

Editors Column

What Was the 2026 Budget Day Like?



Angel Song
Grade 11
Harvard-Westlake School

Since the ninth grade, I've been involved in LA's neighborhood council (NC) system as a youth representative. This relationship began by attending monthly meetings and slowly evolved into one in which I took more steps to become involved, including creating Civicate Youth, a non-profit dedicated to bringing more civically engaged teens into the NC system by raising awareness about these civic opportunities.

Leading this group involves sharing information about events or leadership roles on social media platforms for teenagers in LA. While searching for information to share on the Civicate Youth Instagram (@civicateyouth), I stumbled across a post about the 2026 Neighborhood Council Budget Day taking place June 27th, 2026.

Budget Days, organized by the Neighborhood Council Budget Advocates, aim to inform LA residents about the city budget. This comes in the form of keynote speakers and breakout sessions. This year's Budget Day was especially memorable because it included the inaugural youth breakout session supported by the Olivia Mitchell LA City Youth



The 2026 Budget Day included a youth breakout session allowing teens to speak on issues they wanted the city to spend more money on.
[Source: Author, Angel Song]

Council (OMYC). I shared this opportunity, hoping to encourage others to attend, using Civicate Youth's social media accounts and prepared to attend the event myself.

The most memorable speak-

er this year was Kenneth Mejia, the LA City Controller who was reelected this June to serve a second term. Instead of giving a speech, Mejia chose to host a Q&A with the audience members. This method of interacting with constituents gave people a direct opportunity to have their specific questions answered by the controller himself.

After listening to speeches and attending a panelist session, attendees were separated into breakout sessions based on the NC they were members of. Younger participants could remain in the main room for the youth session with the goal of both informing and learning from teenagers and their perspectives.

This year's youth session included interactive Mentimeter questions and OMYC alumni serving as panelists who answered every question, along with the

audience. Young people attending were allowed to share their answers to the questions.

The youth session was meaningful because it was a real opportunity for youth, especially teenagers, to share what they wanted to see within the city. Youth aren't just the next generation's leaders; they already have spots within the city and the OMYC. However, the problem is that many of them don't realize these opportunities exist for them, despite the fact that they are interested in voicing their opinions and helping improve the city. This makes it even more critical that they are informed about and get to attend events like Budget Day and share their opinions with the rest of Los Angeles.

This year's Budget Day was a clear success. The speakers and breakout sessions were engaging and transparent, making it easy for everyone to understand components of the day like the budget breakdown. Opportunities like these are frequently shared through EmpowerLA (@empowerla on Instagram), the LA City department focusing on neighborhood council development.

Student Reporter

A Relaxing Day at the Guangzhou Maryland Resort



Jisu Wi
Grade 9
New Covenant Academy

Recently, I visited Guangzhou, China, for a family vacation. During the trip, my family stayed at Guangzhou Maryland Resort for a few days. After checking in and exploring the room, my family discovered many activities available throughout the retreat. Since all of the activities were located within the resort, guests could easily access them using the elevator.

One of the most popular activities at Guangzhou Maryland is the water park. This area provides a refreshing vibe in the humid weather of Guangzhou. In the water park, there are water slides, which are available as either a single-person ride or a four-person ride. My favorite was the four-person water slide because it was more thrilling. It had huge drops and twists, which made the ride more exciting. Also, since you can ride with your family or friends, it provides a fun memory with them. There is also a wave pool in the water park. The waves were pretty big, so I accidentally inhaled some water from them. Although that happened, I still had a great time because the water helped me cool off in Guangzhou's humid weather.



The water park at Guangzhou Maryland Resort features a variety of water slides and attractions, creating fun memories for visitors.
[Source: Author, Jisu Wi]

The Maryland resort is also known for its hot springs, featuring over 40 of them. All have different temperatures and functions that make each of the hot springs unique. There are specific types of essential oil hot springs, aromatic infusion hot springs, and more. The hot springs allowed me to release stress by having a peaceful time there and to release bad things inside my body. I specifically liked the sweet orange hot spring because its nice fruity scent made me feel like my body was being cleansed and refreshed. So, it was a good experience that made my body feel

healthy.

