

the newspaper by and about teens

# L.A. youth

LAYOUTH.COM

NOVEMBER 2006



## A day in court

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PHOTO BY VICTORIA IMTANES, 16, FAIRFAX HS

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# About L.A. Youth

## How did L.A. Youth start?

Former teacher Donna Myrow founded the nonprofit teen newspaper in 1988 after the Supreme Court Hazelwood decision, which struck down student press rights. Myrow saw a need for an independent, uncensored forum for youth expression. L.A. Youth is now celebrating its 18th year of publishing.

## How is L.A. Youth doing today?

L.A. Youth now has a readership of 400,000 in Los Angeles County. Hundreds of students have benefited from L.A. Youth's journalism training. Many have graduated from college and have built on their experiences at L.A. Youth to pursue careers in journalism, teaching, research and other fields.

Our Foster Youth Writing Project has brought the stories of teens in foster care to the newspaper. For more info, see [www.layouth.com](http://www.layouth.com).

## How do teens get involved with L.A. Youth?

Teens usually join the staff of L.A. Youth when they read the newspaper and see a notice inviting them to a Newcomer's Orientation. They also get involved through our summer workshop for writers. Sometimes a teacher or parent will encourage them to get involved.

Newcomer's Orientations are held every other month on Saturday mornings. Call for info at (323) 938-9194. Regular staff meetings are held every Saturday from 1 to 3 p.m.

## Where is L.A. Youth distributed?

L.A. Youth is distributed free to teachers at public and private schools throughout Los Angeles County. It can also be picked up for free at many public libraries and agencies that provide services to teens.

## How is L.A. Youth funded?

L.A. Youth is a nonprofit charitable organization funded by grants from foundations and corporations, donations and advertising.

## What's L.A. Youth's mission?

We will provide teens with the highest level of journalism education, civic literacy and job skills. We will strengthen and build our relationships with more teachers to bring relevant issues into the classroom and improve the quality of education. We will reach out to the community to better educate policy makers about teen issues; create a more positive image of teens in the mainstream media; and raise the credibility and awareness of L.A. Youth.

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# L.A. youth

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# mail

These are letters we received about stories in the October issue of L.A. Youth.

## SYMPATHIZING WITH THE COLLEGE FREAK OUT

I really appreciated Gerardo's article "College freak out" because I could relate to so much of what he said. Even though I'm not a senior yet, I've lost motivation just as Gerardo did when he realized that the successful students around him got to where they stood by cheating and valuing their scores over their education.

I'm glad to see that someone who really put his heart into school, yet didn't pull perfect grades or get accepted to Yale, is still successful and happy with his choice of college. Plus he got an impressive scholarship to a UC!

It's really refreshing to see a fellow student realize that our lives aren't about getting the most points, but more about doing what you love and being a positive influence on the people around you.

*Sylvana Insua-Rieger,  
Beverly Hills HS*

## A BOY IN PRISON KNOWS FAMILY IS MOST IMPORTANT

Sitting here locked up thinking about what I did, I feel so nervous I can't breathe. Everyone that was my homie in the street doesn't even worry about me. When I was out there I didn't really care about my

parents but they still came to visit me.

I'm finally realizing that friends ain't s--- to me. When I'm out there banging they say we're family, but now I'm here and all of the homies just disappear.

It feels so messed up when nobody cares for you. But you know what? Your parents will always be the only ones there. So when you get back out don't go to your homies first because when you needed them they weren't even there.

*Name withheld,  
Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall*

## A FORMER DRUG ADDICT GOT A SECOND CHANCE

The article "My second chance" inspired me to tell my friend to get out of his gang. I also told him that it is essential to stay away from drugs. When I told him, he thought about his past, of all the trouble he has been in. He has been doing good and staying away from gangs, and has been throwing his drugs away in the trash. It has been three weeks since he has done any drugs or gotten into trouble. And he has been going to school. I appreciate this article because it made me tell my friend and it changed his life. Now he's into sports and the police have not been going to his house. Thank you very much.

*Lawrence Lehauli,  
Paramount HS*

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Send your letters to L.A. Youth



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# essay contest Reflections on mirrors

1ST PLACE \$50

## My sister's disability taught me that there's more to life than how I look



**Jisu Yoo**  
WILSON MS (GLENDALE)

**D**ogs are man's best friend, likewise, mirrors are a woman's best friend "forever," or maybe not. To some people, mirrors help them look decent; to others, it's a nightmare. Various girls today look in the mirror and say to themselves, "Why can't I be pretty like her?" Or perhaps the famous line all women love to repeat, "Oh my gosh, I am so fat!" I, like most girls, said these thoughts to myself about how imperfect I was in front of the famous "mirror on the wall."

Society and mirrors got me thinking that I needed to say out loud that I thought I was fat and ugly. If I thought I was pretty or normal, I would be considered a conceited brat. My friends would inspect themselves in the beloved mirror constantly, checking to see if they were pretty enough for a certain guy or looked stunning just for the attention. Being the girl who wanted to fit in, I did the same and took quick glances at myself to see if everything was in order. There was so much to fix: from making sure my hair was perfect, to seeing if my clothes showed enough skin, and putting even more lip gloss on my shiny lips. My way

of thinking, however, changed completely because of my beautiful, little baby sister named Natalie.

My baby sister was born with brain damage that impaired her ability to move, which includes activities like walking, sitting up or even talking. I learned more from Natalie than anyone else. She showed me that life was too short to think about being perfectly pretty at school and influenced me to become a neurologist and find a cure for her. Living life isn't about looking constantly at your own reflection and being insecure about your every move. I thought to myself, "I should just be who I am, not think about what

people say about me or what the mirror says I am." I was going to be myself, become someone, and no one could take that away from me.

Now when I look back at who I was before, I feel pathetic. Then I look again and I'm proud that I've been able to come this far because I can turn my eyes to the mirror, at myself, and not have to fix a thing. I am capable of looking into a mirror and seeing a future. I can see myself as a neurologist with my baby sister walking beside me, talking to me about her day.

2ND PLACE \$30

## After years of pain, I am proud to be gay

**Anonymous**

**A**s I walk into the bathroom, I see a person facing me, a young boy whose past is riddled with sorrow, regret and emptiness. He held a secret in his heart, a secret that caused him pain inside. But he would never let go of that secret, afraid that he would be despised, hated, out-of-place and unaccepted.

I remember the same boy sacrificed countless amounts of joy, pretending to be something he was not. I watched him cry at night wishing he could relieve himself of that burden. I watched him lose faith as he asked why it happened

to him. Why couldn't he have someone to talk to?

I remember watching the same boy as he held a blade to his arm and sorrow flowed from the wound. I watched as he did it over and over again. I would look at his face and see tears flow from blank eyes. I saw how those eyes turned to sadness as he cleared the blood and covered the wound he'd created.

I remember watching the same boy as he looked down from the building. I remember him thinking how small his life was compared to the multitude of people down below. He contemplated crossing the rail, a boundary to stop him from flying over those people. But his mom calls

him in at the last minute.

I remember a hand pulling the boy from the depths of shadow and despair. I watched as he was guided down the right path. I saw fear cross his face as he realized that he had to let go of his secret and be free. I watched as he tried to run but gentle hands and arms held him in place. I watched as the weight was finally lifted from his shoulders.

Now I look away from the boy. Now I look away from my reflection, as I think of now and the future and how each day is another day to live as a young, gay man freed from his burdens and the sorrow of his former life.

## ESSAY CONTEST

# How should schools be improved?

3RD PLACE \$20

## The mirror changed from enemy to friend

**Justine Burroughs**  
GARDENA HS

She was my worst enemy. She revealed my horrible reflection. She seemed to always show my imperfections. It seemed like she was always there to humiliate me about the way I looked. She memorized every flaw I contained.

My enemy saw and remembered every degrading moment. She was there when I suffered from nappy, untamable hair. She saw when I had a mound of pimples that took over my face. My bully saw my enormous nose grow larger every day. Although she saw all of my imperfections on the surface, she never saw the real me.

After a few years of letting my enemy determine my self-esteem, I decided to change. I started to love myself since my enemy was trying to keep me down. I began to embrace my big nose, pimply face and nappy hair. I

did this to show my enemy that my reflection didn't bother me as much. My enemy saw that she couldn't damage my spirit, so she began to put emphasis on the real me.

My enemy became my friend due to my change in attitude. She let me see a reflection that I truly admired. I saw my beautiful traits now that she was my friend. She revealed my radiant complexion, bright brown eyes, textured hair and my wonderful gigantic nose. She was no longer someone to run or hide from because she began to show me as the great person I am.

If I had never changed, then my friend, Mirror, would still be my enemy. She only revealed what I let her reveal. Mirror made me see that everything was gorgeous about me, even my pimply face. Thanks to Mirror I have high self-esteem. Mirror taught me that only I, not a person or thing, can determine what is a flaw.

HONORABLE MENTION

## Beautiful, wonderful me

**Anonymous**

Mirrors function as a part of my daily affirmation. Every morning before I go to school, I look into the mirror and I tell myself, "I am beautiful and intelligent. I will not let people put me down because they do not know what a wonderful person I am." I use this routine as a way to boost my confidence.

A few years ago, I was humiliated and alienated by a group of girls who did not like me. I did not do anything to them, but they bullied me because it boosted their confidence. The bullying went on for a long time and when it finally stopped, I refused to accept

myself because I started to believe I was not normal.

My life was completely dark and shattered until I read a magazine article about a girl who dealt with bullies. She suffered the same pain as I did, but she found help. She attended sessions with a therapist who suggested she do daily affirmations. These daily affirmations consisted of looking in the mirror and saying a few positive things about oneself. I have done these daily affirmations for about a year now and it has helped build my confidence tremendously. I no longer feel alone and helpless, but I feel a sense of belonging and strength to overcome anything.

The Los Angeles Unified School District has a new superintendent, David L. Brewer. He wants to improve schools and says his goals are: to focus on low-performing schools, remove "bad teachers," make middle schools better, reduce the number of drop-outs, and help homeless students and foster youth. But he's never been a teacher or run a school district, so we thought he should hear directly from students. Write an essay about your ideas for improving schools. You don't have to attend an LAUSD school to answer this question. Regardless of what school you attend, you've seen what works and what doesn't. Describe something positive about your school—something you think every school should have. Or pick something negative and suggest what you think should be done about this problem. In addition to publishing the winners, L.A. Youth will mail all the essays to the new superintendent.



WIN  
\$50

**Write an essay to L.A. Youth and tell us how to improve schools.**

Essays should be a page or more. Include your name, school, age and telephone number with your essay. The staff of L.A. Youth will read the entries and pick three winners. Your name will be withheld if you request it. **The first-place winner will receive \$50.** The second-place winner will get \$30 and the third-place winner will receive \$20. Winning essays will be printed in our January issue and put on our Web site at [www.layouth.com](http://www.layouth.com).

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# Is Harvard right for me?

## Not necessarily.

By Katherine Lam

17, RAMONA CONVENT (ALHAMBRA)

As a senior, college has been on my mind almost 24/7—yes, even in my dreams. I used to think that Harvard, Yale, and UCLA were the best the world had to offer and that if I went to those colleges, I would be the happiest student ever. I would laugh it off when I read articles saying that students should look beyond the Ivies and other “famous” universities. I thought that Harvard could be right for me because it was at the top and obviously I’d want to attend the best university there was.

My college search started with checking out large universities’ Web sites. All of them said they offered “a great education,” “opportunities,” “world-class faculty.” How could I find the “right” college? I tried Princeton Review’s Counselor-o-matic machine to help me search for schools, but each time I tried it I would get different results. I talked to my friends, my counselor and my cousin. Who knew that there were so many details to consider, like whether to apply “early decision” (which means you have to go if you get in). Would applying early help my chances?

I was still stuck on applying to Yale and all the other big-name schools until five months ago when I met Kev-

in, a Yale alumnus and private college counselor at a college workshop. He tried to push me beyond the well-known universities, shifting my attention to lesser-known colleges that focus on undergraduate education. His advice really helped. I thought about what I liked about high school—small classes, caring faculty, love for learning and numerous discussions. I realized that I wanted the same things in my college experience. As soon as I took off colleges that were on my list solely for fantastic academics and a great reputation, I felt much more comfortable. And anyway, I didn’t want to be completing 15-20 applications, especially for schools that I did not really want to attend.

