



# the accolade

December 2023 1801 Lancer Way, Fullerton CA Sunny Hills High School Volume IXIV, Issue 2

*In a post-COVID-19 society,  
The Accolade investigates  
factors leading youth toward  
the path of mental health*

# RECOVERY

## Meet Staci Balliet

What exactly is a mental health specialist? Sunny Hills introduces its newest full-time staff member | pg. 12

## Up, Up and Away

September 2023 survey results show gains in students' views on school climate, relationships and more | pg. 17

ILLUSTRATION BY JINA HAN

## Room 20 Hits the 'Spot'

From fidget toys to bean bags, new wellness center provides just the right touch to ease students' stress | pg. 26

# DEAR READERS,

When the editors and I first started brainstorming our second issue’s theme, my thoughts immediately jumped to the COVID-19 pandemic. While students across the nation continued classes behind a computer screen in the nooks of their room, I recall the many articles and social media posts I would see concerning teen mental health. To be completely frank, this was the first time I earnestly thought about how this issue affects this generation. However, these topics are, if not more, relevant today, and they are what our publication intends to explore.

Challenges that are not only growing in number but also complexity loom over our heads because of various nationwide and global issues. As a result, it’s a relief that Sunny Hills students’ overall mental health has shown improvement. This issue’s cover story (pg. 17) discusses the school’s results from the September wellness survey, with increases in all categories compared to the April questionnaire including school climate, supportive relationships, emotion regulation and sense of belonging. Students and a California State University, Fullerton, associate professor in social work convey their thoughts on issues caused by more than simply grades or relationships — the issues that we face today seem to be just as diverse as this generation.

Throughout this issue, we have also decided to highlight the various changes made across our school that emphasize the importance of emotional and mental well-being. New systems, such as The Sunny Spot (pg. 8), have been introduced to make help more accessible to students; our front cover as well as a profile story (pg. 12) features Staci Balliet, Sunny Hills’ newest mental health specialist. On the back cover, we have incorporated hotlines and mental health projects into the art in hopes of further informing our readers of available resources.

Even amid all, it’s a privilege to say that we have our own celebrations as well. I want to express how honored the staff and I are that *The Accolade* was recognized as a Pacemaker by the National Scholastic Press Association last month. We were one of three high school student journalism publications in California to receive the honor, and though we try not to focus on awards too much, I cannot help but emphasize how proud we are of the fact that our 2022-2023 efforts resulted in our program’s second Pacemaker plaque. *The Accolade* staff will continue striving to produce high-quality work in print and online. In the meantime, I hope readers are able to take away something meaningful in this issue and refocus a part of their day to their mental health and emotional well-being.

Best,  
**Jaimie Chun**  
*Editor-in-Chief*

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**ABOUT THE COVER:** Graphics editor Jina Han’s artistic rendering of new mental health specialist Staci Balliet, who is among those guiding teens toward recovery in a post-COVID-19 society.

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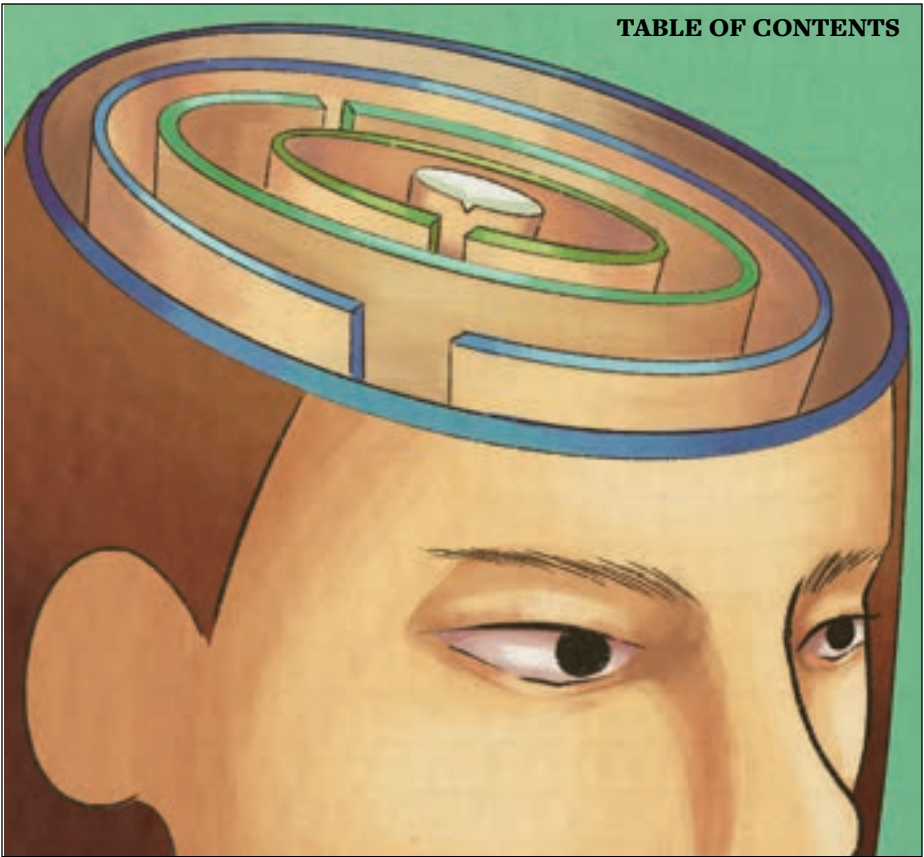


ILLUSTRATION BY **JACOB KIM**

## COVER STORY

### SH Mental Health Climate

The biannual Fullerton Joint Union High School District Panorama Education wellness survey shows increases across all categories for SH students who responded in April compared to September

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B

Behind a podium and in front of all the Fullerton Joint Union High School District [FJUHSD] board members, Troy High School senior Jeff Sun stood alone.

Having personally witnessed and heard of several mental health incidents among his peers at school the past three years through school newsletters, Sun spoke at the Sept. 12 [FJUHSD] Board Meeting to address the need for a more accessible wellness center at his school.

“Despite Troy having a very competitive environment, there is a stigma causing students to avoid speaking about their mental health,” Sun said. “I decided to act upon this issue because despite having professional therapists, students were struggling to use the wellness center here, as it requires them to open up for a referral from the teacher or administration.”

The senior first reached out to the school administration during the beginning of the second semester of last school year but after being

faced with a lack of support, he chose to raise his concerns to the district level.

“When I tried to connect with the school administration through email by bringing up the mental health issues with possible solutions, I was either left with no response or short ones so I decided to share my ideas at the school board meetings instead after my friend told me about the simple process of filling out a form for the secretary to speak there,” Sun said. “I was nervous at first but it was rewarding as a few of board members, including the superintendent, complimented me for my bravery and it felt nice to see that the district truly cared about students’ mental health.”

Although there has not been a lot of progress made regarding mental health at Troy following his public comment, Sun said he understands that it is a slow process.

As of last school year, the FJUHSD began supporting the implementation of mental health resources at each school and principal Craig Weinreich said it was done simply because the administration thought it would be beneficial to the students, despite Senate Bill 224 that was signed into law Oct. 8, 2021, which requires all students in California to

receive age-appropriate mental health education.

“It was a district initiative overall as they encouraged all of the sites to develop these resources,” Weinreich said. “Although laws like Senate Bill 224 may have had some impact on the district decisions, it was mainly if these additions are good for our students.”

By Oct. 1, the district dedicated a mental health specialist at each school to support students in addition to wellness rooms, which are funded by the Orange County Department of Education [OCDE], according to an Oct. 1 FJUHSD newsletter sent to students, parents and staff.

However, mental health specialist Staci Balliet said regulations for the wellness centers vary from school to school with the respective staff deciding the rules for their room, as each school has different priorities regarding the issue.

Buena Park High School’s [BPHS] Coyote Corner requires a permission slip from the teacher to use the room during class but is open to anyone during break and lunch, BPHS senior Daniel Kwon said. On the other hand, Troy’s The Lounge is only available to students with a referral unless of an emergen-

# LONE RANGER

*FJUHSD student questions effectiveness of mental health referral process in public comment to school board*

STORY BY **AIDEN PARK**



A screen shot from the Sept. 12 Fullerton Joint Union High School District board Meeting  
**SPEAK UP:** *Troy High School senior Jeff Sun takes the mic to share his concerns about his school’s wellness center.*

cy, Troy senior Grace Shin said.

The wellness center at Sunny Hills, The Sunny Spot, opened on May 1 and is run by Balliet from 8 a.m.-4 p.m. every day in Room 20 and welcomes all students.

