



PROGRAM SUMMARY

2016 Middle School Student Leader Breakfast

St. Andrew's Episcopal School

March 3, 2016

EVENT OVERVIEW

The Parents Council of Washington (PCW) hosted its annual Middle School Student Leader Breakfast on Thursday, March 3, 2016 at St. Andrew's Episcopal School. As noted by PCW event Chairs Nancy Lopez and Catherine Resor, this event provides a forum for 7th grade student leaders to share ideas and discuss relevant issues with peers.

Twenty-six participating PCW member schools selected 49 students to attend. An administrator/faculty member from each school accompanied the students. The student program was moderated by Kristin Cuddihy, the Middle School Dean of Students at St. Andrew's, and Samantha Speier, the Education Center Director and Seventh Grade Academic Dean. The administrators/faculty members attended a separate program moderated by Rodney Glasgow, St. Andrew's Middle School Head and Chief Diversity Officer.

Students were encouraged to speak honestly and openly about issues on their minds. They were asked to identify problems that middle school students face and propose ways that they, as leaders within their communities, could help to solve those problems.

The group began by discussing the characteristics of leadership. Then, they generated a list of issues facing many middle school students:

- Fitting In

- Cliques and Popularity
- Gossip
- Peer Pressure
- Bullying
- Social Media/Online Bullying
- School Stress
- Issues with Teachers
- Study Habits
- Stereotypes
- Gender Inequality
- Parental Expectations

The students selected “Gossip” and “Social Media/Online Bullying” as issues to discuss in depth. The students then broke into four smaller, student-led groups to discuss these two topics, starting with “Gossip.”

Gossip

The students were tasked with 1) identifying why gossip causes problem in their schools, and 2) to brainstorm solutions. Here are some the problems they reported. Gossip can:

- Hurt people’s feelings and harm friendships
- Be true or false
- Lead to verbal and/or physical abuse
- Be amplified by social media
- Be a tool of cliques
- Spread quickly and get out of control
- Be a way for students to get attention, express jealousy or revenge

- Be mishandled by teachers

Students then proposed a number of solutions, including:

- Don't be the source of gossip
- If you hear something you know is gossip, don't spread it further
- Ask the gossiper to stop
- Try to change the subject when people are gossiping
- Avoid people who gossip regularly
- Avoid stereotyping or using sexist language
- Don't get in the middle of issues between other people
- Comfort the person who is the target of gossip;
- Be inclusive and grow your friend group so that there is a place for all
- Have friends outside of school to vent to
- Tell an adult

One student shared that a motto at his school is “don't be a bystander, be an “up-stander.” The students agreed that the number one way they can help stop gossip at their schools is to do something or say something to stop it as soon as they hear it.

Social Media & Online Bullying

The second small group breakout session focused on social media and online bullying. Here are some of the issues students identified:

- Students can use social media to say things they wouldn't say in person
- Social media can be a means for advertising popularity; students will post photos from events where others may have been excluded

- Online comments may be subject to differing interpretations, and can lead to hurt feelings even if that was not the original intent
- Social media has become just another responsibility for many students

Then, the students offered some possible solutions:

- Unfollow or block someone who posts annoying content
- Use private accounts to limit followers
- Think carefully before posting and consider how others might react
- Don't take someone else's phone and look through it
- Take a break from electronics and go outside, play sports or do another hobby
- Delete your social media accounts, if necessary
- Talk to an adult you trust

Several students commented that it was helpful to know that so many others are struggling with the same issues.

The session was closed with a challenge issued from the moderators to the students – to take the discussions of the morning back to their own schools and continue the dialogue within those communities.