



PROGRAM SUMMARY

2015 PCW Orientation

National Presbyterian School

Wednesday, September 24, 2014

OPENING REMARKS

The Parents Council of Washington (PCW) hosted its annual Orientation Program for Representatives and Parent Association Presidents of its member schools on Wednesday, September 24, 2014 at the National Presbyterian School (NPS). Board Member Lynn Maloney opened the program by welcoming attendees and introducing her co-chair, Board Member Julie Ray as well as the Parent Association President of NPS, Molly Evans. Ms. Evans welcomed attendees in place of Head of School, Mr. James T. Neill.

Ms. Maloney also thanked Board Member and NPS parent Jennifer Heimert for her help with the program and introduced Joan Levy, President of the Board of PCW.

Ms. Levy welcomed participants and remarked on the crucial role that parent association presidents and PCW representatives play in the Parents Council mission of fostering a closer communication among parents, students and independent schools. She noted that it was an honor and privilege to be a part of the PCW as it celebrates its 50th anniversary this year and highlighted the upcoming special anniversary event open to the general public on October 7 at the Holton-Arms School as a memorable evening planned with a reception of food prepared by chefs and presentation featuring Susan Cain, *New York Times* bestselling author of the book *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking*. It was shared that Ms. Cain's TED Talk has been

viewed over 9 million times and that several member schools use her book as a resource and required reading for faculty.

Ms. Levy also mentioned the anniversary project of examining and documenting the organization's 50 years of history since its foundation by Jean Wallace Douglas in 1964 led by past PCW Presidents, Betsy Mandel and Elizabeth Tonner. PCW has remained true to Mrs. Douglas' vision of providing an organization that gives independent school parents a forum with opportunities to learn and interact on education and social issues. Having started with 19 member schools under her tenure, the organization has grown to include more than 50 member schools today. Ms. Mandel and Ms. Tonner have worked tirelessly to interview former Presidents and Members of the PCW Board to collect information about the PCW through its 50 years. Ms. Levy thanked them both for their hard work and for preparing a script that is being made into a documentary video with the aid of Board Member Liana Montero. Ms. Levy then introduced the past PCW Presidents in attendance as Ms. Jeanne Richards (1977-1979), Ms. Mary Francis Koltas (1986-1988), Ms. Peggy Stewart (1976-1977), Ms. Elizabeth Tonner (2007-2009), Ms. Betsy Mandel (2009-2010) and former Board Member Mary Ismay.

ORIENTATION

Ms. Maloney began the orientation by revealing this year's PCW theme of "Re-thinking Success" and announcing that the programs offered throughout the school year all focus on a renewed understanding of success as a parent or student. She provided an overview of the PCW Board further explaining that representatives would receive monthly checklists from their Board liaison with information to share with their school communities. After a brief introduction of each Board member and Administrative Assistant Jane Caldeira, Ms. Maloney emphasized that representatives can reach out to Board members for anything related to PCW and that the Board enjoys hearing from everyone.

Ms. Maloney took the time to then review the materials within the Orientation packets and discuss the important role representatives play as the communication link between the PCW and school communities to share event information. The Program Schedule with event details and the Step-by-step Guide to Being an Effective PCW School Representative are the key documents for representatives to use as reference tools this year. The three basic components to being an effective PCW Representative include:

1. Communicate

Determine the best way to communicate to your schools to inform the community about PCW events whether through newsletters, list servs, electronic and non-electronic bulletin boards, home room or weekly distributions. PCW Representatives should also communicate their school events to PCW.

2. Attend

There are four programs each year that PCW Representatives, Parent Association Presidents and member school parents are invited to – Fall Speaker, Parent Speak, Best Practices and Spring Forum. Representatives and PA Presidents are invited to attend the Fall Orientation and outgoing/incoming PA Presidents are invited to attend the Spring PA Presidents Forum.

3. Follow-Up

PCW Representatives should share PCW program information with their school communities for those who were unable to attend. Program summaries are available on the PCW website.

Online presence:

In addition, the PCW website offers basic information from archived summaries to membership forms and lists of resources. The PCW Facebook page contains a variety of dynamic and current articles, links and blogs on parenting issues. The PCW Listserv available by invitation-only is another way to stay informed on important events.

Other materials in the packets included a PCW brochure, a summary on the benefits of PCW membership and a flyer for our Fall Speaker Series. Copies of all of these may be requested.

