




THE LEARNING CURVE



**An Anthology of PUSD  
Student Stories**

Volume #2

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	= Mental Health
	= Equity
	= Curriculum

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# Introduction

*The Learning Curve* (fondly nicknamed “TLC”) was created last year, coinciding with the founding of the Pasadena Unified School District Student Think Tank. It was created during a majority of 2021, in the midst of a global pandemic and the strife of virtual learning. It was created as a reaction to what we students are facing. The first edition gave a voice to us students to tell our stories. As editors, we have realized that this practice is one that needs to continue. The issues presented in last year’s edition of *The Learning Curve* were not unique to that year. Many told their stories from elementary school and middle school, before the pandemic. Issues presented in the first edition of the anthology covered discussions about race, sexuality, student-teacher interactions, and school resources. We also recognized that we were missing the voices of a lot of students. This year, our goal was to broaden this resource.

The first part of this process was to broaden our team. This year, *The Learning Curve* anthology has a team of fourteen students from John Muir, Pasadena, Blair, Marshall and CIS. We communicated this opportunity to our teachers, counselors, librarians, and school administration from all six high schools: John Muir, Pasadena, Blair, Marshall, CIS, and Rose City. There is still work to be done. There are still so many voices missing from this anthology, but already we are hearing from new students. This copy of *The Learning Curve* has 150+ student narratives. This is the power of students working together.

There is no doubt that this work must continue. Students, staff, administration and teachers alike must hear these stories. This initiative must continue! We, who are PUSD students from across the district, want it to continue and that is why the publication exists today. I urge the same message as I did for the first edition: students must be at the center of the conversation surrounding our own education.

— Ella Uriu

Co-creator of *The Learning Curve*, Class of 2022

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# **Student Stories**

## **Spring 2022**

# Identity

## **Learning About My Roots Through PUSD's Dual Language Immersion Program**

*MG, Pasadena High School*

I am Chinese and I am White. My family on my Chinese side has lived on the Hawaiian island of Oahu since they were brought over from China to work on the plantations in the 1800s. I was born on Oahu and lived there for the first three years of my life. My grandma on my dad's side took care of me while my parents went to work during the day. Even though she is full Chinese, Cantonese to be precise, she speaks hardly any of her language.

I remember going to the China Town in Hawai'i and getting dried fruits and looking at the qipaos with my grandma and auntie. I remember going to big Chinese restaurants with family members I hardly knew to eat dim sum on round tables.

When my family and I moved to the mainland, my grandma would send hongbaos filled with large checks, qipaos of many colors, and nian gao with white sesame seeds and a date atop in the mail for Lunar New Year; the box filled with red tissue paper to symbolize the lucky color red associated with the event. She would send us laulus, kalua pig, and poi in the mail, all local foods on the islands, along with Chinese candies and common snacks found in Hawai'i. My culture in a box.

When we moved to Pasadena, California in 2009, I attended a preschool that offered an after school Mandarin class. Naturally, I took it and quickly learned the basics of the language: numbers, colors. When it came to finding an elementary school, my parents searched around in Pasadena and elsewhere. I still remember the day when they listed to me the schools I got into. Instinctually, I chose the one that offered Mandarin. This was perhaps one of the most important choices I have ever made. I can't imagine my life now had I not chosen Field Elementary.

At Field, I quickly made many friends and learned the ropes of the Chinese language. I picked it up all very fast, especially considering I was the first person in my family to learn the Chinese language after generations and generations. We learned to read, write, listen, and speak the language. Every class: math, history, science, was in Mandarin, except English of course. Whenever a Chinese holiday approached, the whole school would do crafts, participate in traditional customs, and learn about the history or mythology behind the event.

It was all so exciting to see the faces around campus who were learning the language - Asian kids, White kids, Black kids, Latinx kids. I didn't think about it much growing up at Field, but I would soon learn to cherish my six years at the school for the community and the lessons I learned there.

When I arrived at Sierra Madre Middle School, which is where most of us Field kids went afterwards to continue with the Mandarin program, we became the minority. We didn't get an elective of our choosing; Mandarin was basically a forced elective. We had to take history in Chinese, which didn't work out great for many. Our once large Mandarin-speaking community that we had at Field was now limited to just one classroom.

But, I continued to learn about my culture. In 6th grade, we painted paper lanterns with poems we wrote in Chinese. We helped fill and wrap dumplings for Lunar New Year in 7th grade. A group of friends and I choreographed and performed in a lion dance demonstration for the whole school to see in 8th grade. We were only a small part of the Sierra Madre Middle School community, but we were strong.

Then in freshman year of high school at PHS, most of those of us Field kids that remained took AP Chinese Language and Culture... during online learning. For many of us, this was an amalgamation of 10 years of learning the language in school. 10 years of hard work, that came down to a final AP test, a final score that proved our dedication to the language. You could imagine the pressure.

I studied my hardest, but some of the content we learned leading up to the exam was very unfamiliar to me: Chinese family structure, politics, customs. Many topics I didn't learn. It made me wonder if I was more Chinese academically rather than culturally.

On the day of the exam, everyone was nervous. I looked around the room where the test was being administered. I saw a small group of people, but I also saw the people I had grown up with since kindergarten, a group of people I had known for so long and hadn't gotten to see for a whole year because of covid. Many of those people were some of my closest friends. It was truly beautiful.

Weeks later, I learned I had earned a five on the AP exam. I felt satisfied with myself, but I also wondered what else there was to learn about the Chinese culture. As a PHS sophomore, there were no other Chinese-related classes to take. All of us students have retired our Mandarin in the academic world. I try to keep practicing, but it's not easy with such a huge workload from school. I know I won't lose all of my knowledge of which character is which and what it means or the correct pronunciation of a word, but I'm afraid I might.

I have had the luxury of learning about my Chinese roots throughout my time in PUSD. Being biracial, it's hard to know how others identify you when they look at you. It's hard to even identify yourself sometimes. Questions abound. While being in the Mandarin program has made an unmeasurable impact on my life, I know there are still more questions that will arise in the future. This is the end of my narrative here, but only part of the bigger story that is my identity.

## **(CONTENT WARNING: Dreadful situations)**

### **Alone**

*AS, Blair High School*

Where am I from? My parents immigrated to the United States more than 20 years ago, so I and my older sister were born here. Before my parents returned to El Salvador, I had to leave when I was four years old and I grew up there. I came back at 14 years old.

I have lived in many states, places and with different families together with my sister during the year 2019-2020, and since 2021-2022 I have been living alone. Without my parents, working and

changing states alone, looking for a place to live on my own, talking to all the people who are close to my family if they can help me. It has not been easy since most of them did not answer my calls.

One thing I remember the most was two months ago when I decided to move back to LA from Denver. It was a three-day bus trip and stops in New Mexico, Arizona, just me and my two suitcases on a bus.

And when I got to the station in downtown Los Angeles, I was alone in the station, it was about 12 o'clock in the morning. And I had nowhere to go, no one to pick me up, and no one knew because no one wanted to help me, no one cared, but I was sitting on a bench tired of calling everyone for help. I only saw the sky, while I realized that maybe I'm too young for this.

After several days, I found the place where I am right now, where I can stay for three more months. When I turn 18, I feel happy because I have left the places where I was not well and suffered psychological abuse, beatings and SA.

And now I have therapy at Blair, and I am working in healing all my traumas complex, and all my illnesses. They are helping me with things that are difficult for me too since no one has ever talked to me about taxes, documents, and adult things. Although I was already paying rent and bills during 2021, I worked more than 10 hours a day for it, instead of studying.

Life has been more complicated than I could write a Saga of books about all my experiences at my young age.

The only thing I have loved about all this is my freedom and what I have learned from my mistakes that have helped me to have more emotional maturity and be more rational when making decisions about my life and future.

## **I Want Freedom**

*B, John Muir*

In all honesty, there is more than one story that I feel it's important for the teachers to know, but I'd like to talk about my most important. My most important story from the year was overcoming and having to adapt to the close-mindedness of my family who was set in their ways of religion. There were a lot of things that happened which resulted in my situation of me moving to California from the South. I wasn't upset about it; instead, I was really happy because I'd finally be in a place that was more accepting and open, inviting those like me who were different—at least that's what I thought.

After being in California for not even a full month, I realized how wrong I was because, yes, people were more accepting here, but I just so happened to have landed in the most homophobic household possible. I realized this after I made a comment on a female being pretty and later my aunt had a "conversation" with me. She began to throw God in my face telling me how wrong it is, but the only thing I thought at that moment was how much of a hypocrite she was. In her words, all sins are equal, yet she proceeds to take her anger out on everyone except herself and curses out

other people but has the nerve to say “God knows my heart” and “If I’m doing something wrong God will let me know.”

So every time she tries to have a conversation with me about *my* sexuality, all I can do is look at her and think that she is only a narcissist and a hypocrite and that she has no right to use God as often as she does. She once threatened to send me back to Texas if I were to be “sinning”(embracing my sexuality and who I am) while living under her roof. This issue has caused me to be fearful of joining clubs that support people like me such as the LGBTQ+ club and it has also caused me to be fearful of the people I associate myself with. I’ve accepted the fact that I can’t change anything. The only thing that plays in my head on a constant loop are the words, “I Want Freedom.” While experiencing this, I’ve decided that once I leave this household I will never let anyone tell me who I should be and who I’m allowed to love because this honestly feels like torture. Last, but not least, this place feels like a personal hell that was created just for me, but I will always fight with all the passion that I have for my right to love, like, and hang out with whomever I please.

## **Working with a Mexican dad during the summer**

*J, John Muir*

It’s hard because any break you have is work time. I did gardening for the whole summer and got ripped off. At least I had plenty of water. I had to wake up at seven and got out at three. Sounds like fun but it’s not. Okay, that’s all. Thanks.

## **Herstories of My Family**

*HS, Blair High School*

This year, I have been able to research my family’s story of immigration. It is a shame that it is only through a school assignment that I have been able to learn about it. Nevertheless, I am grateful. I am a second generation Chinese immigrant who comes from a family of fearless women. My great grandmother (on my dad’s side) raised six children on her own because her husband was murdered by the Chinese government for prohibiting the military draft of the students at his school (he was the principal of a school in Taiwan). Because of the one-child policy, she was constantly avoiding patrollers, and was forced to make the decision of sending some of her children to live with relatives. During all of this, she still needed to work in order to support her children, however it was difficult for her to find jobs because she was known as the wife of a criminal. She persevered through much hardship and was eventually able to immigrate to the United States with her family.

My grandmother (on my mom’s side) immigrated to the United States with her daughter alone because her husband was away working in Cuba. She was forced to raise her daughter and simultaneously work long hours as a seamstress at a factory where she was subject to harsh racism. My mother had to keep herself accountable in school because her parents were usually away

working, and she had to help her parents fill out the bills because they could not speak English. Despite all of this hard work, all of these women are recognized under their husband's last name. While the histories may be preserved, what about the HERstories, and the obstacles that the matrilineal side had to overcome? Without these hard working women, my family would not exist the way it does now. This is why I am writing this short herstory, so that more people can recognize the significance of the women in our lives.

## **When I came to the United States**

*LD, Blair High School*

I think every student has something special to share about school because something happens to us everyday. My story starts five years ago when I came to the United States. I was so scared and nervous because I didn't know any English. I remember when my sister-in-law took me to the Pasadena district to find a school for me. The people there were so nice to us. They were speaking in Spanish for me, and explained to me how the schools work here. They gave me an exam to see how my English was. I knew that my English was really bad, but I tried. When they saw my results, they gave me the closest school for me and the school that is going to help me more. I remember how I was praying on my first day at Blair because I thought that no one was going to speak Spanish.

I thought that I wasn't going to have any friends, but when I arrived at Blair and saw people from different Latin American countries, I was so happy. I made friends the first day, and my teachers were so nice to me and they explained things to me in Spanish if I didn't understand.

I am so thankful to the people that have helped me since my first day at Blair. Thanks to them, I learned a lot. My English is not perfect, but I am still practicing to get better. In conclusion, this is a story that I like to share with all the students that come to Blair without knowing any English. I like to tell them that they can do it.

## **Siempre tuve mi propósito en mente- I always had my purpose in mind**

*AR, Blair High School*

En mis cinco años que he estado en los Estados Unidos he tenido una buena experiencia y dificultades mientras navegaba por un nuevo país y aprendí un nuevo idioma. Fue muy difícil para mí. He tenido muchas experiencias en las que me sentí excluido de varios grupos de personas y tratar de sentirme bien fue muy difícil para mí. Incluso, cuando sentí que no podía soportarlo más en mi primer año de secundaria, siempre tuve mi propósito en mente y siempre lo mantengo en la cabeza arriba y dar lo mejor de mí en cualquier momento. En muchos momentos he hecho mucho como ayudar en práctica con mis entrenadores, he obtenido muchos diplomas de sobresaliente en

algunas clases, pero no muy bien porque cuando empezó la pandemia todo me fue mal. Me costaba intentar concentrarme en la escuela. Aprendí mucho de diferentes personas que conocí estos años porque me apoyaron cuando los tiempos eran difíciles para mí y diferentes maestros me ayudaron cuando estaba a punto de dejar la escuela durante mi tercer año. Aprendí a salir de mi zona de confort y a manejarlo porque durante la experiencia de la escuela secundaria ha sido un poco difícil. Aprendí a ser un buen líder, incluidos los deportes que estoy haciendo ahora mismo porque al principio no supe ser una persona con carácter para que otras personas me respeten. Tuve tantos obstáculos durante mi tercer año porque era difícil aprender la escuela solo a través de una pantalla de computadora y entender que tratar de aprender de esta manera no es lo mismo que estar en clases presenciales. Mi plan después de la escuela secundaria es tratar de mejorar y tratar de ser mejor que en la escuela secundaria, tratar de entrar a una universidad de cuatro años y tratar de graduarme y luego ir a una escuela de medicina y lograr de agarrar mi master diploma y lograr todo lo que quiero.

## **Helping your community allows you to grow as a person**

*IF, Blair High School*

I want to protect my community at all costs by aiding those in need, preserve the greater good, and put the needs of the people first. I enrolled in the Los Angeles Sheriff's Explorer Program at the Altadena Sheriff's Station at the age of fourteen. Unfortunately, due to budget constraints, the Altadena station was temporarily closed, and I was forced to transfer to the Walnut Sheriff's Station in order to continue my path as an explorer.

The major purpose of the explorer program is to educate and mentor youths interested in law enforcement while providing in-depth firsthand knowledge in the field of law enforcement. I am confident that I will do great things: serve our community and seek justice for all the people. I've taken part in a variety of events as an explorer. One example is assisting families who cannot afford to buy Christmas gifts for their children, as well as providing them with free Christmas dinner.

I also help out at Pasadena's Saint Gregory Armenian Apostolic Church. Every Sunday, I'm part of the choir at the church, a member of the Armenian church youth organization, and the publicity director. Being Orthodox Christian is part of my culture as an Armenian, and I give back to my community by providing packed lunches for the homeless. This is one example out of many ways I help my community. The most important aspect is my obligation to spread Armenian culture and religion to the rest of the world before culture disappears. The war between Azerbaijan and Artsakh, was a tragic event in history. With that said, I am afraid that my culture will be lost; which is why it is critical to be active in the Armenian community and the larger community. As part of the ACYO team and our community, we helped pack food, water, first aid kits, clothes, and blankets for Artsakh during the war. Helping your community allows you to grow as a person and gain a better understanding of how you fit into the world around you.

I've always enjoyed sports, especially basketball. Basketball has been my extracurricular activity in school since 9th grade, and I eventually made Varsity and was given the opportunity to captain my



team. This activity has taught me leadership skills, as well as self-confidence and trust in my team. I received an honor roll award for my academic performance in 11th grade. It was difficult, especially with the pandemic, but I didn't let that stop me from receiving the honor roll award. I also participate in the Armenian Club at Blair, which aims to raise awareness of my culture. Helping out in my community is a great way to broaden your worldview. You can learn a lot about how the world works by immersing yourself in a community and surrounding yourself with people who are dedicated to bettering the world. Serving those around you gives you a distinct sense of purpose, which often manifests in other areas of your life.

## **(CONTENT WARNING: Kid put in difficult position)**

### **Un Camino Difícil- A Difficult Way**

*AP, Blair High School*

Todos piensan o esperan que siempre tenga los mejores grados y entrar a una buena universidad pero a la vez ya no puedo. Tener una segunda vida es muy difícil porque por que quiero vivir feliz pero lastimosamente no mas puedo ser feliz en la escuela pero la escuela es lugar para aprender pero a la vez es muy difícil por la presión de que me han puesto. Mis maestros diran que porque usare mi cel todas las veces. Pues no lo uso en mi casa porque tengo miedo que me regañen. Mi escuela es como mi casa pero a la vez tengo miedo de que mi familia se de cuenta que soy otra persona de la que ellos no esperan. Mi vida ha sido muy difícil a pesar que tuve que dejar a mi familia por una decicion que yo quize por toda la homofobia y pensaba que iba a ser mas feliz aqui. A lo contrario me ha pasado cosas terribles ocultarme teniendo dos vidas, tener miedo de que mi familia me entere y me mande de vuelta para Guatemala por no quererme como soy. He tenido mucha depresión y estres por mi familia esperan que siempre terminen mis tareas rapido y por veces les tengo que mentir porque ellos quieren que haga otras cosas. Gracias a mis amigos soy yo mismo pero mis amigos por veces no estan o no me hablan y lo comprendo no soy perfecto y pues tampoco los puedo obligar pero si vieran como yo los veo a ellos, son como mi familia por eso nunca me puedo enojar con ellos. Pero hay veces que ni se quien soy yo o porque yo mismo decidi venir para aca. Yo solo quiero ser feliz es lo que siempre he querido sin tener que ocultar. Siempre intento hacer lo mejor para mi y para ellos. Y si por veces les miento para quedar con mis amigos porque ellos no me dejan ni salir con mis amigos porque piensan que estare haciendo algo malo. Es un camino difícil que pienso que algun dia lograre superar...

### **My Living Legend**

*AR, Pasadena High School*

Who would you consider to be an important person in your life? Could it be your friend, neighbor, or mom? Mine would be my abuelita, Austreberta Gonzalez. My abuelita has been there since day one, literally. She has always been there to care for me, make me laugh and teach me so many lessons.

My abuelita is a literal legend in my eyes and just someone who I will always be grateful for and remember.

To start, my abuelita always shares her stories of when she was back in Mexico and they are always so crazy. She would tell me about how she was a hero and would fight off any guy who tried to come near her daughters. She told me how she would really give her all to provide a nice life to her children with the little she had.

“No necesito ningún hombre para que me haga las cosas,” she would tell me while sitting on the front chair of the kitchen table.

My abuelita does things that people would consider a “man’s” job. This makes her the bravest and strongest person I know today. She’s done the most unimaginable things, she literally killed a snake for me. In my eyes, she saved my life.

When I would go to ask my abuelita what jobs she worked in Mexico, she would basically say she was just there to do the laundry, clean, and make food. Now here in Pasadena, that’s really all she does and knows. Even when telling her to just sit and relax she doesn’t. It has really become a habit for her. Also, whenever I need something, my abuelita is The Flash and without fail, gets me what I need, she helps me to the best of her abilities. At her age of 85, she is still all over the place, never taking a day off.

I look up to her because even when she is feeling sick, she always finds the strength to get out of bed and make her day productive. Her finding the strength to overcome certain challenges that come her way has changed everything for me. I think about my abuelita when I’m at the verge of giving up and it really keeps me going, it has become a set mentality for me. If she can do what she puts her mind to, I certainly can as well.

For the most part, my abuelita always makes sure she teaches me everything I need to know to be independent, or the no hombre life as she calls it. She has taught me how to cook certain things and I think I’m pretty much a pro in Mexican standards. I can now flip a tortilla with my bare hands, maybe burning my finger tips every once in a while, but nonetheless I’m still a pro. My abuelita has also taught me how to wash clothes by hand and sew. She now always comes to me and says “hija me ensatas la abuja.” I was even taught how to iron my clothing without burning a hole straight through it.

The most important thing she has taught me though, would be to not let other people get in the way of your happiness, no matter who they are. Those few words are engrained in my brain and really stuck with me after coming out. I used to think I didn’t need to know or learn any of this, but god was I wrong. When I’m placed in a certain situation I pretty much have things under control thanks to my abuelita, I have actually grown and have taken on more responsibilities. I try to make sure I know how to do things on my own and I’m not always relying on my grandma all the time, but it’s good to know I have a little mentor just in case I’m in need of any help no matter the situation. Many people don’t have someone like my abuelita in their life, so I’m very grateful for her.

In addition, my abuelita has a passion for her garden and all her plants. She is out there every day caring for them. She can be there until sundown picking out the weeds, watering them, and cleaning up the unwanted leaves around it. She usually comes in with bloody arms from all the thorns she battles with. I tell her to be careful and she always comes at me with “nomas cura me,” I almost always have the smell of hydrogen peroxide in my nose. When rain comes, she goes outside to cover her plants so they don't completely get destroyed. This, believe it or not, is an inspiration for me. Just knowing that someone cares so much about little things is just so moving. I sometimes don't care about things, but seeing my abuelita give her all into her plants really gets me thinking and makes me want to strive for my passions.

My abuelita is a superhero, one of the biggest inspirations in my life. I'm extremely glad that I am able to call her my abuelita, that I've gotten to live with her, and that she's a part of my life and I'm a part of hers. Without her, I'd really be lost and not the person I am today. I've really gotten to see the growth that has come from my abuelita's lessons. I will always look back at those memories I have with her and see how lucky I got. Thanks to her, I was able to grow up with great knowledge and useful skills that I will be able to use in my everyday life. That is why my abuelita is the most important person in my life, my living legend.

## **Aguja**

*MM, Pasadena High School*

Before my great grandmother, Marychuy, came to California from Oaxaca, she sold her sewing patterns and creations to families and random people who came to her candy store. It wasn't just a passion, but a business. Sewing is a resourceful skill. It's not just about making things, but also fixing them.

Since sewing is so generational, it provides links to past generations and cultural roots. My great grandmother embroiders pillowcases, clothes, towels, oven mitts, and many other things. Whenever I come home from school or somewhere else, she's always sitting on the couch watching a novela and sewing. I greet her and she just looks up at me with her little black eyes, soft smile, and smell of talcum, and says, “Ya llegastes?” and acknowledges my existence while her hands are still working on her interesting patterns. I'm always amazed at how she can look up and not accidentally poke herself. When I was about five and she came to visit, she bought me a piece of cloth with a mermaid on it with the intention of teaching me how to embroider, but I never finished her mermaid tail.

My grandmother's sister, my aunt who is also named Marychuy, makes and mends clothes and makes party decor. She crochets too. She has made most of my baby outfits and Halloween costumes, and has repaired some of everyone's clothes too. When I was younger, my elementary school had a 'culture parade' where everyone had to wear something cultural. I told my grandma, who told my aunt who then started on the dress. It was a china poblana style dress, full of sequins and glitter. Now whenever I tell my grandma about possible halloween costumes she tells me to ask my tia Mary to help make them.

My uncle, Arturo, only fixes what his rabbits tore or his clothes that need fixing. My grandmother, my 'Maita', also mends clothes. I mend clothes and other things like blankets and pillows. Sometimes when my backpack tears, I know how to fix it. I like to think of it as a skill that will get me places. Like for example, what if I somehow get a cut that requires stitches BUT I'm stranded in the desert and the only thing I have to help is a sewing kit. I could just stitch myself right up and I'd live to see another day.

My grandmother taught me how to sew just like she taught my uncle and my mom. The very first thing my grandma taught me was how to make plush toys. Even though I still can't really sew buttons on the right, at least I know how to sew them on. She taught my mom how to sew clothes for her dolls and she taught my uncle how to sew up his old hand-me-down sweaters.

My mother, Brenda, told me about how when she was little, she used to sew Barbie clothes and her own purses out of old clothes. Once when I was younger I brought over a Barbie whose clothes I had lost in her house and she helped me make overalls for Barbie out of some old jeans. She told me about how when she and my dad were together she tried to teach him how to sew but of course, he didn't have the patience and called it a "woman's hobby".

Recently my favorite cousin, Rudy, had a baby. Months before the baby shower, my great grandma was already sewing pillow cases for the baby. Everyday I got home from school, she would walk up to me and ask me if I could show her a picture of Spongebob to see if she was using the right colors. She wasn't. When Rudy's girlfriend opened up the box with the pillow cases and held them out for everyone to see, he cried full of emotions and Modello, and said he loved them, even if Spongebob had a brown arm and brown legs.

My other cousin, Polet, also recently had her second baby. My great grandmother was sewing a tapestry with a figure of a doll holding a teddy bear. She loved it so much she kept it for herself. She even got a doll that matched the doll on the tapestry.

A cultural item to me is a needle. Almost everyone in my family knows how to sew. Sewing has been in my family for generations, my great grandmother, my grandmother, my aunts, my cousins, my uncle, my mother, now me.

## **E's Journey in PUSD**

*ES, Pasadena High School*

I was born in La Esperanza, Honduras on October 28, 2004. I came to the U.S. on May 5, 2011 at the age of 5. When I came to the U.S. I had two big wishes, to learn English and to be white. While we all know only one of my wishes came true and I'm sure we can all guess which one. Although I'm a lot more confident in my skin color, I struggled to love it, the same as I struggled to communicate with the other kids when school started. I was put in 1st grade instead of going to 2nd because I wasn't born in the U.S. and I had a late birthday. At my elementary school, Ms. Guzman was my 1st grade teacher. I feel like because of Ms. Guzman I wouldn't be where I am today. This brilliant

teacher took the time to explain her lessons to me in Spanish. She made sure I understood her lessons and would take her time helping me spell things out in English. She even went out of her way to sit me around kids who spoke Spanish which helped me make friends.

When I got to my 5th grade year, My school faced some big changes. We had a new principal, teachers were leaving, and different substitute teachers all the time making it hard for us to have a set lesson plan and set rules. During this school year I faced bullying and didn't report it until my parents noticed I was acting out at home. We took it to the new principal and he didn't take much action. My parents arranged a meeting with him and demanded something to be done. It was a week or two before 5th grade promotion and our new principal pulled the bully and me into the library and had a talk with us. He warned us that if the bullying continued, we weren't going to be in the 5th grade promotion. I felt as if my call for help to the principal ended up in me getting in trouble too and from that day on I chose to keep things from grown ups because I felt like it was somehow always going to be my fault. As I was finishing 5th grade with my final teacher Ms. Nuno, she told me "not everyone is going to like you and that's okay" and that stuck with me forever. Until this day I still live by what she told me and it was useful throughout my middle and high school years.

Transitioning into middle school was scary. I had to become independent and responsible. Throughout the year we were slowly taught how to be both. I went to John Marshall Fundamental where I attended all of 6th grade, the end of 7th, and all of 8th grade. The reason why I only attended the end of 7th grade was because my family chose to move to Seattle to see if we liked the atmosphere and what Seattle had to offer us. I attended a school named Sequoyah Middle School for about a month or two before my dad decided he didn't want to live there. We moved back to California and luckily, I still had my spot at Marshall so I decided to come back a little after they started their second semester. I had a lot to catch up on, but thankfully my friends were there to help and welcome me. I stayed up until my 8th grade year where I decided to join the dance team since I've always loved dancing as a kid. I made the team and had so much fun going to practices and making a family-like relationship with my teammates. Dancing felt like therapy, I was able to express myself through the choreography and music. This passion for dance then made me want to try something new for my high school years that would still involve dancing but will challenge me some more and will push my limits.

