

# spot light

A specialty magazine produced by The Accolade

March 2025 | Volume I | Issue 2

Sunny Hills High School  
1801 Lancer Way  
Fullerton CA 92833

HAVE A GREAT DAY LANCERS!



## FIVE YEARS LATER

*The viral outbreak that started in March 2020 led to historic changes in education and the community. We look back to see how much we have progressed since. Have we fully rebounded?*

### **Viral Academic Impact | pg. 4**

From “test-optional” to “test-blind”; learn the lexicon of college admissions requirements

### **Viral Myths, Findings | pg. 9**

Unpacking the truth about six-feet distancing, remote learning and reflecting back on the recovery journey

illustrations by SOOJIN CHO  
and LINDSEY UM

# DEAR READER,

Five years ago, the world changed almost overnight.

The Class of 2025 was in seventh grade when the closure of schools for in-person learning was announced. This school year's incoming freshmen reached fourth grade with less than three months left before finishing the spring semester.

When I (Faith) first received news of my school being closed for a day, I did not have any fear but rather joy at the thought of attending classes in my bed. Zoom was a new platform I soon got used to as I clicked on the link posted on Google Classroom every weekday morning.

The Class of 2025 became the first freshmen crop that returned for in-person instruction in the 2021-2022 school year. Ironically, ninth-graders had something in common with their fellow underclassmen sophomores: entering high school in-person for the first time.

For me, Angelina, when I look back on that first day in my zero period English 2 Honors class, I was worried that wearing masks and keeping distances from one another would be what the rest of my high school years would look like.

While for me, Faith, I remember looking around, curious to know what everyone looked like without their masks on, but at the same time worried about how I would make new friends because everyone was used to being independent.

So then to follow up on our inaugural issue that focused on national, state and local elections and their impact on our future, we wanted to center this edition on the past\*. First, we delve into the academic impact (page 4) as to how universities adjusted to the viral outbreak and how five years later, they're reverting back to pre-pandemic testing expectations. On page 6, we review whether learning loss was a myth as some claimed, or if distance learning had a negative effect on us.

Our cover story (page 9) explores the different aspects of the pandemic and our journey toward recovery.

As you read these pages, we hope you'll take a moment to reflect on how the pandemic impacted your life and education and the ways you have adapted and grown since.

Lastly, we want to thank those who donated money to our journalism program to help pay for the 1,000 copies of *Spotlight*. We hope to secure enough funding to bring this specialty magazine back next school year, and so if you have suggestions for what we should dive into next or feedback on what we covered in this edition, please don't hesitate to let us know via email at [theaccoladeshhs@gmail.com](mailto:theaccoladeshhs@gmail.com).

Best,

**Angelina Jeong & Faith Jung**

*Spotlight Specialty Magazine Editors*



## ABOUT THE COVER:

We wanted to mirror what the 2020-2021 *Accolade* staff did with the cover of its one-year, COVID-19 pandemic anniversary issue. The exception would be that the health and safety protocols have been dropped, and we have become more comfortable in large groups again.

\*For longer versions of some of our stories in this issue as well as for more five-year COVID-19 anniversary stories, be sure to go to our online news website, [shsaccolade.com](http://shsaccolade.com).

# spotlight

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illustration by LINDSEY UM

## cover story

### FROM PANDEMIC TO RECOVERY

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Five years after COVID-19 first broke out, *Spotlight* looks back at how the world handled the problem to make steps toward recovery

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School officials, student leaders should bring back pre-pandemic rites like Mr. Sunny Hills

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Reader responses to Issue 1, which focused on elections

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# VIRAL IMPACT ON SAT, ACT

March 2020 lockdowns sprouted new entries into the lexicon of the college admission system like 'test-optional' and 'test-blind'

story by KYUWON HAN

Science teacher Mason Morris was an administrator here before the coronavirus outbreak forced schools to close down in March 2020.

Upon reflecting on the pandemic's impact on college entrance exams, Morris recalled the academic mindset among students on campus.

"I remember that students were always practicing and studying, especially their sophomore year and then their junior and senior year," he said. "Especially the junior year, trying to take the test one or two times, maybe more, trying to get the scores they would like."

And then after March 2020, College Board and American College Testing [ACT] officials acknowledged that upperclassmen — especially in California — couldn't take their exams because of lockdown protocols.

That left many to go out of state to find open testing sites, like in Nevada or Arizona.

A month into the coronavirus outbreak was when the Uni-

**"BEING TEST-OPTIONAL OR NOT EVEN ASKING FOR THESE EXAMS IS BENEFICIAL BECAUSE A TEST SCORE DOES NOT DETERMINE WHAT YOU KNOW"**

- Genesis Perez, College Center's guidance technician

versity of California system dropped SAT/ACT test scores as a requirement for admissions. California State Universities followed suit two years later in March 2022.

That didn't sit well with some students.

"Requiring test scores is more fair than just looking at grades for academics because a lot of schools have grade inflation," junior Rhea Ji said.

