



E-BINDER

Parents Council of Washington presents

2016 BEST PRACTICES PROGRAM

Finding the Right Balance:

How Schools Encourage Students and Families to Discover and Maintain a Healthy Balance

Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart

Wednesday, February 3, 2016

8:30 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. – Light Breakfast

9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. – Program

How Do Our Schools:

- Define balance for students?
- Encourage students to recognize and live balanced lives?
- Address the concept of balance with students, faculty and parents?
- Support students with high levels of stress in need of assistance?

Dear PCW Friends:

Thanks to those who were able to attend our 2016 Best Practices Program entitled “Finding the Right Balance: How Schools Encourage Students and Families to Discover and Maintain a Healthy Balance.” Thank you also to Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart for hosting us and to panelists Dr. Elinor Scully, Head of The Langley School, Ms. Lauren Keller, Lower and Middle School Counselor at Bullis School, and Mr. Malcolm McCluskey, Assistant Head of Upper School at Stone Ridge. Each of our panelists shared valuable experience, insight, best practices and takeaways that can certainly help direct our children to live balanced lives during lower, middle and upper school and beyond.

This particular program stems from your direct response and feedback seeking more dialogue and follow-up on topics relevant to parent and school communities. Aside from the panelists and three schools highlighted at the Best Practices event, each Parents Council of Washington member school had the opportunity to submit its best practices on the topic as well. Materials collected within this e-binder showcase those chosen practices from participating member schools. Please use this document as a resource to prompt further discussions or explore questions in more depth in your schools and your families.

Also feel free to share the ideas contained within this e-binder with your Head of School, Dean of Students, Division Heads and parent community. Again, thank you for your support of the Parents Council of Washington.

Sincerely,

Susan Newell and Elaine Vining 2016 Best Practices Program Chairs

Speaker Biographies

LAUREN KELLER

Bullis School

Lauren Keller is in her second year as the Lower and Middle School Counselor at Bullis School in Potomac, Maryland. Lauren began her career in education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she earned her undergraduate degree. Lauren was selected as a Student Orientation Coordinator, welcoming hundreds of incoming freshman and their families to campus. This work helped Lauren realize her passion for advising and supporting students. Lauren felt it was important to work with students first in the classroom before transitioning to a role as school counselor. She was fortunate to work as a fifth and sixth grade general studies teacher at her husband's alma mater, the Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School in Rockville, Maryland, while she completed her Master's in School Counseling at Johns Hopkins University. Upon completing her degree, Lauren was offered and accepted the Middle School Counselor position at Sandy Spring Friends School in Sandy Spring, Maryland. She remained in this role for 10 years. In 2014, Lauren accepted the Lower and Middle School counseling position at Bullis School. In addition to her work as a school counselor, Lauren has presented several workshops to faculty, parent groups and camp organizations on a variety of topics related to adolescent development, bullying prevention and appropriate boundaries and supervision of children. Lauren is the proud parent of two young children, and is passionate about working in partnership with parents to meet students' needs.

MALCOLM McCLUSKEY

Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart

Malcolm McCluskey is the Assistant Head of Upper School and Upper School Theology Teacher at Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart in Bethesda, Maryland, where he has served in this capacity for 6 years. Before joining the Stone Ridge community, Malcolm taught for 11 years at Elizabeth Seton High School in Bladensburg, Maryland, where he served as the Chair of the Religious Studies Department. Recently, Malcolm joined the faculty for the AISGW Emerging Upper School Leaders Institute, where he will serve as a mentor for aspiring leaders in area independent schools. In addition to these programs, Malcolm also is a member of the faculty and planning committee for the Bearing Witness Program, a national institute where teachers are trained in Holocaust

and Anti-Bias education. Malcolm holds a BA degree from the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts and a MA degree in Educational Administration from the University of Notre Dame.

ELINOR SCULLY

The Langley School

Dr. Elinor Scully has served as Head of the The Langley School, an independent preschool through eighth grade day school in McLean, Virginia, since July 2013. She began her career at St. Stephen's & St. Agnes School in Alexandria, Virginia, where she served as a family life education teacher, Chair of the Family Life Education Department, and Associate Director of the Upper School from 1991-2005. Dr. Scully then spent eight years (2005-2013) at National Cathedral School in Washington, DC, serving in several roles, including Associate Head of School, Assistant Head, and Upper School Director. Her work at National Cathedral School centered on curriculum development, multicultural education, and developing leadership within the faculty, staff, and student body.

Dr. Scully is an educational consultant with a national reputation in the field of childhood and adolescent development, with a focus on gender, sexuality, and social and emotional development. She has consulted with more than 40 independent schools and written for several publications, and currently serves on the Elementary School Heads Association Executive Committee and the Virginia Association of Independent Schools Board of Directors.

Dr. Scully holds a PhD in Education and an MS from the University of Pennsylvania and a BA from the University of Virginia.

BEST PRACTICES PROGRAM SUMMARY

Finding the Right Balance:

How Schools Encourage Students and Families to Discover and Maintain a Healthy Balance

WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

PCW President D.D. Holcomb welcomed guests and expressed thanks to PCW member schools for promoting and attending the Best Practices Program. She noted that the annual program embodies PCW's mission to promote excellence in education by fostering communication between students, parents and independent schools. The presentation by a panel of experts from PCW member school allows the sharing of ideas and engagement of parents and school communities. Thanking Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart for hosting the program, she then introduced Head of School, Catherine Ronan Karrels.

Ms. Karrels stated that Stone Ridge was pleased to host the event and work in partnership with PCW in its mission. She mentioned that when she came to Stone Ridge eight years ago, the concept of 'balance' was just beginning to be a part of independent school conversation. Today, schools are working rigorously to strive for balance and encourage students to make wise choices through partnerships with parents. Next, PCW Board Member and Program Chair Susan Newell reviewed the agenda, presented the topic of 'balance' and introduced the day's panelists:

- Dr. Elinor Scully, Head of School at The Langley School
- Lauren Keller, Middle and Upper School Counselor at Bullis School
- Malcolm McCluskey, Assistant Head of Upper School at Stone Ridge

Listed below are program takeaways from our panelists; specific recommendations for what parents can do to help children achieve life balance. Following the recommendations are summaries of each individual presentation, with a focus on best practices of the schools in encouraging families and students to discover and maintain a healthy balance in life.

PANELIST TAKEAWAYS FOR PARENTS

From Dr. Elinor Scully, Head of School, The Langley School, McLean, VA:

- Balance does not equal harmony or happiness. Living a balanced life requires choice making and moments of struggle.
- Empower your children. Do not enable them.
- Define success and achievement developmentally, not in terms of outcome.
- Create boundaries and limits for your children.
- Prioritize family time, unplugged and interpersonally connected.

From Lauren Keller, Lower & Middle School Counselor, Bullis School, Rockville, MD:

- Establish routines. Middle school students like to have a set schedule. They like to know when they will do homework, eat dinner, have some tech time, have family time, etc. Having your child know each day when, how and why they will complete each task of the day is important.
- Sometimes just have a dance party. If you see that your child is stressed about a particular assignment, push the “pause button.” Teaching children the difference between healthy stress and negative stress, and how to manage stress, is an important life lesson.
- Choose priorities. Ask your child: What matters the most to you? No one can or should do it all, so choosing what extracurricular activities to focus on, and saying no to some things, helps to achieve balance.
- Take tech “time outs” every day. I would suggest that all family members step away from devices/phones at a designated time each evening, and not use the device again until a designated time the next morning. Devices should always be in a “public” space in your home to help students avoid the temptation of using technology at inappropriate times, or too frequently.

From Malcolm McCluskey, Assist. Head of Upper School, Stone Ridge, Bethesda, MD:

- Keep lines of communication open with the school. You may be seeing something at home that would be helpful for us in supporting your child. We will do the

same with you, as we may be seeing something that will be helpful for you to know.

- Have early and consistent communication as a family regarding computer/tablet/phone use and the need to “unplug” and then model the behavior. This will only help to increase the quality of time you spend as a family and it can improve relationships with friends as well.
- Sleep. Sleep. Sleep. Adolescents require about 9 1/4 hours of sleep per night. Shutting down machines at least 30 min before bed can help. If this seems unreasonable, build up to a longer and more reasonable period of sleep gradually (get to bed 30 min earlier for a week, then do the same the following week).
- Listen to the enthusiasm and excitement your child has regarding activities. These are the activities with which she/he is most likely to engage in challenges, take intellectual risks, and grow into a leadership role. It will also lead to a more meaningful growth experience. It is far better to have 1-2 activities done over a period of 3 or 4 years. Resist the urge to “build resumes” by adding 10 different clubs/activities.

PANELIST PRESENTATION SUMMARIES

1. LOWER SCHOOL PRESENTATION

Dr. Elinor Scully

Head of School, The Langley School, McLean, VA

Dr. Scully shared that Langley is a pre-school thru 8th grade school, providing a very different experience from her years spent working primarily with adolescents. She said that even though the sizes of the kids are different, there are many common issues between all students when it comes to the quest for achieving balance. However, her focus for the program is on kids in lower school.

Regardless of the age of the students, educators have become increasingly concerned about kids who believe that their identity and self-worth are tied to what they accomplish. Helping kids find a sense of balance is done through helping them connect to an authentic sense of self. She said that an educator’s job is to help kids find who they are as unique individuals and teach them how they can grow into their potential.

One threat to balance is in believing that your child has to achieve certain accomplishments right now (a specific grade, making a certain team, etc.) because, if the opportunity sneaks by, you might not get it again. She warned that students should not pay attention to messages they get from society that tell them success should be gauged by markers that may not be a good match for them. Well-intentioned parents want to give their children every opportunity to help them grow and flourish, but this often results in too much on their plates . . . kids are overscheduled and stressed out, joyless and tired. Overscheduled, perfectionist kids often retreat from the joy of learning, consumed by how others view them and afraid to fail.

A reason for the Best Practices Program is to figure out how to pull back from that trend and reverse the problem now that it has been identified. How can parents and educators help kids without overwhelming them? Parents and educators cannot do it in a vacuum; schools need parents to partner with them, and parents need schools to help notice things in the child, strategizing ways to help them grow and stretch without being overwhelmed.

Creating balance is about making choices. It is not about being all things to all people. At Langley, they try to balance the curriculum and program offerings, recognizing that kids develop along an “arc of development.” The arc is very steep in the early years because so much complex development is taking place. Langley looks to the “arc of development” and scaffolds it for individual children. Social and emotional competence are critical. A balanced curriculum tends to a child’s intellectual development in equal proportion alongside social and emotional development. Good schools today address it all.

In independent schools, kids are in classroom environments where they are known for who they are. Learning is not linear, nor is emotional development. Both go in fits and starts, the growth is not even. A plateau or a setback often follows a huge growth spurt. Schools such as PCW member schools are ready to scaffold both emotional and intellectual learning for kids along that arc, supporting them when they are flourishing and also when they are stuck. Balanced curriculum is about not rushing kids before they are ready. It is not about assuming every child learns the same way. It is about recognizing that in order to learn, a child needs to feel safe and confident.

Some of the ways Langley addresses this type of learning is to offer a fully fleshed-out social and emotional curriculum that works right alongside the academic program. Programs such as Stress Less, Laugh More and other parent education opportunities also help parents partner with the school around what works for children. The curriculum encourages getting to know each learner as an individual, not judging the

outcome or a child's trajectory in terms of grades, test scores or comparison to others. Langley wants students to . . . wonder, dream, imagine, try, fail, test, make mistakes, get up, and do it again.

The data coming out of colleges and universities right now suggests that there is a very brittle generation of young people arriving on college campuses unable to function. They cannot handle bad grades or failure of any kind. What educators are learning from this is that overwhelming stress is what is getting college kids into trouble. Good stress motivates kids to challenge themselves and take healthy risks, whereas bad stress leads them to believe that if they are not perfect, their life is off-course. Applying this to a lower school environment would suggest creating moments where kids are assessed in a more holistic way, rather than being graded in an overly quantitative way.

Good schools build moments in which students can create, fail and lead from the back, middle and front. Engagement in projects that are completed over a long period, for example, allows students to see their growth and development and how they have matured. Additionally, there are a lot of projects that involve kids doing work in teams, using each other to facilitate learning. The environment is not an individualistic "it's all about me" kind of learning environment. Instead, teaching focuses on meta-cognitive skills; "how do I learn, what happens when I stumble, how do I self-advocate?"

The ability to self-advocate – to know oneself, to know when to ask for help, to know what you are and are not good at, to know that you cannot be good at everything – is the bedrock of being able to lead a more balanced and healthy life. As such, Langley puts an emphasis on service learning and leadership development, allowing children to exercise and apply skills in real-life contexts.

Dr. Scully said that one of the biggest threats to balance is teaching kids that they do not need to problem solve for themselves – letting them think that teachers and parents are going to do it for them. To truly achieve balance you have to be able to not only problem solve for yourself, but also set boundaries and say no. Dr. Scully said that schools are starting to find creative ways in the curriculum to provide children with ways to practice doing those things on their own. Support systems are in place for parents and children when things go awry. At Langley, advising and counseling programs and child study teams allow teachers to partner with parents.

Children are born with unique personalities; some are prone to perfectionism, and others could not care less. Recognizing the diverse personalities of children within your family and at school is critical. Parents need to be realistic about their child's journey through school and determine if they are going to help in finding balance. Parents have to be honest with themselves about what the destination is and whether it will be

jeopardized by the journey. In other words, parents should not focus solely on the outcome or operate under the impression that success of the child, or lack thereof, is a reflection on their parenting.

