



PROGRAM SUMMARY

2016 Spring Speaker: Brigid Shulte

The Langley School

April 12, 2016

Overwhelmed: How to Work, Love, and Play When No One Has the Time

Brigid Shulte

The Parents Council of Washington Spring Speaker Event featured a discussion with Brigid Schulte, author, reporter and fellow at the New America Foundation. Schulte addressed an audience of 100 PCW member school parents, administrators and teachers, as well as members of the general public. Kathleen Smith, Assistant Head of School, welcomed attendees on behalf of our host, the Langley School.

Schulte is the author of *Overwhelmed: How to Work, Love, and Play When No One Has the Time*. Ms. Schulte spoke about the external and internal pressures challenging parents struggling to balance responsibilities at home, work, and in the community.

She emphasized how important it is for parents to keep the larger picture in mind. She urged the audience to think about what constitutes a “good life” – meaningful work, love and play. She said that her focus for the morning’s presentation was on the last of these, how to re-discover a sense of play, how to stop rushing through endless activities and instead make room for downtime and reflection. Neuroscience shows how important this is for both productivity and creativity, in both adults and children. It also makes for saner parenting and happier families.

She focused on three parenting myths that are pervasive in today's rapid-fire culture.

The first myth is "**More is Better.**" Schulte discussed the so-called "cult of intensive parenthood," in essence trying to balance numerous commitments for our children with other competing demands on a parent's time. She pointed out that kids are more overscheduled than ever, and that too many parents view busyness as a "badge of honor." This can lead to significant stress for families, putting many of us in a state of chronic stress. Studies show that long-term stress can actually have serious physical effects, including shrinkage of the brain's prefrontal cortex. However, this can be reversed through mindfulness, yoga, or just being fully present where you are. She also talked about the dangers of multi-tasking, emphasizing that it's exhausting and leads to poor results.

The second myth is "**Put Achievement First.**" There is tremendous societal pressure towards academic achievement, from Pre-K onwards. Schulte reminded parents that kids also need play in their lives. Instead of having kids take umpteen AP classes, parents should think in terms of encouraging their kids to develop "grit, a growth mindset and gratitude." The most fulfilled people are those who show persistence, imagination and energy, not necessarily those who received the best grades in school. Most importantly, she urged parents to "parent for happiness first, not achievement." Achievement only follows from happiness.

The third myth is "**Play is Optional.**" Schulte reminded the audience that kids need to figure out who they are and what they really like. To do this they need unstructured, imaginative time -- time to play and explore the world. They need to experience failure, in order to develop resiliency. Play is critical to activating the default mode network with the brain, and science has shown this helps lead to greater productivity.

After the presentation, Schulte spent time answering questions from the audience on a wide-ranging set of topics, including work culture, gender differences, college admissions pressures, evaluating how sports and technology fit into play, and shrinking vacation time.

Ms. Schulte is an award-winning journalist for the Washington Post and Washington Post magazine and was part of a team that won the Pulitzer Prize. She is also a fellow at the New America Foundation. She lives in Alexandria, Virginia with her husband and children.

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