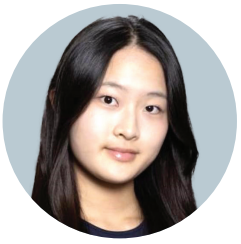


## Editors Column



**Angel Song**  
Grade 11  
Harvard-Westlake School

Behind Hollywood's glitz and glamor, Los Angeles is a civically vibrant city divided into 15 City Council districts and equipped with 99 neighborhood councils. Ever since I became a youth representative on one of those neighborhood councils, I have been determined to provide the same opportunity to my peers, beginning with Civicate Youth.

Through Civicate Youth, I became connected to the LA Promise Fund and StudentsBuild. Knowing the StudentsBuild National Summit was happening on March 11, I reached out to obtain a booth for Civicate Youth at their HelloFuture expo and VIP reception. Civicate Youth's mission is to involve youth in action campaigns and increase their civic engagement in Los Angeles, specifically through neighborhood council elections and youth representative opportunities. Tabling at the expo, where thousands of K-12 students would be visiting, made sense in terms of increasing our reach.

After our spot was confirmed, we got to work. As a member of the Centre for Sport and Human Rights Youth Leadership Council, I decided to host a sports and hu-

## Youth Leaders are the Future



The 2026 StudentsBuild National Summit's HelloFuture expo took place at the YouTube Theater. Civicate Youth had a table to promote youth civic engagement, sports, and human rights awareness. [Source: Author, Angel Song]

man rights awareness campaign in tandem with neighborhood council election information resources. I prepared a large tri-fold and red post-its for the campaign, where the goal was to have students write down harmful practices they've observed in sports, including bullying and discrimination. I hoped this would encourage them to think about how human rights and sports are closely connected. Post-campaign, I saw almost 100 responses containing distinct answers, showing me the diversity in answers we were able to collect.

In terms of voter information, I prepared multilingual flyers containing QR codes for our monthly newsletter, as well as the EmpowerLA website, where students can search for their neighborhood council and any additional opportunities. Knowing that there is a huge immigrant population within Los Angeles, I knew it was critical that all of this information is accessible, considering language barriers. While tabling, I was glad to see that many students were scanning QR codes on our English flyers, while others

were also looking at those in Korean, Mandarin, and Chinese.

On the day of the summit, I found myself slowly adjusting to the atmosphere as people began trickling in. I had the opportunity to talk to students from schools all the way across Los Angeles and listen to the variety of experiences they had. Overall, the event was a success. Not only did I network with hundreds of students who visited our table, but most importantly, I was able to get most of them to take a flyer, scan the QR code, and think about unhealthy practices in sports. I believe tables like these can help ease teenagers into civic spaces, where they will be able to voice their own opinions and build the city they want to live in.

Increased youth civic participation doesn't come out of nowhere. There needs to be consistent effort and hard work towards informing more youth about the local civic opportunities they can seize. The lack of civic engagement in Los Angeles is a huge problem, and I know one organization can't and won't be able to solve it, but I'm still glad to be a part of this youth-led movement, solving problems one table at a time.

## Student Reporter



**Ava Je**  
Grade 8  
Orange County School of the Arts

Each year, the Orange County School of the Arts' Integrated Arts conservatory presents a short acting performance showcased by the middle school students. Known as Acting Moments, the show has a different theme or topic each year, with this year being "History Lessons." Though it is a small event, it makes a significant impact on both the actors and the audience.

To start, the Integrated Arts middle school students who wanted to be a part of the performance first attended an audition, where they had to read a short monologue selected and judged by the conservatory director and student directors. A few days after the auditions had passed, the cast list was posted, and students were assigned their roles, and rehearsals began. During two months of hard practice after school and everyone getting used to their characters, the time for dress rehearsals finally came.

During the two nights of dress rehearsals, the excitement was high, since everyone was allowed to try on their costumes



The Integrated Arts conservatory middle schoolers line up for applause during the second act of the Acting Moments show. [Source: Author, Ava Je]

and practice running the show with all of their props. As the directors made their final fixes to the individual acts, the stage and seating for the audience were set up. While this was one of the most exciting parts of the process leading up to the actual shows, it required a lot of dedication, as students had to go to rehearsals right after school ended

at 3:25 pm and stayed until 8 pm.

The next day, after attending school and conservatory, all students gathered after school at the theater for Acting Moments to prepare for opening night. As the audience slowly started to arrive, the actors were busy backstage reviewing their lines and preparing for the big night.

The first show was one of the best parts of the whole experience for me, since I was the most eager to finally perform, above all the other nights. While I had done other dance performances, this was my first acting show at the Orange County School of the Arts, which made it all the more special.