The most important thing a parent can do for a child is to discover individual biases about what they hope for their child. Make room for the child to chart the right course, no matter how bumpy or wide-ranging. If parents can help support children through the process of understanding the self, possibilities and outcomes will more likely lead to success. The bull's-eye for success is so small for some kids, and the very difficult process of trying to fit themselves in this very small bull's-eye causes kids to do things that are inauthentic to their true self. It can cause them to believe they have to build a resume of school experiences and let go of the magic of creating a world full of possibility. The biggest gift that schools can give parents and children is to expand their horizon of possibilities, not contract it.

The truth is children learn more about balance from their families than they do from their schools. Parents need to try to silence what our culture tells us about what our children should do and be. As much as you can, try to figure out who this unique creature is in your life, and get out of the way. Do help them explore who they are, but trust that the path is not linear and it is going to be covered with bumps. If we give them room, children are much more likely to go within themselves and find the necessary resources and strategies to discover their own capabilities. They will do things in life that surprise us and, ultimately and hopefully, develop a sense of inner harmony that is more valuable than any bumper sticker on the back of a car.

2. MIDDLE SCHOOL PRESENTATION

Ms. Lauren Keller

Lower & Middle School Counselor, Bullis School, Potomac, MD

Ms. Keller began her portion of the program asking the audience “How many of us are truly living balanced lives?” As adults, we should be able to look at a snapshot of our day and acknowledge that we cannot always get it all done. We recognize we have to prioritize options and make choices. Because middle school students lack the ability to figure out the complexity of their lives on their own, they are constantly looking to their parents to figure out – or tell them - what to do, what to think and how to act.

Children are always watching us. They model the behaviors that they see – especially from their parents. While parents tend to worry about their kids hanging around with “bad kids,” it is actually their own behavior that they need to examine. For this reason, it is very important to pay attention to interactions with your middle school child. Even

though it can be difficult to make the right choice in any given moment, balance is really about teaching kids how to handle life when things do not go well or as planned.

Finding balance in individual relationships will help create balance in life. It is important to apologize to your kids when you have made poor choices, and explain what you wish you had done differently. Though it is impossible to constantly monitor what we are doing in the moment, we can review and circle back and fix things. This helps in restoring balance in a relationship.

Beyond what parents can do, Ms. Keller discussed what is happening at Bullis to help middle school students achieve better balance in their lives. Because middle school students are generally not quite ready to manage their own time, Bullis helps them by setting boundaries that the kids have to model for themselves and others. The school has intentionally set up a very deliberate schedule: two academic classes and then a break that includes a snack; middle school kids are encouraged to play on the playground or go outside during their break when the weather permits. While middle school kids may want you to believe that they are too old for outdoor play or breaks, they are not. They love it.

After the first break, students get “community time” which includes things like advisory group meetings or independent reading. Bullis builds 20 minutes of independent reading time into the schedule to ensure that middle schoolers are reading (because often reading is not a priority after the lower school years). Bullis also offers built-in “extra instruction time” when teachers make themselves available to answer questions. This helps students by designating a time to go to a teacher and lessening the stress of having to carve time out of their own schedules.

After community time, students have another block of academics that is followed by lunch. Lunch is unique in middle school at Bullis, with students assigned to tables that include at least one teacher or faculty member. Food is served family style. This arrangement is inclusive and encourages new friendships that might not otherwise form. It also allows faculty members to interact with students in an informal setting. The school has found that taking the seating choice out of mealtime greatly reduces stress and, contrary to what one might think, students talk freely and typically feel relaxed and comfortable. This gives the faculty member at the table the opportunity to hear conversations they otherwise would not hear, and pick up on social nuances that may need to be addressed. In general, this approach and the outcomes have been very positive and beneficial.

Next Ms. Keller explained the approach to athletics at Bullis. Every middle school student has athletics (as opposed to a sports team practice) at 2pm every day. It is

considered a class and it takes place from 2:00-3:30pm. This structure has led students to view this as time to combine socializing with exercise. “Athletics” is a broad umbrella and includes much more than traditional sports. Depending on the time of year, it may include music and musical theater, as well as other art opportunities. As a result, students have a chance to become more well-rounded than they might otherwise choose to be.

Ms. Keller said that for middle schoolers, finding balance boils down to the ability to determine what they are passionate about (e.g. sports, dance, music, etc.). As it becomes more and more evident, the next question may need to be, “How do I decide what to say no to?” And once they have narrowed it down and made choices (a sport, class, activity, etc.), they should give it their all.

Bullis School has delineated Core Academic Values and Core Institutional Values, all of which are woven into classes and programs. The Core Academic Values are critical thinking, collaboration, communication, resourcefulness and creativity. Incorporating these values into daily life helps facilitate balance. The Core Institutional Values are integrity, respect, diversity, service and responsibility. More and more schools in our metropolitan area are striving to integrate values, introduce more comprehensive programs and produce caring global citizens.

Middle schoolers often express complaints using big bold statements such as, “no one likes me,” “everything stinks” and “you just don’t get it.” They use these phrases because they lack the communication skills to verbalize what they are really feeling. In these moments, it is important to validate your child’s feelings and assure them that life is not over. Middle school students do not always want their parents to solve their problems, they just want to vent and be heard.

Parents who want to teach their kids how to balance their emotions and recognize the difference between “a pebble, a rock and a boulder” have to model the behavior and talk them through the stressors they are feeling and how to deal with them. Another strategy to use with stressed children is to validate their feelings, and then suggest that they hit the “pause” button and focus their energy elsewhere for a few minutes. If the child brings the same issue up later, you will know it is an issue that is truly important and you can proceed from there. Many times, however, the issue will disappear which indicates that they were probably just venting in the first place.

Ms. Keller closed by explaining that during the middle school years, students live their lives as if an invisible audience is constantly following them; thus explaining why they are constantly consumed by their appearance and what others think. This “invisible audience” makes them very self-conscious. Additionally, hormones have a huge impact

on their thinking, feelings and actions. Middle school students are struggling to figure out their identity and they want reassurance that they are normal.

Bullis teaches students that they do not need to choose one thing to define who they are, but they cannot choose everything either. Lower school is a time to encourage kids to try all sorts of different activities to help them determine where their interests lie and what they enjoy doing. When kids get to middle school, they can begin to narrow their sports and/or activities that take place outside of school, while also making time for studies, family and friends, leisure – time they very much need in order to live balanced lives.

As a school, Bullis wants to partner with parents to ensure students live healthy and balanced lives. We must all realize that it is too much to ask middle schools students to “do it all.” As parents, we know that when we expect ourselves to do it all, it is too much – we cannot and we end up with stress and frustration. Be open to your school’s programs and model what you want to see in your child. Students need their parents to provide balanced responses to the drama and emotions that are a fact of life in middle school. They want it from their parents and they need it from their parents . . . even if they will never say it!

3. UPPER SCHOOL PRESENTATION

Mr. Malcolm McCluskey

Assistant Head of Upper School, Stone Ridge, Bethesda, MD

Mr. McCluskey highlighted common themes that had already been shared by other panelists, but that are similarly relevant to upper school students.

- **Mission.** Most schools in the greater Washington, D.C. area have particular mission statements and rely on them heavily. The mission of a school tells you a lot; it is a concise expression of school values, and what the school has to offer your child and family. Mission statements guide many of the conversations that exist between schools and parents, and should guide the school’s program offerings as well. Mr. McCluskey said that as children progress through lower, middle and upper school, parents should revisit the mission statement from time to time and ask themselves if indeed the school is living up to its mission.
- **Partnership.** Schools and parents are partners. Teachers choose to teach because they love children and love teaching. They are constantly looking for ways to innovate and improve, in order to help parents do some of the work of raising children. The work that teachers do in partnership with parents is the

most rewarding type of work, but it requires communication, honesty and trust. It also depends on a keen, listening and discerning ear on the part of both parents and educators.

- **Modeling.** What kids see, they will do. Mr. McCluskey illustrated this point by telling a personal story about a Sacred Heart girl who traveled to France as part of a school exchange program. He was struck by the fact that the student's number one takeaway from her trip was that French families sit down every night to eat dinner together. He thought this spoke volumes as to what was being communicated and modeled by her French family, and how it resonated so positively with her.
- **Self-Advocacy.** Grit and resiliency, the ability to bounce back, the ability to self-advocate, the ability to respond in a time of crisis . . . these are important qualities for getting through life. Remember that kids will learn and model what they see at home. If what they see at home is mostly positive, students will likely learn to handle challenges without falling apart which, in turn, is more likely to lead to a more balanced life. If instead students are prone to parents constantly overreacting or “freaking out” over the slightest thing, the child's ability to cope will likely suffer. This behavior may also lead to a back-and-forth game of “emotional hot potato” between parents and child, ultimately involving the teacher and school as well.
- **Identity.** Stone Ridge and other area schools are dedicated to educating the “whole child.” This begins by helping children discover who they are and what motivates and is important to them. The school uses this information to guide how teachers teach each individual child. Teaching the whole child involves both academic development, as well as social and emotional development.

After explaining these areas of commonality, Mr. McCluskey said he was going to use the areas as guiding principles in conveying specific information about what Stone Ridge does to help upper school students lead more balanced lives. He explained that years ago Stone Ridge took a deep and honest look at whether or not the school was actively living its mission.

Stone Ridge discovered that while the upper school girls seemed generally happy with their high school experience, they were surviving it and not necessarily enthusiastically thriving or enjoying it. Students were feeling too much stress, torn in too many different directions and overwhelmed. To find a solution, Stone Ridge first examined the school schedule and scheduling process.

It is easy for lives to get out of balance during this phase and stage. A recent study reported that the two times during a person's life when the brain does the majority of its

growing are during the toddler years and the adolescent years. During these two phases of growth, the brain is “soaking up all kinds of information.” This explains why adolescents have such strong emotional reactions to things and have so many interests. It is also why they are taking both academic and social risks. An increased level of adrenaline is behind risk-taking during adolescence, and also motivates kids to want to try all sorts of new experiences.

But, teenagers need to learn to make choices in order to figure out what balance looks like for them – and it is not always easy and it does not look the same for every student. Mr. McCluskey said that he begins to form an opinion of how families approach balance in the very first meeting he has with parents before a student starts upper school. He meets with parents and their child separately so he can begin to determine if the child’s view of self is similar to how the parents view their daughter. This is a very important time in life to find one’s authentic self.

As the teachers at Stone Ridge continued examining the school schedule, they spent a lot of time listening to the girls about how each student learned best. Girls like to learn through collaboration; they like to work on projects where they can dig deep and explore together.

Prior to making changes, Stone Ridge girls had seven classes per day, and – like at most independent schools - the schedule rotated by the day, so that the girls were not taking the same class at the same time every day. Even though this model is considered to be a “best practice,” the girls were still struggling, juggling too much and becoming too stressed. Why?

Stone Ridge hired outside consultants to help examine their process and identify ways to eliminate some stress in the upper school. After observation, the consultants suggested that perhaps taking seven classes per day (back-to-back academics) was too much and resulted in far too much homework. They observed that the girls were rushing through the day without enough time to transition from one subject to the next. (Keep in mind that it takes the brain seven minutes to transition from one activity to the next.)

In addition to listening to the consultants during this process, the school also listened to the students to determine how they could better align school practices with their values – the values included in their mission statement.

The following changes have been implemented at Stone Ridge as a result of this process:

- Each day begins with an assembly. Starting the day as a group, with a community activity that includes prayer, provides a gentler start than jumping into academics in individual classrooms.
- The number of classes per day has gone from seven to four. Each class is 80 minutes in length, and the teachers handle classes different too. Instruction is much more interactive and collaborative, with girls having the opportunity to move around and engage, rather than just sit and listen. This new classroom encourages more innovative teaching and more “deep dive learning” which requires more skill development than memorization of facts.
- Tests are more skill-oriented and less content driven.
- The upper school reduced the amount of daily homework from approximately 4.5 hours of homework per night down to 2-3 hours. While homework is still a work in progress, the goal is to decrease it even more over time.
- Students are encouraged to spend more time with their teachers and get additional help when necessary. The school has worked to give students more access to teachers outside the classroom. One way is by giving the entire upper school the same lunch period, thus teachers are technically available during lunch. This approach also gives students more opportunity to practice self-advocacy.
- Certain classes, previously optional or elective, are now built-in to the weekly schedule. Two examples are counselor meetings and study skills classes, adding balance to the schedule and opportunities for the girls to connect with teachers and classmates outside of academics.

Mr. McCluskey stressed the importance of the role of the school counselor in helping students achieve better balance. School counselors are often the best, and most overlooked, resource a school has and should be the first person a student goes to with a problem or a concern. Further, society needs to do away with the stigma associated with admitting a problem or asking for help. Students actually build resiliency by admitting to struggles and working to find solutions. As parents, we can also model asking for/being open to getting help.

Nurturing one’s spiritual life is a key ingredient to living a balanced life as well. Stone Ridge starts each day with prayer, teaching the girls the importance of being able to pause, reflect and pray. Theology classes are part of the academic curriculum, and girls

are given many opportunities to “give back” by serving the community through a variety of social action projects. Stone Ridge girls are challenged to think about how they are connected to one another and to the world around them.

