

Comprehensive Assessment For Valley Forge Military Academy and College

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Executive Summary

Governance

1. If the Board does not change in both form and function, the school cannot survive.
2. The Board needs to commit to ongoing training to learn what it means to be an independent school and college board.
3. The Board needs to stop being reactive. The “ready, fire, aim” decision making process has brought the school close to closure.
4. The Board hires a President to run the school’s day-to-day operations. Board members need to stay out of day to day operations of the school and begin following the chain of command if they need information to meet their mission.
5. The Board should recruit new board members outside of the alumni base.
6. All board members must be in a position to make significant gifts to the school and must understand that their seat on the Board requires that they do so on a yearly basis.
7. The Board must develop and adhere to a plan to bring the faculty salaries and benefits to a level that will enable the school to recruit for an increasingly short supply of teachers.

Overview

1. Valley Forge Military Academy purports to be a competitive college prep school, yet the programs, facilities and services that it offers have not kept pace with similar priced independent schools.
2. Valley Forge Military Academy is geographically well placed for both a small, college prep, boarding and day school.
3. The School cannot rely upon full paying international students to compensate for the fact that nearly all the domestic students are heavily subsidized, mostly through unfunded tuition discounts.
4. The school should find ways to engage the greater community as much as possible.
5. The school should investigate a five-day boarding program.
6. Going forward, the Academy needs to hire experienced independent school and college professionals to run the academic and business sides of the school and whose

experience in fine independent schools and colleges reflects the caliber of the experience of those running the military side.

7. The School should investigate a one-year high school post graduate designed for students to gain appointments to U.S. Service Academies and entrance to private four-year military colleges.

Enrollment

1. The school should carefully review the messages on the website, both intended and unintended to ensure that they accurately reflect the mission of the school and the parents that they hope to attract.
2. The Admissions Office staff needs to be trained in independent school best practices.
3. The School should find a way to bring admissions visitors onto the campus through another
4. The reregistration program needs be very different if it is to be used as a retention tool.
5. The college program needs to be studied so that a more cohesive student body can be developed that reflects the mission of the school.
6. The college athletic program needs to be evaluated to ensure that the program is mission appropriate and that it serves the needs of the student-athletes.

Development

1. The development office needs to be staffed in a way that reflects their considerable goals.
2. The board needs to begin to plan for a comprehensive campaign to fund initiatives beyond the annual fund.

Client Experience

1. Parents chose Valley Forge for their sons because of the military model. They are looking for more order and discipline not less.
2. There is a great deal of satisfaction among the parents with the recent leadership changes.
3. The school should look for ways to involve parents in the life of the school in support of their sons
4. The school should empower the cadets to expand the weekend activity offerings.

5. The School should put together a plan to begin to deal with the backlog of deferred maintenance in the physical plant.
6. The athletic program needs to be studied to ensure that it supports not only the mission of the school, but benefits the cadets as individuals.
7. The Academy should consider recruiting teachers differently, utilizing independent school channels rather than public school sources and actively recruiting veterans who are more likely to understand and support the military model.

Governance

The school will not survive if the Board continues in its present form and function. Valley Forge Military Academy and College is a small independent institution with an endowment of approximately \$10 million that is far short of what is necessary to fund the school in times of scarcity. Tuition, room and board is approximately \$45,000. There seems to be, however no strategic vision coming from the Board that gives any indication that they grasp this reality. An independent school and college board has two major responsibilities:

1. To carefully choose and support the President who is in charge of the day to day operation of the school.
2. To ensure the financial health and sustainability of the school.

Despite the Board members relatively kind self-appraisal as evidenced by the board surveys, the board has failed in both of these responsibilities. **(See Appendix A)**

While the recent hire of General Lord as President appears to be the right man at the right time, the experience for the class of 2018 was more indicative of the Board's track record. The few Cadets in that class and their parents who were at the school for four years experienced four changes in the President's office. This "ready, fire, aim" approach to decision making is one hallmark of this board.

