

2026 Autumn Classic Figure Skating Competition



Sora Ju
Grade 12
Geffen Academy

The 2026 LA Autumn Classic wrapped up at the Toyota Sports Performance Center in Los Angeles, California, giving spectators a close-up look at how figure skating competitions work. This three-day event, an annual competition, ran from October 2 to October 4 and brought together hundreds of skaters for a major step in the U.S. Figure Skating National Qualifying Series.

To the casual observer, figure skating looks like pure theater. Before a skater even steps onto the ice, hours of preparation take place backstage. Hair is slicked back into flawless buns, and heavy performance makeup is carefully applied. Because the bright lights and vast rink spaces can easily wash out an athlete's face, skaters use bold, sparkly, and highly pigmented makeup to ensure their facial expressions reach the judges sitting far across the ice.

Then come the blindingly bedazzled costumes. Far from standard dancewear, modern skating dresses are custom-built engineering marvels designed to survive high-velocity impacts and intense stretching. They



The 2026 Autumn Classic featured beautiful programs from a wide range of skaters. [Source: Author, Sora Ju]

are heavily encrusted with hundreds—sometimes thousands—of genuine Swarovski crystals, meticulously glued on by hand to catch the overhead arena lights with every rotation. The base fabrics are made of heavy-duty, four-way stretch mesh and Lycra, reinforced with flesh-colored elastic straps so everything stays perfectly in place during a four-minute routine.

But once the music starts, the theatrical beauty quickly gives way to a highly organized athletic event. To keep the massive week-

end schedule on track, organizers at the 2026 Autumn Classic had to run events on three separate ice rinks—the NHL, Olympic, and Pond surfaces—all at the same time. Skaters were grouped into different flights based on their age and skill level, starting with young beginners and moving all the way up to elite senior athletes.

For the higher-level skaters, the weekend was a two-part test. First came the short program, where skaters had to execute a strict checklist of mandatory el-

ements—like specific spins and jumps—with no room for error. The second part was the free skate, a longer routine where skaters could show off their unique style and try their hardest, highest-scoring jump combinations.

Every move was tracked by the International Judging System, which splits the scoring into two separate teams of officials. First, a technical panel watches instant video replays to make sure the skater took off on the correct edge of their blade and fully completed their jump rotations. Meanwhile, a separate panel of judges grades how beautifully those moves were done, scoring things like the skater's speed, grace, and musical timing.

The end of this competition doesn't mean the season's conclusion, however. The scores from the weekend are officially locked into the national standings. For the hundreds of skaters who packed up their rhinestone brushes and skate guards on Sunday night, the points earned here represent the first major step toward earning a spot at the National Championships later this season.

How Nutritious are School Lunches?

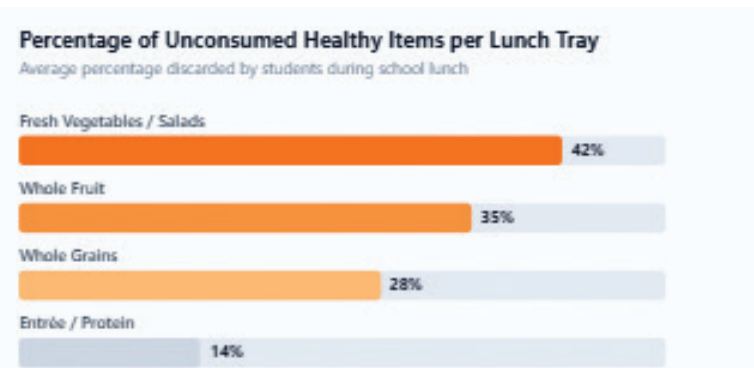


Jayden Kim
Grade 9
The Science Academy
STEM Magnet

School nutrition in the United States has gradually been shifting away from the “mystery meat” stereotypes and focusing more on locally sourced and higher-quality meals. However, despite improvements, students and parents say otherwise. Common complaints include low-quality, highly processed “heat and serve” meals, a lack of appetizing options, and “food fatigue” from repetitive menus.

Currently, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)'s dietary guidelines include product-based limits, such as sodium and added sugars, at least 80% whole grain per week, fat-free or 1% milk, daily servings of fruits and vegetables, and a minimum and maximum calorie requirement of approximately 750 - 850 kcal for high school students. In addition, starting January 1, 2027, products with brominated vegetable oil, potassium bromate, propylparaben, and red dye No.3 are prohibited.