ORIENTATION Q&A

Q: Are summaries provided to PCW Representatives for distribution with program flyers or dates to advertise an event?

A: Often there is a summary submitted, but in some cases it is up to the representative to determine what type of summary is most effective for the school.

Q: How many middle school students are invited to the Middle School Student Leader Breakfast?

A: Two 7th grade students per member school. Most schools send a girl and a boy if co-ed.

Q: Can member schools communicate their events to the public through the PCW?

A: Yes. Member schools can submit Open House dates or other events and the PCW will mark them on the main calendar. There is also a PCW listserv program where schools can communicate events.

Q: Can PCW Representatives share the Fall Speaker program on Facebook?

A: Absolutely! We encourage everyone to “share” to reach a broader audience vs. “liking.”

KEYNOTE PRESENTATION

Following a short break, Ms. Maloney returned to introduce Dr. Patricia Lyons, Ethics and Religion teacher and Director of Service Learning K-12 at the St. Stephen’s and St. Agnes School as the keynote speaker of the topic, **“The Soul of Success.”** Dr. Lyons is also author of *The Soul of Adolescence*.

Dr. Lyons thanked the PCW for inviting her to present and noted that she highly values the organization. She felt that PCW is responsive to presenting brave and hard topics whether widely popular or not, asks questions and gathers information. In discussing “The Soul of Success,” Dr. Lyons encouraged attendees to not just represent, but to agitate and to ask questions, questions that might not be raised by schools. An engaged parent population shares moral visions for children and how they learn. She admitted that the broad topic of success is a complicated theme. Success is powerful and can be a force for creativity or for danger. Much like a knife can be a scalpel performing miracles in the hands of a surgeon or a weapon in the hands of a criminal. There are many traditions of success and visions of success and she hoped that attendees would have a renewed vision of their roles within their families by the end of the presentation.

She stated that according to the CDC, upper middle class teenagers are most at risk than any other socio-economic grouping for issues involving eating disorders, suicidal thoughts and depression. Parents in this society and culture often also face many anxieties. Dr. Lyons shared the results of a study where a parent tracked stress levels throughout the day at an amusement park through a special watch. The most stress on

the parent occurred at the beginning of the day trying to get everyone out the door and on their way as opposed to riding complex roller coasters or other rides. Another example for students came from a photography flyer for senior pictures. The sample picture showed the caption “Just in case you turn out to be famous.” As if teenagers don’t have enough pressures with the college process, surviving the recession or living through divorce, this example confirms that this picture will last forever, that you may need it in the future, that it becomes part of your resume, that it is very important to get done. Companies today are playing on children’s fears.

While interviewing students from a variety of different backgrounds across the country (such as students from a homeless shelter or from different cities, gays, Native Americans on a reserve and those within the Mormon culture) for her book, *The Soul of Adolescence*, Dr. Lyons asked them to tell her things true about them and about their world and recorded some of the following responses:

True about you:

Wanting more-never satisfied
 Not ready to got to college
 Always have to be vigilant
 Afraid to fail
 Always tired
 Possessions turn into obsessions
 Need constant reassurance
 Compare self to others all of the time

True about world:

Can never be certain about anything
 Doing the right thing is unrewarded
 I am the only person I can trust
 Only bad things in news
 Peace not possible
 World holds no love
 Nice guys finish last
 Everything is a competition

These statements represent the same anxieties of most teenagers. In upper middle class areas, Dr. Lyons noted there is a constant striving among many that impacts the anxieties that teens have. Many are on a track that no one has questioned and they simply cannot get off. She mentioned the book, *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite ad the Way to a Meaningful Life* by William Deresiewicz which argues that our most elite universities are producing compliant, obedient, uncreative people who are straight-jacketed into a path. That these types of students are morally confused and fearful. The article “*Overprotected Kid*” in *The Atlantic* (March 19, 2014) and the ongoing debate on what college should be are all part of society’s trend of looking at whether we are raising children in a much too narrow way. Dr. Lyons

stressed that the discussion of protection, limiting creativity, the benefits of freedom to fail and recognizing vulnerabilities as not synonymous with fragility is well needed. This dialogue is present for younger children when discussing what the role of play is as compared to competition.