## TEST-OPTIONAL, TEST-BLIND

Among college admission websites, words such as test-optional and test-blind started appearing in 2020.

The former meant that colleges allow students to decide whether to submit their test scores; the latter meant students aren't able to submit a test score.

Morris said those decisions also had an impact on students.

"It was a real struggle for those kids that had already studied, and then they didn't have to take it," said the instructor, who teaches regular and honors chemistry. "Then it made it easier for certain kids to get into schools that they might not have normally gotten into because they didn't require SAT or ACT scores."

But the recent trend is for higher learning institutions to go back to the way things were before COVID-19 hit. According to College Board, 19 private and 35 public colleges this year have been added to the list of those that require the SAT or ACT scores again for admission.

College Center's guidance technician Genesis Perez lamented such a move.

"Being test-optional or not even asking for these exams is beneficial because a test score does not determine what you know," Perez said.

Freshman Viviana Kim disagreed.

Kim said she decided to take the October 2024 SAT.

"Colleges are bringing back SAT and ACT to get a better idea of the applicant's academic and education level," she said. "Although these tests don't fully define a student's capabilities, I think it gives the colleges a rough idea."

Kari Morita, an Advanced Placement [AP] Statistics teacher, said she understands why colleges are reverting back to their pre-COVID-19 pandemic admissions mandates.

"I don't know if the SAT is the best way to judge, but I could understand, for some colleges, they feel it's the best option they have," Morita said. "So if they use that as a tool with other variables to assess whether the student's a good fit, then I could see why it would play a part."

## FROM VIRAL TO DIGITAL

For 97 years — 1926 to 2023 — students tested on printed versions of the SAT or ACT. But two years ago, College Board introduced its first digital administration in Asia.

And U.S. students took it last year on March 9. Many said this was inevitable.

"I would always hope that COVID-19 never happened, but I believe technology would have caught up, so it would have been digital anyway," Ji said.

Some changes from the paper exam to the digital one are a shorter test, shorter reading passages and different versions of the test for all students.

"Digital is fair because it has an algorithm to follow," science teacher David Kim said. "I think it's a more accurate indication of how well they score compared to paperwork."

To prepare for the new digital SAT, the junior said she used practice exams provided by the College Board through Bluebook, a testing application introduced in 2023 that students use to take and practice for exams.

"I didn't have a tutor," Ji said. "I just had a lot of practice problems because the internet has a lot of resources, and I took a lot of all the Bluebook exams on the College Board."

Morita said hearing from her students, they preferred digital tests, but it did not seem to affect them.

"It really has been a non-issue in my AP class being digital or not digital," she said.





illustration by ELISA ARIAS


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# LEARNING LOSS

Some call it a myth; others say they suffered academically

story by KATELYN AHN

Learning loss.

Those two words became prominent in the media soon after the COVID-19 pandemic struck in 2020.

Almost a year and a half into the lockdowns that led to students having to learn from home, a few — including Los Angeles Unified School District teachers union president Cecily Myart-Cruz — dispute whether children and teens ever experienced it.

In an exclusive interview with *Los Angeles Magazine*, Myart-Cruz was quoted as saying in the Aug. 26, 2021, article: “There is no such thing as learning loss.”

She then added more fuel to the fire when she said, “Our kids didn’t lose anything. It’s OK that our babies may not have learned all their times tables. They learned resilience. They learned survival. They learned critical-thinking skills.”

“They know the difference between a riot and a protest. They know the words insurrection and coup.”

She also proposed that the term was propaganda that was created by untrustworthy people, insinuating that learning loss is a marketing strategy.

But is that how Sunny Hills educators see it as they reflect on whether students experienced any negative effects academically during and after the COVID-19 pandemic?

Advanced Placement [AP] Psychology and U.S. History teacher Greg Abbott said he sides with Myart-Cruz.

“I haven’t seen it, but I teach AP classes,” Abbott said. “Maybe those kids are more likely to have been studying harder during the pandemic or something, but honestly, no; I haven’t seen any decline in my students’ performance.”

Contrary to Abbott’s observations, AP Human Geography and U.S. History teacher Kristin Kosareff said students did suffer academically,

**“I DID EXPERIENCE LEARNING LOSS WHEN I GOT BACK TO SCHOOL AFTER COVID BECAUSE IT WAS HARD TO REMEMBER THINGS I LEARNED ONLINE”**

- sophomore Alondra Lopez

but COVID-19 should be the cause of it.

“In all honesty, I think that the actual learning loss was like the disservice to students in regards to not being able to socialize, not being able to collaborate and do kind of that social interaction part,” Kosareff said.

And what about the students themselves?

“I did experience learning loss when I got back to school after COVID because it was hard to remember things I learned online since it was a different experience than learning in person,” sophomore Alondra Lopez said. “I was more used to talking to my friends online than seeing them in person, so when we came back, it took some time to get used to socializing again.”

Although freshman Jacob Ibarra didn’t experience any problems with social interactions, he said he did struggle with his academics.