As I entered high school I decided to try out for the JV cheer team just to get an insight on what it might be like. I tried out for Pasadena High School's cheer team and enjoyed the few practices they held before tryouts to learn choreography and cheers. I made the team and began summer practices which were so much fun. This became my new favorite thing to do and I stuck with it until the end. When the first day of school came around I got to wear my cheer uniform, but it was very nerve-wracking. I couldn't believe I had made it to high school, especially to the high school I was planning to attend since I was in 8th grade. I enjoyed my freshman year of high school, although there would be some conflict between other girls, I still tried to look past it and enjoy the year. Sadly that year was cut short because we entered the pandemic so we finished my freshman year online.

All of my 10th grade year of high school was online. It was somewhat easy at first but then it got hard. I was struggling to get up early to log in to my first class. My teacher wasn't the most patient either, but I still tried to participate as much as I could. I was taking two Advanced Placement (AP) classes, and I was struggling with one of them. I ended up not passing that one AP class and will

now have to retake one semester of it during summer. My other AP class was easy and I passed the exam with a 4. During this time I was also part of my uncle's cancer journey. We were often driving 30 minutes every night to be able to see him and keep my grandma company while she was his assigned caretaker. This was my biggest challenge when school was coming to an end. I struggled with my finals, and I was trying to get school work done at my uncle's house while also trying to have family time. The two didn't mix but I had to push through. I passed most of my classes and was just glad school was over. All I wanted to do was have fun all summer break since I had too much stress during the school year.

For the following year school we began classes in-person. As I'm writing this I am currently a junior in the Law and Public Service (LPS) academy with straight A's, a 4.0 GPA, and a varsity cheerleader. When this school year began I decided to work harder and do everything I needed to do in order to have good grades and maintain strong relationships with my teachers. I also made the decision to not take any AP classes this year and save myself the stress. Although being an LPS student is almost as hard as taking an AP class I wouldn't drop it for anything in the world. We've had to write a lot and have been held to college standards, but it has all been beneficial because now I have experienced some of the things that are expected of me in college. Outside of school I joined the College Access Plan (CAP) program where they educate me about colleges, applications, and financial aid. As I mentioned, I am also a varsity cheerleader for my second year in high school since I decided to take a break during my sophomore year. I've also been doing really well in all of my classes and have great relationships with my teachers. I have enjoyed my high school memories and can't wait to see what my senior year is going to bring. My advice to those on their way to high school is that you shouldn't be afraid to be who you are. Knowing who you are will make you realize a lot about others. You also won't end high school with the same people you started with. You will lose them along the way and it's completely normal and for the best. Never lose yourself over things you can't control and turn your work in always; no matter how late it is.

## **Come as you are**

### *SO, Marshall Fundamental*

Over the last years of being a Marshall student, I have really learned and embraced being Latina and what my heritage really is. When I was younger, I lived in a predominantly white neighborhood and had a majority of white friends. That being said, I was incredibly embarrassed when speaking Spanish because I had no one else to speak it with besides my family.

Once I moved to Pasadena, I learned so much about Latinos. I saw an abundance of people who looked like me and could understand what language I was saying. I was able to explore beyond what I was learning by attending/exploring Latino Club or Puente, or even Latino heritage month and assemblies. Not only that, but Marshall has a diverse race of students that I was able to see every year as more and more kids entered a new school year. In my final years of high school (next year as a senior), I learned not to feel embarrassed about my own culture while also exploring other cultures in school and my community.

## **I am Non-Binary**

*R, John Muir*

I am non-binary. It took me a while to get the courage to actually admit that. I am not a boy or a girl. I am simply me. Gender is a social construct, and so you can change it. Gender is all in our minds. We are what we feel. But a lot of people don't get or respect that. I have had many experiences here at John Muir with transphobic students, teachers, and just ignorant people who like to hurt others. I had emailed all my teachers first semester coming out to them and informing them of my name change. Because the PUSD database says my deadname and not my real name I have to let the teachers know in advance. Most of my teachers, especially Ms. Dao (Puente English teacher) and Mr. Galvan (PE teacher), were very good at remembering my name and using it without outing me. But, I had this one teacher who wouldn't call me R for whatever reason. I would always correct him whenever he took attendance. He wouldn't listen. And so I emailed him after he took attendance one day, so it was during class. I guess he had checked his email after and instead of pulling me over and apologizing he announced the email to the entire class. He had outed me, once again. He said next time I should talk to him instead of emailing him, even after I had corrected him every day since I started his class. He humiliated me in so many ways. After his class I got called a "tranny." It was my first time being called that in real life. And it hurts. I felt weird. I just wanted to be normal after that. All because this teacher had no common decency.

In my English class, we were discussing gender and pronouns. Which is something I love discussing for some obvious reasons. These two boys behind me know I am non binary. And they kept on making fun of pronouns. My pronouns. I go by they/them pronouns, and I am very open about that. These two boys kept on saying the usual "R, there are only two genders," and "R, you are a girl - you can't be anything else, you're a girl." I was used to all this by now, which for the record nobody should be used to. But, what got me was when one of them said, "My pronouns are attack/helicopter!" Now, first off, get original. Really? Attack helicopter? That is always used to get new material. But something in me just couldn't take it anymore. These two idiotic boys were making fun of not only me but of every transgender person out there. Their disrespect was insulting, and they got no repercussions. So, I turned around, and cussed them out. Yelling "Will you guys shut the F up?" I couldn't believe I said that. It wasn't until a few moments later that I realized tears were forming in my eyes. I had shouted at these two jerks. I should have been proud. But I just wanted to be invisible. Everything was too much. The teacher took the boys out and talked to them. I didn't get in trouble because these kids have harassed me before. This time though, I snapped. And I'm glad I did.

Being anything that is not straight and cis is a struggle. It feels like almost everyone is against you. But there are a few good people out there in Muir. I am glad I have found those people. The harassment hasn't stopped. But it's gotten easier to deal with. Everyday it gets easier. So if you are reading this and feel alone and just want to be normal, remember, normal isn't a thing. Be who you are and screw what people say. If you gotta snap, do it.



## **My Bisexual Adolescence**

*A R-G, Blair High School*

When I was younger, I didn't know that bisexuality existed. In my elementary school, my main social circle was catholic girls who believed being gay was a sin. I have a gay uncle, and I knew that lesbians existed. But beyond that, I had no other knowledge of what it meant to be gay, well except, of course, the way I looked at girls and guys in the same way.

Little sixth grade me denied this with everything in her though, having been mainly surrounded by people who believed it was something vile or disgusting growing up. I had my first sexuality crisis in sixth grade, at the tender age of ten, upon having several elementary school memories resurface and beginning to find a girl in my choir more attractive than a friend should. The first time I remembered something from elementary though I brushed it off. But as it continued to happen, I arrived at a crossroads and had no choice but to confront my impending (and glaringly obvious) queerness.

I don't exactly remember how long it took me to come to terms with the fact that I was not straight. But me being me, the second I decided this for myself, I labeled myself a lesbian. So I came out to people immediately. And unfortunately, one of the people I came out to, who I believed had the right to know at the time, outed me. He told his friends to tell everyone they knew that I was a lesbian. He called me so many slurs and made sure all his friends did the same on a daily basis. And basically, everyone in sixth grade knew.

It was this whole big thing, "Have you heard? Alina is a lesbian!"

After having just gotten out of the confining box that is heterosexuality, I quickly found myself in a similar situation with lesbianism. And on top of this new conundrum I'd begun to fall into, I'd have several people coming up to me daily, asking me about my sexuality in an incredibly demeaning tone. I distinctly remember a conversation that cleared my understanding of my own sexuality. It was with an old friend, who was also the only other queer friend I had. They told me about their identity, which was bisexuality, and what that meant. Aka, being able to like both girls and guys.

So now, when people came up to me asking about my sexuality and when girls in the locker rooms shied away from me in fear of me being perverted, I could tell them, "Don't worry, I'm bi! I like girls and guys." Though unfortunately, that did not stop the homophobia, it only caused an increase in homophobia and biphobia. I was told so many invalidating things; practically every biphobic phrase or saying in the book.

This did, of course, have ramifications for my future. It caused me to be stunted in being able to be open with my sexuality or attraction. It made me insecure, and guilty. So, so, so guilty. For a long time, I felt terrified of the girl's locker room because I was played out to be the preying bisexual. I even felt guilty for harboring an attraction to a girl or having a crush on one. I felt invalid in my preferences or sexuality in fear of being too straight, too gay, or my favorite, not bisexual enough.



As horrible as my middle school experience was because of this, a weird, small part of me is glad that I was outed. It meant that I didn't have to go around person to person, explaining myself. It meant someone did it for me, and I was semi-relieved of that duty. Plus, it also meant I wasn't in the closet, and everyone knew about my bisexuality, which made me feel freer. Because being stuck, or limited to straightness, lesbianism, the closet, has never made me feel comfortable, all those things have made me feel confined, but I have so much liberty in my bisexuality, and I love that.

Though of course, I am in no way condoning the homophobia, biphobia, bullying, harassment, and outing that I faced. It is such an incredibly harmful and real issue. It is honestly still so prevalent in my day-to-day life. Every day I hear someone say "gay" in a negative tone, or just blatantly say the F slur. Something about homosexuality or the concept of it is so entertaining and hilarious to these straight people. And it's so infuriating when schools promote themselves to be accepting and open when the school's environment is anything but that.

## **Find your love**

*Anonymous, Blair High School*

I'm learning about myself. It's taking years and decades to acknowledge who I am. After numerous challenges and mistakes, I see myself as an entirely different person from me from ten years ago. One thing that I'm struggling with is my sexuality. Not even just trying to figure out if I'm gay or straight, honestly just where I lie on the spectrum. When I was younger, I didn't know anything about the LGBTQ+ community. I hadn't even heard of things like preferred pronouns or being transgender. Possibly back in fifth or sixth grade, I started experimenting with romance, although it doesn't seem like such a big topic for an issue, the way I've been dealing with it seems like hell. I've never experienced that love feeling. The feeling of having a crush like every source of media will show to young children. I've always read about it, and even created characters that would fall in love, but I never did.

At that point, I thought that I'd have to take it into my own hands. I would go to school and think about the boys in my class. Trying to think about which boy would be best to have a crush on. I rated the boys on their looks and personalities and tried to find the best one for me. Then as soon as I had my choice, I told my friend. She had told me she also had a crush on him. I decided to just forget about my crush on him so she could have her chances, which is a move that I'd believe to be extremely hard for someone who has actual feelings. Later that year, she was rejected by him. Then soon after, she decided to reveal her new crush to me. After she asked me to guess and I gave her terrible answers, she just revealed that it was me. I've never been too educated on girls loving girls, so I didn't know what to do. I couldn't give her an answer, so she ran away. She avoided me for three days before I fixed our friendship with a poorly written note.

Now, I'm a senior in high school, and I've finally figured out my sexuality, after experimenting with two temporary boyfriends, but my biggest problem currently is how to gain attraction to someone. Throughout my whole life, I've never fallen in love with someone. Throughout my relationships, I

would usually lose these “feelings” I had for them, even though the relationships were usually on impulse. In my sophomore year, I claimed to be demisexual, meaning I don't have an attraction to people unless I know them and they're the perfect person. Recently I watched a film about being aromantic, meaning you don't feel romantic to anyone. Usually, aromantic people will never want to be in a relationship. Usually, I'd be happy to figure out another piece of my life, but I don't want to be aromantic, I still do long for a relationship, but now I struggle to even talk to people who could be remotely interested in me.

In conclusion, I wish schools would teach more about the LGBTQ+ spectrum. I feel like I could have had a great advantage if I knew more about sexualities. For now, I'll just try to live life the best I can.

## **It was my choice to take that leap**

*Anonymous, Blair High School*

My family came to the U.S. from Ecuador. I was born here, and now I take the opportunity to study and do my best to have great grades. My parents were not born in the United States, and they made the great choice to have me here, and so I was born as an American citizen. My parents gave me the opportunity to study in one of the best schools in Ecuador. In the two schools that I went to, two schools had a high level of English and education. This education gave me the opportunity to have a good foundation in English and education. The beauty of learning in Ecuador at this school was that I could improve my learning in Spanish, but at the time, develop my skills in English in preparation for moving to the United States should that opportunity come. And indeed it did, but it was my choice to take that leap.

For a better life, I prefer to continue school and finish it in the United States. It was the perfect opportunity and time to take it, but what makes this like just a wish to go to the United States, was the global pandemic, covid. This made me feel bad. I didn't know if this pandemic would end as soon as I traveled to the United States. Because of this global pandemic, I finished my 11th grade virtually in Ecuador, and then I was to start the last year of high school. Then came the great opportunity and great news. The airport was open. Therefore, I could come and start my senior year of high school in California at Blair High School.

## **I should pursue my passions**

*O, John Muir*

I came to the realization approximately a year ago that I'd rather do something I love to do and make less money than do something I'm not too hot about and make more money. It's not every staff member, but many of them promote securing a high paying job over one that really satisfies one's passions.

I understand the risks and potential downsides, but I believe there is much more to one's life and existence than a career that makes good money. Through my passion for soccer, and community involvement, I found that those avenues are where I would like to find a career, and no matter the difficulty, I believe it should be something I should pursue. I should pursue my passions because it is often preached that we "can do whatever we set our minds to" or "the sky's the limit" but I don't know if that is truly what some teachers believe.

## **I don't need anyone hovering over me just because I have hearing loss**

*A, John Muir*

My experience being a part of PUSD has been amazing. Every school I've been to has been a different experience but it's never been bad. Starting in elementary school where teachers were always loving and kind to all their students, to middle school where the teachers were very understanding and it was the most I've had in school to now high school where they've taught me that hard work can lead you to great places and opportunities, every teacher in the district is so dedicated to their jobs and to helping their students above and beyond.

I have a birth defect where I have hearing loss. It is something I keep to myself and don't speak to anyone about it unless you'd know me personally. When I was younger, I used to get upset when people would ask me about it. I was so sensitive about the topic but as I grew up I am more open about the situation. It wasn't anything I was able to control or can control. It never gave me any issues personally. Only when people would come to my school and ask me about everything, and it wasn't like I was having any issues. And if I was, I would clearly state it but they would make me feel so ashamed of it, coming in almost everyday out of the week to ask me how I was and pressuring me to wear my hearing aid when I clearly wasn't comfortable wearing it and I am still not. I remember I would feel so sad and cry because they would make me wear it and people would question it since at that time in elementary I would wear my hair up. It didn't stop there. When they clearly saw I would be uncomfortable, they got this "new equipment" for me which was a speaker that would have to be set on top of my desk and many students were able to see and ask questions about it when the teacher would have to wear the microphone around her neck, I won't sit here and complain about it I am grateful they tried to help but I was honestly fine. I just never liked how pushy they were about all situations and they would hover over me not letting me do my own things.

In all honesty, I do believe PUSD has some of the best and caring staff members who offer so much help, but in my case I was perfectly fine and they insisted on certain things that I didn't feel comfortable about or wanted to do. It was almost embarrassing, I know it's nothing to be embarrassed about, but when they would intervene with certain things, it would make me feel embarrassed when they would have me go to separate rooms from other students when taking tests - they didn't let me feel normal as if I wasn't capable of taking a test in a class with other students. Now in high school they put me in a class during school where I would just do my homework basically all period long and I quickly realized I was purposefully placed in the class, so sophomore

year I switched out. I feel as if I don't need anyone hovering over me just because I have hearing loss. I can function properly mentally. I know that I need to get my homework done. I know how to ask questions. I know.

## **I don't know what I did to provoke this accusation**

*A, John Muir*

It's not really that funny when I think back on this situation but I laugh. When I was in the 7th grade I had this science teacher. We never really got along. She always said I was lacking self-discipline and didn't follow directions. I wasn't really the best student in middle school, so she could have been right.

One day when we were in class we were supposed to be doing research on a topic I can't remember. But she gave us this link to a website that we were supposed to be reading. When I opened the link, my article was in Armenian. I didn't know how it got there, and so I was trying to fix it so I could get my work done. I turned it over to my friend so she could help me figure out how to fix it. When my teacher saw us talking, she came over to us and asked what we were doing. I tried to tell her that my friend was trying to help me fix my article.

All of a sudden, my teacher started yelling at us to stop talking and start working. I then tried to show her my Chromebook and explain that I couldn't do my research because my Chromebook had done something wrong. The text was in Armenian and I didn't speak it, so I asked her how she expected me to do an assignment when I didn't know how to read Armenian. She got all upset and walked back to her desk to write me a referral. She claimed that I was being racist and offensive towards her.

Now I don't know what I did to provoke this accusation, but I'm not racist. I got in trouble with her that day and got sent to the office but even now as a junior I still remember it. I don't think it was fair for her to kick me out. Maybe she was having a bad day, but it still kind of bothered me.

## **They think that my condition can be boiled down to a bunch of stereotypes**

*A, John Muir*

I never asked to be born with ADHD but nonetheless here I am. I used to feel like an outcast or felt like I'd be ashamed if I told people that I had something that wasn't normal. People often ask why I bounce my leg, why I have segments missing from my notes, and or why I get off task so often and I used to hide that. I'm 18 now, and I'm not that scared little boy who cares about everyone's perception of me. Bottom line is that I grew up, and now I'm open about having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. My school experience has gotten better since then, and overall my life has

gotten better since I started being honest with myself. The teachers have been more understanding and despite what I thought, my friends don't mind because they can see past my diagnosis. It's been a tough journey, and I'm very grateful that the school system has tried its best to accommodate me. As happy as I am that society has made strides in the last few decades to improve perception of people with disabilities or who are different from the norm, I am still saddened that some people still cling onto the hate and misconceptions.

In middle school, at the peak of my struggle with the disorder, I was told that my experience wasn't valid by a school counselor because "everybody has ADHD nowadays." I was then disrespectfully reprimanded for struggling to turn in work. Even in my time in high school I've had some teachers who knew I struggled with ADHD. They poked fun at me and called me out by name in class which made me embarrassed and dejected. I don't believe they said it out of hate or even out of a sense of superiority but instead, I believe they are misinformed about the topic. It isn't as easy as sitting down or even trying harder to pay attention but they think it is. They think that my condition can be boiled down to a bunch of stereotypes and think it's a joke condition. We've come a long way as a society, but it hurts that the school system that is meant to help still has uneducated and offensive views being expressed and that made me feel isolated in a room full of people my age. Even though these moments make me feel terrible, I'll still do my best to educate people as best I can so that maybe one day everyone who suffers from the same disorder can stop feeling scared to express themselves.

## **East Coast to West Coast**

*M, John Muir*

As a teenager who took care of his three siblings, I felt as if I had left my kids when I moved to California from Tennessee. Trying not to worry was hard. I had a job at 13. Right after school, I had to get there on time and help my mom. It was pretty hard, but at least my dad was trying to help me. He is the reason why I'm here in California now. I thank him lots for taking me out of the situation I was in. He's giving me the chance to actually be a child, because I don't have to work a job, and I'm not taking care of my siblings anymore. But also, I still worry about my little siblings and miss them. It gets to me the most of everything, but I need to focus more on school so I can get into selling clothing, become an athlete, and help them in the future. My dad is on me so much about my grades. I know he wants the best out of me, but it's hard moving all the way across the U.S. I left everything behind to try to make a career. Right now, I need to work on my grades a lot, but it's not too late to redeem myself yet. Besides this is my first year here and I'm coming straight from online school. I'll get the hang of it eventually. I made some cool friends to hang with. They're chill and pretty laid back. I don't regret coming to California. The school I joined has great classes, the football team is good, and there isn't really that much drama going on. My life isn't the best, but it isn't the worst either. I'm okay with that, and I'm grateful for what I do have.

## **I could not be "Godly" and gay**

L, John Muir

A time I had to question my belief was when my religion went against my sexuality. I thought God was going to hate me and I was going to hell. Almost everyone in my family shared those same beliefs. Therefore, I thought there must be something wrong with me.

My religious beliefs have always been a big part of my and my family's lives. Due to this I, unknowingly, created a divide in my life. I was trying to separate myself and my religion from my sexuality. If I ignore it for long enough it will go back to "normal." This sent me into a dark place. I thought I was being punished by God.

It took me a while, but I got more comfortable and secure with my sexuality. I came to the realization that I could not change or try to control my sexuality and that it was not something evil I needed to get rid of. I learned to embrace my sexuality, but I felt disconnected from my christianity, that I could not be "Godly" and gay.

I had to reflect on myself and everything I knew, at the time, about God. I realized God as seen through organized religion - that is christianity with bigotry - was flawed. To use the religion to fear monger people to think they have to be a certain way to be a "real christian" is wrong when in reality, the entire basis of the christian God is that he loves and accepts everyone. I had to change my belief and break away from "traditional christianity" and choose to believe in a truly unconditional God in whom I could find comfort.

## **When I was in the ninth grade, I was called the f-slur.**

*Anonymous, Marshall Fundamental*

When I was in the ninth grade, I was called the f-slur. I'm unsure if the student that called me this was aware that I am actually LGBTQ, but regardless of whether he knew, it was still very hurtful. I brought it up with my teacher, who dismissed it and told me to go to another teacher. That teacher luckily took care of it, but the first teacher should not have dismissed it like that. It made me feel like my problem was invalid, and that I shouldn't have been upset.

I feel like more needs to be done about the use of slurs on campus. I hear at least 10 people say slurs on campus even if they can't reclaim them. For example, I hear a lot of non-black students saying the n-word. Even if they don't mean it towards someone in a derogatory way, they should not be saying it. I also hear the f-slur being thrown around a lot with the intent to be homophobic. More needs to be done to reduce the usage of slurs on campus.

In addition to this, telling teachers my pronouns can be extremely difficult and nerve-wrecking. It also makes me extremely nervous when we have substitute teachers because they are not aware I go by

a different name than what's on the roster, and I'm worried people may one day question me about that. I feel like more needs to be done to help trans students feel more comfortable, such as sending out a survey at the beginning of the year to ask about pronouns and preferred names for students.

# Pandemic



## **12 AM**

*Anonymous, Blair High School*

I had a really rough time getting back into school. This came after the year of isolation that came from covid. I made a negative amount of friends during the previous year. It was the most gut wrenching experience trying to get back into school. I talked to a few people on the first day. And realized just how isolated that I was from everyone else. At the end of the day I went to my bathroom and just cried. I didn't know what else I could really do. I still had assignments, so I couldn't stay there for too long. I stayed up till past 12 am.

The next day I went back to school incredibly tired. I went through the day and went back home and cried. This repeated for about a week. After that, I became more acquainted with others. But I still didn't sleep well. I still worked on homework till 12 am at least. This would continue far more than my emotional breakdowns. I still go to sleep after midnight almost every single day. For the past school year, I haven't gone to sleep before 12 am even once on a school night. The past year during online school, I was able to eat and sleep an amazing amount. I grew around five inches. I have grown half an inch this school year. I am almost always tired during the first couple of class periods. I am struggling so much right now. But better than the beginning of the school year.

## **I Could Never Go Back To Online School**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

I never had trouble during school until covid happened. The transition from in-person learning to online learning was really difficult for many reasons. When I did my work in bed it made me sleepy and I just wanted to close my computer and go back to sleep. I didn't have an area to do my homework and before online learning, I did my homework in bed. Also, the moment I woke up I was in front of my computer for about seven hours and I had blue light glasses because my eyes would hurt. I had to go to the eye doctor, and they told my mom that I had to get those glasses or I will become near-sighted.

Every day of 8th grade, I would wake up at around 8 am and go straight to my computer and sit there for hours. Don't get me wrong, I did good in 8th grade with a 4.0 GPA, but I had more stress. I struggled more than in any other year in middle school. I am a visual learner so it was harder for me to learn new things in math because they couldn't see what they wrote on the whiteboard. When I woke up I couldn't eat breakfast until around 10 o'clock and I only had 10 minutes to eat so I had to rush it. My mom didn't like online learning because she couldn't give my brothers and me a proper meal because we usually eat for about 15-20 minutes.

Also, for about a week our WiFi wasn't working, so we couldn't do our assignments so our grades started to drop and it was hard to bring them back up. That's not fair if some students don't have WiFi their grades start to drop. And if we tell the teacher, they didn't do anything so I couldn't do anything about it. If the teachers asked me to unmute and some students had a lot of background

noise including me, so the teachers couldn't hear me. I had to type the answer for whatever they asked.

The biggest thing I hated is that I couldn't see my friends, and at the time my parents didn't let me go out with my friends because they said I was irresponsible. If the pandemic got worse, I don't think I could do another year of online learning, so I'm praying that the covid cases stay low.

## **Online school and the Major struggle**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

Middle school was going well until covid 19 started hitting hard around the world, and we eventually went into online classes. Everyone was excited about having to do class online but the transition from in-person to online wasn't as easy as I thought it would be. As I was always pretty good at school, I thought it would be even easier now, but that changed a while after online classes started.

From waking up early and getting ready to go to school to waking up five minutes before online class started. As the year of online learning went on, I stopped caring about school as much and didn't feel any need of continuing the year with good grades. The year went on. The motivation to do good in school stopped, and the pile of assignments were really starting to pile up. Almost every class would be me either sleeping or on my pc playing some games.

Another issue was rarely the meetings wouldn't start or Cisco Webex wouldn't be working or loading, so we just had to work off on our own or we would switch to Google Meets a while later missing a lot of class time. A problem I feel that everyone was affected by was there was no motivation and there was no participation. This really affected most classes as no one was talking and teachers would usually be talking to themselves and there would be no active class discussion going on. Something that was not really anyone's fault was the lag of the meetings where everyone would lag and we would miss important information or instructions. I had a really hard time trying to learn anything in online school and a crucial problem that led to that was all the distractions around me. From waking up and going to class there would be distractions such as my bed, pc, tv, phone, and anything else that could entertain me more than the boring classes going on. Online school overall wasn't good for anyone, and I didn't find many people who particularly enjoyed it. Everyone likes being with friends, but with the online classes you really couldn't interact with friends and the feeling of being excited to see your friends again was slowly dying down. Something crucial I know all people missed was maybe some new experiences or hobbies you could have picked up while you missed in-person school.

## **I'm a believer**

*Yr, Blair High School*

Throughout my high school years, I always managed to get my work done and get passing grades, but I believe my senior year after returning from the pandemic affected me in a variety of ways. I got so used to the WebEx calls and just learning that I forgot what it was like to return.

This year has been the most stressful of my entire life. I've been doing things I know are bad for me, but I know I can keep going. It gets difficult, but I know I can get back up. This school year has been extremely difficult, but the only person who has only helped me get back up is God.

## **Nachos and Tuna Melts**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

Quarantine was hard. Brutal even. Through all the pain, tears, and hardships my most detailed memory was lunch. Every day before quarantine I would get lunch from my school cafeteria and complain about it being school food before eating it and moving on with my day. Four to five different lunches a week. Just like every other kid in PUSD. Going into online school in between that second and third class of the day, I'd come walking down the stairs for lunch time. Gratefully, I had a mom who had the time to make me lunch everyday.

During the first few weeks, "Nachos or Tuna melt?" she'd ask politely after my tiring morning. I'd answer and get excited for the meal ahead of me. Then those first few weeks were done with, although that same question definitely wasn't. Weeks of nachos and tuna melts turned into months of nachos and tuna melts turned into 1.5 years of nachos and tuna melts. I couldn't bear to break the news to my sweet mom that I'd had just too many. So all of a sudden school lunch wasn't sounding so bad. How I've missed the food I once complained about.