“Students can come to the wellness space if they want to talk to me or if they simply need to calm down for a good 10-20 minutes,” said Balliet, who has already helped over 100 students at The Sunny Spot. “If they do want to talk to me to deal with their stress, anxiety or a panic attack, I usually discuss it with them by breaking it down step by step.”

However, with common misconceptions on campus, the mental health specialist said she is not a therapist.

“I provide more of a crisis-type intervention rather than therapy, but if students are in need of that kind of support, I can connect them to an actual therapist with

parent consent,” Baliet said. “In addition to that, we have outside agencies come on campus every Tuesday and Wednesday that provide an ongoing one-on-one help for an eight-week period.”

Similar to the regulations at BPHS, if students wish to use the space during class time, they must first talk with a counselor and obtain permission. On the other hand, no restrictions are in place before and after school as well as break and lunch.

“I wouldn’t necessarily call it a referral and instead more of a warm handoff because we require students to check in with their counselor first to prevent anyone from walking around during class, and in some cases, those who might have nowhere to go mid-crisis while I’m gone,” Balliet said. “That is usually when I am presenting for a class or working with the wellness groups, so there would be a sign

saying ‘The wellness space is closed.’”

Freshman Chanel Armenta said she visited The Sunny Spot to relieve stress after witnessing an undisclosed incident on Oct. 23.

“The day after the incident, I was called to the office during second period and then [I was] sent to the wellness center so I could get stuff off my chest as well as handle the shock I experienced,” Armenta said. “It was nice, as the mental specialist taught me how to calm myself down, so I definitely plan to use the room again in the future.

I think the regulations are well made because it keeps the room available for students who truly need help like I did.”

Although senior Dawood Yaseer has not used the wellness center before, he appreciates the school’s efforts.

“Because the room has very flexible hours, as it is basically open the whole

school day, I think it is accessible and a helpful resource for students,” Yaseer said. “Personally, it is just nice and comforting to know that you have somewhere to go in case of a sudden mental breakdown, whether it is minor or major.”

With each school’s wellness center having its pros and cons, Sun admires Troy’s efforts to provide individually focused support but hopes the school can more efficiently deal with the stigma regarding mental health like Sunny Hills.

“Since I hope for a more permissive usage in the sense that there should be little to none adult referral, Sunny’s regulations are closer to what I envision for the wellness centers with students not always being required to ask for permission,” Sun said. “However, ensuring proper care and assistance through the presence of an active site therapist like Troy is something I believe Sunny lacks.”



IMAGE USED WITH PERMISSION FROM SUE OH  
**LOBBYING FOR CHANGE:** Education Policy Director of California Association of Student Councils senior Sue Oh (left) discusses mental health at the California State Board of Education meeting in Sacramento on Nov. 8.

# LEGAL & APPROPRIATE

## California politicians welcome bills that stem the tide of dire mental health statistics

STORY BY **SEOWON HAN**

**T**he statistics tell the story. For the first two years since the COVID-19 pandemic, California fell behind overall in terms of the prevalence of mental illnesses and access to care.

According to the annual State of Mental Health in America reports — published by Mental Health America — the Golden State ranked 22nd in 2020 and slipped down to 25th a year later.

Last year, the state bounced back and moved up to 24th followed by a sharp jump to 19th in 2023.

The latest 2023 State of Mental Health in America report also produced the following numbers impacting the nation:

### Recent laws aimed at teens

**AB 748:** Requires mental wellness resource posters in school bathrooms

**SB 224:** Mandates schools to include mental health education

**AB 665:** Allows minors to consent to treatment or residential shelter services

“Over 1 in 10 youth in the U.S. are experiencing depression that is severely impairing their ability to function at school or work, at home, with family, or in their social life.”

“16.39% of youth (age 12-17) report suffering from at least one major depressive episode ... in the past year. 11.5% of youth (over 2.7 million youth) are experiencing severe major depression.”

“59.8% of youth with major depression

do not receive any mental health treatment.”

“Asian youth with major depression were least likely to receive specialty mental health care with 78% reporting they did not receive mental health services in the past year.”

“Nationally, only 28% of youth with severe depression receive some consistent treatment ([between 7 to 25 or more] visits in a year). Most (57.3%) youth with severe depression do not receive any care.”

One reason for California’s cracking the Top 20 states that have lower prevalence of mental illness and higher access to care could be the recent mental health legislation that Gov. Gavin Newsom has signed into law, including Assembly Bill [AB] 748 and Senate Bill [SB] 224 — both becoming law in 2022 and 2021.

“It’s really hard for these [politicians] to say they don’t support mental health or like it’s a tricky subject, where it’s just going to look really bad on them if they don’t support mental health,” said senior Sue Oh, the Associated Student Body’s community affairs commissioner who has also been involved with working with the legislative sphere since her freshman year. “This is such a sensitive topic, so it

didn’t have a lot of opposition in the first place.”

Oh said as part of her voluntary involvement with the California Association of Student Councils, she took over the lobbying process to work on getting AB 748 approved by the state Legislature and signed into law by Newsom.

AB 748, which was approved by the governor on Sept. 19, 2022, requires high schools to create and display posters in each bathroom about mental health-related policies and resources.

“So there was not really a lot of convincing that needed to happen because there was no big physical impact or cost [to AB 748] because I just put on some posters,” Oh said.

#### ‘21 LAWS TO BE ENACTED IN ‘24

SB 224, which Oh did not work on, was signed into law two years ago and called for schools to include mental health as part of course instructions.

Because this involved a change in the public school curriculum, the state gave

educators two years to figure out how to enact it.

“It’s interesting to see curriculum bills

*“Mental health is actually a huge topic in the legislative sphere, and I advocate for mental health support.”*

- senior Sue Oh

because they’re so hard to pass,” Oh said. “I was really passionate about AB 98, which was the financial literacy bill, and that died because it’s so hard to pass curriculum bills.”

As of mid-November, Sunny Hills administrators have no details about what will be added to the curriculum next year.

“At this time, I believe our district has a robust mental health system with our community partnerships and mental health specialists at each campus,” said

assistant principal Katie Wright, who oversees mental health supports and services on campus. “I suspect SB 224 will

not be a difficult requirement for us to reach as a district, and I have no doubt that our district will work closely with each school site as they create a district-wide plan so all schools can be aligned.”

SB 224 states each school district, county office of education, state special school and charter school with one or more courses in health education to develop a plan for expanding mental health instruction on or before Jan.

1, 2024. The requirements include signs, symptoms and prevalence of mental health challenges, evidence-based services and supports, wellness and protective factors and the impact of race, ethnicity and culture on the experience and treatment.

As more mental health bills were passed in the recent legislative session, Oh said she thinks the pandemic contributed to the changes as well.

Legislation >> Page 16



# the sunny spot

Room 20. For more than two decades, it has come to serve as the teachers' copy room. And then during the COVID-19 pandemic with students and teachers off campus because of state-mandated distance learning, the two copy machines were moved to Room 60, leaving the empty place to be filled with supplies such as face masks and temperature gauges.

May 2023. After taking nearly the whole 2022-2023 school year to furnish, the Sunny Spot mental wellness center — the first in the school's history — was ready for student use. Even though 2023-2024 mental health specialist Staci Balliet did not oversee Room 20's transformation, Balliet describes it as a space for students to decompress.

Besides shelves containing room decor and sensory items on desks for students to utilize for relaxation, the center comprises a back office for Balliet and front area where students can choose from a range of flexible seating arrangements. A large Viewsonic monitor similar to what many teachers use also rests on one side of the front space. Students can access the wellness space Monday-Friday, from 8 a.m.-4 p.m.

See page 12 for a feature profile about Balliet.

## ADAPTABLE ARRANGEMENTS:

*Students have the option to relax on floor cushions and assorted flexible seats sprawled around the room.*

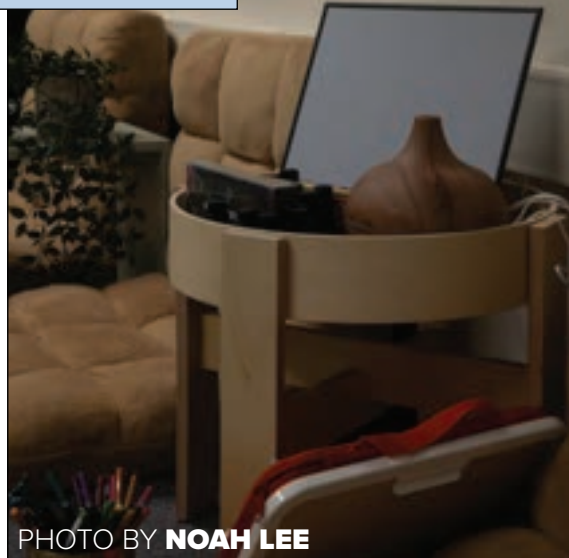


PHOTO BY NOAH LEE



PHOTO BY CHLOE KANG

**DAYTIME DOODLES:** *Within the mental wellness space, students can access various sensory activities, including a roll of paper designated for drawing.*



PHOTO BY CHLOE KANG

**MINDFUL TOOLS:** *Mental health awareness flyers, human rights stickers and affirmation cards lay scattered across the table.*



PHOTO BY NOAH LEE

**CURIOUS CUBES:** *Colorful blocks engraved with conversation starters rest on the shelf.*



**SCRAPE AWAY:** *Sunny Hills students can enjoy their time interacting with a mini sand bonsai set.*

PHOTO BY NOAH LEE



**G**rief and loss. Anxiety. Personal wellness. Healthy relationships. Coping with academic pressure.

Those were among the topics that students could choose from on a Google Form the Sunny Hills administration sent out.