As parents, our job is to listen to our children and, with them, discover their authentic beings. The listening component is the most important aspect of the parent/child relationship -- pay attention to what excites and energizes your child. Help your child live a balanced life by focusing and acting upon at least one or two things that will truly excite your child and lead him/her in the direction they are meant to go. Parents and teachers can work together to help students discover the authentic self, which is the true goal of the parent/school partnership.

2016 Best Practices Program Questionnaire

How Schools Encourage Students and Families to Discover and Maintain a Healthy Balance

Please consider some or all of the following questions in preparing your submission:

- How does your school define 'balance' for its students? Is the definition of balance the same for all students? Why or why not? Does it differ by age or division?
- How does your school encourage students to recognize and live balanced lives as individuals and/or as part of your community?
- What does your school offer or require of students and families beyond academics? Please comment on any areas valued by your school such as spirituality (secular or non-secular), personal health and well-being, community service, enrichment, creativity, athletics, leisure, life skills or other.
- How does your school support students in identifying their own 'tipping point'? What processes are in place for your school to monitor and identify students who may be experiencing high levels of stress? What support systems does your school have in place for students who need assistance?
- How does your school address and communicate the concept of 'balance' with students, faculty and parents? What collaborative processes are in place for schools to work with students and families to reduce stressors and maintain a healthy balance?

And please make sure to include in your submission: **The top 3-5 recommendations you have for parents in order to help their students achieve better balance.**

Please feel free to provide additional information as well.

Submissions must be e-mailed to administration@parentscouncil.org in a WORD document with 'Best Practices' listed in the subject line.

Thank you!

2016 BEST PRACTICES FORUM

PCW Member School Submissions: 'Finding the Right Balance'

ALEXANDRIA COUNTRY DAY SCHOOL

Co-educational, K-8, nonsectarian, day school in Alexandria, VA, 207 students.

How does your school define 'balance' for its students? Is the definition of balance the same for all students? Why or why not? Does it differ by age or division?

At ACDS we define balance for our students as having a love of learning, community mindedness and moral courage, as well as athletic, artistic, and musical skills. We value the whole child and emphasize play, social-emotional well being, and physical health in our students.

A graduate from ACDS demonstrates a healthy understanding of the work/life balance and is open to opportunities and risk. A robust physical education program keeps the kids active, regular recess makes play a part of every day in every grade, and strong social- emotional programs such as Responsive Classroom and Developmental Designs keep the well being of our students at the center of our work.

In order to achieve balance for our students, we maintain a delicate balance between supporting our students and challenging them along the path towards independence.

All too often, parents and educators make the mistake of "paving" this path--giving so much support that challenges aren't really challenges at all. There are no struggles, because we have paved right over them. Students who find success with all tasks all the time aren't given the chance to practice real problem solving, and this will inhibit their ability to become independent.

Instead, we strive to prepare our students for the path--for whatever bumps and twists they will encounter on their way to independence. Our curriculum and instructional practices help us to effectively push our students towards independence.

Teachers pull up next to students during their academic blocks and coach them towards transference--giving tips, encouragement, or demonstrations that push students to new levels. We see this too in how we support students' social-emotional development. We

provide tips and strategies through mini-lessons and Morning Meetings for how to manage emotions, solve disputes, and navigate friendship challenges. And we are at our students' sides to coach them as they work through challenging situations in their social lives here at school.

Especially for our lower school students, balance has “play” at its heart--guiding our thinking about how to provide our students with challenges that focus on quality and not quantity. We ensure that our curriculum allows our students to engage in playful inquiry, where they have opportunities to be curious, take risks, discover and take pleasure in surprises, acquire new understanding, and feel empowered by this constructive experience. Learning, and the pursuit of understanding, can happen in joyful inquiry that looks a lot like play. And, problem-solving requires lots of “playing” around.

While students have nightly homework beginning in first grade, ACDS strives to ensure that homework is meaningful, productive, and manageable given the many demands on a child's time. Homework is designed to reinforce classroom learning, help students develop good learning habits, and keep parents informed and involved in the units of study. In all classes teachers work with students to ensure their assignments can be completed within their schedules. Homework is not assigned to maintain a certain volume of homework.

In all areas, we work to equip students with the skills and strategies they will need to navigate whatever the path has in store for them, and we coach them to transfer their repertoire of skills and strategies--reminding, giving tips, and encouraging when their persistence wavers.

How does your school encourage students to recognize and live balanced lives as individuals and/or as part of your community?

We encourage students to recognize and live balanced lives through our focus on the social and emotional well being of our students, our sports programs, service learning programs, and music, art and drama departments.

At ACDS, the social and emotional well being of all our students is of primary importance. Our Lower School employs the Responsive Classroom Approach and our Middle School uses the corresponding Developmental Designs program for our advisory programs. Both models emphasize community, empathy, respect for others, and cooperative problem solving. These programs provide a strong framework for discussions of diversity, cooperation, inclusivity, cooperation, and peaceful conflict resolution.

Additionally, we provide the opportunity for healthy competition through our interscholastic athletic program open to all fourth through eighth grade students. Our no-cut policy promotes physical fitness through participation, and student-athletes gain experience in leadership and sportsmanship, frequently in a co-ed situation.

Service learning is a hallmark of our students' experience, and starts in kindergarten. Students are encouraged to understand community in both local and global terms. Beginning with our internal community, students are encouraged to take an active role in the school community by volunteering to support school functions, participating in student government, and taking an active role in our buddy program, which pairs younger and older students for activities throughout the year.

The Music, Art, and Drama Department at ACDS teaches each student to combine creativity with conceptual knowledge; to help each student develop interpretive and problem solving skills through the arts; and to make fine, applied, and performance arts relevant to each student.

Lower School students study art and music in designated classes regularly within their weekly schedule. In Middle School, students study music, art, or drama each trimester four days each week. Additionally, in the seventh and eighth grades, students are offered the opportunity to explore areas of interest in-depth through our Independent Study Program in the Arts.

While each of these programs are strong individually, collectively they form a very rich and balanced life led by each ADCS student.

What does your school offer or require of students and families beyond academics? Please comment on any areas valued by your school such as spirituality (secular or non-secular), personal health and wellbeing, community service, enrichment, creativity, athletics, leisure, life skills or other.

ACDS offers robust and varied enrichment opportunities for our students including service learning, interscholastic athletics, music, art, drama, and numerous after school programs.

Service learning at ACDS is a thoughtful program of investigation, planning, action, and reflection that allows students and teachers to address authentic community needs while deepening their understanding of the world around them. Each grade chooses a theme for the year and begins with an "investigation" stage where they research community needs related to their theme. As they develop and implement their plans for action, the students share their learning with each other and the community at large. In

addition to these thoughtful and comprehensive student-led projects, there is an all-school half-day of service in November and an all-school day of service in April, and we enjoy occasional opportunities for one-time community service projects as well.

Our athletic program consists of seasonal sports: coed soccer and cross country, basketball, swimming, and coed softball, Ultimate Frisbee and tennis. Every 4th-8th grade student is encouraged to participate in these voluntary programs and every student athlete has the opportunity to participate in games.

Every student has regular music, art, and drama classes. In music students learn rhythm, melody, and harmony fundamentals, play instruments, write music, as well as perform and improvise. Our art program includes art criticism, aesthetics, art history, and art production and with each consecutive grade level student artists add another level of mastery of materials and intuitive sophistication to their work. Finally, in drama, our curriculum is designed to encourage students to step out of their comfort zones, build confidence, and learn about the art of theater.

Our school offers many after school programs including Tae Kwon Do, ballet, chess, choir, animation, band, and fencing, in addition to offering private music lessons for a variety of instruments.

How does your school support students in identifying their own ‘tipping point’? What processes are in place for your school to monitor and identify students who may be experiencing high levels of stress? What support systems does your school have in place for students who need assistance?

ACDS recognizes that every child is unique and develops at their own rate, and has their own strengths and challenges. Given our student teacher ratio, 7:1, our teachers know every child as an individual. Our teachers strive to provide added challenge or additional support as needed through differentiation in the classroom. This also helps to sense if a student is reaching a point of heightened stress. If a student requires more support, our Teaching and Learning Center staff collaborates with teachers to develop classroom strategies, provide small group or individual instruction, and differentiate learning as needed.

Grade level teams, including teachers, the Division Head, the school counselor, and Teaching and Learning Center staff meet regularly to review student performance from both an academic and social-emotional standpoint and develop strategies for helping students find both academic success and emotional well being.

A strong emphasis on formative assessments and opportunities to retake summative assessments to ensure mastery emphasize the learning process and give students agency over the outcomes of their learning. This focus reduces the emphasis on grades, makes grades more meaningful, and diminishes the “high stakes” dimension of assessment while maintaining high expectations for learning.

A student’s grade is only a reflection of how she/he performs against a course’s established standards. Learning habits (organization of time and materials, active and thoughtful participation in class, effort, and perseverance) are recorded and reported through our Learning Traits Rubric and inform how students can more efficiently and effectively meet standards. The disaggregation of learning habits and performance against a standard ensures that students master the skills and concepts that will allow them to thrive in high school, college, and adulthood.

Finally, we have an on staff school counselor who works with teachers and the academic support team to assist students with social and emotional concerns individually or in groups. These students might need a sounding board or coping strategies, for a single meeting or for a short term.

How does your school address and communicate the concept of ‘balance’ with students, faculty and parents? What collaborative processes are in place for schools to work with students and families to reduce stressors and maintain a healthy balance?

“Balance” is one of four key principles in our educational philosophy and is conveyed as an important value to families beginning with admissions open houses. Balance is a concept that informs discussions among faculty, students, and parents about issues pertaining to the health and well being of our students and our community as a whole. For students “balance” is a common touchstone in advisory discussions and morning meetings.

Beginning in Middle School, the third parent/teacher conference is led by the student. In preparation for the conference, students are asked to reflect on their year and discuss how their work has demonstrated each of our four key values: Effective communication, independent learning, community mindedness, and balance.

A close community, strong parent leadership, and a collaborative environment ensure that issues of concern are communicated promptly and responded to in a timely way. Regular coffees and parent education presentations provide effective forums for communicating the School’s commitment to balance and hearing from parents about

ongoing concerns. A high degree of flexibility and responsiveness allows the School to be nimble in responding to concerns as they arise.

ACDS strives to ensure that its commitment to balance is reflected in all of its decisions.

For example, a recent redesign of interior spaces emphasized reductions in visual distractions, improvements in interior design that enhance the learning experience, and the introduction of ergonomically responsive furniture, including standing desks that support physical health and mental focus.

Top 3-5 recommendations for parents to help their students achieve better balance:

- Don't overschedule.
- Encourage (and perhaps enforce) sleep and healthy eating habits.
- Remember that invitations are voluntary not mandatory (invitation to play on a team, attend the third party of the weekend, participate in a club, take an AP course, go to a Wizards' game on a week night, etc.).
- Teach children that "perfection" is not the ultimate goal; but rather putting forth your best effort and reflecting critically on how you can improve results to achieve the best product possible.
- Make discussions of balance a regular part of family dialogue and reflect on how family choices align with a commitment to balance.

BEAUVOIR, THE NATIONAL CATHEDRAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Coeducational, preK-3, Episcopal, day school in Washington, DC, 396 students.

At Beauvoir, we work hard to create and provide a balanced schedule and environment for our young students. For our students, that includes indoor and outdoor time, work and play, structured learning and unstructured learning, group time and individual time, movement and sitting, and so much more! We begin teaching students about balance very early on in their educational journey. Our students begin to learn about how it feels when they are getting the right amount of activity in their days and our teachers lead formal and informal discussions about how our emotions and feelings change based on the different part of our day.

Afterschool activities are not required at Beauvoir. Many of our students do participate in enrichment activities held here after school hours that may include cooking, learning a language, singing, creating artwork, or playing a sport. This year, we altered the

enrichment schedule to end 15 minutes earlier to allow children more time for transitions and time before evening routines. Throughout the year, teachers and parents check in about the schedules to ensure that children are not feeling tired or involved in too many activities. We are constantly evaluating and gathering feedback from our parents, students, and teachers about our homework amounts for older children so that we can monitor the time students are spending on work at home. We also understand the importance of sleep for our young learners and how lack of sleep can affect a student's day. It is important to balance home activities, schoolwork, and sleep, especially at a young age.

Most of our faculty have completed the ALERT program, a tool for teachers to use to help their students understand how to self-regulate. This program uses the analogy of an engine running "too high" or "too low" or "just right" and helps students begin to notice their own engines and then choose behaviors to adjust their engines to a more just-right level. This tool and common language has helped us support students in identifying their own tipping points. Our teachers know their students well and are continually assessing them throughout the year. Teaching teams talk about their students regularly. If classroom teachers feel a student is experiencing stress, they reach out to the student's family and the School Counselor, the Chaplain or the Director of Learning Resources for support. In addition, teachers may gather all of the teachers who work with that student to compare observations and strategies. A plan is then put in place to support the student. It may involve conversations with the Counselor or Chaplain, lunch discussions, role-playing, etc.

When there is a need for discussions about balance, classroom teachers share information in individual conferences throughout the year. We often host parent education talks over the course of the year on a variety of topics. Currently, we are working with a consultant who observed classrooms across the school and is collaborating with teachers and students about the practice of mindfulness. We will share this information with families as well.

