

To GIPNA and the Independence Park Community:

I am writing this letter in response to your front-page article in your January newsletter, entitled “Disney II Open Campus Policy Lets Kids Loose In IP.” I am speaking to you out of sadness, frustration, and offense. I am a graduating senior who has attended this school all four years, and who is also an active and long-time member of the community; I am appalled and deeply hurt at what was written in that article. Using such terms as “Lets Kids Loose,” to describe how we “roam” and “wander” the streets is frankly absurd, as we have every right to this neighborhood as any other community member. Disney II Magnet is a Chicago Public School, and this neighborhood, although residential, is a Chicago public space, and therefore belongs to us just as much as it belongs to any homeowner who lives here. The way the writer of that article talked about my fellow students and I, as if we were unruly animals being let out of their cages and wreaking havoc on a community, is completely inappropriate as well as offensive and wrong. That intention not only mischaracterizes us, but also dehumanizes the entire student body. Contrary to popular belief, teenagers are humans. We are people, who have every right to the best education possible. We have an *absolute* right to walk on the streets, sidewalks and alleys of the city in which we live. Mind you, illegal activities by any member of the student body should not be excused, however, the harsh generalizations made in the GIPNA newsletter only perpetrate stereotypes that are unfair as well as harmful. Imagine what it feels like for us to find out that not only is the world a competitive, angry place, but now even the community in which we study and spend most of our time has begun to turn against us. This awful situation could lead to an intensely negative relationship between school and community.

In 1924, just ten years after the founding of Independence Park in 1914, Alvernia Catholic High School was opened by the School Sisters of St. Francis of Milwaukee, in what is now the Disney II Magnet High School building. This proves that the Irving Park neighborhood has always been a schooling community, and therefor Disney II has just as much claim to this wonderful area as any other resident.

Not only is the writer of the GIPNA article putting forth stereotypes and creating an “us vs. them” mentality within our community, but they are also not paying attention to well known scientific readings on students’ needs for recreation. In *The Benefits of Campus Recreation* by Scott A. Forrester, PhD, it states “Students who participate in recreational opportunities have increased retention rates and improved health and wellness;” Not every student has enough time to spend on after school sporting activities. This is due to jobs, family obligations, schoolwork, or simply living too far away from school. This inability to participate in recreational opportunities at school makes the time we do get to stretch our legs all the more necessary and important.

I sincerely hope that, in the future, the GIPNA newsletter and Independence Park community can find it in their heart to spread positive messages instead of using such hateful, fear mongering diction. We are teenagers, we are students, and, most importantly, we are people. We are the future of this city. Our school belongs here, and we have every right that you do to be in this community. GIPNA, I challenge you to publish this, and give us the same front-page time you gave your hurtful and damaging article.

Sincerely,

Chloe Cosgrove