

Parents Council

O F W A S H I N G T O N

CONNECTING SCHOOLS • SHARING IDEAS • ENGAGING PARENTS

## **BEST PRACTICES PROGRAM**

Re-thinking Success:

How Schools Define, Recognize and  
Encourage Students' Diverse Strengths

**Hosted by:**

The Langley School

January 27, 2015

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February 2015

Dear School Representatives,

Thank you to those of you who were able to attend our Best Practices program this month, entitled “Rethinking Success: How Schools Define, Recognize and Encourage Students’ Diverse Strengths.” Our panel, comprised of the Head of Lower School at Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart, the Head of Middle School at St. Andrew’s Episcopal School and the Academic Dean and Dean of Students for Ninth and Tenth Grades at The Potomac School, shared valuable insights, experiences and suggestions, to help us encourage and enable our children to be “successful” students at the Lower, Middle and Upper School levels.

This particular program stems from your direct response and feedback seeking more dialog and follow-up on topics relevant to parents today. It is our hope that this year’s presentations will open conversations with your families and schools by providing both food for thought and practical suggestions relating to success.

Aside from the three schools represented in our Best Practices program every year, each Parents Council of Washington member school also has the opportunity to submit its Best Practices on the topic selected. The materials collected within this e-binder showcase practices from additional member schools to use as a resource to prompt further discussions or explore other questions in more depth.

Please share the ideas contained within this e-binder with your Head of School, Dean of Students, and Division Heads, and with your parent community. Thank you again for your support of the Parents Council of Washington and for serving your school communities.

Sincerely,

Kathy Stallings, Carin Dessauer and Mena Burke  
2015 Best Practices Co-Chairs

# Parents Council

O F W A S H I N G T O N

CONNECTING SCHOOLS • SHARING IDEAS • ENGAGING PARENTS

**The Parents Council of Washington  
Presents**

**BEST PRACTICES**  
**Re-thinking Success: How Schools Define, Recognize  
and Encourage Students' Diverse Strengths**

*8:30 to 9:00 a.m. – light breakfast*

*9:00 to 11:00 a.m. – program*

*Tuesday, January 27, 2014*

*The Langley School*

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## How Our Schools:

- ❖ Define success
  - ❖ Identify and develop students' individual strengths and goals
  - ❖ Address the concept of success with students, faculty and parents
  - ❖ Encourage students to achieve balance
- 

Join us as our panel of experts addresses these important issues.

- **Scott Lawrence**, Head of Lower School, Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart,
- **Rodney Glasgow**, Head of Middle School, St. Andrew's Episcopal School, and
- **Alex Thomas**, Academic Dean, Dean of Students for Grades 9 and 10 and Upper School Spanish Teacher, The Potomac School

## **2015 BEST PRACTICES PROGRAM**

### **Speaker Biographies**

#### **SCOTT LAWRENCE**

##### ***Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart***

Scott Lawrence has served as the Head of the Lower School at Stone Ridge since 2011 and as an educator of young children for over thirty years. Prior to his tenure at Stone Ridge, he served as Principal at the Seymour Intermediate School, Head at St. Thomas Day School, and Head of the Lower School at Chase Collegiate School, all in Connecticut. A former bi-lingual teacher, Kindergarten teacher, elementary librarian and reading consultant, Mr. Lawrence has also served on the faculty of both Northwestern University and, for nearly 20 years, at St. Joseph University, where he taught graduate level courses in *Educational Leadership, Curriculum Development* and *Educational Research*. Twice named a Fulbright Scholar, Scott earned his BA degree in Early Childhood Education and Social Studies from The College of St. Rose and advanced degrees from both the State University of New York at Albany and the University of Connecticut.

#### **RODNEY GLASGOW**

##### ***St. Andrews Episcopal School***

Rodney Glasgow is a noted speaker, facilitator, trainer and activist in the areas of diversity, equity, and social justice. He has given a number of keynote presentations, delivered workshops, and offered consultation to schools and organizations nationwide. He is a member of Call-to-Action, the advisory board to the Vice President of Equity and Justice for the National Association of Independent Schools. Additionally, he is an advisory board member for the Family Diversity Projects, Inc. He was on the Board of Directors for The Friendly House, a Worcester-based community empowerment organization, and a Community Solutions Council Specialist for Supporting Positive Youth Development with the United Way of Central Massachusetts. In 2009, he was given the People of Courage Award by the City of Worcester for his work with the Greater Worcester Community Foundation's LGBT Initiative. He is one of the founding members and now Chair of the National Association of Independent School's annual Student Diversity Leadership Conference, a 20 year-old training ground drawing over 1300 high school students nationwide. A graduate of Harvard University with a joint degree in Afro-American Studies and Psychology, and holding a Master of Arts in Organization and Leadership from Columbia University, he is also an independent school alum, having graduated from Gilman School in his hometown of Baltimore, MD. An experienced educator, trainer, and administrator for students and faculty in grades kindergarten through post-graduate, Mr. Glasgow has been the Diversity Coordinator at Graland Country Day School, Assistant Head of Upper School and Director of Diversity for Worcester Academy, and is currently the Head of Middle School at St. Andrew's Episcopal School in Potomac, MD.

**ALEX THOMAS**

***The Potomac School***

Alex Thomas is best reflected by his work, which combines his passion for Spain and all things Spanish with his particular interest in working with young people as teacher, adviser, and dean as they acclimate to high school and begin to imagine their lives in college and beyond.

After graduating from St. John's High School in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, Alex moved to Washington, D.C. to attend Georgetown University, where he did his undergraduate and graduate work in Spanish, Russian, and linguistics, focusing specifically on the syntax of Romance languages and language acquisition. While at Georgetown, Alex spent a year studying in Spain at the University of Salamanca, and there began a love affair with the country that continues to the present day. Alex first taught Spanish as an Adjunct Professor at Georgetown and soon became the coordinator of the undergraduate introductory-level courses. After Georgetown, Alex joined the faculty of the Hebrew Academy of Greater Washington in Silver Spring, Maryland. There, while also teaching American Literature, he introduced a Spanish-language program into the school's dual Judaic and secular curriculum. In 1996, Alex joined the faculty of The Potomac School in McLean, Virginia, where he currently serves as the Academic Dean and the Dean of Students for the Ninth and Tenth Grades. Now in his nineteenth year at Potomac, Alex has taught Spanish courses at all levels in the Upper School, coached in the Weight Training and Conditioning Program, and served as Chairman of the Department of World Languages.