Top 3-5 recommendations for parents to help their students achieve better balance:

- Listen to and talk with your children as they participate in new experiences – a new grade level, new activity, new curriculum. Keep the communication going!
- Keep bedtime schedules as consistent as possible.
- Value childhood! Remember that children are balancing and negotiating LOTS of things over the course of the day. Adults can help them balance everything and

use strategies. Provide opportunities for children to practice using unstructured time, too.

BULLIS SCHOOL

Coeducational, 2-12, non-denominational, college preparatory, day school in Potomac, MD, 810 students.

How does your school define ‘balance’ for its students? Is the definition of balance the same for all students? Why or why not? Does it differ by age or division?

At Bullis, we believe that the best education is achieved through balance. At Bullis, students learn and grow, discover academic and extracurricular passions, value community, develop lifelong skills and are happier and more confident because of the balance we provide. The definition of balance is the same for all students because it is based on pursuing passion and interests, challenging yourself, trying new activities, while also fulfilling academic requirements. Each individual experience may be unique, but the overall concept applies to all students. However, balance certainly looks different in each division. In Lower School, students are exposed to, and participate in opportunities in all disciplines, such as reading, writing, STEM, literature, arts, music, physical education, and community service. The goal is exposure to many opportunities so that they can start developing their passions and interests.

In Middle School, students have more choices and can narrow down their focus, choosing a specific sport and/or Art to participate in each trimester, and this process is even more narrowed down in Upper School when students can create a schedule that reflects their skills, interests and possible career paths.

How does your school encourage students to recognize and live balanced lives as individuals and/or as part of your community?

Bullis teachers focus more on quality than on quantity of coursework, and combine high expectations with flexibility. Students and parents praise the true caring that teachers show for their students both inside and outside the classroom. Teachers adeptly juggle the progression of a class with the needs of individual students. Tutoring support, multiple arts opportunities, school spirit, required athletics with no cuts, transportation options, community service opportunities, all school assembly each Monday are all examples of how balance is promoted and embraced at Bullis.

What does your school offer or require of students and families beyond academics? Please comment on any areas valued by your school such as spirituality (secular or non-secular), personal health and well-being, community service, enrichment, creativity, athletics, leisure, life skills or other.

Diversity makes our community strong. Students come from a wide range of backgrounds and have differing learning styles, abilities and interests. This enriches the campus experience for everyone. At Bullis, we have a strong sense of who we are. Uniforms and formality with our teachers harken back to our traditional roots. Our core values remain consistent, yet evolving to the current day may be the most important tradition here. Discovering new technologies, becoming global citizens, developing new academic programs, trying new approaches to teaching and learning and taking trips outside of our campus—and our country—are just a few ways we make a Bullis education enduring and relevant. Participation requirements place students in athletics or arts activities they may not necessarily gravitate to, and through that they learn to appreciate the abilities of others and develop friendships throughout the student body. Annual community events such as Homecoming, the Bullis Cares 5K, and the Gala are highly promoted and well attended. School spirit is emphasized with Blue and Gold dress days, and friendly competitions and games throughout the year. There are several musical, theater and dance performances throughout the school year in all three divisions, and these events are well attended and celebrated.

How does your school support students in identifying their own ‘tipping point’? What processes are in place for your school to monitor and identify students who may be experiencing high levels of stress? What support systems does your school have in place for students who need assistance?

We use Advisory lessons and Health classes to educate students about finding balance so that they can self-identify if stress has reached an unhealthy point. Faculty have weekly team meetings where we share concerns about individual students who we feel are struggling academically, socially, and/or emotionally. If we are concerned about a student, we may put them on an academic improvement plan, have them work with the Learning Specialist and/or Counselor, and/or be tutored by a professional tutor or an Upper School student. Having a Counselor and Learning Specialist in each division, a rich Advisory program where Advisors serve as mentors and advocates, and required Health classes allows us to identify concerns early, and then respond swiftly.

How does your school address and communicate the concept of ‘balance’ with students, faculty and parents? What collaborative processes are in place for schools to work with students and families to reduce stressors and maintain a healthy balance?

Our website clearly outlines the importance Bullis places on balance. This is also communicated by our Admissions department, and can be found in our handbook, which every family receives. Principals in each division provide weekly communications to parents about upcoming activities and events and how they can be involved. Faculty have weekly meetings, as well as several Professional Days throughout the school year where balance is promoted, and opportunities are given to connect with colleagues to collaborate on projects. Several coffees with Division Heads and Counselors are held throughout the year, giving parents an opportunity to hear about programs at Bullis and share any concerns and/or needs. Counselors will contact families to share concerns related to stress and highly encourage parents to contact the School if they are worried about a child’s stress level.

Top 3-5 recommendations for parents to help their students achieve better balance:

- Establish routines. Students like to have a set schedule. They like to know when they will do homework, eat dinner, have some tech time, have family time, etc. Having your child know each day when, how and why they will complete each task of the day is important.
- Sometimes just have a dance party. If you see that your child is stressed about a particular assignment, push the “pause button.” Teaching children the difference between healthy stress and negative stress is an important life lesson.
- Choose priorities. Ask your child; what matters the most to you? No one can or should do it all, so choosing what extra-curricular activities to focus on and saying no to some things helps to achieve balance.
- Take tech “time outs” every day. I would suggest that all family members step away from devices/phones at a designated time each evening, and do not use the device again until a designated time the next morning. Devices should always be in a “public” space in your home to help students avoid the temptation of using technology at inappropriate times, or too frequently.

GEORGETOWN PREPARATORY SCHOOL

Single-sex boys, 9-12, Catholic, Jesuit, college preparatory, day/boarding in North Bethesda, MD, 490 students.

Georgetown Prep encourages balance in its students through our mission of *cura personalis*, or care of the whole person. As a Jesuit school, we recognize the importance of an integrated intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical life, and we strive to support the whole person of each member of our community daily.

Through the Advisory Program, the freshmen receive targeted information through our Health and Wellness presentations. As a class, they meet routinely for information sessions with the Director of Health and Wellness on the importance of good decision making, nutritional choices, exercise, safety, substance abuse prevention, and numerous other topics relevant to the high school experience.

All freshmen and sophomores are assigned an advisor and these groups meet regularly each month. The Advisory Program provides students with an essential advocate and liaison to the larger school community. The advisor serves as a first contact person for students and parents about all matters from academic to social.

Georgetown Prep provides counseling services for all students who may be in need of either short-term support or longer-term intervention. Students may elect to see the counselor during the school day or after school. Counseling provides reinforcement for students to address the range of academic, social, emotional, behavioral, or family challenges. The counseling department works closely with the Assistant Headmaster, the Dean of Students, the Campus Minister, and the Dean of Residents to support the *cura personalis* of each student.

Parent “Networking” meetings take place throughout the school year. These evening informational sessions, presented by school counselors and administrators, address school events and expectations for specific grade levels. Topics may include academic expectations and adjusting to freshman year, preparing for Kairos understanding the college application process, and service requirements.

Required service hours at Prep increase by grade level as the student becomes more comfortable with academics and expectations. Freshmen participate in small group service projects and a class-wide day of service. Sophomore and junior students complete 20 hours of service work during the summer and/or throughout the school year. Seniors are required to complete 50 hours of service during the summer between

junior and senior year. Rising seniors are offered the opportunity to participate in one of Prep's six summer immersion trips in order to complete their service requirement.

GEORGETOWN VISITATION PREPARATORY SCHOOL

Single-sex girls, 9-12, Catholic, Salesian, college preparatory, day school in Washington, DC, 490 students.

How does your school define 'balance' for its students? Is the definition of balance the same for all students? Why or why not? Does it differ by age or division?

Georgetown Visitation finds it necessary to optimize the functioning of every student by helping her find balance between the various roles she plays, be it classmate, friend, leader or participant. Often these roles are in conflict, and a student must be adept at attending to a variety of factors and assessing priorities. Our faculty and administration brainstorm on ways to avoid new challenges facing each of our four classes. Our students define balance as a healthy mix of academic, athletic, social, and personal excellence and work hard to accomplish each. Some students may find themselves more immersed in extra-curriculars than others. Balance is encouraged as passions are pursued. All four grades will aim for excellence while upperclassmen find themselves in more leadership roles with more commitments to matters important to them.

How does your school encourage students to recognize and live balanced lives as individuals and/or as part of your community?

By upholding the spiritual motto of the school, our students are asked to be who they are and be that well. We find this accomplished when students finally know how to achieve a balance between work and play while finding what makes each unique. Balance at Visitation ensures that wherever a student chooses to invest her interests, the community will accept and support her. Discussions concerning academic expectations are continuous between administrators, counselors and students' individual teachers working together to strengthen the students' understanding of overextension impacting their academics. School-life balance is important for optimal academic functioning. Students often prioritize academics at the expense of personal factors leading to a decline in academic performance. We emphasize their general health and well-being as being critical to optimal academic functioning. Continuous dialogue opens students to recognize an imbalance in their lives.

What does your school offer or require of students and families beyond academics? Please comment on any areas valued by your school such as spirituality (secular or non-secular) personal health and well-being, community service, enrichment, creativity, athletics, leisure, life skills or other?

Each class is assigned a counselor who acts as their advisor through four years. Counseling groups for freshmen and sophomores meet weekly to encourage each student to meet her own potential in moderation. Instructors in our personal development classes teach various topics in health and total wellness including invitations to area speakers every couple of months. Leadership labs are offered in growth mindset. Required student-body assemblies address subjects dealing with depression, anxiety, sleep deprivation, healthy eating, mindfulness, and socially wise choices. There is a requirement for service hours that remains under the aegis of a constantly available Director of Christian Service who guides and counsels students on choices. In serving, student balance is achieved through accomplishment and the realization there is more to life than grades. Yearly traditions, originated by past generations, encourage every student's participation through bonding and healthy competition. There are 'spaces' for everyone on our campus, from a cabin for seniors to designated common areas for each class. This area provides them with a private place to release tensions, study and socialize.

How does your school support students in identifying their own 'tipping point'? What processes are in place for your school to monitor and identify students who may be experiencing high levels of stress?

Our Counseling Department, or any member of the administration, is a resource for students who have not found the medium needed to balance. Each student must know how much she is valued as a member of the community and made aware that our counseling department provides the necessary reinforcement and strategies to help students identify and alleviate stress with honest communication as the key. Parent conferences are scheduled when the counseling department and administration feel more conversation, with overall concern for the student, is necessary.

How does your school address and communicate the concept of 'balance' with students, faculty and parents? What collaborative processes are in place for schools to work with students and families to reduce stressors and maintain a healthy balance?

Balance and wise choices are introduced to students from the time they receive their acceptance letter, followed by ongoing discussions for the next four years. Orientation

for both students and parents begins on their first day of school at which time freshmen are introduced to their “Big Sisters” in the junior class. At “Back to School Night” for all four classes, with the guarantee of a large parent audience, school administrators open the program with comments, offering insight to parents on what to watch for and who to call if they notice signs of “overload and imbalance.” Administrators’ comments are eclipsed by reassuring faculty comments the same night. Students are continuously polled to gauge how they prefer to balance their lives and if Visitation is meeting their expectations and accommodating their stress levels. With ownership on both sides of the balance scale, Visitation asks students to meet them by practicing positive self-talk, eating healthy, exercising and sleeping regularly, making time for themselves and enjoying time spent with family and friends.

Top 3-5 recommendations for parents to help their students achieve better balance:

- Create a strong family network and family-style dining at close-to-the-same time every evening.
- Don’t allow school demands, or the many off-campus “opportunities” offered, interfere with students spending quality time with their family and friends.
- Remove or store all Smart phones, iPads, laptops and other electronic devices during dinner and bedtime and model the same for your child.
- Don’t worry about what your child isn’t doing.
- Recognize when your child needs more support without offering self-pity. 31

HOLTON-ARMS SCHOOL

Single-sex girls, 3-12, college preparatory, day school in Bethesda, MD, 660 students.

How does your school define ‘balance’ for its students? Is the definition of balance the same for all students? Why or why not? Does it differ by age or division?

Holton-Arms defines personal balance as equilibrium in academics, arts, and athletics, social, family, sleep and play activities. The discrepancies fall in the level and values placed within families, in and out of school. Each division has different academic expectations and workloads, particularly in the Upper School. The abundance of choices, with few limits placed on these choices, creates conflict in balance for the students.

How does your school encourage students to recognize and live balanced lives as individuals and/or as part of your community?

Our advisory and guidance programs are designed to assist students in making choices and managing expectations. Responsive classroom, in lower school, assists in making classes feel more individualized. Encouragement in varied activities creates a place for students to find their passion. Our multi-level support staff assists students throughout their experience, to include deliberate conversations in the Upper School each quarter between advisors and individual advisees to discuss in particular student performance, time management, workload, interests beyond the classroom, and life balance. The school has also created a Health and Wellness Committee that is directly committed to creating a balanced community.

What does your school offer or require of students and families beyond academics? Please comment on any areas valued by your school such as spirituality (secular or non-secular), personal health and well-being, community service, enrichment, creativity, athletics, leisure, life skills or other.

