

Editors Column

Spring School Dance Showcase: Talent, Growth, and Community



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Grade 10
Ayala High School

On April 23, I attended the Ruben S. Ayala High School's Spring Dance Show. Within the dance show, multiple groups performed numerous sets: the Ayala Dance Production, which is the official competition dance team, the advanced dance team, the beginning dance team, and the different PE dance groups. Due to the several groups performing, there was much preparation the directors and students put in to ensure the show was entertaining and organized, even during the intermission. By interviewing a diverse group of performing dancers, it is safe to say they had fun and were proud of the hard work they put into the showcase. Thus, the Spring Dance Showcase was amazing, and all individuals involved should be recognized for their great effort.

To prepare, the different groups spent almost the entire school year choreographing and practicing. The PE dance groups learned the basics of dance every day during class. As for the beginning and advanced dance team, they consistently learned new choreography for some school events while also getting a chance to choreograph themselves. Lastly, Ayala Dance Production, the school's official dance team,



Each performing group at the Spring Dance Showcase performed different styles of dance. In this photo, a PE dance group is showcasing a lyrical number. [Source: Author, Kaylyn Wee]

learned new dances for rallies, athletic games, and their fall show. While choreographing for competitions, ADP has consistently been growing its skills for this showcase.

Audience members were able to attend the show from Thursday to Saturday, with tickets selling out for both Friday and Saturday performances. Before the event started, there was a line in front of the entrance, each person excited for the show ahead. As the doors opened for the audience to grab a seat, there were snacks and drinks being sold at the mini concession stand, with Ayala's Dance

Department merch advertised as well. The show was separated by an intermission time where not only the audience could have a break to get snacks or take a trip to the restroom, but also for the dancers and backstage crew to reset until the end of the show. Overall, the show was entertaining and organized well, making it a huge success.

By interviewing multiple dancers from each level, I found that the showcase and the preparation were special and fun, even with the long practices, because they allowed finding community with other students at school.

Throughout this school year, from moments in the practice room to rehearsals on stage, the dancers were able to build strong bonds, support one another through challenges, and celebrate growth and achievements. Each performance showcased in this Spring Show reflected not only hard work and dedication, but also the connection that was developed as a team. On the final night, it was ADP's Senior Night, and each senior was gifted a handmade poster and gifts from the team. The night became so meaningful as seniors were honored and recognized for their dedication and the impact they had on the program.

The Spring Dance Showcase was much more than a performance; it was a chance to recognize dedication, growth, and community. With the months of preparation, the show was a success, and it ended with a meaningful night for the graduating seniors. Every moment of the showcase reflected the commitment and passion of the dancers, directors, and even the backstage crew. The energy, connection, and moments shared on stage made the event memorable, leaving the dancers and the audience with a lasting impression of an incredible show.

Student Reporter

Multicultural Festival: A Fun Celebration for All



Ava Je
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Orange County School of the Arts

Every year, Brywood Elementary School hosts a celebration called the Multicultural Festival, an event that embraces all of the different cultures at the school with a variety of treats from different backgrounds. Being an entertaining and memorable occasion, it attracts many families, friends, and alumni to surround themselves with a wide range of activities and traditions. Having attended the celebration for the past three years, I go annually to immerse myself in all the different cultures while visiting my old school campus, staff, and classmates.

To prepare for the big evening event after school, canopy tents are set up all around campus, as well as a large portable stage. Generous parent volunteers of current or past students and staff set up hours before the event starts, bringing a variety of food, games, and more for the visitors to enjoy. Each booth celebrates a different culture.

When the event finally started at five in the evening, there were already many people there who had come to enjoy this special



Rows of canopy tents managed by volunteers are filled with different cultural foods, games, and other activities at the Multicultural Festival. [Source: Author, Ava Je]



A group of young performers at Brywood Elementary School's Multicultural Festival showcase their talents for the enthusiastic crowd. [Source: Author, Ava Je]

day. As I stepped onto campus, I was immediately surrounded by countless tents filled with food, activities, and games that had been presented by the proud volunteers. After I met up with my friends, we walked around together while taking in everything around us. From mango-flavored Tshuah-ping, which is Taiwanese shaved ice, to spicy Korean tteokbokki, there were many dishes to fill our stomachs up with. Some other food items there included katsu and curry from Japan, crêpes from France, musubis from Hawaii, and maqluba from Palestine.