I had been reading articles that talked about Harvard’s lack of focus on undergraduate education. I believe that Harvard would offer a great education because of its resources, yet was it right for me? In the



end, I figure that college is what I make of it anyway. Going to a nationally-recognized university is not going to make anyone into a successful and caring individual; people are going to thrive in places that are right for them.

Stressing over college applications is normal and I have narrowed down my schools to places where I could see myself being a happy student. It’s also hard in a way because I am very adaptive and I would probably be happy at most places, but I’m including a wide variety of schools, including an Ivy League like Brown and liberal

arts colleges like Claremont McKenna and Swarthmore. My next-door neighbor has probably only heard of Harvard and Yale and not the ones I’m applying to, but who cares? It’s my education and if I rely on U.S. News & World Report to tell me where I will get the best education or others’ opinions about what are good colleges, then I will never be satisfied with my own education.

## Yes.

*This editorial is reprinted with permission from Aspects, the school newspaper of Whitney High School in Cerritos, and reflects the view of its teen staff.*

The following is an actual dialogue between a newspaper staff member and her mother after the mother read Time magazine’s August cover story titled “Who Needs Harvard?”:

“You do. You need Harvard.”

End of discussion.

While it’s common for Whitney High parents to push their kids towards Ivy League schools, kids too realize the push is for a good reason.

Both Time and Newsweek printed issues this summer underscoring the importance of overlooking the Ivies and finding the best match school for students. Both magazines included sections on the “new Ivies,” schools that were of Ivy status but without the name.

At Whitney, we ask our alumni, “What school did you go to?” An answer of a UC or less-known school somewhat gains our interest. We usually just nod and move on to the next alumnus. An answer of “Harvard/Yale/Princeton” instantly perks our ears up and gains our

utmost attention. And it’s just not Whitney students who give interest to Ivy graduates. The rest of society does it as well.

When it comes to finding jobs, critics say that the name of an Ivy school doesn’t make it any easier getting hired. Rather, they say that one’s own work habits and skills get him or her in. While all that is correct, the truth is, the name gets one’s foot into the door. It doesn’t seem like a whole lot, but it really is. Because all one has to do afterwards is just do mediocre-ly to get entirely through the door. On the other hand, without the name, one has to work really really hard just to get a peek at the door.

The article strongly argues that non-Ivy schools can offer just as much as Ivy Leagues: a good education, small class sizes, research opportunities and more personalized education. But there’s a thing they can’t offer: the name. And the name matters a whole lot. After all, Time used “Harvard” on its front cover, in big bold yellow letters, to sell its magazines. Obviously, the name has some significance.

What else? There’s plenty. Ivy league schools have huge endowments. Harvard currently has close to a \$26 billion endowment. \$26,000,000,000. That’s a lot of zeros. UCLA had a mere \$1.2 billion in 2002. More endowments mean that schools can afford to renovate classrooms, dorms, labs, and provide money for re-

search projects. In fact, Harvard has enough money to provide full tuition to all incoming freshmen and still have money left over.

Ivy League graduates also find themselves part of a global network of the best and the brightest. Their success comes from having gone to an Ivy and gained invaluable connections. Harvard alumni include Bill Gates [though he dropped out], actor Matt Damon, cellist Yo-Yo Ma and the princess of Jordan.

Time also included a very short bottom-of-the-page-hope-no-one-will-really-notice article titled “The Ivy League’s X Factor.” This article briefly mentioned two of the most advantageous traits of going to an Ivy: instantaneous social status and confidence.

We admit, non-Ivy schools have much to offer and can be the best match college for many students at Whitney. Students should research about various colleges and try to figure out what they want in their ideal school. What we don’t like is how some faculty members quickly assume that Ivies can’t be the best match for students just because they’re Ivies. Honestly, why can’t those eminent universities be the best match for some of the brightest kids in California?

We are those kids. So now, when people ask us “Who needs Harvard?” it’s fair for us to say, “We do.”

# From the courts of L.A. to the NBA

Three pro basketball players say growing up in Los Angeles can help a sports career



PHOTO BY SAM RUBINROIT, 14, MALIBU HS

Baron Davis, who graduated from Crossroads School in Santa Monica, plays for the Golden State Warriors. He was photographed playing in the "A Midsummer Night's Dream" charity tournament, which he recently took charge of along with Boston Celtics star Paul Pierce.

By Seth Rubinroit

15, MALIBU HS

Over the years, Los Angeles has produced some of the best basketball players in the world. Reggie Miller, Lisa Leslie and countless other superstars all started their careers at L.A.-area high schools.

After speaking with some of L.A.'s best basketball players at the Summer Pro League and "A Midsummer Night's Dream" charity basketball tournament, they said one of the reasons that L.A. is a great sports city is because it provides some of the best competition in the world. Players such as former UCLA star Jelani McCoy would drive up from San Diego on the weekends when he was in high school to "play against better competition," he said. Players also credited L.A.'s stellar high school programs and coaches for their success.

However, a lot of players get distracted by the parties and get into drugs, and stop practicing. Other players get wrapped up in gangs. Former UCLA Bruins star Dijon Thompson warns, "The people you surround yourself with and hang out with is what influences you to do all that stuff. Stay off the streets. Go ahead and get an education, and do something with your life."

Baron Davis and Paul Pierce are two of the greatest basketball players to come out of Los Angeles, and the Lakers have high hopes for rookie Jordan Farmar as well. The players talked about how they did it and gave advice on succeeding as an athlete in L.A.

## BARON DAVIS, WARRIORS

Most professional athletes have to adapt to the shock of becoming millionaires overnight after signing their first contracts, but thanks to a unique opportunity, Golden State Warriors guard Baron Davis was ready.

Davis grew up in a two-bedroom home in South Central with his grandparents. After Davis graduated from elementary school, Crossroads School in Santa Monica offered him a basketball scholarship. At the expensive private school, Davis was surrounded by kids from wealthier families, such as actress Kate Hudson, so he was able to learn about people from rich as well as poor backgrounds.

"It gave me an opportunity as a young man to really see a lot and open my eyes," Davis, now 27 years old, said of growing up in Los Angeles. "To be able to meet so many people in a diverse city and to live in two different worlds helped me to become more of a complete person."

When Davis was growing up, his grandparents kept him on a tight leash, and they made sure he did not hang with the wrong crowd. If he got bad grades, Davis was not allowed to play basketball, so he made sure not to get in trouble.

"Stay focused," said Davis. "Always believe in your dream, and the hardest-working people in L.A. will

make it to the top."

Davis succeeded at Crossroads. His ball handling, which was developed by practicing on an uneven court in his backyard made of grass and cement, impressed scouts and helped lead Crossroads to California's small-school state championship. By the time he graduated high school, Davis was named a McDonald's All-American and the Gatorade player of the year.

When it came time for Davis to choose a college, he decided to stay on the West Coast and go to UCLA. He could have gone to nearly any school he wanted, but he grew up playing pick-up games at UCLA, and decided that is where he wanted to be.

After excelling at UCLA, Davis was ready for the NBA. He was excited because the Los Angeles Clippers held the fourth pick in the draft, and he felt that he could turn around the team he rooted for as a kid, and stay in L.A. to be with his family. However, the Charlotte Hornets, who held the third pick, needed a point guard and drafted Davis. At first, Davis was hesitant about playing on the East Coast, but he adapted. Now in his eighth season, Davis, who was traded to the Golden State Warriors in 2004, has developed into a perennial All-Star player, and one of the best point guards in the league.

Davis hasn't forgotten where he came from. He and Paul Pierce have taken over "A Midsummer Night's Dream," a star-studded weekend when celebrities and NBA all-stars raise funds for charity through a basketball game, streetball tournament and other activities. After hosting the event for 20 years, NBA legend Magic Johnson handed it over to Davis and Pierce this year. It benefits the Baron Davis, Paul Pierce and Magic Johnson foundations. Davis has also run camps for underprivileged kids, sponsored Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) programs, participated in Thanksgiving and Christmas present giveaways, raised funds for the Red Cross to help Hurricane Katrina victims, encouraged blacks to vote in the 2004 presidential election, and visited Navy bases.

"It is very important," Davis said about giving back to his community. "It is the city that raised you, the place you were birthed at. You can always help somebody."

## PAUL PIERCE, CELTICS

Most basketball fans in Los Angeles today root for the Lakers or the Clippers. However, if you grew up in Inglewood as Paul Pierce did when the Lakers played in the Forum before moving to Staples Center, the Lakers were the only team that mattered.

While attending Inglewood High School, Pierce practiced just minutes away from where the Lakers played. Pierce was a starter on the basketball team all four years of high school, and quickly became a star. He credits living so close to the Forum for steering his interest toward basketball.



Inglewood High graduate Paul Pierce of the Boston Celtics, shown here at "A Midsummer Night's Dream," said that Magic Johnson inspired him.

"I've loved basketball from a young age, and growing up near the Forum did help increase my passion for the game," Pierce, now 29 years old, said. "I already loved [the game], but being able to see Magic Johnson and the Lakers play really motivated me to push myself to become the best player I could be."

While Pierce was growing up, Johnson led the Lakers to five NBA championships and was named the NBA MVP three times. Pierce was awed by Johnson's amazing court awareness and passing skills, and learned from Johnson's leadership role. Pierce considers Johnson his greatest influence growing up.

"Growing up in L.A., Magic was every kid's favorite player; everyone wanted to play and be like him," Pierce said. "Being able to grow a friendship with Magic over the years, culminating in taking over his Midsummer Night's Dream charity event [with Baron Davis], has been a great honor."

After graduating from Inglewood High School, both the University of Kansas and UCLA heavily recruited Pierce. Unlike Davis, Pierce decided to leave the West Coast and attend Kansas.

"I liked the University of Kansas because they had a great basketball program, and I wanted to play for Coach Roy Williams," said Pierce. "Coach Williams was, and still is, one of the best coaches in the country, and I felt that playing under him would be great for my progression as a player."

Pierce made the most of his experience at Kansas. He was MVP of the Big 12 Conference Tournament twice, and was named a first-team All-American by The Associated Press.

In 1998, the Boston Celtics got a steal when Paul Pierce slipped to them at the 10th pick. Do you think the Clippers, who drafted Michael Olowokandi with the first pick, and the Dallas Mavericks, who drafted Robert Traylor with the sixth pick, would like to redo that draft?



PHOTOS BY SAM RUBINROIT, 14, MALIBU HS  
Taft High graduate Jordan Farmar said it's a blessing to play for his hometown L.A. Lakers.

While playing with the Celtics, Pierce earned respect for playing tough and playing well in the clutch. Shaquille O'Neal nicknamed Pierce "The Truth" because his game is for real, and the hype surrounding him is not just a myth. Pierce has been an All-Star the last five seasons, and he was the only Celtics player to ever lead the NBA in total points scored in a season.

Along with his involvement with "A Midsummer Night's Dream," Pierce and his Truth Fund have raised more than \$600,000 for charity.

### JORDAN FARMAR, LAKERS

Rookies usually have a tough time making the transition to the professional level, but Jordan Farmar, currently 19 years old, will not have a shortage of advice. Jordan, the Lakers 2006 first round draft pick, is the godson of Eric Davis, a former professional baseball player, and the son of Damon Farmar, who played in the baseball minor leagues.

"He's been very supportive with everything I need," Farmar said about Davis, who was an All-Star with the Cincinnati Reds and played with the Los Angeles Dodgers, among other teams. "He's someone to ask questions to [about figuring] out how to get to the next level."

Farmar was a star basketball player at Taft High School in Woodland Hills. He scored a school record 54 points in a single game and had more than 2,000 points in his two seasons at Taft. As a senior, he led his team to their first Los Angeles City title, was named the Los Angeles Times Player of the Year and was a McDonald's All-American.

"Basketball powerhouses like California, Chicago, New York, Florida, or places like that really help you adapt to the competition," Farmar said, while playing with the Lakers at the Los Angeles Summer Pro League. "L.A. is a great city."

After high school, Farmar decided to go to UCLA and stay in Los Angeles because "I wanted to stay home and

## Other pro players from L.A.

**Gilbert Arenas**, Washington Wizards, attended Grant HS (Van Nuys)

**Tyson Chandler**, New Orleans Hornets, attended Dominguez HS (Compton)

**Jason Collins**, New Jersey Nets, attended Harvard-Westlake School (North Hollywood)

**Jarron Collins**, Utah Jazz, attended Harvard-Westlake School

**Michael Cooper**, former player for L.A. Lakers, attended Pasadena HS

**Amir Johnson**, Detroit Pistons, attended

Dominguez HS

**Steve Kerr**, former player for Chicago Bulls, San Antonio Spurs, attended Palisades HS

**Lisa Leslie**, L.A. Sparks, attended Morningstar HS (Inglewood)

**Ed O'Bannon**, former player for New Jersey Nets and Dallas Mavericks, attended Artesia HS

**Tayshaun Prince**, Detroit Pistons, attended Dominguez HS

—Compiled by Sam Rubinroit, 14, Malibu HS

For a list of more athletes from L.A., see [louth.com](http://louth.com)

be close to my friends and family," he said.

