



PROGRAM SUMMARY

2013 Parent Speak

Holton-Arms School

Thursday, November 14, 2013

The Parents Council of Washington (PCW) hosted its first Parent Speak program for the parent communities of its member schools on Thursday, November 14, 2013 at the Holton-Arms School. Vice President and Board Member Fran Barnes opened the program by welcoming attendees and highlighting the forum and agenda. She encouraged them to listen, share and learn throughout this new event where a variety of topics will be selected for discussion by the participants and introduced former PCW Board Member Mary Cohen as the moderator. Ms. Barnes thanked the Holton-Arms School for generously hosting PCW programs over the years and also thanked the PCW Holton-Arms School Representatives, Ms. Lisa Williams and Ms. Liza Fues for their assistance. She then introduced the Holton-Arms Head of School, Ms. Susanna Jones. Ms. Jones further welcomed attendees and spoke of the valuable insights and rewards everyone will gain from the opportunity to talk to each other in this program setting.

Ms. Barnes began by explaining how the PCW organizes two separate breakfasts each year for two 11th and 12th grade high school students and two 7th grade middle school students from each member school to offer a platform for confidential, positive discussions on issues important to them. The students are selected by their schools. Ms. Barnes provided an overview of the High School Student Leader Breakfast that was held at the Georgetown Preparatory School last February. A confidential summary is prepared for the Dean of Students to further discuss and address the findings at a luncheon hosted by the PCW in April. A few of the topics chosen for discussion by the high school students were:

- Time management, stress and lack of sleep
- Academic honesty and integrity
- General risky behavior
- Diversity
- Technology

Board Member Elizabeth Yeonas provided an overview of the Middle School Student Leader Breakfast that was held at the Potomac School last March while the school administrators who accompanied the students gathered in a separate room to also discuss pertinent issues together. A few of the topics chosen and addressed between the middle school students included:

- Friendship and peer pressure
- Stereotyping and inclusion
- Adult expectations
- Trust and confidentiality
- Time management, stress and technology

The goal for Parent Speak this year is to offer the same type of discussion format to parents and bring them together to weigh in on issues such as child development, technology or healthy relationships. Moderator Mary Cohen opened the forum by surveying how many parents were present with high school, middle school or lower school children. Each grade division was highly represented. Ms. Cohen continued that one of the greatest challenges of parenting is that no right way to parent exists. When faced with any issue, there is sometimes only a split second to respond accordingly and parents are not always equipped with many options, which is why it is important to talk to each other to collect information and share solutions about how other parents respond to the many challenges. She then led a brainstorming session to come up with a variety of topics parents are concerned about and eager for more information. Some of the ideas presented included:

- Behavior management and consequences
- Relationships among parents
- Meeting children from other schools
- Manners
- Homework and stress for teens
- Self-esteem and academic achievements
- Age appropriate social media
- Parents present at parties with alcohol
- Sex and the internet

- Strategies to balance and support growing independencies
- Time management
- Conflicts between parents and child
- Effective communication between parents and child
- Dealing with cliques
- Peers and strangers

Four condensed categories were further created to use as a guideline for discussion:

1. Self-esteem and academic achievement
2. Stress, time management and homework
3. Social media/online time
4. Establishing relationships: communicating with and supporting children

1. Self-esteem and academic achievement:

In response to Ms. Cohen’s question of “what are effective ways to talk to your child to make them feel better about themselves,” parents shared strategies of complimenting hard work, recognizing the process and not the outcome, not placing a focus on how a test went but rather on how the whole day was, talking about external accomplishments, catching them doing something nice and rewarding accordingly and working with a child to set-up steps or a plan to succeed. A good balance of expectations and ownership is key for self-esteem. Minimum expectations should be met regarding school, family, friends and faith. A few comments were brought up that parents are talking about grades too much and that Bs should be viewed more as good grades. In some cases, students are scared to tell parents they received a B. Expectations are high to bring home As. Many parents felt that if the subject is challenging, a B is great. This approach takes the stress off of the grades. However, it’s not as acceptable if the student receives Bs when they are capable of As. As a parent, a balance is needed to figure out the child’s potential. The real challenge is that it’s important to reach potential, but children need to achieve that on their own. One parent does not talk about grades, however the child knows that Cs are not acceptable. We need to understand and know our children and provide them with the right tools to work with academically.