Having lived and studied in Salamanca, Madrid, Barcelona, and Seville, Alex firmly believes experiences abroad can inspire language students and contribute to learning in powerful ways, and he has lived that belief by working in study abroad programs throughout his career. At Potomac, Alex has been an instrumental part of the Eighth Grade Spain Trip, and he is preparing to make his eighteenth trek this March. Alex also worked for thirteen summers as a Program Director for Spanish Learning Abroad where he led month-long home-stay programs near Seville for American high schools students. No decision has shaped Alex's life more than taking his eighth-grade homeroom teacher's suggestion that he study Spanish in high school, and he has devoted his teaching career to opening the same linguistic and cultural doors for his students.



**Best Practices Program Summary**

*“Re-thinking Success: How Schools Define, Recognize  
and Encourage Students’ Diverse Strengths”*

Wednesday, February 4, 2015

The Langley School

**WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS**

Parents Council President, Joan Levy, welcomed the speakers and attendees and thanked The Langley School for hosting as well as the co-chairs for organizing. She explained that PCW’s annual Best Practices program presents a panel of experts to discuss their individual schools’ experiences on a particular topic. Ms. Levy noted that PCW has been offering programs for 50 years that are instructive and useful to teachers, parents and the community. She highlighted a variety of features available through the PCW website, Facebook and ListServ pages such as resources, articles and announcements that provide valuable insights, share information and allow for exploration of issues relevant to parents.

Ms. Levy then introduced The Langley School’s Assistant Head of School, Kathleen Smith, who also welcomed participants and mentioned that the PCW mission is firmly in line with the school. Langley was founded in 1942 with a strong child-centered focus and parents have always been an important part of its mission.

Following Ms. Smith, Board Member Kathy Stallings opened the program by stating that success is a current topic of discussion in the news. What does it mean and what is the role of schools in addressing success for students? She then welcomed and introduced the three panelists from the Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart, St. Andrews Episcopal School and The Potomac School who represented the Lower School, Middle School and Upper School divisions of their respective schools on the topic of defining success.

1. **LOWER SCHOOL PRESENTATION**

Mr. Scott Lawrence

Head of the Lower School at the Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart

After thanking the PCW for the invitation to speak, Mr. Lawrence indicated that the main focus of educators at Stone Ridge is on children, teachers, staff and parents and as he prepared for this presentation, he had pondered over the fact that he did not think that Stone Ridge did anything different from other schools. Schools are generally all passionate about education and children. Part of what makes Stone Ridge unique, however, is that it is a School of the Sacred Heart and within a network of 200 schools worldwide. That allows schools to view different perspectives and share different experiences. Founded in 1800, all

## BEST PRACTICES PROGRAM SUMMARY - Continued

Schools of the Sacred Heart were guided through the vision of St. Madeleine Sophie Barat to educate and empower young women to lead and serve through lives of purpose that integrate five goals of education:

- A Personal and Active Faith in God
- A Deep Respect for Intellectual Values
- A Social Awareness which Impels to Action
- The Building of Community as a Christian Value
- Personal Growth in an Atmosphere of Wise Freedom.

Having approached Lower School faculty members about how they might define, recognize and encourage success, he stated that they spoke of the five goals and how the purpose is embedded within the school. In addition, they reflected on how the five goals operate differently at the lower, middle and upper school levels. The faculty felt that respect, response, resilience and resourcefulness also represented a portion of a successful student.

Within those four areas, it is recognized that the definition of success is different for each student and requires the need to understand individual gifts and that strengths and challenges exist. Identifying that while emphasizing personal growth through the individual choice model and curriculum modification can be accomplished through a learning strategy program by:

- Clearly defining learning expectations and communicating them to parents and students. The expectations are grounded in the respect for intellectual values. Social Service is emphasized at a young age and is inherent in Stone Ridge's education. Education is for the benefit of others and not just to serve yourself.
- Building community as a learning family and focusing on growth. Traditional grades do not exist in the Lower School, instead it's all about the celebration of how children are growing and changing.
- Coaching teachers to reach and teach all learners, support students who may need remediation and stretch girls at the top to move to the next level.

To encourage forms of success and emphasize strengths and goals, conferences and goal setting help students. They also receive personal attention through small classes translating to a high level of participation in academic areas and other arenas. Questions posted in classrooms guide students and promote self-advocacy: Why are you learning this? Why is it important? What are you going to do if you need help?

A social curriculum is also encouraged where it is recognized that it is as important as the academic curriculum. Lower School classrooms are "responsive" classrooms where students are held accountable to social interactions. It dictates how Stone Ridge integrates



## BEST PRACTICES PROGRAM SUMMARY - Continued

students in school and faculty is trained in Responsive Classroom.

Stone Ridge's work is standards based at a high level of performance. The school wants the girls to internalize the Five Goals and this is achieved in a variety of ways. Mr. Lawrence shared one specific approach called Primes. It is special weekly assemblies that emphasize the Five Goals of a Sacred Heart education by recognizing students for their modeling of the goals.

Primes is a unique, formal assembly tradition that dates back 200 years. It is held each Monday morning where each teacher reads a citation that narrates for the student body which two girls from a classroom has demonstrated adherence to the Five Goals. The students are reminded of what it looks like to make wise decisions and the girls are awarded a "très bien" citation. The certificate encourages excitement for peers, not disappointment for themselves.

Prize day and field day are other events at Stone Ridge that recognize success within the Lower School.

Another aspect of reaching success is through goals to serve Stone Ridge families. Faculty members have opportunities to help families as "balance coaches" to make sure that there is balance in the lives of the children. They spend time with parents to ensure that the community knows that success is also about balance. Efforts are made to meet with parents to connect. Clear communication with parents and the community through regular newsletters and e-mails is key for them to know how the students are growing, where they need support and what they are doing well.

The Lower School encompasses celebration and joy in everything we do. Mr. Lawrence spoke of having the best job in the world. Students come to a place where they will be challenged academically and act as participants in the community to create joyful leaders who can serve with intellect and faith. A Sacred Heart education educates the whole student and education should be serious in principles and rich in the life of love. Students should grow in wisdom, age and grace.

Mr. Lawrence ended his presentation with the following quote from Janet Erskine Stuart for the teachers. She wrote the first Sacred Heart curriculum, and understood what success in education represented.