Farmar excelled at UCLA. As a freshman, he was named Pac-10 Freshman of the Year, and started every game. As a sophomore, he shocked the country by leading the Bruins to the national championship game, where they lost to the Florida Gators.

Now that Farmar is going to play for the Lakers, he is the rare person who is able to grow up, and play college and professional ball in the same city.

"We didn't draft him because he was from Los Angeles," said Lakers General Manager Mitch Kupchak. "A lot of times drafting a guy from the city he lives in is terrible because there are a lot of distractions. A lot of times they really should get away from their family, their hometown, and the fans from college. That was more of a factor on not to draft him than it was to draft him. But he is a very unique person."

"It's a great feeling," Farmar said. "Being able to stay home, it's a dream come true. I chose to stay in school at UCLA instead of going somewhere else. At this level, you have no control over that, so to have it work out in my favor is a blessing."

After all these years, Farmar knows there are distractions in L.A. that can hinder your development as an athlete, and he has tried to avoid them.

"[L.A. is] busy," he said. "You don't get a lot of down time, especially as you get older and you get more and more hours in the real world. L.A. is pretty hectic."

Jordan Farmar's father Damon acknowledges the problem distractions pose.

"It's a challenge," his dad said after watching his son play in the Summer Pro League. "There are a lot of distractions and it is a big city, but this is our home. Jordan has done quite well growing up here."

Jordan Farmar's advice for L.A. athletes: "Keep working. Follow your dream, whatever it is, go ahead and do it."

COVER STORY

# A day in court



PHOTOS BY VICTORIA IMTANES, 16, FAIRFAX HS

By **Selina MacLaren**  
17, WEST VALLEY CHRISTIAN JR./SR. HS

**A**fter spending a day as a reporter in juvenile court, I realized that even if teens get in trouble, they can change their lives if they get help. I was surprised to learn that this help could come from the court's punishment. I had thought the harsh punishments were meant to keep "bad teens" off the streets, but it turned out that the court was guiding the teens, and the judge and lawyers did their best to help.

As I walked down the noisy hall of Eastlake Juvenile Court, I knew immediately that the court wouldn't be what I expected. Instead of the wooden benches and echoing gavels I'd imagined, the courtroom was like a busy office. It was small—about the size of a classroom—and full of desks, people dressed in suits, papers and computers. Judge Cynthia Loo was an Asian woman with a desk full of stacked folders but a calm, reassuring face, not an old, stone-faced judge.

My editor Amanda and I took our seats in the chairs for family along the back of the room. A thin boy who looked 14 or 15 years old was slouched in his chair. He was charged with attempted murder for allegedly aiming a gun at police. A defense attorney was trying to convince the judge that this boy hadn't

had a gun pointed at the police, but had instead been running from the police. He said the police had used excessive force when arresting him and falsified the police reports. The two assistant district attorneys were pressing for the case to be sent from juvenile court to adult court due to the seriousness of the charge of attempted murder.

When the hearing was over, Judge Loo invited us into her office to get acquainted. She had given me permission to write this story about her courtroom to help teens understand more about the court process. She explained that the case was serious because the accounts of the boy and the police were very different, and if the boy was tried as an adult, that would mean the possibility of a longer sentence. (The next day she decided to send him to adult court.) After talking for a few more minutes, she had to return to court—30 teens were going to be in her courtroom that day. We took our seats.

## IT WASN'T WHAT I EXPECTED

I had expected teenagers dressed in baggy clothes, yelling at the judge and slamming the table. My ideas of criminals came from TV shows like *COPS*, but I didn't see that violent behavior. Instead, the teens in juvenile court were like any other group of kids—all different. Some shot daring looks at the judge or slouched, but there were also teens

dressed in ties and button-up shirts, sitting up straight with nervous respect, addressing the judge as "ma'am." Even though the teens seemed less violent than I had expected, their charges surprised me. I couldn't believe that a 12-year-old could be charged with a sex offense, or that a gang member would tattoo his gang symbol on the back of his head.

All the teens were Hispanic or black, but that may have been because the court was located just east of downtown. Only two of the cases involved girls. Judge Loo told us that boys are most often charged with gang-related crimes such as weapon and drug possession, stealing cars, robbery and assault, but girls were increasingly committing crimes as well. Girls typically were charged with prostitution and drug possession and tended to get into trouble after they got involved with boys in gangs.

Another thing I had expected to see was trials, and I was a little disappointed when I didn't. Instead, the hearings were about many specific things, like teens being told what they were being charged with or the court closing cases. The hearings were all so different and fast-paced that I was confused sometimes about what was going on. These are some of the cases Judge Loo handled that day (I'm not using the teens' names to protect their identities because they are minors.)

**10:15 a.m.:** a 12-year-old boy charged with a sex offense walked confidently,

but after he sat down, he swung his legs nervously. I stared at the 4-foot-tall boy in disbelief as the defense attorney asked to reschedule the hearing so that a child psychologist could determine if the boy was dangerous. I wished I knew the details. The first thing I thought was that he was a pervert, but then I thought he could have been blamed for some sexual experimentation that was consensual. The hearing lasted only about three minutes—it was the first of a series of brief check-up hearings.

Seeing so many troubled teens, one after the other, was overwhelming. A teen would make me hopeful, but then the next teen would shoot down my hope by showing that they weren't interested in changing their life. The extreme emotions of certain teens stuck in my mind after I left—I remembered the glare of one girl, the eager voice of one boy. Some teens seemed to smile at me, and I thought that they could've been my friends, but then when their charges were read, I was shocked by the things they'd allegedly done. I was used to hearing about teens getting in trouble for chewing gum in class or cussing at the teacher, so sex offenses and armed robberies seemed unreal.

**11:10 a.m.:** Judge Loo left for a break while a young man entered from the left door wearing the blue L.A. County Jail jumpsuit, handcuffed and escorted by the bailiff. While everyone waited for

The boy said, “I recognize my mistakes now.” Judge Loo said, “OK, you need to show you’re serious by your behavior.”

Judge Loo to return, I was surprised that he talked openly about himself to the attorneys. He said he had been on probation since he was 11 but now wanted to change his life. “I’m exhausted of this,” he said. “I want to go to SMC [Santa Monica College], try to do something with myself before it’s too late.”

When Judge Loo returned, the prosecuting attorneys said that he had shown an effort to change. He pleaded guilty to a drug charge, was granted three years of probation and had to participate in a drug program. He left the courtroom and the district attorney said, “He sounds like he wants to do the right thing. But he’s got a drug addiction.” I wondered how much hope there was for this young man.

**11:45 a.m.:** Before the next teen came in, Judge Loo talked to the attorneys about where to send the girl because she had been acting up at Dorothy Kirby Center, one of 19 juvenile detention camps in Los Angeles County. They talked about sending her to a stricter camp. Loo considered the girl’s report from Central Juvenile Hall, where she’d been sent after getting in trouble at Kirby, and a letter written by the girl’s mom.

The girl had broken windows at Dorothy Kirby, but the probation officer said she had been doing well recently in juvenile hall. Judge Loo looked sternly at the girl, who was slumped in her chair and looking angry, and said that although the girl said she wanted to return to Kirby, she wasn’t acting like it. The mother wanted the girl to go back to Kirby where counseling was provided because “at camp you’re not going to get that nurturing environment.” The mother admitted that her daughter was a “tough cookie,” but also assured that her daughter was taught to never give up, and would show the same persistence in improving herself. It was difficult for Judge Loo to decide because, like all of her cases, she didn’t get much time to spend with her. Finally, Judge Loo sent the girl back to Kirby.

At lunch she told us that the mom’s speech and letter made a positive difference in the ruling. “I try to be in line with

the parent,” she said. I felt bad for the teens whose parents were not involved in their lives or didn’t seem to understand what was happening. I thought that taking parents into consideration could be an unfair advantage to some teens. Since this girl didn’t seem to care about where she went, I doubted she’d make much effort to improve.

At lunch I also learned that much of what happens in court was common sense. It benefits teenagers to let their attorneys speak for them because often teens will incriminate themselves without knowing it. In one case, a girl was being tried for prostitution and she blurted out, “I didn’t charge him \$40! I only charged \$20!” leaving no doubt about her guilt.

**1:45 p.m.:** When a young man wearing a jail jumpsuit walked in, his grandmother covered her mouth with her hand and cried silently. The goateed grandson had initials, which I assumed was a gang reference, tattooed on the back of his bald head. In the past, he had been charged with vandalism, petty theft and marijuana possession. The current charge was more serious—using a gun in a robbery. He pleaded guilty to robbery and in exchange, the gun charge was dropped.

Since he was now 18, he was too old for camp. He was eligible for the California Youth Authority (CYA), where the most serious juvenile criminals are sent and can be held until they are 25.

### DISTRUST OF THE SYSTEM

But when the judge asked the grandfather if he had any questions, he demanded that his grandson be sent to an adult prison instead of the California Youth Authority. The defense attorney said he did not support the grandfather’s opinion. The young man sat expressionless as his grandfather argued that “they play too many games” in the CYA, meaning that young men are sometimes injured or killed by other inmates. Everyone had become silent with surprise, but Judge Loo stayed calm. Judge Loo reassured him that



the CYA has become safer recently, then sent the young man to the CYA until he was 22. This case showed that people don’t understand or trust the court system. I felt for the grandfather because he didn’t seem to know what was going on. It was frustrating to see that the court couldn’t spend more time explaining the decision to him.

**3 p.m.:** Another confused and frustrated parent. A 17-year-old boy was charged with vandalism, gun possession and being in a gang. He agreed to plead guilty to vandalism and have the other charges dropped in exchange for not going to trial. The mother interrupted, explaining that he was going to college in the fall, and she didn’t want him to be sent to camp for six months. She hadn’t had a chance to talk with him, and she didn’t know what he wanted to do. Judge Loo pointed out that since this was his third arrest, camp was a fairly lenient punishment, and if he went to trial and evidence proved he had a gun, he would be locked up for three years. The mom began to calm down.

After the hearing, I went outside and talked to the mom. The mom was reassured about the camp because the probation officer had come out and explained it to her, but she still thought that parents deserve to know more about what was going on in their children’s cases.

**3:50 p.m.:** A young man came in with chains around his waist, handcuffed in front of his body. He had been found guilty twice before for vandalism, and although he had done well in camp, he returned to his gang after being released and was arrested again for crossing out tagging from another gang. Judge Loo gave him six months in camp. He had submitted a hand-written letter to Judge

Loo, who read it and said she was impressed with how heartfelt it was. He asked if he could have counseling after he got out of camp. “The problem was my gang affiliation,” he said. “I realize now that’s not my future. I recognize my mistakes now.” Judge Loo said, “OK, you need to show you’re serious by your behavior.” The boy said, “I don’t mind the time, I just want to get help. I really want to change, not just for myself, for my mother, too.”

The boy had accepted his punishment and wanted to change his life by taking advantage of the what the court required, like counseling. He was the perfect example of what the court tries to achieve through punishment.

### TEENS CAN CHANGE

Judge Loo told me that juvenile court is about rehabilitation and hope rather than punishment. I agreed. There are so many places for teenagers to go—camp, Kirby or home on probation. I saw that the court can change people because one of the teens that day had his case closed and was going to go to college. In my opinion, that is proof that the court tries to help teens turn their lives around instead of just punishing them, because the court determines how many rules the teen needs and where he or she can get help. However, no matter how much the court tries to help, teens need an involved family, supportive friends and hope for their future.

One day in one court isn’t enough for me to understand the whole court system, but by the time we left, I had learned a lot about the mercy a judge can have. Judge Loo wasn’t only fair; she was respectful, and she wanted to help teenagers live meaningful lives.

# SCARY AND CONFUSING

## Teens who've been there tell what juvenile court is really like

**W**e asked youth who are serving time at a detention facility in the San Fernando Valley about their first time in juvenile court. Their facility—also called a “placement”—is more strict than house arrest but not as strict as juvenile camp or the California Youth Authority, which is youth prison. We are publishing the comments without names to protect the youths’ identities.

