

## Former student client discloses personal experiences working with indicted college counselor Rick Singer

Dozens of Bay Area parents implicated in largest college admissions scandal ever prosecuted in U.S. history

By Noah Baum & Kennedy Herron  
News & Opinion and  
Managing Editor

After the indictment of 50 people — some of them Palo Alto residents — in a college admissions cheating scandal, many community members involved in the college admissions process say current admissions practices are imperfect.

William “Rick” Singer, a former college admissions coach who pled guilty to racketeering conspiracy, money laundering conspiracy, conspiracy to defraud U.S. and obstruction of justice, worked with a number of Palo Alto families. Singer used illegal means, such as bribing coaches and having SAT proctors change students’ answers, to get his clients into competitive universities.

According to a phone transcript used as evidence in the indictment, Singer described how every year there is “a group of families, especially where I am right now in the Bay Area, Palo Alto (...) they want guarantees, they want this thing done,” in refer-

ence to his illegal services.

Singer performed illegal services with his college counseling business, The Edge College & Career Network, and transferred money for the services through his non-profit, The Key Worldwide Foundation.

In the Key Worldwide Foundation’s public tax returns, one of the listed points in the organization’s mission is that “our contributions to major athletic university programs, may help to provide placement to students that may not have access under normal channels.” The tax return document gives no details on the legality of such arrangements.

As many national and local outlets have reported, the family of a current Paly student used Singer’s services and are being charged in the fraud investigation. The student said he did not want to talk to *The Campanile*.

However, Singer did not offer illegal services to all his customers. He also offered college counseling services that did not involve bribery to clients such as former Paly student Alex, who agreed to be interviewed only if *The Campanile* didn’t use his real name.



Alex said he used Singer’s college counseling services because Singer had worked with many students before with a lot of success.

According to Alex, Singer’s counseling services offered him

help with the Common Application, editing his essays and tutoring for SAT, SAT Subject tests and Advanced Placement tests. However, Alex said Singer’s guidance was not helpful.

“He was kind of a scummy

guy and had very little process in helping,” Alex said. “I would send him essay revisions, and he would come back with grammatical mistakes and stuff like that, which anyone can do.”

Throughout the process, Alex

said Singer never explicitly offered him potentially illegal pathways into college; however, Alex said there were multiple instances where Singer or his employees

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Senior Robert Vetter poses in character with castmates and juniors Aida Mohamed and Isabel Harding.

## 'Guys and Dolls' controversial plotline prompts discussions

By Eve Donnelly  
Staff Writer

The 1950s in New York City was a golden era for musical theatre. Classics from this time, such as “Singin’ in the Rain,” “A Star is Born” and “The King and I” were all popular Broadway shows that helped the musical industry flourish. But along with the beauty of the dazzling song and dance, some see an ugly reminder of 1950s misogynistic gender norms in some of these shows including “Guys and Dolls,” which premiered this year at The Performing Arts Center on March 8. Despite what some people see as sexist undertones, director Kathleen Woods said the art in the musical outweighs any controversy.

“It is a golden musical,” Woods said. “The music is absolutely fantastic. It is a kind of singing and dancing that no matter how much things are changing, these are still experiences and skills (that) are very important for young performers to have.”

Selecting “Guys and Dolls” as this year’s musical was a collaborative decision made by Woods, Choir Director Michael Najjar and Band Director Jeff Willner. According to Woods, the talent is available and the roles that best fit the auditioning students are both

factors she considers when choosing a production. When the decision to perform “Guys and Dolls” was made, Woods said some students discussed with her their reservations in auditioning.

“The students and I, before we started the play, had some conversations (regarding the play’s sexism),” Woods said. “So I was very aware of those concerns and struggles that everybody has, but the job of a performer is to inhabit the character and inhabit the world, and the students are doing an amazing job of that.”

Woods said students could choose not to audition if the play interfered too strongly with their beliefs and some chose not to audition for this reason.

However, she said the age of theatre when “Guys and Dolls” was written should not be disregarded even if it contains both good and bad elements from the past.

