



PROGRAM SUMMARY

2014 Upper School Student Leader Breakfast

Georgetown Prep

February 12, 2014

Executive Summary

The Parents Council of Washington hosted its annual Student Leader Breakfast on Wednesday, February 12, 2013 at the Georgetown Preparatory School. Fifty students from the junior and senior classes of twenty-five Parents Council of Washington member schools attended and participated in the event. Georgetown Preparatory Dean of Students, Mr. Chris Rodriguez, welcomed the students and thanked them for participating to learn from each other and exchange information to provide important feedback to their school communities about their thoughts and concerns. Parents Council President, Ms. Joan Levy, opened the program, explained the agenda and introduced former Parents Council Board Member, Ms. Mary Cohen, as moderator of the student discussions.

Seven topics were addressed during the large group session. The opening subject of **Time Management and Stress** uncovered that the majority of the students feel that they manage a daily balance between school, homework, sports, extracurricular activities, college applications, friends and family, however most also agree that they are not getting enough sleep and cannot miss one day of school. Overall, teachers are helpful if students require additional time, but occasionally they assign a heavy load of homework they believe will take less time to complete than actually does. When this occurs across multiple subjects on one night, it becomes stressful for students to finish everything.

The next topic involving **Honesty and Integrity** found that cheating predominantly and frequently centers on homework, specifically for AP classes, where answers can be looked up on-line. Many students want clearer rules in regards to the definition of cheating vs. helping peers. With today's growing technology, policies are outdated and easily misinterpreted or misunderstood; yet it offers useful tools and most would like to incorporate it effectively. Are Facebook chats about school work considered cheating? Students witness cheating, but most do not take action about it due to social consequences. In addition, while most schools have an honor code in place, students expressed that it is not always consistently followed. Repercussions and penalties are disproportionate. To curb cheating, effective solutions offered allowing student leaders to help students filter academic integrity instead of the decision to cheat by not supplying the answers, but by collaborating with them and steering them in the right direction.

The discussion of **School Reach** strongly showed students' views that schools have the right to discipline for events that happen on school property, but very few felt that schools have the authority over off-campus situations. In fact, most students do not think schools should have official policies regarding issues outside of the school realm, but argue that it is the parents' responsibility instead. Students did however agree that there is an obligation to curtail bad behavior and protect the reputation of the student body when wearing a school shirt or representing the school in other ways and that if the safety of a student is compromised, schools should intervene and serve consequences in both of those cases.

In regards to **Bullying and Cyber Bullying**, students find that most problems stem from indirect comments made on Twitter and Instagram with more school-to-school teasing rather than person-to-person bullying. Solutions included that it is best to ignore the comments, refrain from tagging pictures that raise questions about someone, be aware of where you are and what you are doing at all times.

The **Social Media** topic brought up the overwhelming fact that the majority of the students admitted that it would be very difficult to give up their phones. A number of students also shared that they have made comments via social media that they would not mention directly to someone, although most agree that with the ease of computer screenshots, it is best to confront the person and not leave a permanent electronic trail. However, the Yik-Yak app is gaining popularity for students to anonymously send messages. Suggestions to alleviate on-line problems included developing healthy relationships and gain more confidence to talk about feelings directly.

The subject of **Alcohol and Drugs** provided the insight that few students feel pressure to drink, but most students agree that many of their classmates drink and a few smoke pot. Prescription drugs and heroin are not a substance abuse factor. Drinking takes place on weekends for the most part where parents turn a blind eye to parties. An alarming amount of students know someone who has experienced alcohol poisoning and a comment was made about freshmen at one particular school that have had their stomachs pumped this year. Established relationships with parents and friends play a vital role in knowing when to intervene if someone is engaging in unsafe activities, yet the main issue about drugs and alcohol is the students' inability to recognize key side effects.

The last topic covered **Leadership Roles** where students highlighted that leadership and team players are valued at their schools with teachers and administrators viewing leaders as the "good" students who set the examples. Many agreed that more leadership opportunities and roles tend to exist in a smaller school setting.

Following a short break, four small groups were organized and presented with a series of additional topics to select from and discuss freely. School rivalries, ways to socialize outside of school, diversity and homosexuality, male/female dating relationships and stereotyping were of interest to the students. Another group also expanded the conversation to what they would change about their high school experience if they could and continued elaborating a bit more on the subject of school reach.