“It’s plausible that learning loss has declined [state testing] scores,” Ibarra said. “I struggled to stay on task, I became more unorganized, more unmotivated to do good in school and could not keep up with the subjects because of trouble adjusting from quarantine.”

Senior Isabella Reyes agreed with Ibarra’s assessment.

“Before COVID, I was the type of person who was able to comprehend a topic fully without an excessive amount of studying,” Reyes said. “I feel that after COVID, my scores started declining — not because I didn’t understand the material fully but because I wasn’t put in an environment where I felt scores mattered.”



photo by KATIE LEEM

**GRAB N’ GO:** Nurse Delfina Soto reaches for a student’s delivered food order to give to her at the beginning of lunch last semester in Room 7, the attendance office. Though many campuses nationwide have banned such ordered items even before the COVID-19 pandemic, Sunny Hills officials have yet to follow suit.

*Upon the return to in-person instruction in the 2021-2022 school year, students more likely to pay to have their lunches delivered to campus*

story by ELISE PAK

Junior Elias Vorathavorn has been ordering his school lunches around once every other week since his freshman year.

“DoorDash was popularized during the pandemic, and I saw the good benefits it has, so I use it at school to save time,” said Vorathavorn, who has spent over \$600 on his orders, usually for Chick-fil-A. “But I probably wouldn’t have ever DoorDashed if there was no pandemic.”

Vorathavorn’s view represents a growing trend nationwide of many high school students opting to personalize their own meals after the COVID-19 pandemic forced people to remain locked down at home and to resort to having their food delivered to them using apps like DoorDash or Uber Eats.

According to an online *Mother Jones* article posted last December, DoorDash reported in the first quarter of 2024 650 million orders, a 21% jump from the previous year. The top food item it delivered in 2023 was french fries followed by chicken quesadillas.

It’s no wonder in that same article that the author coined the term to describe these youths, the “DoorDash generation.”

Student services staff member Leslie Rains said she also noticed the trend of food deliveries here after COVID-19, and it was especially popular in the previous school year.

“We all got accustomed to using DoorDash [during the pandemic] and having food delivery pickup,” Rains said. “It just rolled over and became such a convenience for everybody that everybody just started turning to DoorDash versus leaving campus or having parents deliver food.”

Although the media have reported on teen app orders for meals as early as a

year before the March 2020 lockdowns, the fact that they didn’t stop have prompted campuses nationwide to ban outside food orders and deliveries.

Brea Olinda and Fountain Valley high schools, for example, are among such campuses. Sunny Hills, however, remains part

of the few that still caters to the DoorDash generation. The main requirement is that orders must be delivered to Room 7, the attendance office.

That has led to some levels of frustration for the DoorDashers and Uber Eaters.

“It would be much more efficient if they just allowed more people in at a time to get their food,” said freshman Logan Newman, who often DoorDashes Chick-fil-A using his parents’ money. “And it is kind of annoying because I might spend five or 10 minutes waiting for my food.”



illustration by Joanna Joo



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# LOST TRADITIONS

Homecoming, spirit weeks have returned, but few recall Mr. Sunny Hills, holiday quad decorations

story by ELLEN HWANG

Three boys stand in front of a whiteboard in their classroom, each either wearing a paper crown on his head or holding it in his hand.

The one on the far left, holding a balloon in his right hand and showing the peace sign with his left, wears a Lancers football jersey numbered 77.

The one in the middle sports a huge grin while the fingers of his right hand hold onto the string that has a helium balloon tied at the other end.

And finally, the last boy on the far right also tugs onto his string with a helium inflatable at the other end — as if it were a priceless diamond.

An Accolade photographer captured that moment in October 2018, a celebration of senior boys thrilled to learn they got nominated to participate in the Mr. Sunny Hills pageant, usually held in the Performing Arts Center [PAC], a way to recognize male Lancers since homecoming only features a princess court and a queen.

The event featured the contestants entertaining an audience with a panel of judges declaring the winner as Mr. Sunny Hills.

After the COVID-19 pandemic hit two years later, the venue never returned to campus. That tradition — reportedly started in 1995 — joins a few others that indirectly became a casualty of the viral outbreak.

“I’m surprised to hear that Mr. Sunny Hills ... [is] no longer around. I remember some of my friends getting nominated for Mr. Sunny Hills, and it was really interesting to see what performances the nominees came up with,” said Camryn Pak, who graduated in 2019.

Other lost traditions include:

- Holiday quad decorations on the Monday before final exam week
- Off-campus Lancer Awards night at the auditorium next to Fullerton Union High School [FUHS]

“I would

- 1) Then-sophomore Cady Hwang decorates a tree in 2017 in the quad.
- 2) Lancer Award night used to be held in May at the Fullerton Auditorium before March 2020.
- 3) Then-ASB member senior Hannah Son puts a paper crown over the head of Mr. Sunny Hills nominee Hayan Kah.

photo by NOAH LEE  
graphics by  
NATHAN LEE



Then-seniors and Mr. Sunny Hills nominees Akaljit Rai (left), Carlos Serrano (center) and Jimmy Barajas (right) celebrate their nominations Oct. 19, 2018 in their second period class with a balloon and paper crown.

love for [quad decorating] to come back,” said senior Jackson Martinez, who was born on Dec. 25. “Seeing the quad decorated for Christmas during finals week would both be fun and lighten the mood during a stressful time of the year.”