### I didn't get treated with respect

**By Name withheld,**  
A 15-YEAR-OLD MALE WHO WAS 11 THE FIRST TIME HE WENT TO COURT.

**What did you expect it to be like before you got there?** I was nervous and scared. It was nothing like those court shows. You feel like no one has respect for who you are. I expected it to be very quiet, but it was smaller, noisy and crowded. A lot of people talking about who knows what, like that feeling you get when someone is talking behind your back.

**What was confusing to you about the experience?** They're calling out numbers, case loads and names, talking about something you don't even know about and telling each other, “What should we do with this juvenile?”

**What was intimidating or scary?** The scariest thing is when you see parents go in with their child and come out with no child and seeing them cry. It's very hard because you never know what will happen to you.

**How did you feel about the experience? Were you**



ILLUSTRATION BY ALIA  
AIDYRALIEVA, L.A. YOUTH ARCHIVES

**treated fairly?** I got treated unfairly. I didn't get a chance to speak or say anything. They didn't even know who or what kind of person I was to be sentencing me anywhere. I felt like I didn't get respect from them, but at the same time you got to look at it this way: you committed a crime so now you do the time and you get treated like you treated the law.

**If you could give advice to a teen who was going to court for the first time, what would you say?** Stop, think and express before you even commit a crime because believe me, going to the halls [Juvenile Hall] is nothing to be proud of.

**How did this affect you and your family?** It affects your family knowing that you're hurting them. And little by little you're starting to lose their relationships, their love and support.

**Do you think the juvenile justice system is fair and helps rehabilitate youth?** Being locked up six times, I didn't really understand that I was putting my society in danger. But now I realize that I want to change for my loved ones. I think that the juvenile justice system helps you at some point. If you're looking for help you will find it, maybe not now but later down the road.

## Will you be locked up if you get arrested? It depends.

(information based on interviews with attorneys and judges)

### HOW YOU ENTER THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

If you get in trouble with law enforcement, including police, sheriff's, school police, a security guard or other law enforcement agents, that's usually how you end up in the juvenile justice system. You can be stopped and questioned if law enforcement has a “reasonable suspicion” that you did something wrong. They can take you to the police station for temporary detention. If you're not released then you could be arrested if they have “probable cause”—evidence that shows you did something wrong. If your crime was serious, law enforcement

may “seek a petition,” which means they file charges. Your case will be assigned to a probation officer.

### IF YOU ARE ASSIGNED A PROBATION OFFICER

Your probation officer could recommend “informal probation,” or send your case to the D.A. (district attorney). You may be locked up or not, depending on whether you are assessed as a danger to yourself or the community. If you are “detained,” you will be in Juvenile Hall. There's no bail for juveniles.

Even though charges have been filed, the Probation Department may put you

on informal probation and release you to the custody of your parents, if you are not a danger to yourself or the community. You may be required to see a probation officer, go to school, get tutoring or go to counseling. You may be required to go through a drug rehab program. Your parents might have to take parenting classes to teach them how to control you, or your family may be referred to other services. Your case will not be sent to the district attorney.

If your parents are neglecting or abusing you, you may be put in a group home or with a foster family.

# I got a second chance

## By Name withheld,

A 17-YEAR-OLD MALE WHO WAS 15 THE FIRST TIME HE WENT TO COURT IN PASADENA.

### What did you expect it to be like before you got there?

I was hoping the judge would let me go, but if he didn't I was worried about him giving me a harsh consequence. I honestly thought I would just get a ticket and they would let me go and I would have to pay a fine. I got house arrest and probation with a gang file, meaning I was on file as a gang member.

### What was confusing to you about the experience?

My first time going to court I didn't know nothing. Like the D.A. [district attorney], I thought, why is he trying to give me a harsh consequence? Why is this guy going against me?

**What was intimidating or scary?** In the holding tank people were like, "Where you from?" [what gang are you in?] It was scary. I told them I was from nowhere.

**How did you feel about the experience? Were you treated fairly?** Yes. All my other friends their first time got six to nine months in a placement or camp.

**If you could give advice to a teen who was going to court for the first time, what would you say?** Tell the truth. Expect the worst and hope for the best.

**How did this affect you and your family?** It was difficult for me to follow new [probation] rules, like not being able to hang out with my homies, not being able to go outside or even step on my porch. I was also getting tested for drugs and it was impossible for me to stop using drugs overnight, so I was continuously testing positive and going back and forth between jail and house arrest. Also, my mom being worried. She has cancer, high blood pressure and takes seizure medicine. I was arrested six times. It raised her blood pressure. I felt like I was the worst child in the world.

**Do you think the juvenile justice system is fair and helps rehabilitate youth?** Well I can only speak for myself, so for me, of course. I thank GOD for giving me six chances. The court saw something in me, that I can change and be a better person. They gave me so many chances, hoping I would change. If they would have sent me to camp or Youth Authority, I'd be doing the same thing when I got out.

There's more therapy and help here. Here I started to realize what life is about. It's not about constantly making mistakes. It's about making mistakes and learning from them. I want to conquer my dreams. I've been here 10 months. I told them I wanted to stay because I wanted to get my diploma. Me on the outs [not locked up], I wouldn't have done that.

# I couldn't speak for myself

## By Name withheld,

A 15-YEAR-OLD MALE WHO WAS 14 THE FIRST TIME HE WENT TO COURT IN OXNARD IN VENTURA COUNTY.

### What did you expect it to be like before you got there?

I was really scared going to court because I didn't want anything bad to happen to me. I was expecting something really different. I thought I wasn't going to get in trouble at all or that I was going to get house arrest.

**What was the outcome?** I was in juvenile hall for two weeks and at the end I got picked up to go to placement.

**How did you feel about the experience? Were you treated fairly?** I felt scared, but at the same time I was mad because I couldn't speak up for myself.

**If you could give advice to a teen who was going to court for the first time, what would you say?** To be strong and don't give up, because you could make wrong decisions.

**How did this affect you and your family?** I was away from home and everything that I had. It also affected my family because they have to pay the consequences for my actions.

**Do you think the juvenile justice system is fair and helps rehabilitate youth?** I think it is kind of fair, but on the other hand it is not. They should let kids speak up for themselves because the system doesn't truly know the kid. Kids make bad choices but that's not who they really are.

# I feared getting sent away

## By Name withheld,

A 17-YEAR-OLD MALE WHO WAS 15 THE FIRST TIME HE WENT TO COURT IN POMONA.

### What did you expect it to be like before you got there?

I was thinking it would be like the way it was on TV and in the movies. I expected a large courtroom with a lot of people. But it wasn't how I expected it to be.

**What was confusing to you about the experience?** The most confusing thing was when the judge speaks in numbers, like case numbers, department numbers, and speaks with words I can't understand.

**What was intimidating or scary?** The scary part was I wasn't sure what case I had [what charges he faced]. They told me I had a drug sales charge. I was nervous because everybody in court was staring at me. My attorney told me if I lost my case I could go to California Youth Authority for a couple years.

**What was the outcome?** I got nine months at camp. I felt better knowing I didn't get years in California Youth Authority.

## THE D.A. BRINGS THE CASE AGAINST YOU

The district attorney's office (the D.A.) files charges against people who break the law. There are special ones who deal with minors (people who are under 18). A case could be dismissed at this point, if the D.A. does not believe there is enough evidence to go forward, or you may be given probation and supervised by your probation officer.

If your crime was extremely serious, you can be tried as an adult. Examples of such crimes are murder, arson, robbery with a deadly weapon, rape and carjacking.

## MOST TEENS ARE TRIED AS JUVENILES

The district attorney may decide to take your case to Juvenile Court. You can hire your own lawyer, or the court will assign you a lawyer from the public defender's office.

## YOU MAY WAIT FOR TRIAL IN JUVENILE HALL

If you are judged dangerous, you will be kept locked up in Juvenile Hall while awaiting trial or "adjudication." If not, you'll be sent home until your trial.

## ARRAIGNMENT (YOUR CHARGES)

At your "arraignment," you will be told the charges against you and you have to admit the charge or deny it. If you admit the charges, the judge will follow the recommendation of your probation officer. If you deny the charges, the district attorney or prosecutor must prove that you did it.

## ADJUDICATION (DID YOU DO IT?)

In juvenile court, a judge will hear your case without a jury. At your adjudication (trial), if you are found not guilty, you will be released. The arrest and charges still go on your record, though.

If you are found guilty by the judge, you will be sentenced. Your "disposition," or sentence, may include any of the following: You may be sent home on probation, placed in a group facility (not your home), sent to drug rehabilitation or sent to juvenile camp for three months to a year. More serious offenders are placed in the California Youth Authority, which accepts youth up to 25 years old. The decision goes on your record.

## APPEALS

To appeal a decision, your lawyer must convince the judge that the decision was wrong.



PHOTO BY LIBBY HARTIGAN, MANAGING EDITOR

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**E-MAIL [editor@layouth.com](mailto:editor@layouth.com)**

# My mom is amazing

## She helps me be my best and is fun to hang out with, too

**By Nattalie Tehrani**  
16, SOUTH HS (TORRANCE)

**W**henever I go to a kickback to hang out with my friends, I am the only sober one. My friends say I should go wild once in a while but I don't because of my mom. Showing her that I can be responsible is important to me. I feel I owe her for everything she's done for me. She has helped me figure out what I want to do with my life, what I enjoy doing and what my goals are. I want to make her proud, which makes me work harder. This may sound surprising, but I actually feel lucky to have my mom.

Now, while it would be nice if my relationship with my mother was happy and peaceful 24/7, it's not. Like every mother and daughter, we argue. She can be brutally honest. If she hates what I'm wearing, she will nag me until I change. Honestly though, our arguing only brings us closer. We blow off steam, yell a little and then we forgive each other. That's one reason why I feel close to my mom. She gets angry but she doesn't hold a grudge.

I didn't always realize how awesome my mom was. When I was younger she was just "Mom." But looking back, I wonder how she had all that energy. Until I was 14, she'd get up at six in the morning on Saturdays to take me to swim meets. She drove me to my basketball games and picked me up after Junior Life Guards. She has driven me to commercial, TV and movie auditions since I was 4 and when I booked a job she had to hang around all day until I was done.

In swimming, she'd be the first person to cheer and say "good job," even when I was last. I loved swimming, but I never won trophies or medals. By the time I was 12, it was disappointing to lose so much. When I told my mom that I wanted to quit, she said, "Give it another try, all it takes is practice. But if you find your heart really isn't in it, then quit." I was motivated to keep swimming. That summer I tried out for Junior Life Guards and I passed. If I had quit swimming, I probably would not have made it. My mom's support taught me to stick to my goals.

### **SHE ENCOURAGED ME TO PURSUE WRITING**

But the best thing she did was help me discover that I want to be a writer. In seventh grade she read my essay about *The Diary of Anne Frank*. She said, "Wow, this is really good, you really have a talent in writing. If you enjoy it, you should definitely pursue it." From then on I started writing and reading more. I wrote free verse poetry about friends and family or beautiful scenery like the ocean. I also wrote short stories in this little brown notebook. Around the end of eighth grade I told my mom how much I enjoyed writing. A couple days later she told me she had Googled "teen journalism" and found out about a teen newspaper called *L.A. Youth*. (I call my mom "Google Queen" because she finds programs that I



PHOTO BY NATTALIE TEHRANI, 16, SOUTH HS

Nattalie (left) enjoys hanging out with her mom.

could never find if I surfed the Web for hours.)

Being a part of *L.A. Youth* got me interested in journalism. In March I wanted to apply for a place on my school newspaper staff, but the chance of getting picked seemed unlikely because a lot of people had applied. I told my mom and her advice was to try anyway. So I applied and became the newest member of my school's paper, *The Sword and Shield*.

Don't get me wrong, my mom's not pressuring me to work and study 24 hours a day. She does a lot of silly things for me and my sister. She'll take my friends and I driving around the beach for hours while we sing our hearts out to songs by The Used, My Chemical Romance, the Bee Gees and Donna Summer.

Last June, I got her to wake up at 4 a.m. to take my friend and I to the Disneyland premiere of *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*. She waited with us for 17 hours so we could see Johnny Depp, my favorite actor. Thanks to my mom driving me to the sets where Johnny Depp is filming and to premieres, I have met him five times. She calls me obsessed but I think she enjoys going with us. I love when me and my mom hang out. It's almost as if she's like a teen, so my friends and I love having her around.