Dr. Lyons then expounded on different parenting styles. She used the illustration from *The Wizard of Oz* marking how some of us are all following a path clueless, but all in it together much as Dorothy and her companions on the yellow brick road to the Emerald City. The destination is pre-ordained; if we stay on track there will be rewards. The illustration of a GPS shows the system as a solution; the answer to everything we are afraid of as parents-your child will never get lost. However with this parenting style creativity is punished if we fall off track; creating, changing and adapting does not occur when following a GPS, only listening and obeying skills are used as step-by-step directions are given and controlling the outcome. You may arrive on time and successfully, but your skills worsened rather than improving. Success is achieved at the cost of every aspect of humanity, patience and community. Another style was illustrated by a compass that you must learn to use and have skills to understand where you are in order to read it. It tells the direction, but not the road to navigate. A scene from *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* of Luke Skywalker carrying his teacher Yoda on his back also points to the same style. The parent provides a general direction and the child must find his or her way. Failure happens, but the teacher is always with you and behind you. It's rough following someone around, but this parenting style means parents feel it's the only way the child can grow, be stronger and more creative. It's important to keep advocating for our children, never remaining passive. Show your children your feelings about things; being a spectator is not enough. There is a difference between giving directions and give direction. Give direction is at the heart of the metabolism of family. What kind of metabolisms are you creating? Fear not or fear? Asking things from your child that you could not do at that age?

One key example of following down a path projected by parents and not established as the child's own came from a story Dr. Lyons shared with the audience about a young woman who seemed to have it all-excellent upbringing, educated, succeeded in everything she was asked to succeed in-but who went along with the plans her parents had set up for her. She was in the process of divorcing her husband of 6 months at the age of 24. Instead of having the courage and the strength to describe her feelings of not wanting to get married because her parents never showed her how to, she did not want to disappoint them and followed through on the wedding. We all want our children to be happy and it is important to maintain communication with them, being generous of

our time and eating at least three meals per week together as a family. This type of unselfish parenting helps children grow successfully.

As part of her handout listing many resources available to parents, Dr. Lyons passed around an infographic from Harvard's Making Caring Common Project (<http://sites.gse.harvard.edu/making-caring-common>). It consists of interviews of moral lives showing how we respond to success and failure. Dr. Lyons indicated that the Harvard project is one of the largest of its kind to survey parents and children and can be used as a resource for parents to help in raising caring children.

Other websites highlighted in the packet included:

- www.soulpancake.com
- www.g-dcast.com
- www.buildingfaith.org
- www.vibrantfaith.org
- www.askbigquestions.com

Before concluding, Dr. Lyons also suggested parents read Blessings of a Skinned Knee and Blessings of a B-Minus by Dr. Wendy Mogul. Dr. Mogul's "Overparenting Anonymous" checklist is included in the handout. Copies of the handout can be requested and Dr. Lyons' presentation was also recorded. Dr. Lyons can also be reached by e-mail via the St. Stephen's and St. Agnes School website.

PRESENTATION Q&A

Q: When caught in an anxious environment, how can we instill a sense of calm in our children when society factors make them worry?

A: Dr. Lyons stressed the importance of taking a moment to breathe first and foremost, parent and child. This calms the flight or fight response and allows the process of being mindful to begin. She added that you should wait or ask yourself "why am I talking" in order for you and your child to figure out what is important.

As a side note about anxiety, anxiety while growing up has been around for many years. Dr. Lyons remarked that St. Augustine wrote around 1600 years ago "I became a mystery to myself" when he was in his teen years.

Q: Have you considered doing a TED talk or something similar in order to broadcast your talks more widely?

A: Dr. Lyons indicated that she had recorded the presentation and would make it available. She also said that there were many inspirational speakers and teachers available to tap into to and suggested that schools find someone in their community to speak to them about these topics. She added as a resource, Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen, as another spiritual guide who would make a great presenter.

CONCLUSION

Ms. Maloney concluded the program by thanking Dr. Lyons for a well-received speech on a serious topic punctuated with lots of humor and also thanked everyone for attending.

AGENDA

8:30-9:00 **Light Breakfast and Networking**

9:00-10:00 **Orientation**

- Welcome from James T. Neill, Head, *National Presbyterian School*
- Remarks from Joan Levy, *PCW President*
- Introduction of PCW Board
- Review of PCW Program Year and Roles and Responsibilities of PCW Representatives

10:00-10:20 **Short Break for Information Sharing and Refreshments**

10:20-11:20 **Remarks – “The Soul of Success”**

- Dr. Patricia Lyons, Teacher, Author, Director of Service Learning, *St. Stephen’s and St. Agnes School*

11:20-11:30 **Wrap-Up**