According to 2019-2020 Accolade articles, the Associated Student Body [ASB]-sponsored event began in the 1970s as a contest among each of the grade-level classes. Then because of low participation, ASB officers changed it to just holiday themes throughout the quad.

“We actually talked about [bringing the contest back],” ASB adviser David Fenstermaker said. “Better participation at the lower classes is definitely a thing that we’re going to be working on for 2025-2026.”

Few know that before 2020, students and their parents and relatives used to celebrate Lancers receiving academic awards at Fullerton Auditorium next to FUHS. But COVID-19 health and safety protocols forced school officials to move the venue to the quad for two years and then the PAC after when those parameters got lifted.

“Having it at the [off-campus] auditorium would definitely make it feel more official,” sophomore Niveen Hassan said.

## RELATED STORY

STAFF-ED: It’s time to bring some annual rites back to Sunny Hills. See OP-ED, page 14.

accolade file photos



# FIVE YEARS LATER

A look back at what we have learned from the COVID-19 pandemic

story by ANGELINA JEONG

**F**ive years.

The first two, when the COVID-19 pandemic broke in March 2020, introduced us to new vocabulary:

Zoom, app used for virtual meetings since students could no longer meet in person at school.

Distancing, six feet apart to prevent spread of the virus.

Masks, not the ones children and teens wear to go trick or treating for Halloween.

What began as an outbreak overseas soon led to similar illnesses among the elderly in the United States.

Within those first two years, many in the nation faced domestic global shortages of toilet paper, bottled water and masks as several states went into lockdown mode.

Starting in the third year from 2022-2023, especially in California, state officials ended their health and safety mandates. The next word became recovery, the mental, emotional and academic aspects.

2023-2024 and 2024-2025: Many have moved on from the challenges they faced, but some wonder whether government and health officials have fully understood how the pandemic started and whether the

health and safety protocols were necessary to prevent the spread of the disease. Only this month did California Gov. Gavin Newsom issue a mandate requiring state workers to return to their offices for at least four days a week by July 1.

## ZOOMING INTO THE ONLINE WORLD

The biggest shift in the lives of students and teachers was the move to online learning on platforms such as Zoom and Google Meets.

Senior Christopher Kozlova said the shift to remote education brought new challenges with technology and changed his overall learning experience.

“Before COVID, there was a lot more energy in the atmosphere, and as soon as COVID arrived, everything kind of shifted,” Kozlova said. “Zoom was very difficult because we didn’t use these online resources before, and it took time to get used to the new learning environment at home.”

Few recall anything positive from their remote learning experiences.

“Shifting to online learning was really hard because none of my teachers really knew how to use technology,” senior Jack-

son Martinez said. “It was just kind of like teaching yourself, and I’m not really good at teaching myself; it was a rough transition.”

Former English teacher Tom Wiegman, who retired in the previous school year only to return last month as English instructor Teresa McCarty’s long-term substitute instructor, agreed.

“Online learning was awful, and it was not a good experience,” said Wiegman, who taught Advanced Placement [AP] Literature during the lockdown. “I couldn’t talk to students [during Zoom sessions], and some would just show the tops of their heads; I remember one student who put his Chromebook camera down, and he had Xbox and PlayStation controllers in front of him.”

Senior Layla Andre, who was in seventh grade in 2020, isn’t surprised she and her peers started finding something else to keep them occupied since their instructors had no way to monitor their students from home.

If it wasn’t video games, it was social media. “It wasn’t until COVID started that I joined TikTok and also X,” Andre said. “My screen time went up by at least two hours [compared to pre-COVID].”

**SIX-FEET RULE: FACT OR MYTH?**

The first step to recovery was figuring out a safe way to interact with one another in public. This included methods like maintaining six-foot distance from one another and wearing masks and gloves, presented by organizations such as the American Red Cross and emphasized by federal officials like Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Though the protocols were followed, a *Washington Post* article did not find scientific evidence to prove its effectiveness in preventing the spread of the virus.

Martinez doesn't mind that six wasn't really the magic number after all.

"I know there is no scientific evidence, but I still think the farther away you are from other people, you feel better because the odds of bumping into them or touching them is higher when closer together," he said. "It still helped us get in the mindset of 'This is a pandemic.'"

**VACCINES**

It wasn't until July 8, 2022, when the federal Food and Drug Administration approved Pfizer-BioNTech's vaccine, that people had an option to seek medical

treatment to give them some hope of avoiding the coronavirus.

But some, including sports figures like tennis champion Novak Djokovic and Dallas Mavericks basketball point guard Kyrie Irving, refused such an option.

The most common reason behind the hesitancy came from concerns over how safe the vaccine was since it was produced in a rush.

Sunny Hills science teacher Kelly Kim, who was among those who trusted such a medical option, said vaccines are an important factor in preventing the wider spread of prevalent diseases.