I trust my mom with tough decisions because she's truthful. At the beginning of ninth grade I was going to my first party, and I was nervous about what others would think of me since I was going to be the only one not drinking. On the way to the party I told my mom and she said, "Sometimes your friends are going to

do things that you don't want to do. You know that it's against your better judgment to go along and do the same stuff." It was not a lecture, but her way of telling me she trusts me. That's my biggest reason for not doing anything dumb. She told me about parties she went to when she was in college. There were people who did drugs and drank but she always stayed away from it. She said, "There are always going to be people who do that stuff, but the important thing is that you know that it's not right and you have the strength and smarts to stay away from it."

### **IT'S EASIER TO RESIST PEER PRESSURE**

Now I'm more comfortable with my decision to not drink until I'm older. At school, if someone asks me if I'm "partying" this weekend, I'll say, "Nah, I'm a complete straight edge." I have met a few people this year who aren't into the party scene, so that also makes it easier.

I was always appreciative of all the things my mom did for me, and the way she balanced her job as a Macy's vendor (she sets up the display cases) and running around after us at the same time. But getting older made me realize what a strong, intelligent and caring woman she is. Nowadays I notice more of the little things that my mom does for me every day and I make sure she knows that I appreciate her by saying thank you. I hope that someday I can be as strong and smart as she is. She is more than my mother, she is my hero.

### **Nattalie's advice on how to strengthen your bond with your parents:**

**Be honest.** Tell them what's on your mind. The more open you are, the stronger your relationship will be.

**Talk things out.** When you're angry or mad at each other, sit down and talk it all out. Handle arguments maturely and they'll treat you like an adult.

**Set some time aside for them.** Take a day and just hang out with your mom or dad. You'll actually have fun and you will grow closer.

**Respect them.** If you talk to them respectfully, they'll treat you with respect. Talking back or being rude will only get you in trouble.



PHOTO BY ERIC AU (ALISON'S DAD)

Chris (center) posed with his friends (from left) Casey Yin, Annie Tung, Jessel Villegas, Alison Au, Liane Quon and Andy Liu before they enjoyed the steak, sautéed peppers and pasta they made themselves.

# What's for dinner?

## One crazy and fun evening, Chris taught his friends to cook

By **Chris Lee**  
16, WALNUT HS

**A**fter finishing the grueling week of AP testing, my friend, Alison, asked if I would teach her how to cook as a celebration.

"Yeah sure, anytime," I replied, not taking her seriously.

Then she asked if I would teach four other friends how to cook, too. She called it a "cooking party." I gave her a HA!-you-gotta-be-joking look. Then she told me it would be tomorrow, after school. How was I supposed to teach people how to cook on such short notice? Cooking with five girls who I don't normally hang out with wasn't my idea of a party. It sounded like a night of awkwardness. But Alison claimed that I was an expert chef and that I had to come. So I dragged my friend Andy for support.

Somehow the word had leaked out to the underground network of Asian moms that I liked to cook—and was an expert. I should have expected this since I grew up with Alison, and our moms were good friends.

The next day at Alison's house, I felt nervous. When we entered the kitchen to start cooking, the girls stared

at me as if I knew the answer to an impossible question. Giggles erupted suddenly, setting the mood for the rest of the night. I had brought steaks, bell peppers and balsamic vinegar rather than plan a particular menu. Alison had broccoli in the fridge and pasta in the pantry, but black pepper, basil or spice rubs were nowhere to be found.

I assigned each person a task: Andy needed to get the pasta and sauce going; Alison prepped the broccoli; Annie and Jessel sliced the bell peppers; while Liane was busy taking pictures. Everyone worked around the kitchen island while I moved around helping my hesitant friends, by setting the proper pans and pots on the stove to preheat, and making sure the steaks were properly seasoned since they could easily be undercooked or worse, overcooked. I had no intention of making beef jerky. Knowing what perfectly cooked meat looks and feels like took me the longest time to master, and by no means was I letting novices attempt it.

The steaks were ready to cook and I put one into a pan to sear and noticed that the water in the pasta pot wasn't boiling. I told Andy to watch the pot and salt it.

"How much salt do I put?" he asked.

"Add, until I say stop, and find some herbs for the sauce," I replied.

"Aren't there herbs in there already?" asked Andy, giving me a perplexed look. Before I could answer, he sprinkled a pinch of salt into the pot.

I laughed, "Dude, you're not the dust fairy. Add more salt."

The girls laughed, too.

Right after, Alison's mom entered the kitchen and saved me some grief by pointing to a rosemary bush outside, which would have to do.

The rosemary bush was covered with dust and cobwebs. I looked at Alison's mom sympathetically and said that I should have brought some herbs from my herb garden. Surprised that I even had a garden, she wanted to know more about it. Fresh herbs are ridiculously expensive, so I decided to grow my own. Convincing my mom to get rid of her barren lemon tree and dead roses in a crusty corner in the backyard was not difficult. I started with oregano, which requires little maintenance and grows like weeds. Then I bought what sounded tasty—basil, tarragon, sage, chives, mint, chili plants, and a few tomato plants—from Home Depot. Ever since, the garden has accented my cooking.

### MY FRIENDS WERE CLUELESS

I came back inside with some dirty, olive-colored rosemary and gave it to Liane to wash. I glanced over to the sink and saw that Alison had been dipping the whole broccoli head in and out of the water for the past five minutes. I had no idea what she was doing, so I approached her.

"Can we eat the stalk?" Alison asked.

Apparently, she had been waiting for me to show her how to slice the broccoli into edible bites. I joked about her "washing" method, and we laughed her embarrassment away. I found a paring knife and showed her how to remove the broccoli trees by cutting at the end of the little trees. I grabbed a vegetable peeler and ran it down parts of the stalk that looked tough and then handed the knife and peeler back to her.

I suddenly noticed the faint odor of vinegar and heard a sizzling sound, which meant I needed to flip the steak. Luckily it had caramelized perfectly to a leathery brown crust. At that moment, I realized that cooking in a group

was harder than cooking by myself. I looked around and saw everyone lagging behind. Andy stood there like a block of wood; Alison held half the broccoli head; Liane decided to contribute by gazing at the broccoli head; Jessel and Annie had prepared only one of the eight bell peppers. They looked hopeless.

Cooking requires order, meaning the pan needs to preheat while you prep the meat, and while the meat is cooking, you start preparing other things because different foods require precise amounts of time and specific ways to cook. Remembering how difficult it was for me to cook things when I first began, I patiently showed Jessel and Annie how to prep the bell peppers: cut off the top stem, remove the seeds, slice down a side to lay the bell pepper flat, and slice it into strips.

However, I struggled to re-create the magic and ease of the Food Network cooking shows during the party. The bell peppers were diced into green, yellow, and red confetti instead of sliced into thin strips as I told them. The pasta still needed draining and the pot of tomato sauce bubbled over. Alison's dad came home from work, took a sniff, and told us that we better make something good because he was getting hungry.

Surveying the pots and pans of food, he asked how I became an expert chef. I laughed. I told him that watching chefs on the Food Network had helped me the most: caramelizing onions by sautéing them in low heat, searing a swordfish steak in a hot pan or slowly braising lamb chops with velvety wine. By watching chefs use these strange cooking methods, I understood when, how and why to use them. Cooking can't be learned solely through recipe books; instead, cooking must be seen and then, afterwards, done. The Food Network Web site had helpful video clips. I wished they had a video on teaching hopeless friends how to cook.

Two hours later, we finished cooking and had prepared balsamic glazed steaks (seared in a pan and finished in the oven to retain the juices), angel hair pasta in a marinara sauce with a delicate aroma of rosemary and sautéed bell peppers, and broccoli in garlic. At a white tablecloth restaurant, they could easily charge \$16 per plate. Other than a fancy name and intricate plating, we did just as well—even Alison's dad was impressed. The cluttered kitchen yearned for cleaning, but clean-up did not give us a headache since we all helped, unlike at home where my sister does the dishes after I cook.



PHOTOS BY CHARLENE LEE, 13, WALNUT HS

## Chris' pasta recipe



1. Fill 3/4 of a large pot with water. This way, the water won't bubble over and the pasta won't clump and cook unevenly. Add a teaspoon of salt for taste.

2. Wait until the water comes to a rolling boil (the bubbles make the water look like it's rolling around) and add the pasta. Stir to prevent it from sticking to the pot. Cook for the recommended time (usually 8-12 minutes). Correctly cooked pasta should be slightly chewy (in Italian they call this *al dente*).



3. Drain the pasta in a colander: For this recipe, I rinsed the pasta in cold water to remove excess starch, which comes from the pasta and can affect the consistency of the sauce.

4. Heat up your favorite marinara (tomato) sauce in a pot over medium heat until it's barely steaming. Stir constantly so that the sauce won't splatter or burn. Add some dried red chili peppers if you like it spicy.



5. To give the sauce a little more flavor, slice cherry tomatoes in half and sprinkle lightly with oil, salt and pepper. Roast in an oven or toaster oven for 7 minutes or until the skin becomes wrinkled at 350 degrees.

6. To chop fresh basil, use this technique to keep from cutting yourself: hold the knife in a comfortable grip, keep fingers tucked in, rest the tip of your knife on the cutting board, and guide the blade with your knuckles as you slide the basil under the blade.

7. Put the pasta on a plate and cover it with sauce. Garnish with oven-roasted tomatoes, basil and grated parmesan cheese.

# How I learned to cook

By Chris Lee  
16, WALNUT HS

My love for cooking grew out of my love for food. I remember waking up to the scent of my grandmother's scrambled eggs freckled with onions and tomatoes or some noodles and wonderfully marinated (and tender!) pieces of flank steak soaked in beef broth. Sometimes after my mom brought us home from school the faint smell of meat, shitake mushrooms, vegetables and sesame oil greeted me, meaning my grandma had made fresh dumplings. A few years ago, however, her cholesterol skyrocketed, and she has refused to cook with oil anymore, making everything taste like paper.

On the days that my exhausted mom refused to cook dinner, my dad stepped in with his only signature Chinese dish—steamed chicken with rice wine. It wasn't a surprise that my sister and I got sick of all the fried rice, noodles and Chinese restaurants. Because I could no longer stomach my dad's or grandma's food, I needed to start cooking for myself.

## FROM EGGS TO GOURMET DISHES

I started to cook from the basics. I tried my own version of eggs for breakfast, and the next week I, being overly bold, tried instant-mix pancakes and an omelet. But my pancakes burned and stuck to the stainless steel pan, and my omelet turned into scrambled mush. I didn't know that pancakes are supposed to be cooked in a non-stick or cast-iron pan on low heat, or that milk needed to be added to the omelet mix. For me, failure became an encouragement to cook better.

I tried to follow new recipes I found or replicate dishes I saw on the Food Network, which features cooking shows, shows about fun food facts and food competitions. Watching the celebrity chefs on their cooking shows not only introduced me to new dishes but also totally new cuisine. On 30 Minute Meals, Rachael Ray showed how to cook easy, yet delicious, meals like Cajun Pork Burgers. She can squeeze a salad and/or appetizer, the main course and a dessert into 30 minutes of cooking. This is possible only if different foods are cooked and carefully monitored at the same time. It seemed impossible to cook any meal within that time period, but through practice and experience, I learned how to make quick meals without any problems.

My family, not surprisingly, really liked the idea that I cooked. When my mom runs out of ideas for dishes, she asks me how she should cook the chicken. My lazy sister, whose hunger is incessant, asks what I am going to cook for her. During the weekends, my parents, fully aware that I am not planning to cook, intentionally ask what I need from the supermarket. My mom has even asked me to cook for her dinner parties. Nothing was more stressful than preparing a 20-pound turkey for my extended family for Thanksgiving, but it turned out better than any turkey we'd eaten before.

