



THE FACES OF COVID-19

Students reflect on their experiences with the loss of loved ones due to COVID-19.

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ART WHILE WE'RE APART

BVH student artists, filmmakers and photographers win in several multimedia competitions despite the pandemic.

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JUGGLING SPORTS IN THE PANDEMIC

BVH student-athletes manage the responsibilities of playing sports alongside distance learning.

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the Crusader

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SUHSD reimplements revised graduation plan for class of 2021

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Due to the unique challenges posed by the pandemic, Sweetwater Union High School District (SUHSD) is lowering traditional graduation credit requirements from 44 credits to 22 minimum credits for the class of 2021 and Grade 13 students who are repeating 12th grade. Students will not be allowed to drop any of the courses within their current schedule.

The revised plan, a statewide program known as the California Graduation Plan, was also implemented for the Class of 2020. While it will not apply to students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), students enrolled in Learning Centers, Palomar and Independent Studies are still expected to meet the new requirements.

In an email sent on Jan. 29, SUHSD Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Ana Maria Alvarez, Ed.D., explained that every year some students must take additional courses during the second semester of their senior year to make up classes they have not passed or previously taken. To address the educational needs of students, the district created a Graduation Committee composed of teachers, counselors and district officials.

After reviewing multiple options to support seniors in distance learning, including credit recovery and summer school programs, the committee decided instead to revise graduation requirements.

"The unique circumstances of this pandemic and subsequent implementation of a distance learning program [...] enhanced some of the disparities faced by our students. In response to this situation and following the guidance from the California Department

of Education (CDE) to ensure that [the] district provide as many safeguards as possible to support students during this unique situation, we re-evaluated our graduation requirements," Alvarez said in the email.

Additionally, the plan "will not negatively impact students who are already accepted to colleges and universities in the fall 2021 semester," according to the email.

BVH counselor Lorena Mata says the decision was expected as students continue school in a remote learning model, which has posed varying academic, mental and financial challenges for students.

"I don't think the district expected us to be at home for this long," Mata said. "Everybody's situation has been different. So [SUHSD] felt that this [plan] would be one of the best ways to help [students.]"

BVH Principal Roman Del Rosario, Ed.D., believes the new plan will allow students to "move forward" with their lives after graduation amid growing educational disparities in distance learning. An analysis of district-wide grades revealed that a disproportionate number of students were receiving "D" and "F" grades.

"It's just the stories that we hear time and time again of students who [are] struggling because of the pandemic and the challenges of distance learning. [That] was at the core of why that decision was made: that students deserve a lifeline [to] allow them to move forward with their goals during this time," Del Rosario said.

Transcripts must still demonstrate completion of the University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) A-G requirements for entrance to a UC or CSU campus. Students must stay enrolled through June 4, 2021, in order to qualify for the revised graduation plan. Additionally, community service hours will no longer be required for graduation.

"One of the lessons I want students to reflect on is the importance of self advocacy and taking ownership over their grades," Del Rosario said. "I know teachers use Jupiter as a way of communicating progress in grades, [but] I lament that some students are surprised that they maybe didn't pass a class. The reality is [that] many of those students were not very attached with monitoring [their] progress. If [students] think that something is being graded unfairly, or that they [deserve] a higher grade on a particular assignment, it's a valuable skill to speak up [and] talk to your teacher to get feedback. That's an important part in our journey into adulthood."

BVH community members receive COVID-19 vaccine



BVH Advance Placement (AP) Environmental Science teacher Adrienne Marriott holds up her verification of vaccination. Marriott was a part of a double blind Moderna vaccine trial where participants were given injections without knowledge of whether it was the COVID-19 vaccine or a placebo. PHOTO BY PABLO DOLLERO

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As of Jan. 23, San Diego County has begun vaccinating individuals under Phase 1 of the COVID-19 vaccination plan. This phase allows healthcare workers and people over the age of 65 to be vaccinated. Although COVID-19 vaccines are not available for the general population over 16 years of age until Phase

2, several Bonita Vista High (BVH) students and teachers have had the chance to receive it.

BVH senior Natalee Borum, for instance, was able to receive the COVID-19 vaccine on Jan. 30 as she has been volunteering at Sharp Chula Vista Medical Hospital since her sophomore year. According to Borum, Sharp volunteers have not been able to volunteer since the start of the pandemic. Now that the vaccine is available to medical workers, Sharp notified volunteers like Borum to schedule a date to receive the vaccine if they wanted to start volunteering again.

"The plan is for them to start opening up more positions to volunteer [and] get the hospital running because the volunteers do a lot of [important] tasks at the hospital and it helps with the overall function of the hospital," Borum said. "I'm hoping that after the second dose is given, I'll be able to return soon, and if not, I'm just going to keep on waiting until I can."

Borum received the Pfizer vaccine which requires two injections, three weeks apart from each other. According to Borum, she received the first shot at an office building across from the Sharp hospital repurposed to have yearly tests for employees and volunteers for all sorts of check-ups. Those receiving it had to wait outside in a line to follow minimum occupancy rules. Two people would enter the building at a time where they were greeted by two nurses and four volunteers in order to get the vaccine and ask any questions. Once they were given the shot, they were guided to a different room to wait 15 minutes before leaving to monitor any possible side effects. Borum later received her second vaccination on Feb. 20.

In late summer of 2020, Advance Placement (AP) Environmental Science teacher Adrienne Marriott became a part of the Moderna vaccine study for COVID-19 where she got the chance to be one of the first to receive the vaccine. The study consisted of receiving two injections, one on Aug. 21 and another on Sept. 21, 2020. Although she received the vaccination, Marriott did not know whether it was the actual vaccine or a placebo

until February 2021 since it was a double-blind study, where experimenters and participants do not know who is receiving a certain injection. However, it was later confirmed that she did in fact receive the real Moderna vaccine and now she continues to answer questions as an addition to the research.

"[In the study] you have an app on your phone and it would ask you some questions about symptoms and side effects. Then there's a monthly phone call where they checked me and then I continue to be in the study for at least another year because we still don't know if the vaccine will confer lifelong immunity or if my blood no longer has antibodies after some point," Marriott said. "One of the questions they always asked is if I know or have been around someone with COVID because a question that we still have is, 'If I'm vaccinated, could I still spread the disease to others?'"

In light of the recent distribution of these vaccines, conversations have sparked with the current unknowns of the potential side effects. According to a poll conducted by the Crusader on Feb. 8 of 438 BVH students, 10.8 percent were afraid of receiving the vaccine. Although there is fear around the COVID-19 vaccine, Borum expresses that she wasn't fearful of receiving it as she is "a firm believer that science works and trusts all the scientists that have researched it." Moreover, Marriott agrees and believes the vaccine has gone through enough testing, although she did experience some minor side effects.

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Moving the needle SUHSD plans for teacher vaccinations



A BVH student arrives for in-person choir rehearsal on Feb. 24. As of Feb. 24, only some cohorts have been allowed on campus. PHOTO BY LUCIA RIVERA

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In preparation for educator eligibility for the COVID-19 vaccine, the Sweetwater Union High School District (SUHSD) administration and the Sweetwater Education Association (SEA) are currently collaborating with community organizations to plan for effective vaccinations for teachers.

"Once the county gives the formal notification that educators are eligible for vaccinations we have agreed with our teachers that we will need to meet within two days of that notification so that we can start establishing those timelines. That in essence acknowledges some of the ambiguity we're dealing with right now," SUHSD Interim Superintendent Moises Aguirre said. "In the meantime we're putting all the other things in place so that we can have that understanding of what would happen once vaccines become available."

According to the San Diego County website, "Those at risk of exposure at work in the following sectors: Emergency Services; Childcare & Education; and Food & Agriculture" will be in the next group eligible for vaccination. Not only do educators have to be eligible, but the county has to have sufficient doses for vaccinating teachers.

The work being done in the meantime involves communication between district administration, the SEA, community representatives and other groups involved with vaccine distribution.

"As a district, we don't receive our own doses that then we can impart," Aguirre said. "[Our role is] more of constant communication with our partner agencies at County Health and Human Services. We've been in contact with different universities [...] and with different community clinics like San Ysidro Community Health Clinic. It's more of trying to align resources."

The SEA communicates similarly with stakeholders in the plan to vaccinate teachers, with a focus on advocating on behalf of union members. As of Feb. 19, only healthcare workers, other

Phase 1A individuals and people over the age of 64 are eligible to receive the vaccine in San Diego County.

"Our job mainly has been to advocate with our legislators, county supervisors [and] assembly person about 'when are we going to be at the top of the list?'" SEA President Julie Walker said.

As of now, the district has stated that prior to teachers' return to in-person teaching, vaccinations will be offered but not mandated. This information was also relayed to SUHSD teachers by Walker on Feb. 3, who wrote in an email that "it is within [the district's] right as our employer to mandate we return to school when we reach the Red Tier."

While the SEA Bargaining Team is working on the vaccination timeline's language in order "to allow members to be fully vaccinated before returning," the SEA did not decide to press a vaccination mandate. This was due to only 60 percent support of a COVID-19 vaccination mandate in the SEA's survey of teachers.

From an administrative perspective, SUHSD also felt more comfortable en-

couraging and offering vaccines for educators without mandating it.

"There's some ambiguous rules out there [about] whether employers can mandate vaccinations for employees. So rather than go down that route, which is pretty contentious, what we agreed to do—because we deemed it to be more efficient and effective to do this in collaboration with our teachers union—is to have it be a voluntary process. Then once they become available [we will] really start to advocate on our part to make sure that there's a prioritization of vaccinations for educators," Aguirre said.

Although San Diego County does not yet have vaccines for SUHSD educators, 90 percent of teachers have reported wanting to be vaccinated in an SEA survey. Once able, however, district leadership highly recommend vaccinations to staff members.

"We're definitely strongly encouraging anybody who's eligible. Obviously there's going to be exceptions when people might have an allergic reaction or some other ethics-based reason, but to the degree that's possible we're definitely encouraging all of our employees and anybody who's eligible in the community to receive the vaccine, especially because down here in the South Bay we've been so heavily impacted by COVID," Aguirre said.

BVH Economics teacher Elizabeth Palmer is one SUHSD educator who was eager to get vaccinated and now has been, independently from her educator role. Her stance aligns with Aguirre's recommendations to get vaccinated.

"Everyone reacts differently to receiving vaccines of any kind, but in my opinion the benefits of the vaccine (not contracting COVID) exceed the costs (a few days of discomfort after each inoculation)," Palmer said.

While Palmer will now be vaccinated in the case that she does return to in-person instruction, she stated she "would have considered returning to teaching in-person without the vaccine with the proper protocols put in place for [her] and [her] students' safety."

Both Walker and Palmer recognized that they could pass COVID-19 to family members they live with, something that Walker considered as another reason for further safety protocols once educators resume teaching in person.

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Bonita Vista High Sound Unlimited students stand in the soccer field on Wednesday, Feb. 24. This was the group's first in-person rehearsal this school year. PHOTO BY LUCIA RIVERA

BVH choir returns to campus for rehearsals

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On Wednesday, Feb. 24, Bonita Vista High (BVH) choir students returned to on-campus rehearsal, which took place on the soccer field with various safety protocols implemented for the first time since the pandemic closed down activities.

Sound Unlimited members attended the first rehearsal standing at least

six feet apart and wearing masks, after going through a health screening upon their arrival to the campus. Before being authorized to attend, however, students also had to receive a negative COVID-19 test and fill out paperwork.

"Our District VAPA (Visual and Performing Arts) Director, Jeff Kover, announced to us near the end of last semester that we would be cleared to rehearse together in-person in small groups. It involved communication between our administrative team, Mr. Kover, myself, our parents, and our students. Once we communicated

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BVH choir returns to campus for rehearsals



Bolles Theater remains empty of students on Feb. 24. Instead, Sound Unlimited students will practice outside every Wednesday afternoon. PHOTO BY LUCIA RIVERA

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with one another and I submitted paperwork for permission to rehearse on campus, we were cleared to go!" Vocal Music Director Michael Klein said.

While it was optional for members to attend, about half did according to Assistant Director of Sound Unlimited and junior, Rosie Beardmore. Following Sound Unlimited, BVH Music Machine held their first practice on Thursday, Feb. 25. Both choirs currently meet in groups of 14.

"Yesterday [Feb. 24], at practice it was so nice to have that feeling of being all united and being together again. Being able to teach [team members] and correct any issues and answer questions was so nice," Beardmore said. "Everybody was super excited and super happy to just see other people and be able to rehearse together."

While Sound Unlimited is not currently able to participate in their usual

tinue doing this," Klein said.

Beardmore hopes for more students to join rehearsals in the future, something that could happen in the near future as Kover had approved for choir students to meet in person in groups of up to 30. Until then, however, Music Machine and Sound Unlimited will continue rehearsing on alternate days.

Tech students like Co-Tech Leader and senior Kayley Tucci are currently practicing with Sound Unlimited despite working with both groups. While only four tech students attended the first rehearsal, Tucci knew immediately that she would attend.

"[Choir is] one of the things that I look forward to most in my own curriculum. So as soon as they said, 'Oh, yeah, we're opening up in person cohorts' I knew I wanted to go there, if not, just for myself, but also to make sure that we managed and helped out our own section," Tucci said. "There's

"It was so nice to have that feeling of being all united and being together again."

— Assistant Director of Sound Unlimited and junior Rosie Beardmore

competitive festival season, they are still rehearsing song and dance sequences. At their first in-person rehearsal they practiced the song "For Good" from the musical Wicked, and choreography by Music Machine Dance Captain and senior Sierra Hahn to "Lost in Japan" by Shawn Mendes. Klein described the rehearsal content, including "stretching and warming up, vocal warm-ups [and] working on choreography" as similar to what choir students did in a usual year.

"I can only see [so much of] what everybody's doing on such a small screen. When you have everybody there [in-person], you can see 'Oh yeah, this is what you might need to fix' or 'This is what you're doing great,'" Beardmore said. "It was just so nice."

Beardmore expressed no concern about adhering to the safety protocols during rehearsals. In addition, tech members, who handle the technical parts of choir performances, each use their own materials instead of sharing. Klein remains 20 feet away from students so that he can meet with multiple groups throughout the week.

"I think we all recognize that singing and dancing together in-person as groups is an incredible gift. None of us will ever take it for granted again. Because of this, we all understood what the protocols were and how to follow them in order to make sure we can con-

lots of things that go with being a backstage tech and the new people don't really know what those are so it's important that there's somebody there to help them."

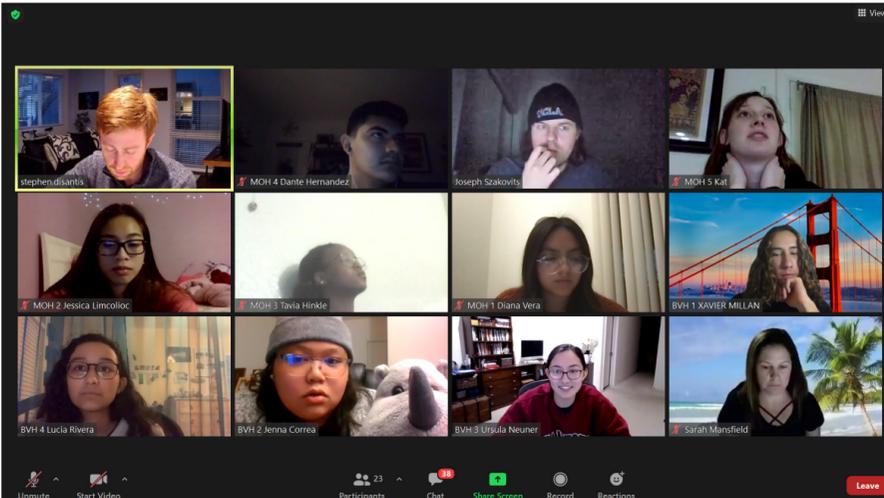
Virtually, Tucci taught her fellow techs through a lot of "hypothetical" situations and explanations, but expressed her hopes to one day be able to return inside Bolles Theater. Despite the challenges that come with being a tech leader for the first time while in a pandemic, Tucci was excited by the first rehearsal.

"It's been hard on the performers especially because some people are so restricted in their houses in terms of singing and being able to move around in their rooms," Tucci said. "Actually having the space to do that was I'm sure really good for them."

Similarly, Klein felt "overjoyed" during the first rehearsal as he "missed seeing students in-person and coaching them on singing and dancing." Those attending the biweekly rehearsals are overall excited to return, while having hopes of more going forward.

"It was nice to actually be back and do things, even if it was just on their soccer field. I mean, you can still see the theater and you can see our storage units," Tucci said. "We're not too bummed about it. I think that it's going to be an enjoyable experience no matter what."

BVH Quiz Bowl kicks off virtual season with victory



The game moderator asks a toss-up question to Bonita Vista High (BVH) and Montgomery High (MOH) competitors. BVH's varsity Quiz Bowl team secured a 380 point lead over MOH in their first match of the season. PHOTO BY EVAN ABUTIN

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After qualifying for the playoffs last year, Bonita Vista High's (BVH) varsity Quiz Bowl team abruptly had their season cut short due to California's stay-at-home order to prevent further spread of COVID-19. Almost a year later, the team competed in their first official online match. On Feb. 8, the BVH Quiz Bowl team competed against Montgomery High (MOH) on a Zoom call, with BVH's varsity team scoring a victory of 480-100 points.

For a large portion of quarantine, the future of Quiz Bowl competitions was unknown to members of the team. However, varsity Quiz Bowl has been conducting online practices since the "third" or "fourth" week of the current school year, as explained by varsity Quiz Bowl Coach Joseph Szakovits. On video calls, the team initially used an automated system called Protobowl, which produces random questions, but eventually switched to Zoom calls in order to emulate the new competition format. Szakovits has felt confident in the team from their first practice—where all of the members showed up.

"You never know what to expect when you're transitioning something that has always been in-person into distance learning, and the students just jumped on board with [that transition]. There have been some technical [and] logistical challenges, but when you have buy-in from the team, all of those things have a way of smoothing themselves over," Szakovits said.

The varsity Quiz Bowl team itself has not changed immensely since last year. Varsity Quiz Bowl Captain and senior Ursula Neuner explained how even though a few seniors graduated, the 2019-2020 team mostly consisted

of juniors. As a result, four out of five of last year's starters are still on the team.

"We've had a lot of continuity this year, and that's generally a good thing. When a lot of juniors become seniors, that tends to lend itself towards having a strong team. We're hopeful we can move forward with that," Szakovits

chat, and I had my finger hovering above my enter key. I was [thinking], 'I hope I don't accidentally press it because that would be awkward,'" Geering said.

The match started with BVH briskly racking up points by correctly answering many toss-up questions, as well as

"I came away [from] that match feeling like we don't have a weak link on this team. That presents a challenge for me because I have all of these players who all clearly deserve to play, I think this was one of the more balanced efforts that I've ever seen from our team."

— varsity Quiz Bowl Coach Joseph Szakovits

Expectedly, several changes have been made to the format of Quiz Bowl competitions, such as the replacement of a physical buzzer with typing "buzz" in the chat and the time limit being dropped in favor of 24 general "toss-up" questions. This created a different competition atmosphere that made Quiz Bowl Secretary, Junior Varsity Captain and sophomore Giselle Geering "kind of nervous" before the match against MOH.

"I was sitting down [feeling] jittery [...] because I had buzz typed in the

bonus questions that followed them. Halfway into the competition, BVH scored 270 points while MOH had none.

"I was happy for the team and excited because [it's] rare to get that big of a lead. It felt good. It made me think that our hard work paid off and feel [...] confident about our team, our buzzing [and] our ability to communicate on the bonuses," Neuner said.