Enrollment declined 40% at the Academy in the last five years. Relatively steady enrollment in the college came at the expense of decisions that resulted in a fractured student body and 98% of the students receiving significant financial aid, much of it unfunded. Rather than study the problem with the President and develop a strategic plan that would lead to sustainability, the Board became overly involved in the day to day operation of the school. Several mid-level managers reported a board "in the weeds" without really being informed. For a school that stresses the military model, the board's willingness to circumvent chain of command is remarkable. Certainly, there may be rare occasions when a board member needs to interact directly with a faculty or staff member. In those cases, that interaction needs to be cleared first with both the President and the Board Chair prior to the interaction. The exception may be the chairs of the development, enrollment and finance committees who must interact with senior administrators in order to prepare agendas for their committee meetings.

An example of the Board reaching into operations is the recent appointment of the Dean of the Academy. The school desperately needs experienced independent school professionals to take the Academy forward. Even if Dr. Lea was the right candidate, the process of placing him permanently in the position was flawed. Independent schools do not replace senior leadership without a national search. This is even more important at a time when the school is experiencing a downturn in enrollment. An inclusive, transparent process needs to be put in place by the President. If the Board wants to suggest candidates, that is their prerogative, as it is the prerogative of every alumni, parent, faculty and staff member. But the process and the decision rests with the

President. If he wants input for key hires, he can form a search committee. Unless asked, the Board needs to remain in their lane.

The Board has not executed its fiduciary responsibility to the school. The school is nearly \$7 million in debt and running a deficit in this year's budget.

There are too many Alumni on the Board. Alumni always look at an institution through the lens of what it was. In the case of the board, they are driven to volunteer to assist the school based on the positive experiences that they had as cadets. The problem is that the Valley Forge is not going to survive by looking backwards. What is needed is a new vision for a small, independent, college prep boarding school in the military tradition. That does not mean the loss of connection to the customs and traditions of the school. For example, potential source of board members are service academy graduates who have gone on to great success outside of the military after they have completed their service. These are people who would see value in the mission of the academy and might bring a fresh perspective to the work.

The bottom line is this. The Board finally appears to have hired a President who understands his job. He has begun to assemble the leadership team that can address the issues facing the Academy and the College. The board now has one short term priority: to give or get the financial resources that will give the President the time that he needs to move the school into the 21st Century and toward long-term sustainability. Once the financial runway is built, the Board must turn its attention to an inclusive strategic planning process.

The Academy

Valley Forge Military Academy is a small boarding school for students in grades seven through twelve. This means that the market in which the Academy competes is the small independent boarding school market whose target is parents with the ability to pay over \$44,000 per year for precollegiate education and are inclined to send their sons to school away from home. It is a tough sell for any school. Valley Forge's standing as a military academy is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, there are going to be parents who immediately reject the military model. On the other hand, the school has a unique brand and niche that makes it one of the few choices like it in the country. The website **Boarding School Review**, one clearinghouse for Boarding School Information for potential parents and students (<https://www.boardingschoolreview.com/>) Lists eighteen Military Boarding Schools in the country, ranging in size from 80 to over 800 students.

Valley Forge Military Academy is shrinking.

	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	Total	Amt Change	Percent Change
2013-14	16	34	60	72	73	78	333		
2014-15	10	29	41	68	67	68	283	-50	-15%
2015-16	11	21	41	52	64	71	260	-23	-8%
2016-17	3	22	32	42	59	59	217	-43	-17%
2017-18	5	15	39	42	42	58	201	-16	-7%
							Total	-132	-40%

As of October 1, there were 201 Cadets enrolled at the Academy. This represents a 7% decrease over the previous year, and a 40% decrease over a five year period. There are many reasons for this. Chief among them was the fact that the Academy was not living up to its promises to parents who sought the school for its commitment to teaching the five cornerstones: Academic Excellence, Character Development, Personal Motivation, Physical Development, and Leadership. Parents in the focus groups reported little discipline, students cutting classes, disruptions in class, little supervision of study halls, and reduced opportunities to participate in athletics.