There was also a fish therapy area, also known as the red gara. The fish in there were bigger than the ones I have seen in other places. There were also countless types of fish, which made me feel kind of scared at first. However, when I placed my feet inside, a lot of them came toward me. It was tickling, but I got used to it over time. The good part was that I could feel that my feet became smooth after doing it, since the fish consume dead human skin.



The peaceful hot springs at Guangzhou Maryland Resort offer a relaxing experience as well as the opportunity to enjoy nature.
[Source: Author, Jisu Wi]

Not only did the resort offer all of these things, but there was also a gym and a kids' place inside the resort. The gym was available for guests who wanted to exercise during their stay. It provided numerous exercises, including treadmills, bench presses, and dumbbells. The kids' place was filled with fun entertainment so that families with young children could enjoy their time together. It had an indoor playground and an arcade. Overall, my stay at Guangzhou Maryland Resort was very enjoyable, as many fun facilities made my trip memorable.

Student Reporter

My Experience at the Hugh O'Brian Youth Leadership Camp



Charis Kim
Grade 11
The Science Academy STEM Magnet

This summer, I attended HOBY, the Hugh O' Brian Youth Leadership Camp. Greeted by the junior staff yelling, "Welcome to HOBY," I didn't know what to expect. I decided to assume the worst and entered with an unenthusiastic mindset. Little did I know I was about to experience a weekend full of amazing people and lasting memories.

As I joined the large circle of people gathered in the grass field, I was greeted by junior staff in the middle of the circle yelling different chants. After awkwardly following along with the chants, everyone split into their groups. Most of the camp consisted of participating in bonding activities, competitive games, and reflecting on what we learned and gained from these experiences. Through these activities, we were able to learn about group leadership. Frustrating tasks required clear communication, some games required cohesiveness, and competitive games required team spirit.



My group on the last night of HOBY after a heartfelt reflection time.
[Source: Author, Charis Kim]

Keynote speakers shed light on the applications of leadership in career-building. Through these lectures, I learned more about different volunteering opportunities and that a combination of small efforts could create an impact on my community. These keynote speakers showed that leadership can be present even in the smallest roles; it's not shown through

just a catchy title or by forcing authority over others. Working closely with my group, I learned how leadership can be collaborative and non-competitive. Through HOBY, I left with a new viewpoint that I can now confidently apply in my community.

HOBY created a welcoming environment that fostered, at

times, vulnerable opportunities, which allowed students to learn and rely on each other. It allowed me to reshape and strengthen my leadership skills by introducing me to a supportive group of people who showed me what resilience and kindness looked like. HOBY allowed me to see how authenticity and staying open can lead to genuine, lasting partnerships. It showed that creating an environment where everyone benefits is possible. Through all of these experiences, I learned that relationships built on support and trust are key to fostering a positive leadership experience.

From the walks to the dining hall, excited for dinner, to waking up to loud pop music and banging on the dorm's door, I truly loved every bit of HOBY. Through this experience, I made amazing friends, lasting memories, and left with a new view of leadership and leadership skills that had been reshaped. This is a program I highly recommend to any rising sophomore.