"We bring up the children for the future, not for the present, not that we may enjoy the fruit of our work, but for others... Therefore, we must have to do with things raw and unfinished and unpolished... We must remember that it is better to begin a great work than to finish a small one. A piece of unfinished insignificance is no success at all. Our education is not meant to turn the children out small and finished but seriously begun on a wide basis. Therefore they must leave us with some self-knowledge, some energy, some purpose. If they leave us without these three things, they drift with the stream of life."

## BEST PRACTICES PROGRAM SUMMARY - Continued

### 2. MIDDLE SCHOOL PRESENTATION

Mr. Rodney Glasgow  
St. Andrews Episcopal School

Mr. Glasgow opened by describing what he loves about Middle School: “When you think about Middle School, it is that point of development we all want to forget and we would if we could, but we can’t.”

He enjoys being in the midst of this developmental snapshot and to help parents understand what is taking place in the mind of a middle school student, he created a unique activity. He instructed attendees to think about what made them feel anxious about themselves that they didn’t want people to see upon arriving for the program. While thinking about that one specific anxious aspect, he asked everyone to hold their hand out flat and imagine a golf ball in their palm containing the anxious issue. Staying focused on the ball, he then instructed the audience to move their hand up and down while he began asking a series of questions that everyone answered out loud:  $3+2$ ,  $5 \times 7$ , who was the first President of the United States, who signed the Magna Carta, what is the symbol for iron? As the questions increased and people had more difficulty finding a quick response, he explained that the retrieval for answers becomes slower due to all of the thoughts swirling in our heads and the exercise, he noted, was a strong simulation to what goes on in the mind of a Middle School student constantly worried about many things.

In their own minds, Middle Schoolers tend to see themselves as emerging adults, not as children anymore. They are desperately seeking a need to improve and are afraid of failure. They think they have or should have all of the answers. It is a difficult situation for them and each student needs at least one adult at school who can be a trusted adult to talk to about school or what he/she is going through. Mr. Glasgow told the story of an Upper School student who after making an appointment to talk to him, stopped by and couldn’t remember specifically what she had wanted to talk to him about. All she actually really needed was to talk and he happens to be the person at school she talks to. When a Middle School student also stopped by to visit, the Upper School student told Mr. Glasgow that she remembered being in Middle School and thinking she was old because she had reached a double digits’ age, but now realized how foolish that looked. This is the way students feel in Middle School.

At St. Andrew’s, Middle School isn’t all about the academic achievement, but about knowing child development and what is in the minds, bodies and spirit of the Middle School child. Being open to all that is going on in the students’ minds, bodies and spirit means they can be open to being educated. There is a focus on the brain and the school counselor reminds parents that students are growing faster and more than any other time in their lives aside from their first three years. Middle School is an exciting time and the moment when everything has clicked in.

St. Andrew’s lets the students know that it is ok to be who they are and that they are at

## BEST PRACTICES PROGRAM SUMMARY - Continued

confusing times in their lives. Skills are not matched up yet and it is the teachers' jobs to prepare young students for the Middle School classroom with the skills to complete tasks they need. They can do things, but not everything they think they can do. Mr. Glasgow added that it takes time coaxing some students to understand that they might not have actually turned in homework they thought they did. In their minds, they completed it and handed it in, but in reality, they didn't submit the work. The organizational and follow-through is key to academic success in Middle School. They are not yet too worried about grades and college, but make mistakes and begin to learn from them.

For most Middle Schoolers, there is the general idea that teachers are people that are "different." St. Andrews encourages students to see the teachers as approachable, as real people to make the students more comfortable with reaching out to them to get the help they need. One way the school tries to achieve that is by having the teachers sit with the students at lunch. It helps them stand out as real people to the students; they can relax with each other, meet with each other and get to know them better.

Because some students will require more help at times, Mr. Glasgow created an academic plan for all students with three Cs or a D. The plan is in place to recognize that the students can do better and will receive the help to do better. Even though teachers felt Cs were fine, Mr. Glasgow expressed that 70% of the material in three classes is not acceptable especially when parents are paying a lot of tuition. He wants to raise the bar for the students, but in a way that is achievable. The plan means "we are watching and caring for you" and trying to determine what is going on in that student's mind. Stronger grades could be a simple matter of adjusting or implementing a routine for a student and helping them understand the concept of time and time management. Mr. Glasgow assisted a student who was not turning in homework and whose grades were impacted. He set the student up to access the school's online system with his parents on Sunday evenings to check assignments submitted and bring any missed work to class on Monday. The student was able to move from an academic plan to honor roll by the end of the following trimester and knew that someone had been watching over him to make sure he was improving.

To recognize success in students, St. Andrews holds honor roll assemblies during the year. Students are honored academically, but some are also recognized on a numerical scale for the efforts they make. This allows more students to feel successful on different levels. The "effort grade" can consist of day-to-day learning, participation, note-taking and self-advocacy efforts. The school mandates that all students from A to D+ develop strategies to improve in these areas in every class. Each report card comment addresses a child's strengths as well as weaknesses or challenges. With more students on the academic honor roll than the effort honor roll, the school realized that a student can display exceptional work, but output average effort. The effort honor roll idea is that students should also be proud of their efforts of sitting still, paying attention or being on schedule. It is an important achievement to recognize and encourage. Mr. Glasgow loves that St. Andrews defines success for honor roll in different ways.

## BEST PRACTICES PROGRAM SUMMARY - Continued

One last success factor within the St. Andrews Middle School includes the social curriculum. Teaching content and community are equally important. If one is not addressed, the other falls apart. Mr. Glasgow spoke of an introverted student who didn't like to speak but was very snippy when he did upsetting many around him. The school worked with him to own his insecurities and to learn how to work with teachers and others. One day on a tour, he introduced himself to a stranger and that was a big step for him. Mr. Glasgow made a gratitude circle and the student pointed to him and said thank you. He was an A+ student, but needed work on the social side.

For parents, the home-school partnership is most important to maintain in order to not lose students. Parents need to know that the school is keeping an eye on the students and the students need to know that there are adults who value them as individuals and will be there to help them fix what is not working.

### 3. UPPER SCHOOL PRESENTATION

Mr. Alex Thomas  
The Potomac School

After thanking PCW for the invitation to speak, Mr. Thomas noted that Upper School intensity ramps up with grades and college expectations. At Potomac, the focus is less on those two things and more on learning and learning who you are.

