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1st Place

Picture the rolling vines that plaster the covers of Napa Valley postcards. Feel the crisp California air as it rustles the thick ancient grape leaves, and hear the giant fans circulating the air across the vineyards. While the natural landscape may very well look much the same when you come back to this scene in 20 years, the hum of that circulation propeller, or the whir of the pesticide sprayers, may have faded from the picture. In their stead lies the next marvel of agricultural technology, built from the ground up by a generation of scholars who grew their minds in the Napa Valley.

When one brings up the Napa Valley, one thinks of a community shaped by the culture of wine, a delicacy enjoyed exclusively by those over 21. But what about those of us who remain cutoff from the culture that our entire county thrives upon? Well simply put, we are the future, and we currently thrive in a 21st century education.

Such an education will define the next generation of Napa residents, a generation of not only culinary expertise and winemaking artisans, but of technology startups and breakthroughs in agriculture. Through computer labs, a new project-based philosophy and the power of online education, Napa's educational environment gives us an opportunity to build businesses that rival the not so distant Silicon Valley.

It may be hard to see beyond the tourist trap state of the Napa Valley, but I believe that the image we produce will be far more than just grapevines in the coming years. While the appearance of the future is indescribable, the people that will be there are the same people I know and cherish today, and in those people I see promise. We have been educated on new platforms that no generation before has had the privilege to use. These new means of learning will reflect in the work we produce both across existing and unconceived industries.

Just in this past year, our county has enlisted the new common core education to every student, delivering the latest tools to prepare us for the mathematics of today and tomorrow. In addition, we are privileged to have a division of the Career Technical Education group right in our backyard, providing classes that put Napa students right into skilled Napa jobs. They offer such courses as: digital media, machine tools, biotechnology and much more.

I can't say that education here in the valley is perfect however, as many of our schools still lack classes for the necessary future skill that is computer programming. This pitfall will likely be overcome in the coming years. As technology continues to dominate our society the need for such skills becomes hard to ignore. I remain optimistic that Napa has the capacity to build on its agricultural roots and grow into something far greater than a tourism oasis. Even as I speak the tender green chutes of Napa's future are beginning to surface, and the result has the promise to be groundbreaking.