

Connor Hsiao '26

Editorial Leadership | NSPA Best of Show | Spring 2026 | ConnorHsiaoMedia.com

Contributions, Positions Held and Job Descriptions - PRIDE Yearbook

Contributions (in no specific order)

- Will be a co-speaker for two sessions at the NHSJC Spring Convention in Minneapolis: 1) expanding modular design coverage and advanced strategies, and 2) effective social media tactics to enhance marketing
- Served as a student panelist with school administrators to interview and select a yearbook publishing company for the upcoming school year
- Member of the Student Press Law Center New Voices Institute; advocated for student press freedom and adviser protections in California and trained staff on legal rights and ethical reporting
- Inaugural inductee of Quill & Scroll Honor Society for Portola; helped launch the school's first chapter, managed chapter operations and handled award submissions
- Secured the school's first CSPA membership; coordinated the team and managed award submissions
- Attended CSPA Summer Program for Design Concepts; studied advanced design and instructed staff in layout, typography and visual storytelling
- Assisted with NSPA Pacemaker award submissions for the yearbook
- Cross Country and Track Manager: Managed 180+ athletes. Social media manager for @portola.xc
- Former GENup participant (CA-based organization for education policy advocacy)

Positions Held

Co-Editor-in-Chief (2025-26) – First Male in this Role

Led a **34-member staff** in producing a **384-page** yearbook, overseeing all aspects of **design, copy, photography and production**. Directed workflow by assigning pages, enforcing deadlines and facilitating coverage meetings to ensure consistent progress and on-time completion. Developed the **yearbook ladder** and **led summer theme development**, shaping the book's structure and visual identity across opening, divider, closing and all other theme spreads. Coordinated coverage of over **50+ events**

Implemented a **structured editing and feedback system**, reviewing and revising every page for accuracy, consistency and adherence to publication standards. **Trained** new and returning staff in design, writing and production systems while also **grading** spreads. Collaborated across editor teams to streamline communication and ensure a cohesive, polished final publication

Managed **communication with publishing company** (cover details, troubleshooting and book logistics); coordinated **with local sales representatives and company employees**

Managing Editor (2024-25) – Inaugural Role

Launched **monthly leadership meetings** focused on motivation, staff feedback and performance highlights. Redesigned page planning into a shared calendar, **increasing on-time submissions by 25%**. Served as the **daily liaison** between staff, editors and adviser to manage logistics and team morale. Developed surveys, etiquette guidelines and conflict-resolution systems to **foster a professional and collaborative environment**.

Managed a daily slide deck to track tasks, assignments and deadlines, overseeing over **50 submissions** while **checking in regularly** with staff and editors. As my co-editor and I were the first in this role, we established all systems independently, set precedents for future leadership and guided the team's processes

Layout Editor (2023-24)

Co-led feature and sports page design, leading to a **10-point increase** (90/100) in NSPA critique scores. **Designed all theme and specialty pages** (dividers, opening, closing and theme pages, establishing a cohesive **visual brand** for the yearbook). **Collaborated** with co-editors to develop **templates and style guides**, introducing advanced visual storytelling techniques such as macrospace and showstoppers tactics. Worked closely with leadership and the graphic designer to help **design the book cover**, ensuring theme alignment. Proofed designs and trained new staff members in **design principles and software**

Senior Ads Manager (2022-23) – First Freshman and Male in this Role

Oversaw all senior ads across **nine spreads (110 ads)**, **managed parent communications** and **ensured consistent, thematic layouts**. Designed templates and a checklist system, which **eliminated missed ads** for the first time in program history, and is now **adopted annually**. Proposed and implemented a Table of Contents for reader services

Program Builder and Strategist (2022-26)

Built and scaled a **developing yearbook program at a young school (10th year)**, establishing systems and traditions still used in production. Partnered with editors to streamline workflows, improving efficiency and increasing on-time page completion. Created key resources, including a **105+ page staff manual, AP Style Guide, camera checkout system** and **photo training**

Codified the program's **first comprehensive Editorial Governance Handbook**; authored four pages of **foundational policy covering Journalistic Ethics, AI Usage, Advertising Standards, etc.** Integrated CA Education Code 48907 and **Tinker v. Des Moines precedents** into the staff manual to ensure 100% legal compliance and protect student-press-freedom rights ([full policy here](#))

Aided in recruitment and digital outreach, growing Instagram from **260 to 680+** followers and increasing engagement from **800 to 16,200** interactions, contributing to a **record 32 new staff applicants**. Created engaging **reels, posts and informational graphics** to promote the yearbook and showcase **behind-the-scenes content**; with posts that have generated **6,000+ views** and **300+ likes**. Drove record-breaking yearbook sales of **1,400 copies**, 200 more than the previous three years

Reintroduced **world-event coverage** for the first time since 2021. Advocated for covering events, including the Elections, the Olympics and local protests, with **student perspectives**. Managed the integration of this coverage across the pages through dedicated **sidebars, thematic index titles** and **'Year-in-Review' modules** to ensure the book serves as a definitive **historical record**

Strengthened program visibility through **campus-wide marketing campaigns** and by representing the yearbook in communication with ASB, administration and prospective students through various school events

Staffer (2022-26)

Supported all areas of production with a **team-first mindset**, stepping into roles as needed. Edited and revised **100+ spreads in writing, photography and design**. Spreads aided in were recognized with local and **national awards**. Took outside responsibilities by writing closing copy, designing theme pages and strengthening alignment with NSPA standards through **AP Style implementation** and copy modernization.