## **Keep myself alive**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

Eighth grade was one of my hardest school years. Covid hit and I couldn't focus to the point where I didn't even log into class. My internet wasn't the best at the time. Since we moved, I was adjusting to a new environment. I would get stressed out real easy because I didn't understand what my teacher was trying to teach me. I couldn't get anyone's help to show me how to actually do the problem. My grades got so bad to the point where I didn't even check my grades on Aries because I was afraid to see them. I ended up not even logging into class at all.

Online school was so difficult. I had no clue what I was doing. I've tried to get help, but it wouldn't fix anything. Since I'm a visual learner I couldn't learn the way that was best fit for me. I'm not the only one who has experienced this either. Almost everyone I knew was failing online school. They just

couldn't stay focused just like me. There were too many distractions at home and not enough resources to get the help when we needed it.

I can't possibly think about going online again. I would fail instantly. This is why I hope even when covid gets really bad, we still have an option if we want to go to school or not. During online school I had a 1.5 GPA. And now I have a 3.6 GPA. This just proves how difficult online learning is for some students. But I can say that experience has helped me now. I have to be more independent. Also now it counts so if I end up failing online it will be a big problem for me in the future.

## **Don't assume what you don't know**

*LF, Marshall Fundamental*

Being a student athlete is a challenging yet rewarding experience. Constantly balancing training times, school, and homework is never easy. I have had to make many sacrifices throughout high school due to both school and athletics. Sometimes I feel so consumed with my extracurriculars that I am somehow missing out on the high school experience. However for many kids like me, this is the high school experience. Athletics has taught me perseverance. It has taught me how to adapt and get outside of my comfort zone, but most importantly it has given me structure. The repetitiveness of my daily routine may be an uncomfortable thought to others, but like many student athletes it brings me comfort. Because of athletics, I don't have to worry about organizing my own day. I know that once I get home I have a set amount of time for homework, and a set amount of time to relax and decompress. Oddly enough, the covid lockdown was when my grades dropped the most. I had so much free time on my hands I didn't know what to do with all of it.

Covid made me realize how much sports had impacted my life, mainly my attitude and grades. I believe that as a student athlete I have an advantage over other students, because athletics has forced me to learn a lot of life lessons at an early age without me even realizing. I am extremely happy with my high school experience so far as a student athlete, even though it was not at all what I had expected. I am also very thankful for my teachers, administrators and fellow classmates at Marshall fundamental for constantly supporting me in my education and athletics. Lastly, I want to encourage any student in high school who is considering joining a sport, or any extracurricular for that matter, to just go for it. You will never know how much something like that can positively affect your life until you give it a shot.

## **Graduation is the culmination of all that was supposed to happen and didn't**

*E, John Muir*

I have about six weeks left of high school. And I am exhausted. It feels like a majority of my high school experience has been about grieving and that this - graduation - is the culmination of all that was supposed to happen and didn't.

The pandemic cut my sophomore year short. When I had once spent my life moving (my life centered around band, sports, clubs and friends), things were now still. I filled that stillness with alarms. I planned my days out to the minute. I had three panic attacks in which I thought I might actually die. I did not see a single friend in-person for months at a time. I never saw my grandparents. I lost friends. I missed the faces I saw in the hallways, even when I didn't know their names.

During junior year, my Grandma on my Dad's side (the Asian side - one of my final connections to my Japanese heritage) suffered injuries from a bad fall. I attended protests to #StopAsianHate and fell asleep terrified that I was going to lose my Grandma, that this pandemic would take her with the same violence it had taken countless (Asian) grandmas: by disease, hate and isolation. I grieved for the time I missed with my grandma. I grieved for my Asian American community being attacked and harassed online and on the streets.

Next year, I will be in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, far away from all that I have ever known; far away from John Muir High School, from Pasadena, from California, from my family and my community. I'm sure seniors generally feel a grief similar to mine, across time. But I know that the last three senior classes have been deeply affected by their time lost on campus. There are friends that I wish I had gotten close to sooner. I feel like I have barely started my athletic career. I only just got my drivers permit. I only just got back into the rhythm of school. And now I am going to be graduating and moving across the country.

I feel a deep sadness and a deep grief.

And for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. Because of my loss, I know that I have loved. My time at John Muir High School has been filled with so much love, community and family. My friends, marching band, late night bike rides, water polo tournaments, the Rose Parade, Turkey Tussle, lunches in the library, the conchas at nutrition, the Story, fist bumps from Dr. Gray and Dr. Robles, deep breathes in the Wellness Center, eating from Perry's or Homestate or Lincoln, librarians, coaches, friends, little brothers.

My anger is still valid. I can and will be angry about covid and how it has impacted my school experience.

AND I can be joyous. I will cry. I have loved. I will be leaving. I plan to come back.

I want administration, teachers and staff to know that just because we are "out" of this pandemic does not mean the effects are over. Students are still struggling with all that they have lost and we are still relearning how to function in a classroom setting. We have lost out on emotional learning, friends, family; our academics have suffered from lack of internet access and support at home or from teachers. You cannot expect us to just jump back.

You need to keep listening (or reading) our stories and take action to respond to our experiences.

## **True Colors**

*Anonymous, Marshall Fundamental*

One personal story that I think would be important for teachers and administrators to hear would be the determination that I have for tennis throughout quarantine and now. I want to show how determined I can be with everything I put my heart into. During quarantine I had a sparked interest in playing tennis for Marshall with my friends. It was my first time playing tennis.

Tennis is fun and enjoyable when you have friends around so I enjoyed it a lot. I started to embrace more to the point where I practice tennis everyday because it was something I wanted to pursue and become great at the sport. Tennis season started and I made it to varsity. Through this personal story of mine I want to tell the teachers and admins that anyone can achieve anything with their own hands if they put their mind to it.

Schools are mixed with kids who can be troublemakers and people who get straight A's. But most of the time, kids who usually present bad behavior get a lack of attention from the teachers because they usually don't do their work; which I highly disagree with because people who don't do their work can sometimes be tired of it or are putting a lot of pressure on themselves. They can achieve finishing their work. It's just a matter of what situation they are in whether or not they are capable of doing it or not. So I wished all teachers could give their support to all types of students because everyone is capable of doing anything.

## **I had to adjust**

*CV, Marshall Fundamental*

For about the last quarter of 9th grade and the full year of 10th grade we did online learning. I really didn't pay attention much and I would sometimes fall asleep during class, especially in my first and fourth periods. During this time I didn't learn pretty much anything because I didn't really have to study for anything as most of the answers were online. My teachers were also very lenient with turning in late assignments, so I sort of got used to turning them in late.

It was hard going back in person and I had to adjust. In the beginning I struggled with turning in all my work, especially on time, and doing well on quizzes and tests because I couldn't just look up the questions and find the answers. Some of my teachers made it easier to get used to in person learning by giving most of our assignments on the chromebook, and we didn't have to turn them in until midnight, which is better than turning them in during class. They also made the first few quizzes pretty easy, which helped me adapt as well. I feel as if I've gotten used to in person learning, but I

am still struggling with the same problems in some of my classes. I definitely have to start managing my time better, and doing better on my exams.

## **Tiktok and the Pandemic**

*G, John Muir*

Generation Z has taken the world by storm. We are one of the only generations that said, "Sc\*ew you!" to typical gender norms, prejudice against the LGBTQ community, and even racism. We've picked out all the issues with our current world and put them in the spotlight, acknowledging and trying to fix these issues.

During the beginning of the pandemic, we were all forced into virtual learning. Millions of students were emotionally, mentally, and sometimes physically drained from this change, and I don't know anyone who actually enjoyed that period of time. I am one of the people who hated it. I developed awful depression and didn't take care of myself like I do now.

During this pandemic, Tik Tok was on the rise. More and more people downloaded the app mainly because they were bored. But, something interesting happened. With all these people on the app at once, we started to realize a lot of things that didn't sit right with us. Predators, racists, sexists, etc were all caught in the act on this app. This opened people's eyes and made them realize how prominent these issues are. And they are still being tackled today.

## **Why was half my middle school experience robbed of me?**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

Why was half my middle school experience robbed of me? This stupid pandemic stole that from me. I had to get an education from a laptop that half of the time didn't even turn on. At some point, I started showing up because I would ask questions but never got answers. This happened throughout half my 7th-grade year. I thought that 8th grade would be different from the previous year but it wasn't. I asked questions in the chat. I would send my teachers emails. I would even ask them through the classes but I never got an answer. I would end up getting in trouble with my teachers for "not showing up." I used to show up until they stopped caring. I told them that they never answered the questions. I asked them, but they never responded to me again. I didn't show up for half my 7th-grade year and throughout all my 8th-grade year. I didn't even get to interact with all my friends; some I didn't even say bye to. This pandemic made my life somewhat ruined.

## **I caught covid**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

My experience at Muir so far has been filled with positive things. I was involved with a lot of my school's programs and school typically comes easy for me. Being back in person also boosted my motivation and excitement for the school year. Fast-forward to after winter break, and I caught covid. Suddenly I was back home, online learning again, except I was alone. As I'm sure you can expect, having covid was hard and was even harder when you know that almost all of your other peers are in the classroom or on the field without you.

When I finally came back to school it was like everyone moved on without me. I was behind in my classes, and I missed a lot of events that were important to me. When I came back, I lost the sense of excitement I had for school and was instead feeling the dread of having to catch up to the rest of my class. I just wish that there was more preparation to make at-home learning better.

## **I would stay up till six in the morning**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

In middle school when we did online learning, it was hard at first but got pretty easy after that. I would do good later on the year, but at first, the problem I had was my sleeping schedule. It was all messed up. I would stay up till six in the morning because I couldn't sleep, which caused me to sleep in class and miss them so I fixed that as soon as possible.

The other problem was that my grades were bad since I didn't check on them, so I did as much as I could every single day. I was able to finish the school with all A's and B's and one C but before that I had two F's and C's and D's. I had other problems at the time but those had nothing to do with school. There were some other problems.

## **Running Out Of Time**

*LU, Marshall Fundamental*

From the first few weeks into my sophomore year, I noticed that my teacher struggled teaching online. It was more than just struggling to explain the content that she has been teaching for several years now, but I gave her the benefit of the doubt for teaching over WebEx in front of the class that consisted of thirty squares of initials. Even though I tried my hardest to pay extra attention for my first AP class, I struggled to grasp the concepts. I ended up with an A by the end of both semesters, and



I did pass each exam. However, these accomplishments did not come without struggle. By spring semester, I had become increasingly worried about the online AP test in May.

The teacher's study guides were not great and she ended up finishing the course curriculum extremely close to the exam date. Before we finished the content though, I decided that I would at least try my best to pass the exam. I had a friend and myself self-study the entire course load of AP Bio over the span of one month in addition to AP World History. I felt confident in that class due to the amount of prep. Our studying consisted of review books, practice questions and tests, and a lot of Youtube videos. Through our rigorous study schedule, we both ended up with 3s on our AP test.

This parallels my current class as we are coming very close to the AP tests but still struggling to finish the course work. My teacher is teaching this course for the first time ever. I do feel bad for his circumstances, but it is at the cost of all of our grades and college credit. I have been passing every test at the top of the class, but I am still worried about the AP test even though I have been studying on my own. I have heard that I am one of very few students in the class with an A. The fact that I am one of the highest in the class leads me to believe that the pass rate will be unbelievably low. I have looked ahead of the curriculum and realized that our class has been skipping important information and content and I am worried for me and the rest of my class in May.

## **Circles**

*Anonymous, Marshall Fundamental*

During my first year of going into high school, I was a person full of happiness, ready to take on the world. Then during the second half of the year, school was shut down because of covid. I was still as energetic as always, but over the course of the online year and coming back to school, I had changed. It was not for reasons related to school, but those related to stress at home and stress with my health. I was constantly worried about life and it affected me greatly, including my grades.

At the end of the first semester, I was able to pull myself together and try to get my grades fixed. Over the second semester, I was feeling better partially because I was less worried and partially because my teachers were willing to help me bring my grades up. I had a few teachers who I could tell cared and I was able to sleep better knowing that they were there to help me if I ever needed or wanted it. Basically, I want to thank those teachers that are there for their students. Those who go the extra mile to make sure their students are okay and provide help if they ask for it.

## **I think they knew we were not learning**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

Online learning was never easy for me. Eighth grade was the worst school year for me grade-wise. I never really paid attention to the teachers and hardly ever did my work. Even when I would pay

attention, I felt like I wasn't even learning. The pandemic really affected me for the school year and outside of school.

I was going through things and that would bother me during online school. I had a total GPA of 0.67 which was horrible and the worst I have done in all my life. I think the teachers were trying their best to teach us, but I think they knew we were not learning. If I'm being honest, during the first class in the morning, I would just join the meeting and go back to sleep. If you were to see my grades for 7th grade, you could see that I was at the point of having straight A's. That just shows how online school affected my grades.

I believe the problem with online school was that the teachers would give us work but couldn't explain the assignments right. That was part of why I wasn't doing good in any of my classes. I was struggling with a lot of panic attacks during quarantine. That really bothered me while doing online learning. I think maybe if I didn't have panic attacks, I would have done at least decent in classes.

Honestly, I think I could speak for all my friends when I say that we did no type of work that year. I'm glad that our grades did not matter in 8th grade. If they did, I would not be in 9th grade right now. Overall, that was the worst school year ever. I hope and wish to never live that year again.

## **I just learned how to focus on myself**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

For my personal narrative I wanted to talk about a moment in my life that changed my outlook on everything. Covid is something that happened to everyone, so I think everyone should understand what it was like when the lockdown started. Everything was crazy. You could barely leave the house. You had to wear a mask everywhere, and all the toilet paper was gone. My reaction when I first heard about the lockdown was probably the same as other people. I didn't really think it was going to last the entire year, so I wasn't even following the covid guidelines. I was still going out and everything was normal for me. It wasn't until around the beginning of the year when I realized that covid was going to last. That's when I started to take things a lot more seriously, and I don't mean as far as covid, but I mean with my own life. I think it was because I had so much time to be alone, I just learned how to focus on myself. I feel like after covid, that has been the biggest shift in my mindset.

## **2022 is not like 2021**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

Last year really changed me because virtual learning happened. I've gone through an emotional and mental health change - from someone that tried to act tough my first year at Muir to someone who actually shows emotion towards things that are happening in and out of school. I've also read a lot of news that's changed my life.

Even though last summer changed me, I've missed seeing my friends at Muir. I'm happy that I was able to make new friends online last year because they've shown me that I can achieve anything. Even during the difficult parts of life, even if I'm stuck at home with nothing to do. Though the pandemic is still happening, I hope that we don't have to go back online next year because I don't think I can live through another year of learning online again.

## They helped me through it

*Anonymous, Blair High School a*

During the pandemic with covid, it was hard for me to focus and actually participate while on the computer. However, with the help of a few teachers at Blair High School, I got through it. One hard moment during online learning was math, but I'm grateful for a really good math teacher who helped me out. I ended up getting an A in her class.

## Motive

*Anonymous, Blair High School*

Pandemic. At the time when this word was first uttered by the news, I was indifferent, but as each day started to creep forward I felt confused and didn't grasp the gravity of the situation. My confusion only increased as there were conflicting reports on all the news outlets and social media. Because of this, I found myself consumed with wanting to learn more about the coronavirus and focused on it every waking moment. As time progressed and after experiencing a myriad of emotions that spanned several weeks, I finally landed on one...horror.

That horror would go on to manifest itself in a multitude of ways. After spending the entirety of my academic career in a traditional school setting, to give us a sense of normalcy, we began online school for my junior year. Obstacles that I encountered during the pandemic were procrastination and not reaching out for help when I needed it the most causing physical and mental exhaustion. Even though my goal was to go in with a positive attitude, my mental health just wouldn't allow it. As a result, I would put off school work to spend time with family, however going to school online for seven hours a day while watching a computer screen, trying to get hours in for Associated Student Body, and then practicing for basketball all contributed even more to the deterioration of my mental health. Being home and resting in my bed was a way out, and a way for me to relieve stress. Wasting time on my phone was a way to escape my problems and to just relax. It was a safe space for me. Scrolling through TikTok, watching television, and catching up on social media was the only way to let my mind feel relaxed because all of those things, unlike life, were COVID free. Of course studying was always my priority, but every attempt would make me feel drained. There was no motivation to complete any work. The pandemic and its constant updates made it harder for me to complete my tasks on time to the point where all I could do was scroll on social media for hours, searching for answers as to when this nightmare would be over.

After the completion of my junior year and dealing with the pandemic for a year, I now had learned to cope with living within it. It wasn't until my senior year that I realized how deep-rooted the negative impact of covid affected me. During that strange time and experience, I should have put my academic priorities first and my free time later. Despite the depth of these negative emotions, I have

learned how to keep going through adversity. The lesson I took from this experience was to learn to start focusing on what is going on now instead of putting too much of my attention on futile distractions.

As traumatic as the COVID-19 pandemic has been, there were some positive lessons learned. Now when I start to feel mentally fatigued, I take a break and go play basketball to clear my mind. The personal goals I have set for myself are to help me manage my time and get the items on my priority list completed. My grades have improved, I want to make over a 3.6-grade point average, graduate with straight A's, and have time for myself to relax. To reach my goals, I am going to set an agenda for myself, and learn to seek help when needed. Now I am confident that I have the skills and tools to get into a good college. Even though I am going to a different environment, despite the new changes, I will learn how to adapt. I am going to focus on ways to achieve my goals for future success.

## Staring at a blank screen

*A, John Muir*

It was the beginning of covid, towards the end of my 7th grade school year, and everyone was being sent home from school for two weeks. But soon, those two weeks turned into months, and then they turned into years and I hadn't gone to school in person. After that day we were all sent home. For the past two years I would sit in the dining room at the table where I would do online school. They were the worst two years of my life. I felt alone all the time and I had no one to talk to.

I would look at the computer screen for hours and sometimes I would zone out. No one ever interacted with each other while we were doing class online, and no one ever turned their cameras on. The classroom was usually silent and any of us barely turned our microphones on to speak to the teacher. We would only use the chat if we wanted to make a comment or ask a question. I often felt sad because all my friends and I were stuck at home wondering if we were ever going to see each other in person again.

Then, I finally realized that I didn't need to feel alone anymore during my 8th grade year. I began to reflect on myself and everything that has happened in my life to be where I am today, and it made me feel better about myself. At the end of my 8th grade year, covid had gone down a bit, and it was time for my 8th grade graduation. Even though we weren't able to have a graduation in person, we had a drive-through graduation where we got our certificates and awards. I also got to see one of my friends when I went in their car.

I was sad that I wasn't going to go to the same school as my friend, but now that I'm in the 9th grade, everything is starting to open up again and sometimes on the weekends I hang out with my friend, and we go do things that we weren't able to do for the last two depressing years during quarantine.

## No struggle was as great as the two years under covid

*DT, Marshall Fundamental*

Over the last six years of middle and high school there have been many things worthy of being talked about under this prompt, but no struggle was as great as the two years under covid. This article and the words I write will be my views, my insights, and my struggles during the hardest point of my life yet. Right as the New Year kicks off, there's news out of China about a new virus detected that was making people sick. As the first months of 2020 wore on, it turned from epidemic to pandemic, and early reports painted the virus as possibly a real problem. Reality sets in when the nightmare for me really starts on Friday the 13th of March, and at first it seemed like a weird dream of sorts. So many times it was reiterated as just a two week pause, an extended Spring Break, and it sounded perfect to us. However, I missed that final Friday because I was out sick, and I didn't think of it much at the time, but that would be the last normal school day for upwards of one and a half years. One and a half years, and I would never even get to say goodbye. The first week maybe wasn't too bad. Two weeks in and I could still keep myself occupied, but as our return date continued getting progressively pushed back, my concerns continued to grow. Another two weeks would go by, and it would be pushed back again and people would start wondering about AP Testing, and serious concerns over missed classes and instruction were snowballing. This is where I began to decline, I had no idea how to respond to this and handle this. The impact can be reflected in the grades of the few classes that still assigned work and gave tests, where in most of them my grades took a hit. Thankfully, there wasn't long left in the school year, and we could get to summer vacation where it would all hopefully be sorted out and we could return just like normal...

Wrong. We all know how this went. Most of the summer was spent sitting inside visiting the occasional restaurant or going to a park, as everything else was closed or off limits. While this didn't lead to a decrease in my mental health, it didn't make it better. As the new school year arrived this is where things truly went downhill for me. So many hours everyday spent inside on a computer screen looking at 30 dark gray squares. This is where the schools made what I think to be one of their biggest blunders through my entire time at Marshall, not reducing workloads and being lenient. Teachers would say they understood how it was such a hard time for us students to not be able to see our fellow classmates and how it was a rough time for all of us, but then turn around and give us heavy workloads. I have somewhat mild ADHD, but being at my home environment made it much harder for me to concentrate and focus. Completing assignments that weren't even that long would potentially take me hours to complete, and I fell behind in several classes quickly. This was also one of my hardest years in terms of the classes I was taking yet, with AP and honors classes to worry about. As I continued falling further and further behind I experienced my low point. Fall/Winter of 2020 was rock bottom. Sometimes I had full weeks where I did not smile, as the world seemed to fall apart outside and as my concerns kept increasing in school. By the end of winter, news of a vaccine was finally here. It was a long way from the end of the tunnel, and we're still not finished with covid yet, but we're in a lot better position now than we were then.

## **I'm still regaining the social skills I lost over covid**

*T, John Muir*

Over the pandemic, I found online school to be super stressful. Assignments kept pouring in all the time, and sitting in front of a screen for hours every day was so uncomfortable. Coming back in person after not interacting with anyone since 7th grade was also very stressful, and I had no way of knowing what would happen. I was very surprised about how welcoming everyone was, and I made more friends than I thought I would.

I'm still regaining the social skills I lost over covid, but I'm getting better each day, and I really appreciate how understanding people are about that. I think all teachers should give extensions on due dates when needed, because even if I'm not doing extracurriculars or activities, just going to school and interacting with people is draining enough, and I have almost no energy after a school day. On better days, I can get many assignments done, although they might end up being overdue. I'm very thankful to the teachers that do, as it makes my day a lot less stress-filled, and I'm not super worried about getting things done.

## **I struggled with motivation & lack of confidence**

*J, John Muir*

My experience during quarantine was good and bad. I struggled with motivation and lack of confidence, and I barely wanted to get out of bed at a certain point of time. All I did was sleep & eat constantly. At the beginning of the lockdown, I was super skinny & honestly, I felt good about myself until I started watching Tik Tok. Tik Tok made me realize how bad my body looked. I started trying to work out but that was not fun. I don't know how people do it constantly. It's super draining & makes me sore. Over time, I grew out of my insecurities and my body grew magically, I started eating so much more than I did and boom a baddie magically appeared. When I tell you my confidence went all the way up, it went all the way up! I started surrounding myself around positive people. I got closer with god - that was the most important thing. Closer to the end of 8th grade, I got myself together, got my grades up and promoted.

## Working From Home

*S, John Muir*

When we first got sent home from school in March 2020, most kids were just happy to have an extra two weeks of spring break but little did we know our whole world was about to be switched around. By the end of those three weeks, covid had gotten worse already, concerning most people, not to mention the fact all schools were now closed until further notice. Once school started back up again, my stress really started to kick up. At least for me, school was actually a lot harder than it was before even though I didn't have to leave my home and was working from the comfort of my warm bed. About halfway through the school year is when the loneliness kind of set in. I felt super unmotivated and found it hard to wake up in the morning. Maybe that was when my whole life at the time came down to sleeping, school, and playing video games to try to cure my boredom. By the end of the school year, I had just felt drained like I've never felt before. I always did pretty good with school and it didn't really bother me about the added pressure of everything going on. It was so hard to have it not affect me.

## I couldn't pay attention even if I tried

*Anonymous, John Muir*

Quarantine was not for me. Learning from home was good and bad at the same time because I could sleep in, the bad thing was I wouldn't do anything for school. I barely got anything done and it wasn't helpful. I would be on my phone playing video games and watching TV, I couldn't pay attention even if I tried. One of the reasons I couldn't pay attention was my brothers blasting their TVs to the point where I could hear them from my room, but I really didn't care because half of the time I was sleeping or watching something on my phone. I rarely did my work. I would always open the class and then go off and do something else like play video games on my Playstation, go outside and play baseball with my little brother until I got bored. I did so badly that my GPA was 0.50. At this point I did anything to go out because being at home for two years was getting to me mentally. So anything that I could use to go out I took because I hated being home. That is why quarantine was not for me.

# Relationships



## (CONTENT WARNING: Death of a pet)

### **The Last Breath**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

It was Feb 11, 2017. I woke up to a loud dinosaur roar sound from my living room. When I went to the living room, I saw my brother watching *The Land Before Time three*. I ran to the kitchen to get my breakfast. I also made my brother a Pb&J. I joined my brother with my food and we watched the movie together. When we finished, we got up to clean our dishes and then put on *Home Alone*. My uncles got breakfast and joined us for the movie. We watched the entire trilogy. As we finished the movies, my grandma woke up. She went to the kitchen and started making coffee. Then my mom woke up and got a cup of coffee too. I had woken up my dogs. One of them nearly ran me over while the other slowly walked off to her bed. She had a really bad foot injury that my family and I had been trying to treat for months now.

My family all sat at the table while my grandma made pancakes. I asked for chocolate chips just for fun. As I got some bacon, I sneaked two strips under the table, one for each dog. As we ate, I started to hear one of my dogs whining. I looked under to see my dog bleeding from her injury. I told my mom and we rushed her over to the vet.

The vet told us something that we were hoping to not hear: my dog's infection has gone throughout her entire body and we had no choice but to put her down. As we shared my dog's last 10 minutes with her, we gave her all the attention in the world. When the vets came into the room, we all knew it was time to give her up and let her have a long sleep. After the shot, we came back in to see her still awake and slowly getting sleepy. She passed away and we all left. We got her ashes and have kept them in a box in our house, knowing she will always be here with us spiritually and in our hearts.

### **Your own happiness**

*Anonymous, Blair High School*

I've had to keep a secret throughout my educational life. I felt like I had no one to confide in, I suffered from being a first gen daughter. I mostly grew up with my grandmother while my parents worked to provide for me and my siblings. I've always felt like I owed something to them for everything.

I grew up thinking I was unloved because of someone who was supposed to protect me and care for me. They made me think that in order for someone to love me, I had to allow them to hurt. I grew up thinking I had to protect everyone else except myself, that it wasn't a big deal because everyone else was happy.

I let someone harm me because I thought they truly loved me. He hurt me and took my innocence, and school was my sanctuary from that. Never let someone allow you to feel unloved or make you feel like it's your responsibility to keep someone happy. Your own happiness should come first regardless of how selfish it may seem. The people you may think don't love you probably do much more than you know.

## **I don't want this to become a sob story**

*M.S., Blair High School*

I can't stand here and say that I have never given up. There were times I had to let go of many things that were killing me inside. I don't want this to become a sob story but a story where I allow you to feel the ambition and hunger in my chest.

I remember one time precisely in middle school feeling like I wasn't worth it because I couldn't wear brand name shoes on my feet. I can tell you that one time I was laughed at because of the 10 dollar shoes my dad had just made enough to buy me. That experience has left a scar in my heart forever. It doesn't make me sad anymore because I knew that my dad, no matter how poor we were, held the accountability of being a hard worker high above his head. I am grateful for my beliefs and the opportunities God has held my hand through.

When I turned old enough to even find myself a job, that was exactly what I did. I looked for opportunities on my own and always held my father's wishes and beliefs in my heart. When I received my first written check in my hands I knew that everything I had worked for was here and that I was the sh\*t because I made it from my own sweat.