Staci Balliet, the mental health specialist, would then start a group on the most popular topic for students to join.

The one that ended up getting the most votes was the first topic: grief and loss.

"I wasn't surprised because I had been informed by the counselors and admin that a lot of students were experiencing that," Balliet said. "So I was thankful there were students wanting to take advantage of getting that support."

The results also allowed the mental wellness specialist to base the first of several student support sessions on this subject on Sept. 29.

Officially referred to as "wellness groups," Balliet said she moderated the first 2023-2024 school year 40-minute session in Room 20, now known as The Sunny Spot mental wellness center. Five students attended the meetings for this topic ev-

ery Friday.

"My goal is to create community and common feelings among peers and allow students to be able to relate to each other," she said.

The groups, typically comprising of 5-10 students, will meet for about 6-8 sessions per topic once a week during a different class period each time, Balliet said.

"It helps to feel supported in a nonjudgemental setting," she said.

The second session on anxiety, which had received the most votes on the second form Balliet sent out, was held on Oct. 31 with five students in attendance.

"My experience within the wellness group has allowed me to reconnect and find comfort in sharing with other students," said a student who participated in the grief and loss wellness group. "I will always recommend wellness groups because I believe that the key to coping skills and strength is to simply talk about it."

Even though what's addressed in the group remains confidential, it's up to those in the group whether to reveal their real name or not, Balliet said.

STORY BY **FAITH JUNG**  
PHOTOS BY **CHLOE KANG**

**Sessions during the school day gives students a chance to share views on heavy topics like grief, loss and anxiety**

# TEEN TALK

## YOUR TURN What mental health topic would you be most interested in talking to other peers about?



"I would feel comfortable talking about **anxiety** because I have been dealing with it for some time. So, by sharing my own experiences, I hope I can help someone else who could be going through the same struggles."

— freshman Ysabel Eneria

"

I would probably talk about **sociopathy** because I feel like some people around me have it and it's a bit awkward not talking about it."

— sophomore Declan Tryon-Schneider



"I know a lot of my friends who struggle with **anxiety** and **depression**, so an open discussion about what works for different people and what would help develop more healthy coping mechanisms without turning them into something less healthy would be good."

— junior Nalani Reed

"

**Anxiety and depression** because it's widespread. Especially since we're in such an academically rigorous school, everyone deals with a ton of things such as sports and homework. Everything just piles on and it can create anxiety."

— senior Carlos Arguello



**"My goal is to create community and common feelings among peers and allow students to be able to relate to each other."**

— SH mental health specialist Staci



**WARM WELCOME:** Mental health specialist Staci Balliet offers group sessions during the school day in The Sunny Spot Room 20. These are a continuation of what former mental health specialist David Saldana started in the 2022-2023 school year.

Before the discussion starts, she said she explains the ground rules: (1) Anything that they discuss stays within the group (2) Students don't talk about each other outside of the group (3) Students are never expected to share anything they don't want to.

Then she asks students to introduce themselves however they feel comfortable and starts with icebreakers to help lighten the mood.

The students then go over their goals and what they hope to gain from the group.

After introductions are out of the way, Balliet said she gets right into it by doing a quick check in and introducing a discussion topic.

The groups are focused on how the topics are affecting them and their success at school. For example, in one of the grief and loss sessions, Balliet focused on triggers at school.

"I went over some coping skills and how we can support each other at school," she said. "So I have different [subjects] that I cover weekly based on the overall topic."

Each student is then allowed time to chime in and agree or disagree with what Balliet shared.

"At the end of the group, the last session, we review all of the things we've talked about, and I try to make it be a more fun day," the mental health specialist said. "For example, we could do an art activity, bring some food in or do something for closure of what we learned and how we are moving forward."

Although Balliet did not schedule the next wellness group, she said she will email another

form for students to apply to join after Thanksgiving break.

Even though wellness groups started in January during the spring semester of the 2022-2023 school year, Balliet said she did not supervise the sessions because she had not been hired at the time.

So far, Balliet said most of the students in the groups actively participate during the sessions, so she hasn't seen any issues.

School officials acknowledge the program's importance, especially since teens' mental wellness has been impacted because of school lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I'm glad that we have this service, and we're able to provide by having [Balliet] here full time to run these groups and help out students whenever we can," principal Craig Weinreich said. "I'm so excited that we're able to continue that."

Students interested in joining a future session can fill out a self-interest form the next time Balliet emails one.

## HOW TO SIGN-UP

- Students can request to join a wellness group by filling out a self-interest form via Aeries communication or from an email the school sent out on Sept. 8.
- The form is open at all times for students to sign up, and attendance at every session is not required.
- To participate in wellness sessions during classroom instruction, students must provide a consent form signed by a parent or guardian, available in Room 20 or their counselor.



# DARE TO DREAM

## New full-time mental health specialist rekindles her childhood ambitions

STORY BY **IRENE SHEEN**

By a twist of fate, this past summer, Staci Balliet stumbled upon a time capsule dating back to her elementary school years.

Unlocking the contents of her personal archive, Balliet revealed that her fifth grade self had expressed an early interest in a career related to child services.

In the midst of some unexpected turns, now mental health specialist Balliet assumes a full-time position on the Sunny Hills faculty, following the Fullerton Joint Union High School District's [FJUHSD] decision to assign a dedicated mental health specialist to each of its eight schools.



**STACI BALLIET**  
Mental Health  
Specialist

"I think that it's always kind of been in my head that this is what I wanted to do," Balliet said. "I just took a little detour and came back."

Though she initially studied nursing at California State University, San Marcos [CSUM], Balliet said she soon realized that the field conflicted with her career goals and transitioned into social work during her first semester of college in 2009.

"I always had an interest in helping others, and I kind of thought that [nursing] was the path that I wanted to take to get there," the mental health specialist said. "After I realized how academically hard that was going to be for me and how much science went into that, I switched paths."

An internship during her last year of undergraduate studies at a group home facility for foster youth cemented Balliet's belief and prompted her to rediscover a passion for child services.

"I think it gave me a lot of perspective and made me realize that a lot of working with other people, specifically youth, is just connection and relationship building," she said.

Upon completing her undergraduate and master's program at CSUM in social work with an emphasis on children, youth and family in 2013 and 2016, respectively, she obtained her Pupil Personnel Services credential at San Jose State University in 2016.

Right out of college, Balliet secured a five-year position as a school social worker at a school district in San Diego County, which she declined to name for privacy reasons.

"I was doing a lot more case management-type services, and I covered multiple schools at once," she said. "I realized that I

wanted to do more clinical-type work with students as opposed to just connecting them with resources."

For more specialized work, Balliet initiated a three-year journey to become a licensed clinical social worker.

Throughout this period, she fulfilled 3,000 hours of clinical work supervised by a licensed social worker. She also studied for nearly six months in preparation for the California Law and Ethics Exam and the Association of School Work Boards social work licensing exam, all while commuting from Orange County to San Diego.

"It took me a little bit longer than anticipated because of [COVID-19], and I went on maternity leave as well," said Balliet, who became a licensed clinical social worker in August 2022.

“

What I realized very quickly was that she had a lot of personality that was able to come through the Zoom, and it seemed like she would be somebody who could build an easy rapport with students and staff.

- assistant principal Katie Wright

”

During this time, the mental health professional discovered a job opening in the FJUHSD on edjoin.org — a site frequented by those looking for employment in education.

"I have worked in school districts ever since I graduated with my master's [degree], so I was kind of familiar with that process already," she said.

Following an interview with the district's director of Student Services and SH assistant principal Katie Wright, Balliet was offered a position as a mental health specialist a week later in April 2023.