While working on his presentation topic, Mr. Thomas thought of five essential questions:

1. What does the road to success look like?
2. How do students and parents talk about success?
3. How do we approach teasing success out of students?
4. How do we help identify students' strengths and goals?
5. How do we help students who are not the straight A students feel successful?

In the road we travel to success, the twists and turns induce anxiety, self-doubt and questioning. The destination is unknown, but it can be rewarding when you learn something from it. How did people in our lives react when we took our turns? Did they have perspective? Our reactions help determine how our students will gain resiliency. We need to remember that our own journey towards success worked out even when we did not see the path forward. The Upper School tries to provide students with the ability to allow flexibility as they change and discover new interests, to navigate the road. In the end, everything will work out even if it might not be exactly how they dreamed it or what they aspired to. The students need to be in the center of the discussion, not fitted into a pre-formed block.

When Mr. Thomas asks the 9<sup>th</sup> grade students how to define success each year, the responses are: high grades-get into college-know all the answers. When he recently asked the juniors, the first answers received were: perfect scores with a 4.0 GPA and 2400

## BEST PRACTICES PROGRAM SUMMARY - Continued

SAT/36 ACT score-getting into a good college-getting into a good college with a program I want. Mr. Thomas noted that the replies from high grades to perfect grades saddened him. One response of being happy and having stories to tell my children was laughed at until other students added discovering oneself, knowing who you want to be, what you want to do career-wise or what you do not want to be, discovering something new or something that you do not like. By the end of the conversation, they were talking about a successful student knowing who he or she was and not related to perfect scores.

How would Potomac define success? Academic achievement is one component, however the school is focused on graduating students prepared to lead exemplary lives and who value life-long learning. The intensity of academic learning is necessary, but trying to keep their attention off of the letter grade is also important. Potomac's goal and vision is to internalize learning independent of outside influences and ensure the students know how to handle it. Students need to understand and practice the point of learning in order to invest in long-term learning throughout their lifetime and one way to accomplish that is to help students understand how to deal with learning challenges and how to grow. Grades will follow.

How do parents define success? Mr. Thomas mentioned an article in *The Atlantic* entitled "Why Kids Care More About Achievement than Helping Others." [<http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/06/most-kids-believe-that-achievement-trumps-empathy/373378/%5D>] The article pointed to the work of the Making Caring Common Project at Harvard's Graduate School of Education, which surveyed 10,000 middle and high school students about what was important to them. The study found that almost 80% of students ranked achievement or happiness above caring for others. The study authors found a "rhetoric/reality gap" between what adults tell children they should value and what adults show they should value through their behavior. The survey found that 96% of parents said they wanted to raise ethical, caring children, but 80% of young people said parents were "more concerned about achievement or happiness than caring for others."

The achievement message above all others is what is getting through to children. The happiness part was interesting to Mr. Thomas. He spoke of the tendency to fix problems and even out challenges rather than letting children grow through challenges and supporting them with additional resources. Failure and struggles are necessary steps to achieve learning and success.

How do we tease success out of students? Potomac reinforces that (1) the work we do together is important, (2) the adults believe in students no matter what they do and (3) they can do what is expected of them if they invest in learning and put in the time.

By moving away from grades as markers of success, students can be fully present and prepared for learning. They get it in sports, music, drama, etc., and it is expected that they get it on the academic side. Taking care of the little things feeds the big things. The mind-set

## BEST PRACTICES PROGRAM SUMMARY - Continued

makes you better. Anyone can improve with guidance. Potomac addresses what happens when things do not go well, talks to the students about how to deal with challenges, failure, changing procedures and how to work smarter with the required effort-not just harder. Honing in on different ways to achieve a goal.

How does Potomac teach students to seek help if they run into difficulties? Resources are in place for them to tap into. The learning center, writing center, faculty, deans and advisors are all available, but the students have to actually move down that path on their own.

How does Potomac develop and identify strengths and goals? The school's messages spin and are organized around grade level retreats, grade level meetings, sports, clubs, etc. The advisory piece is the most important piece where students are at the center, one-on-one or within groups working together towards the goal of life-long learning. Teams of adults are in constant communication with parents and every student is known and known well by at least one adult on campus. Potomac seeks for students to want to share the great news and the difficult news. The trust from these relationships helps to guide the students, promote self-advocacy, identify the objectives of why they are doing what they are doing and whether it is working for the student. Success is a constant discussion, not the grade. Success at any given moment might be limited in space and time. How do I perform this solo next week? How do I learn this? How do I speak before that audience? The school helps the child define the milestones even as those may change over time. Potomac wants the student to be able to develop the capacity to define, move the process forward and take ownership over the process of getting there. It is a skill set they will take with them beyond school.

What about those who are not as academically successful? Can they be successful? Yes they can, but it is tricky for all kinds of reasons. Mr. Thomas stressed that the school wants them to feel successful too and discussed six traits that make it work for them:

- Partner well with adults (seek out those who can help them) whether coaches/teachers or mentors;
- Accept working very hard for less robust results, do their best and do not measure themselves by their grades;
- Stay sharply focused on what it takes to learn and to acquire skills – focus on how to learn the growth of the progress not the grade;
- To stay positive, these students need to be celebrated and acknowledged for something outside of the academic grade – something for them to look forward to;
- Learn to be organized and match the study habits to their learning needs;
- Have caring parents who push them to do their best and who love them for who they are, not what grade they receive.

Mr. Thomas concluded that when alumni are asked what contributed to their success at Potomac, many reported that (1) finding an adult to talk to in high school was so important,

## BEST PRACTICES PROGRAM SUMMARY - Continued

(2) taking advantage of every opportunity, (3) taking care of each other, being invested in learning and being collaborative and (4) taking advantage of opportunities to reinvent yourself and giving your friends the space to change. Everyone has a shot of being successful; figuring out who you are and becoming that person is what makes a successful student.

### Q&A

**Q: As a parent, how do you balance the importance of grades and growth with children while recognizing personal gifts and understanding challenges?**

**LS:** Mr. Lawrence answered that from the lower school perspective, Stone Ridge tries to help parents understand it is about personal growth and responding to the challenges as learners. Growth and expectations should be celebrated over attainment. What are areas of difficulty for the child and what are not? The message for very young children should be focused on growth, individual gifts and purpose - not grades.

