

# THREE APS OR NOTHING

For many, grind culture is a characterizing part of their high school experience. Students share how this idea impacts their educational journeys.

## Feeling the pressure, pushing the limit

Students, staff discuss the causes of grind culture

By Amanda Boles, Faith Watters and Catherine Yang

Grind culture describes how students will overload themselves and work extremely hard to gain academic advantage in hopes of improving their future, sophomore Avyush Gaywala said. It is extremely prevalent in Silicon Valley due to the abundance of colleges where admission feels like a lottery, even if you have a strong academic profile, junior Eric Ko said. Grind culture gives you something to continue working toward, but sometimes if getting into a good college is the only thing on your mind, it can become detrimental, Ko said. However, Ko said he believes by focusing on the present, rather than the future, he can limit his stress for college.

"I think my stress and worry for college is lower than [most since] I work towards improving what I'm doing right now rather than [doing it for] college," Ko said. "It may be related to college, but in my mind, that is not something that I'm mainly thinking about. College will be the result of improving what [I am] doing right now, and having this mindset is way less stressful."

It is important students understand that where they go to college does not matter, but rather how they go about it, social studies department lead Marc Gonzales said.

"What you make of your college experience is what matters the most," Gonzales said. "There are 3,000 plus colleges throughout the country and [not getting into the] top 50 isn't the end because there are [many] colleges out there where you can get the same good quality education."

Students are constantly pushing themselves to take the most rigorous classes even when it is not in their best interest, Gonzales said. Wanting to keep up with peers and to have the prestige of applying to the best school shouldn't take away from the high school experience, Gonzales said.

"You want to be able to enjoy your time, enjoy your friends and the area we live in, because it has a

lot to offer. Try not to let the grind define you," Gonzales said. "You need to find ways to be able to express yourself to have fun. You're young, you're never going to be 14 through 18 again in your life."

Learning to celebrate your success is something all students and even adults need to work on, school-based therapist Sarah Loyd said.

"We've seen a lot of huge accomplishments, but at the same time, success is different for everyone," Loyd said. "Accomplishments are more than just academic based, or how many AP classes you take. Academic rigor is not the only way to measure your success and accomplishments."

Many students' mindsets toward grind culture are concerning, Loyd said, as it arouses stress and anxiety among students.

"I want to get rid of this all or nothing thinking," Loyd said. "[Many students think] 'If I don't get an A, I'm not going to get into college' or 'if I don't do well on this assignment, I'm flunking high school.' These extreme thoughts are untrue."

In addition to the weight of college, the environment someone is raised in can play a pivotal role in their perception of grind culture, Ko said.

"Growing up, that kind of pressure was embedded in me," Ko said. "So it doesn't really feel like a pressure, but something I feel like I'm obligated to do."

Despite the overwhelming pressures of grind culture, Ko said it serves as strong motivation for him to achieve academic success. Ko said the more work he has, the more driven he is to get his work done quickly, so he has the time to destress.

"I'm driven by knowing that once I get my stressors out of my mind, I can relax," Ko said. "I take around an hour every day to destress, whether that's going through Instagram reels or watching Netflix."

Gaywala said the pressure to do well in school comes from his personal desire to attend college and, in the event he ever has children, to set them up for success.

"I want to succeed academically and go to a top college like Stanford, Harvard or MIT," Gaywala said. "In order to keep up with [my peers], I also have to commit to grind culture, so I joined

a lot of clubs, am doing independent research and am running a nonprofit outside of school."

While he has a large workload, Gaywala said he leaves time to do activities outside of school and tries to maintain a healthy school-life balance.

"[At any moment] I can choose to back up a little bit or not do as much work," Gaywala said. "I have support systems in place for myself, and I've taken on an academic load that is manageable along with what I want to do outside of school."

Despite the repercussions if taken too far, Gaywala said there are some benefits to grind culture. Specifically, Gaywala said grind culture prepares students for the stresses that come with adulthood. His freshman self could never handle his current workload, Gaywala said.

"If you are going to grow yourself as a person, you need to learn how to cope with stress properly," Gaywala said. "Every time I feel stressed, I quickly take two deep breaths and move on."

Ko said it is important that students focus on their passions, and the results will follow.