Moreover, staying backstage with the other students was fun as well. As we waited for our turn to go on stage, we passed the time by playing card games, joking around, and drawing together. During this time, I was able to bond with the other students outside of my grade, forming new friendships along the way. However, for me, the main highlight was the last bow during the closing night. The audience was filled with family and friends who had come to support everyone in the show, as well as some school staff. As we all celebrated our outstanding performance together and looked through the cast photos, I felt extremely thankful for this opportunity and know I definitely grew from this unique experience.

## Student Reporter



**Tae Lee**  
Grade 10  
Science Academy STEM Magnet

No one is meant to handle life's toughest moments alone. Throughout my experiences as a high school student, I often convinced myself that staying quiet and dealing with my struggles made me stronger. In reality, the idea of asking for help felt intimidating, even when I knew I needed it. Countless times, we hear parents and instructors ask us to come speak with them when schoolwork piles up, friendships get complicated, or worries become too heavy to ignore. Despite how simple that advice sounds, taking that initial step seems out of reach.

Teachers also shared their perspectives on supporting students. One of mine explained that he notices when a student seems more stressed or withdrawn than usual, but can't truly help unless the student communicates. Although they can invite them to discuss any discomforts, as part of their job, they educate us beyond academics by counting on us to learn where and how to seek advice.

Parents I spoke with expressed similar feelings, stating



Counseling sessions outside of the classroom create lasting connections that help students with their struggles. [Source: Author, Tae Lee]

they worry that teens assume they'll be disappointed or upset if their child approaches them with a problem. One parent explained, "We'd rather know what you're going through than have you carry it by yourself. As a parent, it's obvious we want to help out as much as we can with our child." It made me realize that adults also struggle to find the right words, patiently waiting for the moment their child needs support.

Curious, I also interviewed classmates, and their experiences were some of the most relatable. One friend replied that the school workload had been getting to her for months, but kept her feelings bottled because she did not want to admit her struggles. After she finally reached out, she felt a sense of relief she hadn't expected. "Talking to someone doesn't feel forced. It feels more like sharing experiences with a more ma-

ture friend."

Reaching out is not a sign of weakness, but a sign of strength from the courage and bravery it takes to ask for it. While circumstances vary from person to person, turning to others for support can only make things easier. Life is hard enough; asking for support is a fail-safe way to grow connections and alleviate our strains.

Student Reporter



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

For many students, school feels like an endless cycle of assignments, exams, deadlines, and projects. With many having piles of homework due for their multiple AP classes, tests every other day, in addition to clubs and extracurriculars outside of school, most students, including me, feel exhausted and always stressed by the time the weekend arrives. So most of the two-day weekends are spent either sleeping, participating in extracurriculars, or studying for an exam on Monday. This leaves me and other students unable to participate in activities that we actually enjoy on the weekends, like hanging out with friends or indulging in new hobbies. However, by putting aside school assignments and extracurriculars for later and enjoying the moment, I was able to spend a weekend stress-free, and how I wanted to.

During my stress-free weekend, I finally had the chance to hang out with my friends outside of school while enjoying delicious food and endlessly chatting, which we rarely get to

## More Than Just A Break



My friends and I enjoyed Korean BBQ in Koreatown, which was a great way to recharge and enjoy some time away from the stress of school and studies. [Source: Author, Yale Lee]

do during busy school days. We went to a Korean BBQ restaurant in Koreatown, California, where we ate all the meat and sides, filling our stomachs to the fullest. Afterward, we burned off our previous meal by walking to a shaved ice place nearby for dessert. We also spent a whole hour in a photo booth, snapping pic-

tures with silly props and striking fun poses.

I was also able to spend another enjoyable weekend with another group of friends, spending our whole day thrifting across Los Angeles. Before starting our thrifting journey, we visited one of my friend's favorite

Thai shops, where I had the most delicious pad thai. After, we wandered through multiple areas of LA, browsing shops in areas like Echo Park and Silverlake, to Melrose, and all the way to Santee Alley in the Fashion District of DTLA. While sorting and searching through racks of different styles of clothing, we were able to express our individual styles while laughing over some of our questionable finds.

By getting to enjoy my weekends with different groups of friends doing different activities every time, I finally got to experience what it felt like to have a break without constantly being stressed and worrying about school assignments and extracurriculars. Instead of feeling overwhelmed and drained by assignments and responsibilities, I felt more refreshed and more present in the moment. Therefore, these experiences reminded me that taking time for myself isn't a distraction from productivity but actually helps me feel more motivated and energized to return to school.

Student Reporter



**Jisu Wi**  
Grade 9  
New Covenant Academy

Six Flags Magic Mountain is a popular amusement park located in Valencia, California, near Los Angeles. I recently went to Six Flags with my school for a field trip. It was very hot, reaching a high of 97 degrees Fahrenheit and staying within the 90s throughout the visit. Despite the hot weather, there were many people there to enjoy the rides.