It should come as no surprise then that 63% of the school receives some form of financial aid, much of it unfunded, effectively lowering the average tuition collected per cadet to less than \$28,000. The school cannot long continue to subsidize an average of \$16,000 per Academy Cadet.

Like many American boarding schools, the Academy depends upon the recruitment of full paying international students to help balance the budget and make up for the policy of heavy discounting for U.S. Students. This is problematic. The competition for International students is fierce and the demand for mission appropriate international students for Valley Forge greatly outpaces the supply of those students. Most parents of international students rely upon the assistance of agents to place their children in schools overseas. The parents of top tier students are concerned first with the college placement record of the schools that they consider and the agents are keenly tuned to the demands of their clients. Besides the Service Academies, which foreign nationals are not eligible to attend, Valley Forge does not consistently place students in the brand name, high profile universities that the parents of top tier international students demand. Because of that, the school is not attracting those students. Other factors impact the supply of mission appropriate international students including:

1. The increase of high-quality education at home. Schools in sending countries such as China are being built at a remarkable rate and the academic programs mirror those of top tier U.S. independent schools. Parents in those countries now have options that were not available less than a decade ago.
(<http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20180209120222866>)
2. The current political climate is not encouraging parents to send their children to the United States when there are other more welcoming alternatives. The World Education Service in a recent article stated that:

The American Council on Education (ACE) and 32 other higher education associations, for instance, submitted an amicus brief to the U.S. Supreme Court when the court took up hearings on Trump's latest travel ban in April 2018 that noted that the ban "sends a clarion message of exclusion to millions around the globe that America's doors are no longer open to foreign students, scholars, lecturers, and researchers." It "jeopardizes the vital contributions made by ... [these individuals] by telling them in the starkest terms that America is no longer receptive to them."

<https://wenr.wes.org/2018/05/latest-sevis-data-number-of-international-students-in-the-u-s-is-declining>

The Challenge then lies in attracting more full paying domestic parents to the school. This requires a change in mindset. As enrollment has declined steadily, it is easy to blame increasing tuition as the cause of the exodus. In fact, the problem does not lie with the cost. Tuition, room and board at Valley Forge actually represents a relative bargain in the small boarding school world where costs can reach well over \$50,000. The problem lies with the value proposition. The Academy has quite frankly not kept pace with the small boarding programs with which it competes in terms of program, facilities, services or outcomes. Valley Forge Military Academy is a shadow of its former self in terms of enrollment because it remains a mirror of its former self in terms of programs, facilities, and services. This will be discussed in greater detail in the section about the student experience.

The Market

Valley Forge Military Academy sits squarely in the middle of the eastern megalopolis that extends from New York to Washington D.C. Within a mile of the campus is a train station providing reliable transportation to 30th Street Station in Philadelphia where Cadets and their families can access trains to New York to the north and Washington DC to the south. Several major interstate highways pass within a few miles of the gates of the school. Simply put, the Academy is ideally placed for a small boarding school. Given the geographic advantages, investigating a five-day boarding program makes a great deal of sense.

The Academy also sits in the middle of a prime independent day school marketplace. Several independent schools charging nearly the same amount for day school as the Academy charges for boarding, including Episcopal Academy and Haverford School are thriving within a short drive of

the Academy. The difference is that those schools have developed a reputation in the area for academic excellence that the Academy does not enjoy. However, as the Academy's value proposition increases the following graph indicates that there are over 8500 high school students living in households with a median family income of over \$106,000 in the school districts immediately surrounding the Academy.

	Conestoga	Radnor	Marple-Newtown	Haverford	Lower Merion	Upper Merion	Total
Enrollment	2062	1177	1165	1709	1440	1142	8695
Median Household Income	\$121,687	\$106,209	\$82,596	\$99,043	117,914	\$80,419	\$102,626

The Academy could begin outreach to the community by publicizing events on campus like parades and concerts. They could also organize community appreciation events that will enable members of the local community to be on campus and interact with the Cadets in less formal way.