# L.A. youth ART CONTEST

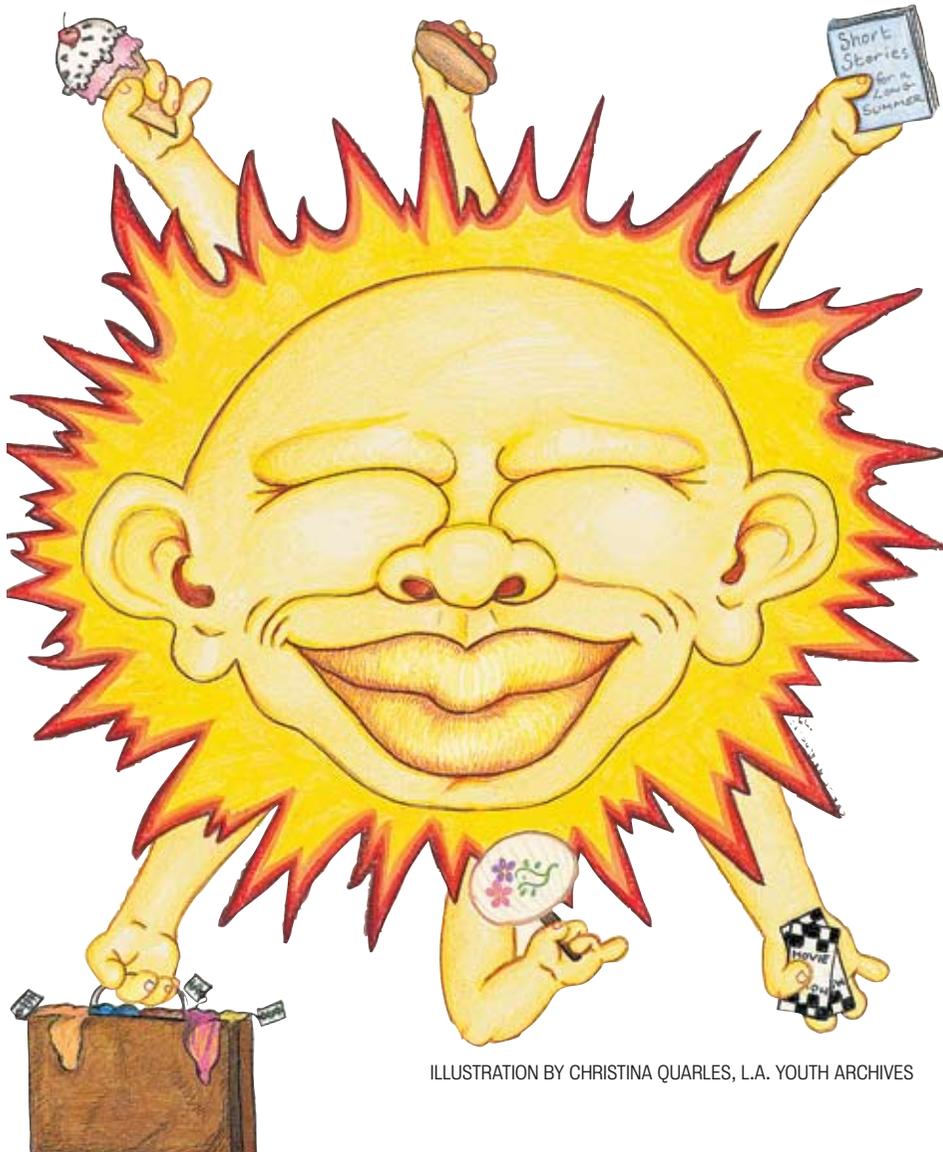


ILLUSTRATION BY CHRISTINA QUARLES, L.A. YOUTH ARCHIVES

## LIGHT OF MY LIFE

This year's art contest is inspired by light—daylight, nightlight, lamplight or any light. Perhaps the sun makes you think of sunny Southern California, the sunshine of your life, or what you love about a beautiful day. What is on the sunny side of your mind? What lights up your life?

### RULES

- ❑ The contest entry must be the original artwork of a Los Angeles-area youth ages 13 to 19.
- ❑ The work may be done in any medium, including acrylics, oils, charcoal, pencil, pen, watercolor, collage, multimedia, photography or sculpture. The dimensions should be 8 1/2" by 11". Three-dimensional artwork should include a photograph of the artwork.
- ❑ Each artist may submit only one entry.
- ❑ The artist's name, age, address and phone number should be indicated on the back of the artwork. If the artist is in school, the institution's name should be included. If the artwork was created as an assigned project in a classroom, the teacher's name should be listed. Artwork will be returned if a return address is provided.

1ST PLACE

**\$75**

2nd

3rd &

PLACE

**\$50**

The teen staff of L.A. Youth will select a first-, second- and third-place winner as well as some honorable mentions. The first-place winner and his or her teacher will each receive \$75. Second- and third-place winning students and teachers will each receive \$50. Winners and honorable mentions will be published in the May-June 2007 issue of L.A. Youth newspaper.

**Questions?** Contact (323) 938-9194 or [editor@layouth.com](mailto:editor@layouth.com).

**DEADLINE:  
MARCH 31, 2007**

# mail

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

The article "My second chance" really hit home for me because I know many friends who are in the same situation as the writer. They do drugs, screw around in school and get into trouble with the cops. Joel Muñoz gives hope not only for my friends, but troubled teens around the world. His positive attitude and willingness to change made a big difference in his life. Hopefully others will follow his example and positively change their lives, too.

Since the media focus only on the negative aspects of teens, it's nice to finally read about something more positive.

*Esther Lee, Kurt T. Shery HS  
(Torrance)*

I really liked this article because the writer talked about all the struggles he went through. But at the end he did better and stopped doing drugs. This story inspired me to do better and not just play around in class and to do all of the things my teacher tells me to do. I hope this story inspired others not to mess around in class and to listen to your teachers. They know more than you do.

*Josh Bonales, Hutchinson MS  
(La Mirada)*

## A BIRACIAL GIRL SAYS PEOPLE SHOULDN'T BE JUDGED BASED ON RACE

The article "No more labels for me" was so touching to me because I'm half black and half white. I have been teased all my life, but now I know how to deal with putdowns. I think everyone should read this article so that they will know how people who are mixed with different races feel.

I appreciate your writing this article. For a long time I thought I was alone with my struggles. Thanks for helping me understand that I'm not alone.

*Ariel James, Paramount HS*

I would like to thank the author for this article. I am also biracial and I have gone through almost the same exact instances as this girl and I could relate. I also had racist grandparents or people saying that I don't look black and don't believe me when I say I am. This article gave me a new perspective on being biracial. Don't act ghetto, don't act white,

just be you. Thank you, once again.

*Laurel G., Immaculate  
Heart HS*

This article made me think about how people shouldn't judge anyone from the outside. When I came to Wilson everyone thought I was white. Some people [who are Armenian] didn't like me because they thought I was a different race. If I did something wrong, most people would start speaking Armenian to each other. I understood, but I didn't say anything. Even if I were white, that wouldn't be a good reason to say things in another language. If I were in Melanie's situation, I would have stood up for myself every time. I learned that no one should judge anyone based on their skin color, race or how they dress, etc. The only thing that should really count is your heart.

*Alanna Collura, Wilson MS*

I can't relate to Melanie, but I used to have a friend who could. His father is Armenian and his mother is Mexican. He loves his parents a lot, but he wishes that he were only one race. He didn't know where he belonged. Every time he sat with the Armenians, the Mexicans would stare at him. When he sat with the Mexicans, the Armenians would stare. Every day there were stupid fights on campus, just because of his race. So one day he couldn't take it anymore and he dropped out of public school. He got home schooled instead, and I never saw him again.

*David Chakhoyan, Wilson MS*

## WE SHOULD PAY ATTENTION TO THE GENOCIDE IN AFRICA

The article about the Sudanese genocide was one of my favorites and I would like to thank Sarah Evans for writing it. This genocide has been ignored way too long and people need to know about what is happening. Men are murdered, the women are raped, many have been displaced ... this must stop!!

*Virginia Morales, Odyssey HS  
(South Gate)*

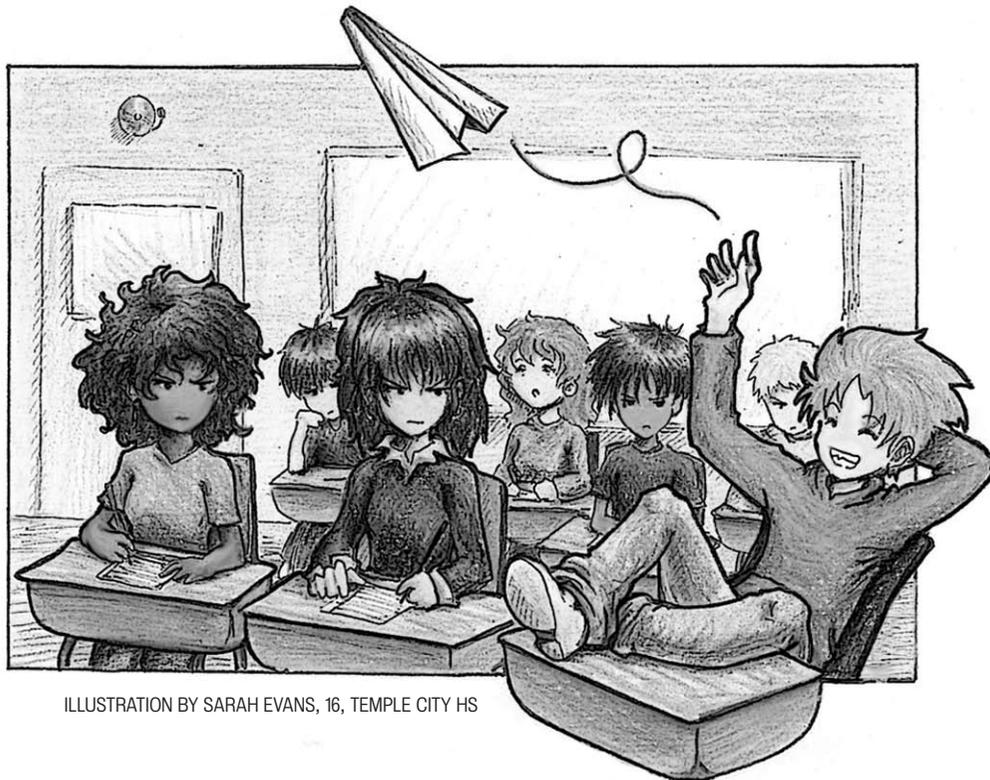


ILLUSTRATION BY SARAH EVANS, 16, TEMPLE CITY HS

## EVERYONE HATES DISRUPTIVE STUDENTS

There should be more strict teachers because I have a strict teacher for one of my classes and no one acts up in her class. If students yell out and throw things it's because they want to get noticed. The teacher should just ignore the ones who are acting up. Students who fail are the ones who goof off and don't do any work. It finally clicked in my head that it's bad to goof off at school.

*Gaige Herrera, Hutchinson MS*

The article about disruptive students is true. The first couple times it gives the class a good laugh, but after that it's just a ploy for attention. Some teachers don't care and just want to teach and get over with class, but others want to make their students disciplined. One of my teachers last year was like that; she had zero tolerance. She would make the student never think of missing a homework assignment or talking in class ever again. It's embarrassing when you're under the limelight in front of the whole class being lectured, and you can't defend yourself because you know you screwed up. When the annoying kids comment in class I just scream, "Shut up!" But the teacher never notices because there's always too much noise in the class. Half of the time the kids who talk out loud are not even close to being funny. It's only funny to watch them be stupid.

*Alan Ghazarians, Wilson MS*

I agree with this article. There's always one student who always interrupts the teacher. They just don't learn to keep their mouths shut. They think it's funny. It's really annoying. It's disturbing that a person wouldn't have enough common sense to stay silent during class. They act so immature.

*Tyler Trinh, Hutchinson MS*

## I WANT TO GO TO COLLEGE

My dream is go to college, hopefully USC, which is my favorite college football team. I hope that my time there will be worth studying for. I hope to reach more of my goals while I am there. My dream is to go further in college than anyone in my family has. If I am not smart enough, then I will continue to try over and over.

College is my most important goal. If I can at least finish college, I will get the highest-paying job I can. By getting through college, nothing will stop me from reaching my goals.

*Jeremiah J. Jimenez, Hutchinson MS*

To read more letters go to our Web site, [www.layout.com](http://www.layout.com)

# What are you doing with the rest of your life?

The health care industry needs you! Health care offers a variety of jobs and careers, with great pay and flexible schedules. Whether you plan to start working right out of high school, or go to trade school, community college or a university, you can follow a path directly to a great future.

For more information, check out

## www.MakeItInScrubs.com

Funded by a grant from The California Wellness Foundation.

## A cool medical job

As a 23-year-old junior pathologist's assistant, Jerry's work is critical in helping doctors make the right diagnosis

By Chris Lee  
16, WALNUT HS

Entering the medical field does not necessarily require straight A's or long years of college. But most people have never heard of any medical job other than "doctor" or "nurse," so it was interesting to find out about jobs in a hospital pathology laboratory.

