

Lauren Puerta – City of Happy Valley

If I Were Mayor

If I were the mayor of Happy Valley, I would make a few changes. For example, I would improve the following:

- inclusion in our schools
- Diversity and racism in our community
- Sexism in schools and workplaces

I see plenty of things in my day-to-day life. In school, I hear slurs. In public, I see the looks some people give others. Happy Valley needs to welcome all people as a place where everyone can find peace.

I would address a few things with the schools—first, the teachers. Happy Valley schools are a place where children go to learn and discover themselves. Most of the teachers at our school are incredible and help kids progress and become successful in life. However, many school buildings are short-staffed. Consequently, as mayor, I would encourage people to come here and teach students to get involved in our children's lives.

Second, Happy Valley's children's school community and support systems must offer greater support. In schools, there are always minorities. Often it's based on race, religion, or sexuality. Lots of times other students will choose to make fun of students in the minorities and use offensive terms to harm them. I want to educate all students on the effect their words hold, and encourage students to speak up when they see or hear about students being bullied or bullying other students. Students' bad experiences should never be swept under the rug and ignored, even if claims are exaggerated, it should be the school's responsibility to make sure all their students are safe and feel welcomed every time they enter their school building. Most of the schools have at least one, most often two counselors but from my experience, they are almost always busy, so it's hard to find time to speak to them. I go to HVMS and we have three counselors, 1 per grade. With the size of my school, they are almost always busy. I would like to find a way for students can always have someone to talk to when they need support if their normal counselor is busy. Even if it's something as small as encouraging students to reach out to support websites like youth line or the Trevor project, I want everyone to have the resources to easily seek help. The Happy Valley schools are all massive with hundreds of students. Most of which have very crowded hallways and full classrooms. Happy Valley doesn't necessarily need another school, the schools we have now just need to be able to fit the students in them. Portables, like the ones that were added to Happy Valley Middle School, work well when extra classrooms are needed. If I had the opportunity to make our schools a better place, I would.

69% of the citizens living in Happy Valley identify as white. Our city has little representation for most of the ethnicities outside the few large percentages. There are people in our city who get called slurs or are made fun of because of their race. Our city should be able to be called a safe space for people of all ethnicities or backgrounds. People who are part of the LGBTQ+ community face similar issues, often just in different manners. Queer people are often treated differently or asked uncalled-for questions about themselves. In locker rooms, people who like the same gender can get looks or questions like "Are you going to watch me change" when all they want is to change themselves. Children growing up and realizing that they may be part of the LGBTQ+ community can face rejection from their parents who choose not to support them. Oftentimes these kids have no one else to go to and they resort to bundling everything up inside. The governments may support people in underrepresented communities, but there are

always people out there who choose to be disrespectful to those who are different from themselves. If I were mayor I would create a space where people of minorities could go to find a safe space and connect with other people like themselves. I want Happy Valley to have representation for all people so that everyone feels safe and respected in their community.

Sexism is something that I often see every day. It can be something as little as hearing a comment placing men as the superior sex, or something as large as hearing about harassment at my parents' work. Sexism doesn't stop at the comments or other things you can ignore. It works its way into your work and creates things like the gender wage gap, or it takes opportunities away from women and gifts them to men. Sexism is engraved into all of our brains, the traditional stereotypes are everywhere "Men are stronger than women" or "Boys will be boys" after making a sexist remark, or causing harm to a woman. Sexism even works women to women at times, teaching young girls to cover up to "Not distract the boys" while ignoring the reasons girls have to cover up in the first place. I want to slow the spread of sexism. I think that children should learn at a young age to respect one another equally no matter the gender of the person. If that means teaching them in school, schools should teach that. Children shouldn't have to grow up under toxic gender roles that make them feel bad about themselves.

If I were Mayor, there would be a lot of things I would want to do. Some I may be able to accomplish, others maybe not. I would want my term to be remembered for making a change. No matter how small or insignificant, I would want my term to have a long-lasting purpose. If I were Mayor, I would make changes, but that's if I were Mayor. For now, I am an eighth grader hoping that one day, my city will be able to reach its best potential.