Below is an abbreviated listing of offerings for our students, faculty and families, an asterisks is by those programs which are required:

- PE required 3rd – 9th *
- Additional athletic credit required in Upper School for graduation
- Sports:
 - Middle School: soccer, field hockey, track, cross-country, tennis, swimming, dance, ice hockey, badminton, lacrosse, fitness, and more
 - Upper School: swimming, ice hockey, soccer, field hockey, cross country, tennis, basketball, indoor track, winter conditioning, softball, crew, track, lacrosse
 - Music and Art are required 3rd – 8th, Upper School requires credits in both for graduation
- Arts, whole program: photography, dance, ceramics, drawing and painting, chorus, jazz band, ensemble, orchestra, chamber singers, chamber band, swing choir, drama, production technology, handbells, music tech lab, and more
- Fine and Performing Arts Adjunct program
- Advisory 6th – 12th, Guidance 3rd – 5th, 7th – 9th
- Creative Summer
- Wellness Clinics and classes
- Community Service required in 7th – 12th

How does your school support students in identifying their own ‘tipping point’? What processes are in place for your school to monitor and identify students who may be experiencing high levels of stress? What support systems does your school have in place for students who need assistance?

Advisors, Dean, Guidance, Athletic Trainer, School Nurse, and other support staff help students make selections for program choices, support students who are stressed or have chronic conditions. In the Upper School, a team comprised of the four Class Deans, the Guidance Counselor, the Learning Specialist, the Dean of Students and the Division Director meet every three days to review students at each grade level who seem to be struggling academically, emotionally, or socially. Teachers, coaches, parents, and students themselves report concerns to individual members of the team. At the meeting, action plans, which include follow up with students, teachers, advisors, and parents, are discussed and devised.

How does your school address and communicate the concept of ‘balance’ with students, faculty and parents? What collaborative processes are in place for schools to work with students and families to reduce stressors and maintain a healthy balance?

The school employees parent coffees, advisory and assemblies, and a health and wellness course page. In the Upper School, advisors meet with each advisee and her parents to discuss the choices and plans for the following academic year. As part of this conversation, students complete a “Time Balance Sheet,” on which they identify their baseline physical needs (sleep, hygiene, exercise and eating) with their academic and extracurricular commitments. This sheet is used as the basis for the larger conversation about balance, expectations and maintaining focus and interest.

Top 3-5 recommendations for parents to help their students achieve better balance:

- Don’t overextend your child’s schedule inside or outside of school. Every child should have free play time/down time at all ages.
- Extracurricular activities can enrich a child’s life, but over-commitment to extracurricular activities can be counter-productive. Strive for a healthy balance of commitments after school.
- Be good role models for balancing life, work, and play.

MARET SCHOOL

Coeducational, K-12, college preparatory, day school in Washington, DC, 650 students.

Maret offers its students a rich array of rigorous classes and exciting extracurricular opportunities. In the Middle and Upper School most students take five challenging academic classes each year, and students fill out their schedules with non-homework classes in visual and performing arts, technology, service learning, and human development. Almost all students K-12 participate in a physical education course or play on a team, and students enjoy an abundance of extracurricular offerings revolving around performance or other special interests. The opportunity to do so much is extremely appealing to our students, but it can also pose challenges. The richness can lead to overly busy and hectic lives—and of course the potential for stress is only compounded when students also seek to meet family, church, community, and other outside-of-school obligations.

We at Maret recognize that achieving a balance between work and relaxation, between study and play, is a widespread problem in today's society. We appreciate that imbalance can lead to a level of stress that can cause maladaptive behaviors and actually impede learning. So we consciously seek ways both to alleviate stress and to help our students learn manage it. We consciously discuss the idea of “balance” throughout our program. We see developing the skills needed to achieve balance to be an important aspect of our curriculum.

Some of the methods we use to encourage balance are programmatic and intentional. Our Upper School Homework Policy, for instance, creates guidelines that insure that teachers assign reasonable amounts of homework during the week. It also designates specific times of the year—Homecoming Weekend, Thanksgiving, Winter Break, and Spring Break—as times when homework cannot be assigned, so these periods can be truly restful.

In addition, our Director of Counseling, Holly Hinderlie, strives to create programming that helps students develop the skills needed to manage and alleviate stress. One important recent thrust has been “Mindfulness Lunches” in the Upper School, which feature talks by a well-known local expert on the subject. There has been such interest in mindfulness that many faculty recently attended a session on the topic designed just for them. At a recent community-wide event, directed to students, teachers, parents, and alumni, we watched and discussed the film *Race to Nowhere*, which addresses the impact of stress on students. This year a similar event will discuss failure and how failure is, in fact, an important impetus to growth and learning.

Maret endeavors to alleviate student stress in other, less obvious ways. Our emphasis on knowing and appreciating all students deeply as individuals helps faculty identify when students are feeling stressed and then offer advice on managing it. This counseling approach infuses our program and is apparent in settings as diverse as the mathematics office and the Lower School playground. Importantly, it informs our approach to student scheduling and to the college admissions process. When we talk to students about creating their academic programs in the Upper School, we emphasize the importance of creating balance in their home/school lives. Fortunately, our academic classes are not beholden to external entities like the Advanced Placement program, so we have the luxury of creating rigorous and fascinating classes that proceed at an age-appropriate pace. Our College Counseling Office is exceptional in its ability to help students and families navigate a dynamic and sometimes confusing process. Our thoughtful and caring faculty prioritize students' emotional needs as readily as they do students' intellectual needs.

Unusually, one of Maret's core values is "Joy," and we seek ways to bring joyful moments into our lives. We at Maret are serious about fostering joyfulness. Lower School students "Dance Into Spring Break" every year, Middle School students compete in fun contests through the 5-8 "house" system, and Upper School students appreciate joy-filled community events like Field Day. So while we recognize that we must create intentional curricular programming delivered by a committed and caring faculty, we recognize that there's a lot of power in simple gestures, too.

Ultimately, we want Maret students to graduate both with strong academic skills and with a strong sense of how to navigate life. Our emphasis on both excellence and joy in students' lives is carefully designed to meet both needs.

McLEAN SCHOOL

Coeducational, K-12, college preparatory, day school in Potomac, MD, 350 students.

How does your school define 'balance' for its students? Is the definition of balance the same for all students? Why or why not? Does it differ by age or division?

McLean does provide balance for all its students in grade K -12. Age-appropriate activities are offered both during the school day and after school. In the Lower School, there are Friday afternoon clubs, such Robotics, Cooking, Dance, and Art, where students in grades K - 4 select clubs based on areas of interest. In addition, there are after school activities offered on a rotating schedule throughout the school year. For

students in grades 5 - 12, we have Robotics teams, performing arts opportunities (band, chorus, strings) and a variety of athletic opportunities by competing in the Potomac Valley Athletic Conference. The homework policy for students in the Lower School (through grade 4) limits homework to a minimum, and for students in grades 5 - 12, it varies from an hour and a half to two and a half hours nightly. Yoga classes are offered to Lower School students and Mindfulness is incorporated into all three divisions of the school.

How does your school encourage students to recognize and live balanced lives as individuals and/or as part of your community?

McLean encourages its students to live balanced lives both as individuals and as community members. In grades K - 8, students have daily PE classes and are required to complete two credits of PE in the Upper School. Each day, students have a fifteen-minute break for exercise and movement and a balanced snack is recommended. Middle School students have opportunities to join clubs of interest such as Chess, Magic the Gathering, Girls in the Middle, Sports, and Modern Men. In the Upper School, students are required to join two clubs as well as earn community service hours. Lower School students have community service opportunities on campus and Middle School students have opportunities off campus to Martha's Table and Wider Circle.

What does your school offer or require of students and families beyond academics? Please comment on any areas valued by your school such as spirituality (secular or non-secular), personal health and well-being, community service, enrichment, creativity, athletics, leisure, life skills or other.

See above.

How does your school support students in identifying their own 'tipping point'? What processes are in place for your school to monitor and identify students who may be experiencing high levels of stress? What support systems does your school have in place for students who need assistance?

Homeroom teachers and advisors learn of an individual student's strengths and challenges through their Student Learning Profile, which provides strategies and accommodations to help students gain success in the classroom. Each grade level meets on a weekly basis to discuss students' progress and any challenges that may have been developed. In the Lower School, in addition to the classroom teachers, the support team consists of a Reading Specialist, Learning Specialist, Math Specialist (grades K - 8) and a Counselor. The support is offered based on a scaffolded approach. In the Middle School,

the model is similar to the Lower School but there is an additional counselor. For grades 7 - 12, there's an advisory system that allows for additional support in the Upper School, in addition to classroom teachers and advisors, there is a support team that consists of a Learning Specialist, Guidance Counselor, Academic Coach, and College Counselor. For students in grades 5 - 12, there is a resource period or study hall offered during the school day to receive support.

How does your school address and communicate the concept of 'balance' with students, faculty and parents? What collaborative processes are in place for schools to work with students and families to reduce stressors and maintain a healthy balance?

Division Heads send weekly emails that provide information for parents on activities that have happened during the week at each grade level. The Director of Community Health and Wellness organizes a community education series for parents. Our Parents Association organizes an annual Cecily's Day Advocacy Workshop with nationally recognized speakers and experts in areas related to educating the whole child. The College Counseling process involves parent meetings as designated grade levels to ease stress involved in applying to and choosing an appropriate college for our students.

Top 3-5 recommendations for parents to help their students achieve better balance:

- Model balance in your own life.
- Provide structure for child's school work, down time and social time (including social media time).
- Be present and connected to child's school activities.

NORWOOD SCHOOL

Coeducational, K-8, day school in Bethesda, MD, 440 students.

How does your school define 'balance' for its students? Is the definition of balance the same for all students? Why or why not? Does it differ by age or division?

We view balance at our school as growing out of our child-centered approach to education. Specifically, we want to challenge and support students at the right levels for them throughout their educational career; in this sense, balance is different for each

student. Further, it is different for a student over the course of the career at the school depending on where they are in their development.

How does your school encourage students to recognize and live balanced lives as individuals and/or as part of your community?

We explicitly talk about balance in our homeroom and advisory classes. Additionally, in our daily assemblies, topics often include discussions of balance and lifeskills associated with maintaining a leveled approach to learning, school, and life. Occasionally, we have parent events that center around topics like balance. Within our curriculum, students, throughout all of their years at the school, take a balance of core, arts, and physical education classes; this approach teaches students to attend to their creative, academic, physical, and emotional needs.

What does your school offer or require of students and families beyond academics? Please comment on any areas valued by your school such as spirituality (secular or non-secular), personal health and well-being, community service, enrichment, creativity, athletics, leisure, life skills or other.

As discussed above, our school has a child-centered approach to education and community. We believe that teaching the whole-child, including discussions around spirituality, personal health, leisure, etc., is the core of instruction; our curriculum addresses many of these topics and culturally many of our community-wide events create opportunities for broader conversations on these topics.

How does your school support students in identifying their own ‘tipping point’? What processes are in place for your school to monitor and identify students who may be experiencing high levels of stress? What support systems does your school have in place for students who need assistance?

We use a homeroom/advisory system where child is well-known by their teacher. Students interact with this adult daily, and that teacher serves as a direct contact with the student’s parents to talk about this and any other issues. Additionally, the homeroom/advisory system, in addition to our middle school lifeskills program, teaches students to be reflective, and to develop a self-awareness so that they are aware of when pressure or anxiety is impacting them negatively. In addition to the advisor or homeroom teacher, students have access to a counselor if they need a safe place to process issues they are working through. Based on the specific situation a student is experiencing, a number of other resources are available to help students.

How does your school address and communicate the concept of ‘balance’ with students, faculty and parents? What collaborative processes are in place for schools to work with students and families to reduce stressors and maintain a healthy balance?

With faculty, teachers and administrators frequently discuss the requirements that we are placing on students and families, from number of events at school to the frequency and volume of homework assigned. With students, faculty make reasonable accommodations for students who find their current balance untenable or too challenging. With parents, there are open lines of communication between faculty and parents; division directors work with parents to support students in ways that help them find appropriate balance in their school experience.

Top 3-5 recommendations for parents to help their students achieve better balance:

- Beware of overscheduling your child to help them achieve a better balance. This can be accomplished by knowing your child’s limitations in terms of how many after school activities they can realistically manage. While some children can manage five sports practices a week in addition to their school work, others benefit from having more unstructured time.
- Make family time a priority. Despite everyone’s busy schedules, set aside quality time with your family. Although, it’s age –appropriate for teens to spend much of their free time with friends, it is important to instill the value of family time. Watch a movie, have a family meal together or enjoy the outdoors!
- Teach your children the art of time management. Help give them the tools to prioritize what needs to be accomplished. Some children are naturally good at managing their own time, while others get overwhelmed and need more support/guidance from their parents. Planners and weekly to-do lists are good tools that can help students be organized and achieve better balance.

ST. ANDREW’S EPISCOPAL SCHOOL

Coeducational, preK-12, Episcopal, college preparatory, day school in Potomac, MD, 525 students.

Finding the Right Balance is a question asked regularly at St. Andrew’s Episcopal School. Without providing that balance, we can’t fulfill our mission of knowing and

inspire each child. Being a school with students as young as two and as old as 12th graders, we understand that balance means something different for different age groups.

For our youngest students, Responsive Classroom allows them to bring their personal stories and reflections into the classroom. Prioritizing social/emotional learning time during the school day can be just as important as academic learning. Keeping our students moving regularly throughout the day, providing brain breaks, allows them to stretch their muscles, not just their minds.

For our Middle School students, balance is built into their day - from core curriculum classes to arts to athletics. We are also mindful of the social curriculum, which requires as much attention as the academic curriculum. Lastly, we remind students to balance work and fun, home life and school life. We model that by building breaks in the day from our routine through things like clubs and special assemblies.