However, the food was not the only attraction at the Multicultural Festival. There were tents filled with different games, activities, and stage performances. One of the most loved was Yo-yo Tsuru, a common Japanese summer festival game where players try to pick up a floating water balloon using a fragile hook to win the prize. Meanwhile, different groups of performers were performing on stage and showcasing their talents related to their culture for everyone to see. Some included K-pop dances, El Baile de la Cintas, pungmul, and wushu.

Once I left the celebration, after it ended at eight in the evening, I returned home with plenty of fun memories from another exciting year at the Multicultural Festival. But above that, I had the opportunity to immerse myself in new cultures by meeting new people, trying new foods, playing different games, and getting to see different performers. In the end, I felt extremely grateful that I was able to attend and explore different traditions, and I am already looking forward to next year's Multicultural Festival.

Student Reporter

Uni High Students Teach Local Elementary School



Irene Kim
Grade 11
University Laboratory High School

St. Elmo Brady was the first African American chemist to obtain a Ph.D., receiving his doctorate from the University of Illinois in 1915. To commemorate his work, the University of Illinois Laboratory High School (Uni High) hosts their annual whole-school visit to Booker T. Washington STEM Academy (BTW), a local elementary school. With St. Elmo Brady Day scheduled close to Earth Day, Uni High students plan water and earth-related activities for BTW students. Every year, students organize and propose these activities ahead of time.

On St. Elmo Brady Day, Uni High students teach their activity for three different BTW classes and at the end of the day, enjoy a pizza lunch and recess with the elementary school students. St. Elmo Brady Day encourages Uni High students to make an impact beyond Uni High through connecting with younger students, exploring community, collaboration, and education.

After St. Elmo Brady Day this year, Uni High students shared what their favorite parts were. "I did like doing my class [most],"



Uni High sophomore Max Burton-Mills pours glitter into a BTW student's bioluminescence shaker bottle. [Source: Author, Irene Kim]

sophomore Max Burton-Mills said. Burton-Mills taught Bioluminescence and Oceanic Ecosystems through the Uni High club Build to Break Through, which works throughout the year to create a women-focused local summer camp, introducing girls to women in different studies and professions.

Their activity taught BTW's 4th and 5th-grade students about marine bioluminescence by hav-

ing them craft shaker bottles. Students painted their jellyfish with glow-in-the-dark paint and added them to a small container of a blue liquid mixture to see how bioluminescent organisms light up in their natural habitat.

Uni High junior Harmony Lehman had a different highlight. "My favorite part was recess, because it's like going back to my own childhood," she said. "I gave a lot of kids piggyback rides, and

we did tornadoes, where you spin around with them on your back and go 'whoosh, whoosh.' It was super fun."

During class time, Lehman taught Build a Straw Tower, organized by the Uni High club Sprabitat. Sprabitat is a service club that supports Fuller Center for Housing, a nonprofit organization that provides shelter for people in need, and Spring Initiative, a nonprofit that offers long-term programs for youth and families facing difficult academic, social, or economic circumstances. The straw tower engineering challenge urged BTW's 2nd and 3rd-grade students to collaborate in teams in order to build the tallest tower. Lehman shared that the goal was for students to learn by experimenting with different strategies on their own without help from teachers.

Through a variety of STEM activities, Uni High students fostered active learning and cooperation in BTW classrooms. At the same time, they themselves learned how to teach younger students and connect with the larger community.

Student Reporter



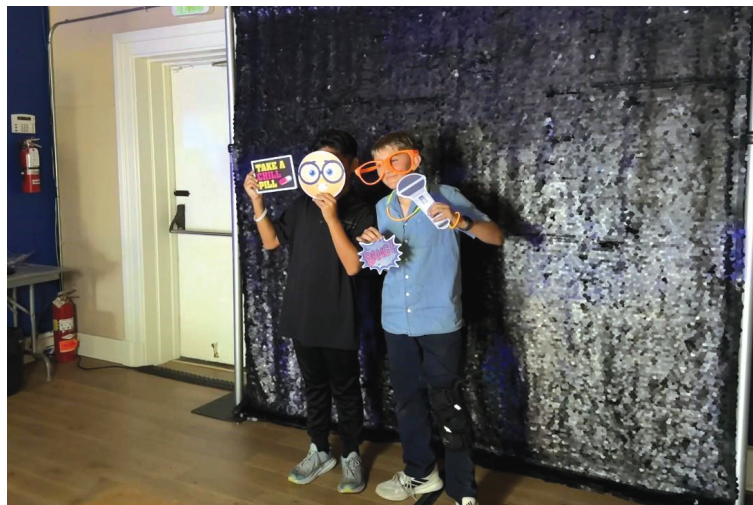
Jisu Wi
Grade 9
New Covenant Academy

A Night at the Middle School Dance

The New Covenant Academy school recently held a middle school dance to provide a fun experience for the students and give them a short break from academics. The dance occurred from 5-7 pm and was glow-in-the-dark themed with an all-black dress code.