Assisted staff with **interviews** and coverage development while helping lead beat meetings to refine story and page ideas. Managed camera equipment, tech issues and email correspondences

Awards and Honors

National Scholastic Journalism Awards

- JEA NSMC – Yearbook: Inside Pages, Superior Rating (2025)
 - First-time participant; earned the first Superior rating in school history; second student in school district history to receive a superior (last student received superior in Spring 2019)
 - Top 8% received this distinction for the JEA On-Site Competition
- NSPA Best of Show – Design: Yearbook, 6th Place (2025)
 - Achieved top placement among more than 25 Portola Best of Show entries
- NSPA Leadership Award, Recipient (2024)
- NSPA Honor Rating, First Class (2025)

Publisher Recognition – Balfour Yearbooks

- Balfour Great Shot Contest – Photography (Emotion), 2nd Place (2025)
- Balfour Great Spreads Contest – Design, 3rd Place (2025)
- Yearbook Yearbook – Featured Honors (2023)
 - Awarded for the “Featured Yearbooks” category, placing in the top 4% of Balfour publications
- Featured in Balfour’s national teaching curriculum for “Coverage Details” and “Showstopper Layouts” (2023)
 - Senior Ads and “Favorite Books” spreads selected as exemplar content

Regional Journalism Awards

- Received California State Assembly Certificate of Recognition for excellence in student journalism, awarded by District 73 Assembly Member Cottie Petrie-Norris (2025)
- 11th Grade Winner, 2025 Earth Day Student Poster Contest | Irvine Unified School District (IUSD)
 - Recognized for artful advocacy of renewable energy and environmental protection.
- SoCalJEA Yearbook Sweepstakes – 1st Place (2024, 2025, 2026)
- SoCalJEA Theme Development and Concept – 1st Place (2024)
- SoCalJEA Yearbook Design and Copy – 1st Place (2026), 2nd Place (2025)
- OCJEA Super Sweepstakes (Newspaper and Yearbook) – (2023, 2026)
- OCJEA Yearbook Sweepstakes – 1st Place (2023, 2025, 2026)
- OCJEA Yearbook Sports Design and Copy – 1st Place (2025, 2026)
- OCJEA Yearbook Feature Design and Copy – 3rd Place (2023)

School-Level Recognition – PRIDE Yearbook

- Adviser’s Choice Award (2025)
- PRIDE Award for the Value of Drive (2025)
 - Selected by the adviser for demonstrating drive; awarded to 5% of students per semester
- Bulldog Award, Service to the School Category – Excellence Rating (2023)
 - Awarded to top-performing students in service-based classes (Yearbook, Newspaper or ASB)
- Best Coverage – 1st and 2nd Place (2025)
- Best Showstopper – 1st Place (2025), Honorable Mention (2023)
- Best Module – 1st Place (2025)

Certifications

- **USC: Digital Marketing (Pre-College)** – Developed skills in branding, content creation and social media strategy to grow the online presence
- **Northwestern: Sports Marketing (Coursera)** – Studied audience growth, brand strategy and event promotion to enhance journalistic coverage of school sports and community events
- **Discussing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Workplace** – Gained skills in inclusive communication, cultural awareness and respectful reporting to approach topics accurately in journalism and team settings
- **Canva Design School Certifications** – Developed proficiency in Canva tools, layout design and visual storytelling to create social media content and conceptual yearbook spreads

Leadership Philosophy (200 words or fewer)

As a self-proclaimed perfectionist, I previously equated leadership with total control, believing my 100% effort was the only way to ensure a high-quality yearbook. However, I've since learned that a true leader has to not only produce a book but also cultivate a team.

Leadership tests your ability to trust others and balance responsibility. While I still dive into my tasks of writing captions, shooting photos or designing a page, I now prioritize being a resource for them as well. I've traded the urge to "take over" a spread for the discipline of mentorship.

My leadership shows up in smaller actions: pausing my work to answer a freshman's question or highlighting staff on our daily slide deck. Celebrating a staff member's strong interview, displaying their photos or recognizing achievements (like winning a competition) helps create shared pride and collective ownership. I strive to be approachable, and by practicing radical empathy, I ensure my staff doesn't just work on the yearbook but also feel empowered to lead it. Yearbook is a group effort, and I want everyone to feel their contribution matters, fostering a sense of ownership, belonging and satisfaction in the end product.

Most Proud Leadership Moment (100 words or fewer)

On the final yearbook publishing day, the last task that loomed over me was the entire index. However, I didn't take over this time. I watched Sahasra (the student I mentored as a freshman partner) take charge as an editor. She and her partner tackled the index with such accuracy that my final check revealed practically no errors. Seeing her transition from a hesitant trainee to a thriving leader has been my greatest success. It proved my most lasting contribution wasn't the pages I designed, but the foundation of capable leadership I helped build for this program's future.

Statement of Support (100 words or fewer)

"Connor Hsiao is a once-in-a-lifetime leader whose vision, integrity and dedication set the standard for excellence. As Editor-in-Chief, he transformed the entire program, strengthening writing, storytelling and authentic student voice. He turns learning into action, mentoring peers with precise, thoughtful feedback that inspires growth. His coverage of the 2024 elections reflects maturity, depth and integrity, earning national recognition. Connor views leadership as a responsibility to inspire and serve his community. He leaves every space stronger." - Crystal Le, Yearbook Adviser