"What I realized very quickly was that she had a lot of personality that was able to come through the Zoom, and it seemed like she would be somebody who could build an easy rapport with students and staff," said Wright, who manages the administrative factors of the school's mental health services.

Now headed into her eighth year working as a mental health professional, Balliet oversees a range of responsibilities, which extend from running support groups with students to supervising the newest wellness space located in Room 20.

Although she provides support for students requiring immediate assistance, her responsibilities typically involve universal instruction and group intervention support. In special cases requiring intensive assistance, she coordinates external referrals with agencies that provide specialized, one-on-one services.

"I'm not a therapist on campus, so I don't have a case-load of kids," said Balliet, whose role pertains primarily to on-campus related services. "Of course, if a student is in a crisis and they need immediate mental health support, I do give them that, but I'm not an ongoing provider."

During the first week of school, Balliet said she organized a presentation for English teacher Jill Lomheim's students upon the educator's request.

"I felt like juniors tend to have the hardest academic year, and I wanted them to know that there was a place and space for their help or to help them should they need it," said Lomheim, who at the time taught three periods of College-prep 11th grade English and two periods of Advanced Placement English Language and Composition [AP Lang]. "I think [Balliet's] ability to normalize a very complex topic and provide a space for her students to have a conversation with themselves, but also within an academic setting, gives students an opportunity to feel free to share who they are and what they're going through."

The mental health specialist has since presented to nearly 900 students on campus, including sports teams and special education classes, on topics ranging from stress management to tips on a smooth transition back to school.

"I feel like mental health over the years has become a growing issue, especially among students," said junior Layla Andre, who was among Lomheim's zero period AP Lang students who viewed Balliet's presentation. "This is why I appreciated a lot of her advice since it was catered toward helping students specifically with stress management."

Wright said she appreciates Balliet's efforts to build trust among members of the SH community.

"I think that if it wasn't positive, we wouldn't have teachers continuing to request her to do those large classroom presentations," Wright said. "I think that it was a hugely progressive step for the district to be able to give everybody one mental health specialist, and right now, as far as Sunny Hills is concerned, our numbers are showing that one is sufficient."

Balliet said she hopes to encourage student engagement in mental health by coordinating more campus-wide initiatives and continuing her series of classroom presentations

**TYPING AWAY:** Mental health specialist Staci Balliet

works on her computer during sixth period on Nov. 13

in Room 20, The Sunny Spot.



# PIECE OF THE

*“I found something so much more important than just knowing about people. [I wanted] to orient that knowledge of people toward helping them know themselves.”*

—Psychology Ph.D. candidate Peter Tan

ILLUSTRATION BY JINA HAN

According to Biola Rosemead School of Psychology student and Ph.D. candidate Peter Tan, multiple puzzle pieces make up the mind and social life of an adolescent.

Tan believes that factors including peers, family and school play a significant role in the development of depression and the quality of one’s mental health.

The parent-child relationship and support aspect of clinical psychology is what Tan hopes to focus on in his upcoming study for the school.

“I did a lot of research on peer social support and parental social support, both being a key indicator [of whether or not an individual is depressed], especially in adolescence,” said Tan, who wanted to specifically target a more general aspect of parental relationships.

The pilot study, which was conducted in October 2022, is now in the process of data analysis with the thesis deadline set for December.

Students ages 13-18 were asked via a Google Form or a flyer to answer demographic questions and volunteer for the study, which entailed an eight-week survey period.

The survey asked various questions regarding parent and youth communication — specifically about individuals’ well-being and how comfortable they feel talking to their parental figures.

After 10 weeks, Tan’s pilot study garnered five participants who were asked to complete said

tasks with a check-in survey halfway through the intervention.

Tan said he predicts that as good parent-child communication occurs, an adolescent’s mental well-being will become more positive and lessen rate of depression.

“Currently [the study focuses] mostly on the parental social support aspect of it, and how communication, which is one small aspect of parental social support, plays a role in the overarching mental health and specifically resilience of adolescents,” he said.

Tan acknowledges the role that educational institutions play in shaping students’ missing communication with parental figures, often allowing them to turn to mentor figures at school in place.

“Having a mentor figure at school, [like] a teacher that they feel comfortable with and trust that they can look up to, also does facilitate greater mental health and in a lot of ways,” he said. “Especially when a student does not experience parental, mental, social support, it can potentially fill in for that lack of safe, authoritative relationships at home.”

Similarly, peer relationships have an increasing importance throughout adolescence, Tan said.

“It’s not that parents become less important, it’s that peers become more important [than before],” he said. “So both parental social support and peer social support are heavily important lessons for mental health.”

## PATH TO PSYCHOLOGY

Tan said his struggles with mental health throughout his high school experience motivated him to turn to mentor figures in his life and created his desire to provide a similar sense of support through studying psychology.

Although Tan initially studied personality psychology during his first years of college, in his senior year of undergraduate studies, he made a switch to clinical psychology after taking a course on that same topic.

“I found something so much more important than just knowing about people,” he said. “[I wanted] to orient that knowledge of people toward helping them know themselves, helping them understand the world and helping them know how to best live in the world.”

After earning his bachelor’s degree in psychology from the University of California, Riverside, in 2019, he received his master’s degree in psychological research from California State University, Fullerton, in 2021.

During his time at both institutions, he participated in numerous internships and various forms of training, most notably administering school IQ tests, all of which allowed him to put his learnings into practice.

STORY BY ALEXXA BERUMEN

# PUZZLE

***Biola psychology student and Ph.D. candidate reflects on his research on teen depression without adult support***



**FROM PAGE 6**  
**LEGISLATION**

“I realized that adults do care about students’ well being, and they want students to have the best possible experience at school,” Oh said. “They recognized mental health, especially after the pandemic; I think that was a huge thing that shed a lot of light.”

When informed of the 2023 State of Mental Health in America report citing more than three-quarters of Asian youth nationwide “did not receive mental health services in the past year,” the senior said she hopes this alarming statistic will change and that Asian parents and their children will someday overcome the stigma surrounding mental illness.

“One of the biggest things is recognizing signs of mental health and de-stigmatizing it because, for example, I go to therapy, and people shame me for going to therapy because they think it’s weird,” Oh said. “And I think we haven’t really de-stigmatized seeking help for

mental issues.”

One of those new laws included another bill that Oh lobbied for — AB 665. Signed into law on Oct. 7, AB 665 calls for allowing minors 12 years or older to consent to mental health treatment or counseling or to residential shelter services.

“Mental health is actually a huge topic in the legislative sphere, and I advocate for mental health support, too,” Oh said. “I’ve always worked to ensure that mental health is always prioritized and that people can take breaks that they need to through.”

Co-president of Stress Less club junior Alyson Chow said she appreciates the government’s efforts in advocating for new mental health policies.

“It’s a good idea that the government is focusing on the well-being of its people,” Chow said. “Perhaps my co-president and I could eventually bring to light the news in our club during one of our meetings by explaining the additional mental health support that the government is implementing.”

**FROM PAGE 14**  
**RESEARCH**

While aiding school psychologists in assessing the results of various cognitive tests, which test the function of an individual’s brain, the Ph.D. candidate decided that this was not a path he would want to continue with in the future.

“Ultimately [during these assessments] I’m not the one who’s helping them,” said Tan, whose professors urged him to go into the assessment field because of his impartial personality. “I’m actually just showing them what kind of help they need, and although that’s important, it’s not necessarily the type of work I’m passionate about.”

Associate Professor and licensed clinical psychologist Joseph De Luna, who is currently overseeing Tan’s research, said he was very encouraging of the Ph.D. candidate’s endeavors and has helped mentor him

through the numerous phases of the project.

“[Tan] is a very hard worker and extremely determined and motivated,” said De Luna, who chairs multiple research projects per year. “He has done very well in our program in every facet.”

Most recently, Tan began an internship at Starview, an adolescent call center in Los Angeles County. Through this, he holds the opportunity to provide therapy through leading both group and individual sessions with clients.

After this experience in therapy, he has become more invested in the practice and interaction aspect of clinical psychology, providing help and guiding adolescents in need to the proper resolutions.

“I really hope that I can be part of the puzzle to facilitating a full life for clients, or at least [a life] better than what they have experienced in the past,” he said.

# OUT OF THE SHADOWS

## Mental wellness survey sees increases across all categories

STORY BY JUSTIN PAK

**T**hey were two moments in time.

**April 28, 2023:**

Nearly three years after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, most students came to campus with a more back-to-normal mentality.

Gone were the masks that covered their smiles or laughs. Gone were the frequent uses of each classroom’s hand sanitizer dispensers. Gone were the constant worries of getting sick.

The classroom workload had returned to its more rigorous pre-pandemic state.