Editors Column

A Journey in Media at USC Annenberg’s Youth Academy

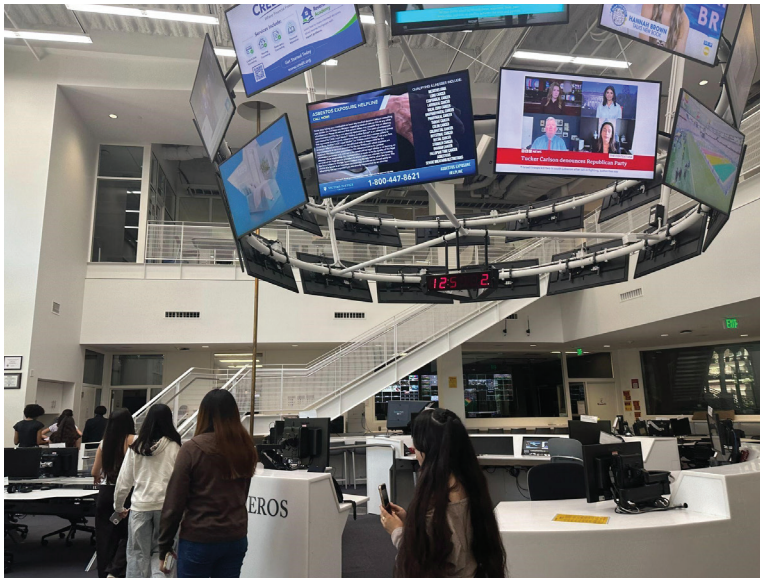


Yale Lee

Grade 9
Science Academy
STEM Magnet

Walking onto the USC campus for the Annenberg’s Youth Academy, I felt a mix of various emotions and thoughts. Part of me was filled with excitement, eager to discover what the program had to offer. But on the other hand, I was anxious about navigating a new environment. However, during my three weeks at USC, my initial uneasiness was replaced by a series of unexpected lessons, meaningful experiences, and unforgettable memories.

Annenberg Youth Academy, a three-week program held by USC’s Annenberg School of Communications and Journalism, offers high school students an immersive experience in media-making for social change. Throughout the program, one of the most memorable opportunities was writing, producing, and directing our own newscast. Before filming, our cohort collaborated on building the script and rundown, with everyone writing, researching current events, and organizing the segments. When I first entered the newsroom, the student anchors were already practicing their scripts while everyone reviewed the rundown. Once the cameras finally start-



USC Annenberg’s Media Center, where the cohort I was a part of went to film their newscast
[Source: Author, Yale Lee]

ed rolling, the anchors read from the teleprompters as the rest of us worked behind the scenes, following the run-through in real time and counting down before every new take. After the cameras cut, the room erupted in cheers as we celebrated the success of our first newscast. In that moment, it was rewarding to see how everyone’s role and effort, from writing and organizing to anchoring and produc-

ing, played an important part in bringing our newscast to life.

Another significant memory was the field trip for the communications class to the Natural History Museum. During this visit to the museum, I was able to socialize with my peers and explore the various exhibitions while learning new lessons along the way. On our walk to the museum, I was able to grow clos-

er with my cohort members as we chatted about school, common interests, and the upcoming AP scores. When we arrived, I walked around the Natural History Museum, passing by multiple exhibitions and artworks depicting the rich history of Los Angeles. As I observed the various artifacts, physical replicas, and artworks, they all had a common factor: that there was a message behind them, which connected to one of the previous lessons we learned about: how media played a key role in delivering a message.

Throughout my time at USC Annenberg’s Youth Academy, I learned how to step out of my comfort zone by engaging with new people, taking on unfamiliar roles, and embracing hands-on media production. Whether it was collaborating on a newscast, exploring the museums through a communications lens, or simply navigating a new environment, each moment pushed me to become more confident and curious. By the end of the program, not only did I grow a deeper understanding of media and storytelling, but I’ve also grown deep friendships and permanent memories I’ll reminisce on.

Student Reporter

Making Marshmallow Chewy Cookies: A Summer Treat



Irene Kim

Grade 11
University Laboratory
High School

As a rising senior, this summer I was finally met face-to-face with the grand high school capstone: the idea of college. Because I was focused on just getting by for most of my junior year, I hadn’t had much time to ponder myself beyond high school.

I decided to use this summer to check off the hobbies and projects I’d been wanting to try. Some were college and career-related—like visiting colleges and web surfing about careers. But my most recent obsession wasn’t college-related at all: making chewy cookies.

The sweet treat went viral on Korean social media, with influencers sharing DIY recipes. I had wanted to make it for a while, long before the newer, “hotter” Korean trend: Dubai chocolate chewy cookies. With a bag of leftover marshmallows, I gave the chewy cookies a try.

When cooking, I usually rely on popular online recipes. So to prepare, I went through Korean blogs and watched videos to catch tips and tricks.



