

Ending Complacency: Student Ideas for Institutional Improvement

At The Potomac School, we believe that intellectual development, love of learning, and strength of character are complementary and equally essential educational goals. With a firm commitment to our core values and a rigorous academic program, we prepare students to lead lives of purpose, achievement, and generosity of spirit.

As we accept, learn from, and celebrate difference at our school, we also work together to uphold the principles that form the foundation of the Potomac community – our core values, a commitment to mutual support, and a shared focus on the common good.

Potomac Mission Statement

We, the concerned students of Potomac, take pride in being part of this school. We care deeply about the future of Potomac and want it to continue to attract and produce bright individuals. As such, we are dedicated to the needs of our fellow students and believe we must hold our beloved school to its mission.

We greatly appreciate the work that administrators and faculty have invested toward the enrichment of the institution. In our time at Potomac, we have observed some areas in which the student experience could be further improved in order to bring ourselves closer to the values above.

Attached you will find a list of ideas we feel will resolve some of the most pressing issues Potomac students, faculty, and administration face today. The needs addressed in this document have been generated and written by students and for students.

As student success and well-being are the goals of Potomac, we hope the student body and administration will receive this document with due consideration.

Executive Summary:

Student Health:

1. An anonymous and comprehensive community needs assessment
2. The collection and publication of health resources
3. Transparent guidelines for students following major mental or physical health events
4. The hiring of an on-site, full-time clinical psychologist

Equity and Inclusion:

1. Bias and sensitivity training
2. Increased discussion of diversity with the student body
3. More institutional support for affinity groups
4. Increase equity within athletics (Level the Playing Field)
5. Increased education of identity and the college process

Community-Building:

1. The relaunch of Potomac families
2. Semesterly grade meetings
3. Improved transportation for major community events
4. Increased conversations about respect in younger divisions

Student Health*

In order to establish services that are culturally competent and representative for addressing the emotional, psychological, and physical health needs of the Potomac community, we ask for...

1. An anonymous and comprehensive community needs assessment to identify the health problems of the community, identify inequalities in health and access to services, and determine priorities for the most effective use of resources.
 - a. The needs of individuals who actively volunteer their health information is unlikely to reflect the wider health needs of the community, which could be detrimental to other students. A community needs assessment is the systemic approach to ensure that resources are being used to improve the mental and physical health of the community in the most efficient way. This process may involve qualitative and quantitative research methods to collect information and transfer what is already known or available.
2. The collection and publication of health resources made easily available to Potomac families including, but not limited to:
 - a. Online and off-campus services such as online support groups or resources for coping with symptoms of a wide variety of health matters, and;
 - b. School resources such as peer groups, services provided by on-site counseling, information on the process for requesting classroom, assignment, and examination accommodations.
3. Transparent recovery guidelines for students following major mental or physical health events
4. The hiring of an on-site, full-time clinical psychologist to lead the counseling team and assist in:
 - a. The hiring of additional counselors if necessary;
 - b. The design and implementation of a comprehensive health plan for the Potomac community;
 - c. Frequent, individual check-ins with members of the Potomac community;
 - d. Helping individuals within the Potomac community come forward and discuss health-based issues.

**Note: We define "health" as "a state of physical, mental, and social wellbeing"*

Equity and Inclusion

To foster an environment in which underrepresented students are supported, and in which diversity of students and faculty is fully embraced, we ask for...

1. Mandatory and regular bias and sensitivity training for faculty to eliminate ignorance of what constitutes harmful behavior, as well as to increase accountability when interacting with fellow faculty and the student body.
 - a. This includes a requirement of diversity literature for faculty. (example: “What if I Say the Wrong Thing?” by Vernā Myers)
 - b. Experts on diversity and inclusion should implement required educational training to students regarding conversations about race, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, family structure, and ability; this would alleviate responsibility from minority communities.
2. School-wide discussions about diversity with more regularity, through:
 - a. The creation of an easily accessible school-wide multicultural event calendar that marks special holidays and important cultural history/events. A calendar would be combined with an increased effort to acknowledge those days as they come up throughout the year.
 - b. More frequent and accessible schoolwide diversity discussions, like Diversity Week should be incorporated into the year, combined with mandatory, in-depth discussions each day to supplement student-organized events
3. More institutional support for affinity groups, including multiple times set during the year for school-wide gatherings and discussions in this format (similar to the event originally planned for this spring).
 - a. The process of requesting and scheduling assembly time should be more transparent for leaders of affinity groups. Reaching out to club leaders after they are established at the beginning of the year to collect assembly requests should be standard practice.
 - b. Affinity groups should not be classified as political by default.
 - c. Affinity groups are meant to be safe spaces where students can be comfortable in sharing their experiences with people similar to them. These groups should be able to have the same funding from the administration as any other club without having to open their meetings to the entire school.
 - d. Younger students (Intermediate School, Middle School) should also have access to affinity groups in order to raise consciousness about diversity.
4. Increase equity within athletics (Level the Playing Field) .
 - a. In order to increase accessibility, students should have the opportunity to rent sports equipment through the school.
 - b. A team by team review of what constitutes essential athletic gear to be covered by financial aid and what is not
5. Increased discussion of how identity intersects with the college process.
 - a. During junior year, students are introduced to the “holistic review” process of college admissions, a practice that reviews all aspects of a students applications, from test scores to extracurriculars, and everything in between. Potomac, however, does not pay enough

attention to aspects of an applicant's identity, (e.g. race, gender, sexual orientation), which are important aspects of some applications.

- b. Regardless of a student's views on holistic review or affirmative action, all seniors are faced with these institutions, and the Potomac College Counseling Office should clarify this portion of the application. Increased education (with help from leaders in diversity work) will help the college counseling office help those who have struggled in this aspect of the process.
- c. So students are aware of the plethora of financial aid/scholarship options available during the college application process, Potomac should discuss this topic before Early Decision deadlines, so no student applies to a school unaware of the opportunities presented to them. Moreover, Potomac should offer more robust standardized testing services, as not all students can afford private tutoring.

Community-Building

In order to grow the sense of community throughout the Upper School, we ask for the following:

1. The relaunch of Potomac families, a school run program that paired together one student from every grade in the high school, and;
 - a. Offers younger students the opportunity to talk with and rely on trusted upperclassmen peers
 - b. Allows families to engage in community-building games that strengthen connections between grades
2. One class meeting per semester with one trusted adult present to facilitate open grade-wide discussions
 - a. Allows transparency within the grade and provides a format for students to easily share their observations on current issues
 - b. Allow SGA members to collect honest feedback from the student body.
3. Increase the accessibility of major events (such as the Bonfire, Winterfest, Flint Hill Basketball Games) via improved transportation
 - a. Offer more bus routes from major community events for students who live further from campus
4. Acknowledge that transportation creates a problem of inequity, particularly for students of color
Facilitate conversations about self-respect and respect of others in the Intermediate and Middle Schools through the following:
 - a. Two age-appropriate educational seminars led by professionals in the Intermediate and Middle Schools involving respect of others through 1) race, socioeconomic status, religion, gender identity, and sexual orientation and 2) sexual consent and healthy relationships
 - b. Conversations with peer leaders involving mental health, body image, and socioeconomic inequity
 - c. Creation of a club similar to Safe Space in lower divisions