Editors Column

Unmuting the Mic for Youth Leaders



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Imagine a room full of youth leaders, advocates, and researchers debating how to make the digital world healthier. Participants eagerly crowd around tables discussing media literacy, brainstorming tech policy reforms, and challenging teen safety regulations. These attendees aren't just high school and college students—they are the future of technology, media, and policymaking —and they are determined to shape the digital world.

I arrived at the 2026 Amplify Youth Summit with an empty notebook, excited to experience the intellectual exchange I had always associated with academia: passionate discussions, worldly diverse perspectives, and ideas that lead to new breakthroughs. I had assumed that many of the problems youth faced online existed simply because not enough people were taking the time to discuss them, and that by bringing together enough people, we could develop meaningful solutions in three days. However, change is far less straightforward than it seems.

During a group discussion, my team brainstormed challenges we wanted to address, including the pressure to present an idealized version of oneself online. Immediately, we hit our first roadblock. While many agreed that seeing carefully curated posts made them doubt themselves, others argued that social media was inherently inauthentic, and that our proposed solutions could make unspoken social media etiquette feel even more restrictive.



Youth leaders from across the nation came together at the 2026 Amplify Youth Summit to create honest dialogue and actionable steps toward healthier online spaces. [Source: Author, Evalyn Yu]

We shifted our focus to discussing how digital communities could encourage more in-person connections. Although much of our interactions with others now occur online, my group argued that we still live in a physical world and we need to promote healthy real-world experiences. But right when we were about to begin drafting solutions, one participant, a representative from Next Gen Men, an organization that empowers young boys through an online Discord community, spoke up. He argued that online relationships are just as meaningful and can be a lifeline to people who didn't have access to those communities in person, and moving those communities offline was neither realistic nor fair because it could take away that sense of online support that his organization had worked so hard to cultivate.

Our initial ideas were not as sound as they seemed after hearing his rebuttal. I was hit with the sobering realization that we could not "solve social media" in a two-hour discussion. Instead, we refined our problem statement: how to create a digital world where people have more choice, agency, and positive spaces. Then we proposed interventions: mental health reflection prompts built into For You Pages and sensitivity disclaimers for potentially triggering posts.

What stayed with me most was the importance of speaking up and respectfully sharing different perspectives. Had that participant complacently let us carry on with our solution, we would have neglected to address the realities of many for whom social media is their lifeline. Very rarely are young people given the space and attention to have a voice in decision-making. Thus, when we are allowed to speak, we have the responsibility to amplify everyone's voice.

Student Reporter

A Sweet Scoop on Local Government



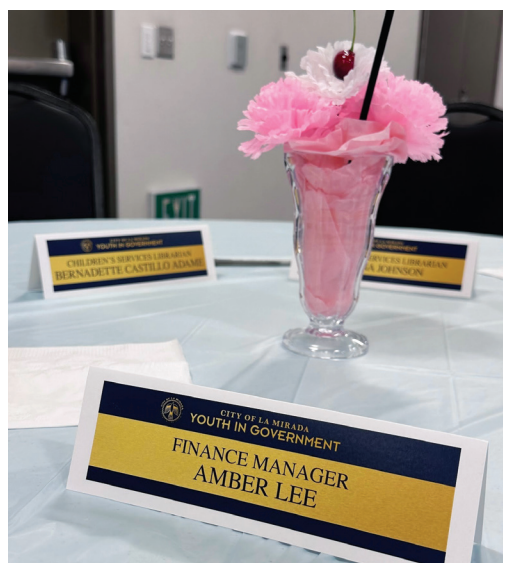
Amber Lee
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La Mirada's Youth in Government Program is known for the experience it gives to teenagers in how the city runs; it's one of the few perks of having a small local government. As a member of Youth in Government for the past few years, I have been able to enjoy these benefits to the fullest.

In the midst of the busy first quarter of junior year, the annual interviews to become part of the Youth in Government rolled by. After going through the nerve-wracking process, I was fortunately accepted and was paired with La Mirada's Finance Manager as my counterpart.

Out of the many special experiences the program offers, the one that stands out the most is the relationship student members can create with their counterparts. Counterparts consist of major figures who help run La Mirada, ranging from the Mayor to the Finance Manager.

The city also offers a variety of events to help students build tighter bonds with their counterparts. One of these events is the Ice Cream Social, a casual hangout-type of event where students can enjoy their time through a build-your-own ice cream station. This was my first opportunity to meet my counterpart, Melissa Pascual. Unlike last year, when I had been so nervous, this time I was able to actually bond with Melissa.