“It wouldn’t make any sense to throw out that whole time period or that whole generation and say there’s no value,” Woods said. “If you can kind of get beyond the parts that make you cringe, the music really is unforgettable and just fun.”

One student who felt uncomfortable auditioning for the play was sophomore Zoe Russell, who opted to be a makeup artist and

deck crew member. She said she felt that being a part of the cast would open her up to unwanted objectification throughout the show.

“I was very aware of those concerns and struggles that everybody has, but the job of a performer is to inhabit the character and inhabit the world.”  
Kathleen Woods

“It bothers me a lot,” Russell said. “I don’t particularly like that we are doing a show that’s as sexist as this. I feel that at the age that we are, it’s not the best to be giving the impression that that’s how relationships should be. I don’t think it’s OK to have girls as young as 14 be stripping in any capacity on stage.”

Although Russell said she admires the talent and effort that went into the making of the musical, she still thinks “Guys and Dolls” was an inappropriate choice.

Full Story Online

## CAASPP testing incentivized

Prizes such as free parking permits used to increase participation

By Paige Knoblock  
Staff Writer

Paly juniors will be taking the two-day California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) tests from after lunch to 3:30 p.m. on March 25 and 26. This year, Paly admin is taking new steps to incentivize students to take the exams.

In his weekly newsletter on Feb. 22, Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD) Superintendent Don Austin detailed the benefits of such tests, the importance of taking them and the ways in which they can help the PAUSD community.

In addition to academic achievements recognized by the state, Assistant Principal Tom Keating notified juniors of the incentives offered to students taking the tests.

“We are working on a number of incentives for students who complete all of the CAASPP tests,” Keating said in a Schoology

message. “Every student completing all tests will receive an item of Paly swag. In addition, we will hold a raffle.”

“Paly was asked by the District Office to come up with a plan to increase student participation in CAASPP testing.”  
Tom Keating

These new incentives come after previous years attendance was around 25 percent for these state-administered standardized testing over the past few years. In previous years, many students chose to opt out of these tests for various reasons. This year, Paly administration has decided to incentivize test takers, hoping these new prizes may increase participation.

“Paly was asked by the District

Office to come up with a plan to increase student participation in CAASPP testing,” Keating said.

The raffle will contain a range of highly coveted items, some with values over \$100. Student parking passes, athletic passes, yearbooks and VIP parking for the junior class graduation ceremony in 2020 are among the potential prizes.

According to senior Esme Stotland, students didn’t take the tests in past years lack of information and incentives.

“I didn’t take the test because there wasn’t really any benefit,” Stotland said.

According to Keating, the District wanted more students to take the tests, so providing incentives was the most efficient way to effectively increase students excitement for participation.

“In a meeting at the District Office early in the school year, Gunn High School administrators shared a list of incentives they

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## Students participate in climate strike

Activists protest government inaction on environment issues

By Jaures Yip  
Staff Writer

Dozens of Paly students joined thousands of youth activists from over 120 countries after school on March 15 to protest against government inaction on climate change issues. Gathering at the intersection of Embarcadero Road and El Camino Real, students carried rallying signs and posters to participate in what national organizers dubbed as the Youth Climate Strike.

With over 100 walkouts in the U.S. alone, the movement first gained traction last summer after 16-year-old Greta Thunberg began protesting outside the Swedish parliament during school hours. Inspired by her environmental activism, thousands of students began partaking in similar strikes, including Paly students.

As president of the Paly Democrats Club, which often coordinates student involvement



with political issues, senior Warren Wagner organized the event with junior Rohin Ghosh, vice president of the club. Leading chants such as “no more coal, no more oil, keep your carbon in the soil,” Wagner emphasized the vital role of youth as the driving force behind the climate change movement.

“I wanted to help generate some interest among Paly students

to hopefully show them what they can do to help our planet,” Wagner said. “We kind of own this issue as young people since it’s going to be our life and our world going forward, so I think we’re the most important voice.”

Wagner, who was also involved in the organization of Paly’s protest against gun violence last year,

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conveyed false information on his Common Application. "There were situations where I would be reviewing some of the stuff that he put in (to the Common Application), and it was not truthful," Alex said.