Though he never thought he would go into medicine when he was in high school, Jerry De La O became a junior pathologist's assistant at the City of Hope hospital in Duarte after realizing that he did not want to be a banker or firefighter for the rest of his life. At 23 years old, he loves his current job and plans to finish his schooling and become a pathologist's assistant in the next two years.

### How were you introduced to the medical field?

I took an anatomy and ROP [Regional Occupational Program] class on becoming a medical assistant when I was at Duarte High School. I was training to become a medical assistant. I was never interested in medicine before, but I took the class for a girl I liked. I wasn't a great student. Normal classes like English—I just couldn't focus on them, they didn't grab my attention, but my anatomy and ROP class came natural to me. The girl left the class, but I stayed.

### What was your ROP class like?

I took the ROP class after school. We would get a lot of homework, and sometimes I would stay in the class until 10 or 10:30 p.m. But it was fun. I learned anatomy, how to take blood pressures, EKG [electrocardiogram, which measures the electrical activity of the heart], weight and shots. You had to really pay attention. We learned how to draw blood. You had to practice on each

other, which was scary because everyone wanted to practice on me.

### What did you do after high school?

It was the ROP class that helped me. You're getting a foot in the door to see different areas of the medical field. Right after high school, I was able to get a job as a medical assistant for a general practitioner [which is a regular doctor] while some of my friends had to work at McDonald's. The doctor taught me a lot and was helpful.

### Did you know that you wanted a career in medicine for the rest of your life?

No, I wanted to do everything—everything seemed cool to me. I became a banker for Wells Fargo, but that was boring. After that I tried the fire department, but during those jobs I kept thinking about my ROP class and the time I worked as a medical assistant. Then I knew that a career in medicine was for me.

### How did you become a junior pathologist's assistant?

After quitting my past jobs, I became a lab assistant at the City of Hope hospital. I washed dishes, but I thought 'Oh, OK, maybe there'll be a way to find out more.' Then one day, they were short-handed in the lab, and a pathologist's assistant asked if I wanted to become a junior pathologist's assistant if she trained me. I said sure.

### What does a pathologist do?

The pathologist is the one who looks at the tissue from a patient and decides whether the tissue is cancerous or not. Before a surgeon can treat a cancer patient, he must know what kind of cancer is affecting the tissue, how far the cancer tissue is from other sections, and how serious it is.

The diagnosis is made here, so without pathology you don't know what you have, so it's one of the main keys to medicine.



PHOTO BY CHRIS LEE, 16, WALNUT HS

### What do you do specifically?

I'm a junior pathologist's assistant, so I help the senior pathologist's assistant prepare specimens. I gross specimens [which means] I dissect them, put them into cassettes, preserve them in formalene or freeze them for the senior pathologist or for other labs. The team I work with is great. I really like what I do. I love coming to work. You always see something different every day.

### What kind of specimens do you diagnose?

I diagnose all kinds of specimens. We get tuberculosis specimens, tissues from tumors, thyroids, arms, kidneys. Sometimes I do biopsies [preparation of tissue from live patients]. We get arms, legs that they bring in from surgery. Also autopsies, I've assisted in a few of those. [An autopsy

is a surgical procedure after death which involves the examination of body tissues, often to determine cause of death.] That's the best anatomy training you'll ever get.

### Why should teens consider this field?

It is a big field and there is a constant demand for pathologists. There is always a need for someone to decide if you have cancer or not. And they pay well; head pathologist's assistants can make \$100,000 a year.

### Will you go to college?

I currently attend Citrus College while I work. I have to take a lot of courses in chemistry and biology, but I can finish college and get training here [at the City of Hope]. I plan to attend pathologist's assistant school within two years at Quinnipiac University in Connecticut.

### What do you recommend to high school students who don't know what they want to do in the future?

Get your foot in the door, and you can open your options. Take ROP classes because they'll show you different careers, and you can work right after high school. Find something that interests you. You can take ROP classes at other schools. Ask your counselor. Just ask!

# Are you a foster youth in Los Angeles County?

Do you want to let other teens know what foster care is like? Here's your chance.

L.A. Youth is looking for foster youth ages 14 to 19 who want to write an article to be published in L.A. Youth.

By joining L.A. Youth, you can:

- EARN \$100** for each story published
- IMPROVE** your writing skills by working with an editor
- HELP** other foster youth by sharing your experiences
- INFORM** others about "the system"



Foster Youth Editor Amanda Riddle (right) works with a writer on his story.

## They got me through

My foster family gave me a stable home and a chance for a better future



By Teresa Hidalgo  
16, SIERRA VISTA HS

Before I entered the foster care system, I thought that I would walk in the same footsteps as my cousins. I would live in poverty and possibly get pregnant at the age of 15 or be addicted to drugs. But everything changed when I met my foster parents. I experienced the support of a caring family and learned about college.

At the age of 11, I moved into my foster parents' home with two of my five siblings. It was my third foster home in one year. I thought, "Oh man, here we go again. I need to start all over again, new school, new friends and a new family." I was nervous, but as soon as we moved in, my foster dad made jokes. I saw that my brothers David and Ray were laughing and I relaxed.

Their house was beautiful and I had my own room. My foster dad helped my brothers unpack and my foster mother helped me unpack, which is something my previous foster mothers did not do. This made me feel welcome. While my foster mother and I unpacked my clothes, she talked about her family and asked me questions about my family and what things I liked to do. It was important for me to live with a married couple because my parents never married, and it was something I wished they had done. I even thought that if they were married, there could have been more stability and maybe we could have been a closer family.

Before we went into foster care, my siblings and I had been living with my grandmother. How come we didn't live with my parents? Well, let me inform you. My moth-

PHOTO BY TERESA HIDALGO, © SON RICKO TORREALA. WITHIN Teresa's foster family was proud to watch her graduate from Sierra Vista High School. They are, from left, her foster father, Armando Gonzalez, Teresa, her foster mother Rosa Gonzalez, and her foster sister, Diana Medina.



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Invite Amanda to speak at your school, group home or foster agency about writing for L.A. Youth.



**Got questions?**  
Go to [www.layouth.com](http://www.layouth.com) and click on the Foster Youth link to learn more and read stories written by foster youth.

Turn the page →  
to read a discussion on emancipation

# Am I ready to be on my own?

## Teens share their fears and hopes for when they leave the foster care system



**W**hen you're in foster care, they boot you out at 18 and you are on your own. It's called emancipating. They have housing, but with 20,000 foster youth emancipating this year and so many trying to get into housing, it's like trying to win the lottery. I've seen a lot of foster kids end up on the streets. They have no family to go to; they have nowhere to turn. They don't know anything about being on their own.

Foster youth have to do so many things for themselves that other teens don't have to worry about, like calling your social worker for permission to get a job or meet with your siblings, and speaking up for yourself in court. You have to work really, really hard to get support and what you need from the system.

When five other foster youth and I got together to talk about emancipating, we felt frustrated and empowered. I heard similar complaints that I'd heard other youth talking about, how they didn't know about a lot of things they were eligible for, like transitional housing and college financial aid. It was so irritating, it made me mad at the system. The system keeps you safe and makes sure you get all the things that parents would provide. But when you leave, they don't make sure you are prepared. I think they should make sure everyone who is emancipating knows about the services they are eligible for. They shouldn't put you out unless they know you are ready.

After I emancipate, I plan on going to college while living in transitional housing, which will be an apartment that the system will pay for for a few years. I am excited because I can do what I want, but I'm worried it's going to be too much freedom. I don't want to do something that will get me in trouble and get me kicked out. I wouldn't have family to go to. I'd have to go to a friend's house and life would be a lot harder.

—Trayvione Travis, 17, Ofman Learning Center

The following are selected comments from six youth in the foster care system, at a discussion organized by L.A. Youth.

L.A. Youth Editor Amanda Riddle: The

big thing in your life when you get to be this age is, 'What am I going to do when I turn 18?' The system is supposed to be the mom and dad taking care of you and making sure everything is being provided for. Do you think that's happening?

**Loretta Jordan, 18, Long Beach City College (Westchester HS graduate):** A week ago, I was talking with my grandmother about emancipating, but I have no knowledge of what I have to do to take that step. I found out through the community program I go to that there was even an emancipation program. They were talking about it: 'Me and her have an apartment together. We have a job.' I was thinking about it, I want that for me. I didn't know who to go to or what I need to do. I felt mad because I wasn't given that chance and I was supposed to be given that chance. Whoever is responsible for letting me know what's out there for me didn't do that.

**Amanda:** Trayvione, what do you hope to do?

**Trayvione Travis, 17, Ofman Learning Center:** Go to THPP [Transitional Housing Placement Program] in February. ... I'll basically be on my own, but there will be somebody to check on me once in a while. You have your own room.

**Loretta:** My cousin ... was in transitional housing before I was. He had information on it, but I didn't know nothing about it until now.

**Aaron Shaver, 18, The Linden Center:** Your social worker is supposed to let you know about it, even before you turn 18.

When you turn 16 you go to ILP [Independent Living Program]. [You learn] independent living skills, like they teach you how to get your phone and utilities turned on, how to manage money, job skills, how to act at an interview; basically how to live on your own.

**Amanda to Luis:** Do you have a social worker helping you?



**Trayvione Travis**  
17, OFMAN LEARNING CENTER



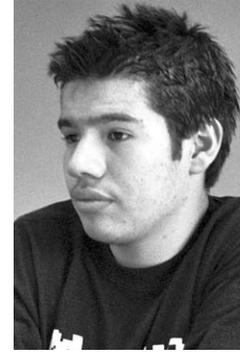
**Aaron Shaver**  
18, THE LINDEN CENTER



**Shimia Gray**  
17, CENTENNIAL HS (COMPTON)



**Brandy Hernandez**  
15, HAWTHORNE ACADEMY



**Luis Sanchez**  
18, OTIS COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN



**Loretta Jordan**  
18, LONG BEACH CITY COLLEGE

**Luis Sanchez, 18, Otis College of Art and Design:** At the moment yeah. We've been trying to get me into the program [transitional housing]. ... I was hoping to get help with paying tuition and other stuff I would need for school. And a close place to live because I live far from school.

**Shimia Gray, 17, Centennial HS in Compton:** I still have a year until I emancipate, but I am scared to emancipate because I have been running away a lot and that affects what types of chances I have to get into transitional housing. My social worker says it's going to be hard to get into transitional housing, because people are not going to want to accept me because they think I will be acting out. ... Some days I'm like 'I can do this.' But sometimes I'm scared because it's a big world and the world is changing every day. Sometimes I'm scared I won't make it, everything is expensive. What I want to go to school for, writing, sometimes I'm thinking I'm not going to make a lot of money off of it.

**Aaron:** You don't always get it [transitional housing] in the city that you want. You might live in L.A. and want to get in L.A. but you might get it in Palmdale or Pasadena. Because it's not always open in those places or that place might not accept you.

**Amanda:** When you hear statistics like 25 percent of foster youth will be homeless four years after emancipating, you think, how could that happen?

**Loretta:** It's hard to get individual help in the school system, so I know it's going to be hard for the government to give us the individual help that we need. But I am not asking them to go that 100 miles, but at least that extra mile to help. I want to meet somebody halfway, or make it fair.

**Trayvione:** I'm asking them to go the

whole 100 miles. Because only 2 percent of those kids graduate from college. I really feel that's a shame. The only reason that 2 percent graduate from college is that the government is not giving them the stuff that they need. It's a shame when most of them don't get the help that they need in foster care and the help that they need in school. In my school, I'm not learning what I need. They are using old books.

### SCHOOL PROBLEMS

**Amanda:** Are nonpublic schools [which many foster youth attend] teaching foster youth?

**Shimia:** They teach you like you are retarded.

**Brandy Hernandez, 15, Hawthorne Academy:** A lot of kids at my school are in the system. My school, I think they can give you a good education if you are on top of it. ... I just met with my assistant principal, asked her if I had all my credits and what I needed. My school does not offer AP classes so I will be going to Southwest College to take those extra classes. My school is a small school so they don't have those classes we need to get into a certain college [like a UC].

**Shimia:** I was in the group home David & Margaret. I went to school on grounds, and now that I am in a foster home those credits for some reason don't count, so now I am 90 credits behind and I'm in the 12th grade. ... I was taking regular classes: math, earth science, P.E., everything you start out with at high school.

**Amanda:** What are you going to do, 90 credits behind?

**Shimia:** I really, really want to graduate, so this year I am on top of my game, doing whatever I got to do, doing extra work, trying to show them I am trying

to do something; I started on my senior project. My counselor said she is going to help. They said my best bet is to go to continuation school.