The Academy should actively publicize in the local market its success rate placing graduates in the Service Academies. A significant number of students and parents in both the boarding and day school markets would be interested in a school that was a conduit to the Academies. A curriculum designed with Service Academy admission in mind would appeal to both students currently attending high school as well as those who need an extra year of high school in order to improve their record for admission

The Marketing and Communications Overview contained in Appendix A provides an in depth look by the Healey Director of Communications, Valerie Asuncion, at the marketing effort of both the school and the college. She is impressed by the work produced by Mary Heller and believes that the "Leaders at Every Level" will resonate in the educational marketplace. There are a number of questions however the essential question is this:

Is your well-oiled machine on the right track? Have you agreed across the organization about whom you are trying to reach and what you are promising them? Are you answering the right questions for the prospects most likely to buy what you're selling?

As an example of a well-oiled machine on the wrong track, a look at your website reveals the following clear messages:

1. **The School is not marketing to full paying parents.** The opening photo on the website's homepage tells the reader that "Valley Forge Military Academy awards more than \$4 million in scholarships and financial aid annually." That message is not directed at the people who can afford to pay \$45,000 per year for precollegiate education. It signals that Valley Forge is expensive and the school understands that they have to soften the blow. It also tells potential parents that they can come into the school expecting not to pay what it costs.
2. **This is not really a college prep school.** The second page of the website says that 95% of the class of 2017 went to college, while 3% joined the military and 2% entered the workforce. Those would be impressive numbers if the school were a comprehensive

public high school. It's a tough sell for a parent to pay nearly \$200,000 over four years of education for their child to join the Army.

Academy Retention and Recruitment

Like many of the people in positions of authority at the Academy, the Director of Academy Admissions had no experience in independent school admissions prior to taking the job. Because he is well organized, committed to the mission and has the requisite skills to be successful promoting the Academy. The Academy should invest in training for him. The Association of Independent School Admissions Professionals (<https://www.aisap.org/home>) provides resources for both new and experienced admissions professionals.

Marketing to Full Pay (<http://www.marketingtofullpay.com/>) is run by Claude Anderson, Dean of Enrollment at Northfield Mount Herman School in Massachusetts. Generally recognized as one of the top independent admissions professionals in the country, Claude runs workshops periodically around the country.

Reregistration is not well handled at the school. It should therefore not be surprising that retention has been an issue. Reregistration begins in March with an email to parents requesting that they complete online course registration with their sons. There was a follow-up email every two weeks subsequent to the initial email blast. The Dean of Enrollment then spent the summer contacting any parent who had not reregistered. This is a bad system on lots of different levels.

1. In a college prep school, the Cadet's academic advisor or college counselor should work with the Cadet to ensure that the proper courses are being taken. That's what parents are paying for.
2. In a school that is experiencing retention issues, the process should be happening much earlier. If a parent is considering leaving the school, the school needs to know that long before they fail to respond to a couple of emails in March and April. By that time, there is one month of the school year to address issues.
3. If course selection does not begin until March, and continues through the summer, staffing for the new school year can't be properly planned.

The Academy should consider the following revised procedure:

1. The Course selection process should be completed by each Cadet with his academic advisor or college counselor by February 1.
2. The advisor should set a phone appointment or conference with the parent to apprise them of the course selection.
3. The advisor will then hand the parent the contract for the coming school year with a March 1 return deadline.
4. Incentivize parents to return their contracts on time by offering a reduction in the registration fee for contract returned by March 1
5. On March 2, phone calls are made to parents who have not reregistered to determine the cause. Those calls should be coming from either the President, the Superintendent, the Commandant or the Dean of the Academy.