To the surprise of Neuner and Szakovits, several BVH players got several guesses correct. For instance, when the game moderator asked what ele-

ment represented atomic number 92 on the periodic table, Neuner correctly guessed "uranium," even though she was unsure. In addition, Varsity Quiz Bowl member and junior Xavier Millan correctly guessed the name of a Russian astronaut, despite Szakovits stating that his tone sounded "like he was making the name up."

"It was funny [...] and honestly reflects our confidence. We were playing confidently, and sometimes if you're nervous it's harder to throw out a random guess because you might feel embarrassed to get it wrong," Neuner said.

Reflecting on BVH's victory, Szakovits explained how the Quiz Bowl league had recognized discrepancies in the preparedness of teams from different schools and, in turn, decided to not conduct play-offs at the end of the season. The league intended to reduce the competitive aspect and make the matches more about having fun.

"The important thing to understand here is that the playing field is not nearly as necessarily level for competition this year. We were practicing very early on in the season. There were very few schools that had some trouble putting together their teams [and] organizing practices," Szakovits said.

By the end of the match, all ten varsity competitors had the opportunity to play in the match, which Szakovits felt every one of them "deserved." Looking forward to the rest of the season, Szakovits believes this success has bred an optimistic outlook for the future of BVH Quiz Bowl.

"I came away from that match feeling like we don't have a weak link on this team. That presents a challenge for me because I have all of these players who clearly deserve to play. This was one of the more balanced efforts I've ever seen from our team [...] That's on credit for everybody," Szakovits said. Despite the noticeable differences this first virtual match had with Quiz Bowl's first match in the BVH library last year, Geering noted that there have been positive aspects of the team's transition to online competition. She misses competing in person but recognizes the new season isn't without its silver lining.

"It makes you appreciate those [in-person] connections more because you realize, 'Oh wow, I actually miss going to matches.' You realize how important those interactions are. Like they say, 'You don't know a good thing until it's gone,'" Geering said.

On Feb. 23, BVH will be competing against Chula Vista High (CVH). Contemplating the season as a whole, Szakovits believes that above all else, Quiz Bowl is giving students a sense of "community" amidst a time when everything is being cancelled—despite what the scoreboard may look like at the end of each match.

"That's a lot more important than how many wins we get [or] how many questions somebody buzzes in on. What we're delivering here is a positive experience for the kids, and I hope they really enjoy it and [...] the sense of community it brings. If that is the legacy of this season, then I'm happy with it," Szakovits said.

BVH community members receive COVID-19 vaccine

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"The only side effect I had was after the first shot, when my arm was sore for several days. Interestingly, after the second shot, my arm actually swelled up a little bit [and] it looked like I had muscles. I could tell that my body was having an immune response, but that was it," Marriott said. "But [it was] certainly worth it."

Like Borum, BVH junior Noe Contreras was able to receive the Pfizer vaccine this January. Contreras indicates that he was able to receive the vaccine since his parents take care of disabled individuals, therefore it was necessary for him to receive the vaccine to ensure household members' safety. In Contreras' situation, nurses were able to go to his household, check everyone's medical information and give the vaccine to his household members.

"I was afraid at first because I thought they were going to put a chip in my arm but then I realized that it



BVH senior Natalee Borum received the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine at an office building across from the Sharp Chula Vista Medical Hospital on Jan. 30. She was able to receive her vaccination early as she is a volunteer for the hospital. PHOTO BY PABLO DOLLERO

was not true because [these medical professionals are] trying to save lives. Also I saw so many of my family members die because of COVID and that changed my mind," Contreras said.

Marriott feels that her experience as part of the COVID vaccine trials has proven to her and others that the vaccine is nothing to be afraid of, however Marriott understands that there will always be people that don't trust the vaccine. For those who are fearful, she suggests "to consult a reliable source of information like the Centers for Disease Control or Dr. Fauci."

"I think that new things can inspire fear in people," Marriott said. "One of the things I've heard people say [is] that it's gonna change your DNA. It can't do that. The vaccines are made of mRNA and we cover this in ninth grade biology that the flow of information is from DNA to RNA, not the other way around. Try to keep an open mind and talk with your own physician or your medical group about it."

Bonita Vista High School the Crusader

Mission Statement:

The intent of The Crusader staff is to inform, entertain, and discuss current issues in a professional unbiased manner. The thoughts expressed are not necessarily those of Bonita Vista High School or the Sweetwater Board of Education.

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IB confirms BVH will not be holding exams

Madelyn Omelina
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After many months of waiting, the International Baccalaureate (IB) community at Bonita Vista High (BVH) was given an answer to the many questions concerning the official plan for exams during the ongoing pandemic. IB students were informed by IB Coordinator Jared Phelps that there would be no seated exams in May. Phelps forwarded the information from an email he received from the IB Organization (IBO) on the morning of Feb. 11.

"Your IB grade (score 1-7) for each course you're testing in will be based on the Internal Assessments (IA) you submit in your IB class and on your teacher's 'predicted grade' that they think you'd earn on the IB exam if you did get to take it," Phelps wrote in his announcement to the IB Diploma Candidates of 2021.

After receiving the announcement on the IB scores and assessment, both teachers and students indicated that they felt a great relief. On both sides, the feeling came from not having to worry about the extra stress or the content that was not covered in the course.

"I am glad the IBO recognized that BVH is not in a position to have sit-down exams. I'm mostly relieved that the way in which we're going to be examined is fair and just considering distance learning and San Diego being in the purple-tier," IB Diploma Candidate and senior Cambria McClelland said.

Regarding the IAs in particular, there have been both positive and negative responses from students and teachers. Many are grateful that the IBO is putting more weight on it as it is a factor that clearly represents students' knowledge of their courses. The negative revolved around the extra pressure and stress surrounding the IAs and Extended Essays.

"Doing my IA over distance learning was something I was not looking forward to because normally you get to be in person with your teacher there to help you and make sure everything is running smoothly," IB Diploma Candidate and junior Kailee Wendeln-Lankard said. "However, this year we all had to do our IAs from home, and while the teachers were very helpful and tried their best to help us along the way, there was only so much they could do."

Science classes have had the most challenges when it comes to completing their IAs, as Wendeln-Lankard said

Oh, you're missing units, you [don't have] enough scientific reasoning. You didn't show your math. It takes me like a good hour to go through every IA," Mardahl said. "I'm very paranoid [because] I want the IAs to be pristine and as good as they can get."

In his announcement, after communicating how the students will be assessed and how the scores will be given out, Phelps addressed the financial aspect of the exams.

"You will still need to pay for your IB exams, even if you're not taking the seated exam in May because IB will still be grading all of the IAs and spending

kind of necessary because there's people that are going to be grading your IA. I think that maybe the fee should be reduced because it's not even close to the same amount of work that they're grading, but they should still be paid," IB Diploma Candidate and senior Diego Gonzalez said, referring to the absence of seated exams to grade.

To provide more guidance to teachers on grade predictions, which are now 50 percent of students' overall scores, the IBO sent statistics gathered on grade averages for BVH on Feb. 28.

"The IBO has noticed in their statistics that schools' predicted grades and

"The seated exam was the external evaluation. That's how people outside of my classroom got a chance to assess the students. [However,] if they're not going to have that opportunity, then definitely, the weight falls more on the person who's been talking to them for nine months, [the teacher]," Dillingham said.

Students showed different reactions to the fact that the predicted scores will contribute more to their overall scores. For Gonzalez, he questions if it is really an accurate representation of students' knowledge of a course since many students have just been cheating. McClelland

going to get a high predicted score. It doesn't matter what they do with the score or how they count it. It's still my opinion based on what I have observed through[out] the year," Dillingham said.

Phelps specified that the IBO decided to have no seated assessments based on surveys they sent out to IB coordinators at IB schools around the world. The surveys asked how their schools are handling COVID-19 and how the pandemic has affected them.

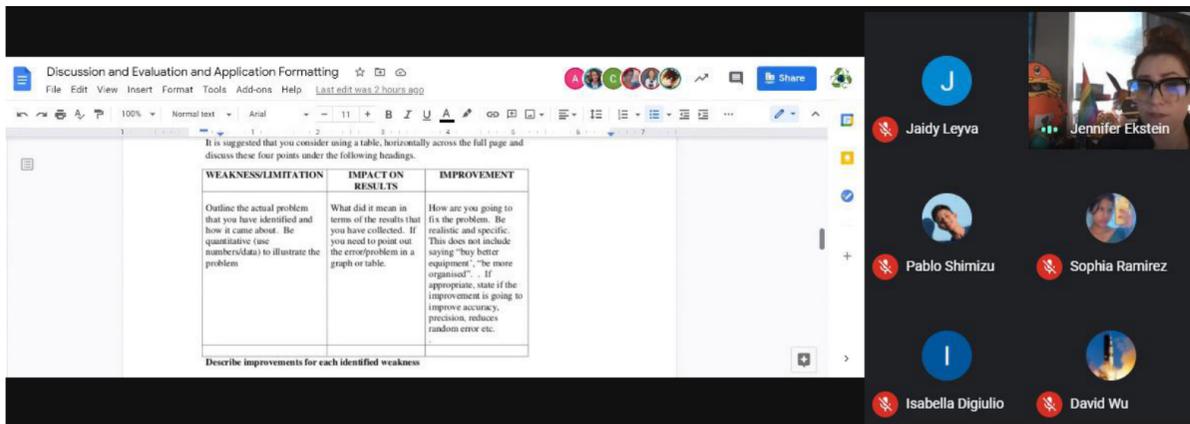
"Everyone's in different situations — financially, socially, whatever it may be. I feel like that's the right thing to do, to not have any seated exams," Gonzalez said.

Phelps believes the program analyzed the data taken from the surveys and came up with a plan "fairly quickly" given that they had the information by Jan. 20 and they sent out the official plan on Feb. 11.

"They needed to get to a point where we were close enough to exams, for coordinators, and their administrative teams to feel like they were able to make decisions; but not so close that it was too late to make that decision," Phelps said. "Us having this information in early February [is about] two months better than what we were dealing with last year, which is helpful."

Phelps expressed that there cannot be a perfect replacement, but he believes the plan set by the IBO is both a fair and compassionate one. He said he is "inclined to trust IB's statistics work and data analysis when they tell us that this is the most fair solution that they can come up with." McClelland noted that one of the top things that matter to her is that the IB graders take all of the students' limitations, academic and personal, into consideration.

"At the end of the day, all IB students can really do is the best given their circumstance, and this looks different for everyone. 'Being prepared' has a tremendous grey area that's hard to define. What does it mean to be prepared for anything anymore?" McClelland said.



Environmental Systems and Societies (ESS) teacher Jennifer Ekstein instructs her students on what is required for their IA (Internal Assessment). PHOTO BY ALEXA VAZQUEZ

when referring to her Environmental Systems and Societies (ESS) class. IB Biology teacher Michelle Mardahl, Ph.D., explained how it is first a challenge coming up with projects students can do at home, and a challenge to grade all of the reports, since they are all around 12 pages long.

"I want my students to get the highest grade that they can get. So [when] I'm looking at [the reports], I'm saying, 'Oh my gosh, your titles aren't complete, you need to have a complete ti-

tle and energy in trying to fairly assess your learning and provide a score," Phelps wrote.

Phelps continued to explain that the fee for each exam will remain the same 125 dollar amount as it would have with the seated exams. Although he understands students' frustration that the price has not changed, he clarified that the money will still be used to pay for the labor in grading a part of the assessment.

"At the end of the day, I feel like that's

passing rates don't change massively from year to year. They might change a little bit, but it's not drastic," Phelps said. "It tends to be in a window, so I think IB is communicating that they expect to see similar percentages of students passing exams."

IB French and Spanish Standard Level (SL) and Higher Level (HL) teacher Marina Dillingham believes having her predicted scores be worth more of the overall score is logical considering the current situation.

land and IB Diploma Candidate and junior Xavier Millan wish there was more information on how teachers will be predicting the grades, since they are already familiar with the grading of the IAs. They illustrated how, as students, they are left to trust their teachers and assume their teachers will give out scores based off of the students' overall grades.

"Somebody who performs well in all areas of the language — speaking, reading, writing and listening — is

Little by little

SUHSD announces plan to return 10 percent of students to campus

Carina Muniz
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In the latest Sweetwater Union High School District (SUHSD) Board of Trustees Special Meeting held on Feb. 26, district officials announced that the next phase of the 10 percent reopening plan is to be implemented on April 12.

Furthermore, Interim Superintendent Moises Aguirre, Ed.D., stated in a letter to SUHSD schools that the County of San Diego would begin Phase 1B (Tier 1) vaccinations for teachers on Feb. 27.

"There are many factors that could slow this progress with new strains, community behaviors, etc., but it looks like the county is on track if this progress continues for a potential mid-March time frame moving to Tier 2," SUHSD Security Coordinator and Advisor John Czajkowski said in the Feb. 26 Special Meeting.

Aguirre's letter also included that the County of San Diego is working closely with the San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE) and Southern California Voluntary Employee Benefits Association (VEBA) to help distribute vaccines to teachers "as quickly and efficiently as possible."

The reopening plan includes bringing 10 percent of students back on-campus for in-person instruction. An estimated 240 students would return to Bonita Vista High (BVH) as well as a selected few teachers and staff members. BVH Assistant Principal Esther Wise explained that the return to campus is entirely voluntary for all staff and students.

As seen in the District Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ), document that was provided by BVH Principal Roman Del Rosario, Ed.D., there is a list of three main requirements:

County of San Diego must be in tier two (red) or lower.

A 14 day SUHSD (by district zip code) average case rate less than 200 cases for 14 days consecutively. District zip codes include: 92173, 92154, 91911, 91914, 91910, 91950, 91915, 91932, 91913, and 91902.

SUHSD (by district zip code)

[COVID] positivity [rate] is less than 8 percent for 14 days consecutively.

Wise described that students and teachers are advised to follow health guidelines and stay in their small cohorts of 14 people while on campus. Additionally, before entering, students and teachers must abide by the check-in process to ensure that those who experience COVID-19 symptoms will be sent home and treated by doctors.

"If you are one of the students [returning to campus] and your period one teacher is back [on campus], you would go to period one and you would have your laptop while engaging with your period one teacher during syn-

chronous teaching," Del Rosario said. "If your first period teacher was able to return but your second period teacher wasn't able to volunteer to come back, we would have another place for you to do your distance learning in a group and maybe with a substitute teacher or resource teacher supervising the classroom where they can stay six feet apart."

The selection of students returning to campus is ultimately dependent on teachers' decision to return. Students are given the choice to return to campus in order to receive the support they need, however it is reliant on if their teachers are willing to also return. One student among the small group who has been attending on-campus school in a previous phase to aid struggling students is sophomore Tanya Hernandez



The SUHSD Board of Trustees held a special meeting on Feb. 26 announcing that the next phase of the 10 percent reopening plan is to be implemented on April 12. PHOTO BY ALEXA VAZQUEZ

taken on campus, students like senior Gerardo Gonzalez are still sceptical of going back and aren't sure what choice to make.

"My mom is at high risk [for] COVID, so I know I would want to make sure I don't catch it even if it wouldn't affect me that much," Gonzalez said. "I don't know if I could go back unless everyone is vaccinated and COVID is gone."

Gonzalez's sentiment is shared among other students facing the dilemma of going back to in-person school or not. Even if they are not at high risk themselves, they do not want to potentially bring the virus back home to their families and put them in danger. Nevertheless, students like Gonzalez continue to miss the atmosphere of in-person instructions.

"There are no teachers to tell you to stay on task [at home] and this caused me to not do well in class. Being here on campus is something I recommend since it has made a drastic improvement and I am proud of the grades I have now," Hernandez said.

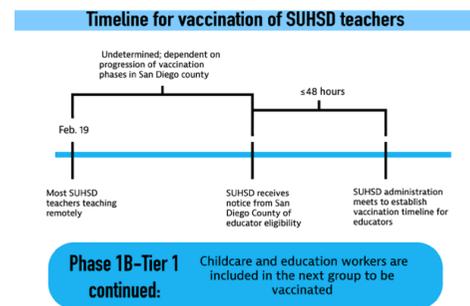
Remaining students and teachers who are not part of the 10 percent reopening plan will continue to attend distance learning until the next phase—the 20 percent reopening plan—is confirmed.

"I want to make sure that our Bonita Vista High School families and community know that the safety and security of our students and staff is our priority," Wise said. "It has been a priority before the pandemic, it's the priority during the pandemic, and it will remain a priority after the pandemic."

"I actually enjoyed school more than most people would think and a lot of my teachers were the reason for that," Gonzalez said. "They were really good at making their lectures interesting, fun and educational. Nowadays, I feel even teachers are a bit tired of everything and they're prioritizing [to] make us not feel overwhelmed, even at the cost of that teacher-student relationship."

Hernandez's academic experience has benefited greatly from going onto campus. For her, the change in atmosphere has fostered a new found success in online school which she believes could help other struggling students as well.

SUHSD plans for teacher vaccinations



Information about the plan to vaccinate teachers sourced from the San Diego County website and Sweetwater Union High School District Interim Superintendent Moises Aguirre. No set date is available as of Feb. 19 for when teachers will be eligible for vaccination in the county. GRAPHIC LUCIA RIVERA

IN CONTINUATION FROM PAGE 1

"A big concern for me has always been that I care for my elderly mother. I wouldn't have wanted to risk exposing her to the coronavirus. That is why I'm grateful I was able to take the COVID vaccine because now I'm protected against the disease," Palmer said. "It gives me peace of mind that I won't infect my family members, especially my mother (she, also, has been vaccinated)."

In contrast, 10 percent of SUHSD teachers reported not currently wanting to receive the vaccine, according to Walker. In the survey conducted by the SEA, this minority of teachers gave three primary reasons for their stance.

"I have some members who for medical reasons, can't take the vaccine. So we'll figure out a job where they don't need to go in until herd immunity and everything else. I have pregnant members who right now don't want to get vaccinated because there's been no studies; I get it, we're gonna figure something out for them. I have some members who don't trust the mRNA vaccine. I'm hoping that the Johnson and Johnson one, which is more traditional, [...] maybe that's the one those that are a little bit more hesitant will be able to feel comfortable [with]," Walker said.

BVH Government and World History teacher and most senior teacher within SUHSD Frank Schneemann is one of the educators who wants to receive the Johnson and Johnson vaccine

As Interim Superintendent, Aguirre also expressed his gratitude to teachers' efforts and input during the pandemic.

"I'm encouraged that even when [administration and the SEA] have a little bit of a disagreement, we're able to take a break, come back and reset, refocus and come to an agreement that works for both sides, and works for everybody, including the kids. Because ultimately, if we keep the teachers safe, we're gonna keep the kids safe, and that's where our advocacy is, at safety," Walker said.

In order to maximize their advocacy for SUHSD staff, the SEA formed a reopening work group of staff members that provide input to the district. Additionally, there is a site representative council with one representative for every 15 SUHSD teachers. At the core of Walker's work, however, is emphasizing safety for everyone amid "a lot of competing voices."

Schneemann stated he does not personally feel like his voice is heard by SUHSD, but emphasized his understanding of the procedures that administration has to follow as they plan for teacher vaccinations.

"I know [the district is] kind of in the middle between the teachers and the state and I support the administration and what they have to do, because they don't have an easy job," Schneemann said. "They have to do a balancing act between all this silly stuff that comes out from the state and the teachers also."