During my time at the park, I rode on The Riddler's Revenge, The New Revolution, Ninja, Gold Rusher, Buccaneer, Jammin' Bumpers, and Swashbuckler. The Riddler's Revenge's unique structure made it my favorite ride of the night. It requires riders to stand during the ride, adding to the thrill and differentiating it from other roller coasters. However, I also enjoyed Jammin' Bumpers, which are bumper cars. It was even more fun since I did it with my friends and constantly bumped into them. The Magic Mover, a ride not meant for thrill-seeking purposes, exists for transportation purposes. This made my visit way more convenient as it provided transportation to the top and bottom regions of the park. Consequent-



Six Flags Magic Mountain in Valencia, California, offers a fun experience and an opportunity to learn more about physics through its various thrilling rides. [Source: Author, Jisu Wi]

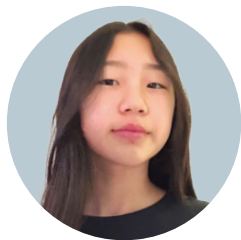
ly, I didn't have to spend a lot of time walking, but rode the Magic Mover to move from ride to ride. It was also refreshing since it was cool, so when I was having a hard time with the heat of the hot weather, riding it calmed me down.

In the middle of the day, I stopped by the food court to get lunch. Since it was a very hot day, I needed to stay hydrated. So, I bought a large-sized Coke and chicken tenders. It tasted good, but was pretty expensive, like most other menu items that were overpriced. Because of this,

I highly recommend packing your own lunch for Six Flags if possible, as you will save a lot of money.

However, this field trip was more than just a fun trip. It was also an educational experience that bettered my understanding of science by experiencing the elements of physics. Roller coasters are a direct example of physics in real life. At the top of the ride, everything feels slow, but as the roller coaster drops, gravity pulls us down, and the speed increases. When the roller coaster falls from the highest point, the momentum from the drop, combined with gravity, allows the cart to gain speed and reach the highest velocity. The biggest hill is where it has the most potential energy since potential energy depends on the change in height of an object. As the roller coaster goes downhill, the potential energy is converted into kinetic energy, as shown by the increasing speed of the carts. Overall, my time at Six Flags was a memorable experience, where I got to learn physics while also having fun and enjoying time with my friends.

Student Reporter



**Paisley Park**  
Grade 10  
South Pasadena  
High School

At 1:00 p.m. on Friday, January 30, students poured out of South Pasadena High School to meet in front of the gym. Homemade posters in one hand and megaphones in the other, students were ready to protest with a purpose. Hundreds of students flooded into the streets, walking in unison to speak out against ICE. The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is the federal agency responsible for enforcing U.S. immigration laws. Recently, its role has drawn national debate and criticism for the perceived use of force, deportation, and policing. This has sparked protests in multiple states and has led student activists to stage walkouts, calling for accountability and change to the system. Various high schools throughout LA County planned to practice their right to protest, and I participated with my peers.

Information about this walkout was provided about a week prior to its happening, across social media and school administrators, who informed us of our rights and stressed safety first. The walkout reflected more than just disagreement with immigration forces; it revealed how students are constantly engaging

## Students Join Walkout in South Pasadena



A participant of the walkout waves a large American flag, towering above their fellow protesters. [Source: Author, Paisley Park]

with nationwide issues. Though the structure of this walkout could have seemed chaotic, there were constant reminders and updates about the event, from meeting locations, times, poster ideas, and more. During lunch, right before the walkout began, students were scattered all around campus, making posters and preparing for the walkout.

Walking out the school's gates, the only thing in sight was a sea of students and a feeling of solidarity. When the walk began, many upperclassmen carried megaphones, reminding their peers to stay safe and protest in an organized yet purposeful manner. Carefully crafted signs were thrust into the air, with messages like "Education, not deportation" and "Protect people, not power." We marched to the

corner of Fair Oaks Avenue and Mission Street, the busiest corner of town, and eventually accumulated over 600 students. Police cars carefully managed protesters, not interfering, and some students went into their cars, waving their posters from the windows. At the intersection, each corner was filled with protesters, cheering and chanting, and even some middle schoolers joined in. The sounds of the walkout included the cheers of students, supportive honking from passing cars, and drums that students set up at a corner. Parents also joined, and one of the most powerful moments of the walkout was massive piles of ice, symbolizing ICE, thrown into the middle of the street.

This walkout demonstrated how involved youth are today in political issues and the role of students in making change. The scale of participation showed how much young people care about the country and the responsibilities they carry in being active community members. Students have such an important voice in society, and this walkout was an opportunity for them to exercise their rights and civically participate within their community.