Typical foods in 2026 balance traditional favorites with stricter health standards. Popular cafeteria lunch items include: pizza, nachos, nuggets or wings, burri-



Unfortunately, for many schools, the healthiest components of a student's diet have the highest waste rates during lunch. [Source: Author, Jayden Kim]

tos, taco salads, sweet potato curry, jerk chicken, pasta, and more. Although most of these sound good and may look even better in photos, different schools may have less appetizing versions depending on the health standards at their schools.

While all schools participate in federal programs, funding disparities often lead to differences in the quality and variety of foods served. Districts with limited resources often struggle to cover the full cost of healthy meals, which can lead to a greater reliance on cheap, highly processed foods. Federal reimburse-

ments often don't cover the full cost of producing a meal, forcing schools to cut corners. They may lack the equipment, infrastructure, and staff training necessary for scratch cooking, leading to a greater use of ultra-processed, pre-packaged items.

Some other factors could be supply chains and procurement. Even if a school wants to serve healthier food, they are often at the mercy of manufacturer availability. According to the School Nutrition Association, nearly 89% of schools report trouble obtaining enough items that meet current standards for whole grains, low

sodium, and low sugar.

Furthermore, a major non-financial barrier is whether the students will actually prefer the healthier options. New low-sodium and low-sugar versions of familiar foods sometimes have a different taste or texture, leading to increased food waste and lower participation from the students. Also, with short lunch periods and long lines, students are more likely to pick the quick, processed “grab and go” option over fresh salads or meals that require more time to finish. This means that while there can be better options, the transition to implementing them can be challenging.

All of these things show that although schools are meeting the federal guidelines, there are many barriers to implementing actual scratch cooking and reducing reliance on ultra-processed foods. Constraints such as funding shortages or preferences make it so that the federal guidelines don't have as big of a positive impact as expected. To make food healthier, there must be something done to improve quality.

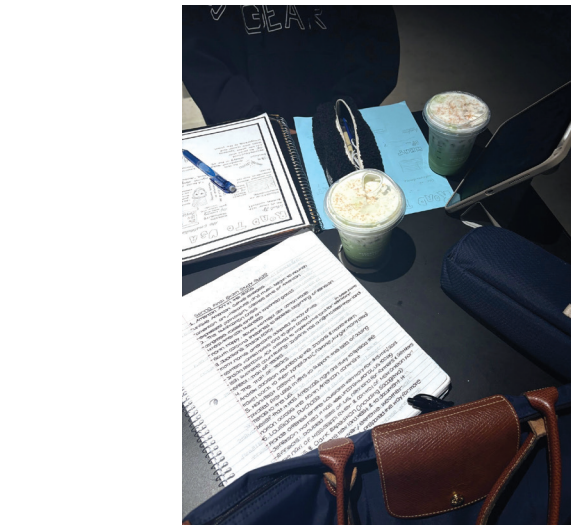
Top 3 Science-Backed Study Methods



Yein Cho
Grade 9
Crescenta Valley
High School

Now that school is officially in session, students may find themselves spending more time at their desks, studying for upcoming assessments. For many, hours can go by before they realize they have been rereading the same information without actually absorbing it. The long hours sacrificed for the study session suddenly feel useless and frustrating. To help with this relatable issue, there are certain scientifically backed study methods that can help students use their timemore efficiently.

The first method is spaced practice, which involves spreading study time across multiple days instead of cramming everything into one session. Cramming may seem productive, but trying to absorb large amounts of information in a short period can cause important details to be overlooked. In contrast, spaced practice gives students more opportunities to process and connect information, helping strengthen it in their long-term memory. This is known as the spacing effect, which has been demonstrated in more than 200 studies and with over more than a century of research. One way to use this method is to spend 30-40 minutes each day reviewing the new material taught in class and gradually becoming more famil-



Endless study sessions during finals week can be prevented by adopting certain study habits. [Source: Author, Yein Cho]

iar with the concepts. By the time the test arrives, one will have encountered the material multiple times, making it easier to recall. This approach can also help students avoid those four-hour study sessions that can leave them feeling overwhelmed and dissatisfied with their progress.