**MS:** Mr. Glasgow agreed and added that at the middle school level parents should set the bar accordingly. The student should define the upper bar. There was a student celebrated at St. Andrews this year who was receiving Ds and Fs because she did not have a routine at home. I needed her to get to a C level as a start. After working with her to make her understand that her transcript did not reflect her talent, she has now reached all Cs and continues to move up. I celebrate those Cs and what it means to her. She can now define her success since she was held accountable of her own expectations at the lower bar and reach much higher. Talk to your children and see where they think they can honestly be and discuss how to get there.

**US:** Mr. Thomas spoke that students are more mature at the Upper School level and that we want to make them reach the point where they can seek out and identify the resources they need to help them meet tangible goals.

**Q: What is the impact on academic success given the social media our children face?**

**US:** Mr. Thomas noted that some things have not changed. There were similar issues impacting us just as when we were in school. That factor has not changed, but the ideas have been amplified by social media. We try to get the kids focused off of what everyone else is doing and make them understand that it is not relevant to their journey. I sit with my advisees and talk about accepting their individual trajectories through school, that they will be different from someone else's trajectories and try to get them to not compete against each other or what they think the other is doing. Someone may have more free time while you are in study hall or meeting with a teacher or in sports. Hurt, anger and frustration exists from social media. Instead of only five people hearing something that was said in person, now 2 million people hear it.

## BEST PRACTICES PROGRAM SUMMARY - Continued

**MS:** Mr. Glasgow replied that in Middle School, they admit defeat because the students live in social media and it is not going to go away. In the past, if we did not get together with people we were missing out. Now if students are not on Facebook for 20 minutes, they feel out of the loop or talked about. In school buildings, students are not allowed to text or Google chat. Phones need to be in lockers. They can use his phone if they need to call a parent and we are trying to place value on face-to-face interaction and help students understand that privacy does not exist on social media and they need to treat it as such.

**Q: You spoke about the importance of kids having a relationship with an adult at school that they can talk to, but how do more introverted students make those connections and seek out adults?**

**MS:** Mr. Glasgow responded that 90% of the time at his school, the adults are talking and 10% are the students. Students know they are being seen and not being ignored. I check up on them every time I see them. By continuing to talk to them, they will turn around and talk to me when they need to. It's important that they do not feel invisible. The student trying to be invisible is the one who needs attention. I have to stop and listen to how they are doing.

**US:** Mr. Thomas said to find the person the child is most connected with to help whether a teacher or coach. At the Upper School level, we are constantly observing unobtrusively. Parents expect that we are watching and acting when needed. Mr. Glasgow agreed that it can be any adult and to ask your children who that one person on campus is that they know they could easily talk to. One parent attending the program added that she had similar problems with one of her children and worked on getting the child to reach out to teachers first by e-mail, then in person as the child became more comfortable with being her own advocate.

**Q: In an increasing quantifiable world, the “mathematics” of success are more widely disseminated. It is hard to walk away from parents talking about college or other issues in an ambitious community. How do you address parents?**

**US:** Mr. Thomas noted that Potomac tries to make sure parents accept that kids change, understand that their children's path will not always be predictable and that it's not a bad thing. Without that understanding and when parents are solely invested in the achievement culture, there is tension and it is more difficult. The message to be delivered is that a C in 9<sup>th</sup> grade Biology is not the end of the world. Maintain the focus on the long-range goal. It's about the journey. However, the transcript and the student should match. If they don't, there is a problem that needs more discussion. Keep asking if the goal is appropriate for the child. Let's look at the better fit, the growth and the improvement. My message to seniors is that the college selection is not about a once in a lifetime event that will mark you forever. It may feel that way, but it's not. You can always transfer.



## BEST PRACTICES PROGRAM SUMMARY - Continued

**Q: What are some ways that your schools celebrate alumni beyond where they go to college or after the next level?**

**LS:** Mr. Lawrence stated that Stone Ridge sees alums as people to offer connections and provide a legacy – the scholarship, commitment, accomplishment. We celebrate alums for the experience, how women serve. Not the development side. We can roll out the honor roll of where they went to school, but we focus on what have I become and how I got there.

**MS:** Mr. Glasgow mentioned that St. Andrews' alumni are still in college, but they do come back to discuss what at St. Andrews makes them successful in college. We celebrate and like to hear what the alumni do with what we gave them.

**US:** Potomac has a robust alumni office that is tightly tapped into the alumni community. Past students return multiple times as there is a remarkable connection that is cultivated after they graduate. We want them to talk to current students about their journeys and show them how accomplished they are. It's not necessarily the big alumni names, but past students who took untraditional routes to show how different paths can lead to similar results.

**Q: Meditation plays an important role today. Is this a strategy your schools are using to keep students grounded?**

**LS:** Mr. Lawrence indicated that Stone Ridge offers yoga in Kindergarten with blocks and mats. We practice Espacio that allows children to find space within themselves first giving them the permission to be silent and not engage.

**MS:** Mr. Glasgow mentioned yoga and mindfulness are built into the classroom at St. Andrews.

**US:** At Potomac, Mr. Thomas stated that a yoga after-school program is in place and they are exploring mindfulness. We also try to teach the students moments of extended reflection.

**Q: Are there policies or procedures for balancing the athletic success and academic success?**

**MS:** At St. Andrews, Mr. Glasgow said that they understand the need to balance these two areas. People sometimes see the academic and athletic as separate, but they are not. We make sure the students realize both are related. All Middle School students play on a competitive sports team. That works for 90% of them, but for the remaining 10% it's a challenge. If they are not performing academically, they are removed from a sports team. Sports are viewed as a part of the curriculum.

## **BEST PRACTICES PROGRAM SUMMARY - Continued**

**US:** For Upper School students, Mr. Thomas spoke that they are mindful of the time and commitment needed for athletics and for academics. It's a balance to integrate athletics into the curriculum. The school recognizes that sports will get some into college so it's important to understand the whole perspective. We believe in trying new things and that may be stretching to some. Most important things is the question of identity – those who identify themselves as a soccer player, for example, cannot just identify as that. If something were to go wrong, it would be devastating. We try to get the kids to understand their identity holistically. We will celebrate your athletic talent, but we are not going to let you off the hook on the academic side simply because you are a good athlete. Academics, athletics and community service are all equally important. It's very important that students don't match with only one aspect of his or her identity, but that all parts are necessary to flourish.