"I know some people are still arguing that vaccines don't work, but I think they definitely helped change some things in regards to preventing the spread of COVID-19," Kim said. "At that time especially, it was very helpful that you got vaccinated."

Lohuwa Mamudu, assistant professor at California State University of Fullerton [CSUF] in the Department of Public Health, took part in a research that explored the perceived likelihood of receiving a COVID-19 vaccine among the U.S. population.

In this study, Mamudu said certain groups of people — such as younger adults,

individuals with lower income and education and those with a lower perceived risk of infection — were more likely to show signs of vaccine hesitancy and decline.

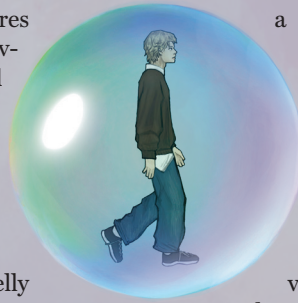
"We found out that individuals of ages between 18 and 49 were less likely to perceive getting the COVID-19 vaccine," said the assistant professor, who has been teaching at CSUF since 2021.

Over the past two and a half years, 81% of the U.S. population received at least one dose, and 70% of the population has become fully vaccinated, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

It doesn't come as a surprise that many question the U.S. government's early actions at the start of the viral outbreak. The last worldwide health scare, besides the one that hit Asia, was the Spanish flu in 1918.

"At the start of the pandemic, the government did not handle the virus very well," Andre said. "However, over time, when the government started to take more action and precautions and people started to get vaccinated, we



Illustrations by EVINA LEE

A group of patients in the city of Wuhan, China begin feeling a pneumonia-like sickness that didn't respond to traditional treatments.	WHO addresses the disease as the 2019 Novel Coronavirus and releases developing information on the virus.	WHO declares the 2019 Novel Coronavirus outbreak a public health emergency of international concern.	WHO officially names the disease COVID-19.	FDA approves Pfizer-BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine for ages 12-15 years old.
Dec. 12, 2019	Jan. 10, 2020	Jan. 31, 2020	Feb. 11, 2020	July 8, 2022

**TIMELINE: 2019-2022 from pandemic to vaccine**

World Health Organization [WHO] begins its investigation.	The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention receives first report of the coronavirus outbreak in the U.S.	Food and Drug Administration [FDA] approves the emergency use authorization for the first official testing kit, SARS-CoV-2.	WHO announces COVID-19 as a pandemic following over 118,000 cases in 114 countries and 4,291 deaths.
Jan. 1, 2020	Jan. 20, 2020	Feb. 4, 2020	March 11, 2020

were able to recover to where it's not a big deal anymore to get COVID."

Wiegman also questioned California leaders in their approach to the viral outbreak.

"California was one of the last states to open back up, so we waited too long," he said. "I was not a fan of some of the rules that the government put in place, and the people who were in the least danger were young people, while for old people, it was very difficult."

**PUSH FOR MORE WELLNESS SERVICES**

Wellness centers, especially in the public school setting, were barely existent before the pandemic struck.

Jake Gutierrez filled in for mental health specialist Staci Balliet over the past eight months while Balliet's been out for maternity leave. Gutierrez said COVID-19 may not have directly affected the coming of Sunny Spot, but it did influence mental health awareness in general.

"The Sunny Spot opening on campus because of COVID may be unsure, but mental health has definitely been talked about and more normalized ever since COVID," he said. "I think having more sources to get mental health help may have been the district's way of helping students who were just coming back from online learning so they can better adjust and get help when needed."

Mamudu said his research confirmed the need for wellness services, especially among teens.

"We took a look at the general population before COVID-19 and after COVID-19 and how it affected depression and anxiety levels," he said. "The results showed that after the occurrence of COVID-19, there was an increase in the number of people who had mental disorders such as depression and anxiety that went from 29.9%-32.2%."

**WHAT NOW?**

Kim said she has become more optimistic as to whether the government will be prepared should another outbreak occur in the future.

"I think that over the last five years, we learned to be more responsible, especially when it came to handling sicknesses in general," she said. "Before COVID, when we got sick, we weren't as cautious or considerate as to how the sickness can spread, but now, everyone wears a mask when [they're] sick and stays home."

Some students still need more time for healing.

"COVID affected my work ethic because I remember before COVID, I was more used to doing my homework right when I got home," sophomore Valerie Miranda said. "After getting used to staying home for school, I started procrastinating regularly."



**CANDID**  
What was your experience like during COVID-19?



**Brayden Almonte**  
Senior

Staying home all day affected both my physical and mental health negatively because of the lack of socialization and communication with other people.



**Alejandro Pardo**  
Junior

I stayed home and only spent time with my family. I didn't do anything besides being on my phone, doing school work and playing a lot of video games.



**Elaine Lee**  
Junior

Online learning was generally okay, but my social life sucked because I didn't get to hang out with my friends, and I wanted to go outside.