Finally getting to meet my counterpart, the Finance Manager of La Mirada, at the Youth in Government's Ice Cream Social event was a great part of the Youth in Government Program. [Source: Author, Amber Lee]

We started off with quick introductions: what we like, what I do as a student, and what Melissa does as a Finance Manager. We surprisingly had a lot in common, such as enjoying math class but disliking science. The most memorable part of our conversation was when I asked her if she does a lot of math as a Finance Manager, and she laughed back, saying that everyone asks her that too, but in reality, she does not do as much math as people would think.

After a bit of time, we went to get our ice cream and scooped up various flavors with delicious toppings. With the ice cream satisfying our sweet tooth, we began a deeper conversation regarding which direction we would take our student-led projects this year. I introduced her to some of the ideas that were proposed by our student body, such as holding a cultural event at La Mirada, building a separate study hub for students, improving our city bus stops with creative but essential decorations, and so on.

Overall, the Ice Cream Social further changed my perspective on local government and leadership. I had always thought of going to the city hall or meeting people who work in leadership positions as intimidating, especially to high schoolers. Even last year, when I had just joined, this Ice Cream Social made me feel more stiff and anxious than comfortable. This time, I was able to freely explore various topics with my counterpart and was able to see her as a trusting mentor as we led through this year's projects.

Student Reporter

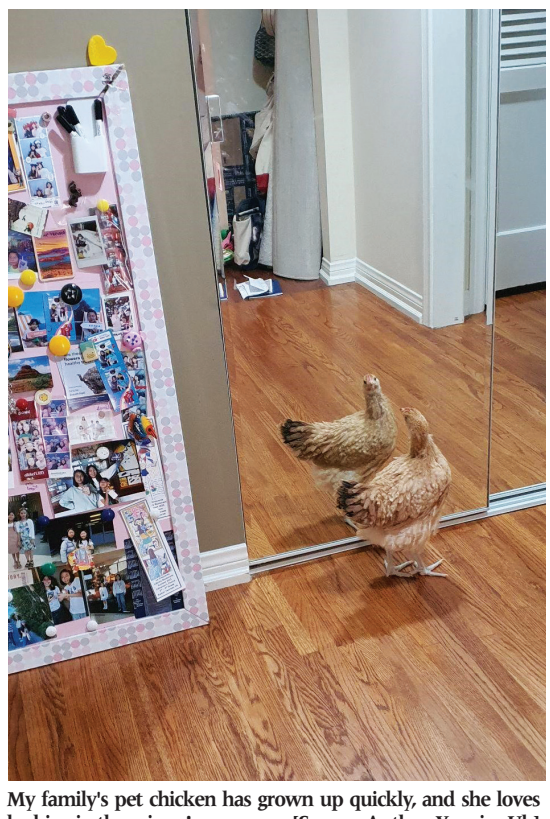
How I Got a Pet Chicken



Angelina Yeonjae Uh
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Rosemont Middle School

I have a pet chicken. It is kind of surprising to me; when I was younger, I would have never thought of myself having this type of pet. My chicken's life started in an incubator; my family and I hatched it ourselves. The story behind our pet chick is an interesting chronicle. We had a mourning dove nest in our backyard, with two tiny eggs in the nest. We had hoped for the birds to hatch, and looked forward to seeing what would come next. However, one day the mourning dove dropped an egg to the ground purposefully before abandoning the nest. After doing some research, we concluded that the mother dove had realized that the eggs weren't going to hatch for some reason and thus had fled the nest. That incident not only gave us sadness; it gave us motivation to see a baby bird hatch.

A bit after this happened, my family visited an Airbnb that was part of a farm that had quails and even more animals. There were chickens, a pig, a goat, donkeys, and many animals on the farm. We talked to the owner about our hatching experience, and she offered us four eggs that her chickens had laid. We were happy and excited to see the chicks hatching, and we brought the eggs home with excitement.



My family's pet chicken has grown up quickly, and she loves looking in the mirror! [Source: Author, Yeonjae Uh]

When we came back to our house, we immediately put the eggs into the incubator. Approximately a month later, one chicken had hatched! We couldn't stand the chick's cuteness. It soon became fluffy, and I couldn't believe that the chick came out of the small egg. The chick acted very cute, too. As soon as it was able to fly a short distance, it started to hop on our lap and then fall asleep. Its eyelids were so thin we could see its eye faintly even when it was napping. It followed us when we walked around, so we had to make sure that the chick wasn't going to get kicked or stepped on.