Students on campus were preparing for upcoming Advanced Placement tests. Meanwhile, in the state and nation around them, California unemployment rates rose to 4.5%, the House of Representatives passed a bill that prevented transgender women athletes from competing in girls sports and the Russo-Ukrainian War continued without an end in sight.

**Sept. 5, 2023:**

Over four months later, the 2023-2024 school year had just started in August.

Students looked forward to a year of new experi-

ences, new schedules, classmates and teachers.

The pandemic was long behind them, and school officials allocated more efforts toward supporting students’ mental health, hiring a specialist in the field and opening a wellness center — it actually had a soft opening in May of the previous semester.

Fullerton Joint Union High School District [FJUHS] officials chose those two moments — April 28 and Sept. 5 — to conduct a mental wellness check on their students. They contracted with a Boston-based education technology company called Panorama Education to produce survey questions that addressed the following categories:

- School Climate
- Supportive Relationships
- Emotion Regulation
- Sense of Belonging

In the spring semester, students were informed to use their Chromebooks to answer the multiple-choice questions at the beginning of their second period class with open-ended questions about what adults on campus are doing well to support them and what they can do better.





Administrators said they could not share the total number of questions because they were not supposed to see the survey.

A total of 1,491 students ended up taking 10-15 minutes to complete the voluntary assignment. The follow-up — also held during second period — had 1,869 respondents and featured a new question about how much students value school.

*The Accolade* asked school officials if they would be willing to release results of both surveys. Principal Craig Weinreich agreed to share via email only the percentage increases of each category because he said the numbers themselves are not representative of the entire school and can be misleading since not all students took either survey.

In contrast to growing depression and anxiety rates in the nation, the most recent responses showed increases across all four categories compared to the April 28 questionnaire, Weinreich said.

Each of the survey's four categories saw growth, increasing 7% in School Climate, 5% in Supportive Relationships, 4% in Emotion Regulation and 2% in Sense of Belonging.

The principal was also willing to release some comments students gave from the September questionnaire.

When students were asked what teachers or other adults at school can do better to support them, the most common responses were “give less homework” and “understand that everyone has bad days sometimes and be considerate of that factor,” Weinreich said.

“[Assistant principal] Mrs. [Katie] Wright and [mental health specialist] Mrs. [Staci] Balliet shared the results and improvement areas we experienced with our staff,” he said, adding that this happened during the Nov. 1 staff development day. “They focused in on ways to continue to show improvements and help our students in these areas.”

Overall, Weinreich said the percentages were either on par or higher than what administrators from other schools in the district saw from the same survey their students took.

“It is nice to see that our emphasis on these areas as a staff has been beneficial,” he said. “[I think the cause was] more awareness and focus on student well-being as a staff along with additional training.”

California State University, Fullerton, associate professor Sean R. Hogan, who has a doctorate in social welfare and previously analyzed data related to federal welfare policy initiatives, assessed the results based on what he knew, which did not include specifics of how Sunny Hills faculty supported students.

From what he could analyze, Hogan said the increases in these categories can also be attributed to the school returning to normalcy after the pandemic.

“Students were reacclimating to a stable school environment ...

and you might also have teachers and administrators also adjusting back to healthier patterns of working and dealing with students,” he said. “The climate may have naturally been improving because the students and faculty were improving.”

Hogan said the better metrics may also result from students dealing with social media in a more healthy manner.

“I’d like to think that students are feeling better about their environment and social networks, which might be an indication that they’re getting a better grasp or position on social media, and maybe they’re starting to appreciate that social media is not necessarily the end-all-be-all,” he said. “People are moving back to developing better in-person relationships with their peers, teachers and family.”

Senior Jimmy Kayani agrees that having strong in-person relationships with others is important for good mental wellness.

Kayani said one of the major problems threatening students’ mental is that school has seen a gradual increase in difficulty over time as getting admitted to a desirable college becomes more demanding.

“Life has gotten harder for everyone since everything is just so much more competitive,” he said. “I often feel pressured to do all these extracurriculars and to balance them with high-level classes — it really takes a toll on your mental health.”

However, beyond education, the senior has also noticed problems that continue to grow and show little signs of stopping: social and political tensions.

#### THE FUTURE OF PANORAMA SURVEYS

Wright said she expects the FJUHSD to continue to get mental wellness feedback from students each subsequent school year for an undetermined amount of time.

So it’s not certain that the gains will continue because the local, state, national and global climate keeps changing.

Political divisions in the country could play a factor in the well-being of some students, Hogan said.

Over the years, tensions have risen among Americans as differing political stances grow further apart, he said.

Freshman Megan Al-Rawi, who prefers to use “they/them” pronouns, said they believe politics have become more intense since 2016, when former President Donald Trump was elected.

Hogan also said the Trump administration led to the rise of radical groups, creating a greater rift in politics.

“I think people are forced to take a position now that’s a little more extreme than they had in the past, and these are polarizing positions,” he said. “There’s very little middle ground for people to meet and so you’re either one or the other and then the extreme feelings and emotions that are tied to these political positions cause

people to be angry at each other.

The associate professor said these differences are sometimes seen in groups that usually provide support for each other, which may cause anxiety among adolescents.

“A family is a good example of a group that’s very close-knit usually, but within families, you can see divisions happening because you have some family members who lean toward more conservative and others who are more liberal, and there’s not that middle ground where you can have some sort of intelligent discussion or express the differences and make it not personal,” he said. “It’s all become very personal in how people think about politics.”

Kayani agreed and said close groups like families may have disagreements over topics like politics, religion and war, including the current Israel-Hamas conflict that started Oct. 7, potentially causing students to not have people to talk to these things about.

“It’s a tricky subject because I’ve been told that people who follow certain religions are obliged to support certain sides,” he said. “I feel like there’s not much they could do about it because people just follow what they were taught even if they believe in something else, in some situations.”

Al-Rawi said they also view exposure to new things and problems can cause students to feel confused and detached from what they were taught and that having someone to converse with about these issues is helpful for teenagers.

“You’re exposed to new religions or new ways of thinking or because your whole life you’ve been told by adults like and that’s been your thinking process — just what you’ve been told,” Al-Rawi said. “And now it’s like exploring something new, and that’s very overwhelming for a lot of people, and that’s probably the cause of a lot of teenagers, emotional problems, mental health issues.”

#### SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Hogan said the most vital part of lessening anxiety and depression among adolescents is finding support.

“In our community, you really want people to feel accepted and part of and included in all the activities and you can set up support so that they can join and be around people who are going through the same ex-

periences as they are,” Hogan said. “It’s very important to feel that you’re not alone when you’re dealing with these kinds of issues.”

At Sunny Hills, Weinreich said the school’s best-rated category was Supportive Relationships, which Hogan said saw the largest percentage because students may feel it’s the most important, resulting in them providing positive responses.

“I think it’s really valuable as far as your emotional and psychological well-being, to be able to share with somebody,” he said. “It’s important for your health to have someone you can talk to when things are going poorly.”

Students have reflected this opinion, saying that faculty have been doing a good job supporting them, which they attribute to the increasing survey percentages.

Despite the category being the school’s highest, Vargas said she thinks teachers should still strive to be more open to talk regarding things like pressure.

“I think maybe teachers should be someone who you could just go to and talk to them about how you’re feeling about or your workload without taking it personally,” junior Giselle Vargas said. “They should take it from the perspective of a student like how they’re feeling and how their workload is affecting them and how a student can get more help.”

Nov. 17, 2023:

Five more months until the first moment in time will lead to the likelihood of the spring administration of the Panorama survey.

By then, it will be the fourth year from the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. It will remain to be seen whether any of the problems students face today are resolved or what new ones might spring up to take their place.

Kayani will also have figured out which college he plans to attend, which for him could resolve lots of uncertainty for the moment.

“I think I’ll be looking forward to what’s to come,” the senior said. “College is what most if not all of us have been working toward, and it’s just crazy how I’m at that stage in life where it’s all been said and done.”

## AND THE SURVEY SAYS ...

Since 2022, SH students have taken a wellness survey each semester. Compared to results from 1,491 students this April, the September form saw increases in all categories from 1,869 students. Administrators declined to share raw numbers, as they don’t represent the entire campus.

Compiled by Nathan Lee

1  
5% ↑  
SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS  
Having someone to talk to about stressful topics

2  
7% ↑  
SCHOOL CLIMATE  
Environment the school provides for students

3  
4% ↑  
EMOTION REGULATION  
Students’ ability to manage emotions when dealing with difficult situations

4  
2% ↑  
SENSE OF BELONGING  
Extent to which students feel like they are valued members of their school







ILLUSTRATION BY IRIS KIM

# SEASONAL GREETINGS:

## ALLERGIES' UNDERRECOGNIZED EFFECTS ON MOOD AND FOCUS

**I**t was a few minutes into then sophomore Elizabeth Choe's sixth period honors chemistry class. As her teacher, Andrew Colomac, was introducing the topic of acids and bases to the class, she felt the sudden urge to blow her nose, a symptom of her seasonal allergy.

