



PROGRAM SUMMARY

2015 Parent Association (PA) Presidents' Forum

“If I Knew Then What I Know Now”

Washington Episcopal School

Tuesday, May 5, 2015

WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

Parents Council of Washington (“PCW”) Board Member and co-chair of the Forum, Carin Dessauer, welcomed the speakers and attendees and thanked Washington Episcopal School (“WES”) for hosting the Parent Association Presidents’ Forum (the “PA Forum”). Ms. Dessauer thanked Claire Henderson and Amy Ruberl of WES, in particular, for their assistance, and introduced Susan Stern, Primary and Elementary Grades Director at WES.

Ms. Stern also welcomed the participants. She mentioned that, as a current administrator and a former PA President, she was aware of the importance of the PA to enhance the programs at the schools.

Ms. Dessauer next introduced PCW President Joan Levy, who noted that this program allows currently serving PA Presidents to share best practices and lessons learned with incoming PA Presidents. Ms. Levy also highlighted for the annual programs offered by PCW to allow parents to explore relevant issues, and highlighted the programs geared towards students and administrators at member schools. Ms. Levy encouraged attendees to use PCW meetings, and the PCW website, Facebook page and ListServ as resources to support their internal efforts. Finally Ms. Levy noted that member schools

are encouraged to have two Parent Council Representatives (one new and one experienced) to facilitate transitions at the end of the year.

Following Ms. Levy, Ms. Dessauer opened the program by introducing the PA President Forum Panelists: Gary Friend, Georgetown Day School, Patty Lovett, Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart, and Wendy Gagnon, Potomac School, each of whom has served one or more member schools in many different volunteer capacities.

“IF I KNEW THEN WHAT I KNOW NOW . . .”

Mr. Gary Friend, Head of the Parents Service Association (“PSA”) at Georgetown Day School (“GDS”)

Mr. Friend began the presentations with a brief description of GDS and its Parent Service Association. GDS includes “service” in its PA name because “service” is embedded in GDS culture and the parents association provides service for students, staff and the school. The GDS PSA holds approximately 175 events during the year, ranging from chorus rehearsal dinners to field day and graduation parties.

- The Challenge of the Two Campus School: The GDS PA holds approximately 175 events during the year. It has 5 parent coordinators who organize and recruit more than 500 parent volunteers who pull off the events. Having two campuses increases the complexity for organization, allocation of resources and creating community.
- Communications: On-line, word of mouth and direct out-reach are the main modes of communication at GDS. Grade coordinators ensure that information that is relevant to a particular grade goes to that grade. All communications are electronic. Mass communications tend to be the least effective.
- Funding: The PSA has a \$23,000 budget, with approximately \$7,000 provided by the school. The rest is self-generated by the parents or through events.
- Types of Activities: PSA has events for students, staff and parents: For students, events range from theater or chorus related to “after-prom”, which provides a safe environment for the students post-prom. The PSA organizes dinner for teachers for curriculum night, and a monthly breakfast for staff and teachers, as well as the annual appreciation lunch. PSA also organizes gifts for specialty teachers and the “behind the scenes” staff. Many events are aimed at supporting parents and creating community. For example, on Martin Luther King, Jr.’s birthday, GDS holds a “day in” instead of a “day off”, which brings students and

parents together for public service. First Friday of each month is a parent meet-up.

- Volunteer Logistics and Management: Volunteer data is key when you have to keep track of so many volunteers and events. Co-chairs (with one experienced in each position) help maintain institutional knowledge given that the PSA Chair is limited to a one year term. There is a need to deepen and broaden the volunteer base.
- Timing of Events and Parent Engagement: A big decision for PAs is whether to front-load or back-load events. Also, what types of events will engage parents. This past year, one of the most popular speaker topics was Parties/Alcohol and Drugs.
- Leverage PCW: Under lessons learned, Mr. Friend would have better leveraged PCW. He has suggested to his Board that PCW resources be better utilized.

Ms. Patty Lovett, Head of the Stone Ridge Parents Association (“SRPA”) of Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart

Ms. Lovett noted that SRPA has an 8 member Executive Committee and 35 Committee Chairs. It handles approximately 70 events per year. Each Committee has 1 or 2 co-chairs depending on the Committee. SRPA supports the Preschool through High School grades.

- Communication among Volunteers: Key issue is always communication. Ms. Lovett worked with the IT Department to set up a SRPA specific communication for the Executive Committee and Committee Chairs. Google Drive is used for all those communications, including reimbursement receipts. The Executive Committee was charged with educating Committee Co-Chairs on how to use Google Drive to document their events.
- Continuity: SRPA strives to have a “chair-elect” for each Committee to help with continuity and transition.
- Communication to Parents by Division: Through a weekly newsletter, the SRPA communicates with all parents and highlights upcoming events by division. It is the main means of advertising events. Other targeted newsletters on upcoming events are used to drum up volunteers and attendance at events.
- Communication with the Administration: The Executive Committee meets 3 times per year with L/S, MS and HS VPs. It can alert the administration to confusion or concern (e.g., when report card forms change) among the parent community.
- Communication by the Administration to Parents: Key administrators are invited to speak at SRPA meetings (one meeting per month).