The chick grew really fast, and we bought a bigger cage for it. Over this past summer, my family made a visit to Korea, and we left our new pet with a friend to take care of it. When we arrived back home, we were surprised to see that our chick - now a chidkent - had grown so big

Even though our chicken is now almost fully grown, it is still adorable. Our chicken loves to look into the mirror and see itself. It also loves cheese and sunflower seeds; I'd never seen it so eager to eat something.

Oftentimes I think, 'This is how it feels to have a pet!' The love of our chicken will never change, even though it often runs around, leaving trails of feathers and droppings. I think a chicken is a great pet to have, and there's nothing anyone can do to change my mind.

Student Reporter

Outdated Skills: Convenience or Catastrophe

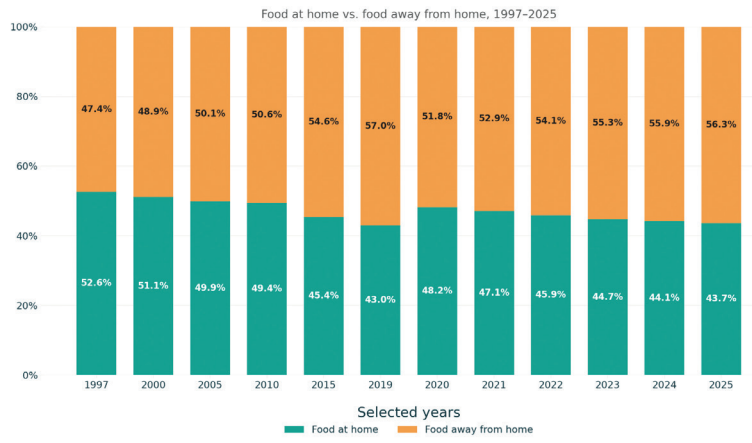


Jayden Kim
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In the modern age, where some skills are rendered obsolete, humanity has forgotten some of the most important aspects of life that were considered to be essential just a few decades ago. As technology handles most of our daily chores, some outdated skills are starting to return. These skills not only help with cost management but also to combat the growing problem of consumer culture.

One of the more impactful skills that can benefit many is cooking from scratch. The current population relies heavily on food delivery and highly processed, pre-packaged meals. Knowing how to cook basic items with just raw ingredients can save money and give a sense of accomplishment. When making your own food, you control the ingredients used, your nutritional intake, and taste preferences. Cooking is essential because you never know when you need to care for yourself without pre-packed meals. It also promotes independence when you make the food, plate it, and clean it, all by yourself.

Another skill that can save your life is navigation, specifically reading physical maps. Picture this: you're stuck in the middle of the woods, and your GPS is down. You only see trees and a mountain in the distance. The only supplies you have are a compass and a map. Most people in this situation would try to use the mountain as a reference point. But how do you know which side of the mountain you're facing? That's when learning to use a compass comes in handy. Many wilderness and travel emergencies stem from initial navigational errors. Knowing how to read the landscape helps you get out of these situations.



The decrease in cooking at home and increase in eating out over the past two decades shows a reliance on others and a skill we can bring back.
[Source: Author, Jayden Kim]

In the present time, most people rely on GPS and smartphone apps that fail to operate without a signal in rural areas or need new batteries. In times when you're uncertain of your location, this is how you'll stay alive. Studies from the University College London did research on London cab drivers, showing that active spatial navigation increases the size of the hippocampus in the brain. Conversely, relying on apps all the time will reduce brain capability. While most will never end up in dangerous situations, there's always a chance to end up in a Lord of the Flies type of circumstance.

Finally, an outdated skill that's been negated is memorizing phone numbers. Nowadays, people's information is saved in their contact lists. People once used phone books to find phone numbers, but the process was shortened and made easier through modern cellphone technology. However, when using a stranger's phone or a landline, memorizing a select few numbers like parents, emergency contacts, or close friends is useful.

Every day, we take our modern conveniences for granted, never knowing when they could all be taken away. During those times or situations, it never hurts to learn skills that take a very short time to grasp.

Student Reporter

Halloween Tradition in South Pasadena



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South Pasadena
High School

Every October, the streets of South Pasadena are decorated with lights and gravestones as residents prepare for Halloween. Families and visitors gather throughout the city to experience the fun and fright of Halloween. Over the years, Halloween has become a major part of South Pasadena's tradition. From candy to decorations, the holiday brings people together.