Other conversations centered around the importance of not emphasizing grades, but to tell children to focus on trying hard and doing the best work possible. A parent mentioned that sharing stories that show how we struggled when we were their age can be helpful. Sometimes children have the impression that their parents are perfect and that they are not able to meet the standards they feel are in place. Another idea

suggested was to ask children what they feel is achievable and to develop a plan for them to take ownership of themselves and their work. Asking questions and letting children drive the project all work towards ownership such as asking them if they want to be an A or B student and if they are willing to slow down and not rush through their work if they want an A. One parent would rather have children happy with grades they are comfortable with-not necessarily As, be able to advocate for themselves and know right from wrong.

One parenting challenge discussed was when a child feels he/she has done everything possible to achieve an A when they could have done more. The question is how do parents get passion rolling? One suggestion was to nurture passions outside of school, being supportive of what interests your child and making them feel good about who they are. Parents agreed that they do need to help manage and balance their children's lives whether in middle school or high school. Every day is different with activities and dismissals and parents need to help children figure out how to make everything work. Another challenge presented was how to manage the different dynamics within the family where it's acceptable that one child receive Bs, but not the other. How do you bolster self-esteem in that one child? Emphasizing learning as more important over grades was one strategy discussed. Most agreed that if learning is taking place consistently, grades will follow.

2. Stress, time management and homework

Ms. Cohen asked the group if they felt their children had too much homework. Very few parents felt their children had too much homework and of those who felt did had children in high school. She raised the issue that some children put stress on themselves and some are too laid back causing stress for their parents.

Some felt that their children multitask while doing homework and that they should be encouraging them to understand the difference between completing it too quickly or try to perfect it taking too long. Most parents find it difficult to find a middle ground between letting the child get the work done the way the teacher wants it done vs. focusing on the details, taking longer and getting enough sleep in the process. Someone shared that parents communicating with teachers or children communicating directly with teachers is essential to make sure that teacher/parent and teacher/student expectations are the same in regards to homework or projects. Children are more likely to listen to the teacher as parents may push harder than the teacher. The importance of talking to the teacher and allowing the system to work was stressed; a partnership with the teacher should be the goal. Discussions with the teachers can solve a multitude of

problems and help a family reach a turning point such as when a teacher might work with the child to overcome an issue with homework or study/organizational skills. Feedback from and to teachers is key as is talking to your child about the learning process and learning independently from parents about time and stress management.

Ms. Cohen asked what role parents should have in time management. With five AP classes, numerous sports and other activities, we as parents are heavily involved with our children's schedules. Children want to do everything, so how do we teach them to manage all that they sign up to do? Again, comments included involving the teacher and letting them do their job as well as letting the child meet any expectations on his/her own and enabling them to be their own advocate. Ms. Cohen also mentioned that this is important for when children graduate from high school. They need to be able to successfully stand on their own feet and it is our job to provide them with the right skills and the opportunity to use those skills to get there.

3. Social media/online time

In response to Ms. Cohen's questions, a fair amount of parents indicated that their children had cell phones and that they monitor both their time online as well as social media outlets such as Facebook. Some threaten, but don't actually check. A few have time limits on phones. Ms. Cohen continued by stating that the world is different today. Texting is the way children communicate now and this can pose challenges with the speed and lack of person-to-person conversations. Parents felt that children are not learning how to talk to others because they are on their phones so much and it is important for them to have conversations and delayed gratification. She asked for strategies that have helped children navigate this process.

A parent shared that she uses Common Sense Media and monitors text messages by receiving them on her phone. If her children want privacy, she has suggested they make phone calls instead. Most agreed that it can be hard to enforce no or less texting when parents themselves text often. Another suggestion was to take phones away during an event and enforcing a no texting, no pictures and no filming rule to keep privacy. Children today do not always participate at a school dance for fear of being recorded or filmed then finding it posted online. Most do prefer structure even when they are pushing back. In one situation, a parent shared that when asked to place phones in a basket at a party, the children mentioned they had a lot of fun without their phones. Parents should demand to have phone passwords. Children cannot get a phone without

parental assistance, therefore parents have the right to know what's going on with that phone, what they and their friends are doing.

Ms. Cohen added that giving children an excuse to get out of an awkward situation such as “why didn't you text me back” by allowing them to use parents as the “bad guys.” Establishing a contract and set of rules with time and usage of devices/programs can also be helpful. Parents must enforce expectations at an early age and be responsible by setting examples and working on limiting or overcoming their own distractions as our children look to us for model behavior. For some of the parents, not allowing their children to have a phone has saved them a lot of stress and helped them avoid a lot of drama.

Ms. Cohen raised another question as to whether parents talk to other parents if they see something on Facebook. One parent had this experience and went directly to the school administration. It was a teaching moment for the school to address the students. Many felt it is important to use resources and talk to one another. Another suggestion was to reach out to the school counselor. Getting the assistance needed is the ultimate goal for the student and it is equally important that they have someone they can talk to.