In one occurrence, Alex said that Singer and his subordinates falsely wrote that he had received an impressive award in the Honors section of his Common Application.

"The honor was some ridiculous award that was given to very minimal people in the state of California," Alex said.

Alex said he then told Singer's employees to take out the false award and replace it with a truthful one. Subsequently, Alex said he confronted Singer and his subordinates about the dishonest information.

"When I elaborated and asked about why they were doing this — because, quite frankly, I was offended — (Singer and his employees) were saying how it increases your chances of getting into college," Alex said.

Singer and the Key Worldwide Foundation did not respond when contacted for an interview.

When asked about how colleges should deal with students accepted using false scores or information, Alex said it is a tricky situation, because it is not completely apparent whether students knew about the illegal activity.

"For bribes, there should be a serious consequence and obviously, if the student knew what was going on, (colleges) should consider (expelling the student)," Alex said.

**"The honor was some ridiculous award that was given to very minimal people in the state of California."**

Alex

Despite the negative aspects of the scandal, Alex said the situation may shed light onto the integrity and fairness of the college admissions process and the factors it considers.

"If anything, it's a good segue into how the college admissions system right now is a little fraudulent and, in general, is not the best system," Alex said. "I think things like SAT scores, which hold a lot of importance in the college admission process, shouldn't even really be in there."

Alan Young, a local private college counselor, agrees that the current college admissions process could be improved.

"Part of me is thinking that maybe some other admissions processes are a little bit better," Young said.

Young said people may re-examine several ideas after this in-

dictment, such as the hysteria that surrounds getting into college, the process of recruiting student athletes and standardized testing.

"I think we're just at the tip of the iceberg," Young said. "There's so many other things that are going to be coming out."

Young said individuals can easily begin a college counseling service with little professional experience.

"The barriers to entry aren't very high," Young said. "So anybody can do it and claim that they do it."

This lack of regulation of college counseling services can lead to individuals like Singer basing their businesses on fraudulent practices.

"There are a lot of (counselors) that aren't that qualified, don't know a lot about college advising, (or) don't have the best interests of the student or the families at heart," Young said.

**"Students who don't necessarily end up at their first choice ... after a year, can't imagine themselves anywhere else."**

Sandra Cernobori

Although a variety of high-profile Silicon Valley families used Singer's services, Young predicts that if someone had asked 10 local

college counselors about Singer, nine would not have known who he is.

Paly College Advisor Sandra Cernobori also said she had never heard of Singer before the current investigation.

Cernobori said she tells students and parents to consider colleges they may not have heard of before to find the college of best fit, rather than focusing on "the name brand recognition or the reputation" of the school.

**"He was kind of a scummy guy and had very little process in helping."**

Alex

"I would argue that those that don't choose by fit don't always end up staying and might transfer," Cernobori said. "It's not only about getting in, it's about what you're going to do once you're there, and it bums me out sometimes, because this, theoretically, could be a really fun and exciting time in your life."

However, Cernobori said regardless of prestige, many students end up content with their choice once they are at a college that is a good fit for them, in her personal experience.

Cernobori said, "Students who don't necessarily end up at their first choice ... after a year, can't imagine themselves anywhere else."

## ASB busy planning end-of-year activities

By Sophia Moore  
Staff Writer

With Prom quickly approaching and spring just around the corner, Paly's Associated Student Body (ASB) has been busy keeping up with their many scheduled events. According to senior Sarthak Pant, ASB Social Commissioner, Paly's annual promposal asking competition has started, though final prizes have yet to be determined. Prom tickets are still for sale and will be available for purchase until Mar. 27.

Over the last few weeks, ASB has been discussing the possibility of making changes to their constitutions, according to senior Ashutosh Bhowan, ASB Senior Site Council Representative.

Despite these discussions, no huge alterations have been made thus far. "We did make some amendments, nothing too game-changing," Bhowan said. "Some new rules, new delegations of responsibilities, along with the removal of the videographer position."

According to Bhowan, ASB was considering adding an "Executive Coordinator" position, which would have served as a liaison between ASB and the admin-

istrators at Paly, mainly in order to help with scheduling and other logistical issues.