Choe walked to the back of her classroom and sneezed three times loudly, feeling like she was disrupting the class.

Right then, Colomac shouted, "Geez, you're interrupting my lecture!"

Although everyone, including Choe, laughed, she realized that she can be really distracting because of the loud sneezes and loud nose blowing.

"My allergy symptoms get really distracting and it bothers my mood for the rest of the day if it's persistent," she said. "A lot of my energy is absorbed into the sneezes and my attention is focused on my allergy symptoms."

These common symptoms serve as the connection between allergies, hay fever and mood disorders, although it is not the direct cause.

"Allergy sufferers are one and a half times as likely to have major depression," according to a May 8, *The New York Times* online article, "The Connection Between Seasonal Allergies and Mental Health." "Allergic rhinitis is associated with a high risk of anxiety."

Despite these serious consequences, their connection with mental health is a very under-recognized topic among people

in general and health care practitioners.

For students, seasonal allergies especially affect their mood and focus in and out of classes as they are constantly surrounded by a variety of plants that may be the cause of their allergies.

"I get allergies where there are the most trees, grass and flowers, especially when there is a breeze to pass the pollen into my nose," said junior Lillian Foster, who has been suffering from seasonal allergies her whole life. "But now, I am able to ignore it at school because I learned to get used to it as years progressed."

When her allergies occur, mainly during winter and spring at school, Foster said she would cough into her arms and chug water to try to stop her fit from getting worse in classes.

Junior Dax Tran, who has been sensitive to environments with lots of plants and flowers since fifth grade, also had similar experiences when it came to distractions in class.

"Allergies affect me at school because it makes me lose motivation and not try with my work," Tran said. "I sometimes get super depressed and it really affects my mood."

### MEDICATION AND MOOD

Medications also seem to play a role in the connection between allergies and mood.

"Benadryl definitely makes me more tired, especially if I take it before school because I'm trying to fight to stay awake,"

senior Samantha Burgess said. "It sometimes brings me down for the day because I'm not able to focus."

On the other hand, some did not feel any negative effects on their mood from taking medication but rather an improvement.

"The medication definitely helps my mood since it makes the day go smoother, as it allows me to not have any added stressors or inconveniences on top of my day-to-day struggles," Foster said.

SH school nurse Ynette Johnson said the jury is still out over the findings of *The New York Times* article.

"The article is very interesting but there is so much in research it often takes several studies over a long period of time to make a statistically significant conclusion," Johnson said. "However, I will say, after reading this article, when I am encountering students with a diagnosis of mood disorders, I am more likely to ask if there is any history of allergies."

Despite the fact that allergies might be a common disease with more than 100 million people in the U.S. experiencing it each year, the constant battle within oneself cannot be ignored, as it can increase the possibility of having depression, according to the *New York Times* article.

"I think it would be great for a lot of people if they knew how to accommodate for allergies and just realize how inconvenient it is for a lot of people and maybe have a little more consideration because of that," Burgess said.



# DIGITAL INTERACTIONS

## Some Lancers are debunking what recent research has concluded about the harmful mental and emotional effect that social media has on teens

STORY BY STACY KIM

**T**he common denominator of most headlines regarding social media and its effect on teens: the impact is detrimental.

The reality, however, is far from black and white. A closer examination reveals a rather complex and multifaceted relationship between adolescents' digital interactions and their mental health. Social media can be platforms of support.

Typical teenagers spend more than four hours per day on social media, according to news.gallup.com, and frequently circulate through multiple platforms for entertainment. Therefore, people can assume time spent on social media is directly correlated to plummeting teens' mental well-being without considering extraneous variables.

Social media's addictive nature is often

rooted in its design. Features like endless scrolling and notifications can trigger the release of dopamine, contributing to a compulsive usage pattern among teenagers. This, in turn, disrupts sleep patterns, decreases in-person social interactions, fosters feelings of loneliness and instills feelings of low self-esteem in adolescents, according to *The New York Times*, which is why research heavily correlates bad mental health with the negative impact of social media.

However, some students who debunk this trend have actually benefited from their use of social me-

dia — their self-confidence, for example, has not declined because of the five hours they spend on such social media platforms as TikTok and Instagram.

Senior Jacqueline Coen always caught herself comparing herself to others on media platforms until her role model, favorite YouTuber and now podcaster shifted her mindset about herself and social media.

"I always fed into the beliefs that Instagram, TikTok and other platforms would have a negative impact on me — and it definitely did before," Coen said. "But, Emma Chamberlain's podcast, 'Anything Goes,' really changed my perspective."

Having social media since middle school, Coen's self-confidence was never at an all-time high, but turning on Chamberlain's podcast every morning since 2020 made her realize she wasn't alone in experiencing those feelings.

"Emma always has something insightful to say and I find myself relating to everything," she said. "It made me feel heard and when I scrolled through TikTok, I found videos of other girls voicing how much they appreciate Emma for being so open and relatable."

In her Oct. 5 podcast episode titled "comparison," Chamberlain discusses the negative effects of comparing ourselves to others and offers tips on how to prevent it from "ruining our lives" which stuck with Coen.

"Each episode is unique, but I love when she talks about her own experiences and how she overcame them because they really do help," Coen said.

During a February 2021 Psycom interview, Thea Gallagher, an assistant professor and director of the Center for the Treatment and Study of Anxiety at the University of Pennsylvania, said people often use social media to share their mental health journey, which allows others to feel heard in their own struggles.

"[Emma's] podcasts always resonate with me and it's nice seeing an influencer like her have the same experiences as a high schooler," Coen said.

Rather than deepening her unhealthy relationship with comparing herself with others on social media, Coen found comfort in exploring more creators that delivered the same content as Chamberlain.

"I'm always trying to find more influencers or creators that have the same kind of content or podcasts like Emma because I think it's refreshing and reassuring to see other people have similar experiences as me," Coen said.

Similarly, junior Kevin King follows over 50 celebrities on TikTok to get an inside scoop of his favorite influencers' lives and finds joy in seeing them act "normal."

"Sometimes, when celebrities post about mental wellness, I laugh because they seem to have it all but at the same time, it reminds me that they're human too, and I feel like I can relate to them in one aspect," King said.

Though some may think lavishing over celebrities' social media can actually be more toxic than enjoyable, like an article from theguardian.com claims, it brings pleasure to King.

"It might be weird to some people but I think seeing my favorite celebrities having fun or thriving also gives me a sense of happiness," said the junior, who often keeps up with his favorite artists such as Kanye West and Travis Scott. "Even though I'm not experiencing their pleasures firsthand, it still makes me happy."

King also attributes increasing mental health issues to the generation as a whole, rather than blaming them on social media.

"At our age, it's pretty normal for everyone to compare themselves to people online or think they have poor performance because of social media," he said. "But there are way more pressing issues to be depressed over than social media."

There are also students who once struggled with their mental wellness but found ways to cope through social media like senior Madelyn Guzman.

"The concept of ASMR [Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response] was foreign to me at first, and I even thought it was kind of weird," said Guzman, who has struggled with anxiety since she was young but met its peak during COVID-19. "But, I found lots of different accounts of TikTok like NoaAsmr, Jocie B Asmr and other accounts that provided me with a sense of comfort whenever I felt anxious."

Since she was young, Guzman found solace from her anxiety through rain and fireplace sounds, so ASMR was a

familiar feeling to her.

"I would even record the rain sounds so I can listen back to when it wasn't raining, so when I saw rain ASMR videos and even fireplace ASMR on TikTok, it felt nostalgic," she said.

Sunny Hills mental health specialist Staci Balliet also agrees social media doesn't only have harmful effects; rather, our opinion about it reflects on whether we perceive media as inherently good or bad.

"If you've ever noticed, sometimes when you're feeling down, the only things that show up on your algorithm are things that make you feel more down," Balliet said. "So spending too much time on social media can not be healthy; however, isolating yourself is not healthy either."



ILLUSTRATION BY JINA HAN



The Accolade's Seowon Han conducted a Q&A with journalist, author, public speaker and mental health advocate Jeneé Darden, who experienced depression and anxiety since her teenage years. Darden worked on mental health advocacy as part of Peers Envisioning and Engaging in Recovery Services. Her media experiences range from covering arts in the Bay Area for National Public Radio's KALW station to publishing in 2018 a collection of poems and essays titled, *When a Purple Rose Blooms*. Darden shares her experiences combatting the challenges and dealing with the cultural stigma of mental health. (Answers have been edited for length and clarity.)