4. Establishing relationships, communication and support

Between parents:

Ms. Cohen asked how we establish relationships with other parents. She mentioned that one of the PCW's strengths is to bring parents together. Getting involved in volunteer work, attending grade level social events and making yourself available to other parents were helpful ideas. Most agreed that it is important to be present and approachable. Parents tend to draw conclusions easily, but parents should feel comfortable to reach out and introduce themselves. We all learn from each other and getting to know other parents provides a safety net in the event you need to call on them. It's not even necessary to have everything in common to establish a relationship, the well being of the children can be the only common thread and parents do not need to be limited to being friends with the parents of their children's friends. Ms. Cohen also suggested approaching the Head of School for grade level gatherings to talk about what is going on.

Within the family:

By reinforcing at an early age that different families have different sets of rules, children will learn to respect that concept. If a child claims that everybody else is doing

something, ask them for three names and in most cases, they are not able to come up with anybody. Families should not place judgment on other families. Teach children to be positive and respectful of others and learn good values. Parents agreed that starting a dialog early and explaining to children that their family is making the best decisions they can and establishing certain rules will make things less challenging later on. Being consistent with communicating to children is key. One parent mentioned that we should allow our children to participate in conversations about values. Brainstorming and making decisions together helps create a “buy-in” for the children to follow. Children will tend to hold themselves to a higher standard. They will see what other families do and realize that they like the rules established in their own home better. Posting the rules somewhere in the house is also a good idea. Some options to consider were:

- Being honest
- Ok to disagree – parents mean well and have their best interests at heart
- Must provide phone passwords

It’s important to hold children accountable of standards and provide them with tools to cope not just within their own family, but also when with other friends and families. They actually like having rules in place and want to please their parents. Children should take risks and will, but if parents lay the foundation early enough, they will remember the rules even if they do not make the right decision. We need to let them explore, listen to themselves and be a sounding board for them.

As important it is to establish rules, consequences also need to be considered for bad behavior. Ms. Cohen asked the group how parents choose to deal with that. When children make mistakes, they grow. Instead of grounding, one option mentioned was to have the child stay close to home and discuss what happened with them. What counts is what will they do now after the incident? Talking to them about how this affected them and how will they make it right should be part of the process. They need to reflect, gain and learn something. Focus should not be so much on a punishment, but rather on the behavior. Children do not want to disappoint parents. Parents also need to understand why the behavior occurred in order to have more insight as to what to do with a consequence. Children need to buy-in to the consequence for it to be effective. Talking to children and letting them know how difficult it is for parents to impose a consequence. Involving them in the conversation and decision helps with the buy-in process. In addition, consequences should be harsher if incident happens again. Focusing on empathy also helps by telling children to put themselves in other’s shoes and to think twice about what they will do. In some cases, older siblings can help

reinforce that certain behavior is not acceptable with the family. Children can find siblings to be more persuasive and may listen to them too.

Within cliques:

Social issues and pressures can be intense. Risky behavior comes from peer pressure. A few ideas on how to cope were discussed including helping children define the different groups at school: popular, sports, etc. Most cliques form because it is the children who are labeling themselves in a particular way. General advice for children is to surround themselves with good people and to understand that those people may not be the same from year to year. Cliques change around as well, but having a few friends watching your back and on whom you can count on Giving them the confidence to feel good about themselves is key to feeling comfortable around cliques. Parents agreed that it is the parents' job to be sending the message to be kind and inclusive of others, especially for girls who tend to group together based on common interests. Equally important is for the school to also address the issue. Ms. Jones stressed research in an article that girls with one or two close friends are generally happier than girls who are a part of a larger group. Girls who have good friends feel better about themselves. It's important for children to have friends outside of school too and have the capability of creating friendships.

One parent shared the concern about middle school cliques and whether anything changes or worsens once in high school. Most agreed that children grow enough to shake up any cliques. Children need to decide whether they want to be a leader or a follower.

Ms. Cohen concluded the forum by thanking everyone for their participation and hoped that each person who attended picked up a tidbit to use with their families. She felt that everyone should feel proud of the job they are doing and also mentioned that people should take advantage of the programs, network and website offered by the PCW.

“COMMUNITY SERVICE: ITS PURPOSE, IMPACT AND PROGRAMS WITHIN OUR SCHOOLS”

Laura Friberg, PCW Board member and program co-chair, welcomed the participants and panelists and introduced Stone Ridge Head of School Catherine Ronan Karrels. Ms. Karrels spoke of the importance of the best practices topic and noted the important work of the Parents Council. Joan Levy, PCW President announced the celebration of PCW's 50th year and highlighted PCW's role and mission.