## **He is like a player who gets a lot of girls and treats them like sh\*t**

*Anonymous, Blair High School*

I have this friend that I'm going to call X. Over the summer, X and I started talking more and we became closer friends. We were telling each other personal things like secrets. X started dating this girl who I'm going to call L. L and I were already friends and she had a friend; we'll call her M.

One day, X and his girlfriend were going through troubles and they started arguing. He ended up roping me into the situation, which I didn't mind, but I didn't really want to interfere. I was mainly there to stop him from being an a\*\*hole to L and watching what he says to her because he is like a player who gets a lot of girls and treats them like sh\*t.

One day, X and L were arguing and they decided to involve me in it. X told me he wanted to break up with L because he doesn't like her anymore. I told him to not break up with her because then she'd think I was the reason for it. I didn't want my friendship with X and L to end on bad terms because of X.

The next day, X told me they broke up and he started telling me the bad things L had said about me. Then I went quiet and just started keeping to myself. I guess she told L I was the reason they broke up and L got mad at me. We just fell out on being friends.

## **Nobody would check up on me**

*Anonymous, Blair High School*

I have been at Blair since 6th grade and will be graduating this year. I have learned so many things here. First, I want to say that Blair is an amazing school for middle school. You make many friends, the teachers are great, and the school is small. It's easy to get to classes.

As you enter high school, many kids start to change schools, and you're left with fewer and fewer people to hang out with. You realize why people say "you won't see many people you knew in middle school by the time you graduate." Tenth grade for me was horrible. Nobody would check up on me. There would be days where I was really not good and all a teacher could say is: "Why aren't you doing work?" or "Why didn't you do it?" Thankfully, the pandemic happened. I was able to stay away from school for a whole year and my health was amazing. My junior year, I did the best I have ever done at school. My first semester after coming back to in-person school was good. But as graduation comes closer, many of these things are putting pressure on me. I'm not getting stuff done because I'm too lazy to care.

After graduation, I can't wait to start a new chapter at PCC and then move on to Cal State LA.

## **Divorcal Aftershock**

*Anonymous, Blair High School*

Sometime before October 2013, my parents divorced. From my six year old perspective, I could not recognize the unhealthy relationship my parents shared. However, I didn't have to be mature to recognize the amount of loud arguing that was in the house. I cried and cried; not because I was empathetic towards them, but because of my feelings. Six year old me would think, "C'mon, can't you just fix your relationship?"

I was desperate to keep the family together. My own selfish desire was for them to be happy together and live under the same roof. The entire divorce process was so nerve-wracking. House searching, packing, hearing the grown-up discussions about the financial aspect of the separation. What really upset me was the discussion of when me and my sister would visit my dad. The schedule itself was the point of no return.

Although I knew of the divorce, the schedule itself made things seem more real than they already were. My mom and dad had two different parenting styles and different house rules. It almost felt like

I began to have two different personalities. Two different relationships with my parents. It was stressful having to find an in-between.

It's not easy turning on and off different versions of myself. That meant the ways I acted, spoke, and dressed. I have more leniency with my dad, but he isn't the most confrontational person. Not the greatest with a sense of urgency. My mother is more strict, and we have more opposing opinions. However, she knows me on a personal level better than my dad.

The divorce itself created multiple issues for my sister and I. My sister and I know each other's mannerisms very well because we are almost never apart. The divorce was very emotional for us and many aspects of our lifestyle have changed. I know the divorce was best for my parents, but as their children, nowhere feels like home except for the house where I grew up with my parents together.

## **My aunts have been trying to take my grandma's money**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

My family has had to deal with this situation way before I was born. My mom was always bullied by her sisters when she was young. She couldn't do anything about it because her mom kept working. But today, I feel like my life has gotten worse. I currently only have to visit my grandma three times a week. My grades are dropping, my anxiety has gotten worse, and I feel like I should talk about it.

Back in 2013, my grandma was diagnosed with ALS, a disease that paralyzes the muscles in the body so that she can't speak or move. From what I can remember, ever since my grandma got diagnosed, my two aunts have been trying to take her money. When my mom had everything settled to take care of my grandma, my aunt R sent these people called "conservators" who hired nurses who weren't trained for the job. Usually, the nurses have to do an overnight shift to take care of grandma. My mom caught both nurses sleeping on the job and took pictures of it too.

A few years later, we got control of the nurses we wanted to hire, but the bad news was that my mom no longer had control over my grandma. My aunt put a restraining order on my mom in order to keep her away from my grandma. Luckily, I didn't have any restrictions, but it was still pretty sad. Two years later in March of 2021, my aunt R tried to sneak into our rooms and take pictures. My mom tried to cover her room, but then my aunt claimed she hit her. I saw the whole thing, and my mom did not touch her once. Then my aunt punched my mom in the face, leading to a physical fight. That's when I made the worst mistake of my life. I called down my Aunt U to help stop the fight, but it started more drama. They called the police, and I had all the evidence I needed. I saw the police talk to them first, and then they went to me. I said everything I saw and then my aunt left once the police told them to.

We went back to court but on a different subject. This time it was to remove the restraining order. If we lost, we would get kicked out of the house and only be able to visit her on scheduled days. If we won, we would be able to stay and the restraining order would be lifted. But... we lost.

For the moment, we are living in my mom's house, which is 40 minutes away from the school. Things are very peaceful now. When I lived at my grandma's, there were cameras everywhere except in our rooms of course. It was stressful because I couldn't talk about anything without my aunts listening. There was a gate that led to our rooms. I went back there and all of the locks were changed. I didn't expect to go into our rooms, but I wanted to know what it looked like back there without us being here.

I don't miss living at my grandma's house anymore because I don't have everyone watching me where I live now. The big problem is my grandma. She hasn't been outside for ages except for when she goes to the doctor. My aunt is practically waiting for her to die because she is loaded with money. If my grandma does die, I will miss her a whole lot. She's 90 years old and I just want the best for her.

## **Just like Me**

*Anonymous, Marshall Fundamental*

In my family, I am the oldest sibling. To be honest, I really do like being the oldest. I get a lot more freedom than my siblings do, but still with no impartiality. Being the oldest does come with a lot more responsibilities. All my life, I have had to watch over my siblings. My mom has been a single mother most of our lives, and I have had to step up to help my mom out when she goes to work. I know that she really appreciates my act of benevolence since I obviously do this expecting nothing in return.

One thing that I have noticed now that I am older is how much I influence my siblings' lives. It may be because they've had to follow what I say because I'm in charge. They spend a lot of time with me when I'm watching them. I know that I hold an ascendancy over them. I can see that they see me as a role model. As a matter of fact, there have been many times when I have heard my siblings explaining to others how I am their inspiration. There have been times where I go to my sister's school and her teachers tell me how much she loves to talk about me, how my sister aspires to be like me. Even my mom has told me before that my sister wants to do everything I do. It's really quite flattering when I hear things like this.

I have always had autonomy which makes me very independent and my sister really admires that. However, my sister will never tell me this to my face unless she is in a very very good mood. She is still very malicious. We are still siblings, which comes with a lot of fights and arguments, but nothing serious. I constantly bamboozle her and my brothers, but it's my way of showing that I care for them, I don't appreciate it when my sister copies everything I do, but now I understand why she does it. I get that she wants to be just like me.

In addition, I have also had similar experiences with both my brothers. One of my brothers is always very upfront about it. He tells me himself how he does a lot of the things he does because I do it. Recently, we started getting interested in the same things. Whether it's video games or movies, he always watches what I do and that influences him to do the same. Like he says, he does it because he wants to have more things in common between us, so he can spend even more time with me,

and so he can learn things from me. I really do appreciate this because I never imagined having the relationship I have with my brother now.

Although when he or my other siblings do anything that is disrespectful, I do not condone it. I am sure to show censure to make sure they stop and won't do it again. I've never used coercion to force them to stop because I know that is not the way to do it. They say I am the meanest person in the world when I do. Sometimes I feel bad, but I know it's for the best. It's nice to know that in the end I am still having a positive impact on them.

Furthermore, I am starting to see something similar with my youngest brother. Although he does not live with me, I babysit him most days of the week. He is still very young, but from what my step mom and dad tell me, I already play a big role in his life. They have said he is constantly talking about me when I'm not with him. They have told me that they have a hard time getting him to listen, whether it's related to school or just his behavior in general. I do find myself having to admonish him sometimes. For some reason my little brother does listen to me even more than his parents. It's pretty bizarre that when he is around me, he does what I say no questions asked. My parents really appreciate how I help him, especially with school. He feels as if his homework hates him sometimes. This is where I usually come in to help. My little brother can be as stubborn as a mule, but since he has always seen me doing my work and being focused, I think it makes him want to do the same. He sees me to be very sagacious. It makes me happy knowing that I am helping him do better.

I am hoping that I can continue to be a role model to my siblings as we all get older. My siblings are really the sunshine in my life. Though I have always been seen as lacking empathy towards them, I am trying to be more cautious and aware. I hope to find more ways to connect and share my experiences with them. I can see that I am a huge part of their lives and that I am an example they look up to. This helps me be more aware of what I say and how I behave because I know that they are always seeing what I do. This is especially so with the two siblings that I live with. They mostly have a motherly figure who is my mom, so I know that they need that extra support from the absent father, a role that I hope I can help to fill even though I know it's not nearly the same thing. I am happy to help in any way that I can with tremendous fervor. My siblings defer to me because I am the oldest kid, and I see that now. I will continue to ameliorate their lives in the best way that I can.

## **Glad you came**

*Anonymous, Marshall Fundamental*

I grew up with a fantastic father who dedicated substantial amounts of his time to me. We have created a lot of memories together. In fact, the only memories I can recall from when I was little are the ones with my dad. The main memories involve sports. Although I appreciate basketball, baseball, football, soccer, and Korean martial arts, sports were never really my thing. One sport that did stick with me was track, but I absolutely hated it. The meets lasted all day and the practices were not much better. My whole body screamed in pain and I was above average at best. I ended up joining Marshall's track team, so I guess it grew on me.

My dad and I did a lot of other things too. Looking back though, a lot of it was pretty dangerous considering how young I was at the time. If it wasn't riding ATVs, playing in rattlesnake country, chopping through furniture with an ax, or messing around with fireworks at five years old, then it wasn't much fun. Not all of it had to be risky. My dad would get me video game equipment, remote control vehicles, train sets, and amusement park tickets, but nothing was and still is more interesting than the game of chess. It turns out I'm a pretty simple child. I would have been happy doing outside chores and playing board games. So that brings me to where I am now. I am aiming for a track scholarship and now have my own chess club at Marshall. I sent out my first email to the Chess Club not too long ago:

*Hello, I am the president of the chess club.*

*Our first meeting will be the day we come back from break, Tuesday, January 4th, 2022. We will talk about what you people want out of each meeting and events for the club. I and my cabinet members will start the meeting five minutes after the bell rings for lunch.*

*I expect everyone to show up for this meeting as we will probably only have one of these this semester. Don't act like you have places to be or things to do. I really don't want to have to spend my lunch tracking down over 60 members..., but I will do it! If I don't see a room dangerously exceeding covid capacity I will be very concerned. Just because I tricked half of you into signing up does not give you the excuse to avoid me.*

*I have found a very helpful advisor for my club, her name is Ms. Ardon. She is the statistics teacher. We will be meeting in her classroom, A218, on the second floor. Don't get lost and remember this is for you people. I don't run dictatorships. If you show up and decide chess isn't for you or I'm not for you, reach out to me, or better yet my cabinet members who are doing nothing, and we will take you off the email list.*

*Again, Tuesday at lunch in room A218*

*Thanks for signing up, I appreciate it even though it's more work for me.*

## **All Time Low**

*Anonymous, Marshall Fundamental*

To be honest, this has been the most chaotic year of my life. I've had problems with my mental health and in my personal life. My parents separated, which had a negative impact on my education and myself on many levels. My relationship with my mom worsened, and for a while, we were arguing every day. I don't see my dad as much as I used to, but I try to call him after school. I feel like their situation made me question my friendships. I was always worried that someone would betray me or secretly dislike me. I don't know if that was just my insecurities coming to light. Now I'm just by myself most of the time, although I feel like it brought people's true colors to light.



## **The system caught him really early**

*J, John Muir*

I'm blessed to have lived a life that hasn't been filled with very many traumatic moments, but there's one that has really stuck out to me. It happened when I was still living in Colorado. From what I remember, I was eight and the year was 2013. My mom broke the news to me that my father, who had not been very present by choice, was going to prison for a long long time. He had been to jail years prior, but it had just been short term. He would stop by after getting out and claim that he was going to "be around more", but that never came to fruition.

My mother and he were super young when they had me and that attributed to their immaturity. I'm bringing this up because it really was a textbook example of how a quick young Black man can be institutionalized. The area he grew up in wasn't the best, and he went to a Title One school in Colorado which already had really low school funds at a state level. On the flip side, he had a father and a mother who were very present in his life and who lived honest hard-working lives as a contractor and a nurse. They set a good example for him to follow, but that all fell through in the end.

The system caught him really early. He had been going to youth detention facilities and army camps for troubled youth since middle school. Then he got arrested and he ended up where he's at right now. I learned a lot from his experience and learned that the system has set me up for failure. I learned that it's so easy to get into this rut called the prison system. Most importantly, I learned that my education will set me free.

## **(CONTENT WARNING: Abusive Relationship) DATING AN ACTUAL PSYCHOPATH**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

I went to a private school my whole life before I attended Muir. There was this girl I liked - let's call her "K". K seemed like a nice, respectful, quiet girl. I used to watch her draw. We gradually became good friends and started dating.

What I didn't know is that I was being manipulated and abused. She punched and kicked me for no reason, then acted like she was the victim. I didn't know what was going on. I felt bad even though I did nothing wrong.

K was always so violent. She was so possessive of me. She didn't let me talk to anyone but her. She took our relationship as a hostage saying, "If you talk to so and so, I'll break up with you." As a 6th grader, I didn't want that to happen. This happened repeatedly. I didn't know what to do. I felt broken and depressed. She still kept playing games with me.



I started to realize what was going on. I was only a jester. K had me on a hook. She was a walking red flag, but I was too young to realize what that even looked like. We dated until the next year. I broke up with her during the last week of school. I consulted my best friends before, and they have known about me being abused by her. So I told K, and she started beating me up. My friends tried to stop her, but they got hurt as well.

Even now she's abusing people. One of my old friends, let's call him "M", is dating K. I told him not to do it because I really cared for him and I didn't want him to fall into the loop. He didn't listen. He's dating her now and he's really getting hurt too. I don't know what's happening to him now because I cut communication with him. I don't think it's anything good though.

## **Sneaking out**

*V, John Muir*

At the beginning of covid, I caught feelings for a boy because of a party we had gone to the day before things got shut down. I regret both catching feelings and going to that party. He and I were already really good friends so things weren't awkward for us as we started talking more. As the days went by, he had mentioned sneaking out to see each other since we live only a few blocks away from each other. At first I didn't want to because I was scared of what could happen if I were to get caught. However, a few days later around midnight, I had the spontaneous idea of sneaking out. I texted him, asking if he wanted to sneak out together. He obviously said yes, so we decided to meet up halfway and we just walked around with nothing to do at 1 am.

Our only destination was La Pinteresca. We went into the skatepark and just lay down as we watched the stars. We started talking about how we thought covid was only going to be a few weeks long and how things would soon return back to normal. It was about 2am when he walked me to my house and I snuck back in. As I lay in bed that night, I prayed that my mom wouldn't notice the fact that her only daughter had snuck out, and to see a boy no less.

Not even two full days had passed, and we decided to sneak out again. Our first destination was La Pinteresca again, but we didn't want to go there anymore. We decided to walk to the field at Muir. I found it both therapeutic and terrifying to be walking the empty, lifeless streets alone at night. When we got there, we realized there was no actual way of getting onto the field, so he just walked me home. I got back into my house thinking it was another successful night. Boy, was I wrong.

The next morning, I woke up at about 1 pm and my mom entered my room asking "Did you leave last night?" My heart sank. I tried lying my way out by saying my friend told me to "go outside and get fresh air", which clearly did not work. I fessed up saying I had snuck out, and she already knew exactly who I had left with, considering we didn't live that far away.

My mom took my phone away and I didn't think she was that mad; she was THAT mad. Every time I left my room my mom would not speak a word to me. She gave me the silent treatment, and that hurt worse than anything else. I spent the next few days in my room and outside crying my eyes out. She called me into her room to talk to me and for the first 10 minutes it felt like I had been there for

hours because of how quiet we were. I couldn't look her in the eyes without crying. It genuinely hurt my soul knowing how much pain I had caused her.

My mom started saying how she never thought I would do something like sneaking out. She said that if I were to do it again, she'd call the police on me. I couldn't stand hearing that, so I broke into tears. I had never felt like such a disappointment in my life. I had put my mom through something that she kept to herself and would never tell my dad. I can't imagine what she was going through.

After the long talk we had in her room, she slowly started talking to me as the days went on. We went back to our normal relationship after about two weeks. Having put my mom through that made me want to change and become the best version of myself I could ever be just for her sake. I never want to be a daughter my mom isn't proud of because if it weren't for her, I wouldn't be here.

## **Rollercoaster**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

At the beginning of my senior year, I made a friend. I was full of joy considering I was new to the school and had planned to lay low until graduation. One friend was all I needed. We shared class answers, left our classes to walk around campus together. It wasn't when they stopped replying to me, nor was it when they chose their other friends over me, that I noticed maybe we weren't the friends I thought we could remain.

It's not like they completely cut me off or anything, they were busy. That's what they said at least. I believed them, because why wouldn't I? But you're right, maybe I should've noticed. This story doesn't involve me being cut off, I swear. One thing about me is that you can always count on me, no matter the situation or the time, I will always be there if you need me.

They knew this of course. Of course my friendship and kindness was taken for granted, because why wouldn't it? I remember getting multiple messages from them asking me for money, rides, and places to stay. Never did I say no. Until I did. That was their last straw, I suppose. Therefore, it was mine.

Now, I sit surrounded by laughter and warm embraces, all because I took a different path to class one afternoon. Then I continued to take that path. This path has brought me joy, love, and family. This path has led me to people that genuinely care about me and all of my many feelings. There isn't a day that goes by where I'm not hugged and told I'm loved. There isn't a day that goes by where I don't feel complete and utter abandonment. Although I had to wait an annoying amount of time to get on this ride, I'm glad because the view is beautiful from up here.

## From A Different Perspective

C, John Muir

Students of all grades suffered a dramatic impact during the 2020-2021 pandemic, whether that be financially, mentally, or emotionally. Students who went through the stage of online learning and the struggles of being unable to afford school necessities felt the impact on their education. Learning at home caused students' learning styles to shift to more independent styles.

Parents/Guardians who've witnessed their child shift to more self-taught, independent learning can identify how much of an impact it had on their child. When students reflect and express how they felt during quarantine and what affected them as a person, their changes can also be viewed by their parents, friends, and family. This study offers a different perspective of how three students changed during quarantine and how it either changed them permanently, or caused them to change when they went back to in-person learning.

*What Parents/Guardians have observed of students during online learning and at school learning:*

*\*Learning Curve editor's note: Some sentences in this interview have been lightly edited for clarity\**

*Student #1: Parent's response to their student*

Did my attitude, mentality, and emotions change during quarantine?

- *Parent 1:* (Si, tu estrsastes para ser o presntar lo mejor de tu tarea.) Yes, you were stressed to do or present the best of your work. You separated more from us (the family) to work on your homework, which made you stress a lot. You still spoke to us but you only talked about your homework and when you needed help. No, because only you know, I look at you the same.

Is my attitude, mentality, and emotions still the same now that I'm on school campus?

- *Parent 1:* I actually see that it's the same.

Do you think our relationship changed in any way over this period of time? (trust, loyalty, etc.)

- *Parent 1:* Our relationship got better. You count on me as if I were your friend, which at times got emotional. We would share our problems as a mother and daughter. We are a lot closer now. We go out more, like on hikes or to attend church.

What are some possible solutions you think will/would have helped me during the pandemic? (For example, what resources would've helped me online or during the return to campus)

- *Parent 1:* During quarantine, having contact with people who are experts, like an online tutor or older sibling, would have helped. Now, having more communication with teachers would help.

*Student #2: Teacher Response of their Child (Anonymous)*

Did my attitude, mentality, and emotions change during quarantine?

- *Parent 2:* Yes, because in the beginning, you didn't have interaction with the family. Everyone in the household was in their own personal space and isolated from each other.

Is my attitude, mentality, and emotions still the same now that I'm on school campus?

- *Parent 2:* They changed for the better, but hasn't returned to normal levels.

Do you think our relationship changed in any way over this period of time?

- *Parent 2:* Of course, familial discussions put things into perspective, like family loss with covid. It brought us a lot closer as a family.

What are some possible solutions you think will/would have helped me during the pandemic?

- *Parent 2:* The concern of mental help. Being mindful of kids' mental health helps more than the outcomes, like failing what people's standards are for them. All people too. Checking in on the mentality of kids.

### *Student #3*

Did my attitude, mentality, and emotions change during quarantine?

- *Parent 3:* Yes, it changed. The attitudes and emotions were filled with anger.

Are my attitude, mentality, and emotions still the same now that I'm on school campus?

- *Parent 3:* Yes, you're now a lot less stressed.

Do you think our relationship changed in any way over this period of time? (trust, loyalty,

- *Parent 3:* It didn't change

What are some possible solutions you think will/would have helped me during the pandemic?

- *Parent 3:* During quarantine, speaking with a tutor would have helped. Now, you don't need help because you've got most things sorted out.

Through the three parents/guardians' perspective of their child's shift to self-study, they each had different opinions and experiences to tell. The three parents/guardians that were interviewed are not even close, by experience, to what the millions of other adults around the globe have been through with their families. This also includes students who couldn't have the resources that they needed in order to learn from their homes, like technology and the availability to do independent studies.

What most parents seemed to have in common, from what they saw, was the amount of mental stress their child went through during online learning. Not being able to have a supervisor or instructor help with homework or simply help answer questions without any kind of difficulties, led to the students to isolating themselves from *all* people nearby in order to work out problems that they had. In responses from students 1 and 2, their parent/guardian saw a major change in familial connections. The students isolated themselves in a room in order to spend more time by themselves, away from family or other people around them.

What young people, or students, went through during quarantine affected their ability to learn as well as their relationships with the people around them or their loved ones. From an adult/parent's perspective, it seems that students stressed a lot about doing their work or had difficulty learning from a device. There are many reasons why students are always stressed. This could be for a good or complicated reason that adults sometimes see as a problem that their child can figure out themselves. The reality of this is that students try to seek help, but in the conditions of each household, help is something students don't ask for since it's something that is not spoken much of.

## **I don't come to her classes sometimes**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

I have recently received mistreatment from one of my teachers. I can't say names, but she screamed at me asking me why I never come to her classes or never come early. I don't know if she screamed at me in front of everyone on purpose or if she was trying to embarrass me in front of others, but I found it very disrespectful. I told her that the reason I don't attend her classes sometimes is because I have transportation problems or I run late because of problems at home. She said both weren't good reasons and that I shouldn't come crying to her about my grade once it drops.

I just left it like that because I wasn't going to put much attention into the situation. I'm so respectful towards her and have never disrespected her or given her problems or an attitude. For her to respond to me the way she did was hurtful. I try my best to come on time for my first period class, but it's hard sometimes. I really can't do anything about it now because it's already the end of the school year. The only thing I can do is to just finish my work and try to get a good grade in her class.

## **Patience**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

I think parents should have more patience with their children, because some kids are going through a lot. Some parents, like my parents, don't understand. I feel like parents should have more patience with their kids because they don't know what they're going through. They should be more patient with their kids who are going through stress, anxiety, depression, or just being overwhelmed in general. Parents should be more understanding when it comes to that.

## **What shaped who I am today is the people**

*I, John Muir*

I would say that all of the schools I have ever been to have shaped me more than my own family did. At home, I usually put on a different persona because I know that my parents wouldn't approve when it comes to some of the things I enjoy. School is where I was always able to express my true self even with the judgemental opinions. The people that have had the heaviest impact on who I am today are definitely all of the people I've met in my lifetime. Every school year, I would switch friend groups so that I could experience so many different types of personalities. Learning about new people and taking in things from them is the most important thing to me. It helps me grow the most. Of course, I don't just leave my old friends behind; I still talk with and maintain connections with the majority of my friends. I would say that for me, what shaped who I am today are the people. Socializing has been the best part of my life and I can't wait to meet new people and experience new things in the future.

# Mental Health

## Importance of Mental Health Awareness, Especially in Schools

*Anonymous, John Muir*

I couldn't stop shaking. I felt my heart in my throat. I was right in front of the principal, shaking in my seat as she looked at my left and right wrists, which were covered in scars. After a few minutes of silence, she told me she would have to tell my parents; that was definitely the last thing I wanted. Deep down, I knew I needed help; I was scared of myself and the harm I would put myself through if I continued. I couldn't explain what I was feeling or going through. All I knew at the time was that I didn't want their help.

I was angry at everyone. I was angry at my "friend," who told the school what I was doing to myself, and I was angry at the school itself. Never once during that time did I feel as if there was a safe space at school where I could express what I was going through. I never felt as if the school even cared about me or my mental health. So why did they suddenly care so much?

After that day, I met with a counselor that would come to the school and meet with me weekly. At first, I absolutely hated it; I wanted to be left alone. I tried my hardest to avoid the counselor. Eventually, after a couple of sessions, I warmed up to them and got the help I needed and have been able to stay clean for three years now because of this help. But why did it take for me to reach my breaking point for resources to be available to me back then? I look back and wish there were more resources available around the school, the place where I spent most of my time.

Although I have since passed from this time of my life, adults (staff and parents) may not always realize when some students are struggling. When I was struggling, I also didn't fully understand what I was going through; I was lost and in the dark, which is why I believe it's essential for schools to start teaching about mental health and creating spaces where students can feel comfortable talking about these issues. Schools have a large impact on our mental health and our understanding of the subject. Even many of our parents don't have a large understanding of the topic. I know my parents didn't understand what I was going through and were struggling financially, so it was difficult to access the help I needed. The resources the school provided were all I was able to access. Increasing the availability of these resources around the school can help any other students that may be going through what I experienced. Schools can help make sure that no one else feels as if they reached their breaking point.

**(CONTENT WARNING: Bullying, thoughts of suicide)**

### **A time when I felt voiceless and powerless**

*JAR, Pasadena High School*

When I was in 6th grade, I was 12 years old. I was being bullied. I got bullied by my classmates on social media. This led me to think "I wasn't worthy of being in this world," "I wasn't so pretty," "I looked like a pig." I wanted to end the feeling of not being able to fit in and not be wanted. I didn't



know how, but the only thoughts in my head were to kill myself. You're probably wondering how it affected me? It affected me in many different ways. For me personally, it was traumatic and sad I needed therapy.

This experience was not the best, it was horrible. I always thought I was never going to be good enough. I thought I wasn't going to have any friends. The only person that had my back through it all was my mom. My mom was always there for me. I was so afraid to speak up about getting bullied. I didn't know if they were going to believe me or maybe they'd think I was exaggerating. I felt so low. I felt like I'd been getting stepped on.