## 2015 Best Practices Forum

### Re-thinking Success: How Schools Define, Recognize and Encourage Students' Diverse Strengths

**Please highlight the following information in your submission:**

- How does your school define “success” for its students? Does your school have specified core principles for the “successful” student?
- Is the definition of success the same for all students? If so, in which areas?
- How does your school help students identify individual strengths and goals? How are students encouraged? How can each student feel successful?
- How does your school help students understand that there are different types of success?
- How does your school help students achieve balance?
- How does your school address the concept of success with students, faculty and parents? What challenges does your school face?

**School Contact for any additional questions:**

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Please feel free to provide any additional information that you think might be of interest to your counterparts at other schools. **Submissions must be e-mailed in a WORD document file format to [administration@parentscouncil.org](mailto:administration@parentscouncil.org), with Best Practices listed in the subject line, by January 12, 2015. Thank you!**

## **BLESSED SACRAMENT SCHOOL**

For the past 15 years, Blessed Sacrament has used National Middle School Association (NMSA) guidelines to create and support a middle school advisory model that highlights the unique gifts of each student, celebrates the service that we provide each other as a part of community and supports each middle school student with an adult advocate.

Our middle school advisory program began as a project identified for re-accreditation through the Middle States Association in 2000. It has become an integral part of our school culture and was highlighted as a part of our current accreditation through AdvancEd and our (successful) application to become a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence, awarded to us by the US Department of Education in 2012.

The NMSA publication 'This We Believe' serves as the foundation for our philosophy and we work to respect the desire for adolescents to become more independent while giving them a safe place to learn and grow with adults who will nurture them. Our model also allows for a means to identify students who may be 'slipping between the cracks'. We find that through our student surveys, our middle school students do feel safe and respected. Anecdotally, we also see that the majority of them come to school with a smile on their faces and a feeling that their teachers care about them.

### **Blessed Sacrament Middle School Highlights**

#### **Structure**

Every middle school student is assigned to an advisory that will...

- allow participation in a small group community (no more than 15 students)
- provide a welcoming, comfortable atmosphere to pray, to work, and to play
- create opportunities to share in activities such as service projects, contests, and athletic events.
- pair the student with an advisor who will advocate for the student throughout the year.

#### **Program**

In addition to our core curricular program, we provide...

- outstanding state-of-the-art science and computer labs
- cross-curriculum literature units
- foreign language - French and Spanish
- Folgers's Shakespeare Festival (8<sup>th</sup>)/Medieval Play Festival (6<sup>th</sup>)
- resource support for students needing accommodations
- counseling program for students needing other support

#### **Catholic Identity**

- regular celebration of the Sacraments (Eucharist/Reconciliation)
- vocations speakers and Vocation's Mass (8<sup>th</sup>)
- visits to Adoration
- Confirmation preparation (8<sup>th</sup>)

## BLESSED SACRAMENT SCHOOL - Continued

- Mass cantors (8<sup>th</sup>)
- Quarterly Top Dawg Awards (Highlighting students who show C.A.R.E.)

### **Community**

- Buddy Program (each 6/7/8 student paired with a K/1/2 student)
- service projects
- Student Council, Safety Patrols and Christ Care Corps
- Retreats for all grades and school-wide Mission Fair

### **Cultural/Arts**

- Spring musical (8<sup>th</sup>)
- cultural field trips (art and performing arts)
- talent show
- Week of the Arts

### **Physical Education**

- Physical Education classes 3 times a week
- Outdoor Education Trips 6/7/8
- Blue/Gold 6/7/8 competitive games quarterly
- Field Day

## **CONGRESSIONAL SCHOOLS OF VIRGINIA**

***How does your school define “success” for its students? Does your school have specified core principles for the “successful” student?***

Congressional students are happy, empathetic and motivated learners. They are also creative problem solvers, unafraid to take intellectual risks. Our students are able to think outside the box and are nimble in the way they approach problems.

Congressional provides the educational experience that allows and encourages inquisitive young minds to ask questions. Committed to each student’s intellectual and personal growth, faculty know how to teach and whom they teach and so are ready with a nudge, a hug, or whatever is needed. Parents are part of the team, too, coming together with teachers and students to ensure each child’s success.

***Is the definition of success the same for all students? If so, in which areas?***

At Congressional, success means students achieving their personal best -- academically, socially and emotionally. As children grow and progress through our program, they acquire attributes that in the aggregate produce students who are all academically accomplished, socially secure and emotionally supported and involved in many areas of school life including the arts, athletics and clubs.

***How does your school help students identify individual strengths and goals? How are students encouraged? How can each student feel successful?***

Students in Middle School meet with Advisors to identify their personal strengths and individual goals for the year. Goals may be academic, social, or even physical. By continuously reviewing and considering their personal objectives with the support of faculty, our students know that they have advocates among the staff who want to see them do their best. This support extends in the Lower School and Early Childhood programs where the staff recognizes and acknowledges the strengths of the students. The youngest students at Congressional develop their own feelings of self-worth and value in part because of the nurturing they receive from their interactions with teachers during the earliest years of their education.

***How does your school help students understand that there are different types of success?***

Congressional offers a broad program that encourages a wide array of student strengths and interest areas. Congressional knows that each student may excel in different areas as they make their educational journey. Children are actively encouraged to achieve according to what is appropriately challenging for each individual, not to a timetable or a prescriptive paradigm. In addition to their academic accomplishments, children are publicly recognized for their successes as good citizens,

## CONGRESSIONAL SCHOOLS OF VIRGINIA - Continued

as community leaders, and as good teammates in various venues throughout the school year.

### ***How does your school help students achieve balance?***

Children are encouraged to take time to play, to explore and to pursue interests outside of academics. Teachers are guided by practices such as developmentally appropriate homework standards to ensure that students and parents can strike a balance in their lives outside of school. It doesn't stop there. Our students are encouraged to cultivate a wide array of interests. In Middle School, our inclusive athletics program encourages all students to participate in a team sport. Both the lower and middle school student body is invited to participate in the School Musical. Opportunities for students as leaders, as community members are encouraged and nurtured.

### ***How does your school address the concept of success with students, faculty and parents? What challenges does your school face?***

At Congressional our model emphasizes process over product and it defines the classroom experience for our students. Particularly in our fast-paced, often competitive environment in the metropolitan area, helping parents *and* students to broaden the sometimes narrow definition of success serves as both a challenge and an opportunity that we address through regular education and community conversations.