After welcoming remarks, panelists from Georgetown Day School, St. Stephen's and St. Agnes School and Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart presented on the role of community service within the Lower School, Middle School and Upper School classrooms of their respective schools.

LOWER SCHOOL PRESENTATION:

Ms. Elsa Newmyer – PreK-8 Service Learning Director, Georgetown Day School, referenced GDS' mission statement, which embraces diversity and social justice. As the first integrated school in DC, GDS has had a long-standing commitment to provide age-appropriate education, to include service learning, towards making the world a better place.

Ms. Newmyer spoke of the difference between service learning and community service by elaborating on the definition and goals and objectives of service learning.

Philosophy of Service Learning

For service-learning programs to be effective, actual service must feel important and meaningful, not make-work; it needs to resonate. It must be put into a meaningful context through preparation, to include research and discussion and reflection. In order to achieve this, schools need to make the connection between service, curriculum and personal experience. She provided an example of GDS' support for the Bikes for the World program, which includes students learning about the environmental impact of bikes as transportation, repair of bikes and use of bikes.

By comparison, community service as she defines it, while also meaningful, is generally a one-time experience that doesn't necessarily have the same context. It is a stand-alone activity.

Service Learning from a Developmental Perspective

Service learning can occur at the youngest ages. In Lower School, the goal is to provide students with experiences that help create awareness of other people, working toward empathy, connectedness with the outside world and ultimately altruism. In the early years, this awareness focuses on "helpers" (e.g. a crossing guard).

As children get older and more sophisticated, they are introduced to more complex issues. This exposure includes the introduction to cultures that differ from their own to help students develop a sense of where they fit in within the larger world community.

GDS high school service learning brings increased independence, leadership opportunities and a service graduation requirement. The activities are student-led, and the curriculum student-developed. Examples include working in the arts or music, tutoring, exploration of and support of advocacy for social issues.

For teachers, the integration of service learning into the curriculum can be explored in the summer. GDS also offers service-learning programs in the summer for students entering 9th grade. The Service Learning Institute is on the GDS web site.

Ms. Newmyer presented grade-by-grade examples of the GDS Lower School Service Model:

Pre-K: sandwich-making for Martha's Table

1st grade: acting as "buddies" and pen pals for early childhood program

2nd grade: C & O Canal project linking service to history, environmental science and poetry

3rd grade: participating in a "buddy" program with 3 and 4-year-olds at a bilingual pre-school, incorporating academic topic of integration, early service and language learning

4th grade: developing environmental awareness and stewardship through the grade's hosting of the school recycling program

5th grade: offering of full service learning opportunities for exploration of topics to include: food access, homelessness, and intellectual and physical disabilities. The program is seminar-based, with an advocacy component, and the students do research and give presentations.

Parent Support For Service Learning in Schools

Parents are an essential element of the service learning experience. Schools need them to help support service-learning programs! They can provide support for class events by organizing, chaperoning or providing transportation as age appropriate. They can provide elbow grease and contribute to in-class drives.

They can also participate with Parent Associations, which support service- learning events. Children should be involved in whatever support the parent is providing to school programs. An example of family support for a school organized service event was the family pie bake at Thanksgiving for the D.C. Central Kitchen.

Beyond school walls, parents should undertake family-based service projects and educate children about current events.

MIDDLE SCHOOL PRESENTATION:

Dr. Patricia Lyons, Service Learning Director, JK-12 at St. Stephen's St. Agnes School (SSSA) began her presentation "Beyond the Bake Sale: From Charity to Social Justice" with a quote:

"A world broken by systemic injustice is best transformed by learners with skills in systematic change."

She identified a "cool" thing of the day related to social consciousness, a book called *The Material World* showing photos of what families own, and a companion photo documentary book, *What the World Eats* (both published through Hungry Planet).

She also cited the largest longitudinal study of teenagers in books by Christian Smith, sociology professor at Notre Dame, on the spiritual formation of teenagers. It shows that the moral vision of parents is the single most important determining factor in their children's orientation towards others, which has to grow at home. Research also shows the effectiveness of parent communities that are linked around the same spiritual and moral values (best example: the Mormon faith).

Social Justice Education

Dr. Lyons noted the distinction between charity or "reactionary compassion" in the form of rapid response teams (e.g. holding a bake sale to raise money in response to a natural disaster) and social action toward a more systemic change toward problem solving, which is the goal of service learning.

Research shows that students do better in their academic subjects when service learning is incorporated into school curriculum because it gives a meaning to the material in the context of the "real" world. It gives a purpose to learning, and takes students off the

“treadmill” of academic achievement for achievement’s sake alone. Academic theory needs to be connected to real world experience.