**Anthony Chung**  
Sophomore

When I had COVID-19, I stayed in my room for a week. I had a stuffy nose and phlegm when I was sick, despite being vaccinated.

compiled by JISEONG YOO

# Q&A with JON HART

## Party School novelist shares experience before, during coronavirus pandemic

compiled by ASHLEY KANG

Non-fiction writer Jon Hart crosses over to the world of fiction in his recently published novel, *Party School*, which centers on Dylan Mills, a troubled teen, and his struggle to balance his relationships in college. Hart reached out to Spotlight and agreed to share his experiences working on this project before and during the pandemic. The interview was edited for brevity and clarity. Be sure to go online to [shhsacolade.com](http://shhsacolade.com) to find the book review in the A & E section.

**Q** How and when did you get started in writing?

**A** I wrote a short story in a creative writing class [in the early 2000s], and people listened and didn't make fun of me, so that started me off. And then, I resumed procrastinating until I decided that I must do something with my life.

**Q** Who or what encouraged you?

**A** NO ONE! Yes, I exaggerate. However, a lot of people told me to get lost. You swing a hundred times, and you're fortunate to connect with a few incredible people who change your life. I owe everything to my parents, and I do everything for them.

**Q** How do you think the COVID-19 pandemic affected your writing process/routine?

**A** COVID-19 turned my life upside down. I'm not going to go there because it's too much of a downer, and I want to spare us both.

**Q** Even though you want to spare us both, can you please expand on how COVID-19 affected your book's publication and/or your process of writing it?

**A** I'd done most of the writing pre-COVID-19. However, I did a lot of rewriting and editing during the pandemic. I also worked on some other things. With everything going on, I felt selfish discussing it. I feel selfish discussing it now.

**Q** No need to feel selfish since I'm sure we have lots to learn from you. Please share with us what motivated you to keep writing amid everything that happened because of COVID-19.

**A** I wasn't motivated, but I wanted to complete what I started. Also, for better or for worse, writing is what I do.

**Q** Speaking about getting better, tell us about your novel, *Party School*. How did you decide to focus on young adults as your main characters and college life as your setting?

**A** I overheard someone mocking certain schools, and that set off my humor antenna, and I went from there but only after a lot of procrastination. Anyway, I wanted to write something funny. Eventually, it evolved into something serious.

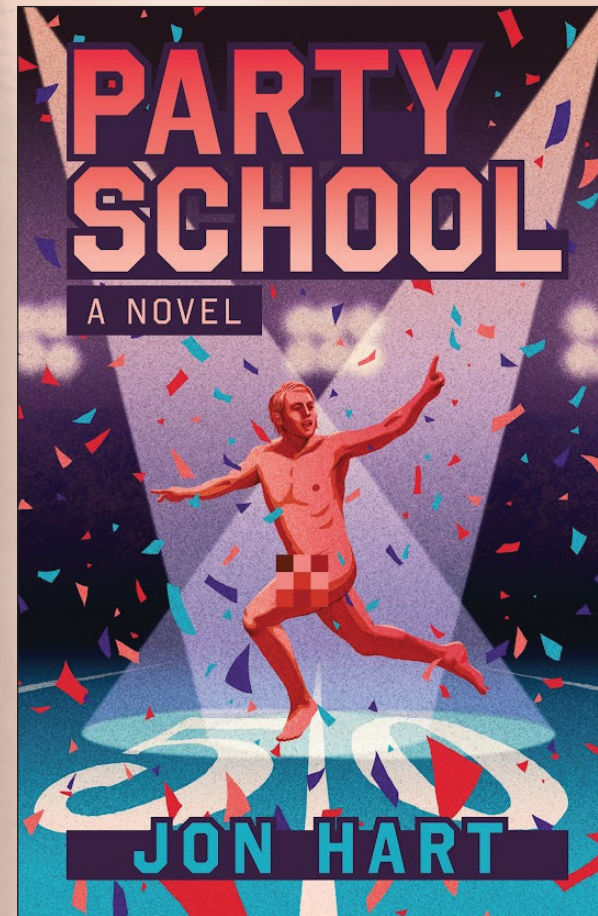


image used with permission from Jon Hart

**WORTH A READ?:** The front cover of *Party School*, a coming-of-age novel about a teen's transition from high school to college. The 228-page book is available for purchase on Amazon for \$16.18. (The author declined to have a picture of his face published.)

**Q** What did you learn about yourself as a writer during this time?

**A** I learned that I needed to get a lot better. You can always get better.

**Q** How long did it take for you to revise your draft and finally release it?

**A** It took too long. In one form or another, I've been working toward this my entire life, even when I was unaware or unconscious. Yes, it took a while.

**Q** Not to jinx anything again, but what are your thoughts about basing your next novel on the fifth anniversary of COVID-19?

**A** I mention COVID-19 in both [*Party School* and the next novel] I'm working on. However, it's not the focal point. I tried to find something funny in it even though it's not funny. I give COVID-19 a big thumbs down.