While spaced practice allows for time management, the second method, blurting, supports students' memory. This method allows students to test their ability to recall information. The blurting method encourages students to write down everything they re-

member about the material without looking at their notes. They can then check their answers, review what they missed, and repeat the process to strengthen their memory. By repeatedly quizzing and forcing themselves to explain the concepts before being given the answers, individuals can clearly distinguish what they need to work on.

The last method is the Feynman Technique. Simply memorizing information does not always help people fully understand the “why” behind it. This can become especially troublesome when com-

ing across questions that require a more critical understanding of the material on the test. To prevent this, the Feynman technique starts with the student explaining a concept in their own words as if they are teaching it to someone who knows nothing about it. During that explanation, they can identify gaps in their understanding or where there is confusion or trouble. Afterwards, they can refer back to their notes to fill in those gaps and continue explaining the concept with a stronger understanding. Eventually, the student will become capable of teaching the concept to others in their own words, proving their understanding of the material.

These three study methods all focus on different areas of skill a student can improve upon. From time management and memorization to understanding, these skill sets are important to strengthen a student's study habits. Not only do the methods provide a thorough way of studying, but they are also efficient in time, allowing busy individuals to balance schoolwork with other tasks. Whether you are struggling to manage your time, remember information, or fully understand a concept, finding the right study method can make learning more effective without taking over your schedule.

Editors Column

Getting Ahead on College Applications



Yejoon Choi
Grade 12
Northwood High School

College Applications are often considered one of many hurdles that students challenge in their academic careers. Ranging from the stress of getting good grades through school to writing college essays, applying to colleges can hence be a difficult task to go through. However, there is one overlooked difficulty of applications that may prove to be integral to a fast and easy journey in applying for colleges: the process of filling out personal information.

In almost all applications, such as the Common App, students who apply for colleges are required to fill out a broad range of profiles, ranging in topic from their activities, ethnicities, and school grades. Although obviously not as important as your personal statement essays or college-specific supplementals, filling out this information as truthfully and efficiently as possible is instrumental to gaining an edge in the application and acceptance process by presenting information in this orderly and understandable fashion.

To first approach the college application process, it is important to set up an account and



Although college applications can appear to be a daunting task, you can make facing them much easier by doing something as simple as filling out information. [Source: Author, Yejoon Choi]

scope out the required questions to plan ahead in working with this website and organization for the upcoming months. Next, many applications will be asking for the activities or extracurriculars and the awards you've received throughout your academic experience. Here, it is important to summarize and simplify a list of those activities, describing them concisely, as they are often limited to low character counts when

asking about what your extracurriculars and awards entail.

If you are not yet at the age where you need to work on college applications directly, it is still a great idea to fill up a resume of activities, extracurriculars, or awards you've earned so that you can be prepared to share them in applications or even further in the future, when trying to apply for jobs.

Past this, there's also the academics section for applications that focuses on the grades and academic career you've had in school or other exams such as the SAT. Here, it is important to list any classes or GPA with the assistance of a counselor or advisement teacher. Here, it is important to not misspell or mis-categorize any of these classes due to there being dozens of classifications and labels that mean different things for each class. If a school hosts a workshop meeting or tip sheet for this topic, it is also a great idea to attend to help learn to navigate the academics.

Beyond the general information for the application, however, it is also integral to make up a list of which colleges you want to apply to so that you may be able to ask for a letter of recommendation from teachers and notify them posthaste.

The application process can be difficult and confusing for many students trying to apply. However, it is therefore also important to find a semblance of order and mastery over this chaos by tackling it in the seemingly menial tasks of filling in information.

Student Reporter

An Eagle Scout's Responsibility



Tae Lee
Grade 11
Science Academy
STEM Magnet

Scouting is a place where people are united through leadership, regardless of background or experience. Reaching the rank of Eagle Scout is an opportunity for young adults to practice leadership and make a lasting impact on their communities. Fewer than six percent of Scouts earn the rank of Eagle Scout, making it an achievement that reflects years of personal dedication. Reaching this milestone requires completing 21 merit badges, holding leadership positions within a troop, and planning service projects that benefit a local school, church, or organization. After nearly six years, I achieved the rank of Eagle Scout and learned many valuable skills along the way.