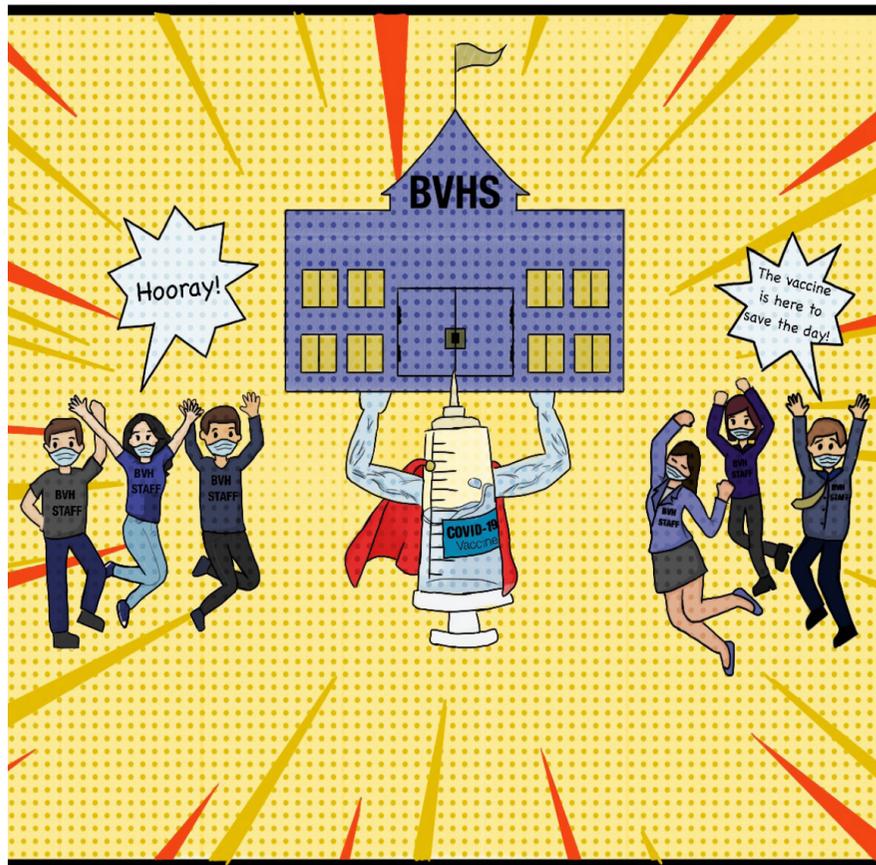
More than anything, Schneemann hoped to return to the classroom and provide students with the same quality of education they were receiving prior to the pandemic.

"I guess it doesn't matter to me whether I have a voice. I'm a soldier. Whatever my administrators want me to do, I do, and more," Schneemann said, explaining that he will follow any safety protocols SUHSD puts in place for reopening.

Overall, vaccines are only one element of the precautions SUHSD will take in order to maintain the highest level of staff, student and community safety during reopening.

"That's ultimately the goal: to get ourselves and our students back in. We're pretty smart, creative people, we've got great ideas, and we need to be heard by every level of government," Walker said. "We need to have a say, to make sure that our teachers are as safe as we can make them. And that they're safe with their students so that we don't contribute to community spread when it's done correctly [and] deliberately."

Editorial Cartoon:



Before teachers return to the Bonita Vista High (BVH) campus, they should take precautions and receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Therefore, staff, teachers and students may feel safe to return. GRAPHIC BY ADALI LEON

Letters to the editor

The Crusader Letters Policy:

The Crusader encourages community dialogue on public matters. Letters submitted to the Crusader may be edited prior to publication and must include a full name and class grade. Please email letters to erichelle@sweetwaterschools.org or visit www.bonitavistacrusader.org to view additional letters.

Dear Editor,

I was recently reading “Yes/No: Should students return to school?” by Nadia Martinez and Laurinne Eugenio and found the arguments very convincing on both sides. I appreciated the coverage on both sides of this topic because it provides a reason [as to] why us, students, should be able [or] not able to return to in-person classes. Nadia’s focus on the mental health [of] students in the pandemic is a sad but true story. She even agrees that a return to school does not just mean everybody goes back with no plan at all. I feel like this is a really important thought that most people glance over. Laurinne’s ideas of allowing the spread to get worse is a real reason why we still have not gone back. One area I feel that could be improved is extending this to a further timeframe because the relevancy of this piece is non-existent, since we are past the March 1 deadline the two writers discuss.

Best regards,
Tyler Carter

Dear Editor,

I recently read the article “The Final Test” [by Nicole Macgaffey from] the Crusader, which discussed many of Bonita Vista High School teachers’ decisions to adapt their final exams to conditions relating to distance learning. I admire that the article produces a unique perspective brought from teachers who all teach different subjects of our education, yet share a similar understanding regarding this topic. I am thankful to realize that we as students are not alone in this decision to adapt our finals to the mental health of our students. In the article, I would have liked to have seen what the standard class teachers’ thoughts on adapting their finals for students [were] as well, considering that all the teachers that were interviewed were involved in AP/IB curriculum.

Sincerely,
Tatiana Eustaquio

Dear Editor,

My name is Diego Gonzalez, and I am a senior at BVHS. I found the recent publication of the article “SUHSD announces plan to return 10% of students to campus” by Carina Muniz very informative. In our current situation, full of uncertainty, us students are often left hanging without meaningful information that might be significant to us, but the school newspaper constantly keeps us updated with any relevant information we might be [in need] of. I really enjoyed this article because it gives us an idea of what to expect in the near future in terms of reopening schools, and it also hints at the next possible reopening phase after the 10% phase. The article was concise and to the point, making it easy to understand and gather the information necessary with regards to the future of school in person.

Best regards,
Diego Gonzalez

Dear Editor,

I, Marco Olmos, am a senior who has always enjoyed reading the Crusader. I recently read the [article] “IB Confirms BVH Will Not Be Holding Seated Exams,” [and] I found this story to be rather interesting. I appreciate this piece because it is informative and concise about the topic at hand while also going into a great amount of depth [regarding] the situation and perspective of IB Coordinator Jared Phelps. Most recently [during] the pandemic, I find it intriguing when the paper focuses on the struggles of the students as well as the staff since they are in this situation just as much as we are, and this piece does a great job at expressing both sides. Personally, I did find it strange to discover that the prices of tests will remain the same, given they would no longer be held. I found this piece to be very insightful giving the opinion of both sides, as well as informative to myself and other students who come to the Crusader for reliable information.

Thank you for your work,
Marco Olmos

Staff Editorial:

Bringing honor to journalism

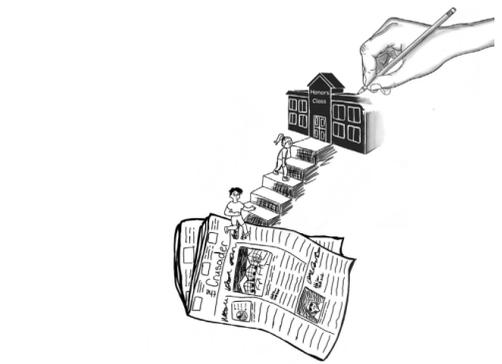
Honors journalism approval encourages next generation of leaders

Newspaper is one of Bonita Vista High’s (BVH) most rigorous courses, instilling student journalists with the skills of the next generation of leaders. As the staff of BVH’s newspaper, The Crusader, we affirm the efforts of BVH Principal Roman Del Rosario, Ed.D., to grant our course Honors credit as a weighted Honors Journalism class: it is a welcomed and necessary change to the BVH curriculum.

As a student-led organization, The Crusader is dedicated to serving the school community on a year-round basis. Like many Honors courses, our commitments require time and diligence; we produce high-quality content that informs and entertains our audience.

Since March of 2020, we have been working remotely, covering the impacts of COVID-19 on students and staff throughout the pandemic. We documented Sweetwater Union High School District’s (SUHSD) financial state as schools closed, and we informed students of changes to graduation and the implementation of distance learning. We hope to continue representing a source of transparency and clarity during a time of dramatic upheaval.

Every story we write has multiple steps to ensure accuracy, thoroughness and overall quality. Throughout every issue of our publication, we hold workshops and meetings to work on articles, multimedia, page design, lessons and logistical conflicts. Independently, however, each member of our staff also



The Crusader appreciates Principal Roman Del Rosario’s, Ed.D., efforts in advocating for the Newspaper course to become an Honors course. GRAPHIC BY ADALI LEON

conducts interviews, attends sports games or online events, takes photos and researches different issues.

It’s no surprise that our newspaper was ranked fourth-best in the nation among broadsheet high school newspapers in the 2019 National Journalism Convention. Our paper’s production is rigorous and mirrors the difficulty of other Honors courses, which demand time and hard work from students. Our work is no different.

We hope a weighted credit for our class will expand our staff size and bolster our mission as student journalists: to inform and entertain. Reporting keeps our community updated on district and schoolwide events. We keep our leaders accountable and encourage a watchful student body. Without journalism, corruption seeps into institutions of power. Our work encourages

students to empower themselves and identify challenges to students’ safety, interests and well-being. Our commitment is to facilitate this process.

Throughout the pandemic, we have also been recognized by several organizations for our journalistic excellence. The district has shared our work with the broader Sweetwater community to help illuminate trends and events occurring across the South Bay region. We have also published content in The Best of SNO, a website for the best student journalism nationwide.

As student journalists, we are inspired to tell the stories wedged in the nooks and crannies of our community. We believe The Crusader is BVH’s beacon of transparency during uncertain and tumultuous times like these. Honoring our mission will keep that beacon alight with hope.

Barons Speak

How do you keep yourself motivated?



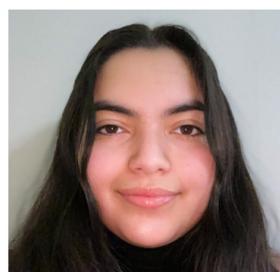
Freshman, Aidan Omelina

“I’d say that I’m able to keep myself motivated by adhering to a schedule. Emulating our normal school schedule has allowed me to stay motivated in class and keep learning as if we were in the classroom.”



Sophomore, Cesca Catibog

“I keep myself motivated in a few ways. I try to keep myself busy whether it be school work, extracurriculars or anything else. I also remind myself that I have to stay on top of my work because falling behind will affect me once we are back in person, so staying motivated now will help me in the future.”



Junior, Tannya Meza

“I keep myself motivated by having a mindset in which I believe everything I do now will benefit me in the future. For instance, it has been hard to be motivated when it comes to online school, but I just try to think about how staying on track and having good grades will help me get into a good college.”



Senior, Dillan Busk

“I keep myself motivated by setting mini goals that I know I can accomplish. I also keep myself motivated by going boxing five to six times a week, which helps me clear [my] mind.”

Don’t bottle it up

Students should allow themselves to express their emotions more often

Jennifer Dye
MANAGING EDITOR
@JennyDcrusader

As we’ve endured almost a whole year in a pandemic, many of us have faced a whirlwind of emotions. Many of us often bottle up our emotions and set them aside to be dealt with later because of daily distractions with remote learning and constant changes to everyday life. Avoiding emotions is not healthy in the long run. Crying, one of the most common ways most people express their emotions, is something many try to avoid. Crying is often frowned upon as it can be seen as embarrassing or a

sign of weakness. However, in reality, it is the complete opposite.

For instance, crying can allow the growth of emotional intelligence. There is beauty and strength in allowing yourself time to cry, reflect and let everything out. Crying is also a form of self care; forcing yourself to bottle up emotions for long periods of time can cause intense mental breakdowns.

In an Op-Doc, the New York Times featured a short documentary from the 2021 Sundance Film Festival by filmmaker Noemie Nakai that followed “self-described tears teacher” Hidefumi Yoshida. This Japanese teacher, Yoshida, hosts workshops around Japan to aid adults in learning how to cry. He expresses that the traditional

ideals of Japanese culture have historically looked down upon showing emotion by crying, which makes it difficult for many to cry, even alone.

However, this stigma around crying does not only exist in Japan, but all around the world. At Bonita Vista High (BVH), it is not common to cry in front of peers or in private because of the perception that crying represents weakness or is embarrassing. For example, a poll conducted by the Crusader on Feb. 8 revealed that, of 438 BVH students, 48.3 percent of stu-

... continue reading on our website, bonitavistacrusader.org



Kimchi and me

Having a plush doll isn't embarrassing. It helped me through tough times.



Yealin Lee
OPINION EDITOR
@yealin_crusader

“Mommy! Where is Kimchi? I can't find her anywhere!” I said, panicking.

“I don't know, where did you put it?” is how my mom always responds when I misplace her.

Kimchi is my lifeline, the one I rely on for comfort, the one I cling to at night, the one I use to wipe away my tears when I am sad. Kimchi is a 16-year-old plush doll my grandma named after a Korean dish. I have had Kimchi since I was born. In all my memories she has always been there dangling beside me.

Sadly I am on my fourth Kimchi doll. The first time I lost my doll, I had a fever for a week, cried all night and refused to sleep. My father drove three hours from our home in Bratislava, Slovakia to a hotel in Budapest, Hungary to retrieve my Kimchi, but he never found her.

Unfortunately, my first Kimchi is lost forever.

My parents learned their lesson, and a week later I saw three identical Kimchi dolls with either brown or blonde hair. I gravitated towards the brown haired doll and had it until I was 12.

Then I lost it and had to move on to the next one.

To be honest, I always wonder to myself why I still have this doll and somehow have no willpower to get rid of her. I am not ashamed or embarrassed that I have her; rather I am thankful. However, my whole family thinks of this relationship differently. My family thinks it's weird that I still have her. Everytime I visit my extended family they always say, “You still have Kimchi?”

I soon realized why I needed her so much—during the second semester of sophomore year I experienced the toughest moments of my life. I felt like nothing was going right, and I was constantly nervous about the next test, the next assignment or the next commitment. Going to sleep took so much time because of all the thoughts running through my mind.

No other human being could have possibly known what I was going through, so I kept it to myself. When I went to school I smiled and laughed through it all, concealing my suffering. I came home and had my parents, but I knew they didn't really know how



In 2007, Yealin Lee is on a swing with her plush doll, Kimchi. She brought Kimchi wherever she went. PROVIDED BY YEALIN LEE

I felt. I needed someone to comfort me without judgment, without any criticism.

I know that a doll has no feelings, has no thoughts of its own and can't feel emotions; however, when I'm with Kimchi I feel like she is the only one who gets me. That's because she does not have a mind of her own. I create the world that she lives in—I create in my mind what she is thinking.

I have a habit of rubbing her hands in between my fingers. One can tell by how all the stuffing is gone from her hands, and the fluff from the material has worn off. Students can benefit from touching a plush, just as I have. In a recent study from UV University Amsterdam, it suggests that touching a stuffed animal helps relieve existential angst. The study also reveals that touch is a means of increasing social connectedness among people during periods of anxiety.

Having a stuffed doll or an object to seek comfort in should not be embarrassing. It should not be viewed as creepy or childish. For me it is a solution, one I've had my whole life and one I will always need.

Should students return to school?

YES.

Nadia Martinez
PODCAST MANAGER
@NadiaCrusader

In March 2020, a week before spring break, Bonita Vista High's (BVH) students were sitting in their classrooms until the silence was broken by a voice on the intercom. Students, wriggling in suspense, were pleased and even surprised to hear that the last week of school had been canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We're nearly a year into quarantine and most students haven't returned to campus. Further time away from campus has only hindered many students' mental health and education; therefore students should be able to go back on campus.

According to a study published in November 2020, by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), mental health visits accounted for a higher proportion of pediatric emergency department visits during the pandemic compared to the same months of the previous year. Among teenagers aged 12 to 17, there was a 31 percent increase proving that, statistically, the pandemic has worsened students' mental health.

According to the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC), mental health issues can adversely affect students' academic performance, physical health, as well as their relationships with friends and family members. Problems with mental health will reduce the energy level, attention, dependability, mental ability, and optimism of a student, hindering learning. In a comparative study published by Sage Journals, the research shows that depression is correlated with lower grade point averages and that this correlation may be intensified by depression and anxiety. This is why it's extremely important to focus and address the mental health of students as it directly hinders their education.

Since schools have gone online, motivation to do work has decreased and has become an uphill battle for many students as distance learning continues. As the Crusader has previously reported in the article “I'm not doing okay right now”, the pandemic has been stressful for many students who struggle in finding a balance between getting work done and dealing with distractions at home. Many children struggle to keep their attention on the screen for many hours when they have chores to do or younger siblings to take care of.

Additionally, the CDC reported that in the United States, indications of anxiety disorder and depressive disorder rose dramatically between April and June of 2020—when the COVID-19 pandemic started—compared to 2019. The isolation from being in quarantine for a year has taken a drastic toll on students because they can't see or talk to their friends every day. With disturbances at home and poor mental health, such as depression and anxiety, it can be difficult to find the motivation to do school work.

Being back on campus would help students improve their mental health since they are no longer isolated from social interactions. Many educational experts say that in-person learning is overall better for a student's education. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, schools provide more than just academics to students: they provide a way to exercise social and

emotional skills and have access to mental health and other support services. Although there are support groups online offered by BVH to help students with their mental health, many have seen a decrease in attendees since the pandemic, which correlates to the increasing rates of mental health concern.

Although some would argue that we should stay safe and not go back to school, they fail to realize that we can go back on campus and continue to be safe. In fact, there are guidelines that the CDC made for schools to go back to on-campus instruction. We could use these guidelines to formulate a plan for BVH to go back to school.

As stated by the CDC, there is a hybrid learning model for schools to begin integrating students back to campus in which most students and teachers participate in in-person learning some days then engage in virtual learning on other days. In-person courses could host slightly larger groups of students, with a combination of physical and online classes. All precautions to protect one another, such as proper use of face masks, social distancing, and hand hygiene would be practiced by students, teachers, and administrators. Regularly scheduled cleaning of commonly infected areas would also take place daily.

Implementing health guidelines such as these are key in formulating a plan to open up BVH. As long as the guidelines are followed and carried out properly, returning to campus is a realistic option that BVH should come sooner.

Although there are some considerable risks with going back on campus, we should be able to have the option to return to in-person learning. With this plan, we could go back and have the benefits that came from physically being in school, while also being able to stay safe during this pandemic.

The pandemic may not be over, but the future is becoming more hopeful, especially with the COVID-19 vaccines out and being administered. According to SanDiegoCounty.gov, the distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine is being done in phases. As of right now, health care workers, which include people age 65 or older, staff working in behavioral health residential, providing emergency medical services, etc, are able to get vaccinated right now.

After going through a year of uncertainty, it's time to regain some semblance of normality by socially interacting with other students and teachers while remaining six-feet apart, wearing masks, and over-all being cautious. It's better for the students to go back with caution than not going back at all.

NO.

Laurinne Eugenio
FEATURES EDITOR
@EugenioCrusader

School gates are finally open, and students rush to campus with their face masks on. Staff and students socialize and interact with each other while staying six feet apart. This sounds like an exciting dream that some staff, students and family members hope can be turned into a reality.

However, as of Feb. 12, according to the County of San Diego's public health information on COVID-19,



Two students are at home during distance learning, one who wants to go back on campus and the other who wants to continue staying home. Both students have been affected by distance learning but have very different opinions on going back to school. ILLUSTRATION BY NADIA MARTINEZ

cumulative positive cases passed the quarter-million mark to 250,791, while the total number of deaths went up to 2,979 within the county. Because the safety and well-being of both students and staff within the Sweetwater Union High School District (SUHSD) should be the utmost priority, the SUHSD board should decide to not reopen schools on March 1.

A common misconception that many consider a justification for reopening schools is that infants, children and adolescents are immune to the virus. This is false. In fact, in a report by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and Children's Hospital Association, it was concluded that as of Feb. 4, “About 2.93 million children have tested positive for COVID-19 since the onset of the pandemic.” Children also represent 12.9 percent of all nationwide cases.