In the Upper School, we work to help students lead balanced lives through individual counseling by the academic deans, advisors and teachers. Balance for them also means getting enough sleep, approaching being a student as having a job, and most importantly, participating in something they are passionate about (sports, clubs, etc.) while also maintaining their important relationships.

With balance in mind, we offer our students and families many activities that go beyond academics. Our Lower and Intermediate School students have after school clubs, weekly chapels, community meetings and social events for them and their families. Middle and Upper School students have Chapel, they participate in athletics throughout the year, and Service Learning is a critical component in their education.

As a school devoted to research-informed teaching, we also conduct our own original research. Last year, in partnership with Research Schools International, which is led by faculty at Harvard's Graduate School of Education, we conducted a study on how happiness correlates to motivation and academic achievement. Prior to that, we did a study with researchers from Johns Hopkins and looked at stress levels in our students. We work hard to make sure our students are as happy as they can be and as low-stress as possible given the demands of an academically rigorous education.

In the Lower School, we initiate conversations with students so they notice how their bodies feel when they experience certain emotions. We empower them with self-help strategies to help them practice how to navigate these feelings independently and with teacher guidance. In the Intermediate School, our homeroom-based schedule allows one teacher to spend most of the day with the students. Any time there is a concern, they schedule a meeting with all teachers to gather information and chart a course for

supporting the student. In the Middle and Upper School, we rely on our advisors, who meet with our students weekly, and our school counselor, to help identify students who may feel stretched too thin.

Our biggest asset is of course our teachers and parents. Professional development for our faculty, parent education nights and coffees for our community, help lead to healthy relationships and allow us to help provide balance for our students.

In the end, the most important thing that we have are the relationships with others. Research shows that children who are more adept socially and lead balanced lives are happier later in life. Make the time as a family to connect at the end of each day and parents should model the balance they want their children to have. And perhaps most importantly, don't put additional pressure on their students. Celebrate their successes relative to where they began, not to where you think they should be.

ST. STEPHEN'S & ST. AGNES SCHOOL

Coeducational, JK-12, Episcopal, college preparatory, day school in Alexandria, VA, 1120 students.

How does your school define 'balance' for its students? Is the definition of balance the same for all students? Why or why not? Does it differ by age or division?

This question of balance has become a true focal point for many independent schools, ours included. There is a very clear awareness on the part of our parents, faculty, administrators and students (at least in the upper grades) that we live in a time of anxiety and stress for many. In truth, we as a community have not set about trying to define balance for our students. Rather, we have been engaged in conversations that explore the factors that contribute to a sense of imbalance or stress on the part of community members. As a part of this process we are seeking to identify those strategies and means by which we can diminish the influence of those factors that contribute to a lack of balance in students' lives. Furthermore, we are engaging in conversations centering on wellness as a key component of our school's culture. An important dimension of these conversations is the awareness that students are at differing places developmentally and that the strategies we incorporate must be age-appropriate and thoughtfully implemented at each of the divisions.

We believe it is important to gain insight from our students on the nature of their experience as students. Toward this end we administer Quality of Life surveys to

students on each of the three campuses. We also ask parents to participate in an on-line survey regarding our academic program, school culture, and their child's engagement and workload. The student and parent surveys have provided valuable data, which allows us to clearly analyze and understand the points of tension for our students. Our three divisions are engaged in meaningful collaborations around these ideas. For example, a cadre of US faculty members created a Professional Learning Community centered on incorporating mindfulness practice in their classrooms. We also have teachers piloting mindfulness practice at the MS and LS levels as well.

What does your school offer or require of students and families beyond academics? Please comment on any areas valued by your school such as spirituality (secular or non-secular), personal health and well-being, community service, enrichment, creativity, athletics, leisure, life skills or other.

We hold fast to our Episcopal identity and as such every member of our community attends a weekly chapel service on his/her campus. There is no requirement that every community member is Episcopalian, and we are very clear that all are welcome at the table. As such, the chapel service is an important time for us, as it allows community members to slow down and gather in a meaningful manner. It is a time to reflect on what truly matters: service to others, community connections, care for the planet and so much more. Students also participate in chapel in age-appropriate ways, such as Upper School students giving the homily, Middle School students reading the bible passages and Lower School students leading the prayers. Our students also participate in religion classes, starting with the Godly Play (Montessori-approach bible story explorations) in the LS through to our Ethics courses in Upper School.

We place an emphasis on teaching students the importance of healthy bodies and healthy minds by providing health classes to our students beginning in third grade and running through twelfth grade. We also work with Middle School and Upper School students to understand how stress can influence decisions and behavior through such programs as Freedom From Chemical Dependence workshops. In addition, we have classes that are taught by our Counseling Department focused on teaching Upper School students to recognize the signs of depression.

We are also a community that understands the importance of creative play and movement. Our students in the LS have at least one recess each day. Our Middle School students also have regular recess opportunities. We strive to engage the whole child, and in doing so, we provide a rich and diverse set of offerings for students to explore and engage in beyond their college preparatory academic lives. Some of these offerings are in the form of classes, while many are enrichment offerings made available outside of the

regular school day. The enrichment programs are viewed as opportunities as opposed to requirements. Ultimately, we seek to nurture the spirit and our enrichment activities and programs are not designed to add more to the students' plates, but rather to allow students to explore those areas that inspire, energize or intrigue them. Finally, we have a strong Physical Education program JK- 6 and dynamic sports program in grades 8-12.

How does your school support students in identifying their own 'tipping point'? What processes are in place for your school to monitor and identify students who may be experiencing high levels of stress? What support systems does your school have in place for students who need assistance?

One of the most important aspects of our school is the value that we place on developing strong relationships between students, faculty and administrators. The strength of these relationships allows for teachers to truly know their students and to identify those times when students appear to feel overwhelmed or stressed and to help them navigate the challenges they face. Teachers also communicate regularly with families, administrators and counselors regarding student performance, student stress levels and/or concerns. Our school also has the following programs in place for student support:

Our school has an excellent counseling department with a full-time counselor on each campus. Our counselors run lunch bunch groups as an opportunity for students to discuss their successes, challenges, experiences and stressors. Counselors also meet with students one-on-one to provide support as needed. The counselors are available to teachers and parents as well. Our counselors help community members to identify where they are emotionally and how to navigate the issues they might face. Our counselors also teach workshops on recognizing the signs of depression to our US students.

Our chaplains are available as a resource to community members for guidance, connection and support during positive periods and also when experiencing stress, anxiety and/or concerns.

Faculty members provide support and assistance to students during planning periods, lunch and STAT periods.

Our Academic Support Centers offer support to identified students on each campus, allowing students to gain assistance with planning and execution of academic work, thereby reducing stress.

Top 3-5 recommendations for parents to help their students achieve better balance:

- Recognize the value of “down time” and creative play for young students. Current research highlights the value of creative/imaginative play as highly valuable.
- Check-in regularly with your child. Have conversations about the importance of balance and making time for endeavors that one truly enjoys.
- Model the living of a balanced life. Set aside specific time for family and don't allow work or other obligations to intrude on that time.
- Have non-tech times in the house, times when everyone unplugs and disconnects. Family dinners are a great time to be together and focus on each other.

STONE RIDGE SCHOOL OF THE SACRED HEART

Single-sex girls, 1-12, Catholic, Sacred Heart, college preparatory, day school in Bethesda, MD, 706 students. Coeducational through Kindergarten.

How does your school define ‘balance’ for its students? Is the definition of balance the same for all students? Why or why not? Does it differ by age or division?

Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart defines balance in multiple ways. One approach to defining and encouraging balance is through the Goals and Criteria of Sacred Heart education. These Goals and Criteria charge schools of the Sacred Heart to form students in areas of faith, intellect, community, social action, and personal growth in an atmosphere of wise freedom. This approach provides a structure and an environment to develop the whole child and where each student can discover and deepen his/her own passions. With these items in mind, the school also recognizes that each child brings with him/her their own gifts, so the idea/definition of balance will look different for many students at different times during their development. The Goals and Criteria provide all members of the community with a reminder of the need to develop a positive sense of self with an appreciation and understanding of each person's unique role in growing and supporting the community and world at large.

Because each student is at a different place developmentally and comes to the school with different experiences and backgrounds, the definition may differ from child to child, but the overall philosophy and definition of balance is the same, placing equal emphasis on family, academic, and community life. The understanding of each child's

needs is developed through the close relationships the school forms with family and through open and honest communication with each other.

How does your school encourage students to recognize and live balanced lives as individuals and/or as part of your community?

As stated above, Stone Ridge uses the Goals and Criteria of Sacred Heart education to encourage students to recognize and live balanced lives as individuals and as a community. The school does its best to model the practice of balance through the various daily schedules that provide each developmental group with the structure and time to grow and thrive as a community of learners. The various schedules in each division were created in consultation with Independent School Management group so that they reflect the current research on how students at different ages work and learn best. The decision to implement each schedule was also influenced by the school's belief that students need to engage in the arts, physical activities and athletics, extra-curricular activities while managing an appropriate amount of homework as articulated in the homework policies in each division.

The schedules also reserve time for prayer, morning meetings and assemblies, mid-morning breaks (Upper and Middle School) and snack (in the Lower School), advisory periods, study halls (Middle school) and free periods (Upper School), teacher help opportunities (Upper School), and clubs and activities (Upper School). Regular conversations are built into homeroom (Lower School) and Advisory periods (Middle School) using the Responsive Classroom and Developmental Design models where students are encouraged to look at their use of time and their level of involvement in other areas of community life. In the Upper School, students are scheduled into different seminars where developmentally appropriate topics of academic, social, and emotional wellness and health are discussed. Upper School juniors and seniors are also scheduled into college seminars to guide them through their individual journeys through the college process. These seminars are taught by school counselors, learning specialists, and the college counselors.

What does your school offer or require of students and families beyond academics? Please comment on any areas valued by your school such as spirituality (secular or non-secular), personal health and well-being, community service, enrichment, creativity, athletics, leisure, life skills or other.

Stone Ridge offers students and families with a myriad of opportunities to engage in the life of the community. As a Catholic school, liturgies and prayer services are of the most important and cherished activities that Stone Ridge offers. Here mothers and daughter

and fathers and daughters gather in prayer to recognize, celebrate, and explore their faith together. In addition to this, Stone Ridge offers a robust Social Action program where students at various stages learn the importance of and develop the practice of doing regular service in the community. This service ranges from various fundraisers and drives to the regular engagement in service learning through the unique Social Action program in the Upper School where students perform service in the Washington metro area during a school day (this is required of all Upper School students). The school also offers a number of after-school programs for Lower and Middle School students so that students can explore other areas of interest and passion. These range from Girls on the Run to cooking to dance to robotics clubs and classes. Middle School and Upper School students can engage in our rich Athletics program and Upper School students can participate in number of lifetime fitness and wellness classes. Middle and Upper School students also have the opportunity to explore the dramatic arts through the musical and dramatic theater productions offered each semester. At various points during the athletic seasons, all members of the community are invited to celebrate their school pride, cheer for the athletics teams, and share their talents through Gator Game Day. In addition to these activities and offering during the year, a number of Upper School students will take advantage of summer classes and enrichment opportunities to provide themselves with a manageable and reasonable schedule during the school year.

How does your school support students in identifying their own ‘tipping point’? What processes are in place for your school to monitor and identify students who may be experiencing high levels of stress? What support systems does your school have in place for students who need assistance?

As stated above, Stone Ridge has crafted schedules in each of the divisions where time is reserved for morning meetings, advisory periods, and various seminars taught in the Upper School. It is in the regular interaction with teachers and student support staff members that the school is able to closely monitor students, their stress levels, and each student’s individual academic, social and emotional needs. It is through these structures as well as individual meetings with school counselor and administrators that students are challenged to identify their own “tipping points.” Each division holds regular meetings where student needs are addressed and where teachers can share their observations of and or concerns about particular students. These meetings are facilitated by members of the school administration and student support team. The school also regularly communicates these observations when necessary with families. While each school counselor is equipped to offer a certain level of support for individual student needs, there are times when they may make a referral to an outside psychologist or executive functioning coach when student needs more intensive support. It is the goal

of the school to partner as closely with the family as possible to offer the level of care and support needed for each student.

How does your school address and communicate the concept of ‘balance’ with students, faculty and parents? What collaborative processes are in place for schools to work with students and families to reduce stressors and maintain a healthy balance?

As stated above, Stone Ridge uses the structures of homerooms, advisory periods, seminars, and other assemblies to address the subject of health, wellness, and balance with students. It is in these forums that students are provided with instruction on how to develop the appropriate tools to do this. In recent years, the school has invited local and nationally renowned psychologists to educate faculty, staff, and parents on the growing need for balance in a society with a rising number of anxious and overprogramed students. The school has also taken the initiative to assess the effectiveness of its schedules and to track the amount of homework assigned to students. The most effective processes are through the open lines of communication and personal relationships that are formed between teachers, counselors, school administrators, and families. These relationships are fostered and maintained through individual meetings, parent informational coffees, and through everyday informal interactions. The school believes that through these strong and trusting relationships that it can serve the needs of its students so that they may find the appropriate balance and thrive.

Top 3-5 recommendations for parents to help their students achieve better balance:

- Take advantage of the programs and services offered by the school community to help in dealing with the balance issue.
- Be the parent! As a family, define what balance is for your family. Model the balanced life and seek help (school professionals, books, media, discussion groups, etc.). The struggle for balance is universal. Guide your children to reflect on their choices to actively seek balance in all aspects of their lives (social, family, spiritual, emotional, academic, and physical).
- Remain in close communication with your child and with his/her school.
- Help support your child in his/her quest for happiness; help them find their passion.
- Continually evaluate. Are you/your children doing “too many good things?” What can you as the adults in their lives do about it?