Recruitment

On October 10, a member of the Healey Education Foundation Staff called the Academy Admissions office and conducted a secret shopper interview. The results were mixed. The call was answered by Anne Brennen. Her approach was courteous, polite and welcoming, there was little to connect the caller to the school. The caller was not asked about her interests and needs. She was not asked how she heard about Valley Forge. When asked about a tour, she was informed of the Open House on November 10 and directed to register online. When the caller asked about day vs. boarding, she was told that it depended upon the needs of the parent. Yet the caller was never asked to define those needs and, as a result, the caller did not get an important question answered. She was then directed to the website for more information. There has not, as yet, been any follow-up.

When a prospective parent calls the school, the office must assume that they have read the website. It is up to the admissions office to determine:

1. **How they heard about Valley Forge.** The answer to this question can help to determine the effectiveness of various marketing efforts.
2. **What interests the prospective parent about the Academy.** This can help to direct the parent to people on the campus who can assist in recruiting the new student.
3. **When are they available for to visit the campus.** Directing a parent to an Open House is not necessarily a bad thing. But rather than sending the parent to a website to sign up online, the question is, "Is November 10 a good day for you? If it is, let me sign you up for our Open House." Then a follow-up card or email to confirm attendance is in order as is a follow-up call after the event. If the Open House is not convenient, "When is a good time to schedule a visit to the campus for you and your son?"

Admissions is sales. And the admissions staff needs to understand that every call is an opportunity to sell Valley Forge.

The College

The College suffers from an identity crisis. The college has four identifiable groups in one institution and they often perceive that they have conflicting interests.

1. **The Early Commissioning Program** students are committed to service in the United States Army after graduation. They wear uniforms that are different from the other members of the corps and, because of training commitments are not generally part of the Corps leadership.
2. **Members of the Corps of Cadets** are full time students who live on campus. It is from this group of students that the Corps leadership comes.
3. **Commuter Students** are not part of the corps. Rather they live off campus and come to school for class.
4. **Athletes** are generally recruited to play a sport at the school. Athletes can be either commuters or members of the Corps. Some hold leadership positions.

Virtually no college student pays the full tuition, room and board. Early Commissioning students are paid for by the Army. Athletes receive full, unfunded tuition scholarships. Members of the Corps and commuters are often provided financial aid, both funded and unfunded. This does not mean that the cost of education is covered. A significant number of students, many of them recruited athletes, take out significant loans in order to cover their expenses at the school. It is not uncommon for a student to graduate from Valley Forge with \$40,000 in debt. That's not defensible.

On paper, Valley Forge Military College costs over \$50,000 to attend. That's actually a tough number to find. The only way that I could find the full cost of tuition, room, board and books was to fill out the form on the webpage and providing a great deal of information. Given that the fictional parent who filled out the form was from a family of four making \$65,000 and living in Pennsylvania, the net tuition came to \$37,000 after a \$15,000 grant in aid. That's a hefty price tag for a junior college. By comparison, an academically talented student whose family makes \$65,000 would be fully funded at the University of Pennsylvania with no loans expected.

The College is simply not sustainable in its present form. Except for the Early Commissioning Program, there is no value proposition. If the cybersecurity program operated in a state-of-the-art facility, there may be a case to be made for attendance in that program, but not at a price that a student would be asked to pay at a top private four year university.

The athletic program is a financial drain on the college with little return on investment. The athletes are actively recruited, often without the involvement of the Admissions Office. I was told by the Senior Director of Admission that it was not uncommon to see a coach escorting a recruit on campus without having that recruit come through the Admission office. When an admissions counselor finally does get the opportunity to talk with the recruit and discuss the military obligations in the Corps of Cadets, they hear things like, "The football coach told me I wouldn't have to do all that stuff." It should come as no surprise then, that the athletes are generally not model cadets, although some do buy into the program after they arrive and more than one has risen to a position of authority within the corps.