**Amanda:** How is the system helping you?

**Shimia:** The one who really is trying to help me with my school is my lawyer. My social worker ... has more than she can handle. She's one of them social workers that if you are alive and breathing, that's all she cares about. When she comes to see me it's for five minutes. She hands me my bus pass, saying am I doing OK? Am I harmed? I say no and she leaves and she comes to see me the next month. I never really have a conversation with her. Right now I'm trying to help myself. There are people helping me but I'm the only one who can do it because it's for my future, it's not for nobody else's.

**Luis:** What I did when I was in a nonpublic school and I had chances to go to court, I would complain to the judge. That's all you got to do, just bug them and bug them and they'll do it eventually.

**Amanda:** What didn't you like about the school?

**Luis:** They only had six basic classes, they didn't have that extra stuff that you needed, economics and other stuff. They just had basic history, basic math.

### BE YOUR OWN ADVOCATE

**Trayvione:** Advocate for yourself. ... When they wasn't getting visitation for me and my brother and my sister, I told my social worker if he could ask for my visitation, and the next thing you know my social worker wasn't even showing up at court. So I had to go and do it myself. When I went in there they just started talking and then it [the hearing] was over and they asked me to leave. I was like,

wait a minute, so I stood up to say something. They asked what was the issue and I said my social worker wasn't signing up visitation. I told them I wanted visitation and I've been asking for it for a couple months and I want a new social worker. I got my new social worker and they got me my visitation. It's court ordered that I get visitation once a month.

**Amanda:** You get to see your brother and sister once a month?

**Trayvione:** Yes. They're all the way in Palmdale and it's really hard for me to go out there.

**Amanda:** Do you feel you are emotionally ready to handle life at 18?

**Trayvione:** There's always going to be stuff that you're not going to know how to handle, because when you're in the system you always have somebody on your back telling you what to do or telling you where to go, doing things for you. Then you have all this freedom and sometimes you won't know what to do with it. ... It's going to be a lot put on me at once.

### ADVICE TO THE SYSTEM

**Loretta:** If you're going to cut off our resources at 18 at least make sure we are ready to make that next step.

**Trayvione:** I think what the system should do now is help the kids to be independent. Right now what my house [group home] does to help us be independent is they teach us how to transport ourselves to our doctor's appointments, to self-transport ourselves to school. They teach us how to cook, how to do store runs; like ILP but in a group home. Every day. And that's a good thing. I think that's what they should have at all group homes.

# Movies in my mailbox

With Netflix—the mail-order movie rental service—I can see all the films I want

By Shannon Matloob  
16, BEVERLY HILLS HS

**B**efore Netflix, my life was pretty boring. I love watching movies but my family only occasionally buys new DVDs, and I can watch *You've Got Mail* only so many times until I have the words memorized and I know when each song will start in each scene ... which I do.

Blockbuster was where I rented movies. But I rarely had a ride, and even when I did, I always ended up asking myself the same question: Where the hell is my movie? I wasn't looking for popular titles such as *Miss Congeniality* or *National Treasure*. I wanted movies that fewer people have heard of and I typically had to ask an employee who had to ask another employee if they had it. My local Blockbuster didn't even carry independent films like *Me and You and Everyone We Know*.

I had heard about Netflix, the mail-order DVD rental service, through the billions of commercials on TV. I didn't really think much of it at first. It was like one of those infomercials for a product that I didn't believe would work. Then I heard one of my friends talking about it in class. This made it credible. I finally convinced my dad to let me use his credit card to sign up. Netflix hooked me immediately with how easy it was to find the best movies. There's a searchable database of

more than 65,000 titles. I finally had a chance to watch *Finding Nemo*, *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *The Incredibles*—movies I hadn't seen in theaters. I know, I complained that Blockbuster didn't have independent films and then the first few movies I rented were well-known, but hey, I'm no indie snob.

The best thing about Netflix is that I'm allowed to keep the DVDs as long as I want. Since you pay by the month, not the movie, there are no late fees. With homework and busy schedules, it's hard to plan a time when everyone is available to watch a movie. I promised my brother I'd watch *The Godfather* with him, but he'd never be home when I was and vice versa. Weeks went by and the movie sat in my room gathering dust. After two months I sent it back, because we never had time to sit down and watch it. Though my brother was disappointed, I explained that I'd get the movie again when we both had time. I didn't see the point of keeping it at home when I could be getting other movies; that's a waste of the monthly cost. I can't get my next movies until I turn in the ones I have.

The first movie I got was *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*. It was featured as a "must-see" on the site. I watched it SEVEN times over three weeks, and one of those times was in French. Blockbuster wouldn't give me enough time to memorize the movie and spot all the mistakes, like in the scene when John and Jane realize that they're

both assassins. There's a car chase and the car gets damaged, but miraculously it was fixed the next day. Netflix lets me indulge my mad movie obsession by being able to spot small mistakes that the script editors failed to catch.

So far, I haven't had any trouble finding something I wanted. Everything is there, from *Star Wars* to all the complete seasons of *Sex and the City*. I got to see *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, the French movie that *Cruel Intentions* was based on. My local Blockbuster didn't have it in stock. The same thing happened with season one of *Sex and the City*. And I wasn't about to start with season two.

## SO MANY MOVIES, SO LITTLE COST

Netflix is especially useful when it comes to studying for school. If there's a book you're reading in class and you don't feel like reading it over again for the test you have tomorrow, just watch the movie! I'm not saying I watched the movies instead of reading the books; I used them as refreshers to help me understand the characters.

I know what you're thinking. Something this good must cost a lot. Well, I'll let you decide if unlimited movies showing up at your door for less than \$20 a month is pricey. Let's compare:

With Netflix you can rent three movies at a time and get new movies roughly every four days. Since there are about

30 days in a month, you can repeat that process seven times each month, meaning basically one movie per day. All this is for less than \$20. How much would this cost at Hollywood Video or Blockbuster, hmm?

Now, as for the payment method, I don't have a credit card, but my parents do. I still pay for it though. I pay my parents back using my allowance. It's worth it because it would cost a lot more to not only rent so many movies from Blockbuster but to pay the late fees of keeping a movie for three months.

As much as I love Netflix, there are a few drawbacks. It takes four days to get a new movie—two days for the movie I rented to get back to them and another two days for the new movie to come to my house.

My list of movies that I want to see has 384 titles. I don't think I'm going to have time to watch every movie on that list, let alone watch *You've Got Mail* or *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* one more time!



**Shannon** says that Netflix is a movie lover's dream.



## How to set up your own Netflix account

**1.** Go to [www.netflix.com](http://www.netflix.com). Enter your email address, make up a password, and enter your zip code. Click "Continue Sign-Up."

**2.** Choose a plan. The bare bones plan: for \$5.99 a month, you get one movie at a time

and a maximum of two movies per month. You can also get unlimited movies each month, two movies at a time for \$14.99. The most popular plan is unlimited movies, three at a time for \$17.99 a month. There are three other plans, too.

**3.** Enter your contact information—name, address, phone number. Click "continue."

**4.** You will need a credit card number. You get a two-week free trial to see if you like Netflix. You will not be billed until your free trial ends. Once

you've entered the credit card number, press "Start membership," and you're done!

**5.** Now here's the fun part. Start finding the movies you want to add to your list, which holds up to 500 movies at a time!

# reviews: music



**CD: RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS**  
**Stadium Arcadium**

**By Katherine Trujillo**  
17, NOTRE DAME ACADEMY

**A**fter more than 20 years (when most bands are growing stale), the Red Hot Chili Peppers are as fresh and insightful as ever.

The double album *Stadium Arcadium*, with one CD named *Mars* and the other *Jupiter*, is by far the Chili Peppers' best work. Whether it's lead singer Anthony Kiedis allowing guitarist John Frusciante to belt out more than just background vocals, or Flea taking his mad bassist skills to a new extreme with Chad Smith drumming fast and frenetically trying to keep up, all of the Peppers seem more confident.

Avoiding the monotony of most double discs, the album shifts from party soundtrack to sentimental ballads in which the Peppers pour out their souls. Songs like "Charlie" and "Hump De Bump" beckon everyone to the dance floor. In "Slow Cheetah," Kiedis sings one post-suicidal note after another: "I've had a chance to be insane/ ... I've had a chance to break," as he reminisces on the pain he experienced while addicted to drugs.

But ultimately it's "Wet Sand" that leaves my heart aching for more. As the soft, melodic song begins, I immediately feel the passion behind the poetic lyrics. "My love affair with everywhere was innocent/ why do you care?" sings Kiedis, reminiscing on falling in love with life, its joys, sorrows and imperfections.

I've never been this emotionally engrossed by any Chili Peppers album. This album perfectly captures the essence of the band's musical evolution from the funk and rap days of the 80s to the surreal, mature and ingenious songs they've produced in the past decade.

**I've never been this emotionally engrossed by any Chili Peppers album.**



**CD: NO DOUBT**  
**No Doubt**

**By Ana Tenorio**  
16, ORTHOPEDIC HOSPITAL MEDICAL MAGNET HS

**W**ith the members of No Doubt temporarily separated, it is no surprise that many fans have forgotten old-school No Doubt music.

I prefer No Doubt's initial O.C. ska sound—the musical and emotional roller coaster of trumpets, drums, electric guitars and bass backing Gwen Stefani's eerie lyrics—featured on the band's self-titled debut. The 14-track album expresses everything from a young teenage boy's obsession with a sexy celebrity, "Paulina," to an advice-filled song about reminding your lover how much you love them, "Get on the Ball." "You gotta tell her she's the only one/ show her, make sure she never feels abandoned," Stefani sings.

"Trapped in a Box" is one of my favorite No Doubt songs because of its message of hostility and anxiety. "Trapped in a box/ my life becomes void/ and all of my thoughts for myself now destroyed."

Back then it seems that music was what both the fans and the musicians wanted. Nowadays making music that is overplayed on the radio is what sells, regardless of what your music's character was initially. Unfortunately this happened to No Doubt. Their new stuff has less trumpet, fewer eccentric lyrics, and follows the popular rock standard of having your video featured in the top 10 on MTV's TRL.

So if you've grown tired of hearing "Don't Speak" on the radio, give classic No Doubt a chance.

**No Doubt's new stuff ... follows the popular rock standard of having your video featured on MTV's TRL.**



**CD: SILVERSON PICKUPS**  
**Carnavas**

**By Estee Schwartz**  
16, CONCORD HS

**I**t's rare I find new music that compares to the brilliant innovators of the original indie rock scene. But if this were the 80s, Silversun Pickups would have been on the same record label as Sonic Youth and Dinosaur Jr.

Silversun Pickups' debut album, *Carnavas*, has a growling, grungy sound, but for moments it attains perfect clarity and feelings you can't help but want to chase.

My favorite aspect of this album is the bizarre interludes in songs like "Common Reactor." The screaming amps and effects, which are a throwback to Sonic Youth, stay interesting, which is hard to do with gurgling feedback.

A standout track is "Melatonin." It has a calming vibe and floats along with layers of fuzzy guitars. Brian Aubert's moody lead-vocal tones shift from lullaby-worthy to ravenous. His voice tends to cuddle into his surrounding sounds giving his less approachable lyrics a comfortable outlet.

Aubert sings, "After six milligrams, we're talking again/ who would have known?" midway through "Melatonin." Aubert has a soft nuance so no matter how loud he yells, he never sounds scary or jarring, much like Billy Corgan of the Smashing Pumpkins.

The largest flaw in Silversun Pickups is the still quality in their music. I wish there was more movement and power.

Nevertheless, *Carnavas* proves that Silversun Pickups is a highly capable band. They've managed to take genres of music that have been argued to be inaccessible and combined them to make an extremely available pop album.

**Aubert's voice tends to cuddle into his surrounding sounds giving his less approachable lyrics a comfortable outlet.**

# TEACHERS: WANT

“L.A. Youth is one of the things students really enjoy reading as opposed to stuff they *have* to read.”

Mike Zwart, language arts teacher, Paramount High School



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“Participating in the essay contests and letter writing gives them an opportunity to succeed.”

Jolie Augustine,  
English teacher,  
Wilson Middle School in  
Glendale (with student  
Yessica Cortez, 13)



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“The kids see other students' work published and they see topics they relate to.”

Mike Dean, coordinator,  
Jefferson High School,  
Trade Tech Early College  
Incentive Program

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