**Q** How did you feel when your novel was finally published in 2022?

**A** I felt some relief, and then I was overwhelmed with anxiety. I second-guessed myself. I wondered if anyone would read it. And then, I worried what they would think if they read it. Fun times! By the way, READ IT! And please write a review if you have anything remotely positive to say. Yes, I'm annoying! But I did say please.

**Q** Looking back, would you do anything differently from the start of your writing process to the publishing process?

**A** OF COURSE, I WOULD DO A FEW THINGS DIFFERENTLY! But what's done is done. And ultimately, I accomplished what I set out to do.

**Q** What message would you want your readers to glean after reading *Party School*?

**A** I don't want to preach to anyone but here goes: Let's all be a bit kinder. Let's stop looking at our phones and listen! Apologies for preaching. I warned you.

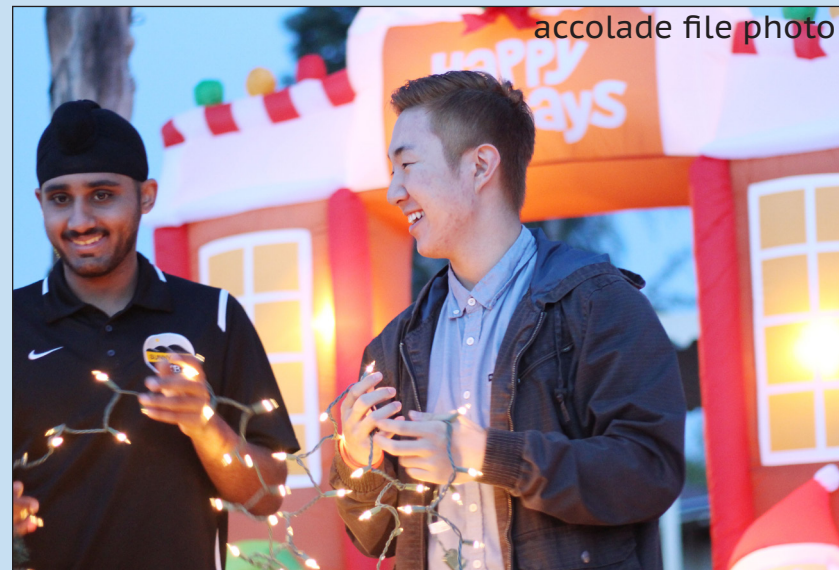
**Q** Interesting that you bring up preaching. So what advice would you give to aspiring authors?

**A** Let's start with reading. Read! But don't read too much because you must begin. Think! What's important to you? What gets under your skin? What must you share? But don't think too much and psych yourself out. Discuss your ideas and get inspired. But don't discuss too much because you must begin. Keep going. Lastly, don't procrastinate, which is easier said than done.

illustration by RYAN SHIN

# TRADITION NEVER GRADUATES

Five years after the coronavirus outbreak, it's time for school officials, Associated Student Body members to bring back some activities that have yet to return



**HOLIDAY SPIRIT VS. BA HUMBUG:** Students from December 2016 decorate parts of the quad before the start of first period on the Monday of final exam week. This rite of passage should return to campus.

Instead of relying on Accolade's 21-member editorial board to address a specific topic about the aftermath of COVID-19 five years later, we decided to incorporate every staff member to discuss the issue of annual activities that never returned to campus.

The vote count in favor or against will be listed for each lost tradition.

Ex-head coach for girls soccer and social science teacher Jeff Gordon came up with "tradition never graduates" as a motto for his players in 2004. In his more than 30 years of guiding his program, he established consistent routines for his student-athletes.

"We wanted our players to know that even though great players were leaving and graduating every year, our tradition would remain, and the next group would keep the winning tradition. ... Never-ending ascension," Gordon recently wrote to *The Accolade* in explaining the reasons behind his slogan.

Such sentiments can be applied to all Lancers. Seniors leave and graduate every year, but Sunny Hills [SH] tradition should remain, too. And the next group — incoming freshmen, rising sophomores through the next juniors — would keep the Lancer traditions alive.

However, some annual SH activities never resurfaced after COVID-19 health and safety protocols were lifted in March of 2022. When our adviser polled the whole staff and asked if anyone cares about past traditions that never returned after March 2020, no one bothered to raise a hand in the air. But upon further discussion into the specific events and venues that are no longer present on the Hills, some started seeing their value and agreed that they should be revived.

Here are some examples that Li reviewed with us:

• **MR. SUNNY HILLS** (18 of the 45 students on staff want to see this return)

Started in March of 1995, this event featured senior boys tapped to compete against each other in a pageant-style atmosphere. The Associated Student Body [ASB] members would

come to the lucky senior's classroom and endow him with a paper crown and a SH gold-colored balloon as a way to officially induct him into the event.

One main reason for its creation was it provided an alternative to homecoming since the latter event only crowns a queen from a group of princesses. With Mr. Sunny Hills, the winner gets the ultimate "king" treatment.

Those who favored its return agreed with the notion of equity — celebrating a senior boy and his accomplishments since homecoming is limited to female titles.