# WELLNESS JOURNEY

Q&A



Image used with permission from Jeneé Darden  
**VICTORY STORY:** Jeneé Darden gives an acceptance speech at the New America Media Awards in San Francisco, where she won outstanding community reporting on how colorism affects Black people's mental health in 2012.

**What motivated you to publish *When a Purple Rose Blooms*, a collection of poetry and essays?**  
I've always wanted to be a published writer. Even before I was working at Peers, I had already published articles, but I never had a book. I had all this poetry I had written over 20 years, and one of my mentors suggested putting it in a book. So I did, and a lot of the pieces were about mental health or social issues that affect your mental health.

**Have you dealt with mental health issues yourself?**  
I got diagnosed with depression when I was about 13, and it's in my family. I also think sometimes depression and anxiety could just be a physical health thing.

**How did you overcome the challenges of disclosing your own mental health issues to the public?**  
It was very liberating once I disclosed my mental health problems when I started interviewing people with mental health issues for podcasts for PEERS. I took care of my mental health by going to therapy in high school. I understand why some people aren't open about it: the stigma of having mental health issues is still there. Having to go to conferences and leading workshops, I just started speaking and sharing my own story.

**How do you think mental health is perceived differently for various ethnic groups?**  
For me, as an African American, there's always this expectation that Black women are supposed to be strong and grateful because our ancestors survived slavery and the Jim Crow era. Because of all those kinds of tragedies, we shouldn't be depressed because our ancestors survived so much.

**How do language barriers or cultural norms have any effect when discussing mental health?**  
When I recall, before I left the organization, I worked on a project with Asian communities. I remember in Chinese communities, there was a

stereotype that if you had a mental health challenge, then that was a bad reflection on the rest of the family, so some people were hiding [their condition], too. Most therapists are overwhelmingly white, but we have immigrant communities that may have a harder time getting access to therapists if they speak different languages.

**How did you overcome your depression and anxiety?**  
For me, meditation helps me a lot, so I have meditation CDs. There are also different types of meditation apps and websites on YouTube you can stream, and that helps me. Also, I just go for a walk, calm down and let things out of my head as I do with the exercises, so I don't overreact to my depression and anxiety.

**How accessible were mental health specialists and resources for you when you were in high school?**  
I went to Kaiser Permanente for a child psychologist because our small Catholic high school didn't always have access to mental health resources. I even took a psychology class in high school. We talked about different topics like, "This is what bipolar disorder is, this is what depression is." But we didn't really get into like, "What if you have it?" So that's why I like talking about these to make people more comfortable dealing with these issues.

**What do you think about the stigma with mental health now compared to when you were a teenager?**  
I feel like I've overcome the stigma pretty much, but the stigma is still there. But it's not as strong as it was then because now people are talking more publicly about mental health. I never thought in my life that I would get in front of my eyes and say, "Hey, I was diagnosed with depression and anxiety," because I was so ashamed.

**What are some things you wish you had in high school dealing with mental health challenges?**  
I wish I saw some of the famous people that I liked be more open

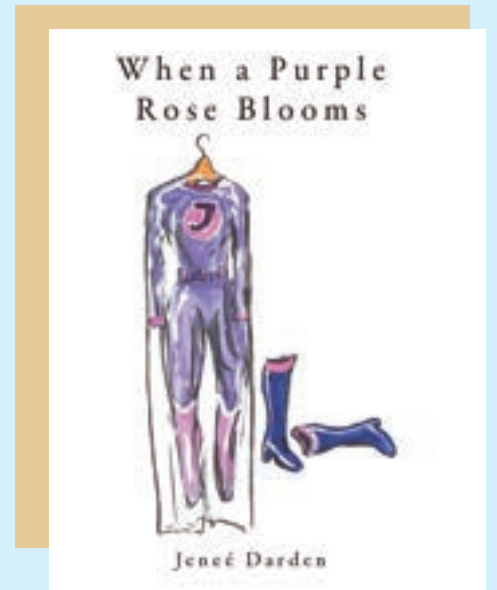


Image used with permission from Jeneé Darden  
**SHARING EXPERIENCES:** When a Purple Rose Blooms features poems and essays about Jeneé Darden's journey of Black womanhood and mental wellness in 2018.

about it too. Also, now we have so many books and resources. We didn't have podcasts back then. I just wish I had those types of resources to see people my age struggle with it and see people that I admire be open about their struggles with it.

**What advice would you give to those dealing with mental health issues?**  
I still go to a therapist once a week. I try not to take on too many responsibilities because I used to do that, and I would be stressed out. Also, I watch what I eat and take a blood test to see what I'm deficient in. I have friends who also do mental health work, so I can go to them when I'm struggling.

**Why do you think people should be more mindful of their mental health?**  
Your mental health is just as important as your physical health, so it's important to take care of your mind. We had a campaign where researchers found that people with mental health challenges lived 10 years less than the general population, and often it was because of preventable ailments and diseases like smoking-related cancer. So, our minds are important.





ILLUSTRATION BY JACOB KIM

## STAFF EDITORIAL

# Open since May 2023, wellness center hits the spot

*Three of The Accolade Editorial Board members had a chance to tour the Sunny Spot in Room 20, which offers a variety of stress relieving activities and comfortable furniture. Though it opened in the last month of the spring semester, The Sunny Spot wasn't made available to the media until the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year. 12 agree The Sunny Spot is a successfully calming space; 4 disagree.*

Soft, cushioned seats positioned on the floor. Fidget toys displayed on the desk. Paper with colored pencils, markers and pens spread out for students to doodle, draw or sketch out how they're feeling.

These are a few of the items and activities offered in the new wellness center on campus, also known as The Sunny Spot. Located in Room 20, it offers a comforting and welcoming atmosphere for students who want to pause and take a short breather. Such furnishings are exactly what our predecessors on The Accolade had in mind when they pushed for such a facility back in 2019.

Despite not being available for student use until the last month of the 2022-2023 school year, the administration and those who worked on finalizing its furnishings deserve praise for providing the student body with The Sunny Spot — an outlet for students during post-COVID-19 pandemic, stressful times.

First opened on May 1, students who are experiencing anxiety or stress can visit the wellness center and mental health specialist Staci Balliet on their own time from 8 a.m.-4 p.m. during break, lunch, before or after school.

However, teachers must refer students who want to go to the center during class. They must tell a teacher to be sent to Room 5, where they can either talk to their counselor or an administrator to be escorted to The Sunny Spot, Balliet said.

Although some can consider this protocol restrictive, we understand the school officials' view that the referral process acts as a

means to prevent students from attempting to abuse the resource as a way to ditch their classes.

However, referrals may be seen as an obstacle for those who are genuinely in an unstable mental state and would not want to disclose their struggles to a second person.

In that light, the system has a slight flaw that may need revision in the future to allow these students to get help without divulging personal information.

Balliet said students are encouraged to only spend around 15-20 minutes in the room.

Room 20 provides comfortable floor chairs, a hanging egg chair, a soft rug and a large wooden table scattered with a variety of calming materials such as colored markers and paper, stress balls and foam slime.

With these sources as well as its dim lighting and pastel colors, The Sunny Spot succeeds in conveying a calming atmosphere. It truly radiates comfort and supplies students with different outlets to relieve their stress.

However, one downside of the room is its size, which is around half the space of a typical classroom. The small dimensions of the wellness center may seem confining, especially compared to Troy High School's wellness center's large dimensions.

If possible, relocating the area to a larger space could help further communicate its welcoming atmosphere.

Although some students have said not enough people know about The Sunny Spot, information has been sent through emails and newsletters multiple times — an email regarding the October wellness group and

The Sunny Spot was sent through Aeries Communications on Oct. 13.

Balliet said she is also working on presenting to classrooms about stress and the wellness center, having already talked to almost 900 students in classrooms since this school year.

Balliet's presentation is helpful and mind opening, continuing to spread information to students on how to battle stressful situations and better their mental health.

However, more can be done to show students that the room exists. For example, the school could put a sign or design on the door of Room 20, similar to the letters on the office doors, to differentiate it from a normal classroom.

Still, the news about The Sunny Spot is spreading and reaching students on campus, and it's now up to them to pay attention to these announcements if they seek help.

The Sunny Spot remains a prime example of how our school and the Fullerton Joint Union High School District are working to break the negative stigma surrounding mental health and provide help to all students; it's an important continuation of the administration taking action on teen mental wellness. Nevertheless, we urge school officials to consider relocating it to a larger space for a more breathable and spacious area.