The school needs to study its entire athletic program to ensure that it meets the needs of the athletes as well as filling seats at the college. The facilities and program are not conducive to high powered junior college athletics. College football players, for example, typically gain muscle and weight as a result of highly developed weight room workouts and increased calories in the form of training tables with large quantities of protein rich meals. The football players that I spoke to at the focus group are losing weight. This is a result of a high carb diet with insufficient calories and missed meals due to a rigid meal schedule that often finds them with leftovers or no food at all by the time they get out of practice.

The commuter program was implemented as a way to increase enrollment without a lot of thought as to how it would affect the Corps of Cadets. While there may be a way to effectively implement a commuter program at a military college, the program is going to take a great deal of time and study to get right. It would be worth the College's time to do that.

As is true in the Academy, people have been placed in positions of authority at the college who do not have the experience or training to do their job. The Dean of the College is very bright, understands the inner workings of the college better than anyone on campus, has a passion for

the mission and is completely underqualified to be the Chief Academic Officer at a \$50,000 per year academic institution. She has never taught at the college level and holds no administrative degrees or credentials.

The Dean's appointment as well as the Senior Director of Admission's appointment are the result of hiring practices that devalue the academic program of both the Academy and College. They were both promoted to the positions they currently hold from junior level positions in the college. In the case of admissions, she was virtually the last woman standing when her boss left his position with no notice in the middle of the night. It's hard to imagine on the military side of the school, a junior TAC being promoted to the Commandant's position.

The result is a fractured program in the college that needs to be fixed.

Development

The development office was rated 0-5 on the following ten key performance indicators. A 0 reflects no evidence of the performance indicator and 5 reflects an overwhelming strength. The Ratings and reasons for those ratings are below:

1. The school has a work plan including clearly defined job descriptions and documented role responsibilities for all members of the office?

Score: 4

The development office is well managed and has a work plan that outlines the development goals for the year and the path to achieve the goal. The Vice President of Advancement has worked with a steadily shrinking staff to ensure that all of the work necessary to achieve the goals is being completed.

2. The development program is staffed and funded to meet fundraising expectations?

Score: 2

The development office is grossly understaffed for the size of the goal that they consistently are given. The Staff with a goal of annual goal this should should at a minimum include:

- The Vice President for Development
- A Major Gift Officer pursuing gifts above \$25,000 and planned gifts
- An Annual Fund Director ensuring that the Forge Fund reaches goal and feeding prospects to the Vice President and Major Gifts Officer
- Alumni Director who coordinates all alumni outreach and plans alumni and executes alumni events.
- A Development Assistant who takes care of gift entry, stewardship and the donor management data base
- A Development Assistant who functions as administrative assistant for the Vice President and Major Gifts Officer as well as providing assistance as needed to the Annual Fund Director and the Alumni Director.

Development is one of only two revenue streams to the school. As of this writing, the Forge Fund stands at 28% of goal. This is one example of literally being penny wise and pound foolish. Fully staffing the development office, given the management of the program will no doubt lead to increases in attainment.

- 3. Development communications are sufficiently financed to meet the fundraising expectations and consistent with the school's message and branding?**

Score: 3

Development Communications are improving. Collateral materials are being produced that will support the school's development efforts

- 4. An identified staff member, with involvement in planning the school calendar, controls all fundraising activities, including other internal or external campaigns?**

Score 4

The development office would like to coordinate all fundraising activities, but their efforts are not always successful. Athletics is one area where the solicitation of gifts is not always well coordinated. The Vice President should be firmly in charge of all development efforts

- 5. The office has a plan for moving donors through the gift pipeline towards greater support, while simultaneously tracking and replacing those who move to a new level?**

Score: 2

In a mature development operation, the Annual fund manager is able to analyze giving data as well as do prospect research on a broad range of donors. Because current staffing does not provide the time necessary for that to happen, it is difficult to tailor annual fund solicitations for anyone other than the major gift prospects.