THE LAB SCHOOL OF WASHINGTON

Coeducational, 1-12, college preparatory, day school for students with learning differences and disabilities in Washington, DC, 375 students.

How does your school define ‘balance’ for its students? Is the definition of balance the same for all students? Why or why not? Does it differ by age or division?

Balance means something different for every student at The Lab School, whether age 6 or 17. Some kids struggle with executive functions and time management, so learning coping strategies that work for them helps build much needed confidence and resilience. Lab also focuses on helping students with emotional balance through positive practices like Responsive Classroom and mindfulness. We want our students to know that we value their emotional life as much as their academics.

How does your school encourage students to recognize and live balanced lives as individuals and/or as part of your community?

At Lab, we encourage students to recognize the importance of balance. We focus on metacognition by teaching our students to think about their own thinking, to become more self-aware, and to discover what they need to be successful. Taking consistent breaks, promoting movement, and learning strategies for self-regulation are all ways that we help our students figure out how to live a balanced life at school and at home. The more children understand and accept themselves as individuals — academically, athletically, artistically, and socially — the more successful and balanced they will be.

What does your school offer or require of students and families beyond academics? Please comment on any areas valued by your school such as spirituality (secular or non-secular), personal health and well-being, community service, enrichment, creativity, athletics, leisure, life skills or other.

The Lab School was founded on an integration of the arts into academic curricula so that learning is project-based and reinforces the subject matter, most notably in our Academic Clubs. Beyond the academic curriculum, any child who wants to play a sport, participate in theater or other arts, travel, participate in community service, and join other activities like Model UN can; there are no tryouts or restrictions. Although extra-curricular activities are not required, we encourage and support all of our students to take risks in this safe environment, to try new activities, and to discover their strengths and passions.

How does your school support students in identifying their own ‘tipping point’? What processes are in place for your school to monitor and identify students who may be experiencing high levels of stress? What support systems does your school have in place for students who need assistance?

The Lab School is a small community. Teachers, related service providers, and administrators are collaborative players, and know what to look for to keep kids from their “tipping point.” As mentioned above, we promote movement, metacognition, and mindfulness — all ways to help our students find calm and balance. Also, because of our small teacher: student ratio, our faculty and staff know each of our students well, not just as learners but as individuals, whole people. Each of our four school divisions has a dedicated social worker who is both available for students and who also consults regularly with the teachers.

How does your school address and communicate the concept of ‘balance’ with students, faculty and parents? What collaborative processes are in place for schools to work with students and families to reduce stressors and maintain a healthy balance?

In addition to setting up meetings with faculty, staff, or administrators when desired, there are many opportunities for parents to ask questions and address their concerns. We hold regular parent lectures, round tables, town hall meetings, and coffees with division heads where we address such topics as social media, managing anxiety, and navigating friendships. When our students receive iPads, their parents learn with their children how to use these tools in a balanced way at school and at home. We want parents to know that we are helping their children learn to find balance in their lives, an individualized process, which may be very different from ways that parents find balance. At Lab, we have an open- door policy and encourage our parents to be involved so that their children thrive in and out of school.

Top 3-5 recommendations for parents to help their students achieve better balance:

- Celebrate your child’s successes, no matter what size or shape they take.
- Focus on your child’s effort rather than performance. Celebrate their “islands of competence,” which might manifest on stage, on the basketball court, in science class, or behind a camera.
- Slow down, step back; celebrate your child’s individuality.

- Model and talk with your children about how you achieve balance in your life, and how you deal with stress when it bubbles up. Acknowledge and accept your own mistakes, and let your children see them in the open.
- Facilitate a good and trusting relationship with your child's school so that your child knows s/he has a secure base both at school and at home.

THE POTOMAC SCHOOL

Coeducational, K-12, college preparatory, day school in McLean, VA, 1032 students.

How does Potomac school define “balance” for its students? Is the definition of balance the same for all students? Why or why not? Does it differ by age or division?

The Potomac School's mission is to foster each student's intellectual development, love of learning, and strength of character within an inclusive community distinguished by a spirit of support and challenge by focusing on the whole child. Understanding that growth happens in response to challenge, the school incorporates this mindset throughout each student's daily experience. Our 90-acre campus supports the school's belief that learning occurs not only in a classroom but outdoors in natural and open spaces. Potomac's five core values: courage, humility, integrity, respect and perseverance guide our community in leading balanced lives.

In many ways the definition of balance is the same for all of our students. As a school, we seek to support each student in their journey toward self-understanding and self-advocacy. On the other hand, the definition of balance differs by student as we take into consideration the developmental stages and move from a more external and structured model in our younger grades to a more internal and independent process for our older students.

One way The Potomac School defines balance is to provide multiple opportunities to develop skills that support self-understanding and self-advocacy. Programs and initiatives across K-12 such as SEL (Social Emotional Learning) assemblies, Responsive Classroom, the Real Me 6th grade girls leadership program, ABBS (Potomac's Adolescent Brain and Body Studies), Frameworks of Identity, Conversations that Count parent program series, and a variety of clubs and activities exist across multiple divisions.

How does your school encourage students to recognize and live balanced lives as individuals and/or as part of your community?

The Potomac School believes that leading a balanced life is an important and an evolving process. As part of this process The Potomac School is dedicated to teaching and supporting students growing self-awareness, self-management (including time management skills and maximizing their learning time), relationship skills, social awareness, and responsible decision-making.

- SEL lessons provide students with language and skills that are central to self-awareness and self-management. This common language allows even young students the ability to express themselves in times of conflict and concrete strategies to help them calm their bodies and minds including mindfulness techniques.
- Each LS classroom creates its own tool box that includes materials that represent tools such as the “I” message, “stop, think, choose,” mind jar breathing techniques to help students with self-regulation.
- Faculty (K-8) are trained and committed to incorporating SEL tools/strategies and Responsive Classroom such as open session, check-in’s, classroom guidance lessons and monthly assemblies to build a student’s ability to communicate their thoughts and feelings to build resilience.
- Intermediate School (IS) and US faculty serve as student advisors who seek to develop collaborative and supportive relationships with advisees to foster their individual and academic growth as part of the school community, while guiding students toward individuality.
- The school strives to stay current in its understanding of external forces impacting students’ day-to-day lives such as technology and social media.
- Through choice and self-selection of clubs, activities, athletics, arts and course work, students are guided by faculty and advisors to pursue individual interests while being realistic about schedule management.
- Regarding homework, the School sets limits on the time and/or amount at different grade levels in order to allow time for self, family, and other interests.
- Schedules are designed for students in each division to maximize opportunities for academics, completion of assignments, access to faculty and learning resources, as well as exposure to arts, athletics and other interests.

- Faculty are encouraged to utilize our beautiful outdoor campus. There are a number of outdoor classrooms and natural surroundings that can add to the experiential learning process.
- Upper School students participate in an independent health and wellness survey to assess knowledge of health and wellness topics to evaluate curriculum that addresses these areas.

What does your school offer or require of students and families beyond academics? Please comment on any areas valued by your school such as spirituality (secular or non secular), personal health and well-being, community service, enrichment, creativity, athletics, leisure, life skills, or other.

The Potomac School encourages students to become independent thinkers and learners. The School's richly varied curriculum draws students beyond mastery of fundamental skills towards the rewards of inquiry, initiative and reflection.

Our community K-12 strives to incorporate many voices and viewpoints in day-to-day learning experiences that strengthen and support students awareness and understanding of cultural competency. Students have the opportunity to experience and celebrate their own identity by making choices to participate in affinity and alliance groups, clubs and activities.

- A belief in fostering physical health through activity and movement, all students grades K-12, are not only required but encouraged to participate in physical education and athletics. Lower School (LS) and Middle School (MS) students are exposed and introduced to a variety of sports and physical activities on a weekly basis. In the Intermediate School (IS) and Upper School (US) there are specific athletic and activity requirements. Students may choose from a wide variety of options to fulfill this requirement including: team sports, yoga, weights and conditioning, team management, yearbook, robotics and theater productions.
- The school has a long history of service within the community and is currently exploring and developing a new framework for service learning and how community relationships and service projects can be intentionally incorporated into the curriculum.
- There are initiatives in place to further and deepen existing programs that focus on life skills such as financial literacy, public speaking and cultural competency.

- In each division certain grade levels are required to fulfill a more in-depth and independent project that allows students the flexibility to choose an area of interest to pursue.
- At Potomac, we want to ensure that every student is fully engaged in all aspects of student life. In addition to our classroom teachers and advisors, our STEPS (Strengthening Engagement at the Potomac School) program offers students both faculty and peer mentors who support and guide each student who might need extra help academically, socially, or emotionally. All students in grades 7-12 are eligible.
- In order to help students with life balance, the school has established classroom, athletic and activity requirements that encourage students to go beyond a natural area of interest. For example, the US arts requirement of one and one half credits is fulfilled by taking courses in two of three areas: theater, studio art and music. This requirement allows for some students to go beyond their comfort zone while also allowing students the opportunity to continue with personal interests.
- The school provides more in-depth coursework and specialized programs that students may choose to apply for including SERC (Science and Engineering Research Center), VPAC (Visual and Performing Arts Concentration, and GPAC (Global Perspectives and Citizenship).
- There are whole-class discussions and individual opportunities for all Potomac School students to develop leadership skills. Beginning in the third grade, and through each division, there are committees and activities where students are invited to self-select and serve in a more formal leadership capacity.

How does your school support students in identifying their own ‘tipping point’? What processes are in place for your school to monitor and identify students who may be experiencing high levels of stress? What support systems does your school have in place for students who need assistance?

Stress is the body's response to the needs and demands of daily life. School life can be very stressful and can fall out of balance. This might occur when too much emphasis is placed on the fear of not earning good grades, the need to perform perfectly, the desire to maintain an active social life, the need to combat social media messaging and meet college applications deadlines. Each person responds to stress differently, and it is important to understand that stress can be normal and even beneficial. It only becomes

too much and is seen as a “tipping point” when it starts to negatively interfere with our daily lives.

Potomac strives to help students identify the role that stress plays in their lives. The faculty is focused on teaching our students strategies and skills to learn different techniques to manage stress. A fundamental way in which we help our students to keep perspective and to lead balanced lives is by understanding that relationships and support networks are essential.

- SEL skills are taught starting in kindergarten to help students learn to self-regulate, identify and communicate when they need help or support. Students learn that asking for help and self-advocacy is a sign of strength.
- Students are surrounded by support systems and resources. Homeroom teachers and advisors are building relationships with students. This allows students to have at least one adult in their lives that are monitoring them by encouraging students to gain self-understanding and advocacy skills in order to identify when they are overwhelmed. Students will then engage in conversation around an action plan to help them regain balance.
- Each division has a weekly support system in place that allows for designated time to discuss students who are struggling and to develop a plan to help the student regain balance.
- Advisors are also monitoring students by receiving communications around academics and behavior from the administrative team as well as faculty. This allows the advisor to look for patterns and pull in other resources when needed such as the learning support specialist, counselor, tutoring or the use of the writing center to name a few. Advisors are also responsible for communication with parents/caregiver.
- Each division has designated faculty members who are identified as Deans of Students. Deans work together to oversee progress of each student. Deans are essential in pulling together a team to work collaboratively when supporting a student.
- Each division has a number of support staff in place to help students such as a learning support specialist, counselor, writing specialist, math specialist and reading specialist to name a few.
- Potomac has developed a thoughtful and intentional 8th grade transitional program that helps current Potomac students understand the move to Upper

School. There are a number of sessions in place that allow students and parents the opportunity to hear from faculty, administration and Upper School students on life in the Upper School. During these programs balance is specifically addressed.

- Advisors and College Counseling play a role in helping students strike a balance within their academic schedule. There are constant discussions around balance, looking at the whole picture including activities and being realistic with expectations.

How does your school address and communicate the concept of ‘balance’ with students, faculty, and parents? What collaborative processes are in place for schools to work with students and families to reduce stressors and maintain a healthy balance?

Communication is essential in building relationships and a critical component of supporting our students, families and faculty. The School continues to work collaboratively with groups such as the Parents Association, grade level and classroom parent representatives to develop and facilitate programs on a variety of topics.

Students:

- Students are encouraged to take time for fun and understand the importance of play. In the Upper School, students take advantage of the outdoors during their unscheduled time by playing soccer, frisbee, volleyball and eating their lunch outside.
- In the Upper School, each grade level participates in a program titled “Conversations that Count.” These are opportunities to encourage difficult conversations between parents/caregivers and their child. Topics focus on Drugs and Alcohol, Sexual Wellness, Stress and Transition to College.
- Advisory systems are in place to maintain an open line of communication between the school and parent as well as the advisor and student.

Faculty:

- Wellness classes are offered on campus for all interested faculty such as yoga and weightlifting.
- Faculty are given choice around school committees and initiatives that may build upon personal interest.

- Designated time is given to faculty in order to complete student progress report writing.
- Faculty are encouraged to help lead clubs and activities that build upon personal interest.
- Faculty are encouraged to participate in professional development to foster growth in your discipline area as well as personal interests.
- Potomac is dedicated to mentoring and providing experience to younger teachers. We offer housing for faculty participating in internship programs.