When the students arrived at the dance, they were first met with a check-in process. This was conducted by high school volunteers, and is what I took part in. As a volunteer, I helped check the students' names and take attendance on a list of all participants. Then, I handed out a raffle ticket and a customized glow-in-the-dark bracelet that was specially made for this event. After this check-in process, the students were able to enter the dance room.

In the dance room, there were many activities set up for the students. The first activity was a fun golf game, where the students could play with a glow-in-the-dark ball. The next station had glow-in-the-dark sticks for students to use and make them according to their preference. They could be used to make bracelets,



Middle school students enjoyed the New Covenant Academy Dance by experiencing many fun activities that were provided, but especially taking photos to keep the special time in memory. [Source: Author, Jisu Wi]

necklaces, or just as a simple stick that they could use as a cheer tool when dancing. There was also a photo booth where students could freely take photos. Many students loved this, as they could keep the photos as a memory of this special day. Then, definitely the most important activity, was the dance floor, where students could enjoy the music that the DJ was playing.

When all of the students arrived, dinner was provided. Fried chicken and pizza were served along with snacks like cookies, chips, gummies, and drinks that the students could freely take throughout the dance. During this time, many students enjoyed their food and happily talked amongst their friends.

When dinner concluded, there

was a scavenger hunt for tiny ducks that were hidden all over. Before any students arrived, the volunteers and teachers, including myself, had hidden all of them. There were a total of 200 ducks of many different colors, so we strategically placed them where they would camouflage into the background. The students were given 10 minutes to find the ducks. As a volunteer, I wandered around and helped anyone who was struggling to find a duck. When the time was up, all the students gathered and counted the ducks that they had found. The winner, with 48 ducks, got a prize of a ticket that could be used in our school's student store.

Following the duck event was raffle time. A teacher pulled a raffle ticket from the box full of them and rewarded the owner of the winning ticket with a student store ticket. That concluded the dance as the students left. Then, all the volunteers and teachers gathered to clean up the mess. Overall, this dance served as an experience for the middle school students to strengthen their relationships and have a great memory of the school year.

Student Reporter



Yale Lee
Grade 9
The Science Academy
STEM Magnet

AP Exams: Opportunity or Overload?

Each spring, as AP exam season approaches, many high school students are cramming to get as many practice tests and reviews done as possible. Sleep schedules become nearly nonexistent, caffeine is a daily necessity, and conversations are about course concepts. Advanced Placement courses are widely viewed as one of the most important parts of a high school student's academic career, promising an introduction to college-level courses, credit, and a stronger application. However, many students, during AP season, can't help but wonder: are these rigorous courses truly meaningful in the long term or just stressful?

As a student, AP courses do provide new learning opportunities and habits that are otherwise not offered in regular high school courses. The heavy workload and difficult unit exams of the courses challenge students to think critically, learn time management, and engage with introductory college courses early on. Many of my peers who have taken AP courses have said that balancing the work and study-

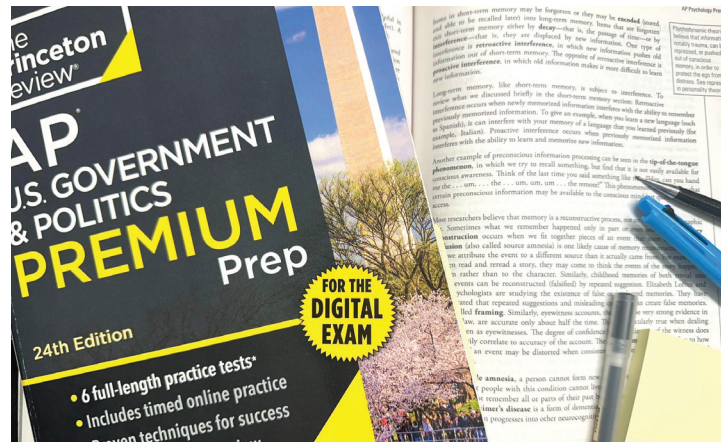
ing that goes along with these classes has taught them new and efficient study methods that they've applied to high-school-level classes. They've also stated that the information learned from the courses helped provide prior knowledge and a foundation when listening to lectures at colleges.