When my mom found out what was happening, she started to question me. She'd found out because she saw my phone that had messages of wanting to kill myself. She then started to question what was going on and why was that on my phone. I explained I was getting bullied at school and being called nasty names. After I told her she took it straight to the school. The school I was attending was Madrid Middle School. My mom proceeded to set up a meeting with the vice principal and when had that meeting she only set me up with therapy. I was still getting bullied. My mom then had set up another meeting but this time it was with the principal of the school. He was new there, and he had said he'd talk to everyone and make sure they wouldn't do it again but they still did. At this point it was frustrating for my mom and me that the school wasn't doing anything. Nothing to protect me and my safety. After the school not doing anything, the cops got involved. The cops came and they also pulled out the people from class that were bullying me and talked to them.

After all this happened, my mom and I knew I wasn't gonna be going back to that school for the rest of middle school. She asked me if I wanted to move to the school that my cousin was going to. I said no because the school year was already ending. She said okay. I knew seventh grade would be at a whole new district and a whole new school. I wasn't so scared because I was going with my cousin and we were in the same grade. The school I then attended was Eliot Arts Magnet Academy. I met amazing people. Everything was different. The energy there was so positive and wholesome. I found my voice there. I was now able to speak up for myself and be who I wanted to be, who I really was. I could express myself and just be me. I didn't have to pretend I was someone else. Some people I met there became my closest friends and till this day they still are. I enjoyed both my 7th and 8th grade year at that school.

In conclusion, all the bullying that happened to me changed the way I see life. It changed the way I act and how I think now. I have very few friends, and I keep to myself most of the time. I learned not to be afraid and to be able to speak up for myself. I'm grateful God gave me another chance at life because I learned so much. I wouldn't wish for anyone to be bullied and for those who are, I'm sorry that's happening to you.

## **Up and Down**

*Anonymous, Marshall Fundamental*

I've had a lot of experiences as a PUSD student, good and not so good. There isn't really a specific memory or experience that really stood out to me to share. But I do just want to express how I feel as a PUSD student and some of the ongoing things I've been going through. Being a PUSD student comes with being an achiever and being a hard worker. I say this because PUSD takes everything with pride. Even if it's on an educational level or an artistry level.

I go to Marshall Fundamental High School, and I know that on a personal level because Marshall Fundamental does take whatever we do with greatness and high success. We Eagles are achievers and try our best to be great role models to others. With that, I feel great most of the time being a PUSD and Marshall Fundamental student.

There are those days or weeks where I do feel overwhelmed and just so unmotivated. Mental health nowadays is a highly talked about topic and a serious one. As a student, teenager, and just overall human being, having episodes where you just don't feel motivated at all to do anything whatsoever is very changeling. It doesn't just affect your school work but also your personal life in general. As one of those students that goes through those episodes from time to time and being a student in Marshall, I have realized that they have a lot of help and resources that help you with that. Not just Marshall but PUSD as well. So, you could say I have a lot of ups and downs in experiences with PUSD. But overall, it is a pretty good district to be a part of.

## **This semester I don't Have the Same Motivation**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

Lately I haven't been feeling the same as the past few years. I don't think I have been trying in school whatsoever and I haven't been giving it my best shot. In the earlier years of high school, I was really motivated and encouraged to try my hardest and to score A's and B's, which was something that really made me happy because it made my parents happy. I was always early to school and really wanted to learn.

This semester I don't have the same motivation. I haven't been on top of my work at all in almost every class. I have more than 50 assignments missing from classes, and overall, I haven't gotten back into liking school. Sometimes I don't even care anymore as I look at all the work some teachers give, mainly mathematics. I honestly don't feel as if it's been fair. I've already been informed about low grades in certain classes, but I just choose to look away, which is not like me. I will say one thing is that I would hope to not be like this next year with lack of motivation. I can't promise anything because I can't see the future.

## **I needed and wanted to make friends**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

The time my outlook on life changed was when I was in my first year of high school. I had no friends because I came from a completely different school than everyone else. And being a shy person by nature, that didn't help me at all. I needed and wanted to make friends but because of my really bad past of making and losing friends, I had trust issues. At first, I didn't really mind being alone but when I saw the other kids having fun in big or small groups of people I knew I wanted to make friends. A couple of months passed, and I had made one friend because we had the same classes together. Everything was great but then the lockdown had happened and she and I had a lot on our plates. Dealing with taking care of our younger sibling and trying to juggle school work and outside schoolwork. We barely talked because of it.

## **I don't want them to feel lonely**

*J, John Muir*

At the beginning of my junior year, I saw a lot of new faces, and I could tell that those new faces were lonely as if it was written on their chest. I felt that if I spoke to a new face everyday that I would make their day a lot better, because sometimes that's what it takes for someone to just acknowledge them. They feel like they have no one because it seems to them that no one cares. So everyday of my junior year I found a student whom I've never seen before and asked them how their day was. Some would tell me it was great and others would say not so good, and then I would ask why. If students are lonely, I don't want them to feel lonely because being lonely affects a kid a lot; having no one to talk to could really take a toll on you. My goal is to keep that cycle going. My goal is that when I leave John Muir High School, there won't be one lonely student and no matter the gender, size, or color, everyone will get along with each other.

## **Literally my life**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

High school life, in a nutshell, is just exhausting. There are many different personalities and variables that go into child development, and schools fail in almost every aspect. I feel that teachers are not understanding enough and are far too inconsiderate when it comes to some students' personal lives. However, some teachers are different. I personally can name about three teachers that have been quite understanding in this aspect and they have made things a lot easier especially with covid.

## Academic Anxiety

*Anonymous, John Muir*

This has to be incorrect; maybe he graded it wrong. I had gotten my report card and I had a C - one big fat C staring me in my face. I had never been the best at math, but I couldn't remember doing anything C-worthy. That was true, I hadn't done anything C-worthy... I started to walk up to my teacher to ask him to change my grade when I started to feel like I couldn't breathe. A second before I was fine, but then, was I having a heart attack? Kids didn't really pay that much attention. My face was on fire, and I was still struggling to breathe. I didn't want to tell anyone because they would want an explanation. I was too embarrassed to tell anyone I had a C.

Growing up, my parents only wanted the best *for* me and that meant wanting the best *from* me. They never put too much pressure on me, but I knew if I didn't get good grades they would be disappointed. "I know you can do better - you'll get it next time," my mom would tell me. No matter how soft her tone was, it made me feel like I needed better grades. It didn't help that kids branded me as the smart kid, so I soon connected my academic achievements to my personal worth. I craved academic validation. When I didn't get it, I looked down on myself.

Soon the ache in my chest faded, and I could breathe again. I looked up to see that everyone in my class was headed out the door, and I was the last one. I realized that my mom was on her way and would be asking for the report card. I hurried out the door and as soon as I hit the corner to the main hallway, I made direct eye contact with my mom.

I slowed my pace, trying to prolong getting to the car. My palms felt sweaty, and I could hear hammering in my chest. It felt like it would burst through my ribcage. I reached a shaking hand to the car door and pulled. I put my backpack down and got in. "How was school today?" my mom asked me as she pulled out of the school parking lot.

Good, she's not asking about the report card, I thought to myself. After a while, we arrived home. I thought I was in the clear.

"What do you want for dinner," my dad asked. He was obviously cooking.

"Chicken, mashed potatoes, and green beans," I replied. My mom was sitting on the couch staring at her phone and I sat next to her. Pressing through someone's Instagram story, she saw that my godmother had posted her daughter's report card. We were going to the same school at the time. I could basically see the wheels turning in her head. It felt like everything was in slow motion. She turned her head eerily and slowly, "Where's your report card, daughter?" she asked.

"I'll probably get mine tomorrow," I said. I had lied. I was terrified, and it came out of my mouth before I could think. The next day I gave it to her, ready for disappointment. But I was greeted with a smile. She was proud. She knew and understood that math was hard. I had held myself to that harsh standard for no reason. I had created a persona for my mom that only consisted of grades, but that's what anxiety does.

## **This civil war inside my head**

*MS, Marshall Fundamental*

Teens are surrounded by mental barriers in every aspect of our lives. This creates an unrealistic amount of stress that we are expected to know how to deal with from the time it begins. I don't have a specific experience to relay, but my mental health journey as a whole throughout this year.

Everyone told me that junior year was going to kick my ass. Admittedly, it is very difficult, but not in any way I expected it to, nor in a way that anyone prepared me for. I feel far more resigned. I don't care about anything serious, but I do still care about everything that matters. My grades need to be all A's, but it's okay if this assignment is late, and if I only study a little for this exam. I can't get into college if my GPA is below a 4.0, but it's fine if I go out with friends tonight, and homework can wait.

My dad always asks me when I get home how much homework I have. My answer is always: I don't know. I'll check before bed, at 1 am, when my brain is too tired to finish it. I don't even know the point I'm trying to make, just ranting about the bickering in my brain. Stay on top of your work, orrrr, chill out nothing matters. Get good grades, be top of your class, get into MIT or Harvard, orrrr, slack off, hang with your friends every night, chill out, enjoy your life.

I have so much stress from this civil war inside my head that I've lost the motivation to do the things I love. I want to go on a hike with my dogs, sit in the park and read, go to fun places with friends, but I've gotten so used to ignoring my motivation for school work that it has spilled into my free time activities. Maybe it's the caffeine addiction talking, or some mild undiagnosed depression that I'm doing my best to ignore, or even the diagnosed, but nonetheless, unmedicated ADHD. I'm really not sure what my problem is - just that I need to fix it, eventually. Maybe tomorrow, or tomorrow's tomorrow, or the day after that. Oh well. I'll fix it eventually.

## **My anxiety attack**

*J, John Muir*

I have been going through a lot of anxiety, and I don't know how to control it. I'm sorry that I haven't been doing my work in your class. I will try to turn in my work on time.

## **Holding on**

*Anonymous, Marshall Fundamental*

"I've worked my whole life, just to get right, just to be like 'look at me I'm never coming down'" (Rosé, On the Ground).

Mental health is an issue almost everyone deals with in their life, although many won't admit it. Everyone's personal life is different but one thing most of us have in common is school. It's stressful and many of us don't have a method of coping with the stress. And I wouldn't blame the teachers, but the school system itself. We all work in preparation for college, but college isn't for everyone. It goes beyond grade school.

The University of California system is great, but they also mostly look at grades. Schools don't provide enough resources for students to receive mental health. They're focused on keeping students in class to receive their paycheck. Students are also pushed into taking classes they're not ready for and vice-versa. Counselors want kids to stay in AP classes even if they don't want to and they won't move them up when they feel they're ready. Our entire life is centered around school and we don't have any time after.

Another thing that has come to my attention is the difficulty of getting into college. Someone on YouTube commented, "You have to cure cancer to get into college these days. You used to go to college to cure cancer." We who are 17 or 18. I don't know why they expect so much from us. We are teens. It's a bit sad. I understand that being accomplished and being involved is good, but they expect the most. Education is something I'm grateful for, but I'm scared it'll be my downfall.

## Stress

*H, John Muir*

It began with a busy, stressful school period. I didn't have the right mechanisms in place to cope. I admit that, and the way I saw life took a dark turn. I became stressed and anxious, and at the same time realized my stress and anxiety was rubbing off on my work. I was afraid of the shame that surrounded mental health issues and feared for my grades. I was due to do my work but began doubting my ability to do the work. My stress levels were at the max, and I went over the edge and couldn't get out.

I approached my command chain who was excellent in the way they helped me. I was displaying severe symptoms of depression and anxiety, and God put things in place to help me deal with that. After a while I felt better about myself. I accept that I may find myself feeling unwell again in the future. I have up and down days. There are going to be more tunnels, I know that. I have won this battle, but the war might never end. People need to realize that you can't just expect it all to disappear. You might come across another tunnel like I have, and that's perfectly normal! In my opinion, it would be dangerous to think that it's ever gone forever.

## **(CONTENT WARNING: Self harm)**

### **Built for blame**

*Anonymous, Marshall Fundamental*

I was only 13 when I began self harming. I was confused and lonely. Reflecting back on my younger self, I am heartbroken by my own actions. What else was I to do, I had been abused by a close family member and felt unsafe at school from cyber bullying. Guilt and shame were emotions that carried through classes and remained as I lay in bed. I had no sense of community nor belonging, and felt hopeless.

After each wound, I told myself it would be the last time and I would not feel the need to harm myself anymore. It felt relieving at first, but the aftermath and realization would cause a greater pain than what I had already gone through. When my mom and older brother found out about my self harm scars, I was immediately told that I was "out of my mind" and even made fun of by my older brother, who I had looked up to during my adolescence. Of course, I was told to cover my arms and other areas where there were visible cuts.

Each day I went on to school upset about what had happened back at home, and I could not escape the physical reminders carried on my body. This was four years ago. I have since gone through therapy, established a caring community within and out of school, as well as confronting my self harm. There isn't an exact point to this, but, I wish someone would have been there to listen, or even know that I was not alone. I am not a disappointment or an embarrassment. I am not a freak or a problem. I am just navigating through my experiences with what I could do and knew at the moment. Whoever the reader may be, be mindful of your interactions with people. You barely uncover the tip of the iceberg of someone's life, and everyone deserves space in a community, regardless of what their past may entail.

### **I was isolated with piles of work**

*MYV, Blair High School*

Once, there was a time where I felt like I didn't belong in my classes that I was in. The work was extremely hard to balance because I was taking very challenging classes. So the work was taking up all of my time. I wasn't able to have a good social life for a long time. I would stay in my room for hours at a time and wouldn't really talk to my family or friends. I was isolated with piles of work and wanted to get all of it done in a short amount of time. This was the outcome of procrastination and putting myself under too much pressure.

I stacked my hours, but it turned out that I didn't have the time I wanted. I wanted to be at the same level with the rest of my advanced peers, but I later realized that I wasn't at their level. I was in the same classes with the same or even better grades. I was at the same level but in a different way. I

realized that I had my own way of doing things, and I think that other people should think of it this way as well.

You have to go on your own struggles of just finding your place. When I came back after quarantine, I felt like an outsider in my classes. I had to go on a journey that I didn't know I was on. I felt like everyone will go on a journey about themselves without really knowing their path. This to me is the most impactful lesson in my life so far. Also to everyone going through this, be patient and try to understand your way of things rather than other people's.

## Bleed

*Anonymous, John Muir*

This image represents the exhaustion and stress that I was put under for years. I'm just tired of the repetitive things going on and COVID just changed it for the worse. But at least I have my birds...





## **It caused me to dig myself a hole where I wasn't confident in myself**

*Anonymous, Blair High School*

I believe in living your life the way you see it and not in others' vision or not setting expectations for yourself or others. Putting a label on someone or yourself and trying to expect something that is not, is very harmful. In our society, we are expected to live a perfect and secure life. And it's put into our brains when we are just starting to learn about the world around us. I have, and I'm sure many other people and students, experienced the amount of pressure that is put on us. It can even be harmful to our mental health, especially to teenagers. Their version of success can ultimately lead to your downfall.

When I was younger my parents told me and my siblings that they wanted us to be the best in everything. The best in class, in sports, etc. And at the time it wasn't as pressured because I didn't fully understand what they meant by it. I was young, so I thought if I tried my best it would still make my parents happy. And hopefully proud of me. I thought that even if I got second place it was still enough. Of course, my parents weren't angry if I wasn't the best, but I could tell that they wanted me to be better. It caused me to dig myself a hole where I wasn't confident in myself.

In my freshman year, I achieved being on the Dean's List. In my sophomore year, I achieved Honor Roll. I thought achieving these things would make my parents proud of me - which is true. They were proud of me. I thought it would make the pressure go away but somehow, it was even worse. Since I achieved those, they expected me to make the Honor Roll every single year. But I didn't.

I wouldn't trade my parents for anyone else on this planet. I love them and I know they only want the best for me. But I believe their version of success can ultimately lead to my downfall. Now since I'm almost done with high school, I'm still very pressured. College applications, exams, studying, basketball, ASB, and senior defense are all a lot. I won't get anywhere in life if I keep trying to live up to my parent's expectations.

## **Teachers don't believe that I am actually trying**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

Something I feel like adults don't really understand about young people today is how much we all have been through these past two years. Ever since the pandemic started with covid, everyone has faced different things like family members or friends passing, people's mental health getting bad, online learning and school, and people just losing motivation.

For me, ever since the pandemic has started I feel like things have been going downhill for me. My mental health has changed and in a bad way, I went through a bit of depression for a while, lost interest in things, let my health get ruined, and lost loved ones. Coming back to school helped me a

bit because I get to see my friends again and hang out with them after two years. When I hang out with my group of friends, I feel the best and enjoy my time with them.

But education wise, it has been the worst ever. The first two months of school were pretty chill, but after that, things started getting really stressful. Classwork started getting harder for me, teachers started assigning a ton of homework and assignments, and ever since, I've been really stressed about school work. Work started piling up for me and teachers don't understand what I have been through and reasons on why I am falling behind on work. They don't understand about my personal things happening at home, my mental health issues, and trying to balance education and personal things.

Teachers don't believe that I am actually trying. So I feel like teachers need to understand what students have been through, and what they are going through right now. In general, they just have to be more understanding.

## **(CONTENT WARNING: Abuse)**

### **Young**

*S.B, Marshall Fundamental*

Growing up with domestic abuse as a little girl meant not even realizing I was growing up with it. The extreme violent yelling and physical pains inflicted in our family was a daily crossfire. I thought it was normal, I thought it was just family. I thought it was normal for my dad to hit my mom, even more normal for him to hit us. Those long moments of being afraid made those moments of calmness and tranquility even nicer- a reward after the storm.

But the storm followed me everywhere. It followed me on our weekly Sunday visits to his house before grade school. It followed me in 2nd grade when I would see my mom cry in the school parking lot as I would sink down in my car seat ashamed of a teacher seeing us. It followed me in the end of the 5th grade when we had to choose Marshall, a school a bit farther away from where we lived so he wouldn't be able to find out for our safety. It continued with every 30 minute drive to the LA County courthouse where my mom would fight for full custody after his lawyers would demand to see us in court. I was always too scared to go with her in those cases, she'd mostly go alone... something I'm not quite proud of.

The storm didn't do so well in middle school. It clouded my brain so much that I ended up doing quite terribly the first two years of school. The lack of love and care I felt at home made me want to start dating earlier to make up for it. The relationships were not the best and I ended up hurting people as I myself was hurting from the start. I was lost and I didn't know how to help myself. I had to take a summer program called SKILLZ to make up credit, it helped a lot in reestablishing a bit of my identity and got me back on track which I am forever grateful for. The 8th grade year was better as I passed with all A's.

High school was a repeated cycle though and I wasn't ready for it. It made me upset, angry actually, that it was so continuous. Arguments continued to erupt from left to right. I'd see my siblings cry and feel terrible because I didn't know how to help them. I couldn't even help myself. I'd come to school really mad sometimes and before entering the front doors tell myself that I would be as mean as I could be to people as a way to leash out my problems in hopes of someone comforting me. I did at times, rarely however, and mostly bottled it up and plastered a big smile on my face in front of friends and classmates. It always ached me whenever someone asked how I was doing and I would choke out a fake response that I was doing great. There was this one time though where things got too much for me to handle and I put my head down in class, completely broke down, and started crying silently to myself in hopes that someone, anyone in fact would ask if I was okay. No one noticed is what I liked to tell myself. If I did think that someone noticed but that they decided to turn the other way and do nothing, I was even more hurt.

That was a few months ago, and I'm glad to say I'm doing a bit better ever since. I do my best and try to ask my friends and classmates how they're doing and make myself open to cheering them up because I know that if I could have all my life bottled up then maybe someone out there also does the same. I find a bit of comfort in these routine checkups and hope that they become the norm. As the saying goes, you never really know what someone is going through and you never really know what someones been through.

If you've read my story through, please don't forget to check up on your own friends and classmates. They could probably use it too.

## **I was never motivated to do better**

*E, John Muir*

Things that went on at home were difficult enough. My parents thought that comparing me to my other siblings was the type of motivation I needed. I was always told I was the stupid one, the one who would embarrass the family with one F. Not only that, but I have had social anxiety, which is something that's not easy to overcome. I am also still dealing with anxiety. I had to see a doctor because of how bad it would make me feel. There have been moments when my own doctor would tell me that if I didn't see someone about it, I'd go into a deep depression. Depression to me was always a term of emo which is silly, I know, but it wasn't silly to the doctor.

Once I saw a staff member at John Muir High school, Ms. Nancy, who did help with my anxiety. She would pull me out of class and actually update my stats. She would help me control my breathing and heart rate which honestly really helped, and I'm beyond grateful we now have a wellness center. When I got home to tell my mom that I was getting some help I was called crazy. Her exact words were: "No tienes nada no mas eres loca" (you don't have anything - you're just crazy). Which honestly hurt so bad. I was almost in shock. My own mom!? Saying I was crazy hurt the most.

That day I broke down crying and overthinking everything. There were times I'd want to take my own life and that was when I knew I had to continue seeing Ms. Nancy. She was helping me seek a professional therapist who I could see daily. One day I showed up to Dance Class crying my eyes out. Mr. Galvan and I have had our differences cause I am one of the more difficult ones in his class, but he put all those negative things aside and called Mr. Lopez to seek someone to talk to. When I got to Mr. Lopez's office, he asked for my name and everything. When he saw me being very uncomfortable where I stood, he asked if I had any friends I wanted to talk to, and that showed me that he wasn't there to push me to my limits. He understood boundaries, which I appreciated.

Fast forward to two teachers that made me feel terrible. Mr. A and Mr. B. Both teachers offer classes that I am in fact failing which is not their fault at all. Mr. A always has a story about politics or stories about things we deal with daily but it's all this talk about race and equality but he doesn't show this to me. I get along with Mr. A. We laugh, and he reminds me I can do better but he also doesn't know where I come from. It's always, "your friends have amazing grades, but what are you doing?" He says he doesn't tell me these things to make me feel stupid, but that is exactly how he makes me feel.

Now with Mr. B he is a very pushy teacher, and he's disliked for being "rude" or "mean" which I understand, but there have been times where I completely zone out and come back to reality and I am not able to move, which for me is a panic attack, In the middle of a serious panic attack, I pulled out a sheet that Ms. Nancy gave me that to help me control my breathing, and Mr. B told me to throw it away before I could even explain it. I was already in trouble, so I did what I was told and threw it away. I was so disappointed in him, and how he couldn't even give me a chance to speak. I was beyond flabbergasted, but that is something teachers don't get. For all you teachers and staff: You think us zoning out of class or doodling in class is a form to distract ourselves, but sometimes the action helps a student deal with anxiety. We use doodling as a form to cope with an anxiety attack or to play with random things. So for you to call us immature is beyond disgusting. We ask you to do better. I want to acknowledge teachers and staff who have helped me throughout 9th grade: Mr. Brodie, Ms. Nadia, Dr. Robles, Mr. Resendiz, Ms. Nancy, Ms. Beverly/Rodriguez, and Ms. Issa.

## **Tears Falling To The Floor**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

*Friday, March 13th, 2020 around two o'clock:* I was in PE. It was a rainy day so we were watching a movie inside. It was a sad movie so I was just drawing in a notebook instead. At the end of class before the teacher dismissed us, she told us that our spring break would be two weeks longer due to something called COVID. I was okay with that, and everything was normal. When that month of no school passed, all the parents got an email from the school saying that covid was spreading to Pasadena and that we would not be coming back to school for the rest of the year. And that's when it all began, the worst year of my life....

*April 2020:* It has been a month of being at home, not getting to go to school, not getting to go anywhere, the world going silent, my world closing in on me. Being stuck at home started causing

deep depression and anxiety. Typical me, I didn't tell anyone, I kept it to myself. I was scared that if I told anyone what was going on, one of two things would happen, or both (which is worse): 1 - my friends would judge me because it's just being at home and that it's not a big deal, or 2 - my parents would put me in therapy to try to get rid of this. Luckily for me, I am a very good actor, so my parents never found out about it. On the other hand, there was part of my head that was screaming bloody murder for help and wanted to just tell every single person I knew, but that wasn't an option in my case...

*May 2020:* It has been two months of being at home. My depression and anxiety keep getting worse, with the words screaming in my head, "WHEN WILL THIS NIGHTMARE END!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" It is getting worse, my friends not answering my calls and texts, my family going crazy trying to find things to do, and I can't take it anymore. I went to bed every night praying that the pandemic was just a horrible nightmare and I would wake up the next morning and everything would be how it used to be. But when I woke up, I knew that this was a reality, not a bad dream. I would pace my room with the thoughts running through my head, what should I do? What can I do? When will the horrible nightmare end? Of course, nothing came to mind. That just led me deeper into this path I was being forced to follow, the path that felt like it was going on forever...

## Well that's nothing but a fantasy

*Anonymous, John Muir*

The biggest impact that the quarantine had on me wasn't my grades. It was the friends that I lost. Throughout quarantine I could keep up with most of my school work. I could work by myself well and get things done with a reasonable time space. I wouldn't say it was easy or that I had this great pattern everyday, but I made it. The big impact that the quarantine punished me with had to be through my social interactions. I think that since I don't really text anyone or like texting people very much, I really lost those deep connections and interactions that I used to have all the time with my close friends. Sometimes I would go weeks without texting anyone if it wasn't to get the answers for an assignment. The only people I had good conversations with during the pandemic were when my little brother, my neighbor, and I went on bike rides.

I think that going back and seeing some of those people again is the hardest part. It really is like meeting a new person, since they changed over the quarantine. Getting a new interest, changing their mindset, and having matured. It's like all those core memories of experiences and moments that describe them don't fit their personality anymore. It also didn't help that none of us had done anything special or worth talking about to each other. You know, a lot of my friends' group had this expectation of what we would do in high school together, do the same clubs and try to spend every extra second together that wasn't spent in class. Well that's nothing but a fantasy.

## **My senior year after returning from the pandemic**

*YR, Blair High School*

Throughout my high school years, I always managed to get my work done and get passing grades, but I believe my senior year after returning from the pandemic affected me in a variety of ways. I got so used to the zoom calls and just learning that I forgot what it was like to return. This year has been the most stressful of my entire life. I've been doing things I know are bad for me, but I know I can keep going. It gets difficult, but I know I can get back up. This school year has been extremely difficult, but the only person who has only helped me get back up is God. Not only that, but it was difficult to adapt to new skills, which I had learned throughout my school years at Blair. Yes, it can be difficult, but as the saying goes, "If you really wanted to, you would." When I fall, just hearing that helps me get back up, and I believe God has helped me a lot. I also believe that anyone can return; the question is whether they truly want to. I believe teachers should take it easy this year because it has been a difficult transition from online learning. This year, my English teacher has picked me up several times and he is unaware of it; simply hearing him say anything about me and receiving his emails has helped me a great deal. I feel like I could go to him and rant at him for hours and still have so many inspirational words. I really enjoyed my year at Blair and am grateful for the skills I learned. It has helped me in becoming the person I am today.

## **It's never too late to change**

*A.W, Blair High School*

Before the pandemic happened, there were a lot of bad habits that I developed that I never noticed. I found myself following the wrong crowds and got myself in a lot of trouble. The way that I was at school affected everything at home. My mom was very concerned about why I was acting like this, but I couldn't even tell her myself. I got caught up in wanting to be known instead of focusing on the things that really mattered. I saw that the things that I was doing affected my grades a lot. I just stopped caring and wanted to do things my way, instead of doing what I was supposed to do.

After a while I realized that the people I was hanging around were not for me. It seemed like we didn't have anything in common and that they would rather see me down than up. I realized that some people just stick around because of what you bring to the table, or only if it benefits them. I decided to distance myself from everyone who did no good for me and focus on myself. I got comfortable with being alone, and realized that I didn't need anybody to depend on. When the pandemic happened that's when a lot of realization took place. I learned more things about myself than I ever did. I got back into a good mindset and started to see changes and growth. I developed new hobbies, and found new passions.