Although some may argue that children can't develop severe symptoms due to COVID-19, another report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) clarified that “children are still at risk of developing severe illness and complications from COVID-19.” Moreover, all across the nation, approximately one in three children hospitalized due to COVID-19 were admitted to the intensive care unit.

The report by the AAP and Children's Hospital Association also found that the death toll for children made up 0.00 percent to 0.26 percent of all COVID-19 deaths. The numbers might seem minuscule, but as parents of Skylar Herbert—the first child in Michigan to die of COVID-19 at Beaumont Royal Oak Hospital—LaVondria Herbert and Ebbie Herbert declared in an interview with the Washington Post that, “We just want the world to know that this can happen to anyone. This could have been your kids.”

According to a statement by Beaumont Hospital cited by Detroit-

based news station Michigan WXYZ, “The loss of a child, at any time, under any circumstances, is a tragedy.” The reality is that children can still contract COVID-19. Children can still get hospitalized due to COVID-19. And, yes, children can still die from COVID-19.

When schools operate in-person, students, staff and teachers will inevitably be in close-contact settings. This is detrimental, as the CDC explains that schools are considered a “potential source of COVID-19 outbreaks, due to the number of individuals intermingling in close proximity for extended periods of time.”

The first on-campus COVID-19 case reported should be the last to ever occur at Bonita Vista High (BVH). Students like BVH senior Tatiana Eustaquio should never have to live through a battle against COVID-19 again. Based on a poll conducted by the Crusader on Feb. 12th, out of 437 BVH students, 135 students reported having lost someone they know from COVID-19. Going back to in-person school should not be prioritized over people's lives, and it's not worth risking the loss of another loved one ever again.

On the other hand, people who are in favor of going back to in-person school describe that distance learning takes a toll on students' mental and emotional health. It is indisputable that quarantine and distance learning feels isolating. In turn, the CDC recommends various healthy ways to cope with stress, such as taking deep breaths or meditating, exercising regularly, connecting with others and many more.

We must focus on the silver lining and benefits of staying in distance learning, for it will help slow the spread, flatten the curve and protect the most lives. The SUHSD board should keep its promise of “putting students first.” This means making SUHSD staff and student safety, health and overall well-being a priority. Ultimately, the SUHSD board should not reopen schools.

Calling all teachers: Inconsistent class start times are harmful to students

Nicole Macgaffey
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Distance learning has presented many challenges for Bonita Vista High (BVH) teachers working from home. Whether it be technology issues or dealing with unexpected urgent matters, these challenges affect the time teachers start their class which can cause stress for students who already have their own struggles learning from home. Teachers should have consistent start times during distance learning and provide students with organized updates on class schedules.

In some cases, teachers will start class five minutes early one day and then the following day start class 10 minutes later than the scheduled start time. In cases like juniors Anna Maya and Isabella Garcia, one of their teachers constantly switches between synchronous and asynchronous start times.

For some students it takes a lot of motivation to come to class on time and inconsistent start times can cause those students to lose motivation altogether, especially in a time where less students are engaged in school. Maya mentions how it is tiring and frustrating when teachers do not start class on time and finds herself thinking “when is this class going to be done” when class does start.

“It's very unexpected because I'm

mentally prepared to start the class at one p.m. and then I realize I have to log back [on] in 45 minutes [which is] pretty annoying,” Maya said.

Students like Maya fear missing important class instruction from not being present since inconsistent start times makes it harder for students to come to class on time. In addition, students like Garcia find themselves texting their friends if the class has opened up for them after a first few minutes of the expected time with panic wondering if they are late or not. Even though it may not seem like a big deal to teachers, this confusion causes students a lot of distress than can be avoided through communicating a consistent start time to their students.

Furthermore, inconsistent start times from teachers are damaging to students' mental health, as it causes stress to students who are already facing challenges and hardships brought by the pandemic. Students experience an increased amount of anxiety as well from not knowing when class will start.

“I kept trying to go in [the class call at the expected time] but [Google

Meets] wouldn't let me in and then I feel nervous and [start] panicking,” freshman Christina Gutierrez said. “It was nerve racking.”

Students' confusion about the start time stems from a lack of communication from teachers. Garcia, Gutierrez, and Maya have teachers that use Google Classroom and Jupiter Grades to communicate with students if they will be late or if class is canceled. However, some students have poor Internet connection so they are unable

late or will cancel class, like some of Gutierrez's teachers which she found to be an effective way of communication. Ultimately though, canceling class or being late the day-of on a regular basis is harmful to students with poor Internet connection since it is not an easy issue to fix.

A consistent start time will not only reduce the amount of stress students face, but could also improve attendance. Maya finds that these methods of communication are unreliable for many students, especially those who do not have the Google Classroom or Jupiter Grades app on their phones and don't immediately receive notifications.

Teachers need to keep a consistent start time because it is important for students to have a schedule and routine growing up and adapt to their environment. Maya points out that for teenagers the lack of a routine during the pandemic is affecting them in ways they are not sure how to deal with or identify.

“I believe that high school in general is that type of environment where you learn your habits and routines that you will use for the rest of your life,” Maya said. “In other words, if we don't establish a routine and schedule now, when will we acknowledge this importance in the

future?”

The lack of routine has thrown off the balance of many students as they cannot depend on an exact schedule. Gutierrez believes routines are important because of the negative effects not having one has on students like herself, who are autistic.

“[Maintaining a routine] is very important because I usually freak out if [teachers] don't [have a consistent start time] because I am autistic and I need my routines,” Gutierrez said.

As some people use alarms to wake up at a certain time in order to be punctual, Head of the Math Department and International Baccalaureate (IB) Math teacher Christina Ada uses alarms set on her phone to start class on time.

She has an alarm set for five minutes before each class as a “warning bell” so she can wrap up whatever she is currently doing. Ada often struggles with losing track of time with the task she was doing, whether it was grading assignments or setting up lessons in between classes, which is the reason why she sets alarms.

Teachers maining a consistent start time and establishing an effective way of communication will benefit students who are struggling with distance learning and set them up for a path of success. Students already have a lot to worry about at home due to the pandemic, when their class will start should not be one of those worries. Students need consistency in their education during a time where there is so much uncertainty.



Some students have found themselves texting their friends to find out whether class has started or not. They worry if they are missing out on class instruction. GRAPHIC BY NICOLE MACGAFFEY

to get those messages their teachers are sending, resulting in them not attending or being late for class.

Teachers can tell their students the class period prior if they will be

The faces of COVID-19

Students grieve loved ones to coronavirus



Maria Delgado (left) makes tamales with her grandmother (right) during the holiday season. Maria Delgado cherishes the times she spent baking with her grandmother. PHOTO PROVIDED BY MARIA DELGADO

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Her name was Manuela Delgado. At 89, Manuela Delgado—a resident of Chula Vista, a great grandmother of nine, a family matriarch—passed away on Nov. 2, 2020 from coronavirus.



Maria Delgado embraces her grandmother (left photo). Maria Delgado's great uncle stands next to Maria Delgado's great grandfather (right photo). PHOTOS PROVIDED BY MARIA DELGADO

Junior Maria Delgado remembers Manuela Delgado, her grandmother, as a "kind and generous" woman, as well as a skilled gardener. During their summers, they picked reeds in Manuela Delgado's backyard, adorned with "pretty little trees," according to Maria Delgado, and later baked together.



Manuela Delgado's abrupt passing mirrors the story of many afflicted by coronavirus. She was healthy and active until she began showing symptoms of COVID-19. Manuela Delgado's family initially did not plan on taking her to the hospital, as her sickness had not progressed significantly, but Maria Delgado explained how slowly it "escalated" until she was hospitalized

and later passed.

"I was really heartbroken," Maria Delgado said, wiping away tears. "It's kind of hard to talk about because I was really close to her, but [it was] definitely emotional."

Manuela Delgado's family was shocked to discover that she had passed, as she was "healthy and happy," her granddaughter said. Her passing was further compounded by the family's previous loss of Rodolfo Martinez, Maria Delgado's great uncle, in October of 2020.

"She played a really fundamental role for my family. We [never] saw her passing anytime soon. When she did it was really detrimental," Maria Delgado said.

Maria Delgado said she copes with grief by recognizing that her grandmother is in "a better place" and by maintaining a consistent schedule. She likes to "keep busy" with school and friends to separate herself from the unprecedented circumstances of the pandemic.

"Knowing that [she was] in a better place was almost relieving [because] she wasn't suffering anymore," Maria Delgado said. "I [try not to let] the pandemic throw [me] off. I wake up in the morning and get dressed all the time, and I don't cut myself short [on] things in quarantine. I feel like it's nice to keep yourself busy so you don't dwell on it as much."

Maria Delgado also has friends who have also lost loved ones, which she said contributes to the normalization of death and mourning for many people during the pandemic.

"My best friend actually lost her great-grandmother too. And I'm pretty sure other family members

[did] as well. [It's] really sad, but it feels so normalized because I feel like everybody now has a family member that's passed. I noticed that a [majority] of the people I know lost a relative to COVID. It's like [if] you [haven't], you're really lucky," Maria Delgado said.

Carmen Marroquin deeply valued her faith. Attending church multiple times a week and preaching about God, she heavily inspired her grandniece and junior Grace Ayala. To Ayala, Marroquin was the "kindest-hearted person" she knew.

At 60, Marroquin passed on Feb. 2, 2021 from COVID-19. She and her husband tested positive for coronavirus in December, and due to their worsening condition, they were advised to go to the hospital, where they were both hospitalized.

Not long after, however, Marroquin passed away from coronavirus while her husband remained hospitalized and unconscious. Ayala reacted to the news with a feeling of deep sadness and thought of her uncle, who remains unconscious, and his potential reaction to his wife's passing, which made the news more difficult for Ayala.

"He doesn't know that his wife is gone. And if he wakes up, hopefully, I know that he's not going to want to keep going without her. And that's what hurts," Ayala said.

Marroquin's family was also not permitted to visit Marroquin and her husband due to social distancing orders. Ayala mentioned that her mother shared the same reaction as her and sobbed throughout the day after finding out about Marroquin's passing.

"My mom... was just really sad [and] had the same reaction [as me] of 'what is he going to think when he wakes up?' His wife is gone," Ayala said.

However, Ayala and her family are hopeful that Marroquin's husband will get better. Ayala said her loss has also made her more compassionate.

"I'm in shock that the pandemic has gotten this big. And when I first started I was like 'oh, that's never gonna affect my family,' but it definitely has. It makes me be more considerate about the fact that I have to be careful to protect myself and protect others," Ayala said.

Bertha Ruiz was 81 when she passed away from COVID-19 on Aug. 24, 2020. Her grandson and sophomore Emmanuel Triana described Ruiz as the "sweetest and kindest person" he knew. She had a passion for cooking and baking and baked various pastries for her family up until her passing. She and her husband used to own a bakery in Mexico when they lived there.

Furthermore, Triana expressed that his grandmother liked to be sarcastic and always made jokes. He mentioned that she would poke fun at his cousins, aunt and uncles and he found it amusing to be around her. He remembered the valuable life lessons she would instill on her children and grandchildren.

"She was really close to me. I was like her spoiled grandson. So it felt pretty sad when I lost her, and she lived with us, so I spent basically every morning with her. It was hard those first few

days after she passed," Triana said.

Ruiz began showing symptoms of COVID-19 in late July. On the fourth night of being sick Ruiz could not breathe, so an ambulance was called and she was taken to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU), where she then

her death was a difficult process. He did not immediately become sad, but after his loss settled for a period of time, he struggled to manage it. After a while, however, he felt better and began to accept his grandmother's death. Triana felt comforted by his favorite memories

with Ruiz.

"[When I would go] over to my aunt's house I would walk up to her, and she would always give me these little orange sour gummies. I just really loved that every time she would always give me those gummies, and I [would] sit down with her and eat them," Triana said.

Amid a staggering national death toll from COVID-19, experts predict the United States will face decades of social and economic recovery as the human losses settle. For many mourners, the pain of personal loss will never subside, but the legacy of life remains.

"Tell your family that you love them," Ayala said. "No matter if it's your mom, dad or cousin that you haven't seen for years: you never know when it'll be your last time."

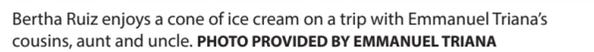
Triana described how coping with

tested positive for COVID-19. Her condition was wavering, but she was doing "decently well" and was "on the road to recovery," according to Triana. However, a few days later, she unexpectedly passed.

Triana said that his family "knew it was going to come sooner or later," but he was still confused at his grandmother's passing due to her unpredictable condition. In addition, Triana said that he has not talked to anyone else about Ruiz's passing but knew that everyone who she knew was "obviously pretty sad."

"I had already accepted that it was a possibility that she was gonna pass, so I didn't [get] hit too hard, of course, but it felt pretty sad," Triana said. "Right now I'm doing a lot better, but it still hurts every once in a while."

Triana described how coping with



Bertha Ruiz enjoys a cone of ice cream on a trip with Emmanuel Triana's cousins, aunt and uncle. PHOTO PROVIDED BY EMMANUEL TRIANA

with Ruiz.

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Triana described how coping with

Seniors lament a year lost to the pandemic



Task Force Officer and senior Grace Rivera (left) and Task Force President and senior Faith Talamantez (right) expressed disappointment in their senior year. PHOTOS PROVIDED BY GRACE RIVERA AND FAITH TALAMANTEZ

Task Force Officer and senior Grace Rivera (left) and Task Force President and senior Faith Talamantez (right) expressed disappointment in their senior year.

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY GRACE RIVERA AND FAITH TALAMANTEZ

helpful as well as thoughtful; it makes it seem like they care," Talamantez said. Talamantez was looking forward to graduation night the most. She said she loves Disneyland and was sad when graduation night was cancelled along with other senior activities. Task Force Officer and senior Grace Rivera received a notice that Disneyland will not hold senior graduation nights for any student groups due to COVID-19, but other avenues are being explored.

"Disneyland is out of the [question]," Rivera said. "If things do clear up, I know my Task Force board and other schools are looking at Universal Studios or other amusement parks."

As a result Rivera stated that it is unfortunate that she would not be able to go to grad night because it was a hallmark senior event that students look forward to.

"I was extremely disappointed when I got the notification from my advisor that Disneyland had canceled all availability for grad night. Not just our school but for every school that holds their grad night there," Rivera said. In comparison, Bagaporo was looking forward to graduation because it is a high school milestone. If a traditional graduation ceremony is held, Bagaporo stated that they would not buy a cap and gown if the price is expensive.

"Part of buying [a cap and gown] is the experience. If it's not discounted, I have caps and gowns at home because my sisters went to BVH. In the end, I could always use theirs instead," Bagaporo said.

On the other hand, Talamantez stated that she will buy a cap and gown. She noted that even though senior graduation may be online, she would like to mimic the experience as much as possible. In fact, she would prefer having a graduation online because it would be the safest way. For now, however, much remains uncertain for the Class of 2021.

"I think one of the biggest things is senior year has felt like junior year part two; it hasn't really felt like a senior year. [It's] kind of [a] blurred line between junior and senior year," Bagaporo said.



Task Force Officer and senior Grace Rivera (left) and Task Force President and senior Faith Talamantez (right) expressed disappointment in their senior year. PHOTOS PROVIDED BY GRACE RIVERA AND FAITH TALAMANTEZ

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A helping hand

Students struggle to find support amid pandemic

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Before the pandemic, Bonita Vista High (BVH) Peer Counseling President and senior Rylie Coons would meet with five to seven students a week to offer counseling services. Since quarantine started, that number has dropped to three students a week.

This sudden decrease reflects a growing shift in the way students reach out for help in the pandemic. Peer counseling allows students to schedule a one-on-one virtual meeting with a student counselor who helps them with their emotional well-being. However, many students have become anxious to reach out for help in quarantine, causing them to stay quiet and avoid receiving support.

As a peer counselor, Coons expressed that she feels disheartened when students don't reach out for help. "One of the links [sent to students] was a survey that you can fill out saying that you want a meeting [with a peer counselor], but we only got two responses out of that. So we were a little discouraged about that," Coons said. Advanced Placement (AP) Calculus AB, AP Calculus BC and IB Math Standard Level (SL) 1 teacher Benjamin Chan agreed with Coons. Chan added that students don't "take advantage" of the help they are capable of getting. He

said that getting students to ask for help is the hardest step to helping a student. "The part that needs the most work is identifying the students that need help and encouraging students to take the initiative and ask for help," Chan said. Chan explained that when students ask for help, it is usually because they missed class and need help getting caught up. Even then, according to

"Occasionally students ask for some advice and you do your best to listen. More than giving advice, it's just listening and just trying to understand where they're coming from," Chan said. Coons described her own encounter with a student who came to her for personal support. She was glad to be able to have an impact on someone's life.

"I had a student come to me saying that

to ask questions," Chan said. Coons said she personally feels comfortable turning to people for help. Nevertheless, she noted that even as a student counselor, she often still feels embarrassed reaching out for support.

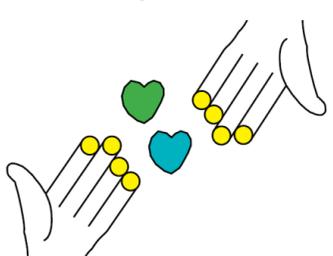
"When I reach out for help I often feel ashamed regardless of how big or small it is and who I'm reaching out to," Coons said. Senior Cambria McClelland admitted that she feels the same way. She stated that she sometimes feels "guilt" in asking for help during distance learning. On top of that, she feels that some teachers express their frustration towards distance learning, causing her to feel uncomfortable asking them for help.

"Sometimes when they express their frustrations with workload or emails I think, 'maybe I should just ask someone else,' and I usually do if I can," McClelland said. McClelland mentioned that she usually only turns to people for academic help. Coons developed the courage to ask for support during a difficult situation and remembered a memorable time that she reached out to a teacher for support, which helped her recognize that she wasn't alone.

"When my dad ended up in the hospital, I talked to a teacher at school about it and she had told me about her situation which is very similar to mine. It made me realize that I'm not the only one who is going through this and that there are people out there for me to talk to," Coons said.

they weren't happy with themselves and they didn't feel they had a purpose in life anymore. That student still books appointments with me and is doing so much better mentally," Coons said. Both Coons and Chan have seen a decrease in the amount of kids asking for help. They agreed that this is because students don't get to build a strong enough relationship with others during virtual learning to feel comfortable to ask for help.

"I think students just feel more distant and don't want to make the extra effort

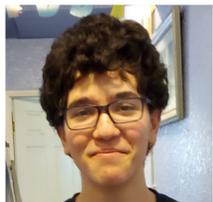


Bonita Vista High's Peer Counseling program has experienced a decrease in students reaching out for help. Peer Counselor President and senior Rylie Coons believes students often fear being judged. ILLUSTRATION BY ISAAC LOZANO

Chan, students can still feel nervous about reaching out. However, Chan emphasized that there is no need for students to be nervous about reaching out.

"The vast majority of teachers are not interested in judging students; we just want to help them," Chan said. Chan said he understands his job is to make connections with his students so that they feel more comfortable asking for help. He expressed that when students ask for emotional support, that is the time when teachers simply listen.

Kristian Rojas



BVH sophomore Kristian Rojas. PROVIDED BY KRISTIAN ROJAS.

BVH sophomore Kristian Rojas started distance learning not having to worry about his younger siblings. His younger step brother is in eighth grade and old enough to take care of himself, while an older cousin came over to his house every day to take care of his younger sister, first-grader Abby Rojas.