## **EDMUND BURKE SCHOOL**

### ***How does your school define “success” for its students? Does your school have specified core principles for the “successful” student?***

Success is very much individually defined at Burke. One constant is growth. A “successful” student has grown into his or her potential and become, as our mission indicates, an independent thinker who steps forward to make positive contributions. We also challenge all students to take responsibility for their education—and the successful Burke student does just that.

### ***Is the definition of success the same for all students? If so, in which areas?***

As stated above, success means different things for each student, but all students who take responsibility for their education, learn to think independently, and make positive contributions to the school and wider communities are considered to be successful. It’s important to note that success at Burke is not only (or always) individual success. We don’t foster competition among our students; rather, we foster collaboration and mutual respect.

### ***How does your school help students identify individual strengths and goals? How are students encouraged? How can each student feel successful?***

We have a very strong Advisory system that pairs each student with an adult who meets with him or her regularly to discuss goals, classwork, and social issues. Twice a year, the advisor comes together with the parents for a student-led conference to go over strengths and goals. Our schedule also allows for plenty of one-on-one meetings with teachers. Our progressive pedagogy makes it possible for teachers to include reflection, self-assessment and peer critiques in their classes.

Students are encouraged and recognized by everyone in the building: peers, teachers, coaches, advisors, staff and administrators. This happens in assemblies, grade meetings and the school newsletter, as well as in comments sent home via email. Accomplishment in the classroom, on stage, in the gym, darkroom, art room, music room and on the field is celebrated equally.

### ***How does your school help students understand that there are different types of success?***

Appreciating students for who they are and embracing differences is part of our mission. Our art requirements, no-cut policy in Athletics as well as our inclusive approach to play casting reflect our philosophy that everyone has something to offer. Our recognition of accomplishments in every area, and our emphasis on leadership and service, sends the message that we value good artists, athletes and citizens as much as good scholars.

### ***How does your school help students achieve balance?***

Like most schools, we require students to participate in arts, athletics and service in addition to academics. We do offer a unique variety of clubs as well as our Leadership and Independent Study programs - these extracurricular activities allow students to develop



## EDMUND BURKE SCHOOL - Continued

talents and pursue interests in areas other than traditional school subjects. We also work very hard to pace the school calendar and class requirements so that our students are able to participate fully in family life. Because our students meet so often with their advisors, no child is able to “fly under the radar” and lose perspective on how best to spend their energies. Problems are caught as they surface, and guidance is always available.

### ***How does your school address the concept of success with students, faculty and parents? What challenges does your school face?***

Like any truly progressive school, Burke is constantly reexamining its practices and listening to feedback. We continue to respond to a lingering misperception that our relaxed, informal atmosphere translates into low expectations for success. Our demanding curriculum, AP offerings and college acceptances help to dispel this myth, and we also spend a great deal of energy on reporting what goes on in our building to parents. We have a robust and informative school newsletter that includes a weekly message from the Head of School explaining the how and why of what we do here. Our regular advisory meetings, biannual family conferences and constant communication with parents via email comments allow us to clearly define success for each child throughout the school year.

### **Burke's Mission:**

Edmund Burke School consciously brings together students who are different from one another in many ways, actively engages them in their own education, has high expectations for them, gives them power and responsibility, and supports and advances their growth as skilled and independent thinkers who step forward to make positive contributions to the world in which they live.

## **FOXCROFT SCHOOL**

***How does your school define “success” for its students? Does your school have specified core principles for the “successful” student?***

- The central components of a Foxcroft education are intellectual; the academic curriculum is designed to challenge each student to develop analytical ability, critical thinking, and communication skills, and rigorous independent thought. We educate each student to seek the confidence and character to meet her future with integrity, high purpose, and a sense of accomplishment.
- Foxcroft women make a difference, and a big part of the reason is that, at Foxcroft, every girl learns that she has the ability to affect her community and the world. The School helps girls identify their gifts and bring them out in positive and productive ways. Students are constantly encouraged to take on leadership roles, to take risks, to stretch themselves beyond where they think they can go.

***Is the definition of success the same for all students? If so, in which areas?***

- No two Foxcroft students are the same and their paths to success will each be different. We help each student set her goals and celebrate her successes in and outside of the classroom.

***How does your school help students identify individual strengths and goals? How are students encouraged? How can each student feel successful?***

- Girls succeed academically at Foxcroft because of the quality of our curriculum and the close attention of our faculty. But they thrive here intellectually, socially, and personally because this is a closely-knit residential community which they quickly come to love. Full-time housemothers, additional faculty who live in or near the dorm, and student leaders comprise the “Dorm Team,” and are responsible for making sure that each and every student is known and valued. Academic, social, and personal challenges are quickly recognized and addressed. At Foxcroft, our housemothers’ main responsibility is the well-being of the girls in their dormitory homes. Housemothers are in constant contact with teachers, the Office of Student Life, advisors, and the Health Center.
- In addition, each girl establishes a special, unique relationship with her faculty advisor. The close rapport that develops manifests itself in many ways: shared meals in the Dining Room or in the advisor’s home, attendance at a game or play, formal meetings, and casual conversations. Advisors and teachers communicate with parents on a regular basis about girls they know on many levels. Coaches and club advisors, too, offer additional adults with whom girls often connect.
- Established in 1991, Foxcroft’s Exceptional Proficiency (EP) Program enables a student with a special talent and a compelling passion to spend time away from campus to train, compete, and pursue her personal dream. Developing

an exceptional talent takes training, and determination, which require a combination of focus, discipline, and time. At Foxcroft, the student who is truly dedicated can have the time and, perhaps as importantly, will get the support she needs to push the boundaries of her ability while being held to lofty educational standards. A number of Foxcroft girls have succeeded in a wide variety of endeavors thanks, in part, to the EP Program.

- Taken together these things create an exceptional community in which each girl grows in knowledge, in wisdom, and in compassion. A place where they feel safe to take the risks that helps them develop into leaders.

***How does your school help students understand that there are different types of success?***

- At Foxcroft, girls are encouraged to find their voice in and outside of the classroom. Leadership is an important part of finding this voice. All Foxcroft girls graduate with leadership experience and that is no coincidence, nor is it solely because Foxcroft is a girls' school. Whether it is through the formal Leadership Program or from the recognition of the role informal leaders play in campus life, Foxcroft encourages girls to be leaders, and provides them with the confidence, skills, and desire to be effective leaders in their School and beyond.