- Parent Engagement: One topic that was particularly interesting to parents this past year was “diversity” or, as Stone Ridge is moving towards, “equity and social justice”. The Administration was invited to speak for the first 20-30 minutes of a meeting to answer questions and promote the discussion.
- Volunteer Recognition: “Volunteers are not paid – not because they are worthless, but because they are Priceless.” Ms. Lovett showed that quote from Sherry Anderson to iterate the importance of recognizing and thanking volunteers. In addition to written thank-you notes, a yearly volunteer appreciation breakfast is held, and this year SRPA gave each volunteer a photo, matted, of his/her child/ren holding a “Thank You Mom” or “Thank You Dad” sign.
- Biggest Challenge: SRPA does not fundraise for its budget. It is funded through a student fee (690 students generates \$38,000). A budget issue, however, is that sometimes committee chairs and members do not submit receipts. It is charitable but it makes future planning and budgeting difficult.
- Timing of Events is Important: One speaker was scheduled at 5:30 p.m. It was sparsely attended because students went home after sports or school and the timing was just off.
- Less Can Be More: The SRPA has scaled back some events to ensure quality over quantity.

Ms. Wendy Gagnon, President of the Parents Association (“PA”) of Potomac School

Potomac School is a K through 12 school in McLean, VA. It has a father’s association under the PA. The PA has a 14 member Executive Committee and Chairs for each Event. Potomac’s PA is also responsible for its auction and this past year had a record-breaking event.

- Know Your Audience and When They Can Attend Meetings: Because most students take buses to school, the PA eliminated most morning meetings because of sparse attendance. Each school is different on what makes sense for timing.
- Set the Tone for the Year at the Start: Send a communication to your school community at the start of the school year to set the tone, highlight upcoming events, and welcome new families and acquaint them with the PA.
- Front-Loading vs. Back-Loading of Events: This past year, the PA chose not to front-load events. It started with a welcome back cook-out as a way to welcome new families and introduce them to the community.

- Communication: A PA flyer was prepared to give contact information and to highlight key events for the year as a way to communicate the main activities for the year.
- Be Supportive of the Entire Community: Ensure that you attend all meetings/events, are supportive of people and help where necessary. Introduce yourself and listen actively. Sometimes you need to just be the listening person for parents. The PA can also be a conduit to the resources that people need to get answers to questions.
- Thank Volunteers: Make sure you thank volunteers throughout the year.
- Logistics: Buy a large calendar, and put all school events on it. You should also add community events and PCW events that might impact your planning. This gives you the ability to see the big picture and change dates or eliminate conflicts. If you don't yet have a school calendar, meet with your head of school to work out event timing.
- Confidentiality: This is key. You have to honor the confidentiality of parents and of staff.
- Leverage PCW: Make sure that your school is taking advantage the many programs that PCW has, including the speaker programs.
- Video for Meetings: Have a video that highlights school events and activities to play in the background at the start of meetings. It shows the school and why volunteers are so important.

DISCUSSION PERIOD

Notecards were distributed during the presentations for attendees to submit questions or concerns that they would like to have addressed. In addition to the panelists, other attendees also weighed in on various issues.

Q. How often do you hold meetings? Is there a set day of the month and a time? What time of day do you have PA meetings or events? What works best?

GDS has monthly Executive Committee Meetings. Larger PA Meetings are held in the morning; but other events are held at different times. At GDS, there are few evening meetings. Potomac has most of its meetings in the evening or after school depending on other events. SRPA alternates morning and evening meetings.

One parent noted that her school had changed meeting times in response to a survey as to when parents wanted the meetings. Rather than alternating evening (to reach

working parents) and morning after drop-off (to reach non-working parents) the K-8 school switched to the morning before school and one half hour into the school day to have a time that was convenient for working and non-working parents. Childcare is provided at those meetings.

Q. Budgets – What is the best structure for the PA? How many events are funded by parents as opposed to the school?

At GDS, the events that are self-funded are the ones in which the parents are most interested or it is really important to their children. For example, for the theater program or chorus, parents fund rehearsal dinners. There is a dollar to child connection. If you have to self-fund, connect it to the children.

The SRPA is funded through a fee and that means more access at all levels of school events.

One parent noted that there could be a detriment to having the PA funded in tuition because parents don't see it. We have the most success with the all school events. We have a bigger budget also for those.