I reflected on what this accomplishment represented. My scoutmaster emphasized the growth I experienced over the years I was part of the troop, explaining that "Becoming an Eagle Scout shows you more than outdoor skills. It teaches you how to lead, how to serve, and how to stay committed." Similar experiences were shared by fellow Eagle Scouts who completed their journey before me. They told me how their confidence grew from the experience



Scouting summer camps offer many merit badge classes and a great time to socialize, creating real, lasting connections. [Source: Author, Tae Lee]

and acknowledged my growth. Like the older Scouts, I've learned to lead a younger group through the challenges of my difficult Eagle project.

The final step of this journey is the Eagle Scout Board of Review, an interview conducted by district and troop leaders to evaluate a candidate's personality, growth, and commitment to Scouting values. In this meeting,

Scouts sit before the board to answer thoughtful and honest questions about themselves and their journey in Scouting. I sat before my board, feeling intimidated but proud. Rather than testing practical skills, the board asked how I managed conflict during my project and how I plan to carry the Scout Oath into my adult life. Looking back on six years of growth, these questions made me realize how much the

program had shaped my perspective.

After spending all of middle school and part of high school in Scouts, I can see an evident change in my behavior and mindset. Not surprisingly, my parents also witnessed this change. "I can definitely tell that you manage your responsibilities and are more accountable after you've reached Eagle." The Eagle Court of Honor recognized my efforts, but it also reminded me of the responsibility that comes with becoming an Eagle Scout. The ceremony was less of an achievement and more a reason to carry that sense of duty forward. Learning to take responsibility for my work, my team, and my decisions taught me more than I could have imagined.

I can confidently say that joining Scouting was one of the best decisions I have made. It provided an environment where I could test my limits, learn from failure, and discover what it truly means to lead. Joining the program shaped my character, introduced me to lifelong friends, and built a sense of accountability that I will carry into my future.

Student Reporter

Celebrating Chuseok in Korean Class



Grace Song
Grade 9
Cypress High School

For many Korean families, Chuseok is a time to gather with loved ones, share food, and honor traditions. This year, my Korean 1 class brought that tradition into school with a two-day Chuseok celebration filled with traditional games and Korean food.

Chuseok, known as the Korean harvest festival, is one of Korea's most important holidays. Traditionally, families gather to celebrate the harvest, spend time together, and show gratitude. Food is an important part of the holiday, with families preparing special dishes and rice cakes. While celebrating Chuseok at school is different from celebrating it at home, our Korean class found ways to bring some of those traditions into the classroom.

The class celebration began Thursday with traditional Korean games. We played jegichagi, a game where players try to keep a small object called a jegi into the air and try to keep it from touching the ground. We also played ddakji, a game using folded paper tiles. Players placed a ddakji on the ground and tried to flip their opponent's tile by throwing



Korean class celebrates Chuseok through traditional games and Korean food while sharing the culture with classmates and teachers. [Source: Author, Grace Song]

their own on top of it. Finally, we played yutnori, a traditional Korean board game in which players throw four wooden sticks and move their pieces around the board based on how the sticks land. Even though some students were playing the games for the first time, the friendly competition made it easy for everyone to get involved. Furthermore, each game gave students a chance to learn more about Korean tradi-

tions while also having fun with our classmates.

On Friday, we continued the celebration with food. We shared songpyeon, a traditional Korean rice cake commonly eaten during Chuseok. The small, half-moon-shaped rice cakes were made from rice flour and filled with ingredients such as sweet bean. We also had kimbap, Korean rice rolls wrapped in dried seaweed and

filled with ingredients such as vegetables and meat. I was excited to see some of my classmates try Korean foods that they had never had before. Seeing their reactions and being able to explain what each food was made the celebration feel more meaningful. Sitting together and trying the food also allowed students to talk with one another while experiencing an important part of Korean culture.

Students also had the opportunity to share the experience beyond our classroom. We delivered some of the songpyeon to different teachers so they could try the traditional rice cakes and learn a little about Chuseok. For me, this was one of the most meaningful parts of the celebration because it allowed us to introduce Korean culture to people who may not have experienced it before.

Celebrating Chuseok at school showed me that cultural traditions do not have to stay only within our homes or communities. Through games, food, and time together, our Korean class was able to bond and create a space where we could celebrate our culture and share it with others.