• **HOLIDAY QUAD DECORATIONS** (18 of the 45 students on staff want to see this return)

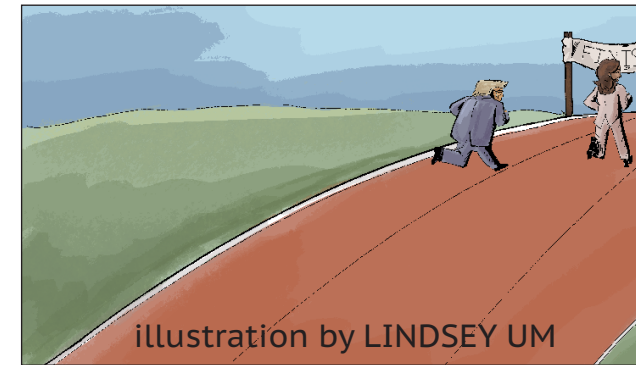
When our adviser was hired to teach here in the 2001-2002 school year, the holiday quad class decorating competition had already been in place. Students from each grade level would spend the fall semester raising money and gathering to figure out how to construct the most appealing holiday-themed exhibit for the rest of the campus to see when they arrived to school — usually the Monday of finals week.

Because of poor participation, the ASB changed it into just its own members coming early morning to school to deck out the halls and various parts of the quad. Those on staff who favored this tradition to return agreed that on the eve of students' final exams, it would benefit them to enjoy some holiday cheer. Although we have Santa visiting and Elf on the Shelf, those don't involve students, so let's deck the halls.

Our adviser brought up additional items, such as whether Lancer Awards night should return to the Fullerton Auditorium next to Fullerton Union High School, but a majority agreed we have moved on from those activities. Yes, tradition never graduates, but some rites should.

The Accolade Editorial Board is made up of the top editors and section editors on the 2024-2025 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).

accolade file photo



## Accolade's staff editorial, debate article too partisan toward the Democratic party

This is not me telling you to support either candidate, but I feel like the way you wrote the "Harris vs. Trump" article is misleading and too partisan to the Democratic candidate: Kamala Harris.

The article highlights what her campaign is offering to schools and its programs rather than other issues she is campaigning and advocating for: immigration and the economy.

It's not deep enough to present why she is a good candidate. In terms of your staff editorial titled, "A PROGRESSIVE FUTURE," I bet the reason eight board members decided not to vote for a candidate is because they were either scared of voting for Donald Trump or were isolated based on their political opinions.

It's best to follow the principles of unbiased reporting and ask the people who support Trump, or even me, and write an article for *The Accolade* that presents what Trump wants to do rather than having an opinionated article on one candidate.

— Eugene Lee, junior

(Editor's note: *The Accolade's Spotlight* editors in fact did reach out to students to be a guest columnist to address the presidential elections.

However, one person whom we asked originally agreed to submit something but later changed his/her mind.

We also reached out via Facebook and Instagram to the Orange County Young Republicans, but no one replied.

This school year the Democrats club disbanded, but we also reached out via Instagram to its former president who didn't reply as well.)

### Reader responses to the Oct. 24 "I'm a Voter" Op-Ed article:

As someone who will be eligible to vote in the next election, I enjoyed Seowon Han's story as it ignited my excitement in being able to fill out my very own ballot.

Given the current political climate of the U.S., the idea that I can voice my opinions through voting to impact my country, despite it being only one vote, made me excited.

I can confidently say that others who read the article also gained a similar inspiration.

— Tatiana Galvez, sophomore

I was deeply moved by the story, "I'm a Voter." Seowon Han's journey to becoming a naturalized U.S. citizen and voter reminded me of how personal and transformative the right to vote can be.

Like Han, I once thought voting was out of reach, but her experience helped me realize how much it means to have a voice in elections.

What struck me the most was her focus on local measures and how even small decisions can have a meaningful impact on our communities; I recall my recent conversation with my parents — my dad, especially — about their voting choices last November.

That was the first time I had shown any interest in civic engagement. I really appreciated my dad's honesty in explaining to me why he voted for the presidential candidate he did based on what was practical — his understanding as to which person would bring about the best business climate to help turn around our economy.

This story reaffirmed for me the

power of voting. It's a privilege I don't take lightly and am excited to participate in when I turn 18.

— Caleb Kang, freshman

### Reader responses to the Oct. 24 "Harris vs. Trump" Impact article:

I learned so much about current events and politics that I lack awareness of, especially since the only political information I get is from social media most of the time.

I gained an overall knowledge of the presidential candidates and their debates through the article, and I also learned about where many of our Sunny Hills students stand in the discussion.

I loved how the writer included quotes about what individuals think about the debate and who they believe will win.

— Kaylynn Park, freshman

Some feedback I will give is to try to make the font a little bigger; the font is hard to read.

— Jenil Kharwa, sophomore

### Reader response to the Oct. 24 "Encouraging Engagement" Impact article:

I enjoyed reading about the poll worker program.

One part I liked about the story was how we were given information on the application process for the program along with a brief overview of what to expect from the training session.

— Kaylee Won, sophomore

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

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