I remember in 5th grade thinking that in high school I was going to have a big group of friends, and just have fun. I thought of high school like a fairytale. I now see that friends come and go and that everything is temporary. I now have a clear mind of what I want my future to look like. I feel confident about starting the next chapter of my life. I know obstacles will appear, and will make me feel like I

need to give up, but high school really showed me that I can get through anything, and accomplish anything if I just focus.

## Help!

*JG, Pasadena High School*

2021 was a horrible year. That's an understatement, as if 2020 wasn't already extremely bad for everyone due to covid and all that, 2021 was like 2020, but even worse, because the sequel is always worse than the original. 2020 was just the beginning as we had started settling into quarantine. It wasn't until 2021 that the real side effects of being physically and internally isolated started to affect a person. It would be an understatement to say that my mental health suffered during the spring of 2021. This time had me facing many mental battles with issues I had been bottling up, but also helped me develop a support system to be able to face these tough times. During those times, I was dealing with a variety of issues, ranging from minor ones like rejection to more serious ones like gender dysphoria.

Quarantine was not easy for me, and from my understanding, I believe it wasn't easy for anyone. All of these issues really got to me, and I felt as if I was a giant Jenga block tower. The mental challenges were slowly taking out my blocks, and then I reached a certain point at which my tower just collapsed. When I say I collapsed, I mean it figuratively, like everything was falling apart; for example, my grades just like the tower had fallen, as well as my dopamine levels. This all resulted in me just giving up on life for a while. There were hours in a day in which I would fall into a state of thought paralysis as I would just get too overwhelmed to do anything other than just lie in bed, in the dark, with my plushies.

Despite all these troubling challenges I went through, I am sharing this not to share my struggles but rather to tell how I overcame them. As cheesy as this may sound, what ultimately ended up helping me throughout these times were my friends. One of my friends had noticed something was up with me, and as he himself had gone through similar things, he was able to really touch base with me and offer helpful advice. After receiving this help, I realized that people were there for me. I gained the courage to reach out to my other friends to explain to them what was going on. Talking with them about the things I was going through really helped me alleviate my thoughts. I realized that people were there for me. I realized I'm not alone, and all of this really goes to show that something as simple as chatting with your friends can really have a great impact on how they're feeling.

## I'm still standing

*JM, Blair High School*

When the pandemic hit, and everyone was under lockdown, I started learning a lot about myself. I went through multiple emotions while being confined and isolated at home, like losing family



members and seeing my family fall apart. Due to the pandemic and the consequences that came with it, I was always busy thinking about all the negative outcomes. I never had time for myself to think about my future or the positive possibilities. I lost the motivation to focus on school, which at the time was the least of my problems. At that time, I could not envision even being able to go to college or even having a career.

As time went on, I was working towards getting a 3.0 GPA or higher my Junior year. I ended up getting the lowest GPA I had ever received in my high school career. I was disappointed in myself for not being able to push myself to achieve my goals. I realized that I had to work twice as hard as some of my classmates. I worked on myself academically by retaking classes and trying to stay in contact with multiple counselors. I'm also connected with programs such as College Access Plan (CAP) and TRIO Talent Search to help give me a better understanding of what steps I should take to achieve my educational goals.

I want to work for myself, and I don't want to be pressured or told by other people to do anything. I have learned how to become independent, but at the same time I am not afraid to ask for help. One goal that I had set for myself for this school year was to advocate for myself by speaking to my counselor or mentors at least once a week. That's one goal I have been consistent with, I visit my counselor at least once a week to give her updates with my grades or ask her questions about graduation requirements and college applications. I have already achieved one goal and I am really proud of myself because I did it all on my own with the guidance of my mentors, teachers, and counselors.

Another goal that I set for myself was to apply and get admitted to a college. That is one goal I had set for myself since the start of high school. When I received my first letter of acceptance, I felt very proud of myself. It motivated me to continue on my path to higher education. I was proud of the hard work that I put in, but what made me the most proud was that I was able to push myself even when I wasn't in the best place in my life during quarantine. It made me look back to when I was in quarantine and how I couldn't see myself in college.

Although I am disappointed with some of my past choices, I am very proud of the student that I have become. I see improvement and I am finally experiencing what success feels like. I am doing my best to improve more and more everyday. I still hold the same goals and values that I had set for myself before the pandemic. However, the only difference now is that I'm taking action to ensure that it happens.

## Overwhelmed

*SD, Blair High School*

Throughout my life, I have struggled with anxiety, but most of the time, it was nothing more than a background buzz. During the recent Coronavirus pandemic, I had the option to just give in to my anxiety and stay home for what felt like forever. It was not just a choice, but an obligation, since leaving the house was synonymous with being infected with a deadly disease. My previously casual anxiety festered and grew to a severe point by the time summer 2021 rolled around, after I was



vaccinated and was slowly returning to normal life for work and an upcoming school year. I began to have physical symptoms of anxiety; I was in pain every time I wanted to leave the house. Suddenly, doing simple tasks like going to work for a few hours felt like I was taking myself to my own funeral, because I knew that meant more pain. I started canceling plans with friends for the first time in my life, which only made me feel worse and cower further into my corner of safety. After a few weeks (or maybe months,) I got so sick of being paralyzed with fear. I finally started to just power through my fear and pain, and with time, it faded away. Even though I had times where the pain stayed or even got worse once I got to my destination, I still knew I had to keep trying or nothing would change. I had to keep persevering through the challenge to make it go away. This also translated to other parts of my life; it taught me that working through something difficult will make small wins seem bigger and other challenges seem easier.

## Non-Stop

*KB, Marshall Fundamental*

Ninth grade during quarantine was quite intense for me. It was so very lonely at first, then incredibly fun, and then heartcrushing again. Throughout all of it, however, my grades suffered. My entire education I had received A's and B's. with only the rare C. It was the first time I had ever gotten a D, let alone failed a class. I didn't have a single A on my report card, and when I realized this, I felt.. nothing. Quarantine had beaten me down repeatedly, so much so that I felt unphased.

## (CONTENT WARNING: Cancer, death)

### The worst time of my life

*MH, Pasadena High School*

The summer of 2018 was probably the hardest summer of my life, and that's including the pandemic (and all of that fear and uncertainty).

I don't really remember when we found out, only the stress that came with it. After a trip to the ER and surgery, they found out the problem. My dad had cancer. By that time, it was already Stage 3. Time passed in a daze. I didn't really have any grasp on it. From hospital visits to hospice care, I was exposed to so many things suddenly afraid of happening.

At school, I pretended everything was normal. Only those I was the closest to knew, and even then it took me a few months to explain the situation. My mom's anxiety worsened; she couldn't even drive to Target without being overwhelmed. Chemotherapy was only available in Beverly Hills, a \$100 Uber ride there and back. We got money for the Uber rides, but only about 10 a year. As summer bled into fall, his condition didn't improve at all. A new diagnosis revealed the cancer was Stage 4 and had spread to other areas of the body.

Another stint in the hospital, and he was back home, only this time we knew he would die there. He made it to the new year, but not much later than that. I remember the date, because it was Friday the 13th (January 13, 2019). I didn't go to school that day, or for about two months after that. My immediate family and I just stayed home and tried to process it. There was family drama, and we cut contact with some people, including my grandma. We had a therapist, but she was late for the first appointment, and didn't even show up to the next one. We didn't bother after that. I don't remember much of that time.

When I went back to school, I had no idea how to tell people what had happened. I just decided to rip the band-aid off and tell anyone when they asked. I dove into schoolwork to distract myself. My after school activities increased, and I started to move on. I was even valedictorian at my middle school.

Summer treated me like I was normal — something I greatly appreciated. The heat and whirlwind of activities was a good way to not go off track. I started therapy with a good (private, and more expensive) therapist. High school was its own challenge, and I wasn't surrounded by reminders of the day my dad died. Everything was going normally.

Then, of course, the surprise of the year, COVID, showed up. School was online, and nothing was normal. We were vigilant in our health protocol, and were taking all precautions. Over the next two years, surges came and went, and we were back in school. Friendships were strengthened, and I didn't think about him that much at all. Most thoughts were positive, reminiscing on the good times. That brings me to today, where I have made peace with what happened. That experience shaped me as a person, but I will not let it define me. I am a strong person because of it, and I can be a stronger person as time goes on.

**(CONTENT WARNING: Self harm, police, family trauma )**

**I've never been strong enough to talk about it out loud**

*Anonymous, Marshall Fundamental*

I don't remember the exact month or day when my brother was taken away from us and put into a mental hospital, but I was really angry at him. He was only 11.

I was angry that he could just harm himself after we told him not to, that our "I love yous" were not enough for him. Our family would never be the same. Not only that, I was angry that the neighbors could hear. The walls were so thin - they knew everything and nothing at the same time. I remember feeling confused about the whole thing and wanting to talk to someone who would get it, but I didn't know anyone who would. I just wanted to know for sure that if I was to tell someone, they wouldn't think I came from a broken family or that we needed fixing. That there wasn't anything wrong with me. It was just a bad time, and times eventually pass.

It did pass, but it continued every few weeks where he'd get sent back to the hospital. It would always be hours away too. Advanced Placement exams were just a few weeks away but they were

at the back of my head as I worried about my family. I didn't really notice it, but it would always be close to a beach. So after we dropped off some clothes and supplies for him, we'd take a short drive there. I felt so nice and warm being out there. Things always seem better for some strange reason when you're at the beach. The car rides back home weren't so great though. My mom would cry so much, and I didn't know how to help her. I would cry too, sometimes for her and sometimes for myself. There was always a huge lump in my throat after I let everything out, I think it was the feeling of guilt

I thought things were getting better, I really wanted them to get better, but I was wrong. We had tickets to see the firework show at the Rose Bowl in the evening and had eaten watermelon earlier. Everyone was so happy, but he wasn't. Things got physical pretty quick. My mood quickly changed though when I saw him pointing a knife towards my mom. Everything changed when the yelling began. Everything changed when I heard pleas to call 911, and everything changed when I was the one who had to make the call.

"911, What's your emergency"

I struggled to say the words. I felt the tears rolling down my face. Was I really going to send my brother to jail? In all honesty I didn't know what was going to happen. He was only 12...he was my brother. I cried the whole time as I was explaining to her what had happened along with what address to come to. I cried some more as I saw a group of police come through the front door and go to him. They took me out of the house by the porch and instructed me to wait there. When I saw them take him away in handcuffs that's where I cried the hardest. He looked so scared and hurt. I never really forgave myself for making that phone call.

That was almost a year ago, I've never been strong enough to talk about that moment out loud, not even to my closest friends, but I hope I'm able to someday. Things still are pretty hard, and at times I feel ashamed of my home life and that in a way I deserve what's happening. Throughout this all, however, I'm learning how to love my brother regardless of what he's done to himself and others, and that he is not a bad person just because he does some bad things. To accept him is to accept that he has mental health problems and should not be looked down upon for them, whether it be at home or school, but rather helped and looked out for. That he is not defined by one or even a few bad moments in his life, and that he is still worthy of care and compassion despite the deep mental health stigmas embedded within our communities that tell him otherwise.

**(CONTENT WARNING: Death)**

**I didn't get to process the death properly**

*A., Marshall Fundamental*

My sophomore year, my dad passed away, taking a really big toll on my family and our dynamic, though I don't recall ever getting the chance to take a break or process that death properly in a way that felt comfortable. I remember getting a card from Dr. Anderson, the previous principal. I don't

exactly remember what it said but I appreciated it. I was okay at first but I thought about how when a mom or someone gives birth they get an eighth month maternity leave. I understand why children are a lot to handle, but when someone grieves and loses a person close to them they might get a day off to go to the funeral. My aunt is also a teacher and the most days she had to process his death was three days. The problem with taking days off as a teacher is unsure of how the substitute would deal with the criteria or is fit to, so it was hard for her to stay away from teaching because of these challenges.

## **Made me think I wasn't enough**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

In this story, I'll be talking about how I view the world differently. It can be from an event which impacted my life to one which most teens experience. The beginning of junior year is when I'd say teenagers experience the most sh\*t. I have been doing a good job with myself even though I have been through so much with depression almost getting the best of me multiple times to the point where the person I wanted the most in life left me. That made me think I wasn't enough, which kind of made me think, what's the whole point of being here? Sometimes I want to accomplish the stuff I want to experience, and sometimes I wonder how I'll even begin my success in this world. Now I'm doing better than I have in a while. If it wasn't for the friends around me (even if it's a few friends or even one), I'd have come a long way. All I want to say is thanks to them, even if I can't express my emotions anymore.



# **School Experiences and Feedback**

## **My body is not your concern**

*NK, Pasadena High School*

I, as a student, should not have to worry about being controlled and having to cover up because people have eyes of their own. Teachers and staff often say certain things to try and force guilt and shame upon my being. Many times I have been told that I need to respect myself or that no one will respect me. I also have been told that I need to cover up and not show “too much skin.” I find these words very discriminatory and derogatory. Teachers are very transparent but very impulsive.

Recently, I got called out by a member of the school and I felt shame; not shame for my behavior, but shame for the way she targeted me and called me out. I always get targeted when it comes to dress code. I frequently see other girls and boys wearing clothes that are way more revealing than what I wear. There is nothing wrong with that, but they don't get called out which is proof of the discrimination that exists within this district.

This idea of me being targeted is far more than just a theory. It is more common for chubbier girls like me to get called out for violating dress code than someone skinnier. I feel disgusted thinking of all the times I was put in a position where I felt like I didn't have the right to wear what I want and not be sexualized. The person that called me out said, “What will the boys think?” I am still in shock from that statement because it came from a woman. One thing I will never do is be pressured to cover up because people can't control their thoughts and actions.

Another incident occurred when I was walking down the hall and a boy yelled at me and said, “Put your belly away.” I looked back and asked, “What did you say?” He proceeded to insult me and call me names. Every day at school I get many looks, and it is very hard for me to be in a good mental state when I get so many nasty looks and get called out every other day. I hope one day discrimination in this community comes to an end and that I, alongside other girls, will be comfortable in our clothes. My body is no one's concern.

## **I thought it was going to ruin my high school experience completely**

*Anonymous, Marshall Fundamental*

I have been a student in PUSD since elementary school, and throughout my years within the school district, I can confidently say that I have had mostly great experiences. At the beginning of my freshman year, I fell victim to a situation where I was sexually harassed. It was my first year in high school, and I thought it was going to ruin my high school experience completely. Now that I am coming to the end of my junior year, and have been at Marshall since sixth grade, I can confirm that it was not true at all. Prior to the freshman year incident, I reported it and proper actions were taken.

I had planned on switching schools and school districts. Now that I am where I'm at today, I am so glad that I didn't. I wouldn't have had the friends I have now or the teachers I get to see everyday. If I

had chosen to switch schools I wouldn't have been on the Marshall cheer team or involved with so many school activities.

Joining the cheer team was one of the best choices I've ever made. For a very long time I struggled to find a hobby or a physical activity that I was good at but also enjoyed. I had very impulsively decided to join the cheer team the summer going into my junior year. This was right after our online school year and we were returning to school this year. Being on the Marshall cheer team has taught me so many things but also given me the best high school experience overall. Although I've had few struggling experiences within PUSD, nothing compares to the opportunities and experiences that I can proudly say I've had now.

## **I was already hurt enough as it was**

*SB, Marshall Fundamental*

Although I don't attend school there anymore, during my time at Blair I continued through the DLIP program offered by PUSD. However, the many substitutes, eccentric teachers, long field trips, and bizarre projects that I experienced while in the DLIP program are not what stayed with me when thinking back to middle school. The thing that has stuck with me for many years since, is an interaction that happened between my middle school teacher and myself. I don't hold anything against her but it did impact me to the point of sticking with me all these years.

To set the scene, we had to complete these AR (Accelerated Reading) exams that would give a teacher an idea of a student's general reading level. I have always loved reading, even from a young age and would consider myself to be very proficient, and my AR scores would always reflect that. I take pride in my love for literature and from it, my proficiency in reading. Because of this, I liked to and expected to get a high score every time. Only once did my score deviate from the normal trend.

Naturally, I was concerned and brought it up with my teacher. I had known her since 7th grade from participating in an after-school club after school as well as being her student for more than a semester, so I thought that she would also be concerned. After expressing this concern, the response I got and was not expecting to hear was, "Is English your first language?" Now of course this surprised me. Coming from a teacher who I thought knew me, I was definitely taken aback. I tried to explain to her my proud history of high AR scores, but the most I got out of her was a shrug and an offer for me to redo the exam. I never did take her up on the offer. I was already hurt enough as it was. I never saw her the same after that.

Looking back on it now and even at the time, I recognize(d) what was truly happening; I was a young naive brown Latina girl looking for the reassurance of an ignorant middle-aged white woman, who I thought knew my history enough, so that I and my concerns might be taken seriously. This may seem like a small innocuous incident that occurred long ago, but it is something that has stayed with me many years since, and has put into perspective my own place in the world as a brown girl. Knowing that many other students of color in PUSD have probably experienced something similar or worse to that leaves me uneasy. Our school district should be one of acceptance and love, a place of



growth and learning, not one where students are put in a position to face the realities of their existence through passive aggressive comments from educators.

## **A test is not an accurate and good way of measuring someone's intelligence**

*B, Marshall Fundamental*

Even from the beginning, I struggled with math. As I progress through the grades, I feel that I tend to struggle more, but the pace of learning only increases. We are expected to complete multiple assignments a week and usually have a test/quiz every two weeks. The lessons seem very rushed even for the teachers due to the mountain of required math. The teachers expect you to remember and master these topics at a very quick pace and that can become overwhelming and stressful over time.

The unbalanced grading scale of all math classes leads to an overwhelming dependence on good test scores. I have learned that a test is not an accurate way of measuring someone's intelligence. This stress of constant testing has caused me to try less and less in math classes. I feel that this system of cramming loads of information into a short period of time has to stop for the sake of all students' mental health.

## **Probably only two of my teachers are understanding**

*AM, Marshall Fundamental*

Teachers should really be more understanding of harsh situations for students. An example would be that some students have multiple outside-of-school commitments that they need to do or prepare for. However, teachers and administrators don't take this into consideration, especially for student athletes like myself. I both work and play basketball for the school team which is now year-round. I have work every Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday. I have practice every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday.

Every day throughout the week, I come home around eight or nine at night, and I still need to shower and eat a meal while having to finish tons of homework. Teachers seem to think that every student has nothing after school, so they assign many assignments at once per class. Not to mention that the classes I'm taking are difficult. I have four AP classes, pre-calculus, and Spanish 3. Probably only two of my teachers understand when I have to turn in assignments late because I didn't have time to complete it since they give so much.

In conclusion, teachers should just be aware that they stress students out even more than what they already have going on. They should be more considerate and also take students' mental health into consideration.

## **I smell you, boy.**

*DD, Blair High School*

Axe body spray is the bane of my nasal cavities. It's a grotesque substance carried by its effective marketing. I've seen the advertisements before, and I know what they're trying to tell me. The most memorable one displays an idealistic young man applying Axe in the shower. It visualizes the spray itself as a moving, living wave of "freshness." Our main character parades through town with his new fresh friend and finds himself next to a girl. The wave proceeds to push the girl towards its masculine master, implying that this is consensual. It suggests that Axe body spray is your "wingman" who'll help you get all the ladies. It promises to be liquid sex appeal. One use and you've won. Surely worth the price!

Of course, the way I just put it makes it sound stupid and unrealistic. And that is very much the point! It makes no sense. But, my God it works, but just not the way it says it will. I am bombarded by this filth every time I step into the boy's locker room. It is revolting. It does not smell like the concept of "sexy." It smells like somebody soaked a pine tree air freshener in pure vanilla extract.

It was Friday evening at Unilever when they cranked this formula out. It was disgusting, and I've never seen someone remotely like its scent. But teenage boys buy into it because they want girls. However, when 99 percent of females are disgusted by this crap, they are not attracted to you.

Unfortunately for us all, the teenage boys SOMEHOW take this to mean they're not wearing enough of this garbage. So then they soak themselves in it. It's so awful it makes me want to scream curse words in this family-friendly exercise. But that's beside the point. After bathing in the grossness in the morning, they universally decide right around gym class that it's time for a refresher. Their thought process must go: "No women have fallen for me yet, so it must have worn off." No, it hasn't. Please stop. Stop turning the gym locker room into a gas chamber. It doesn't help when they start passing around the vape pen.

## **Students are faced with many hard decisions**

*Anonymous, Marshall Fundamental*

Being a student athlete has its good and bads, and most times one outweighs the other. Participating in competitive sports can be draining, but it can also be rewarding at the same time. I was a competitive gymnast until about 8th grade, when I finally decided to quit. I quit because of the instances, and there are too many to count, where I would end up doing school work, crying, and losing sleep by the minute.

I was always tired, and I still am, but even more so when doing more than 16-17 hours of training a week, plus school work. I care a lot about school and how successful I am, and that is why I made

the hard decision to stop and put more focus into school. Students are faced with many hard decisions regarding the things they want/love to do because they want to excel in school, but sometimes the burden can be a lot and we struggle to keep up.

## A plea for change

*AV, Marshall Fundamental*

This is less of a story and more of a plea for change. Sex education in PUSD schools needs adjustments. I remember when I was in 7th grade, our sex education was based around mostly gender and pregnancy/birth. I've noticed that in bathrooms at my school, pads are always disposed of incorrectly or there's bloody stuff in the trash.

I think that Marshall specifically needs to have a version of sex education that takes place as early in the year for sixth graders as possible. Many kids this age will be getting their periods and reaching difficult parts of puberty very soon. Therefore I think it's important that they receive education on what's going on and what to do about it. If kids aren't confused and stressed out about their bodies changing, they'll be able to better focus on school.

Sex Ed should be more focused on destigmatizing certain bodily functions such as growing body hair, odor, periods, weight gain, etc. This would create a much safer environment that would be far more conducive to learning and social development. Increased discussion on sexuality and gender is also very important. It is imperative that Sex Ed is taught as early as possible, before kids start developing dangerous prejudices and making decisions that they'll long regret.

## They go into the real world afraid

*Anonymous, Marshall Fundamental*

I've had and currently have many teachers that whenever they assign us work they always say, "This assignment is worth a certain amount of points so make sure you get it done." Everything you do in class gets you points. It's always "points, points, points, get your points." But it's never a "how are you feeling about this topic, what are some struggles that I (as a teacher) can help you with so you understand this topic well?"

Then those grades decide our future. Those grades decide whether you get into college or not. People will judge you on those points. That is why our school system is a fraud. It's designed to tell people that if you fail you don't succeed. Which is not the case in the real world. The world is about failure. Failing so that you CAN succeed. Failing so that you can learn from those failures. That's life, but school damages our minds and gets us hooked onto this theory that you CANNOT fail. No one succeeds without failure. No one.

However, schools do get you in that mindset that you have to succeed, and that failure is not an option. That negativity alters kids' minds. They go into the real world afraid. Afraid to fail. They don't know what to do after school. And that's why the school system needs to be fixed for the betterment of students.

## **I don't know what my actual accurate grades are**

*AM, Marshall Fundamental*

One major problem for the grading system that needs to be fixed is that teachers mix grades on Canvas and Aeries. One system needs to be decided for grades and teachers should then stick to it, because I personally don't know which grades are accurate or not because some assignments have grades on Canvas but not Aeries and vice versa. So I don't know what my actual accurate grades are. This goes for all my teachers this year and even last year.

This can be really frustrating because then I think teachers aren't grading my work or are marking it as missing. Not only is this a problem, but my parents only have access to my Aeries account. So when they see bad grades on Aeries, I get in trouble even though I do my assignments and work. My work is either not graded or only put into Canvas. This problem needs to be fixed, and all teachers as a whole need to decide where to input grades for students who actually care about their grades in order to actively check them. Hopefully, this problem can be fixed soon.

## **SCHOOL**

*A, John Muir*

Last year I thought that high school would be amazing and that I would have a lot of fun. But little did I know, it would be this stressful and confusing. Somehow I managed to get through this year with a friend, a friend that I can talk to about literally anything and not get judged. That friend is Hector. He is always easy to talk to and always gives good advice even if I don't ask for it. I felt like Hector understands what I go through everyday and doesn't judge because I know that it's hard to go to school and get good enough grades to pass the class. I learned that not everyone can survive a full year without at least one friend that you can trust and talk to.

## **I'm not exactly sure how long this will last**

*Anonymous, Blair High School*

None of my experiences as a student really stand out. I was always burnt out from school like most kids, though my grades were good, I guess. I can never seem to remember anything anymore. My

head feels fuzzy most of the time. I hate feeling like that but most of the time, and I'm not sure what to do.

At one point I got really depressed, and I knew I could not keep going like this. If I would fall any lower, I knew I was not going to come back from this. So instead I started from the top and put all my focus on school. I doubt it's the healthiest thing to ignore all my problems, but it was the only thing that I could think of. I figured out the best ways to study and do homework. So far I'm doing well. I'm not exactly sure how long this will last because whenever I miss one day I usually never come back to it.

School can be really hard to keep up with especially when I am on my period. While I can control the pain with medication, the mood swings are what get me. It's really easy to break down on the smallest thing and then have no energy for the rest of the day. I am not able to do my best work and sometimes even miss assignments. I have to do way more than what I am doing now if I want to end up in the medical field and push through my personal problems.

In the end, I think schools should show students the best ways to get their homework done or ways to study. A lot of us don't know what we are doing and spend late nights doing work. Many of us tend to procrastinate or have a lack of motivation and give up. I think we should be taught what to do then and how to get over it.

## **This is a hurtful practice**

*Anonymous, Blair High School*

I haven't been in PUSD for long. I went to a PUSD school for kindergarten to 2nd grade, and now again in high school. This is to say that I don't have much experience with PUSD, which makes my first impressions of this year's in-person school all the more shocking.

Any time I walk through the halls or around the school, I always hear slurs being thrown around as if they were casual words. It wouldn't be as much of a problem if the people who were using these slurs were reclaiming them, but nine out of 10 times, I'll hear these words from people who have no right to be using them.

I went from having never actually heard any of these slurs in real life, to hearing the words up to three times a day in a place that's supposed to be welcoming and safe for people of all backgrounds and cultures. It's uncomfortable for me to hear, and I can only fully understand the weight of a couple of those slurs. While I have yet to be called a slur to my face, I've heard other people being called slurs, which isn't okay. This is a hurtful practice, and I think it should be addressed.

## **Something in the way**

*MS, Blair High School*

One of the biggest problems with our system of schooling is the punishments doled out that have a direct effect on those in poverty. This is a very bold claim, but there are studies that back it up. According to the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, there is a direct correlation between the level of wealth and level of education achieved, and according to Lamar University, there is also a correlation between the academic achievement levels of parents and children. So, school districts creating rules that ban students from participating in extracurricular activities if they don't have a sufficient GPA is very discriminatory.

The University of Rochester conducted a study that shows that extracurricular activities like sports have a direct effect on brain stimulation. Meaning, they activate the brain and help relieve stress, and make doing school work easier. So instead of punishing students who have unstable environments at home, due to the inability to pay for certain items that others have (food, or even resources like a tutor), schools should encourage struggling students to build a beneficial bond with activities like playing on their high school soccer teams.

The criteria created to try and motivate students to keep their GPAs up so they can participate in programs like student body, or sports, is in fact doing the opposite. It is only harmful towards the students it was made to help.

