting and signs of a healthy democracy. "I hope they think about what it means to be a member of a democracy. How they think about what civic engagement is about, and what it means to be a part of a healthy, vibrant democracy," Wilson said.

For both class activities at the protest, teachers contacted students' parents for permission beforehand, and students without parental permission remained at school.

The walkout and protest on the U. of I. campus was not only a way for Uni students to voice their thoughts by taking part in the protest, but also a learning experience for different classes in different ways. Nonetheless, all of these experiences increase youth awareness of current issues and their role in the broader society.

Student Reporter

## Seeing the Glass Half Full



**Eliud Lee**  
Grade 9  
Downtown Magnets High School

"And the President of the Class of 2029 ... Eliud Lee!" declares Denisse, the ASB President. The moment halts. Then cheer — an enormous and monstrous kind — suddenly erupts from the gymnasium stands.

I knew that student government would be a part of my new orbit since the first day of high school. However, joining ASB would quickly prove to be far more than just another adjunct. Given my interest in political science, it was imperative to become familiar with a political environment. The student government was one medium for that. Although there remain many lessons for me to learn, one in particular has been crucial to my growth: adapting to unforeseen circumstances.

This year, my secretary and vice president cannot provide as much help as other cabinet members due to difficulties in their schedules. Naturally, such a blow to my cabinet was initially devastating. However, three guardrails have helped me navigate leadership without becoming burnt out, and to interpret these setbacks not as failures but as learning ex-

periences.

First, I do not handle tasks alone. Whether I am searching for shades of paint in the Arts n' Crafts cabinet or filling out monotonous paperwork, I strive to involve at least one of my peers. This way, the burden is not placed on one person, but diffused and shared by two or three. As our ASB Director, Ms. Jacob, comments, true leadership does not manifest when one person tries to juggle ten thousand things at once — it manifests when everyone comes together; when people recognize their own weaknesses and others' strengths. Hence, I have learned to lean more on my peers.

Second, my efforts are always relative to those of my peers. When one person fills out two sheets of paperwork, others must do the same — including myself. This principle goes beyond lifting the burden off of one person. When everyone works at the same rate and gives the same amount, it creates productive momentum.

Third, I recognize my own limits. While I frequently take to these principles to foster equity and efficiency to the best of my



"Proactive, productive, prepared." That maxim is not mere decoration; it prompts ASB to sharpen their character when serving. [Source: Author, Eliud Lee]

leadership abilities, the absence of two cabinet members still takes a toll — even if it only emerges in the background. Consequently, I have learned to consult with those with more experience. "Returning ASB students are working on becoming mentors to all new members...they are a wealth of knowledge," Ms. Jacob notes.

Conclusively, my initial setbacks have shaped me into a more mature, insightful leader: a first

among equals. While two crucial members are not fully in the picture, circumstances like mine occur every day in politics. Learning on others, creating productive momentum, recognizing my own limits — these are the skills that are key not only to serve my freshman class effectively, but to become mobile in today's political climate.

Seen thus, I was never two short. I was four strong.