- 6. Does the development work plan**
- **focus on increasing total donors?**
 - **use gift bands (\$1-\$100, \$101-\$250, etc.) as a metric to broaden the base of the donor pyramid?**
 - **provide incentive to find lost alumni?**
 - **ensure appropriate attention to acquiring new donors**

While gift bands exist for the Forge Fund, staffing restrictions preclude some best practices from being put into place, including working to move donors from one level to the next and systematically increasing the donor pool.

Score: 3

- 7. Does the office provide programs and events that engage and cultivate alumni, parents/grandparents, corporate donors and philanthropic organizations?**

Score: 3

The office does provide programs and events to engage parents and alumni. It may be possible to use existing school events, such as parades or concerts, to target donors from the community.

8. Does the office have accurate information (demographics, employment and interests) on school alumni, donors and prospects to effectively target and engage them?

Score: 4

The School uses eTapestry for prospect management. This is a sophisticated program. In order to get the most out of the investment in this tool, it is necessary for a staff member to have responsibility for management of the database. Current staffing does not allow that to happen.

9. Are the Board members knowledgeable about the fundraising process and the roles in the organization?

Score: 2

One of the Board's primary functions is to ensure the financial viability of the school. While some on the Board understand that role and in addition to giving generously, assist in identifying or cultivating donor prospects for the school, most do not.

10. Is there a direct communication and relationship between enrollment, marketing, academic and other administration support functions to assist in the fundraising needs and efforts?

Score: 4

The Vice President for Development works closely with the marketing and communications team to ensure consistent messaging across platforms and on collateral materials.

Total Score: 31

The development office has a heavy lift on an annual basis. Two things make this possible. The first is the strong management and major gift cultivation by the Vice President for Development. The second is the strong relationship between the Vice President and the President. The President understands his role in development and he looks to the Vice President to set the table for solicitation of major gifts.

The problem is that without careful strategic planning, year after year the development office is simply plugging a hole in the bottom of the revenue bucket. As the Board begins to think strategically, part of the plan needs to include a comprehensive campaign that will enable the school to address infrastructure needs as well as fund such initiatives as financial aid and program development.

The Parent Experience

Parent surveys reflect a great deal of satisfaction with the program, particularly with the leadership changes that have recently taken place. (**Parent survey results can be found in Appendix B.**) There is support for the direction of the school and the renewed emphasis on discipline and accountability in the Corps. The parents in the focus groups expressed similar sentiments. They cited examples in the past of cadets not held to account for being disruptive in class or cutting class completely.

In the focus groups, more than one parent expressed frustration at the lack of opportunities for parent involvement except for fundraising events. They also expressed frustration at having to choose between going and watching their sons play an away game on Parents' Weekend or going to the Friday night parent event. Since they could not do both, they chose to support their sons. This is such an easy thing to fix. On a big weekend like Parents Weekend, no team should be playing away. Standard independent school best practice is to schedule games for all teams at home and staggered so that all athletes have the chance to play in front of a crowd.

A word of caution about all of the support. As pointed out in the enrollment section, the school has not kept pace in programs, facilities, and services with other small boarding schools. One example of this is the advertisement of tutoring services and academic support on the school's website. If you are asking parents to pay \$1250 a week to go to school, they have a reason to assume that is an all-inclusive price. Faculty members should be providing office hours during the day so that students can get extra instruction, if they need it, at no additional cost. To the faculty's credit, 60% of the faculty rated the accessibility of extra help a 4 or 5. Less than 13% rated this a 1 or 2.

Given that the faculty appears to be handling the majority of the extra help issues in house, it makes sense to remove the tutoring ads from the website. Most independent schools keep lists of qualified tutors for the rare case that the faculty member charged with teaching the student cannot meet the needs, for example in the event of extended absence. They then share the names with the parents on an as needed basis.

The Student Experience

The perception is that the college students choose to be at the school while the Academy students are sent there. There are lots of reasons that a boy might choose to attend VFMA and a parent may consent to send him. The school should be explicit about what those reasons might be. Of all the competition, nobody does this better than the Army and Navy Academy. Their website is worth a look (<https://armyandnavyacademy.org/>). They emphasize school first. Parent and student testimonials are weaved throughout the website and interesting articles about the advantages of boarding school, single sex education, and a military education are found on the admissions pages. The cost of the school is readily apparent.