## **Something suspicious**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

Lunch had just finished. I walked my way over to my sixth period class. My friend and I sat at the back of the class. They had told us that the class was going to watch a movie since all the PCC teachers were away that week. My friend and I started talking about stuff that has been going on in our lives. One of the students asked if he could put his phone right next to me, and I said sure.

At that moment, the security guard saw him and thought that that same kid had given me something suspicious. At first, he came for the kid, but when he saw me slightly jump out of surprise, he told me to get up too and go with him to the E building. I was nervous because I didn't know what to do. I didn't even know what I had done wrong, but then he stopped me right outside of the E building and told me: "You are not in trouble. I just want to know what that kid gave you."

I said nothing and then he told me, "If you are lying to me, then you will be in trouble."

I proceeded to tell him, "If you want to search me, you can. I don't have anything on me other than a pen. You can search my backpack too if you want."

He said, "No, that's okay." He proceeded to search my hoodie and found nothing. He told me, "Okay, you are free to go."

At that point, I rushed back to the classroom and told my friend everything that happened. I told her, "Oh, he just thought that this kid gave me something. I bet he thought he gave me drugs or something."

My heart was beating so fast, but once everything seemed okay, I just proceeded to watch the movie that was being played on the screen in class.

## **Smells like teen spirit**

*Anonymous, Marshall Fundamental*

Is there really such a thing as popularity in high school? We all know the teen stereotype from the movies with the shiny glossy girls that seemingly "run" the school. Besides that, you also have the jocks/sports kids, nerds, and even the emo/goth ones (think *Mean Girls*). But how many of these are actually true today? I would beg to argue that these stereotypes have seemed to have gone away. High school is such a different experience for so many, yet these stereotypes just don't seem to be prevalent these days. Many of the so-called "popular" mean jocks aren't really that mean after all. And how exactly has social media affected this? Has it amplified it? Or did the opposite? Again, most people tend to mind their own business on social media. Aside from the negative mental effects that can overtake those who use social media (ex. jealousy, procrastination), social media just hasn't really reinforced these stereotypes, other than bonding those who are already close. And while those with similar interests do tend to stick together in high school, it's not quite the toxic environment that everyone depicts in their head.

## **Don't Stop Me Now**

*GA, Marshall Fundamental*

Life as a PUSD student can be pretty difficult, especially when many of the classes you take are AP level, or when you're a student athlete, or working student. It gets very hard trying to balance all of the work, schedules and just having the time to have a break really.

My story is just exactly that. It's all about my freshman year in high school. The toughest year in my opinion, reason being it's your first year and you have to adjust to the work and the introduction of AP level of studies. That was my case, I came into freshman year a working student athlete, straight A student taking my first ever advanced class, from general studies in 8th to AP level and honors classes in 9th. It was a huge leap for me, and took a heavy toll on my mental and physical energy. The studies were hard, and the new fast paced note-taking and comprehension was all new and very gruesome. Safe to say the amount of work and the difficulty of the quizzes were killer and



caused me to have to go to measures of no sleep for days and a major coffee addiction, which also affected my sports and relationships with family.

The studies took so much toll on my body that I wasn't thinking straight. My grades were heavily impacted. I was angry all the time, and I couldn't play my sport. All of this took my straight A self confidence in 8th grade and crushed it to the point of despair in 9th, and there was no one who understood me. I was alone and had to deal with the extra pressures from family and teachers to do better, to not complain but work silently and to smile. But this was impossible, when the whole world seems to hate you, and it seems like life is crashing on you. You're lost, alone, confused and scared. You have nowhere to hide and breathe. It's just extreme amounts of pressure breathing down your neck, everywhere you go, and it's hard, but as an old saying goes, "hang around the barber shop long enough, sooner or later you're going to get a haircut."

Eventually, I caught a break. The pandemic saved me in a way. It was a miracle in disguise. I got to relax, take some time to ponder what I really want, and no more of that pressure. I was at ease, and eventually after a while of comfort, I came around, learned how to handle my emotions, and troubles, got used to the work over time in online school, and now I'm back to being a straight A student in my junior year of high school. What people should take away from this is that life is tough, it's lonely, and extremely aggravating, and it's going to hit you hard. My teachers were ignorant, and my friends were not only unable but also were not interested in wanting to understand me. That happens. It's okay, it's natural, but it's necessary. It builds character and helps build and improve some flaws. I just wish the people in my life would have been more patient and understanding at the time, but I thank them. Thanks to their pressures and a little time to think, I grew up more there than in any other stage in my life.

## **Notion**

*NV, Marshall Fundamental*

I think there have been so many stories I could share about my years here at Marshall because it's filled with so much love and family connections that a lot of us don't even realize. Coming back from the pandemic has been one of the most positive things that has happened after being stuck at home for so long. Being back and being an upperclassman has made me realize the importance of having strong familial love with my peers as well as my teachers. I have never felt as confident or open to speaking up about certain political issues, and any other social issue that I believe should be addressed. Having my teachers back me up and/or expand my knowledge on these issues has made me very passionate about continuing my educational process as well as my social justice dream. Having the support from Marshall teachers throughout the years has truly made my time here an amazing experience. Seeing my peers stand up for what is right, having my teachers speak out and voice their opinions, and coming together as a Marshall community has made me feel as though I belong to a family of diverse people from different backgrounds.



## **Moral of the Story**

*Anonymous, Marshall Fundamental*

Being in school has been an experience for me. And unfortunately, I had to experience both the good and the bad aspects of it. In fact, I never would have thought it would ever happen to me. I became subjected to bullying because I made a very bad choice. The bully (whose name I won't mention) started to harass and say things to demoralize me. It became so frequent that I would lose control in the middle of class to try and engage him. I became depressed over time and thought that maybe I shouldn't live. At my lowest point, the people around helped support me and I rose above myself. I spoke my mind about what was happening and stood my ground. The harassment eventually seceded and those who did nothing but watch me getting treated badly, apologized to me. The point of this story is, people care about you. No matter what it seems. Even at your lowest point, there will be a ray of hope. It still pains me to look back at those experiences, but reminiscing, these experiences helped me grow as a person no matter the cause. If someone gave me a time machine to change my past, I wouldn't. The experience is what made me who I am, and I don't want anything to take that away. Lessons in life can be either gentle or harsh, but you can't choose the moment; the moment chooses you.

## **This Side of Paradise**

*Anonymous, Marshall Fundamental*

My experience at Marshall has been a very fun one. I have met fun and interesting people. I have made friends and some people who I will probably have in my life for a long time. The teachers at Marshall have also impacted me positively for many years. They are a group of the most caring staff I have ever known. I have created more memories in this place than I would have anywhere else. Being at Marshall has been an amazing experience.

## **Point of View**

*CL, Marshall Fundamental*

Although I attended Pasadena High School freshman year, I definitely found my home at Marshall. The community here at Marshall is so welcoming. There are many extracurriculars to join and opportunities to get involved in. It's a smaller school so you get to know more people, and it's a very diverse school, so there's many different types of people you will encounter. The teachers are very willing to help and as long as you seek help, and then you will find it here at Marshall.

## Let them tell you

*Anonymous, Marshall Fundamental*

I think teachers and administrators should engage students by finding out what engages their students so they can be applied to a class. Involving math, you could have students graph their exhibition in a computer game throughout the week. You could even get your web-based entertainment forces to compute many Instagram supporters. Realizing what energizes your students accomplishes something other than drawing them in.

If you don't know how to connect with your students, let them tell you! Give your students a choice in homeroom action by deciding on various exercises, looking for student input for the evaluation plan, and intermittent registrations to screen the conveyance speed. Giving students a decision that likewise cultivates pride over learning. They'll move from aloof shoppers to dynamic students with a stake in homeroom action.

Assuming you're consistently losing students to doodling, off-theme babble, and the inescapable "need to tear and cluster little bits of paper," now is the ideal time to make a splash. Stop the action if it's hauling, explain directions assuming there's disarray, or change to a more student-focused action for more prominent commitment. I comprehend it's difficult to always have each student drawn in. The best thing we can do is see separation and respond to it rapidly.

Finally, winding around humor through your example eases up the temperament and makes for a better time insight. Chuckle with your students, and don't hesitate for even a moment to allow them to giggle at you occasionally! Present learning content in various mediums, including video, sound, and advanced assets. Utilizing such tech-rich assets is drawing in for two reasons. It's a much-needed development from the heaps of paper that your students are typically burdened with. It lays out an immediate and essential association with the computerized world they possess. Games are the most fantastic wellspring of commitment for students beyond class, and they're similarly powerful at driving commitment to learning. Change exercises into games by including trouble levels, rewards, and cutthroat components, select the appropriate educational program and award your students access.

## Satisfied

*K, Marshall Fundamental*

The biggest challenge of my junior year was during the end of second semester when my family was forced to move. For me personally, the biggest struggle of the situation was its timing, which could not have been more inconvenient. My time, which should have been devoted to studying for upcoming exams or simply homework, was quickly filled with the tasks of moving. My parents did not care about school at this time (understandably), because our priority was getting everything out of the house before our time ran out. So while people were on spring break traveling, relaxing or

prepping for exams, I was home, breaking down and transporting furniture, packing/loading boxes, driving to donations, e-wastes and local dumps, etc.

I fell behind in my classes, couldn't sleep, and the stress of moving led to frequent fights at home. I was frustrated at myself but more with the overall fact that my problems were centered around something that I didn't have control over. As challenging as this period was, I learned things I carry with me now. There are some events or factors in life that will occur that you sadly cannot control. Don't blame or beat yourself up over it, but also don't use it as an excuse for everything. It's important to still find the little things you can control, manage your expectations (be patient with yourself) and while it does take extra work, there are always things, even if they're small, that you can do. At the end of the day you are in control of yourself.

I would try to finish as much work as I could during school. It's important when challenges hit you to be adaptable, you cannot have a fixed mindset. In hard times it's okay to ask for help rather than being stubborn trying to take it all in by yourself. I'm not someone that likes to get help or be vulnerable, but I forced myself to communicate with my teachers more, asking for extensions when I really needed it and explained my situation. Some teachers gave them to me and others did not. I passed some exams and failed others. While I wished my results were better, knowing I did the best I could with my situation helped me move and learn from the experience rather than dwell on all of my mistakes. Plus, it gave me even more motivation to do the best I can during my senior year.

## **The Other Side**

### *N, Marshall Fundamental*

I have never had any issues with PUSD as a whole. This might be an uncommon experience but I have always entered any interactions with the administration with an open mind and confidence, and it has served me well. Almost all of my teachers have been phenomenal, and the ones who weren't, were not bad by any measure. My counselor is amazing and all of the senior staff and administrators at Marshall do their jobs very well. I am sure some people have struggles in PUSD, for some reason or another, but it is probably due to their lack of initiative. In cases where it is the genuine failure of PUSD, I pity them.

My experience at Marshall and with PUSD has been great. Some may disagree, and to them I say to keep a more open mind and to be more patient as government programs are always slow. Julle gese daai ek kan praat in alles die taal, kan julle verstaan afrikaans? Indien wel, aangename kennis en het 'n goeie middag. (You said that I can speak in all the languages. Can you understand Afrikaans? If so, pleasant knowledge and have a good afternoon).

## **Cards against humanity**

*Q, Marshall Fundamental*

Something that can be so damaging to a student is calling them out in front of the whole class. I didn't mind being called on for a question in class if it wasn't too frequent, and if the teacher knew what she was teaching.

One of my teachers gave me some issues this year. She gives us these numbers and randomly picks them from a card deck. I have had past teachers do this, but those teachers knew how to deal with students that didn't know the answer. I remember the first time when she called on me. It was a math problem, and I was already such a bad math thinker. There were two minutes left before the bell rang, and she called on me. I didn't know how to answer the problem, so the people at my desk helped me. Then she asked me why, and that is where she got me. I said I didn't know because I really didn't know how to while my voice was breaking. The bell rang, and I could feel my eyes tearing up as I looked up at the ceiling trying not to cry as the whole class was staring at me. She didn't let any of the students go until I answered it. She asked me if I was paying attention in the most careless tone. Little did she know that I was trying to understand the topic we were learning.

I just don't excel in math subjects, but I didn't want to say that in front of my class. I was so humiliated and I wanted to say some words to her after class. She eventually let everyone go, but a piece of my confidence left that day. I'm also very sensitive, so I don't take these kinds of things lightly. To this day, I am afraid of that card deck.

## **Outcast**

*Anonymous, Marshall Fundamental*

I feel like at Marshall there are certain friend groups that are very... no, extremely fake to each other, and will say things behind certain member's (for lack of a better word) back and then be two-faced when said person is present. I'm sure every school has this problem, but because I'm the "Friend group hopper," I'm really noticing that it's a recurring problem with Marshall cliques at every grade level (primarily underclassmen 11th - 9th since that's where I hear the most "Tea." And I don't really have a solution to this problem since it's more of an individual character thing, but I wanted to vent about it just a bit because it does annoy me as people I would consider my friends are actively participating in it.

One thing that makes it hard to stop this cycle is that "going against" your friend group is a difficult thing to do, as you'll quickly be made an outcast or have rumors started about you. I personally have gotten to the point where being made an "Outcast" from a group like "that" won't have as much of an impact on me, but I'm aware it is not the same for everyone. In fact some of my friends that are a part of such groups have vented to me about how they want to tell their friends to stop doing "Stupid" things in a nice way, but each time they speak up, they are shutdown immediately by the group

"leaders" and then they are forced to keep quiet (btw, I'm not a fan of groups that have that one person who determines the Do's and Don'ts of the group since opinions usually aren't shared openly in such settings). Often times, I end up being the friend that shares the "unpopular opinion" because I realize that I'm becoming one of those "Group leaders," which I don't want to be, but if I'm able to share an unpopular opinion as one of these group leaders, it makes it more acceptable for my friends to speak up as well. I'm not sure if there is supposed to be a lesson after all of this, but I mainly wanted to bring awareness to this "Thing" that I see on and off campus.

## **Nothing less than memorable**

*Anonymous, Marshall Fundamental*

My experience at Marshall Fundamental has been nothing less than memorable. I have met some amazing people and I have built year-long friendships with many of them. This year is my fifth year at Marshall and honestly it has been the best experience. I have created memories that will last me a lifetime. But school isn't just about creating memories, it's about connecting with different people and learning the most important lessons you could learn, and this school is the perfect place for that. Not only is the staff really nice, but they are also very welcoming and they do a good job of making everyone feel welcome and safe.

I have learned so much during the years. My teachers not only have taught me educational lessons, but they have taught me lessons that I may take into the real world. They have taught me dedication, hard work, and perseverance. Most importantly though, they taught me that I can do anything, and be anyone I want to be. Although this school is an amazing one, there is always room for improvement and this is something to take into consideration. Some teachers are way too hard on their students. There are many cases where teachers pressure students too much to do well in school, and oftentimes they do not realize that students feel anxious to ask for help. Or that they struggle with mental health, which sadly gets overlooked. But if the school improves their student support system, it will not only make the student's life better, it will also change the school as a whole and create a better environment for all.

## **My transition to a new school was hard**

*Anonymous, Marshall Fundamental*

Sixth grade. It was hard for me for multiple reasons. I had gone to a small elementary school from kindergarten through 5th grade, with many of my classmates there coming from my preschool too. It was a very close-knit community and I loved it. But my parents had a bad experience with the middle school branch of the school with my older sister, and they knew it had some issues that they didn't want me to deal with. So I ended up going to Marshall for 6th grade, where my sister was a freshman. I was excited about the new experience but also scared because I didn't have any friends from my elementary school who were going to Marshall. The year I started Marshall, my sister went

to a different school for her sophomore year, meaning I didn't have her to be with if I felt lonely during the day.

The first couple of months were really hard. The curriculum was vastly different from what I learned at my elementary school, which was a charter school and didn't follow the curriculum of PUSD elementary schools. I had struggled with math in elementary school, and it followed me into my 6th grade year. I hadn't taken official "history" or "science" courses before - we had "projects" in elementary that combined the two - which left me feeling behind.

I also struggled to make friends. I had grown up with the people in my elementary school - some of them since I was a toddler. On the very first day of school, I ate with a girl from my class and her friends from elementary school. They were really nice, but I felt awkward and didn't go back to eat with them for a while. I would sometimes eat with someone else, but that didn't really last.

I started eating lunch alone in the quad. I would bring a book with me from the library and read as I ate. It was a little lonely, but it worked for me. Meanwhile, I was starting to adjust to the pace of the public school curriculum with the help of a tutor and my teacher. I had some friends who I would talk to in the beginning orchestra or in dance, but for the first few months, I didn't have a regular friend from Marshall who I would hang out with outside of school or eat lunch with.

I eventually went back and ate lunch with the group of people I had eaten with on the first day of school. That group of friends would shrink a little, then grow a little over the course of our middle school years. And now, in 11th grade, I am still best friends with some of those people. I am incredibly lucky to have found such a supportive and candid group of friends to spend my middle and high school years with. It's ironic to me (but in a good way) that the group of people I ate with the very first day at Marshall will likely continue to be the people I eat lunch with until the day we graduate.

Overall, I have loved my time at Marshall. I've had some great teachers, great classes, and great experiences (field trips, electives, clubs, and sports).

## **The teacher was giving me a hard time**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

In fifth grade, the teacher I had was the class I hoped I was going to be put into. The class wasn't a hard class, and I enjoyed it a lot. I thought the class was going to run smoothly until it started getting later in the year. The teacher was giving me a hard time. No matter how hard I tried on my assignments, there was always something wrong. And then one time she put me on blast in front of the whole class asking me if the class was too hard for me and if I needed to be switched out of her class. I started to think to myself like what am I doing wrong and why is there always a problem with my work? I wouldn't say it really made me change the way I did things because I knew I wasn't doing anything wrong, but it still was always a thought in the back of my head. I was confused at certain points because she would praise me on certain things along with her criticism. At the end of the year I ended up getting a presidential award for my grades and my work was acknowledged. I realized

that she was just pushing me to be a better student and live up to my potential. This made me realize how successful I can be if I do the best I can in anything that I do.

## **We tried saying it wasn't us but she didn't listen**

*V, John Muir*

When I was in 7th grade, two friends and I were walking down the halls, maybe to go to the restroom or something like that. This is somewhat important to the story. It was me, my friend, and my other friend who is black. Before that, some kids were making a lot of noise down the same hallway we were walking through. My old teacher from 6th grade said, "V, stop making noise - I'm going to call the office." And she went back to her classroom. We were all confused because we weren't making that noise. We tried saying it wasn't us but she didn't listen. Not only didn't she believe us, but it also bothered me that she got my name wrong.

We went to our class - we had the same class. Our teacher got a call saying we had lunch detention, and we were all angry because we hadn't made the noise, and we didn't think it was that serious of a thing to get lunch detention for. The thing that upset me is that me and my friend got detention but our other friend who wasn't there and is black got in trouble as well and got detention. I believe our teacher mistook her for another girl who was with us. I might be reading too much into it, but she looked at us for a long time to know who we were.

## **That taught me a lesson**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

There was this one time in my seventh grade where my friend and I were doing a test and we got to see who was going to finish first. I rushed the test, and my friend did too without realizing this was the test to pass the class. We thought we did well. We both got zeros, and we were the only ones with that failing grade. The whole class went on, but because of the way I rushed on the test, I had to repeat that class again along with my friend. That taught me a lesson.

## **Why I like this school year**

*J, John Muir*

Hi my name is J, and I am 14 years old. This school year has so far been alright because I haven't really had any problems except for keeping up my grades. I have had so much fun this football season getting to bond with my brothers and teammates. We balled out this year. Next year, I will try my best so maybe we can get a ring, but this season was still fun.



I feel like the only thing that motivates me to do well in school is football because I honestly never really liked school, but football motivates me to get good grades so I can play. I also loved how in class I was able to make some friends and although not all people like me I honestly don't care because I enjoyed my time with the people who do like me for being me. I also really enjoyed the things some of my teachers did to make us feel better if the vibe was ever off in class.

## **The Impact of Misgendering**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

This was my first year back from the pandemic. I had decided to not go back in person for the last month of 8th grade. Over the pandemic, I went through a lot of changes with myself, my identity, my hobbies, and more.

Something that was big for me was figuring out my gender identity. I'm not completely sure how I identify now, but over the pandemic I had told my parents that I like being referred to as they/them as well as she/her. Luckily, they were respectful of it and did their best to switch between those pronouns. I got used to it.

Then at school, things changed. I would watch teachers misgender people on purpose as a joke and overlook disrespectful students when they're making fun of others. I had talked to many of my teachers about how people's comments made me or my friends uncomfortable, but that continued to be overlooked. Misgendering students demolishes their self-esteem and how comfortable they are at school, which impacts how they do in school and their grades. It can also affect friendships too.

I know that comments like these aren't ever going away completely, but it could be a lot better. Students shouldn't have to be scared or ready to defend themselves just because someone doesn't like who they are. This is something important that teachers and the administration should work on.

## **Chinese American**

*S, Marshall Fundamental*

I've been a student in PUSD since kindergarten. However, my elementary days were filled with hurtful memories. Although bullying by students was a problem, the people who made it worse were the staff. Those who singled me out due to the fact that I was a chubby Chinese girl, and those who refused to stop those who bullied me. I vividly remember coming home and crying to my mother about it. I asked her "Why am I different?" or "Why did I have to be born as a Chinese girl?"

This issue is so important because it truly made my elementary days horrible. Even now, I find myself thinking, "Oh, they don't want to be friends with me because I'm Chinese." I would also eventually



have nightmares about these teachers and even now I can't bring myself to fully trust a teacher. I don't want any child or human to EVER feel what I did and do now. I don't want teachers to think that they are someone who is all-powerful and hence why rules never apply to them.

**(CONTENT WARNING: Suicide)**  
**Everyone has their own problems**

*Anonymous, Marshall Fundamental*

I'll be honest, sometimes I feel like my struggles are pale in comparison to what other people have gone through in their lives. I've heard stories of people losing parents, dealing with homelessness, drug addiction, or a severe illness. Sometimes I feel like my problems aren't super significant. I have an incredible life—what problems do I have, anyway?

I'm slowly beginning to realize that everyone has their own problems. Some may seem bigger than others, but they are all difficult things to overcome for every single person. Especially when it comes to mental health, where it seems like no one else understands or ever will understand.

I didn't understand the gravity of my situation until I couldn't function normally. On the outside, I was fine. I was happy, and I was laughing. I was getting my homework done and talking to my friends all the time. Inside, all I wanted to do was reach inside my head and tell my brain to behave. Cycles of intrusive thoughts bothered me all day long, and when I got home, I was in a foul mood. I hated being happy, because I felt guilty about the thoughts that bothered me. Whenever I laughed, a small voice in the back of my head told me I was evil. I didn't deserve happiness.

The symptoms started around 6th grade, but I can remember times before then when I knew something was different. In 6th grade, a boy knew a secret about me. And he said that he would tell my mom about it the next time he saw her. My mom was best friends with his mom, and every time she came over, I would worry that he would too. The anxiety would crush me until the knowledge that he hadn't yet told my mom came to me. Eventually, it became too much to deal with. I confessed the secret to my mother, and everything was okay. I felt a whole weight released off my shoulders.

And then the confessions became addictive. The next one didn't come until seventh grade, when I tried to cheat on a final exam. I got caught, and I went up to tell the teacher that it was a misunderstanding. I wasn't trying to cheat. It was an accident. In truth, I was lying. And that lie ate me up all throughout our winter break. I was worried that she would give me a zero on the final exam, and I felt guilty about receiving Christmas presents. I didn't deserve any of them. I was a dirty, guilty child. Eventually, in the new year, I collapsed on the toilet seat while my mom was doing her makeup and told her everything. She was disappointed, and I felt guilty. But I didn't feel like a liar anymore.

In the second semester of seventh grade, I confessed anything that came to mind. I confessed to every dirty thought I had, everything I thought was wrong or weird. I told myself that if I didn't tell her everything, I couldn't rest. I was bad, unless someone else told me that I was fine. I was normal.

This became the norm all throughout eighth grade. I would tell my mom or dad about times I thought I might have peeked at a person's paper on a test, or gotten a grade I didn't think I deserved. I would tell them about all the times I broke the rules. Sometimes, I would even tell my teacher about a grade that was too high. I didn't do that well.

This slowly progressed, until the intrusive thoughts came. These were thoughts that made me feel unclean, and evil. I didn't feel like I deserved to live anymore. And they would pound on my brain, 24/7. I couldn't be completely happy or enjoy anything. I was a bad person, and that was that. Eventually, I had a breakdown. I told my parents about the thoughts. They were worried, but they said everyone has weird thoughts sometimes. I was fine. I was normal.

Eighth grade came and went, and then it was summer. We headed down to Mexico to visit my grandparents. The intrusive thoughts came again. I told my parents about one that kept coming to my mind over and over again. They were scared of me. I was scared of myself, too.

I sat down on the bathroom floor of my grandparents' house and wept. My mom was angry at me for breaking down, and my dad was trying to calm me down. I went to sleep feeling ashamed and scared for my future.

Then, in the morning, my mother promptly informed me that she hadn't been able to sleep. And then she told me what was wrong with me. I had obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Everything in my world suddenly shifted. It was as though I had been looking at my world through a foggy window that had just cleared up. I wasn't weird, and I wasn't unique or alone or crazy—my mind just had a small disorder. I had never been so happy to hear such news.

Over the past few years, I have battled with OCD constantly. At some points, I grew so sick and tired of myself that I contemplated taking my own life. I lost the motivation to do things that weren't absolutely essential. And I never thought too hard about anything, because all of my thinking was going to my obsession. It was tiring.

Out of nowhere, sometime after the beginning of last year, it disappeared. I have heard of this happening to others with OCD, and it's just a cycle. It appears for a while, disappears for a while, and there's a good chance it'll happen again. But I won the first battle. I won by staying alive, and fighting my mind. Every day is a win for me, because it means that I am continuing in the future I used to wish I would never have. It may very well turn up again. But this time—this time—I'm prepared.

## **“Do you guys have dirt on you?”**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

My friend SF and I were walking in front of the school trying to find a friend because class had just ended. So we called our friend AC to see where SF was, but while we were doing that, people were pointing at us saying we were being suspicious. But we didn't know people were pointing at us. After

we found out where our friend was, we walked there, but we had no clue that the security guard was following us.

When we got to our friend, who wasn't too far from us, we were there for like a minute until the security guard appeared out of nowhere and just said, "Follow me." My friend SF and I were so confused about what we had done.

My friend SF asked, "What did we do?"

The security guard just said, "Follow me." So we did, and the entire time we were walking to his office, we thought we had done something bad, like if we hurt someone's feelings by accident or someone looked up a bad website on my computer without me noticing. So we got inside the E building where his office was and no one was near. It was quiet. We walked inside his office, and he asked us to sit down. When we sat down, he said, "So what were you guys doing in the A building?"

We just said, "We are walking around, trying to find our friend AC. And he said, "Do you guys have dirt on you?" At first, I was confused because I didn't know what he meant until I found out what he meant.

And SF said, "Why would we have dirt?" And the security guard just said, "People in the A building were pointing you out." I felt disrespected. Two normal freshmen were walking around when they got asked if we had dirt. After we denied it twice, he said, "What were you guys doing next to one of the exits?" We just said, "We were talking to our friend AC." Then he asked, "Who's AC?"

I can hear it in SF's voice. He was frustrated. We decided to tell him that he could look in our bags, but he denied it and let us go. SF and I were pretty frustrated at that because supposedly we looked like we had "dirt on us."