Parents:

- The Division Heads hold parent coffees in each grade level multiple times a year. This is an opportunity to discuss a range of topics that focus on curriculum, school life and balance unique to that developmental age and stage. Often times, faculty members will attend the coffees to add their perspective and knowledge around their specific content areas.
- In the LS and MS learning specialists host curriculum coffees to review academic work at each grade level and provide parents with information and changes within the curriculum.
- The counseling team and the Diversity and Inclusion Committee collaborate with the school's Parents Association to host guest speakers and book discussions designed to provide parents and faculty of K-12 students, information on topics including: identity and cultural competency, growth and development, parenting of children and adolescents, developing and maintaining open lines of communication, mental health concerns, costs and benefits of active lives, as well as the latest brain research and mindfulness practices that directly impact balance and well-being.

Top 3-5 recommendations for parents to help their students achieve better balance:

- Take time as a family to discuss and model your family values, rituals and traditions with your child(ren) and set aside time as a family both scheduled and unscheduled.
- Children and adolescents are a work in progress; recognize your child's strengths and remain open to potential areas for growth. Parents can teach their children

the value in surrounding themselves with a support system. Asking for and utilizing resources is a sign of strength.

- Parents are encouraged to find moments to reflect, discuss and foster gratitude in their own lives, while modeling these habits for their own child(ren).
- Parents are encouraged to teach their child(ren) to be flexible thinkers and to put situations in perspective. Parents should encourage their child(ren) to learn to let go and determine what is enough.
- Parents should model for their child(ren) the idea of overall wellness that includes the importance of healthy sleeping habits, well-balanced nutrition, physical activity, emotional self-regulation and the need to routinely take time for fun and play. Parents should model for their child(ren) how to identify and pursue passions and things that bring you joy.

THE PRIMARY DAY SCHOOL

Coeducational, preK-2, nondenominational, day school in Bethesda, MD, 120 students.

Balance

Because we are working with such young children at PDS, ages 4-8, much of the work that goes into achieving balance in our children's lives is determined by the teachers and parents. We work to assure that the systems and practices of the school, including achievement and expectations, align with their ability to stay happy, healthy and enjoy learning as an ongoing process. Balance is not the same for all students at PDS. For example, some students have more stamina to complete assignments and activities, while others do not. The overall needs of each child are different. The process of achieving balance is a journey and one that requires intimate knowledge, thoughtful ideas and clear communication within a school community.

Each school reflects the unique core values shared by its community. These core values define the "community of learning" that the students experience. To be most effective in delivering a quality educational experience and one of balance, Primary Day's leadership team, faculty and staff are united in pursuing a common purpose anchored in a set of core values. With these elements in place, the students will naturally reflect the school's purpose and core values. Primary Day's core values center around Beako and the Golden Rule. At Primary Day we value Beako, our school mascot and Beako's Golden Rule, the school's motto, which represents treating others the way you wish to be treated. The Golden Rule is at the core of each child's educational experience at the school. Beako's Golden Rule also translates into valuing service to others. The school and Primary Day

Parents' Association provide ongoing service opportunities to the children. These activities are service learning opportunities which give the children a chance to give back and to learn in the process. The boys and girls learn compassion and empathy, the meaning of giving, and the varied needs of people, animals and organizations in our local community.

I believe that the ideal common purpose for a school is always centered around a commitment to an enriching environment that fosters joy and love of learning in each child. This requires the adults working with the children to listen carefully, respond genuinely and show respect for each individual child. When educators purposefully and thoughtfully work to form trust with each child, they create a "safe" learning environment that allows each student to be comfortable taking the risks necessary to stretch to new academic and personal heights.

The children at Primary Day must be active participants in their learning environment. This is best accomplished when they feel safe, loved and respected. It is essential to establish an educational atmosphere where children can explore, question, take risks and learn from their experiences. When children know they are valued and listened to, when they know their teachers are invested in them, they respond, work harder and are more accountable.

Smart children come in many packages and it is the job of teachers to meet each student where she is and bring her along. Students learn best when they are in an environment that allows for risk-taking. At Primary Day children learn to take risks, which ultimately provides practical lessons in both success and failure, and builds resilient individuals who can adapt and adjust to both academic and social challenges.

A school community should have curriculum that is authentic and pertains to students' lives. A meaningful curriculum is achieved through integrated thematic studies. The right theme and essential questions provide coherence for both teachers and children. This approach makes it easier for children to understand why they are doing something, to make connections through different disciplines and to transfer knowledge from one context to another. When children take the intellectual journey on an integrated basis through various disciplines, and are given the opportunity to wrestle with big questions from different angles, their critical thinking skills and creativity reach new heights.

School communities should be brought together by their traditions, but they should also be willing to explore and embrace innovation, especially in regard to curriculum and teaching methods. Innovation should be thoughtful and collaborative, keeping the school's mission central to decision making. I believe that multiple voices are essential when change is considered. Listening to differences often sparks new ideas and

creativity within the school community. When all constituents come together to embrace the same ideals, much can be accomplished.

Finally, to achieve balance there must be fun, laughter, light-heartedness, courage and passion. These attributes enable Primary Day's community to be a place where children and adults alike are eager to begin each day.

We also value providing our children with activities after school that enriches their learning experience. These activities include cooking, robotics, sports, art, chess, yoga, martial arts, theatre and much more. Offering these activities at school reduces travel time for parents and children, reducing stress in their lives. The classes enhance and enrich the children's learning in areas they wish to explore, providing balance in their learning.

Offering the children hands-on, experiential programs allow for the children to experience authentic learning. This provides balance to the rigor of the school day by giving the children an outlet for learning in the field (Eco-wonder curriculum) or in the lab (STEM). Beako assemblies provide the children outlets for their creative expression through singing, dancing, and public speaking.

Identifying students at PDS who may be stressed or over committed is relatively simple. We know our children and families very well due to the small size of the school, allowing us (the teachers, specialists, head of school and staff) to recognize if a child is stressed and may need support, internally and/or externally.

Internal support at PDS is provided by the teachers and staff and we will often recommend an outside therapist or psychologist to support a child and/or family through difficult times.

Our practices support collaboration. Because we are a small school and intimately know the children and families, the teachers regularly provide the Head of School a heads up if there are any signs of stress or emotional/social issues with a child. Teachers come to the head of school and collectively we devise a plan to support the child. Oftentimes, a phone call is made and parents are invited to the school to speak with the Head of School and classroom teachers to address any signs of stress. We establish a plan with consistent opportunities to communicate on a regular basis so we're all aware of progress being made. At times, outside support of a therapist and psychologist is recommended and the Head of School serves as the person who is the conduit between the support and the school.

Top 3-5 recommendations for parents to help their students achieve better balance:

- **Community.** Ultimately, schools should be strong communities, where students and faculty feel safe, valued and engaged. A culture of mutual respect, integrity and compassion is vital for good learning to take place and sense of belonging to a school.
- **Safe/secure environment.** A safe and comfortable learning environment can be fully achieved by a school if its leadership, faculty and staff are committed to establishing and maintaining trust with individual students. Good schools are not one size fits all. They see all students as individuals who learn and respond differently. They recognize that each student's individual path can and should be unique and different.
- **Strong teachers.** Great teachers are a bulwark of a strong independent school. They work to their highest level of excellence when they feel valued, engaged, stimulated and accountable. Great teachers validate children as learners by making the effort to know well their individual strengths, challenges and differences. When teachers are energized, motivated learners, they lead their students with passion.
- **Parent education.** Ongoing education relevant to community issues and relevance to our age group.

WASHINGTON INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Coeducational, preK-12, international day school in Washington, DC, 900 students.

** Information in this document pertains to Upper and Middle Schools*

How does your school define 'balance' for its students? Is the definition of balance the same for all students? Why or why not? Does it differ by age or division?

How does your school encourage students to recognize and live balanced lives as individuals and/or as part of your community?

Balance is defined as being able to prioritize one's obligations and interests without undue stress or unhappiness. Making choices is a big part of achieving balance. Both MS and US talk about this with students through advisory and assemblies, our internal

health program and life skills classes, and bringing in outside speakers. Teachers also discuss the issue with students as well.

What does your school offer or require of students and families beyond academics? Please comment on any areas valued by your school such as spirituality (secular or non-secular), personal health and well-being, community service, enrichment, creativity, athletics, leisure, life skills or other.

Required:

Students have service obligations. They are able to choose from many opportunities. Health and life skills (required through grade 10).

PE is required (grades 6 through grade 10).

The IB program (grades 11 and 12) require service, physical activity, and creative endeavors.

Offered:

After school athletics. Use of physical fitness room.

Clubs and outside activities (e.g. MUN and other conferences, Ski club, musical productions, assorted field trips, etc.).

MS has a morning break.

MS and US offer long lunches.

Generous outdoor spaces (outdoor seating, basketball court, soccer pitch, etc.).

G11 and 12: free periods built into the schedule.

How does your school support students in identifying their own ‘tipping point’? What processes are in place for your school to monitor and identify students who may be experiencing high levels of stress? What support systems does your school have in place for students who need assistance?

Advisory program and assemblies in all grades offers opportunities for students to reflect and identify their own balance and wellbeing.

MS and US have Student Support Teams (SST) who work with faculty to identify issues and to create support systems (e.g. accommodations, parent involvement, etc.)

SST includes learning specialist, nurse and counselor who work directly with students as appropriate. All are available to all students.

We utilize a network of professionals including therapists, testers, tutors, etc.

We have a structured tutoring system that works to assign appropriate tutors to students.

Faculty meets to discuss individual students on a regular basis in order to develop support strategies if necessary.

How does your school address and communicate the concept of ‘balance’ with students, faculty and parents? What collaborative processes are in place for schools to work with students and families to reduce stressors and maintain a healthy balance?

Monthly parent meetings occur during which principals directly discuss issues related to balance. Parents given the opportunity to provide feedback, ask questions, etc. Parents also complete an annual survey to provide this feedback to the school.

Weekly electronic newsletter updates the community, and includes principals’ and head’s messages related to health, balance, etc.

Faculty collaborate, especially during faculty meetings, to support students.

Top 3-5 recommendations for parents to help their students achieve better balance:

- Talk through the strategies (e.g. decision making and prioritizing) that lead to balance with your children.
- Model balance for your children to see.
- Emphasize learning, fun, interests with your children, and de-emphasize the desire for a particular result (e.g. grades, building a resume, etc.).
- Try to be aware of when your children are stressed out and/or imbalanced. Be present emotionally for your children.

2016

Best Practices Forum ‘Finding the Right Balance’

SUMMARY OF TAKEAWAYS FOR PARENTS FROM SCHOOLS

- Balance doesn't equal harmony/happiness; it requires choices and struggle.
- Empower your children. Do not enable them.
- Define success and achievement developmentally, not in terms of outcome.
- Create boundaries and limits for your children.
- Prioritize family time, unplugged and interpersonally connected.
- Establish routines.
- Sometimes just have a dance party.
- Choose priorities.
- Take tech “time outs” every day.
- Keep lines of communication open with the school.
- Have early and consistent communication as a family regarding electronics.
- Sleep. Sleep. Sleep. Adolescents need sleep.
- Listen to the enthusiasm and excitement your child has regarding activities.
- Don't overschedule.
- Encourage (and perhaps enforce) sleep and healthy eating habits.
- Remember that invitations are voluntary not mandatory.
- Teach children "perfection" isn't ultimate goal; rather, effort and improving.
- Make discussions of balance a regular part of family dialogue and reflect.
- Listen to and talk with your children as they participate in new experiences.

- Keep bedtime schedules as consistent as possible.
- Value childhood!
- Create a strong family network, and family-style dining every evening.
- Don't allow demands to interfere with quality family/friend time.
- Remove/store all electronic devices during dinner/bedtime and model same. 62
- Don't worry about what your child isn't doing.
- Recognize when your child needs more support without offering self-pity.
- Don't overextend your child's schedule inside or outside of school.
- Strive for a healthy balance of commitments after school.
- Be good role models for balancing life, work, and play.
- Recognize the value of "down time" and creative play for young students.
- Check-in regularly with your child and talk about balance.
- Model the living of a balanced life and set aside specific time for family.
- Have non-tech times at home, times when everyone unplugs/disconnects.
- Take advantage of programs/services offered by the school community.
- Be the parent! As a family, define what balance is for your family.
- Remain in close communication with your child and with his/her school.
- Support your child in a quest for happiness; help them find their passion.
- Continually evaluate.
- Celebrate your child's successes, no matter what size or shape they take.
- Focus on your child's effort rather than performance.
- Slow down, step back; celebrate your child's individuality.
- Model and talk with your children about how you achieve balance.
- Facilitate a good and trusting relationship with your child's school.

- Take time as a family to discuss/model family values, rituals and traditions.
- Recognize children and adolescents are a work in progress. 63
- Model balance in your own life.
- Provide structure for child's school work, down time and social time.
- Be present and connected to child's school activities.
- Parents are encouraged to reflect, discuss and foster gratitude.
- Parents are encouraged to teach their child(ren) to be flexible thinkers.
- Parents should model for their child(ren) the idea of overall wellness.
- Community.
- Safe and secure environment.
- Strong teachers.
- Parent education.
- Talk through the strategies that lead to balance with your children.
- Model balance for your children to see.
- Emphasize learning, fun and interests; de-emphasize a particular result.
- Try to be aware of when your children are stressed out and/or imbalanced.