



PROGRAM SUMMARY

2015 Upper School Student Leader Breakfast

Georgetown Preparatory School

February 10, 2015

The Parents Council of Washington hosted its annual Student Leader Breakfast on Tuesday, February 10, 2015 at the Georgetown Preparatory School. Fifty-six students from the junior and senior classes of twenty-nine Parents Council member schools attended and participated in the event. Georgetown Preparatory School's Dean of Students, Mr. Chris Rodriguez, welcomed the students and stressed the empowering opportunity the leader breakfast offered them to openly discuss and exchange information or ideas to provide important feedback to their school communities. Parents Council Board member, Ms. Diana Holcomb, opened the program and introduced former Parents Council Board Member, Ms. Mary Cohen, as the moderator of the student discussions.

Seven topics were addressed during the large group session including:

1. Time Management and Stress
2. Honesty and Integrity
3. Recent Instances of Social Unrest
4. The Power of Schools Beyond School Borders
5. Risk-taking Behavior
6. Who Teens Confide In
7. The Power of School Censorship

The opening topic of **Time Management and Stress** uncovered that the majority of the students felt they managed a healthy balance of school, sports, extracurricular activities, college, commutes, friendship and family commitments, however they also

reported they were sleep deprived and would fall behind if they missed just one day of classes. In their opinion, schools provided some help to alleviate the stress, catch up on work and raise grades by implementing a variety of programs such as block schedules, two day rotations, study hall, tutorial systems and special periods set aside to visit teachers.

Discussions about **Honesty and Integrity** revealed that very few students view academic cheating as a widespread issue; instead cheating was described as isolated incidents and mainly centered on copying homework. Most students expressed a preference for an improved system of enforcement separating the severity of punishment from simply copying homework vs. cheating on an exam. In addition, although many of the students have witnessed cheating, they do not feel comfortable taking action against a student. To cut down on cheating or other rule breaking behavior, a few students shared that their schools offered options to disclose student names confidentially.

Recent Instances of Social Unrest included an overview of the numerous accounts of police shootings and sexual assaults in the news and feedback on whether schools provided opportunities for students to talk about these issues. Overall, more than half of the students agreed that schools provided meaningful opportunities to share conversations through school and student driven assemblies or forums where violence, police aggression, sexual harassment, sexual orientation, stereotypes, racism, religion and how weekend behavior affects a school's reputation were all addressed. Students highlighted the value of the student-led formats, which they felt encouraged ideas and instilled confidence to speak up. They also commented on feeling frustrated that schools limit and shut down suggestions or compromises presented by student governments. Being heard by the administration and hearing from peers were essential components students sought to find solutions for throughout the dialogues.

When asked to describe their feelings about **The Power of Schools Beyond School Borders**, the students strongly voiced that schools have the authority to discipline about events that take place on school property, however only a handful of students felt that schools should have the right to discipline in situations that occur off school property. In fact, many did not think schools should have official policies in place regarding issues outside of school borders unless illegal actions are involved. Instead they argued that the responsibility falls on parents. Students widely accepted the need to curtail illegal behavior and protect the reputation of the school and student body particularly the obligation to represent the school properly when wearing a school shirt

or participating in school related activities. Should a student compromise those obligations, schools should intervene and consequences should be served.

Voted as a popular topic to discuss, comments made about **Risk-taking Behavior** showed very few students felt any pressures to drink or knew someone using heroin or prescription drugs, however the vast majority admitted that many of their classmates do drink and smoke pot and that most parents turn a blind eye to weekend parties where risk-taking behavior is happening. A few knew someone who experienced alcohol poisoning and everyone noted that they would take the responsibility to seek help for someone in trouble. The students pointed out that more conversations through health classes at school would offer support and guidance on how to recognize the trouble signs of alcohol poisoning and the effects of drinking. Teaching moderation or drinking responsibly would send more powerful and effective messages in their opinion than simply using scare tactics and stressing abstinence.

In regards to **Who Teens Confide In**, an overwhelming amount of students turn to friends first when feeling the need to talk followed by school counselors/teachers and parents. Depending on the subject, many students stated that they have formed close relationships and connections with counselors and teachers over several years and would be comfortable openly confiding in them before reaching out to a parent.

The Power of School Censorship provided insight on students' frustration over the hold schools use in publications or free speech. When schools do not allow platforms of expression, students spoke of turning to social media instead resulting in punishment over comments shared. Overall, students want to draw upon their own opinions, have the ability to be heard and not just subjected to one-sided views from teachers.

Following a short break, four small groups were organized to freely discuss additional topics of choice. Some of the material selected included male/female relationships, socializing outside of school, diversity/LGBT, stress and sleep deprivation, dress and honor codes, stereotyping and pressures to conform, grades and getting into college and bullying.