Even with their benefits and advantages, students have also expressed being extremely overwhelmed and exhausted with constant pressure to get good

scores while managing club activities and sports. One student said that taking due to taking 5 AP courses in their junior year, while having volunteering, sports, and preparations for college applications to juggle simultaneously, they almost had no free time to hang out with friends or to get proper sleep during their whole academic year. Another student stated that even though the material learned from their AP classes has somewhat helped them in their college lectures, it was extremely

watered down and doesn't compare to the difficulty of actual college courses.

AP exams and courses come with both benefits and downsides, offering students valuable academic opportunities at the cost of being a source of pressure and exhaustion. Hopefully, as AP season continues, the primary focus isn't only on earning high scores but also on creating a healthier balance between well-being and learning.



Extra coursework that students have to do for AP courses ranges from homework to AP prep books. [Source: Author, Yale Lee]

Student Reporter



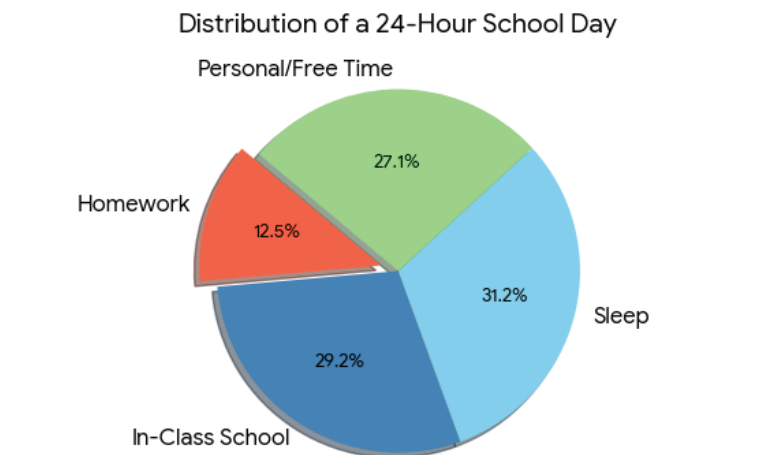
Jayden Kim
Grade 8
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STEM Magnet

Redefining Homework: More Home, Less Work

Ever since political competition during the Cold War, America has put homework as one of its standards, continuing throughout the 20th century. However, this comes with both pros and cons. While homework reinforces classroom learning and develops self-discipline, too much of it can cause burnout and other issues that lead to inefficient performances in the school environment.

For example, heavy workloads can cause stress in teens, preventing them from indulging in youthful activities, such as playing, spending time with family, and pursuing hobbies. This large amount of homework typically causes students to lose focus over time. On the other hand, intentional assignments that take less than 40 minutes have proven to increase understanding and help students retain the information for the next day.

With so much work, some students are forced to sacrifice sleep, especially if they arrive home late, have a part-time job, or have extracurriculars after school. The average student should have 7-8 hours of sleep a day. Suppose the average school day ends around



Homework can take up a significant portion of a student's life. Is the amount of time students spend on it worth it? [Source: Author, Jayden Kim]

3 PM. The student might have an extracurricular activity after school that ends around 5:00. Then they go home, eat dinner, shower, and do chores. By the time they're finished, it could be around 8:00. To get the full 7-8 hours of sleep and wake up for school, the student has to go to sleep at around 10:30. That leaves only 2 hours and 30 minutes to finish homework. When accounting for around 4-5 classes that assign homework, this means that the student can't go

to bed on time. This effect spirals into the next day. With less sleep, cognitive functions slow, productivity diminishes, and students are not able to power through the seven hours of school, let alone an additional 2 hours of homework.

In addition, high homework loads are a primary source of stress for over 56% of students. Excessive assignments contribute to anxiety, emotional burnout, and depression, particularly when students feel overwhelmed

by multiple subjects. Lack of sleep is also correlated to irritability, obesity, and type two diabetes.

The solution? Quality over quantity. Having teachers assign homework that elaborates on the core work they did in class is more efficient than having students do a block of work with no defined chunks in between. Teachers should also coordinate with other teachers to avoid overloading students on the same night. Through this, students will be able to delegate their work more efficiently.

Another solution to the homework problem could be floating deadlines with regular check-ins. Just like projects, having homework assignments that are due weekly instead of daily lets students make their own routines of how and when to do homework. This flexibility lets them focus on an assignment one at a time, but also accommodates their own home life.

While homework is necessary, restructuring it to prioritize the student and their needs, rather than going through mindless sets of problems, can lead to increased performance in class and at home.