However, on Christmas day while on their way to his grandparents' house, K. Rojas' mom received a call saying that she tested positive for COVID-19. After more than a month of quarantining and under the care of an aunt and uncle, the Rojas family finally tested negative for COVID-19.

After the recovery, however, K. Rojas' cousin could not go to take care of his little sister. The month passed and Rojas' cousin still could not take care of the youngest in the family, thus, when the new semester began, Rojas committed to taking care of his little sister.

"We need to help [my sister] with her reading and her writing. In her class, she has to do writing every day. Her teacher gives her a question and I have to make sure she writes it," K. Rojas said.

His parents work day jobs and are out for most of the day, but his dad occasionally stays home on Fridays. For the most part, K. Rojas takes care of his sister as if he worked a nine to five o'clock shift, finally relaxing when his parents get home.

During synchronous classes, A. Rojas sits in the living room and K. Rojas keeps his room door open just in case she asks him for something or needs help.

"I have seventh period so on Mondays and Wednesdays she'll be done and I'll still be in class. Sometimes she'll be hungry or thirsty. She's usually able to get most of the stuff by herself but [for] the things that she needs help with I'll

have to tell her to wait until I'm done with class," K. Rojas said.

One of the positives that have come out of taking care of his little sister, K. Rojas said, is being able to see her grow. Sometimes when they work on math problems together and A. Rojas is able to get the answer on her own, he'll share a 'you did it' moment with her.

Compared to the amount of time that K. Rojas has spent with his sister this semester, before the pandemic their time spent together was considerably shorter. A. Rojas would get out of school earlier than K. Rojas and would be picked up by their grandma. On those days, Rojas wouldn't see her until his mom picked her up after her five o'clock shift.

"If my cousin is able to help [take care of A. Rojas] then I'll go [back to school if it reopens] but if my cousins are not able to help then I probably would just stay [home]," K. Rojas said.

To manage his school workload while taking care of his sister, he uses every asynchronous and lunch break that he can to do his assignments. K. Rojas also faces some challenges when it's time to help A. Rojas with school work. He finds it difficult trying to deal with his little sister whenever she gets upset about doing her work.

"[I struggle] when she starts to cry or when she starts to yell. That's when it's frustrating because I can't calm her down [so] she usually either falls asleep from crying too much or she'll just stop. I'm doing one thing and she wants me to do another thing but I can't because I have homework and she doesn't really understand that," K. Rojas said.

This was especially difficult for K. Rojas when he transitioned to only watching over her while she does her work. He used to read questions out loud and explain what she needed to do, but lately, he has been trying to get A. Rojas to work by herself, only asking questions when the work is very difficult for her.

"In the beginning, she didn't want to do [her homework], she would get mad that I wouldn't tell her what to do and got frustrated when I stopped helping her as much as I did," K. Rojas said. "She wouldn't want to do it at all, so that was frustrating, but over time she's doing the work more and more by herself."

K. Rojas mentioned that it was a lot harder to work with A. Rojas because she listens more to their older cousin. He described taking care of her as "harder than it looks" with a sigh. Overall, however, K. Rojas has enjoyed being able to see A.

Rojas learn to finish her assignments independently and grow throughout distance learning.

"[I hope] that we'll be able to go back [to school] because I feel like it will be easier for her to be in-person with a teacher. I'm pretty sure she's behind because she's not able to talk to her teacher [since] all the other kids are talking, so being able to go back in person would help her a lot," K. Rojas said.



First grader Abby Rojas works in the living room during school. Sophomore Kristian Rojas at this time would be in his room but leaves the door open in case A. Rojas needs something. PROVIDED BY KRISTIAN ROJAS

Features

Beyond the screen

BVH students take care of loved ones during quarantine

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Almost a year ago on March 13, 2020, Bonita Vista High (BVH) students began distance learning, a format, unlike anything they experienced before. More than that, students have had to cope with the pandemic raging beyond the walls of their homes. However, 30 percent of BVH students faced another challenge as the country was immersed into virtual learning: taking care of family.

"The first word that comes to mind [when reflecting on distance learning] is definitely 'interesting,'" senior Yesenia Sanchez, who cares for her grandmother and aunt, said. "[I've been] adjusting to online school with different workloads. My life has been more chaotic."

Sophomore Kristian Rojas has begun dedicating some of his time to taking care of his youngest sibling. While a cousin used to go over to babysit after his family tested positive for COVID-19, Rojas began to take care of his siblings himself and has continued to do so after recovering.

"My step brother is good on his own. But my sister [is] the one who needs the most help because she's in first grade," Rojas said.

Similar to Rojas, Sanchez has found new obstacles while staying home, including taking care of her aunt and grandmother, who both have dementia. She is "constantly watching them" to ensure that they are in good health, while simultaneously balancing her schoolwork.

"Since this quarantine and remote learning started, considering my situation with a family member, it's definitely been stressful," Sanchez said.

Although junior Anahi Marquez-Silva has had a lot of time on her hands since distance learning started, some of the time goes to taking care of her youngest sibling. It is not odd to see Marquez-Silva sitting next to her sister during both of their classes and translating what her sister's Spanish teacher is saying.

"I have three siblings that are all in school and they're all varying ages. My brother's in middle school, my younger sister is in kindergarten and I have a twin sister. [There is] a lot going on at once because we're all in school at the same time," Marquez-Silva said.

Another student who helps her younger sister during school hours is senior Alexis Guevara. Guevara had taken on the role of guiding her younger sister, a BVH freshman, through her first year of high school.

"I definitely take a lot of time out of my day to make sure she knows what she's doing," Guevara said. "She needs more help than what we need [to] get used to it. I want to make sure she's always on track and not losing focus."

These students are just a few living out the new reality that the COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning has created worldwide. Their stories portray how the bonds of family hold up in the most unexpected and uncertain of times.

"It's difficult knowing that [our time in distance learning] is not the same as what everyone else has experienced," Guevara said.

Yesenia Sanchez



BVH senior Yesenia Sanchez. PHOTO BY THE CRUSADER.

try to look at the positives: they're alive, they're healthy, they're not dying," senior Yesenia Sanchez reflected. "I always tell myself, 'don't take that for granted, because the moment you do, something bad always happens. They're well, as good as they can be, with dementia. And they're still here. It's all you need.'"

Sanchez, while attending BVH during the past year of distance learning, helps her mother care for her grandmother and aunt—both of whom have dementia. Dementia consists of the loss of memory and judgment, deteriorating an individual's ability to remember and perform basic functions.

For the past eight years, Sanchez's grandmother and aunt have lived with her and her mother, relying on them for care. Since the pandemic, Sanchez and her mother have faced many new challenges and stresses. For Sanchez, this includes keeping an eye on her grandmother and aunt throughout the school day.

"I'm watching them 24/7. It's just a habit I've grown," Sanchez said. "Before COVID-19, I would watch them but I wouldn't necessarily care for them. But as I got older [and the pandemic happened], I paid a lot more attention [to them]."

While attending her online classes, Sanchez keeps a baby monitor nearby that allows her to watch her aunt and grandmother from another room. At 7:30 a.m., Sanchez's mom leaves the house to work as a behavior specialist for Daly Academy at Ella B. Allen Elementary School.

When she leaves, Sanchez watches her grandmother and aunt until their caregiver arrives at 9:00 a.m. to see to their needs. Additionally, Sanchez often takes on the responsibility of making dinner, doing laundry and assisting her aunt and grandmother walk around the house.

"I think that there has been an overwhelming feeling of, 'wow, this is what

has happened to them," Sanchez said. "They were very social and active. And now, they can't even do things that they could do a couple [of] years ago."

In addition to caring for her grandmother and aunt on a daily basis, Sanchez has several medical appointments each week to address her broken ankle. When attending essential medical appointments, Sanchez is vigilant about sanitizing her hands and wearing double face masks. Given that she lives with two family members at high-risk of severe COVID-19 symptoms, having to go to medical appointments has put added pressure on her.

"If they catch COVID-19, it would be very bad," Sanchez said. "To calm myself mentally [going into the appointments], it's a matter of thinking positively. [I tell myself], 'I don't focus on how you might get it, just focus on getting in and out real quick.' But it's still scary to think about."

Often, Sanchez's appointments conflict



Senior Yesenia Sanchez and her grandmother Yolanda Llanos Arellano visiting a local pumpkin patch when Sanchez was younger. Amidst distance learning, Sanchez helps her mother care for Arellano and her aunt, both of whom suffer from dementia. PROVIDED BY YESENIA SANDEZ

with those of her grandmother and aunt.

"I don't want to impose [the stress] on my mom, so there are times I have had to cancel my appointments, so they can go to theirs, which I don't mind," Sanchez said. "I'll be like, 'mine doesn't matter that much. Take her; she's a lot older than I am. Obviously, she needs more care.'"

The effects of family members having dementia have been immense for Sand-

"We're stuck here. And there's no way to get out. It feels suffocating."
- senior Yesenia Sanchez

ez. With the condition, individuals begin to lose sight of their own identity and become confused with their surroundings. Years ago, Sanchez's grandmother was struck with the condition almost overnight.

"I didn't even feel like I could say goodbye," Sanchez confessed. "It was just: boom! Gone."

Sanchez remembers a time before her grandmother was unexpectedly diag-

nostic with dementia. The two of them would go on long walks across the city of Chula Vista. With the worsening of her grandmother's condition, her grandmother is no longer capable of joining her on those outings.

"I was really close with her," Sanchez recalls. "Seeing her barely being able to walk, it really hit me. She would want to go hiking as much as she could, just

explore the city or even go on road trips with just her, my mom and I. Seeing her in a wheelchair was a really big eye-opener for me."

While balancing schoolwork and taking care of family, Sanchez has also struggled with her personal mental health.

"It's mostly a mental battle," Sanchez said. "It's mentally draining [to] take care of not just one person, but two [people] who are so far gone. And besides that, my mental health has definitely gotten worse during this pandemic. I've never been left alone with my thoughts so completely."

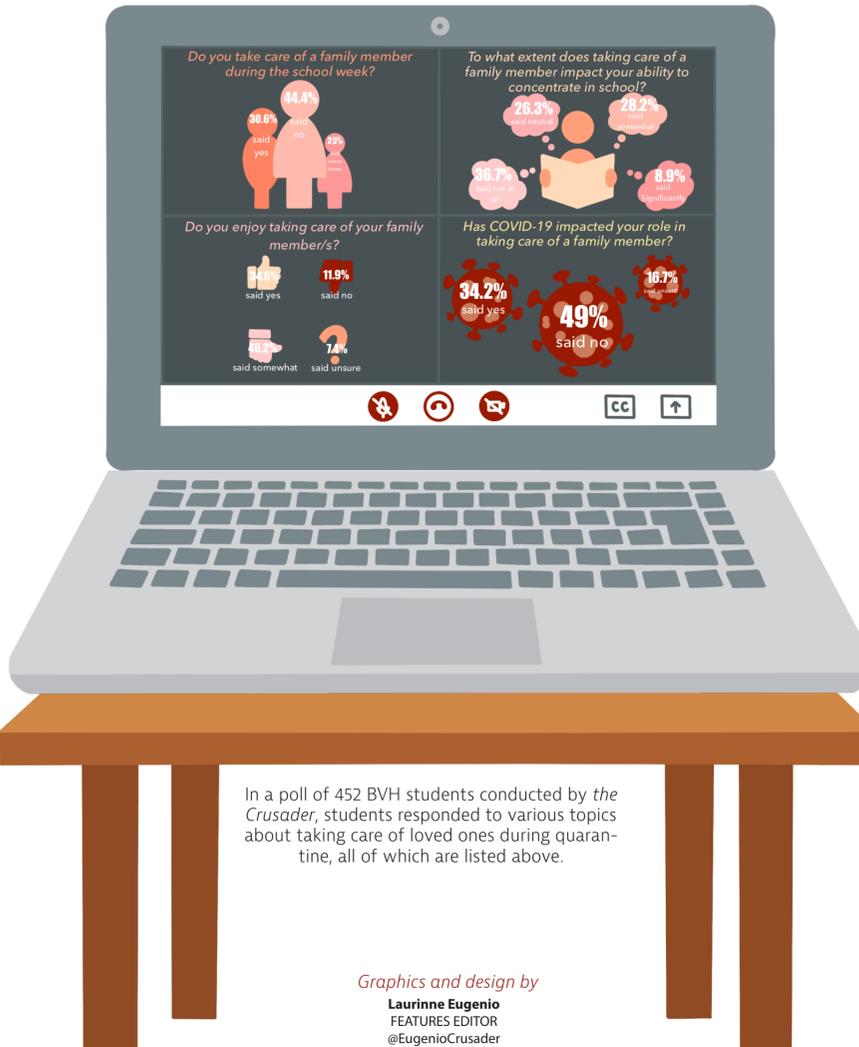
Maintaining a healthy mindset and motivation continues to be an obstacle for Sanchez, but she urges anyone who is struggling to "reach out for help," since that has assisted her in the past year.

However, looking toward the future has been a source of worry. After high school, Sanchez plans to attend Southwestern College. She hopes to complete community college online to remain a resource for her aunt and grandmother, to avoid contracting COVID-19 and passing it to them.

"I have learned that knowing your family is safe, healthy and COVID-19-free is the only thing you ever need," Sanchez said. "I read these articles about people getting evicted from their homes... I'm grateful that I haven't been affected [in that way]. Just be grateful for what you have, it doesn't matter if you're locked inside."

For eight years, Sanchez and her mother have cared for their family members with love and perseverance. Especially given the circumstances of the past year, Sanchez has learned to be increasingly grateful.

"Life can change so quickly," Sanchez said. "Take advantage of every moment you have with the people you love. You never know what life can do. In a matter of seconds, something can be ripped away from you."



In a poll of 452 BVH students conducted by the Crusader, students responded to various topics about taking care of loved ones during quarantine, all of which are listed above.

Graphics and design by
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Alexis Guevara



BVH senior Alexis Guevara. PHOTO BY LUIS SUAREZ

I know my freshman year, it was a big struggle. I thought, 'I don't know how to do this. I don't have anyone to show me the ropes.' And I got lucky that I had a few older friends to let me know," senior Alexis Guevara reminisced. "But to have someone full-on, 24/7, helping you, that is what I wish I would have had when I was my sister's age."

Guevara is an Advanced Placement student and pitcher on the BVH girls' softball team, but she is also an older sister. Through the disorienting months of distance learning, Guevara has taken on the responsibility of helping her sister, freshman Natalie Guevara, navigate her first year of high school from home.

"I definitely want her to do better in school than I did," A. Guevara said. "So I want to make sure that I'm always there to help her so that she can get better grades and achieve more [than I did]."

Even without the pandemic and distance learning, A. Guevara would still help guide her sister through the first



Senior Alexis Guevara (right) and her sister freshman Natalie Guevara (left) have gotten closer through distance learning. PROVIDED BY ALEXIS GUEVARA

of asynchronous class time and during breaks.

"She knows that she can just come into my room [to ask for help if she needs it] as long as she's quiet if I'm taking a test. I'll give her guidance while listening to lectures [in class sometimes]," A. Guevara said. "On those days, I'll just have one of my friends catch me up on the class."

For A. Guevara, there are challenges to balancing schoolwork and her role as an older sister. Helping her sister entails finding time for both her and N. Guevara's work and recalling material from her freshman year. Furthermore, remote learning has pushed A. Guevara to carefully manage her time and review concepts from her first year at BVH.

er, especially because I'm going to miss her when I go to college. It's nice to know that she could be comfortable calling me if she needs help in the future."

A. Guevara will be attending Brown University next year, playing softball and potentially studying biochemistry. As she plans for her future, her sister's journey has been an equally important part of her life.

"I know how hard high school is, but I'm almost done. She's got [three] more years. I just want to be there to help her because I know it's tough when it's late at night and you're trying to finish your work," A. Guevara said. "Even if I'm really tired, it's worth helping her. My sister is way smarter than I am. So I'm glad that I can be there for her."

Junior Anahi Marquez-Silva (left) has spent much of the pandemic helping to watch her younger siblings including Giselle Torres (left). Marquez-Silva primarily began caring for her siblings after her mother and sister junior Isabella Marquez-Silva contracted COVID-19. PROVIDED BY ANAHI MARQUEZ-SILVA

for the both of us to be able to do school here, or I'll go to her room. It makes it easier because we can do homework together and she knows what I'm doing in school and I know what she's doing," A. Marquez-Silva said.

While A. Marquez-Silva does not need to take care of her twin sister, they still

year of high school, although she observes that N. Guevara would likely need less help if students were on campus.

"I've always helped her in general if she needed it, but she definitely needed more help this year," A. Guevara said. "Especially since in high school you're taking more advanced classes."

With both parents working, A. Guevara is who N. Guevara goes to for help with schoolwork. During synchronous class periods, A. Guevara spends 10 to 20 minutes answering questions for her sister. After school, the sisters spend anywhere from 10 minutes to hours together on school work.

"There [have] definitely been a couple [of] late nights where we both stayed up late to do homework," A. Guevara said. "And it's that struggle of, 'I want to go to bed, I just want to be done for the day.' But I also know that she [N. Guevara] has to get her stuff done as well. And if I could help her and let her get some sleep, that's definitely my priority."

A. Guevara appreciates that her teachers do not take up the entire block period with instructional time. This allows her to work with N. Guevara during parts



Senior Alexis Guevara (left) dedicates time to help Natalie Guevara (right) through her freshman year at BVH. PROVIDED BY ALEXIS GUEVARA

of asynchronous class time and during breaks.

"She knows that she can just come into my room [to ask for help if she needs it] as long as she's quiet if I'm taking a test. I'll give her guidance while listening to lectures [in class sometimes]," A. Guevara said. "On those days, I'll just have one of my friends catch me up on the class."

For A. Guevara, there are challenges to balancing schoolwork and her role as an older sister. Helping her sister entails finding time for both her and N. Guevara's work and recalling material from her freshman year. Furthermore, remote learning has pushed A. Guevara to carefully manage her time and review concepts from her first year at BVH.

Anahi Marquez-Silva



BVH junior Anahi Marquez-Silva. PHOTO BY LUIS SUAREZ

BVH Associated Student Body (ASB) Public Relation Commissioner and junior Anahi Marquez-Silva has had an "interesting" experience with distance learning this year, with more time on her hands than ever before. The only things she needs to worry about are school and her three other siblings. Her siblings—Giselle Torres in kindergarten, Alexander Torres in middle school and her twin sister Isabella Marquez-Silva—are a part of her daily routine at home.

Since the beginning of distance learning, A. Marquez-Silva would occasionally sit with G. Torres in her classes and from time to time check A. Torres's homework for any errors. For the most part, A. Marquez-Silva would take care of the youngest sibling and she would only need to step in when her mom was occupied.

A couple of months into distance learning, however, A. Marquez-Silva's mom and her twin sister tested positive for COVID-19 and quarantined for two weeks in her parents' room. During those two weeks, A. Marquez-Silva was completely in charge of her younger sister and checked in with A. Torres more often. Until her dad got home from work, A. Marquez-Silva took care of her siblings' needs.

"It was really hard for me to get any sort of work done. On top of taking care of [my mom], I was home alone with the kids and there was a lot of cleaning. Then, I had to feed my mom because she couldn't go out," A. Marquez-Silva said.