"I advise others to focus more on improving what you are doing right now, whether that is in an extracurricular activity or your grades," Ko said. "This will help you make a more meaningful contribution to the community, which is exactly what you want to do to prepare for college."



Despite the time commitment, Ko said FBLA has allowed him to grow as a leader and travel with friends to competitions across the nation.

### Chris Nafrada, Science teacher

How have you seen grind culture in your students?

"What I have seen for the most part, especially in high stakes classes such as honors and AP classes, is there tends to be anxiety surrounding the grades that are going to be earned in those classes. And in doing so, the learning becomes lost. I truly think that if you learn for the sake of learning everything else just takes care of itself."



How do you try to alleviate stress caused by grind culture?

"I try not to give homework. I used to give quite a bit of it, but then I started to realize that students were just going through the motions of completion, but weren't getting anything out of it. So I try to only assign meaningful work within the scope of the period."

### James Aguirre, English teacher

How have you seen grind culture in your students?

"Kids are doing work that's not even for English. I often see kids [working on] math, science and computer science, which makes me think about how much work those classes assign. I would say it's a sign that there's an imbalance in where kids are spending their energy."

How do you try to alleviate stress caused by grind culture?

"I try to provide flexibility with what I get and when I get assignments from students with my late policy. I try to be mindful about how much work I assign and whether it's valuable or helpful."



## How do you feel when you hear...

What did you get on the test?

"I can understand why people would want to know that and compare, but at the same time that comparison can be a little unhealthy and make people feel horrible about what they might have gotten on a test."

-Kyler Choi (10)

"I get kind of annoyed. I feel like in terms of improving, you should be comparing yourself to your previous grades and stuff if you really want to improve. And for me, it kind of demotivates me if someone gets a better score than me."



-Lucia Liu (11)

I only got (#) hours of sleep.

"That is a little unhealthy, because it is a comparison with other people. But, it can also help, because if you're sharing that you could get some advice from others."



-Kyler Choi (10)

You won't get into a good college unless you have...

"[When I hear this], I feel pressure to get good grades and do more extracurriculars, like getting into clubs and being involved with their activities."

-Amy Li (10)

"I feel really discouraged when I hear this phrase. In this generation, it does ring true to a lot of [students], but colleges should still try to accept people based on their personality and traits instead of their academic rigor."



-Angelina Cuan (11)

I only got a (#) on the test.

"People shouldn't say that to friends or anyone because it can make them feel discouraged and like they want to give up."



-Angelina Cuan (11)

## Obligation or hobby?

Students discuss the struggle to find a balance.

1 Mon

"Track and field has practices every day after school, for a few hours at a time so it definitely takes time. However, as long as I manage my time wisely I can get all my homework done."

-Allison Brown (10)

2 Tues

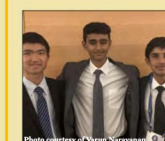


Photo courtesy of Allison Brown

3 Wed

"I mainly do robotics and tennis. The people are really cool because everyone shares common interests. It's definitely a big time commitment."

-Shannon Wu (10)

4 Thurs



Photo courtesy of Allison Brown

5 Fri

"I love doing FBLA. I also do Boy Scouts and play badminton. I like all the activities I do, but sometimes, it can be too much."

-Varun Narayanan (10)

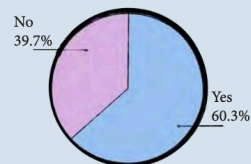
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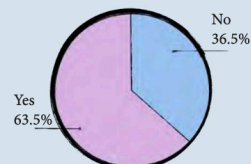
Photo courtesy of Shannon Wu

### SCALE OF STRESS

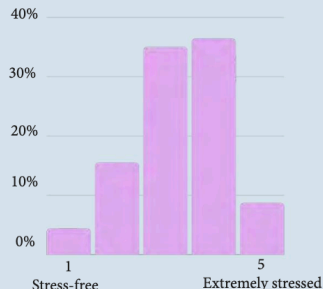
Do you participate in grind culture?



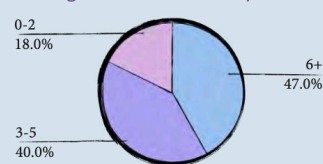
Has grind culture impacted your mental health negatively?



Rate your stress during regular school weeks on a scale of 1-5



Average hours of homework per week



Results from a survey of 218 respondents.