Q. How do you handle scholarship situations for self-funding?

GDS has “suggested amounts” for parents for certain events (e.g., chorus rehearsal dinners or theater rehearsal dinners). In determining those amounts there is a built-in assumed participation rate. Parents are solicited for funding by letter but there is heavy-handed pressure.

Q. Amounts and dues structure:

The attendees indicated that there are many forms of funding. Some schools have per student funding (ranging from \$55 to \$100 per student). Others use an activity fee that covers PA as well as other activities. Some had partial funding from the school and self-funding.

Several parents noted that it is sometimes difficult to determine what is included or not included. At one single-sex school, a Father/Daughter dinner is separately funded by the participants but the PA is reviewing that to see if it should be under the PA.

Another parent noted that at her two campus school, the PA tries to allocate funds fairly on a campus specific basis and to reflect the number of students in each of the Lower, Middle and Upper Schools. Allocations are made on the basis of participation, and it is key to make sure that parents know where the money is spent.

Q. For schools with an Activity Fee does that include the PA or is it separate? One parent noted that her lower school just instituted an activity fees and it is intended to cover everything, even things like staff gifts and those for specialty teacher/staff.

Faculty Appreciation falls under Parent Association at many of the schools and some of those have a specific PA fee. Some schools do not ask for money from parents for events but do take in-kind and time donations.

Some schools have a combination approach with an activity fee but they may have a small charge for certain events. Others ask for donations for some events, often in-kind donations.

Q. Strategies for Getting Dads Involved?

Stone Ridge recently re-energized its Fathers Club as a committee under the SRPA; but the question is should it be under SRPA or under Administration. The Fathers Club has its own meetings and events and is funded separately. The key for the SRPA is to harness and integrate the Fathers Club participation without discouraging it.

Mr. Friend noted that he was the first male PA president at GDS. He became involved and was asked to increase his involvement as his interest was noted. One way to increase participation is to ask more men. There was a deliberate aspiration to increase father participation at GDS and that has happened.

At one school, the Fathers Association scheduled 7 am Saturday breakfasts for fathers this year and had good attendance. The school worked to come up with a time that made sense for the fathers.

One of the parents mentioned that it is important to make sure you know the names of the parents and the dads too and to make sure that you ask them to do things. Tell them what you need and when. They may not want to run a committee but they will volunteer and then you can ask them to run it something the next time.

An attendee commented that fathers clubs seem to be more prevalent at single sex schools. Another parent noted that, if you have a fathers club, make sure that you have the head of it come to PA meetings. At another school, it has an “Adventurers Club”, with weekend events, and that club is typically headed by a dad.

Some commented that the key is to increase all you ask to volunteer. Do not be gender specific and remember that not all families have dads.

Q. Social Equity and Justice Committee?

A parent asked for more information on the Social Equity and Justice Committee at Stone Ridge. That committee has two co-chairs and they are trying to include topics for the SRPA that focus on these issues and to be responsive to needs.

Q. Do you have affinity groups at your schools? Have parents been supportive?

At GDS, all affinity groups are self-generated by the students or the parents. Some have worked to reach out and generate kid/parent discussions.

Q. Resources for Parents on Alcohol and Drug Awareness

The GDS High School Principal was proactive in making sure that education of parents and students occurred as a priority during the school. The school paid for speaker events but the PSA worked closed on them to ensure success. The first speaker was Prevention Specialist Brenda Conlan (<http://www.brendaconlan.com>), who met with parents and students. It helped get all parents on the same page. The most engaged parents were 7th and 8th grade parents. GDS also invited Laura Lynch, prosecuting attorney for Montgomery County, to talk to the parents about the dangers of even attending a party where alcohol is served. The most sobering fact for the parents was that a minor could be arrested if he or she is sober at a party if any minor at the party is drinking. Families can also be fined for each minor drinking at a party. One family was fined \$75,000.

Stone Ridge has an alcohol symposium in the fall and each student has to attend with a parent or she cannot attend prom. School policy is no alcohol on campus.

Q. How do you communicate parent feedback back to the school? Does parent participation increase when administrators attend meetings?

Potomac has parent reps divided by division. They meet once per month with division representatives and that is a key way for feedback to occur. After meeting with the Executive Committee, the PA President brings feedback to the Head of School. The Potomac director of development sits in on that as well.

SRPA has administrators come to Executive Committee meetings. The SRPA President meets with the Head of School approximately 3x per year.

Q. How do you track volunteer hours? Is there mandatory volunteer hours required?

The panel agreed that knowing your volunteers and what they are doing, and thanking them is key to a successful year. One attendee mentioned that her school has mandatory volunteer hours per family. That has helped staff volunteer driven events. Another parent mentioned that a swim team had a fee that would be reimbursed if a family volunteered at a certain number of events.