South Pasadena has had a unique connection to Halloween that dates back to the 1970s. In 1978, director John Carpenter filmed parts of the movie Halloween throughout South Pasadena. The city was chosen for the tree-lined streets, capturing that classic "Middle American" look as Carpenter described. One of the most recognizable filming locations was Michael Myers' House, located at 1000 Mission Street, which is now a popular tourist attraction. Other streets and homes were also used to create the fictional town of Haddonfield, Illinois. After the movie was released, it became a major hit, attracting attention to every location where it was filmed. Over time, South Pasadena developed a reputation for its residential neighborhoods and its history in horror filmmaking. The famous statue called "Astride-Aside" on Mission Street even has a Michael Myers mask and holds a bucket on Halloween. Even today, fans of the movie visit the Myers' House to experience the history of the original film.



The infamous Myers House in South Pasadena stands quietly after dark, bringing back memories of the 1978 horror classic Halloween. Decades later, it remains an iconic landmark for horror fans.
[Source: Author, Caden Ahn]

One of the most recognizable Halloween traditions in South Pasadena is the annual trick-or-treat celebration on Milan Avenue. Every October 31, families and children from all over gather in the neighborhood to get the best candy. Residents prepare for Halloween by decorating their homes with gravestones, skeletons, zombies, and Jack-o'-lanterns, creating a festive atmosphere throughout. In addition to neighborhood celebrations, local schools participate by giving out candy to students and allowing them to dress up in costumes. These traditions bring together residents and visitors from other towns. The popularity of these celebrations demonstrates how Halloween has become a significant holiday in South Pasadena.

Today, Halloween in South Pasadena continues to be an important community tradition. Each year, residents and visitors participate in celebrations such as visiting the famous Haunted House on Diamond Avenue and even costume competitions. Modern Halloween decorations have become more elaborate, with homeowners using projectors and lights to create impressive displays that even have animations. Social media has also helped increase the popularity of South Pasadena's Halloween celebrations by posting stories and reels of the shimmering and spooky decorations on each house's porch. Even restaurants in the area give special discounts on meals for people wearing costumes. In addition, fans of the original Halloween movie can visit the attractions to relive the movie's experience themselves. Although Halloween celebrations have changed over the years, traditional activities such as trick-or-treating or going to a haunted house remain popular among the younger generation. Through those celebrations, South Pasadena continues to be as lively as ever and preserve its Halloween identity.

Student Reporter

Halloween Fun at Buford's Trunk or Treat



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Buford High School

On the day before Halloween, I volunteered at Buford High School's annual Trunk or Treat to give the community a spooky and fun time filled with candy and prizes. I signed up for this event with a group of friends for a school club, planning for weeks before the big day to make it the best we could.

When my friends and I were preparing our personal trunk for the event, we quickly agreed to do a classic Halloween-themed trunk and split up the work. We all bought supplies, whether it was giant bags of candy or decorations, as well as additional items such as boxes of cereal and paper towels to donate to a local non-profit organization.

Once school ended on the event day, we all headed home to change into our costumes and grab the materials we needed. Shortly after, we drove back to the high school to set up our trunk an hour before the event actually started. We placed a table in front of the trunk with cobwebs draped over it, two giant baskets of candy on top, and a fabric background that hung with a design of a witch's cauldron bubbling. Smaller, additional decorations such as candles and mini pumpkins were also set up, and food trucks were parked nearby to serve refreshing drinks and meals to the guests.



My friends and I helped set up our Halloween-themed trunk for my high school's annual Trunk or Treat.
[Source: Author, Ava Je]

The event started at five o'clock and became super packed with eager kids and parents playing games and collecting candy within the first five minutes. Each of the many trunks set up had different decorations, such as mermaid, pirate, racecar, and art themes with colorful balloons and cardboard cutouts.

For our trunk, some of my friends stayed at the table to give out candy and manage all of the guests in front, while I went down the line of people waiting for candy to entertain them. With my hands full of a variety of stickers, including trucks, aliens, sports, and flowers, as well as a bag of colorful, shaped erasers, I gave out these prizes to the other kids as additional goodies for their candy baskets.

As people came, I saw many different costumes, such as inflatable dinosaurs, football players, witches, and cowboys. People of all ages dressed up, with parents doing group costumes with their kids and classmates dressing up together. Even teachers came in their costumes to help organize the event and give out candy at different trunks.

While everyone was tired towards the end of the Trunk or Treat event, we still powered through to make sure the school was clean and to help others pack up as well. While I was worn out, I am so grateful I was able to be a part of this event. Giving back to my community through this fun event was more than just getting service hours, as I had tons of fun myself and am already looking forward to volunteering again next year.