Examples of this integration include using math ability to determine how much insulation is required to rebuild a house destroyed by a hurricane, or using language aptitude to communicate with a non-English speaking community. Service learning is saving our schools. Our youth – middle class teenagers – is in the highest risk group for all youth, according to Dr. Lyons.

The “Design Thinking” Approach

SSSA has developed a method for integrating service learning with academic skills called the design thinking approach. Under this approach, students first need to define the problem/need based on interviews with their potential audience using empathy. An example given of feedback that was insightful is that there is no value in collecting canned goods if recipients of the goods don’t have can openers. Next, they need to brainstorm and come up with a creative solution for the problem. Third, they need to develop a prototype to test the idea. Fourth, they refine and finally implement the idea, using their insights from the empathy stage.

In younger grades, the focus is on building awareness of what people in the outside world are doing for students, and in so doing, younger students also learn about gratitude. Dr. Lyons provided a suggestion for parents: have children write an ongoing weekly thank-you note.

Education + Service + Advocacy = Change

UPPER SCHOOL PRESENTATION:

In her opening comments, Ms. Lauren Brownlee, Director of Social Action, Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart, referenced the founder of the Society of the Sacred Heart, Madeleine Sophie Barat, to note “your example, even more than your words, will be an eloquent lesson to the world.” She outlined the goals and criteria of a Sacred Heart Education:

Personal and active faith

A deep respect for intellectual values

Social awareness which impels to action

The building of communities as a Christian value

Personal growth in an atmosphere of wise freedom

The Stone Ridge social action program is rooted in two of these five Sacred Heart goals: the building of community as a Christian value and social awareness, which includes analysis and reflection on whether society's values serve justice. They hope to engender a life-long commitment to service, awareness of a multicultural world and the need to be stewards of Earth's resources. The school is linked in a reciprocal manner with ministries of the poor.

Stone Ridge considers service learning central to the upper school experience. It includes elements of preparation, action and reflection and seeks to cultivate a cultural consciousness of social justice. Ms. Brownlee noted that social action programs foster connectedness, competence and confidence, as cited by author Dr. JoAnn Deak in *How Girls Thrive*.

Components of Stone Ridge Social Action Program

Stone Ridge dedicates two academic days per month for social action from September to November and February to April. Students also work with individual teachers who have social action or peace project experience. This program is an important part of the Stone Ridge experience. Social action teams are composed of one faculty teacher, a theology department liaison and two members. Preparation occurs in teams and includes videos and testimonials.

A social action day would include:

8 AM: meet for preparation and focus on one-aspect of a year-long theme;

9:30 AM: participate in direct service and advocacy (usually off-campus) in one of six major areas (elderly, disabilities, poverty and homelessness, human rights, childcare and education and the environment);

2:30 PM: engage in student-led reflection that reflects on the day's experience and identifies a "moral outrage"

Student involvement occurs through a Social Action Student Advisory Board and SALs (social action leaders). Grade 9 students are introduced to the six major areas of social action and are led by SALs who help develop and implement the curriculum. Grade 10

students are introduced to a sampling of partnerships at over 40 local agencies, in order to evaluate where they would “fit.” Grades 11-12 students select a particular partnership and work with that partnership throughout the year; students may also develop an independent project.

The program incorporates several leadership opportunities, including: reflection leaders who help students understand how their work is meaningful, SALs who implement curriculum, and the Social Action Student Advisory Board who generally support the program.

In summary, social action at Stone Ridge is rooted in the school mission, provides opportunities for crucible moments and is designed to enable transformation.

She finished with the Martin Luther King quote: “Everybody can be great because anybody can serve.”

Question and Answer Session:

Q: What kind of training or mentoring do your schools provide for parents?

A: Training for parents is more specific to the event, more in the nature of general explanation of the event to the wider community. General training occurs through parent associations during drives and service days. There is a huge amount of parent involvement on those days.

Q: What are the biggest barriers to implementing effective service learning?

A: Barriers include the lack of “buy in” from parents on the importance of service learning. Parents need to reflect what the school’s mission is at home in order to support it. Parents need to teach children what’s real in order to have an appreciation for the material world. Another obstacle can be teachers or administrators who are sometimes unwilling to change traditional learning models. We are all resistant to change.

Q: What do you think of service requirements for graduation?

A: Service, in whatever form, needs to include preparation, action and reflection in order for it to be effective.

Q: How do you integrate service into the earliest years?

A: Circle time is a good time to reflect on awareness of how the world is taking care of them and think about where to put gratefulness.