The physical plant is impressive at first glance. Unfortunately, for many visitors the first glimpse of the Academy is through the back door. The Admissions office entrance is accessed by a service road that runs at the very back of the campus. Once inside, the buildings appear dated and poorly maintained. The barracks do not appear to be much changed for decades. The dining hall is not an inviting place to eat. The classrooms all have a metal grate covering the windows on their doors.

A new coat of paint is relatively inexpensive and can work wonders in updating the look of the space. Cadet labor, either volunteer or forced, can be put to good use. But the school needs to figure out a long-term plan for updating facilities. 21st Century Boarding Schools do not look like 20th century boarding schools.

Academy athletics is an issue. The inability to consistently field teams is going to cause students to leave. At the middle School level, the creative solution of finding a way for an eighth grader to play soccer in the local recreational league could be expanded to more students in more sports. This is also an area where a program designed to place high school students and high school post graduate students into Service Academies and other private military colleges could help the school. Those students tend to be athletically inclined and if the same effort is placed into bringing them to campus as is currently placed on recruiting junior college players, the Academy's stock is likely to rise.

The Academy and College are both primarily made up of students who live on campus. Yet there is very little for Cadets to do. Vermont Academy is a small boarding school in the middle of nowhere in Saxon's River, Vermont. Their website (<https://www.vermontacademy.org/page/student-life/residential-life>) provides the following overview of the weekend program:

So what happens on the weekends? In a word, plenty. In addition to our annual events like Winter Carnival and Casino Night, there are dances, concerts, theatrical productions, volleyball games and outdoor fires in our Nick Grout '03 Memorial Fire Pit. Off-campus activities can include hiking and camping trips, as well as athletic and cultural events, such as lacrosse games at Dartmouth College, or Blue Man Group in Boston. Trips to the mall and visits to Burlington can also be found on the weekend schedule. Most weekends include Saturday night at the movies and, during the winter, Sunday skiing and snowboarding at Stratton or Okemo mountains.

This is the range of activities that boarding school parents and students expect. On a recent visit to the campus I came across the schedule of activities for October. They consisted of a bus to the King of Prussia Mall on each Saturday. The Cadets expressed frustration with the lack of activities available to them, particularly on closed weekends when they cannot leave the campus. One cadet talked about looking at old yearbooks and seeing dances, clubs and activities that are no longer part of the program. The Corps is supposed to be Cadet led. The Academy should consider having Cadets organize clubs and activities, both on and off campus, in which their peers could, with adult supervision, participate.

A school is only as strong as its faculty. As teacher vacancies occur, by requiring teaching credentials, the school is searching for candidates from the same sources used by the public schools. This is almost certain to provide candidates who are neither committed to the military model of education or likely to stay at the school once a higher paying public school opening occurs. The result is that the quality of the faculty is uneven at best. A public school mentality permeates. Faculty members are hard to find on campus outside of school hours.

Because there is an expectation that independent school teachers will contribute to the life of the school outside of the classroom as coaches and club advisors, the school should recruit faculty the way that independent schools recruit. Rather than being concerned with a teaching certification, independent schools seek graduates from strong colleges and universities with degrees in the subject areas of need. Because of Valley Forge's unique place in the market, it might also actively recruit veterans who may be interested in teaching and coaching but are not interested in pursuing a teaching credential. These people would be more likely to understand and support the military model outside the classroom.

By the same token, the school must demonstrate a commitment to the faculty. The Board must develop and adhere to a plan to bring the faculty salaries and benefits to a level that will enable them to recruit for an increasingly short supply of teachers. Many small boarding schools house a majority of their faculties on campus. This helps to build community. One possibility is to renovate at least a portion of the currently closed dormitory and convert it into faculty apartments.