The two batches of cooled marshmallow chewy cookies begin to get cut... or at least are attempted to be cut. The gooey Fruit-Loops batch doesn’t cooperate.
[Source: Author, Irene Kim]

Despite the research, I didn’t follow each step exactly. What I produced by the end were two batches of semi-successful marshmallow chewy cookies. One was an Oreo and strawberry flavor, and the other was a Fruit Loops-flavored mess. The rest of this article is what I did, and my notes on what not to do.

Tools and ingredients:

- Pan
- Spatula
- Baking pan
- Parchment paper
- 8 Jet-Puffed s’more vanilla marshmallows

- LESS than 50g unsalted butter (Using more was what made mine gooey!)
- Milk powder (about the size of your palm)
- Single-serve cup of Fruit Loops or 12 Oreos and a pack of dried strawberries (about 60g) (Feel free to use other ingredients!)

Steps:

- 1.On medium heat, melt the butter in a pan.
- 2.Once the butter melts, switch to low heat and place the marshmallows inside. (DON’T rush this step. They mustn’t burn.)

- 3.While the marshmallows are melting, prepare the cooling process by sizing parchment paper to the baking pan.
- 4.Start stirring to make one big melted marshmallow paste.
- 5.Turn the heat off, dump in your special ingredient(s), and mix. (Heating the marshmallows for too long will also lead to a gooey cookie.)
- 6.Before it starts to solidify, pour it onto the parchment paper-covered baking pan.
- 7.Place the pan in the refrigerator to cool for two hours.
- 8.Cut up the marshmallow chewy cookie.
- 9.Enjoy!

Though my Fruit Loops chewy cookie was a disaster, the Oreo strawberry combo was a hit with my family. What was even more meaningful than the turnout of the dessert was the process of taking the time to navigate something new alone. Amidst the pressure of feeling the need to use every minute for college applications, making marshmallow chewy cookies was a breath of fresh air. Though working on applications is an important, timely process, I also encourage keeping time for yourself.

Student Reporter

Summer Break: A Time for Fun and Relaxation



Ava Je

Grade 8
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of the Arts

Now that the 2025-2026 school year has come to an end, students are on summer break and no longer under stress from the load of schoolwork. During these months of free time, exciting vacations and reunions with families are just some of the most popular things to do. These experiences create fun memories and stories to share; hence, one of the most asked questions this time of year is, “What are you doing this summer?” The great excitement and curiosity that summer break brings connects me and my peers through similar experiences or interests.

Just before school ended and during the beginning of summer break, I talked with my friends about our summer plans this year. I received many enthusiastic responses, ranging from visiting new places to simply staying home all summer. One said, “I am so happy it is finally summer break now. I feel less stressed since I do not have any schoolwork and tests anymore. And I get to visit my friends and family from different states and spend more time outside, something I did not get to do much



With more free time, students can spend more time on their hobbies, such as swimming, during summer break.
[Source: Author, Ava Je]

because of my schedule before.” Additionally, other friends shared that they will be visiting different countries, such as China, Taiwan, England, and Korea. On the other hand, another classmate stated, “I do not really have any travel plans this summer, and I will probably stay here. Though I’m planning

on meeting up with some friends to go to the park or mall together sometime.”

However, summer break is not only about traveling to different places. A majority of the students I talked to are going to exciting events, such as local

festivals and concerts. One mentioned, “Though I am not traveling anywhere, I plan to attend many conventions this summer to meet others with similar interests and have fun.” Also, meeting up with family is common as well, especially since most do not get to visit their relatives who live far away while busy with school. On top of it all, many are dedicating their time to hobbies, including volleyball, painting, baking, and swimming, a popular sport with frequent swim meets especially during the summer.

After sharing summer plans with others, it is clear that every student’s agenda looks different, reflecting their own interests and excitement for the long break. Some look forward to socializing with friends and family, while others are going on vacation, staying at home to rest, or exploring new places. However, for everyone, it is a time to have fun and relax, taking a break from school before sharing newly created memories during the upcoming school year that will continue to be appreciated long after summer ends.