Starting high school, access to mental health care made a big difference for me. Being at a big school with so many other students was overwhelming for me and I quickly became wrapped up in my own anxiety. I started to not go to school and missed out on the community-building that happens the first few weeks in a new environment. I built up going to school in my head, and it became irrationally scary for me.

My school responded to the situation with empathy instead of scolding. My teachers were eager to help me catch up and encouraged me to take advantage of the services available at the school’s clinic. I was fortunate to get the help I needed when I needed it. Unfortunately the kind of support I got isn’t always available to everyone.

At Central High school we have an in-school clinic which offers therapy, as well as birth control and physical exams at a more affordable price. The clinic is a great resource, but because of the lack of information about it made available to students it is underused. This is especially problematic for students who wouldn’t be able to get all these services elsewhere. To make these resources more accessible I would start a student-ambassador program, where students working in partnership with the clinic bring information about it to their peers. This could be an ongoing program, with training for the student leaders in the summer and information sessions for the student body in the fall. Information could be passed along at freshman orientation and in advisory for older students.

Student engagement in extracurriculars can be improved at my school by making clubs more open to all students. Being new at Central High School my sophomore year, there were a lot of clubs that I wanted to participate in but didn’t know how to become involved. Getting to know more people at school, it became clear to me that this is a common sentiment! A lot of the great extracurriculars out there seem like they are limited to the people directly involved, without a lot of outreach to newcomers. Less outgoing students miss out on these opportunities to become involved and clubs miss out on gaining new perspectives and ideas.

To make extracurriculars more accessible to all students I would organize a club fair at the beginning of the school year. This way students would be more knowledgeable about the opportunities available to become involved and feel more welcomed to join extracurriculars. At a big school like Central, it can be difficult to find people who share common interests. Clubs are a great way to do this. By making these extracurriculars based on shared passions more open, the social environment becomes more welcoming and students can feel more comfortable pursuing their interests.
As a student who has attended two of the many Saint Paul public schools, I have experienced many great things. I entered Linwood Monroe Arts Plus in kindergarten, and stayed until I entered Central High School last year. That year was probably one of the hardest of my life because of the true transition I was going through in all aspects of my education. I had come from this relatively small school, which was for me a beloved community that takes on almost a surreal quality now, and I was thrust into this large school where for the first time I experienced a sense of being anonymous.

By this point in my educational career, I have learned to love Central, and I have discovered all the positive things about it, but for me a year ago this was hard. It would hit me in the gut everyday how no one knew my name and how I was just a number. This sense of being so completely alone was so foreign because I was used to going to a school where everyone knew my favorite color and GPA. At Linwood-Monroe, when I closed my eyes at night to sleep, I would feel secure that in the the morning I would arrive at school and be happy.

This is what I would like to help change if I was selected to be on the Student Advisory Council. I would like to help start a program to take away the empty feeling that people get in their transition between schools and points in life in sixth and ninth grade. I think a program like this could, in the end, help with other problems in the schools like bullying and behavioral issues. If a student feels safe and secure in their environment, they are more likely to ask for help and be confident in themselves.

I think that a mentoring program would be a good way to achieve this goal of creating a safe space. This would be most important in the years of transition, sixth and ninth grades. If each student was matched with an older student who matched certain criteria of interests and similarities, then it would be easier for the younger student to ask questions and receive information and help. The students could ask questions about homework, the complicated schedule, or other worries. And this wouldn't have to take up too much extra time, maybe once a month during homeroom.

When I think back and imagine myself at the beginning of last year, being too nervous to ask where the bathroom was, and then myself now, I can see room for so many possibilities. My older self has so much to offer to this younger version of me. In the end, I think, this would increase general happiness of individual students, but also help would increase the connectivity of a the school and of its students by creating a bridge between people and communities.
A Home Within A Community

Walking into my first day of high school was the most stressful and overwhelming thing I have ever done. Coming from the American Indian Magnet School, a small elementary and middle school just up the street from Harding High School, was difficult. AIMS was my home for nine years, and leaving my pond and diving head first into an ocean of 2,000 new faces was stressful, scary and overwhelming.

But I only felt like this for a short amount of time.

The reason I attended Harding (besides the fact that it is my neighborhood school) was because of the American Indian Studies Program. Learning about my history, culture and the Ojibwe language has always been a passion of mine. But the AIS program provided more than classes for me. In the AIS program, I found a new home.