# **Ethnic Studies**

## **I am ready to make a difference**

*G, John Muir*

Being a John Muir student has been the best thing that ever happened to me. I have had great experiences and blessings ever since I arrived in my ninth-grade year. One opportunity I received was being able to take an Ethnic Studies class in my junior year. Seeing from different points of view besides the white man and the truth in general excited me the most.

During my first couple of days in Ethnic studies, we didn't have a lesson, but more of a get-to-know our classmate type of vibe. I love the way my teacher Dr. Rustin welcomed each and every one of us. He showed us from day one that he cares for and loves each student presented to him. Sometimes I feel like he is the father I never had.

Taking an Ethnic Studies class is more than just learning different people's sides of the stories. It is about understanding why we fight for so many things today. I only thought my ancestors went through several extreme events many years ago. Still, other people's ancestors experienced similar occasions, which encouraged me ten times more to become the first African American Lesbian Female president of the United States.

Ethnic Studies has taught me a lot, including being comfortable with myself, fighting for what's right, having a voice for everyone, and becoming one with people who look different from you. Ethnic Studies has made me a better person all around. I am more educated than ever, I am more determined, and I am ready to make a difference. I would like to say thank you to John Muir High School and my teacher Dr. Rustin for making this class available to us as students and preparing us for a better future. If it wasn't for you guys, I would have given up on school and my future.

## **The opportunity to see their communities reflected**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

My thoughts on Ethnic Studies is that it should be included more in school. One reason why is because the course asks us to engage with the issues of racism, colonialism, economic and political systems, and discrimination. Another reason why I believe that Ethnic Studies is important is because it gives students the opportunity to see their communities reflected in the lessons. The course also gives them a chance to learn about their ancestors' contributions to society.

What I love about Ethnic Studies is that the class teaches us about people's experiences, cultures, and issues that racial-ethnic groups face in the United States. I like taking Ethnic Studies. In my opinion, I believe that more students should take the class because it's important that students learn about the various racial and ethnic groups that most history classes don't talk about. Plus, the course helps students gain a better understanding of other cultures while learning about respect towards other people of different ethnicities.

## **I was just relearning the same generic story of big events**

*I, John Muir*

I've been going to school for 11 years and I never knew that Ethnic Studies was a form of history I could take. Taking Ethnic Studies gave me an interest that I've never had in my regular world history or American history classes. The books and topics we cover in class go into detail that a regular history class doesn't. My favorite topic that we covered was the story of John Punch.

During Ethnic Studies, I found the answers I wanted to search for but couldn't find. History had never really appealed to me. It felt like I was just relearning the same generic story of big events and not given the detail of all of the actual horrific things that happened. I'm glad that my counselor enrolled me in Ethnic Studies. The class has ultimately given me a new perspective on the United States and my own culture and heritage that I never knew about.

## **Thoughts on Ethnic Studies**

*D, John Muir*

This year is my first year ever attending John Muir. I made the decision on impulse to come here for sophomore year and beyond because I thought it would benefit me due to its college courses. Coming here, I expected to just rocket through regular primary classes and graduate, that is until I stumbled upon Ethnic Studies. I never really cared about school mainly because it takes a lot for me to wake up every day and get the motivation to work through different subjects I have no interest in. I was more focused on the future after high school.

Ethnic Studies has taught me a lot about history and has dug deeper into the details of what things were like in the past. The course is nothing like a world history class where they do teach the history but more, I guess, "sugar coated and passive." In Ethnic Studies, we learn about topics like what happened to Indigenous Peoples, picking out the critiques made on the United States and understanding oppression. I think it's one of the only classes I really care about because I can take it with me after high school and even help younger siblings and friends understand different communities. This class teaches understanding of other communities, which I can respect a lot.

## Ethnic Studies really opened my eyes

B, John Muir

*I feel like everyone should get to tell a story about something they learned to spread awareness, so other people can learn something new. I want to tell you about my thoughts of Ethnic Studies and what it's about. In Ethnic Studies, we get to learn about people's ethnicity, cultures, race, genders, and histories. We learn about other people's cultures and our own too. I've learned so much about my culture in this class, and that has taught me so many things. It's so important to know about race in the United States because a lot of people tend to have trouble with that. Ethnic Studies really opened my eyes and changed my perspective about everything. You may never know what anyone is going through in their life, but everyone should be treated the same. It's important to know our history, OUR STORY. Everyone should know the stories, so history doesn't repeat itself and we as a society can move together to a new world and leave the old ways behind.*

## Ethnic studies explores the true stories of people of color

J, John Muir

Understanding history is important as it teaches us the world's past and how things came to be. One place that is "good" at covering its gruesome history is the United States. Take for example the Thanksgiving holiday, as the USA celebrates the yearly gathering. It is portrayed as a good thing, which was started when the Indigenous Community and the pilgrims "happily" joined hands like good old friends and had a BIG feast together! In reality, that day is a dark reality that not many people know about, especially kids who are taught an alternative version from the real one. Not only has the United States covered the truth of Thanksgiving with a fake story, but another truth that they couldn't hide was the slavery that happened 500 years ago.

Ethnic Studies explores the true stories of people of color as well as their cultures, including the racism and discrimination that still lasts to this day. I, for one, enjoy exploring the real stories of our fellow brothers and sisters of color and learning what their lives were like. Though it is heartbreaking, it is also interesting to learn about the truth. Ethnic Studies SHOULD be taught to everyone, so they too can learn more about the real story and not just some regular story that has been placed in textbooks.

Ethnic Studies gives students a chance to learn more about their culture and ancestors, which once again is very important to know. In my opinion, Ethnic Studies is better than World History classes because Ethnic Studies tends to grab my attention better; just like the one little girl from Despicable Me where all her attention was on that stuffed unicorn. World History does not grab my attention like Ethnic Studies does; I am not going to lie. It's boring, and yes I know that it is important as well, but learning more about my culture, my people, everything that connects to people of color is so interesting and fun. It leaves me with questions and thoughts like "what if" and so on.

Ethnic Studies leads us to explore more of discrimination in the US from the history of how “colored” restrooms were allocated to the horrifying acts committed against colored people and so much more. As my closing sentence: It is important that we as a human race learn the real past, the stories of humans throughout time, from the good to the bad, so that we don’t repeat the same acts as generations have done. We should build and grow together so that the whole world can heal as future generations take the lead for a better world. Thank you for coming to my TED talk!

## **A history that truthfully narrates all perspectives**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

As a student who has participated in Dr. Rustin’s Ethnic Studies class, I strongly believe that Ethnic Studies should somehow be a required class curriculum. Although U.S/World History and Government have a heavy influence on future societies, Ethnic Studies offers an unfiltered lens to a history that truthfully narrates all perspectives.

Dr. Rustin’s lessons have influenced me to start thinking about the land that I live on and how society has built its way to how it is today. Not only is Ethnic Studies built on a logical curriculum, but it humanizes our history and validates the systemic oppression that marginalized Americans face today. We do not stop to think and commemorate the people who owned this land first or to acknowledge the people who involuntarily built this country.

I believe that with Ethnic Studies, our generation will not be able to identify our societal issues, but also be able to find solutions and act on them hand in hand.

## **That's when they told me I had been assaulted**

*R, John Muir*

This kid has been bothering me for a while. He kept asking to hookup and stuff. I kept saying no. He dms me on Instagram and talks to me non-stop at school. I am polite in person, and I never lead him on. I always say "No thank you" or "I'm not interested." I try to be nice to everyone I talk to because I know how it feels to be treated as if you don’t matter.

This kid kept on insisting we do something. We had met during a summer thing the school did where you came to school for a few days and learned where everything was and did some drawing for the arts academy just to see how we liked our academies. He was nice then. Not creepy. But as the weeks went on, it got too much. Until one day, he crossed the line.

I forgot what day it was. This is back when I was severely depressed, fresh out of the mental hospital. And this kid, who had been harassing me, walked towards me. I didn’t think much of it because it was a hallway. Anyway, he came towards me and I said hi. Being polite and social is



something I am trying to work on. Without warning, he chokes me. Full on, hand on my neck, squeezing and choking me. I was so shocked. I stumbled back, and he just walked away. As if he hadn't just done that. I walked to lunch and told my friend what had happened. That's when they told me I had been assaulted.

Being a victim is nothing new to me. I am queer and non-binary. I get called slurs all the time and harassed all the time online and in real life. But this was new. Someone putting their hands on me was new. I talked to my therapist about it, and she advised me to talk to my principal. So, I emailed my counselor. She never got back to me. So I emailed Dr. Gray, and he handled it so well. He called me the next day after emailing him and asked me about the incident. He said I could take my time answering and that he wouldn't judge me. He was just there to help. Most adults say that and their words have no meaning, no emotion. But Dr. Gray had empathy in his voice. which was nice to hear. I mean, I was so scared to talk. What if the guy who harassed me got angry and did something more to me? All these "what ifs?" came into my mind. I wrote my statement and told Dr. Gray that I did not want to speak to the guy who assaulted me. I was scared.

Later, I found out I wasn't the only person he had harassed. I haven't heard about him putting his hands on anyone else, but he had asked almost half of the 9th grade to hookup. It made me feel like I was just one of many who had been harassed by this guy, like my experience didn't matter. But after a while, I realized everyone's experience matters. Every story counts. Nobody should think their story is any less than someone else's. If you are a victim, you are a victim. That doesn't control your life, but it is a part of you now. This is the part where I am angry. I am angry that this guy thought it was okay to put his hands on me. to choke me. I am angry that he felt as if he was higher than everyone, to the point where he harassed many girls. He is disgusting. But I am saddened by him. I wonder what compelled him to think like this. So J\_\_\_\_, if you are reading this, I hope you are okay. And I forgive you.

# Miscellaneous

## **Musical Justice**

*E, Blair High School*

*There's them*

*And there's Us*

*They get to walk around with their white collars all high and mighty*

*While we walk around with our blue collars just tryna stay alive*

*They keep glancing at us*

*But we just try to fit In*

*They make the accusation*

*We do the time*

*They segregate*

*We celebrate then get hate*

*They associate us with the drugs and guns*

*Assume we sell to their sons*

*But all we want is the job and the money*

*To be free in this f\*\*\*ing country*

*So no more*

*To all the kids*

*Who feel this way*

*Or to the ones who give the hate*

*Share this verse*

*This Tupac verse*

*“The*

*Hate*

*You*

*Give*

*Little*

*Infants*

*F\*\*\*s*

*Everybody...”*

(THUGLIFE, Tupac Shakur <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...>)

## **I thought my life was in danger**

*Anonymous, Marshall Fundamental*

I woke up one day for school, and I noticed that my parents weren't around so I assumed that they were at work. I showered, ate breakfast, then packed my lunch as I always do for school. I always wake up at the same time every day and I do the same things in the morning. It felt like a ritual. I was running late for school because I didn't realize I had to walk to school. I walked out the door. It was a cold foggy morning, and it seemed like my neighborhood was a ghost town; it was quiet as a mouse.

After walking a block from my house, I noticed a red van with curtains hanging inside from the windows was driving the pace I was walking. The van pulled slightly ahead of me and came to a stop. I saw the door slide open, so I immediately started running with my heavy backpack to school because I thought my life was in danger. Once I got to my first period class, I was out of breath and flabbergasted at what had just happened.

That school day went by very fast because all I could think about was what could have happened if I hadn't sprinted to my class. I told my parents what happened, and they contacted the school. After some investigation, the school had told us that it was just a parent dropping off their child at school. I

didn't believe this because I saw no one else in the van but the shadow of an adult sized person. It was very traumatic at the time, but now I just make jokes about the situation every time I see a van drive past me.

## **I didn't even know**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

I didn't even know what happened this year. It went by too fast. LOL.

## **Actions would always speak louder than just empty words**

*Anonymous, Blair High School*

I believe trust is something that should not be given but earned. I come from a family where everything is a competition and earning. This includes love, honesty, respect, and especially trust. Since I was little, I remember my parents telling me that nothing was ever going to be given to me and if it's given, sooner or later it will come with a price, so they made me work twice as hard on everything that I wanted to accomplish. In the end, their advice taught me to always give my 100% to something I truly desire. It didn't matter what it took to have it.

Through my years in high school and outside of high school, I learned very well why my parents told me this. Giving your trust to someone means that they learn more about you, which means they learn about your weaknesses. And that, for my family and me, is something I always hide, not because I'm afraid but because the weaker I look, the more they can hurt and take advantage of me. A very good example of this would be the many times I have given my trust to people I should not have given it to, just by the simple fact that they have used my own words against me and made me look bad in many ways.

My parents once told me, "Friends can love you one day but hate you the next, so learn to never make yourself look weak and do not give your trust to anyone, because once that's given, they can easily stab you in the back." I am obviously not proud of the many mistakes and wrong choices of people that I've made, but my belief in making people earn my trust is very significant to me, and if they truly care about me, they can understand why I choose to stand by this opinion. My greatest example would be one of my closest friends who chose to stay around and who, little by little, has shown me that I can count on her no matter what. Now don't get me wrong, just because I have known you for many years and I have given you my trust doesn't mean I won't change my opinion about it. Actions always speak louder than just empty words, and this is why I believe trust is earned and not given.

## **I have cyclic vomiting syndrome**

*M, Center for Independent Studies*

Despite all the stresses caused by two AP classes, a PCC class, extracurriculars, and everything else that was going on in my busy life, I was surviving school, and that was an accomplishment. I was figuring out bits and pieces of my identity. I was doing alright. Until the stresses piled up and I wasn't alright anymore.

I have cyclic vomiting syndrome, a condition that affects only four percent of kids and is not widely understood. A situation where I vomit for days for the most seemingly insignificant, sometimes untraceable reasons. It's something that's been in the way since I was young, but started affecting school in seventh grade. For the first semester of eighth grade, I considered myself lucky if I made it a whole week without an episode. When the pandemic hit, my episodes went from frequent to absent. Online learning was less hard for me. When we went back to in-person, I wasn't afraid that episodes would start up again. I thought I had conquered them for the most part. This was not the case.

One morning during the first semester of my sophomore year, I couldn't get out of the car when my mom entered the drop-off area. I knew if I went into the school building, she'd have to come back and pick me up. thoughts, stress, tension, vomit. We drove home.

I was up late one night studying for an AP Euro test. I felt I wasn't prepared. thoughts: hot, sweaty, vomit. I couldn't go to school the next morning. I surrendered myself to the syndrome yet again.

Days elapsed. I was there for the make-up test before school. I started freaking out: Is that question right? Yikes, running out of time! Sweaty, cold, thick saliva, nausea. Bag! Vomit. I saw my friends waiting near the classroom as I called for my dad to come pick me up before school had even started. I said, with all the strength I could muster: "I'm going home." I was carrying my heavy backpack, holding a phone and a makeshift vomit bag, getting ready to puke again. I left campus as others were just entering.

I didn't feel good by the second period, but I'd be fine, I told myself. I almost fell asleep by the fourth period because I felt so unwell. Minutes before the bell rings at the end of fifth, I rushed off to the nurse. My mom picked me up shortly. And that was to be my last day at Pasadena High School for the rest of the school year.

Okay, independent study now! I need to catch up; so many days have gone by sick. I'm doing triple the work to try and stay on top of things. Nausea, vomiting, urgent care, ambulance, hospital. October, November...

By December, every week was another trip to the hospital to get IV fluids. I didn't even have the time in between to focus on school. Things were so crazy. I was very underweight from all the vomiting, even needing a NJ (nasojunal) tube and eventually a PICC line to give me the nutrition I missed when I was sick. Everything was happening so fast, I couldn't even process how serious of an issue

this was becoming. My teachers were luckily understanding of the hard work I put in before all the hospital stays. They helped me finish the semester strong, and for this I am extremely grateful.

January 8th, 2022: my last day spent in the hospital up until now. I miss the nice nurses I got to know there. I miss the doctors I saw on a routine basis. But what I missed more when I was there was my family (my mom was luckily able to be in my room with me), my pets, my house, my normal life.

Time to think about school again now that I'm out of the hospital and now that the six-week independent study period is almost up. CIS, what's that? Is homeschooling still part of PUSD? I guess if that means I get to stay on Think Tank! Acellus: an outdated, not secure website that teaches you through pre-recorded videos? No APs or honors classes? A once-weekly meeting with the teacher supervising my online learning? A progress bar to show me when the learning from a class will be over?

This story was a bit of a mess, but my life was, and still is, a bit of a mess. I'm doing so much better now, but I really hope the same thing doesn't happen again next year when I go back to PHS, my teachers, and my friends.

I don't blame anyone for my situation, and I thank the folks at CIS for helping me get through this tough time. I thank the Think Tank for giving me a way to stay connected to PUSD and PHS. I thank my friends, teachers, and family for their continuous support through it all. But even when I think about my situation: how I always have to call someone in order to "attend" the in-person Think Tank lunch meetings at PHS, how I only get snippets of what's going on at school from my friends' text messages, how I see them studying and venting about APs that I just can't even fathom taking right now. It all hurts, but I know that in all this mess, there's something good that will come out of it. Somewhere.

And to anyone else who has cyclic vomiting syndrome, or any other condition or situation that separates them from their normal life that they took for granted before, do know: you can get through this, you will be alright in the end, and know that someone out there sees you.

## **Certain Image**

*GD, Pasadena High School*

*Man, man, man, what a life we live  
Like a game you just need to win  
I try my best but compared to others  
It is less*

*They ask if I'm okay. I say I'm doing my very best  
But deep inside my mental health is decreasing  
Less and less*

*I always keep a certain image around me like a*

*Bulletproof vest  
Is this life?  
Or is this a test?*

*Why does it really matter?  
What I do wrong?  
Or what I get correct?*

*There was a point where I had so many friends  
Told them my secrets  
And always gave each other  
A helping hand*

*As time went by more and more left  
Now we know each other's secrets  
but it's like we've never met*

## **How to get things done**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

*There was a time in 8th grade when I was really big and smart. It was hard for me to learn how to get things turned in on time. I was still learning time management, but one thing I learned from the PUSD community is how to get things done and that it's okay to ask for help when you need it or when you have a bad day. It's always okay to not be able to get things done right. It's okay...*

## **Grown ups have to know that we have problems too**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

Grown ups have to know that we have problems too, and they always (or most of the time) deny it. They always say you're too young for that or you're overreacting, but they gotta know that some of us have real problems that hurt, and some of our parents aren't helping us emotionally.

## **I applied that message to everything**

*Anonymous, John Muir*

A moment that changed my outlook on life was when one of my physical education teachers told me, "Work hard now, so life later will be easy." This changed my outlook on life because I was naturally



talented at sports, but I never put in any work to get better. At the time, I would consider myself lazy, and I just did what was needed to get by. After hearing that, I went home and thought to myself that at the rate I am going now, I will just be a guy with all the potential but never reach it because I did not work hard. After I thought about it, I wanted to live my life in the future comfortably, where I could go on vacations and provide for my family and not live paycheck to paycheck. As a result of my PE teacher's words, I applied that message to everything I did—whether it was sports or school.

# Resources

## Hotlines to Call or Text for Help

### National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

- (800)-273-8255
- Can be called or texted

### The Trevor Project Hotline

- 1-(866)-488-7386
- Specifies in mental health aid and crisis intervention services for LGBTQ+ people

### The National Runaway Safeline

- (800-786-2929)
- Gives advice and aid to runaways + resources, shelter, transportation, and counseling along with advocating or mediating for you if/as needed

### The True Colors United

- (212)- 461-4401
- Organization works to end homelessness amongst LGBTQ+ youth and runs a database of service providers

### Rape Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN)

- (800) 656 HOPE / (800) 810-7440
- Nation's largest organization fighting against sexual violence through advocacy, reforming public policy, and so much more. Your voice is heard and believed here.

### Human Trafficking Hotline

- (888) 539 - 2373 **or** (888) 373 - 7888
- Run by the LA County District Attorney's office. Call if you are in need of help, or suspect human trafficking activity.

## PUSD Mental Health Support & Local Non-Profits & Organizations

### PUSD Mental Health

- Wellness centers at every high school
- Mental Health Clubs at PHS and Marshall (talk to your counselor)
- [PUSD Mental Health Consortium](#)

### Drawing Together

- Website: [drawingtogether.city](http://drawingtogether.city)
- Instagram: [drawingtogether.city](https://www.instagram.com/drawingtogether.city)
- A non-profit organization that specializes in providing art workshops, educational resources/opportunities, and mindfulness drawing workbooks for teens.

### DayOne

- Address: 175 N Euclid Ave Pasadena, CA
- Website: [godayone.org](http://godayone.org)
- Instagram: [day1do](https://www.instagram.com/day1do)
- A non-profit organization that works together with Pasadena Youth to create healthier and transformative opportunities for the community through workshops and events such as drug abuse education, SKILLZ summer program for rising 7th–8th graders, BLOCK9, Cherishing Children in the winter, and so much more.
- The organization also provides a safe space for high school students to be themselves and are heard every Wednesday from 4:30–5:30 PM to discuss social justice topics, event planning, community work/service, and just real life. Dinner is always provided and always very delicious.

### PFLAG Pasadena

- Website: [pflag.org](http://pflag.org)
- Instagram: [pflag](https://www.instagram.com/pflag)
- As the nation's largest family and ally group, PFLAG's commitment is to make the world a place where people are respected, celebrated, and valued no matter how diverse. The local chapter here in Pasadena also provides support and educational workshops and tools for LGBTQ+ communities and youth.

## Editor's Note

*The Learning Curve* is an ongoing project. For students who wish to submit their stories, please submit via this link: <https://forms.gle/uREHPBqtGS3pTpTc6>

For those who have read the publication and have been moved by the content, please share your feedback here - we would love to hear what you think: <https://forms.gle/ToS6KzLc29zysA3m8>

—Editors

## *The Learning Curve* Team

**Ella Uriu** (she/they) is a senior in the Engineering and Environmental Science Academy at John Muir Early College Magnet. She plays varsity water polo, is co-president of John Muir's LGBTQ+ Alliance, and is the Drum Major for the Mighty Mustang Marching Band and the All Star Band. Next year, they will be attending Bucknell University and majoring in Education and Education Policy on the Posse Scholarship.

**Mya Hernandez** (they/them) is a rising senior in the Graphics and Communications Academy at Pasadena High School. They are the first chair viola in the PHS orchestra. Mya deeply loves music, making art, and learning. Outside of school, they like to play Dungeons and Dragons with friends, and go thrifting. They love to spend time with their family and interact with nature, and hope to major in STEM at a school in California.

**Celeste Edell** (she/her) is a senior at Pasadena High School, in the Visual Arts and Design Academy. She is on the Orchestras Dance Team, Green Club, and various other clubs. She plays piano, makes music, and draws a whole lot. In fall 2022, she will join UC-Berkeley where she plans to major in conservation and resource studies on her way to a future career in climate justice.

**Finney Brownstein** (she/her) is a junior at Marshall Fundamental. At school, she is co-captain of the Varsity Tennis Team, vice-president of the Social Justice Club, and is in the National Honors Society, as well as the chamber orchestra. She loves to read, write, watch TV, and hang out with friends and family. She also enjoys baking/cooking, playing board games, going on evening drives, and hiking with her family and dogs.

**Morgan Gaskell** (she/her) is a sophomore at Pasadena High School in the APP Academy. She loves all things science, nature, and learning. At school, she is part of Green Club and *The 28%* newsletter team which highlights women in STEM. Outside of school, Morgan enjoys exploring nature, reading, contributing to community science, and blogging on her website.

**Jesus Gonzalez** (they/them) is a junior at Pasadena High School, in the APP Academy. They are in the Robotics club, Math Club, and various other clubs. Outside of school, they enjoy doing activities such as drawing, gaming, sleeping, and binge watching TV shows.

**Arlington Pacheco** (he/her) is a sophomore from Blair High School. She loves volleyball and is part of ASB council as a representative of Blair's International Academy. She is from Guatemala and she enjoys hanging out with friends. She loves video games, singing and playing the violin. Also, she loves sleeping.

**Stephanie Barcenas** (she/her) is a junior at Marshall Fundamental and a serious Freaks and Geeks enthusiast. She is the President of Self Care Club, a club dedicated to students and their mental/emotional health. She loves her small community of supportive teachers, friends, and classmates that she has met over the years. She likes going on spontaneous adventures with her mom and twin sister, whether it be to LA or some random thrift store in Pomona.

**River Henry-Vasquez** (they/them), is a high school student at John Muir Highschool. They love reading, drawing, and writing. They are changing schools for next school year (2022-2023) and want to make a change in the district. They were inspired by this whole student anthology and hope to create a change.

**Maude Windsor** (she/they), is a sophomore at Marshall Fundamental. They run in both track and cross country and hope to complete a half marathon over the summer. She enjoys reading, writing, and discussing mental health, and wants to continue amplifying student voices through *The Learning Curve* in the years to come.

**Sehba Sarwar** (she/her), author of the novel *Black Wings*, is a storyteller who has offered high school, college, and community storytelling workshops for more than 25 years. She serves as the facilitator for PUSD's Think Tank in which PUSD high school students gather to research and explore solutions for the district.

## **Student recommendations to the Pasadena Board of Education 2022**

1. Highlight mental health and support services offered by PUSD with increased funding to Wellness Centers
2. Seek student voices and ensure representation of diversity in the district
3. Strengthen connection to the community and establish more beneficial partnerships
4. Include more avenues for critical pedagogy and ethnic studies throughout the district
5. Ensure a presence of mental health awareness in curriculum
6. Implement more effective and equitable teacher training and support to create a more student-focused environment and institute more student-led action-based projects
7. Integrate local history of Pasadena in all courses

## **Call to Action**

We request the board provide students the opportunity to voice our perspective in a tangible way through an equal vote on the school board.

To view student presentation to the PUSD Board in April 2022, please visit this link:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wfsCHntsN-eRpA\\_zZSn4JGSaaPnJotle/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wfsCHntsN-eRpA_zZSn4JGSaaPnJotle/view?usp=sharing)

## **PUSD's 2021-22 Student Think Tank Members**

### **Cohort 1**

Sofia Carmenate (she/her), Pasadena High School  
Addie Dale (she/her), Pasadena High School  
Parami De Silva (she/her), Pasadena High School  
Celeste Edell (she/her), Pasadena High School  
Mya Hernandez (they/them), Pasadena High School  
Naomi Moore (she/her), Pasadena High School  
Camila Morales (she/her), Pasadena High School  
Miguel Roybal-Monzo (he/him), Pasadena High School  
Ella Uriu (she/they), John Muir

### **Cohort 2**

Natalia Abadjian (she/her), Pasadena High School  
Liberty Alderton (she/her), John Muir  
Asha Bailey (she/her), John Muir  
Stephanie Barcnas (she/her), Marshall Fundamental  
Finney Brownstein (she/her), Marshall Fundamental  
Kira Burson (any), Marshall Fundamental  
Sophia Chou (she/her), Marshall Fundamental  
Morgan Gaskell (she/her), Pasadena High School  
Jesus Gonzalez (they/them), Pasadena High School  
Lauren Gray (she/her), John Muir  
Elena Grigoryan (she/her), Blair  
River Henry-Vasquez (they/them), John Muir  
Lisabeth Jara (she/her), Blair  
David Kunitake (he/him), Blair  
Ewan Lamond (he/him), John Muir  
Leo Long (he/him), Pasadena High School  
Paulina McConnell (she/her), Pasadena High School  
Arlington Pacheco (he/her), Blair  
Sophie Shahinian (she/her), Blair  
Gabrielle Trujillo (she/her), Pasadena High School  
Cynthia Vanesian (she/her), Blair  
Maude Windsor (she/they), Marshall Fundamental