However, Bhowan felt these loose ends could be tied up within one position, making an Executive Coordinator position unnecessary.

"Others in ASB agreed with this assessment, so we ultimately pushed those responsibilities back to the existing site council representatives," Bhowan said.

In addition to these changes, Pant said ASB is currently planning Field Day, which should take place on May 17.

Hosted during the middle of AP testing and finals preparation, "Field Day is a yearly event put on by ASB in order to increase student morale," Pant said. "We use the extended lunch as an opportunity to let everyone have a good time during this busy period in order to provide students with stress relief."

ASB hopes to have many activities and fun opportunities for students during Field Day, Pant said.

"Last year we had an obstacle course, human foosball and a rock wall," Pant said. "We will be working the logistics of these events over the next two weeks, so nothing has been confirmed for this year yet."

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put in place last school year," Keating said.

This change may have had the desired impact, as some students are reconsidering their original stance. Junior Kaitlyn Meyer said that, originally, the tests seemed unimportant, but she may reconsider opting out because of the new added incentives.

"The incentives have definitely made my decision harder because before I would have just opted out," Meyer said. "I would really like a free parking pass but I don't want to miss the material we are learning in class."

However, the new prizes may not have been successful in convincing all students.

Paly junior Malla Chun thinks the addition of these prizes may

have been a kind gesture to test takers, but is unsure that they are worth rearranging her schedule and taking up large chunks of her class time.

**"The incentives have definitely made my decision harder because before I would have just opted out."**

Kaitlyn Meyer

"I was planning on taking the test but I am not sure if I will be able to," Chun said. "It is unfortunate that the testing is in the afternoon instead of the morning because then I would definitely be taking it."

## Climate Walkout

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reached out to Paly Environmental Clubs Organization (ECO), a coalition of environmentally-focused clubs, and Alex Von Feldt, the Executive Director of Grassroots Ecology, a local nonprofit, as guest speakers during the protest.

When addressing the student protesters on March 15, Feldt discussed the Zero Waste Campaign, which "advocates for corporate responsibility for waste, government policies for resource conservation and sustainable jobs from discards," according to its website.

Reverend Doctor Eileen Altman, an Associate Minister at First Congregational Church of Palo Alto, was also invited to offer a moral, faith-based perspective on climate change.

"For me, the climate crisis is

the greatest moral crisis facing the world today," Altman said. "I think it's important for students to participate, because your moral urgency really will push political leaders to enact changes that are difficult for them to enact."

According to junior Miles Breen, who attended the event, the main goal of the walkout was to prevent the movement from being disregarded as merely a sporadic smattering of discontent, and instead showcase it as a global mass initiative.

"I don't claim to be helping that much just by being here, Breen said. "But coming out and showing that you support the Green New Deal or any form of legislation that'll help solve climate change is important."

To encourage more individual action among communities, Lisa Altieri, founder of Community

Climate Solutions and Climate Solutions Net, attended the rally to promote her new app. The app educates users on different methods of contributing to the prevention of climate change in a collaborative and engaging way.

"Most people in the U.S. care about climate change and want to help, but they don't know what the solutions are, and they don't know what to do," Altieri said. "Everybody can make a difference."

Currently, nearly 40 percent of U.S. carbon emissions are produced from household activities, according to Altieri, with electricity, heating, transportation, food and waste being the main categories.

The app offers affordable and accessible alternatives that can lower negative impact up to 70 to 100 percent in each category.

"We're working right now

with 20 cities and counties in the U.S.," Altieri said. "We're working with high school students in every one of our communities, and they continually blow us away. It's inspiring and honestly keeps us going when we hear from students."

Several students who participated in the protest are continuing to advocate for climate change awareness.

Altman has made an effort to urge students, as well as any others, to follow their lead and reach out to different communities and organizations in order to promote the shift that they are pushing for towards environmental betterment.

Altman said, "My message to Paly students is to find how your particular gifts can contribute to the movement, and look for people in your community that you can partner with to make change."



# MID PENINSULA ORTHODONTICS

Stacey D. Quo DDS, MS