In the depths of a new school was a family, waiting for me. I found a set of teachers that truly cared about my wellbeing, not just what grade I had in their class. They pushed me and encouraged me to do better. They made me feel comfortable in a place that was way beyond my comfort zone. I'm so grateful I had them, because it was exactly what I needed. It continues to be what other students need too.

Every new student deserves this love and respect. Every student needs a place to feel safe and comfortable. Coming into a new school is tough, and no student should have to go through it alone. Every student deserves a person or group of people they can depend on.

My strategy to ensure that more students have an experience like mine is to make sure all students have somewhere where they can be themselves and not have to face the pressure created by their peers. Whether it's a cultural center or a counseling office, every student deserves a safe space.
პასუხი შეიძლება იყოს დაფანტიკური. თუმცა ხელმისაწვდომი იქნა, როგორც მკვლები ნამუშქი და გადამზადება. ტექსტი არ შეიცავს გამოთქმის ძეგლს, რომელიც სწორედ იმპორტობთ სახელწოდება. თუმცა ამ მონაცემთა ქსოვანებაში შეიძლება მოიცავდეს სწორედ იმის შესახებ, რა უპირატესობებს აქვთ გამოჩენილი მონაცემები.
The Racial Divide in AP and Accelerated Classes

An issue in Como, but also in many other Saint Paul schools, is the racial divide that seems to be very obvious in AP/accelerated classes. A week ago I was walking out of my AP environmental class when a fellow student asked a friend of his, who was also leaving, if that class was AP. I looked back at the kid and asked "Why do you ask? Because of all the white kids?" He laughed a little and said "I didn't want to say it, but yes". This was a beautiful illustration that it is an issue. The students, teachers, and parents know it. This kid broke the silence on the issue that is on so many people's minds.

There are multiple ways to combat this issue. One, an idea I heard from a teacher, is to combine all ninth grade students in the same English classes; however it would be best if this was implemented throughout middle schools too. The students would have the ability to participate in quarterly projects as a way to earn honor credits. This would provide students who may not see themselves as honor material with the ability to try something more challenging without having to enroll in an advanced class. This would still give students who wanted to be in a more rigorous course the opportunity to do more challenging activities and receive an honors credit. This would push students of all backgrounds and races towards a more equal future, helping with the issue of racial inequality.

Another way to get more diversity in classes would be a freshman orientation which talked about the benefits of AP and accelerated classes. Students and parents would be told the benefits of the course: students would earn honors credit, students will be prepared students for postsecondary options, they will learn why colleges like to see these classes on a transcript, and also prepare students for the ACT/SAT or accuplacer tests (either of which are needed to graduate).

The two of these solutions would increase awareness that there is an issue with our advanced classes and that there are reasonable solutions. It is so important to have a mix of students in the classroom. It helps individuals gain perspective from different view and opinions, would help to lessen the achievement gap, and would also help with the racial tension and misconceptions of people who are different. Overall it could improve Como Park.
I am a senior at Highland Park Senior High School. It might be surprising to people to find out the majority of Highland's student population is students of color. As an African American woman, I am one of those students.

As a person of color, it is can be difficult to participate in a place where your face is not represented. I have no teachers of color at Highland and when I take an advanced placement course, I am frequently the only student of color.

While I would like to see the racial achievement gap closed, I don't really know how to close it as don't know much about teaching (yet, I plan to study elementary education in college). I have an idea for how to help Highland High School be more inclusive.

Highland's mascot for school sports and activities is a Scottish, male, White bagpiper. Nothing about that mascot represents me (race or gender). Here is a photo of the cut outs used at the school for Homecoming:

I'm sure the Scots bagpiper is a well loved icon in some circles, but maybe change can be made with a little education? Here's my plan:

First, have the students and teachers of the school attend a race workshop (Penumbra Theatre has a great one on subtle symbolism of racism); Second, continue the conversation in identifying racial aggressions (micro and macro) in everyday life at the school; Third, hopefully the mascot would be identified as a racial micro-aggression and a grassroots effort could be started to change it.

Then, I would have a group of students made up of representatives of all races at the school come up with three suggested mascots. The entire student group could vote to choose the next mascot.

I would also suggest using this process to change the white male mascots at Central High School Minutemen and Johnson High School Governors.

We've all heard about the colleges who are changing their outdated, racially offensive mascots. Now is the time for SPPS high schools to retire their non-inclusive mascot, so that all students are represented.

Thank you for your consideration of my application.