During her mom's quarantine, A. Marquez-Silva based her schedule around G. Torres'. First, A. Marquez-Silva would wake up at seven and prepare G. Torres' class materials, then she would wake G. Torres up, get her dressed, make her breakfast and log her into class at 8:30 a.m. G. Torres did not have any difficulty with her morning classes so from there



Junior Anahi Marquez-Silva (right) has spent much of the pandemic helping to watch her younger siblings including Giselle Torres (left). Marquez-Silva primarily began caring for her siblings after her mother and sister junior Isabella Marquez-Silva contracted COVID-19. PROVIDED BY ANAHI MARQUEZ-SILVA

find ways to hang out together and help each other with schoolwork. A. Marquez-Silva stated that she is really close with her twin, so being separated from I. Marquez-Silva for two weeks was not a pleasant experience.

Even now, A. Marquez still helps her younger siblings with assignments so she feels hesitant to go back to BVH for in-person classes. In the event that being part of the ASB pushes her to go back to school, she explained that she would have to ask permission from her parents to go on certain days and stay home on other days to take care of her little sister.

A. Marquez-Silva stated that when she attended in-person classes before the pandemic, and if she were to go back soon, she would not have to help her siblings with any of their work. At home, A. Marquez-Silva has a lot more time to finish her assignments and then transition to assisting her siblings. However, if she were to attend school again she described that the school would have significantly less time for her own work.

With less on her plate, A. Marquez-Silva works from four p.m. to eight p.m. a couple of days a week as a gymnastics coach at Rockstar Gymnastics. When she is not at work she spends her free time finishing assignments or working for ASB.

"I do have a closer relationship with them [her siblings] as a whole because when I was in school I was always out doing something. Now that I'm home, I do get to spend a lot more time with them on an individual basis," A. Marquez-Silva said.

Overall, A. Marquez-Silva has experienced being in charge of her siblings and helping them with school. While not an experience she wanted to have, she emphasized how rewarding "pulling her own weight" around the house was.

"The biggest lesson that I learned [from taking care of my siblings] was to not take free time for granted. Before, I had a bunch of time to lounge around and I would complain about not having enough free time. When I actually had none, I realized how much I should've appreciated the little time I had to myself," A. Marquez-Silva said.

"[If I were to go to school] I would probably have a lot less on my plate [at home] because I'm not there as often," A. Marquez-Silva said. "That would be the only difference, whatever I'm doing I'd be doing less of it. I don't think there would be a shift in new responsibilities or letting go of old ones."

The state of the stage

Speech and Debate team members qualify for state tournament

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The California High School Speech Association (CHSAA) State Qualifying Tournaments for Speech and Debate came to a close on March 6. Students, coaches and parents attended the awards ceremony held on the video conferencing platform Zoom, where rankings were announced. Students sat anxiously in front of their laptops, awaiting their results, excited to see if all their hard work and preparation paid off.

Feb. 19 marked the start of the State Qualifier tournament for Bonita Vista High's (BVH) Speech and Debate team, and by the end, 16 students qualified. Considering the status of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the 2021 State Qualifying Tournaments were held online. Despite difficulties, they were able to end a successful year through each other's accomplishments.

Speech and Debate Advisor and coach Eric Helle did not know if he would have a team this year, considering the pandemic. He explained how it is challenging for students to be staring at a screen all weekend for Speech and Debate tournaments. Helle understands that it "is mentally and emotionally taxing." He is impressed to see his "mental athletes" rise to the occasion.

"I was very happy that we had 16 different students qualify for the state



Seniors Faith Talamantez (bottom) and Ursula Neuner (top right) win first place in the Public Forum event. They both qualified for the state tournament. PHOTO BY JAIME JAZO.

tournament, especially considering the obstacles placed in front of us by the pandemic, distance learning and distance competitions. To equal the number of kids that we had qualified last year at a physical tournament; what a testimony to our school's ability to persevere and compete at a high level," Helle said.

Furthermore, Speech and Debate President and senior Ursula Neuner mentioned that personally, qualifying in three out of the four events she participated in at the tournament was accompanied by a blend of emotions. According to Neuner, while she was ecstatic to hear she was able to progress to the state tournament, "it [was a] bittersweet moment" because it was her last league tournament as a graduating senior.

"I've been working on perfecting

my craft in Speech and Debate for the past four years, so it felt really good to succeed. Individually, it's nice to have a good final showing before I graduate; I was happy that I did well," Ursula said.

Additionally, Speech and Debate state qualifier and sophomore Eiffel Sunga qualified in Public Forum (PF) at the competition, which is a partnered debate event where two teams debate a topic that they have researched beforehand. For her, it was fulfilling to compete against more experienced opponents and come out victorious. Moreover, progressing further into the competition compared to last year made this win much more special, Sunga said.

"[Qualifying is] very satisfying because all year, specifically in PF, I've put a lot of time, effort and research into all of our [arguments]. [It's not

always about winning, but being] able to qualify for [state in PF] and beat a bunch of teams [who are] considered good in the league is very satisfying," Sunga said.

Speech and Debate Policy Captain and senior Gerardo Gonzalez Martinez wanted to end his year strong since it would be his last "hoorah" as a graduating senior. However, he was not able to qualify, but knowing that he contributed to other members' success was already a win for him.

"I would say we [Gerardo and his debate partner] performed at a really high level consistently and this was the outlier, which is why it's a bit disappointing that the outlying bad tournament was when it mattered most," Gonzalez Martinez said.

In the days leading up to the tournament this past weekend on

March 5 to 6, Neuner's teammates were stressed due to the anxiety of not knowing how they would perform. In order to reassure them, she told them that constantly preparing for the competition would help calm them down.

"As officers, our goal was to make sure that the [competitors] were really prepared so that they didn't have to feel as stressed," Neuner said. "I always think that action is the antidote to anxiety. [Work] can [ease] some stress because it makes you think 'Oh, I am prepared.'"

Despite the team's success, Helle mentioned that there have been no benefits from online Speech and Debate tournaments. He described that students want to make eye contact with the audience, but cannot because they would be "blinded by the green light" from the webcam. Helle explained that there is a social disconnect between Speech and Debate team members when presenting their debate cases or speeches.

"It's not the same [as competing in person]. [Team members usually have] an audience when they're in the room, judges are making eye contact with them and students [can feel the] adrenaline rush [while] presenting. It's exciting to walk outside of your room after competing and socialize with your friends, make new friends from different countries and other schools who compete. That's all been taken away from kids," Helle said.

Not only has that social aspect of Speech and Debate been taken away, but student motivation has also been impacted. In terms of Sunga's Original Oratory speech, which is the event she did not qualify in, she shared that procrastination was a huge issue this

time around. She expressed that if she had invested more time improving her speech, she thinks she would have been able to go farther with it. Furthermore, when it came to competing in the out rounds for PF, it stressed her out because she got matched against people who are great at what they do.

"[Competing against difficult opponents] makes me extremely nervous [which] really affects my performance," Sunga said.

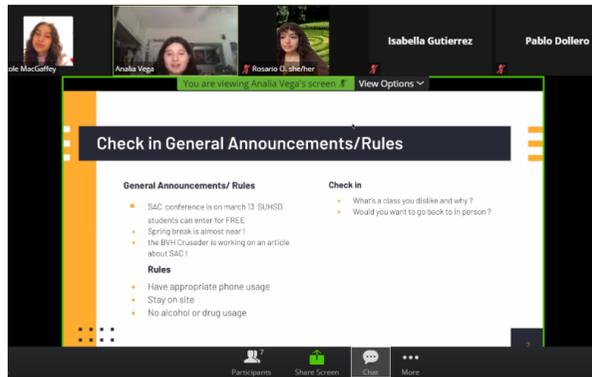
Neuner strives to prioritize the life-skills Speech and Debate can instill in an individual and how "success is coming out of Speech and Debate with a new perspective on the world [and] the ability to advocate for something [they] believe in." Going forward, this year the state tournament will be held online on April 23-25. Unlike last year, the tournament has not been cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions.

"[In Speech and Debate] we're taking out skills that we'll be able to keep for the rest of our lives. We want to reinforce that, even if they don't win a trophy, that shouldn't discourage them because that's not what your main goal should be," Neuner said.

Helle emphasized that it does not really matter if the team members do not get a "piece of plastic" at the end of the tournament. He wants his students to grow, learn how to critically think about the world and develop skills that are going to make students successful adults.

"That's the gravy, man; if you work hard, trophies will come and go, but the skills never leave you," Helle said. "An officer measures the success of the team, not by their own personal success, but by the success that they had in helping one of their teammates."

Student Advocacy Conference to host BVH session



On March 5, the BVH CASC Club held a conference to discuss the upcoming Student Advocacy Conference on March 13th. The meeting was run by BVH CASC Club President and Development Committee Assistant Director for the CASC Region 12 Cabinet Analia Vega. PHOTO BY NICOLE MACGAFFEY

Nicole Macgaffey
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On the front line of change in student education, the California Association of Student Councils (CASC) is working towards building the leaders of tomorrow. CASC is set on giving students a voice in their own education and gives a platform to create a better educational experience for everyone in their community.

On March 13th, CASC is holding a Student Advocacy Conference (SAC) over Zoom to give students from the Region 12 district the opportunity to create and present policy proposals

to their local representatives with San Diego and Imperial Valley. The Sweetwater Union High School District has partnered with CASC to give scholarships to students who sign up for the conference. The scholarship would allow the first 100 students to register to go to the conference for free.

"The district is really supportive of student voices. They want to hear our student voices and hopefully make real changes from student opinions and student expressions," CASC Region 12 president Diane Escarries said.

The conference will cover 10 topics: civil rights, LGBTQIA+, mental health, post high school readiness, digital divide, racial equity, mental health, sexual assault, restorative practices and civil engagement. At the conference, students can choose a topic that they are interested in and will be guided through the process with a staff

member creating policy proposals.

"[The conference] is a great way for students to be involved [in general] and be involved with policies and district decision making and [they're] honestly really fun conferences," Escarries said. "[The conferences are] student run and student led [there], no teachers or advisors who are telling you what to do. It's really a safe environment for all students."

Bonita Vista High (BVH) CASC club president and development committee assistant director for the CASC Region 12 cabinet Analia Vega expressed how these conferences have allowed her to meet a lot of new people and forge new connections. Escarries detailed that students have the chance to develop their leadership as well as communication skills. She also mentioned that the conference is a way to interact and collaborate with peers about a common interest and develop that ability as well.

"It will empower you [and] make you feel like you actually can make real changes. I feel like I have the power in my hands to change my own education," Escarries said. "That's how students will feel when they step into these conferences, and afterwards you just feel good."

Students will also be able to get community service for the hours they attend the conference. Member of the governmental affairs and Policy Committee for CASC Batya Bimstein brought up how going to the conference looks good for college admissions, though she emphasized that this should not be the main motive for attending. Bimstein mentioned how the fulfillment of the conference comes from knowing that your voice made a

difference within California education systems.

"This conference specifically allows us to implement initiatives that have been proposed in the conferences that involve all of California on a local level. So we're able to account for [issues] that might just be happening in the San Diego area and be able to make solutions [that are] more personalized [which] allows for more effective implementation to the panelist you're presenting to. They probably are going to that connection of 'Yes, I definitely see this in my daily life. We need to pass this right now.' It's more local and personalized making the solutions more effective and less broad," Bimstein said.

Vega believes that there is a lot of value students can get out of the conference and sees it as a great opportunity for all students. Bimstein highlighted how this conference causes attendees to become aware of the issues in the community and propose solutions on how to fix them.

"Whether kids feel like [these issues are] impacting them or not, it always is going to impact us whether it be directly or indirectly," Bimstein said. "A big part of being in CASC is that mindset of whether you feel it's not a huge issue for you, it's an issue for someone else. Being able to have a role in helping other people [that are] more disadvantaged; it's a privilege being able to be in that position to speak for them and help people. It comes down to [having] values of being caring of all these things. It really is a privilege having the voice to speak for others and get their input. It's very crucial to get many points of views and think outside of yourself."

How will senior graduation take place?



Plans for graduation remain uncertain, but BVH Principal Roman Del Rosario, Ed.D., is open to alternative options. ILLUSTRATION BY PABLO DOLLERO

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For decades seniors in high school have celebrated and ended their high school careers by dressing up in a cap and gown and walking across a stage. However, for the class of 2021 this traditional ceremony will in no way be held in the same manner.

While there is no set plan for the senior graduation for the class of 2021 at this time, Principal of Bonita Vista High (BVH) Roman Del Rosario, Ed.D., explains that while keeping safety in mind as a top priority, he is open to ideas for how this special event can be celebrated.

"I'm less interested in pushing an idea of what we could do. I'm more

interested in listening and having that idea come from students and their families," Del Rosario said.

Chief of Education Equity and Support Services for Sweetwater Union High School District (SUHSD) Vernon Moore, Ed.D., explains that administrative teams and ASBs are working together to design a graduation ceremony for the class of 2021 that will be based on guidance from the state and local health authorities. Moore adds that the plans will be reviewed by district leadership in mid-March, where they will provide guidelines to the school administrations.

"We intend for this to be a collaborative process with each school site so that the 2021 graduations can be great events," Moore said.

Assistant Principal of Student Activities Christopher Alvarez shares that he attends weekly Zoom meetings with all the assistant principals of SUHSD's 12 high schools, where they have discussed different possibilities and methods for senior graduations. In the conversations, options include in-person ceremonies with limited capacities, in-person ceremonies throughout several days of the week, drive-bys and virtual ceremonies.

Alvarez and Del Rosario agree that as long as safety is taken into consideration and tier levels begin to drop, there is a higher probability of an in-person celebration to be held.

"I believe in the resiliency of our students and even though this wasn't ideal, I know that our students are going to move on to accomplish great things and to live incredible, meaningful lives," Del Rosario said.

Teacher's Say: Do politics belong in the classroom?



Marina Dillingham
French 5-6, International Baccalaureate (IB) Spanish, IB French and AP French

I believe that politics belong in the classroom. Students need to be aware of political issues that affect them and be educated on both sides of an issue. If we don't talk about politics and their effect on society in the classroom, then students will not be equipped to deal with these issues in real life.



Frank Schneemann
US Government and World History

It is not my place to tell other teachers how to teach. Every issue has at least two sides and I do my best to present both sides of every issue while hiding my personal preferences. My discomfort is the price for free thought.



Janice Cook
Integrated Mathematics (IM) 2 and Compacted IM 3/Pre-Calculus

I think there are specific aspects of politics that should be discussed in the classroom. However, I do not believe teachers should give their personal political opinions. Teachers can explain how to do research on political topics. From that research, students can vote based on what they think is best.



Brian Bane
Advanced Placement (AP) English Language, English 11 and English 12

No! Because teachers are authority figures with control over grades. Students can be unduly influenced to think a certain way or may be unwilling to share what they really think for fear of a bad grade or verbal rebuke.

Arts & Culture

Art while we're apart

Students enter digital media contests amidst pandemic

"In Peterson's case, she would have [received] 2 free tickets for her and the person of her choice to go to Washington and see that great photo. What a missed opportunity," Lim said, groaning in frustration. "Oh my god."

Peterson's submission was "most likely" displayed in the Cannon Tunnel, according to Lim. However no exhibition for the works occurred.

"I was a little disappointed. When Lim first mentioned that the winner's art would get to be hanging there and the winner would get to go see it. I was like, 'that would be so cool.' But now, just knowing it's hanging up there and not being able to see it—going would've been great," Peterson said.

Although the pandemic has put a stop to in-person exhibitions, the drastic changes to everyday life that the pandemic has caused are influencing artworks, photos and other multimedia created by students.

"My sister works as a nurse, she's a first responder. She always gives her son a kiss goodbye before she leaves, and one day I asked if she could step outside so I could capture that moment. Everyday that she leaves to go to work, she never knows if she's gonna come back and bring [COVID-19] with her," Peterson said. "I thought it could show that mothers and fathers who work as nurses are risking their lives and their family's lives every time they step out that door."

Lim is a strong advocate for the ways students are expressing themselves

Senior Kiana Peterson's submission to the Congressional Art Award Ca 51st District, with Hon. Juan Varas. Peterson received first place in last year's competition, with her work currently being displayed in the Cannon Tunnel of the U.S Capitol Building. **PROVIDED BY KIANA PETERSON**

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The student artists, filmmakers and photographers of Bonita Vista High (BVH) have been kept on their toes throughout the pandemic; entering various multimedia competitions with the support of Photography and Advanced Placement (AP) 2D Art and Design teacher Edwin Lim. Students have brought several winning submissions to the competitions over the last year, with works representing BVH that are recognized across the United States.

"It's truly a joyous thing. Never did I imagine this pandemic, yet [students are] still submitting things and getting recognized. That means my kids are awesome," Lim said.

Although works are still being submitted, the process of submission has been altered due to distance learning. Most of the time, competitions that require payment per entry are covered by Lim due to the complications involved with sending payments during quarantine. However, the main alteration to multimedia

competitions is the transition from in person exhibitions to virtual ones.

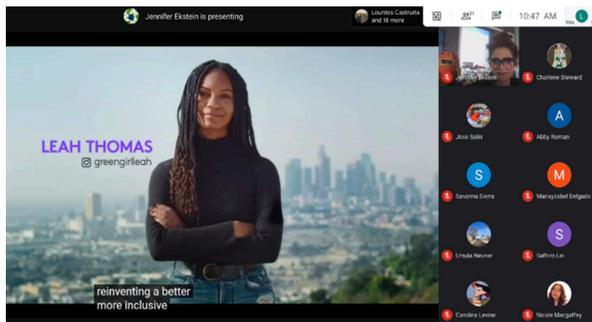
"I know a lot of smaller competitions where they do local exhibitions, but for big international competitions, not everybody is going to be coming out of their state to see the works displayed with all the regulations," senior Kara Barragan said. "Traveling out of state to go see my work would've been a really important time for me and my family."

Barragan submitted work to the Texas Photographic Society's 2020 International Student Competition, where her photo was declared a finalist. Its exhibition would have occurred in Texas along with entries from contestants across the country.

Similarly, the Congressional Art Award Ca. 51st District, with the Hon. Juan Varas, is an international competition that has its winners taken to Washington D.C. to see their artwork displayed in the Cannon Tunnel of the U.S. Capitol Building. Senior Kiana Peterson had her submission take first place in last year's competition, however, did not attend any exhibition due to its cancellation.

"Without the pandemic, a lot of [art] works would have gotten to sit in exhibition halls representing BVH," Peterson said.

Black history month matters



Accelerated Biology and IB ESS teacher Jennifer Ekstein shares her screen, showing a video of African-American Environmentalist Leah Thomas to her fourth period class. **PHOTO BY LAURINNE EUGENIO**

Laurinne Eugenio
FEATURES EDITOR
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Every February, Black History Month, also known as African-American History Month, is celebrated annually to pay tribute to the struggles and achievements of African-Americans, as well as recognize the vital role they play in United States history. This year, some Bonita Vista High (BVH) staff, students and clubs have made an effort to raise awareness about Black History Month by shining a light on African-American figures and experiences to the rest of the BVH community.

"Black History Month for me means celebration, education, honor and respect for our brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers and queer ancestors," Black Student Union (BSU) Co-president and senior Luke Svehaug said. (Svehaug uses she/her/they/them pronouns). "I believe we celebrate our blackness every day but this month is a useful time to spread awareness and share the stories of impactful black individuals; past and present."

She explains that BVH BSU's main purpose is to provide a safe, interactive space for not only Black students but also for all students from different backgrounds. Team members within BSU discuss and raise awareness about current events pertaining to black, indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) communities.

"As a club, we strive to positively communicate, share personal anecdotes and spread awareness of injustices and inequality in race, gender [and] etc. in the minority community," Svehaug said. "We created and implemented this club so students can feel heard and safe in this day and age of distress."

