



"Tampon Tampering" by Brynne Barnard-Bahn

## EDITORIAL: Make menstrual products free and easily accessible!

Whether you've forgotten your sanitary pads at home, your locker stash of tampons has run out or you've simply been caught off-guard by your body's timing, you may be one of the many menstruating Country Day students who have had a day when they've needed access to menstrual products.

Senior Liz Cook is one of these students. On a recent day when she needed these supplies, she asked friends for help—her typical plan for incidents like these.

"I walk around until I find someone who has them," she said. If that doesn't pan out, she will check with Head of Physical Education Michelle Myers or another female teacher.

The one place Cook didn't look? The menstrual product dispenser in the women's bathroom.

"I knew it wasn't going to have anything in it," she said. "It's pretty unreliable."

While this machine says it provides pads and tampons for a quarter, it has disappointed many students who end up losing their quarters.

Unfortunately, this is not a new problem.

"I don't know that it's ever been stocked," Head of Maintenance Jay Holman said.

Instead, students can visit

Head of Physical Education Michelle Myers, or other faculty members on campus, for menstrual supplies, Holman said.

The totality of the circumstances, however, reveals that this is not a workable solution.

First, it relies entirely on students feeling comfortable asking teachers for menstrual supplies.

Students who don't know their teachers well, don't want to discuss menstrual products with others or simply can't find a teacher and are left without options under this plan.

"I feel comfortable with it, but I can definitely tell why some people wouldn't," Cook said. "Also, I'm more inclined to talk to someone my own age — it's a very stigmatized, taboo subject, which it shouldn't be, but it is."

Even if someone is able to ask Myers, there is little way for them to know that this is an option. There are no signs in the student restrooms alerting students to visit female teachers. The only way to learn about this option is through word-of-mouth.

In fact, it's only meant to be a last resort. Myers only holds onto "a small supply of pads and tampons" if the bathroom dispenser is broken.

Other teachers, such as High School Dean of Student Life Patricia Jacobsen, also have supplies in their rooms. However,

Jacobsen realizes the system is faulty.

"It's not like we get a notification on our phones saying, 'hey, by the way, today you're going to start your period,'" Jacobsen said. "Girls shouldn't have to go to the bathroom, realize what's going and then have to go look around for something. By then, the damage is already done."

Not only is this not an effective plan, it's also not what other high schools do.

All California public schools have far more thorough offerings than Country Day in this area.

California's Menstrual Equity for All Act of 2021 requires public schools serving middle or high school students to "stock the school's restrooms with an adequate supply of free menstrual products."

By law, public schools in California have to stock all women's restrooms and at least one men's restroom and keep them stocked at all times starting this school year, according to the legislation approved by Gov. Gavin Newsom on Oct. 8, 2021.

Country Day, in comparison, does not have a menstrual product dispenser in any men's restroom on campus. The dispensers in the women's student restroom are not stocked with menstrual products, and there

are no machines in the faculty restrooms. There's not even a defined plan to supply students.

Quite simply, we can do better than this. If masks and hand sanitizer can be provided at no cost to students in every single classroom, then the same should be done for menstrual supplies.

These supplies are as essential a health product as masks or other COVID-19 personal protective equipment and provide substantial benefit.

Research shows that students "lacking access to menstrual products experience higher rates of absences and are less able to focus and engage in the classroom," according to the Menstrual Equality Act of 2021.

According to a study published in *Obstetrics and Gynecology* in February 2019, period supplies are a "basic necessity" that many cannot access, often due to the cost barrier.

After supplying these vital products, the California bill notes that schools in New York saw a marked increase in attendance after menstrual supplies were made available.

These benefits can also be bought at a minimal cost.

A simple Amazon search reveals that period products can be bought in bulk for as low as \$0.04 per unit, with packs of 162 sanitary pads available for \$7.99.

If this cost cannot be absorbed, then stocking the vending machine would lead to a measurable profit per unit — the machine would pay for itself and more.

However, there are simple steps that can be taken to make menstrual products accessible for all students.

The dispenser in the women's restroom should be kept regularly stocked and in working condition. A similar dispenser should be considered for the men's restroom as well.

When these machines run out, a dedicated plan should be set in place to restock them.

"That would be good that the school establishes some sort of a tree so we know where to go so that the students know," Myers said.

For example, supplies could be left in a centralized location like the front office or in a gender-neutral restroom.

Regardless of the details, students and faculty should both be kept aware of the plan in order to maintain transparency, equity and inclusion. Everyone should have access to menstrual supplies.

By just placing a box of supplies in each restroom for anyone to use, all students would be able to access an important product, improving students' lives.