The Accolade editorial board is made up of the top editors and section editors on the new 2023-2024 staff with the guidance of adviser Tommy Li. If you have a question about the board's decision or an issue for the board to discuss and write about, please send an email to [theacoladeshhs@gmail.com](mailto:theacoladeshhs@gmail.com).



# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Reader responses to the Sept. 29 “New award promotes campus unity” Impact article:

As someone who watched the moment that one of my friends draped the medal for the Lancer LEGEND award, it was interesting to read the article and know what being a Lancer LEGEND is exactly about. With this new positive influence, I am so excited to see the campus filled with delight!

— Lauren Park, sophomore

I personally enjoyed the positive message it tried to deliver, but I also tried to understand the reasoning behind why such recognitions for good deeds on campus are being given out. However, it leaves me troubled with the question of why the distribution of these awards is even necessary in the first place.

Is being a good human being not the norm anymore? Far more acts of kindness go unnoticed throughout the campus, yet we only applaud these people just because a teacher saw it happen.

— Gerald Han, sophomore

## Reader responses to the Sept. 29 “Uphill Journey” Profiles article:

Learning about sophomore Faith Won with muscular myopathy, a disease I did not

know about before, was enlightening and enabled me to observe aspects of high school through the eyes of a student in a wheelchair.

I realized the importance of adjusting the environment for the inclusivity of disabled students.

— Emily Lee, freshman

I loved this story because of the awareness it sends toward people who may not know our school is able to support people with disabilities.

— Jiwoo Hong, sophomore

## Reader responses to the Sept. 29 “Overcoming Norms” Op-Ed article:

I gravitated toward this column about breaking Asian parent stereotypes because it mirrored my experiences and emotions living in a Korean household.

It spoke of what I wanted to express to the world — how not all Asian parents are what society views them as today.

— Soojin Cho, sophomore

I found it very refreshing to read about her experience having non-stereotypical Asian parents. Because I related to Jung, I understood her viewpoint on the exaggerated misconceptions of Asian parents. I not only felt a sense of comfort, but also a stronger connection to my parents,



ILLUSTRATION BY JINA HAN

## What it means to be seen

*Students react to stories from the September ‘Recognition’ issue, which featured various awards programs on campus and highlighted aspects of validation.*

who consistently instilled confidence within me as I gradually persisted through the process of adapting to becoming a freshman at Sunny Hills.

— Ellen Hwang, freshman

## Reader responses to other sections in the Sept. 29 issue:

Irene Park’s news article, “New award honors those who fell short of valedictorian status,” was very insightful. I think this is a great way to recognize hard working students who fell short of the requirements but still deserve credit

for their accomplishments. I hope this helps students feel that their effort is not going unnoticed.

— Lauren Kang, sophomore

“Lancer Nation Roars” by Susie Kim gave me the idea of how much our students love their school and how harmonious and united students can be as Lancers.

— Seungwoo Woo, junior

**The Accolade welcomes signed letters to the editor with full name and grade level emailed to [theaccoladeshhs@gmail.com](mailto:theaccoladeshhs@gmail.com)**

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# LANGUAGE MATTERS

**1** The word “insane” began in the early 16th century to refer to an unhealthy body or mind, which suggested that a person was injured and foolish, according to a website created by University of Michigan students. In the 21st century, people usually use “insane” to reflect their confused and overwhelmed state of mind, oversimplifying the depth of insanity.

**2** Schizophrenia is characterized by disruptions in thought processes, emotional responses and social interactions, according to the National Institute of Mental Health. Some people use this term to describe someone with “crazy” ideas, according to McLean Hospital in Belmont, Massachusetts.

COMPILED BY  
NICOLE PARK &  
IRENE PARK



**3** Obsessive-compulsive disorder [OCD] occurs when a person gets caught in a cycle of obsessions and compulsions, according to the International OCD Foundation. However, people characterize themselves as having OCD when they enjoy being neat and organized, exaggerating their liking to a mental condition and undermining the impact OCD has on people and their daily lives.

**4** Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder [ADHD] is considered one of the most common neurodevelopmental disorders of childhood. Those with ADHD may struggle with activities that require consistent focused attention. Their hyperactivity can cause them to have too much energy, leading to impulsive decisions. Recently, people misconceive what ADHD actually is and equate it with being “easily distracted” or “unfocused,” according to goodrx.com.

**5** “Bipolar” dates back to Hippocrates, who documented two extreme moods of depression and excitement, according to webmd.com. Bipolar can induce impulsive behavior and suicidal thoughts. In modern days, however, bipolar is used to describe changes in mood — having unpredictable moods is not the same as suffering from bipolar disorder. The media tend to focus on the dramatic side of bipolar, portraying people as crazy and dangerous and painting an inexact picture of real sufferers, according to aware.ie.

LANGUAGE PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN SOCIETY. WORDS ARE ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT IN MENTAL HEALTH BECAUSE IT CHANGES HOW PEOPLE VIEW THEMSELVES. HOWEVER, WORDS THAT USED TO DESCRIBE MENTAL ILLNESSES HAVE RECENTLY TAKEN THEIR PLACES IN EVERYDAY CONVERSATIONS, ESPECIALLY AMONG TEENS. IN THE 21ST CENTURY WHEN THE TOPIC OF WELLNESS IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY PREVALENT, IT'S IMPORTANT TO RECOGNIZE THE EFFECTS OF USING MEDICAL CONDITIONS IN EVERYDAY CONVERSATIONS.

“U sing labels carelessly can cause bias for patients who really have those conditions. It can cause the public to make light of true medical diagnoses. It may be a serious condition that people have to live with, but when you use the term carelessly it downplays the gravity of the condition, therefore contributing to public bias.”

- Pediatric neurologist  
Sharon Kim

## RIDING THE WAVES TO SELF-WELLNESS



Image used with permission from Sami Syed

**BEACH BREAK:** Senior Sami Syed prepares to paddle out with his surfboard at Huntington beach on Nov. 26, 2021.

**S**urfing is not only a thrilling and exhilarating sport. It has also been shown to have a positive impact on mental health. Surfing elicits joy, relaxation and mental clarity in many individuals.



**SAMI SYED**  
Guest Columnist

Research about the potential benefits of surfing for psychological well-being has been promising. Being on the waves gives a chance to disconnect from distractions and focus on the present moment, which can help reduce feelings of anxiety and promote a sense of calm and relaxation. Additionally, surfing can be a social activity and further help combat feelings of isolation and depression, which are common risk factors for mental health issues.

This sport has this amazing ability to uplift my spirit and provides a sense of peace and clarity. I made this connection as I got older when school got harder. I coped with the rigorous coursework by surfing a little more often, and I began feeling something incredible. After noticing this in myself, I wanted to know more about the connection between surfing and mental health.

A deeper investigation between the relationship began my junior year in October 2022 when I began my research. When you surf, you engage in a full-body workout that can burn calories, build strength, and endurance. This can help reduce stress, boost self-confidence, and improve overall mental well-being.

Therefore, it is safe to say that surfing is a strong mood enhancer. Each great feat of catching a new wave is rewarded accordingly, with a rush of neurochemicals that lead to a state of euphoria, often associated with the term “runner’s high.”

I first crafted a hypothesis that individuals who engage in this activity are more likely to have better mental health and

reached out to individuals in high school and others in the larger surfing community to get a balance between those who surfed and those who didn’t.

Twenty five males and 20 females were my participants, ranging from age 15-25 years old with the average being 20 years old. Five were excluded from the study because of their age. That left me with 20 surfers and 20 non-surfers.

I created a survey that had 25 questions based on specific prompts relating to mental health. Participants answered the prompts on a scale of 1-5, with 1 = lowest value and 5 = highest value. I then calculated the average score for each question and used the cutoff of greater than 0.3 points difference to indicate significant impact among the surfers vs. non-surfers. I found that there was a significant difference with surfers vs. non-surfers.

After administering the survey, I found that surfers reported significantly better mental health than non-surfers. Out of the 25 questions on the survey, 18 of the questions related to improved mood, reduced stress levels and increased feelings of well-being were scored significantly positive by almost all of the surfers.

Statistically demonstrating surfing can improve one’s mood. Surfers reported more energy and increased activity, with a 0.36 difference. These differences and their corresponding factors clearly demonstrate a significant and strong relation between surfing and superior status in portraying better mental health, with each of those 10 questions having an important background and history in improved mental health.

Surfing is a unique activity that combines physical exercise with exposure to nature and social interaction. It can be a great way to improve mental health and overall well-being, especially for adolescents who are still developing and learning to cope with stress and anxiety.





ILLUSTRATION BY **JINA HAN**

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