According to Svehaug, BSU has been doing "Trailblazer Thursdays" since the beginning of the semester. BSU also started doing a "docuseries," a new segment dedicated to celebrating Black History Month. In these activities, club members highlight individuals and discuss information that is significant to Black history or to the Black community, which are then posted in their Instagram account.

"You don't have to be Black to be [a part of] a BSU; a lot of people have that misunderstanding," BSU Secretary and senior Alicia Verdugo said. "It's important to know about [Black history], and keep them in mind in our day-to-day lives because there's so much we have to be grateful for."

Other than BVH students, some teachers are also celebrating Black History Month inside their classrooms. Accelerated Biology and International Baccalaureate Environmental Systems and Societies teacher Jennifer Ekstein makes an effort to educate her students about the contributions of African-Americans from an environmental standpoint. She plays a short video at the beginning of each class about certain African-Americans who have inspired and contributed to the environmental justice movement.

"I think it's essential, especially

for my very diverse students that they understand, [be] proud of their heritage and that they have role models," Ekstein said.

Ekstein describes that recognizing the work of BIPOC communities results in her students understanding that they have role models as well as feeling represented and empowered.

"I think it's important to look in the mirror and see somebody who's exactly like you and that has not historically been the case," Ekstein said. "I think just the idea of students being empowered is very motivating and lifting."

On a personal level, Svehaug mentions that she tries to become more aware of historical figures and events in an effort to celebrate Black History Month. Moreover, Svehaug stresses the importance of supporting not only Black communities but also other underrepresented groups.

"BVH students and staff can just learn more about our history. This is the perfect time to support black and other underrepresented groups," Svehaug said. "I suggest reading books, sharing Instagram posts highlighting historical black figures or black social justice leaders positively impacting the community."

Like Svehaug, Verdugo is also educating herself on Black figures and recognizing her privileges in celebration of Black History Month. Verdugo states that celebrating Black history goes beyond the month of February.

"Black History happens throughout 365 days a year; all the time. It takes nothing out of your day to do something that honors black people," Verdugo said. "[Celebrating Black History Month] makes you recognize that [we don't live in] a white world."

Ultimately, Svehaug furthers that celebrating Black History month helps her and others to "understand the truth, combat ignorance and discrimination."

"I think educating yourself is very important to understanding the past so that we don't make these mistakes in the future. Within the last year, we [have hit the] breaking point, [for instance, the event concerning] George Floyd—this is not okay and we need to keep this dialogue going; we can't let it die out," Ekstein said. "We have to acknowledge [that] we have to change things. We have to make sure that history doesn't repeat itself."



Senior Kara Barragan submitted this photo to the Texas Photographic Society's 2020 International Student Competition. She was declared a finalist in the competition. **PROVIDED BY KARA BARRAGAN**

amidst this pandemic through their works and believes those submissions, ones that "really mean something" to students, are amazing.

"This pandemic has been the number one influence on a student's mind. One thing that I teach this year is called zeitgeist. It means spirit of the times. One way art reflects society is when you hit the zeitgeist of the times. There's so much anxiety about the pandemic, about safety, about death, even about getting the vaccine. So it's all been massively reflected in their artwork," Lim said.

Senior Angelica Castillo, a finalist in the Sine Kwento: Filipino Stories in Film Art competition, submitted her short film "Entropy," which was centered around the coming of age of a high school senior, and their transition into the "adult world." Castillo commented on how the pandemic influenced that story.

"A lot of it [the short film] was impacted by the pandemic, I feel like I grew and realized a lot because of it. Since it was a coming of age film, I talked about being a senior and transitioning into 'life,'" Castillo said. "I focused on how scary it was during the pandemic, doing all these things alone. The whole experience influenced it a lot."

Despite sacrifice and adaptations that multimedia students are being forced to make, students continue to enter said competitions.

"I felt like I had something to offer. During the pandemic I realized that I had my sister right in front of me. I can show this is how my sister kisses her son every night not knowing if she

might catch it [COVID-19] and bring it home," Peterson said. "That's the message I can send."

Students voice their appreciation for Lim, who has pushed many of them to continue to submit their works in these sorts of contests. Lim acts as an advisor to many of the contestants, helping students to select which works to send in, and providing feedback to others. Even during the pandemic, Lim is "100 percent on their side."

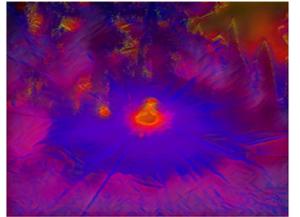
"With every competition, even now with the pandemic, he's [Lim] always pushing us, and then when we win, he gets so excited. The way he does it, it's actually pretty dramatic. We'll come to class and he'll play this grand music before he announces winners," Barragan said.

In the face of the pandemic altering the way multimedia competitions function, student artists, filmmakers and photographers continue to submit their works hoping to take the title of "finalist" back to campus as student representatives of the multimedia community at BVH. It may take time for competitions to revert back to normal, but Lim isn't too worried about the time it'll take, as he chooses to embrace student art regardless.

"My personal philosophy this year is that I will struggle and refuse to let this pandemic win. I will try hard to get students to enter contests, because it's really all about human spirit, right? In the midst of any pandemic or calamity we still need to persevere and struggle," Lim said. "These students are doing a really good job of that. There's struggle, there's perseverance [and] they fight. That's what art is about."

Ian Kearns' coming-of-age EP release, 'Saving Face'

A solid 8/10



Album art for "Saving Face" by Ian Kearns. The EP was released on all music platforms this year. **PROVIDED BY IAN KEARNS**

Kara Barragan
PHOTOGRAPHER
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With his senior year coming to a close, Bonita Vista High (BVH) senior Ian Kearns releases a nostalgic-filled extended play (EP) titled, "Saving Face." It is a reflection on the concept of how fast time passes woven together with extraordinary guitar work from Kearns. The EP is studded with relatable lyrics for those like Kearns, graduating this 2020-2021 school year. With a total of five tracks, Kearns paves his way for the next step in his life, filling the air with heart-driven instrumentals that feel utterly captivating and uplifting.

Kearns' single on the EP, "Plastic Crown," stands out amongst the other tracks and effectively captures the feeling of longing for the past and fear of a future fast-approaching. The instrumentals in this track work harmoniously and give hope to listeners that feel the same nostalgia as Kearns. However, with tracks like "Saving Face Pt. 1" and "Saving Face Pt. 2," it is hit or miss for listeners because both tracks have an accumulated playtime of 13 minutes and 24 seconds with instrumentals mainly outplaying vocals. Though for those instrumental lovers out there, these tracks are a treat, with such impressive and unique instrumental work. Much praise goes to Kearns for creating such tracks during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In its entirety, it's remarkable to listen to a work like "Saving Face" and it should be savored by listeners. Kearns takes the cake in capturing such feelings of nostalgia that are eminent with so many of us now.

Wisdom in writing

Black Student Union hosts journalism webinar

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The sound of keyboards typing, mouses clicking and the pounding hearts of students could be heard as they scurried from lunch to a webinar hosted by the Bonita Vista High's (BVH) Black Student Union (BSU). On Jan. 29 at 1:00 pm, Dean and Professor at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism Charles Whitaker answered student's questions about journalism and media.

According to BSU co-President and co-founder Renee Fagan, they wanted to hold this webinar to remind students that they are not alone during the COVID-19 pandemic. Distance learning might have students feeling isolated, so talking to guest speakers like Whitaker is important to feel connected again.

"It is so important [to have guest speakers] because it shows [students] opportunities of what they could do," Fagan said. "[There is] a whole world out there [filled with people]; the world is your oyster, so crack it open and get your hands dirty."

Fagan explains how BSU is an inviting community of "black and brown students" and their allies, who talk about social and political issues that affect the BVH community. BSU reviews what young people can do to equip themselves with tools to combat injustice. In doing so, they wanted to invite passionate individuals to talk to students, such as Whitaker—their first guest speaker.

"Historically, this country has done its best to put [people of color] down. But, having groups and organizations like BSU to raise awareness on how we are important [and] how we matter is so beneficial to BVH as a whole and the black community," Fagan said.

This webinar was mainly focused on media as well as journalism, and per the words of BSU advisor Don Dumas, students that are not interested in ei-



Whittaker sits down as a guest to talk about his journalism experience. Participants ask questions to learn more about his journey. **PHOTO BY NICOLE MACGAFFEY**

ther "are still consumers of journalism and media." Therefore, the webinar was not exclusive to the BSU students.

"Everyone has Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat. These are all forms of media. Just being at this webinar and hearing Whitaker answer questions, talk about representation in media, how media is a product sold to the public [and] understanding how it's changing and where it's at now is beneficial to everyone," Dumas said.

Fagan's first encounter with Whitaker left her "in awe" because of how much he has done in journalism and the opportunities he has provided for young black people to learn new skills. Fagan could relate to Whitaker because they both grew up with the same magazines, and she felt sorrow when Whitaker informed her that black magazines are diminishing in popularity.

"I remember having Essence magazine and Ebony Magazine when I was growing up. [I admired] how it was a black magazine made by people that are black [who] look like me," Fagan said. "[I was sad after] hearing how black magazines are almost completely wiped out because everything is moving digitally. We grew up with [those magazines] on our [Fagan and Whitaker] coffee table, but now it's just not the same anymore."

A member of BSU and panelist at the webinar Kelsey Brito realized that journalism has a lot of under representation for people of color, especially Black people in America. Brito describes how African American journalists are

really empowering because they show that "skin color does not determine our strengths."

"Hearing that [Whittaker] was a journalist and representing the black community in such an occupation was really moving for me. Before I even entered the seminar, I was ready for him to exceed my expectations," Brito said.

Brito was heavily motivated by Whitaker to follow her passions. As she listened to Whitaker's journey towards becoming a journalist and how it was not as easy as everyone thought, Brito related.

"[Listening to Whitaker provides] inspiration and motivation because a lot of students in highschool start to lose passion and motivation for what they want to do. I definitely have been through that a couple of times, and if I had a guest speaker like Mr. Whitaker, I think I would never have given that up," Brito said. "By hearing from someone that is in the business, in the industry, it's really moving because it shows me that they are not the only ones; I can [fulfill all those careers too]."

Fagan said that the main message from this webinar was that knowledge is power, and being able to provide that knowledge to the public is powerful. The amount of effort it takes to inform the public has really inspired Fagan.

"Depending on who writes and who gets the information, [it] can be either detrimental or can be revolutionary. I want to be a part of the people who make writing revolutionary," Fagan said.

Hitting the books: Students create classic literature book club

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A student sits at a desk, cracks open a book, immerses herself in it and is transported into a completely different universe. The smell of the crisp pages penetrates their nose, stimulating their desire to read. Adventure awaits ahead, as their exploration furthers with each page turned.

In the Pickwick Club, cracking open a book is nothing new, as it is part of their routine to read classic literature. Reading books is accompanied by other activities such as club discussions, sharing thoughts and group analysis. Their club, which was created at the beginning of second semester, holds meetings every Monday during lunch on Google Meets.

"Right now, we're reading 'Pride and Prejudice' as the first book, because I think it's a great introductory book to classic literature. Every time we meet we discuss the chapters that we read," co-President of the Pickwick Club and sophomore Giselle Geering said. "It's not strict—it's just a bunch of people [and] friends talking about books."

According to co-President of the Pickwick Club and junior Abby Roman, creating this extracurricular was vital to providing a crucial outlet for students who have felt alone during quarantine. Not being able to see each other in person can take a negative toll on students' mental health, Roman expressed. She hopes that by forming this club, students can surround themselves with a community that they feel comfortable talking to.

"Communication [with] other people, even if it's just through a screen, can go a really long way. When you're engaged in conversation that is interesting to you, it's fun to talk to different people about stuff you're passionate about," Roman said.

Geering's wish is that by joining the club, students will be able to gain a new sense of gratitude for classic literature. Additionally, it would be a wonderful opportunity to expand on one's interest in reading this genre, Geering explained.

"Although a lot of the people in our club are [already readers of classic literature], some of them haven't explored classic literature. I hope this



Pickwick Club President sophomore Giselle Geering reading *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen before going to sleep. Geering is reading in preparation for the next Pickwick Club meeting. The club meets on Mondays at 12:20pm. PHOTO BY MADISON GEERING

club [leads members to] appreciate the things those people [characters in the books the Pickwick Club reads] had to go through because I feel like we take for granted the privileges that we have in the 21st century," Geering said.

Pickwick Club Advisor and English teacher Kalie Espinoza added that creating this social atmosphere in which students feel safe is important to mental health. Similar to Roman, she believes communication during distance learning is key.

"Self care is really important, and having that support system and social activity can be a [really good] mood booster," Espinoza said. "Having these kinds of clubs reminds us that there are other people out there in the world—that we can be social."

For Espinoza, reading books in our current circumstances is imperative. She mentioned that classic literature—and books in general—hold valuable lessons, whether it be about ourselves or society; it's a great hobby to pick up.

"Especially right now, I think books have the power to teach us about ourselves [and] humanity. We learn lessons from books that teach [us] empathy and understanding," Espinoza said. "We spend so much time on our

screens; being able to pick up a classic literature book and spend a few hours reading—that's going to be good for you in terms of educating yourself."

Since the creation of the Pickwick club, Geering, Espinoza and Roman have run into numerous obstacles. Various activities that are planned for the future have been quite difficult to set up, according to Roman.

"It's been difficult to carry out community service projects. Because we're not in school, we only get so much time to talk to each other throughout the day," Roman said. "It's difficult because we have to follow guidelines when we execute those projects, especially with book drives, and make sure no one is sick."

Geering and Roman have had trouble getting in contact with the San Diego Council on Literacy (SDCOL), which is the organization the Pickwick Club plans to work with.

"People are stressed and busy, [which] means that it's difficult to get responses," Espinoza said. "Overcoming some of that communication was a challenge, but they overcame that quickly."

In terms of the Pickwick Club's goals, Geering strives to make community service projects a common occurrence.

For the club's leaders, promoting literacy within less fortunate communities is essential as a central goal of the newly created club.

"I think bringing books, whether it's classical literature or not, to low income families [is a] really important [aspect] of the club and a cool part of the mission," Espinoza said. "I was already interested in it being a book club, but when I saw that Abby and Giselle proposed this idea around literacy, I would really love to be a part of that bigger mission to bring books to people who can't purchase them on their own."

Roman added that without Espinoza as the advisor, it would have been impossible to create the Pickwick Club. Now that it has come to fruition, Espinoza is the one to thank for the endless support she has been providing the club, according to Roman.

"We're not here to slap anyone on the wrist if they don't do the reading. If you're joining our club, we want you to be there. But we also understand that students have other things going on, and distance learning is difficult," Espinoza said. "We're not there to be the authority; we're there to enjoy it with you. If you're curious about it, join us one time and see what you think."

Red light, green light

BVH students' motivation to get driver's license influenced by pandemic

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When highschool students watch teenage movies like "Teen Wolf" or "To All The Boys I Loved Before," they see the characters drive to and from school, picking up their friends and enjoying many adventures together. Many high school students dream of driving a car, and due to the COVID-19 pandemic some Bonita Vista High (BVH) students have been motivated to get their permit or driver's license. This is not because they want to live out their fantasy but because they have more responsibilities. Meanwhile, other students are hesitant to get their driver's license during the pandemic.

Junior Samantha Bianes, for instance, felt "excited" to drive before the pandemic because she thought it would make her feel more grown up and have more freedom. In addition, she was influenced by the media's portrayal of driving as something "cool."

"Driving a car has turned into a rite of passage, meaning that we all want to learn to drive because in our favorite TV shows, movies and books. I was excited because it would mean I would gain a sense of independence, and it's like a milestone," Bianes said.

Bianes explains that during the pandemic, she has lost motivation overall—whether it be in academics or getting her driver's license. Also, she has been "swamped" with her extracurriculars and school work, which is her current priority.

"The pandemic has left a lot of people with either an increase in workload or a decrease in motivation. It can be hard to do something you're not used to or not good at yet and enjoy it," Bianes said.

On the other hand, some students never wanted to drive, despite the pandemic. Junior Lourdes Castruita shared that the pandemic hasn't affected her decision of whether to drive or not. She has always known that when she is able to drive, it would represent a step towards adulthood, which is why she's hesitant to acquire a license.

"I just don't need [a driver's license]

since my parents can drive me around. I feel like if I get my license, it will signify myself growing up, and I don't want that [responsibility]," Castruita said.

Sophomore Naftaly Illegas said that she has been scared of driving and was not excited to get behind the wheel. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced her to take on the responsibility of getting her driver's permit.

"[The pandemic] actually made me gain motivation to get [my permit]. I am the oldest out of all my siblings, and my dad is a single father. It is hard for him to drive us places. He leaves for work and in case of an emergency, there is no one that can drive. That is why I need to learn," Illegas said.

Castruita believes that some students are opting not to get their license or permit because they don't see a need in obtaining them during the pandemic. Like many other students, she is not going out as often, so she does not see the point in getting her permit.

"Maybe some people feel unsafe learning how to drive without someone else. Due to the pandemic, students are no longer driving with their friends for safety reasons. They also might feel like they don't need it because they are not going anywhere," Castruita said.

In addition, Illegas said that if she did not have the responsibility of taking care of her siblings, she would not want to get a driver's license. She also mentioned that getting her permit before the pandemic would have been faster.

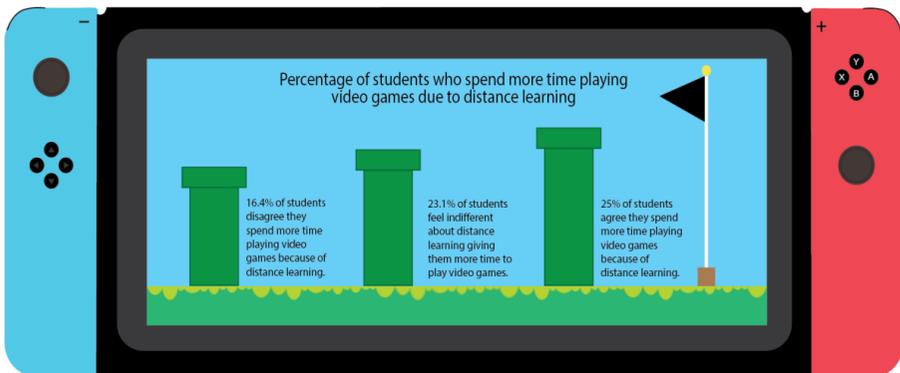
"Before the pandemic, my dad was going to sign me up for a program to learn how to drive. However, right now it is closed down, so it is taking me more time," Illegas said.

During the pandemic, getting a driver's license or permit became a necessity to some people and less of a priority to others. In the end, Bianes, Castruita and Illegas plan to get their licenses, just not at the same time.

"Each person has their reasons for getting their driver's license. Some people are unmotivated because they feel like the pandemic is going to be longer and there is no use for them [and then] there are people who are more motivated, like myself. Whichever is completely fine. When they know they want it or need it, they will get it," Illegas said.

Ready player one?

Video games provide a coping mechanism for students during pandemic



In a poll conducted by the Crusader on Feb. 8, out of 444 Bonita Vista High (BVH) students, 15.3 percent of students strongly agreed that they've spent more time playing video games due to distance learning. However, another 20.1 percent of students strongly disagreed that they spent more time playing video games due to distance learning.

GRAPHIC BY CARINA MUNIZ

Carina Muniz
EDITOR-AT-LARGE
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The sound of aggressive clicking fills the room as the opponent attacks the character on the screen. After hours of grinding, the character dances victoriously as the word "You Win," appears on the screen.

Due to the pandemic, the amount of time spent playing video games has increased for gamers across the Bonita Vista High (BVH) campus. According to a poll conducted by the Crusader on Feb. 8, out of 444 students, 10.2 percent reported spending five to six hours playing video games as a result of distance learning, where another 4.6 percent of students said they spend 7 or more hours playing video games.

"[Video games] just provide me with an outlet to talk to people. With distance learning it's a lot of being by yourself in your room rather than being at school and being able to socialize with others. So just having video games allows me an outlet to communicate with others," senior Tyler Carter said.

Due to strict COVID-19 restrictions, it has made it difficult for students to socialize with their friends or peers. For Carter, playing video games allows him

to have a place to socialize with other people. Juniors Lilliana Mancilla and Marcello Garbo and senior Gerardo González stay connected with friends during the pandemic by playing video games as well.

"I feel like video games [are a] benefit because it's a way to have fun during this stressful era. Students have a lot of things piling up, people are getting jobs, they have homework, their teachers have stricter deadlines because it's all at home. So I feel like video games are a really good way to have fun and be able to bypass all the stress," Mancilla said.

For Mancilla, playing the online video game Fortnite on her Nintendo Switch has helped her bond with her siblings. As for Garbo, Playing Super Smash Bros. Ultimate on his Nintendo Switch helps take his mind off his school related responsibilities.

"When you play competitive games, like Super Smash Brothers or Valorant, it's always nice to see your own skills improving and you have that sense of satisfaction when you notice that you're getting better," Garbo said.

However, having easy access to video games also creates more at-home distractions for students. Now, students are able to play on their video game console without their teachers ever knowing.

"To some extent I would say, especially during distance learning,

it's become a lot harder [to focus on school] because I've still had to maintain that balance, and sometimes I'd rather pick up a controller than pick up a pen," Carter said. "It's become more challenging to do my schoolwork during distance learning."

Nonetheless, playing video games has allowed students to develop personal skills. González, for example, developed micro-managing skills, planning skills and analytical skills from playing video games on his Nintendo Switch, PlayStation 4 and personal computer.

"A lot of games present a narrative and you have to understand it and you have to analyze it just like you would when reading a book. Games present the greater challenge where you have to be good at them, you have to beat their rules and usually that involves managing your time or whatever you're doing in the game," González said.

Students who consider themselves gamers now have more access and time to play video games at home.

"A lot of people argue that you get nothing out of playing video games which I disagree with. I think video games can be just as formative as reading a book or watching a good movie," González said. "Nothing is really a waste of time if you're enjoying it. I would argue that if you're doing something that you actively don't enjoy doing, that's a bigger waste of time."

BVH artists pick up the pen amidst pandemic

Pablo Dollero
COPY EDITOR
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Since the moment mankind first painted on the stone walls in caves, art has been an important piece of everyday life. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected every aspect of life, and artists' work is no exception. For many Bonita Vista High (BVH) students, art has become an essential part of their life in quarantine.

"Quarantine has actually been really good for me because I've had a lot more time to draw now since I'm not going to school in-person," BVH junior and digital artist Isabella Scarda said. "It's made me want to pursue art more."

Since eighth grade, Scarda has liked to draw people, from her friends, characters and herself using a tablet and a stylus. She decided to join Photography and Computer Art teacher Edwin Lim's AP 2D Art and Design class to enhance her skills and to compete with her friend, junior and digital artist Jena Heinz. Similar to Scarda, Heinz has also found ample time to practice and improve her art skills during the pandemic.

"Before quarantine, drawing full body art made me nervous because I felt like I would mess up," Heinz said. "Around June or July 2020, I was finally comfortable because I was able to figure out how to draw clothing and do shading. That took a ton of practice, and when I finally figured it out I knew I could move forward. After I hit that

point, I've been practicing [how to draw] anything ever since."

BVH junior and photographer Manuel Ovadia has also found motivation from quarantine. Ovadia describes that before quarantine he "gravitated towards capturing the daily lives of people inside and outside of school" through photography. Since joining Lim's Photography course this year, he's had to submit photos taken at home while preventing repetitiveness.

"Quarantine has actually given me more time to pursue photography because it gave me a new lens into an artistic world," Ovadia said. "The pandemic has really inspired me to take pictures of practically anything. Whenever I see something, even food, I am tempted to take a picture of it and edit it [to] capture an amazing photo."

BVH artists have also expressed that pursuing art has helped them express and reflect on the emotions they've experienced during the pandemic. Scarda, for instance, created illustrations commenting on female beauty in different ways.

"[I drew] a lady and emphasized how I wanted her to be wider because a lot of drawings have girls with petite bodies, so I wanted her to be wider and more muscular," Scarda said. "[In another drawing] I wanted to give the character some acne and bumps. I was feeling insecure about my acne, so I wanted to make something that was pretty but still had those imperfections."

Heinz also mentioned that she reflects her own emotions through digital art. For example, Heinz might draw depressed characters with darker



Junior Isabella Scarda participated in the #USvsHate art competition, creating anti-hate messages through different mediums of art. Scarda wanted to create a drawing to spread awareness about the rising hate crimes against Asian Americans caused by the pandemic. PROVIDED BY ISABELLA SCARDA

colors when she is feeling down and use brighter colors when she is feeling uplifted, which helps her relax and relieve stress. Similarly, Ovadia also takes some photos in black and white to represent the "saddening consequences of the pandemic."

"Photography is important during world events like [the pandemic] because they help show the emotions of people during such a hard time and they can be used in the future to reference the pandemic and the year that we have all experienced," Ovadia said.

Lim gave students the opportunity to directly showcase the social effects of the pandemic through different art competitions. The Young Workers Art Contest was one competition that Lim encouraged students to enter, which both Scarda and Heinz participated in.

"I [submitted] one drawing about work safety and how kids have to be safe working, especially [since we're in] a pandemic," Heinz said.

Scarda was also able to participate in the #USvsHate competition, where students create anti-hate messages for their communities in any form of media, including art. As someone who is Asian, Scarda felt compelled to participate in order to shed light on the rising xenophobia caused by COVID-19.

"There's been a lot of hate crimes against Asian Americans because of the pandemic, so one of the drawings I made was a xenophobia sketch," Scarda said. "I was using my art as an outlet to reflect real world problems, especially ones that are personal to me."



Junior Manuel Ovadia joined Edwin Lim's Photography class at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of his photos, Ovadia said, had black and white imagery to resemble the "saddening consequences of the pandemic." PROVIDED BY MANUEL OVADIA

Student athletes introduce sports into pandemic life



Swimmer and junior Yarenni Hernandez practices after school at Las Palmas pool on Monday, March 8. Swim and dive coach Betty Alexander also coaches water polo during a typical school year. PHOTO BY LUCIA RIVERA.

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The feeling of wind in one's hair, the dirt getting kicked up by one's feet, the adrenaline filling one's body as they cross the finish line—this is what it's like to be a runner. The chilly water surrounding their body, their arms splitting the water, their feet propelling themselves forward—this is what it's like to be a swimmer.

Due to the pandemic, however, student athletes have had to alter their routines, as sports are now required to follow COVID-19 guidelines at Bonita Vista High (BVH). Furthermore, students who are set to play multiple sports during quarantine have expressed mixed feelings about how BVH is accommodating those who participate in multiple school sports.

"I'm okay with [all sports occurring at the same time] because there is only three months left of school. I think it's good that they're trying to [give] everyone a chance to do a sport. I was excited when they announced that they would still be doing fall sports because my fear was that they [would] just do spring [sports]," cross country and track athlete and senior Sequoia Kriss said.

Swimmer, water polo athlete and junior Yarenni Hernandez shared a similar sentiment. She mentioned that while athletes are lucky to be given the oppor-

tunity to play, the late seasonal duration of the sport is a negative.

"We [student athletes] started really late, so it's cutting our seasons really short. There's not a lot of room for you to improve right now," Hernandez said.

This is not the only obstacle that these athletes faced. Athletic Director and Head Football Coach Tyler Arciaga expressed facing challenges as the main sports facilitator working to organize BVH's student athletes.

"As of right now there's no transportation. There's no locker rooms. There's nothing indoors. The district is not even allowing spectators, but that could change," Arciaga said.

Arciaga believes that collaboration is key to solving these difficulties. He expressed that in order to transition between a normal sports routine and a modified one that follows strict social distancing guidelines, communication is essential.

"Having constant communication with coaches [is imperative]. I send out emails to parents and to the school," Arciaga said. "I communicate with the coaches on a daily basis, and do my best to get them [the necessary sports] equipment. [I also make sure we have] the thermometer for the health checks [and] sanitizer."

For Kriss, a big issue was needing to balance cross country, work and student life. However, she has found methods to cope with this issue so that she is not as stressed.

"I try to plan out my schedule [a]

month in advance, and then work [based on] how many days I can work but still have enough days to go to practice," Kriss said. "[I also try to accommodate for] when I have tests on certain days that I need to be in class. It's difficult to try to balance everything and be part of every single thing but there's some days and weeks where I have to just accept the fact that I won't be able to go to practice."

Hernandez hopes to get back into her daily routine. She stated that she misses being able to play water polo, which she's so passionate about, and that not being able to socialize with her teammates has been saddening.

"[I] definitely [want to] get back into the rhythm of water polo because it was really draining before [quarantine], and I forgot [certain aspects of the sport]. [Getting] back into that rhythm [is my wish]," Hernandez said.

Arciaga expressed that it is acceptable if students are hesitant to do sports during the pandemic. However, he emphasized that health rules are being followed and that student athletes should make the best decision for themselves.

"The biggest thing is [that] kids that don't feel that it's safe for them. That's okay. It's a choice. I just wanted a choice for parents and kids to make the decisions [that's] best for their families; [for] some of them it's to play, some of them it's not, either one is fine. But just having that choice really helps out. [It] helps out those kids that are yearning for any kind of contact," Arciaga said.

Getting back in the game

A breakdown of sports clearances amid pandemic

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As several sports are making their return to campus, major changes are being made to the way practices and workouts are held. Before beginning practices, all sports must undergo a process of athletic clearance ensuring that students are safe to practice and play. However with the COVID-19 pandemic, the Sweetwater Union High School District (SUHSD) have enforced new protocols to ensure further spread does not occur. On Jan. 28, Bonita Vista High (BVH) sent out an email regarding athletic updates focusing on sports clearance, where the new health protocols will be enforced for student-athletes who have been absent from the fields since quarantine began.

"In order to get cleared, we need four main papers from students. We need their athlete information, their electronic signature, their physical and their COVID-19 waiver," Associated Student Body (ASB) Sports Commissioner and senior Tatiana Eustaquio said. "The COVID-19 waiver is a new thing that came in this year in order to [allow] sports during the pandemic."

According to Athletic Director and Head Football Coach Robert Arciaga, students have to get cleared for every sport they plan on participating in. Once the students get cleared at the ASB, they must provide a negative COVID-19 test to permit them to practice and play.

"Once [students] bring [their sports applications] in, we'll check everyone's temperature before they come near us to make sure that they don't have a high temperature. We have a table set up outside so that they maintain distance as we clear them," Eustaquio said.

When the students arrive on their first day of practice, they are allowed in once they show their coach the document that confirms they are cleared at

the ASB. In addition, they must provide their COVID-19 waiver as proof that their test came out negative. If students are not cleared, they are not allowed to participate in team practices.

"The biggest challenge was taking the COVID-19 test and making sure [teammates were] prepared to make those sacrifices. We have to take another COVID-19 test later on and make sure people are going to be committed to staying healthy so we can keep playing," girls Golf team member and senior Alexis Guevara said.

Guevara explains that her team has had several practices at the Bonita Golf Course as it has been classified as a pur-

enjoyed their time together.

"I really hope we get to play this season, but I understand if we don't. It's going to be upsetting because it's my senior year, but I definitely rather we stay safe so we can get through this pandemic sooner rather than later so that kids that are [freshmen, sophomores or juniors] have a better opportunity to play and have their whole senior year instead of just being a part of it like I did," Guevara said.

Arciaga and Eustaquio mention that there will soon be some official games depending on the sport, but due to the everchanging updates in accordance with COVID-19, plans may take a



Associated Student Body (ASB) Sports Commissioner and senior Tatiana Eustaquio (left) clears a student for sports on Friday, Feb. 26. Sports clearances began several weeks ago. PHOTO BY NICOLE MACGAFFEY.

ple tier sport cleared to begin practicing in accordance to COVID-19 health precautions.

"We all made sure to wear masks and we stayed far away from each other, which is easy to do during Golf," Guevara said. "Our coach takes temperatures and does all those safety precautions before practice starts."

Guevara adds that there were not many difficulties during her practice, however, there was much less talking due to social distancing in order to enforce safety precautions, but Guevara feels the team still gets along great and

turn. However, health precautions such as the addition of proof of a negative COVID-19 test and mandatory health screenings will keep players on the field practicing until their games begin.

"The current process has gone pretty smooth so far. We have been able to clear the kids that have registered and the numbers are down because not everybody feels comfortable and is participating in sports, and that's fine," Arciaga said. "We do look forward to the resumption of [more] activities at school sooner rather than later when we get the green light."

BVH renovates weight room after approximately 50 years

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In November of 2019, Bonita Vista High (BVH) English 12 teacher Carmen Ramirez-Stokes received an email from Principal Roman Del Rosario, Ed.D., saying that BVH had been one of the schools selected to receive the Chargers Champions School Grant. Having applied for the grant earlier that year, a long process ensued BVH a 67,500 dollar grant to improve the school's weight room equipment. On Feb. 12, 2021, the BVH football Instagram account revealed their new state-of-the-art weight room.

As for Ramirez-Stokes' involvement in the project, she was originally approached by Former varsity Football Head coach Sam Kirkland.

"Coach Sam was the actual initiator of the whole grant. He and I would work together since a lot of his football players had to pass my English class," Ramirez-Stokes said. "I used to help him out a lot with any type of tutoring and one day he approached me and said 'Hey, do you mind writing this grant for a new weight room.'"

Despite her hesitation from inexperience in grant writing, Ramirez-Stokes agreed to write it if she had a template to model it after. Kirkland and Ramirez-Stokes then approached Del Rosario for support and soon received a template from Sweetwater High, who had received the Chargers Grant in the past.

The grant itself required specific information about BVH's demographics, socioeconomic background and predicted costs for the new equipment.

Ramirez-Stokes also wrote a mission statement, the vision for the new weight room and answered the question, "How will this weight room be accessible for all students?" Photo attachments of the weight room were required to show the state of the weight room.

"The final draft was about six or seven pages long. Grants – especially if you're going to get 70,000 [dollars] – are very specific. [The grant] was sectioned out, there was no word count, but I tried to put as much information as I possibly could within those requirements," Ramirez-Stokes said.

Del Rosario and Kirkland had their own printed copies and the original was sent in a manila envelope with the attached photos. Even though they were later selected for the grant, that did not mean they had officially received it. The Director of Community Outreach from the Chargers came to BVH in February of 2020 before quarantine began to look over the weight room and determine the extent to which BVH needed the grant.

"The Chargers representative was looking for need. How was the condition of the equipment? How old it was, how usable it was, what was going to be put in there to replace it? What was your grand vision for this money?" Athletic Director and Football coach Tyler Arciaga said.

Shortly after the representative evaluated BVH, Del Rosario was notified that the school would be receiving almost 70,000 dollars for new weight room equipment. Arciaga joined the project halfway through during the evaluation process and was in charge of collaborating with the equipment vendor to create different floor layouts. There were seven floor plans, and one was chosen based on cost and effectiveness.

While 67,500 dollars may seem like an excessive amount of money for equipment, Arciaga explained how commercial grade equipment is more expensive because of its higher quality. BVH also had to pay for all the equip-

able to see it. Kirkland left BVH on Feb. 24, 2020, in the middle of the process to receive the Charger Grant. Ramirez-Stokes was also saddened by the fact that this year's seniors would not get the chance to try out the new weight room. The weight room was meant to be ready for them, however the pandemic and distance learning dramatically slowed the process.

Senior and varsity football player Justin Locke found out about the new weight room a couple of weeks after it was finished from an email sent by his football coach. While football players have begun their practices, they most likely will not get to try out the weight room.

"We hope to [use the weight room] but we probably won't because our season has been cut down to only four games," Locke said. "It sucks but there's nothing I can do about it. At least the school will have it for the years after me."

Once the weight room opens, Arciaga foresees Physical Education (PE) classes, BVH sports teams and other athletic teens will use the weight room the most. While Ramirez-Stokes thinks that the new weight room will maximize a student's work out, Arciaga said that it will offer a new environment for students.

"I think it's a sense of pride. I went to BVH and graduated 20 years ago and a lot of that equipment was in there when

I was there and it was old then. It's a sense of pride for these folks and for the students, and I hope and trust that them and the coaches will take care of it," Arciaga said. "Because this isn't going to happen again, we all need to do our part as coaches to supervise and ask kids to take care of it."

Ramirez-Stokes estimated that the weight room had not

been renewed in the last 50 years since BVH opened. Some new equipment was added a couple of years ago that Southwestern College donated, but this is the first time in approximately 50 years that the weight room had been renovated.

"I'm excited for it. I'm excited for the students and for the coaches and for the PE teachers that are going to be in there. I think anytime you make a capital improvement like that, it should be a source of pride. I'm encouraged that the students at Bonita will take care of it," Arciaga said.

Time to warm up

BVH red tier sports first back in action

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Varsity cross country runner and junior Savanna Sierra (left) is closely followed by varsity cross country runner and sophomore Rei Fulinara (right) during the first cross country meet on Friday, March 5. Many runners held their masks as they ran, immediately putting them back on after finishing the race. PHOTO BY LUCIA RIVERA.

going to happen," swim team member and senior Olivia Huey said.

Prior to the announcement, sports had been "nonexistent" for most BVH student-athletes, according to Athletic Director and Head Football Coach Tyler Arciaga. With the exception of Football, Girls Volleyball and Field Hockey being cleared for pre-season conditioning workouts on campus in November, we had yet to see the official return of any sports since their departure on March 13, 2020. Cross Country made history with its long-awaited return, being the first sport to start back up since the lockdown.

"I didn't really expect them to have us practice because of the pandemic, but I'm really glad [Cross Country] came back," Cross Country member and sophomore Rei Fulinara said. "I had been trying to run every couple of weeks during this pandemic, but since practice came back, I've been running every day."

Although purple tier sports have been approved to make their return to

campus, changes to the current plan students and coaches are still transitioning into may occur. The pandemic brings an "ever-changing environment" where adjustments "on a weekly basis are substantial," according to Arciaga. However, countermeasures to the virus's unpredictable nature are the extensive health precautions, measures that have changed the way sports look on campus.

"[Cross Country] is fairly socially distant by nature. There are the stretching lines, and everybody's more spread out [and] wearing masks. [They] have a check-in for all the health screenings, so everybody's getting temperature checks when they come in and asking some basic health screening questions," Arciaga said. "From a coaching standpoint, coaches like to talk a lot after practice and now it's just not the best time to do it anymore. We want to try to minimize the gatherings, so that's cut."

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Several new pieces of equipment have been added to the Bonita Vista High weight room. These include weights of different kinds and mats labelled "BV". PHOTO SOURCED FROM BVH FOOTBALL TWITTER.

ment to be installed by the vendor, so shipping and installment were and addition to the costs. Arciaga estimated the equipment alone being worth 52,000 to 55,000 dollars.

"[For] everybody who uses it, I'm sure they're pretty excited," Ramirez-Stokes said. "It was nice to hear [that we got the grant] because that was the first grant I had ever written. It was cool to write a grant and then actually get the money for it."

Ramirez-Stokes mentioned how she wished that Kirkland would have been