***How does your school help students achieve balance?***

- One way Foxcroft student find balance is through the arts, expressing themselves via any of the many art media and performance options available. Art courses, theater productions, music lessons (for fun or for credit), digital graphics, singing groups, hip-hop dance – between curricular and extra-curricular programs on campus, the possibilities are endless.
- Foxcroft's motto -- *Mens sana in corpore sano* -- translates to “a healthy mind in a healthy body,” and is a central aspect of life on campus. The School is dedicated to the idea that exercise is critical in a girls’ development, and so physical activity is a part of the curriculum. Each student is required to participate in a structured physical activity throughout the year. In addition to developing physical activity as a lifelong habit, we believe participation in sports teaches the core values of sportsmanship, leadership, teamwork, and commitment.
- The tradition of giving back is a cornerstone of Foxcroft School. Our commitment to involvement in and meaningful service to the community is reflected in an array of student-run organizations, community service opportunities, and special ad hoc efforts, limited only by students' busy schedules.
- Students at Foxcroft take part in a variety of activities and clubs. Typically, students choose and become members of clubs during the first few weeks of school in the fall. Students run most of the clubs with the assistance of a faculty advisor.

**FOXCROFT SCHOOL - Continued**

- Foxcroft offers plenty of opportunities for fun. Weekend activities, dorm parties, Fox/Hound SingSings and a score of varied clubs and special activities keep girls involved and happy. The Student Activities Committee, comprised of student representatives from across the classes and community, meets weekly to plan events for weekends. Individual clubs also schedule outings and special events.

***How does your school address the concept of success with students, faculty and parents? What challenges does your school face?***

- At Foxcroft we often use the phrase “everything we do is curriculum.” This embodies all that we do and the idea that we are teachers in and outside of the classroom and working in partnership with our families. As a residential community our faculty and their families become an integral of student lives outside of the classroom as well.
- All schools face the challenge of the changing 21st century with the changing role of technology, the evolving needs in education, and the needs of our students. Foxcroft believes that if we continue to look at the needs of each individual student we will be able to meet these challenges and educate bright, capable young women who will be leading voices in the world.

## **GEORGETOWN PREPARATORY SCHOOL**

Georgetown Preparatory School is a Catholic, Jesuit day and boarding school for young men in grades 9 through 12. Jesuit education centers on the education of the whole person: mind, spirit and body. This is accomplished through cura personalis (Latin for personalized care and concern for the individual) and through a holistic curriculum.

Prep's mission is to form graduates who are:

### Open to Growth

Taking responsibility for his future, growing in self-knowledge and self-control. He is more open to different points of views and new experiences.

### Intellectually Competent

Thinking critically and growing in curiosity to explore ideas and issues.

### Religious

Communicating personally with God through prayer, both private and liturgical.

### Loving

Trusting the love of God, family and friends and putting love into action.

### Committed to Justice

Being aware of the need for social change and learning ways to advocate for the less fortunate.

Prep's program of study prepares each student for success in college. The program is preparatory in the strict sense: every student who graduates will have taken all the units necessary for his admission to college. Each student takes six (6) courses each year.

Minimum requirements for graduation: English – 4 years, Religion – 4 years, Mathematics – 4 years, Social Studies – 3.5 years, Lab Science – 2 years, Latin – 2 years, Modern Language – 2 years, Art – 1 semester, Music – 1 semester, Physical Education – 1 season - 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, and Christian Service. There is a service requirement at each grade level of the Religion Curriculum. Freshmen are required to do a small group service and class-wide day of service. Sophomores are required to do 20 hours of approved service. Juniors are required to do 20 hours of approved service. And Seniors are required to do 50 hours to be completed during the summer between junior and senior years. Prep, also, offers a full program in English as a Second Language (ESL) for international students.

**GEORGETOWN PREPARATORY SCHOOL - Continued**

Every year, Prep will have each class leave the classroom to go on retreat with their classmates, mentors, and faculty chaperones. Retreats offer a time for the students to leave behind the usual distractions and get to know each other as an individual and to deepen one's relationship with God.

## **LANDON SCHOOL**

*Rethinking Success: How schools define, recognize and encourage students' diverse strengths* encourages schools to expand the meaning of what "success" looks like in our institutions. So often, success is that which is quantifiable or measurable — the grade point average, the number of college admits, the number of team victories, the total goals scored, trophies won, awards received.

Landon defines as "best practices" some of the things that we do that give cultural space and recognition to boys who "succeed" in alternative ways. Many of these activities vary by division in order to be applicable to each age group.

### **In the Upper School (Grades 9–12)**

- The Prefects are defined by their trustworthiness, leadership and sense of responsibility. They are identified as successful by both their peers and their faculty, and not necessarily because they are outstanding students, athletes or artists; rather, they are chosen because of their upright character. It is not a popularity contest — it is a respect contest.
- The Improv troop rewards boys for their courage, creativity and teamwork in a public setting.
- The "Great Strides" awards honor boys on a monthly basis in school assemblies. The boys are recognized not for their achievement, per se, but for efforts and improvement in academic areas, by vote of their teachers.
- Ethics speeches are presented voluntarily during school meetings in order for boys to express personal statements which are most important to them.
- Upper School Buddies and Peer Counselors are two programs that allow boys — many of whom previously struggled with feelings of inclusion themselves — to meet with Lower School boys or to lend encouragement to peers who seem to be laboring to find their way.
- Two of Landon's "Big Six" Commencement awards recognize seniors for "citizenship" and for "tenacity of purpose." These awards thus describe success in terms of service to others and in terms of persistence.

### **In the Middle School (Grades 6–8)**

- "This I Believe" speeches give Eighth Grade boys a forum and a platform to express to their community that which is most important to them.
- Project 360 has Middle School boys interview their closest friends and relatives, who in turn share with the boys what they believe the boys' strengths are. This project makes self-understanding, not grades, the marker of success.

**In the Lower School (Grades 3-5)**

- The Lower School boys' archival box project gives boys a place to store their Landon memories and thus build a narrative identity for themselves, using artifacts of their own choosing. In so doing, they can help construct what success at Landon looks like according to their own interpretation.
- The Lower School student government works in such a way that it rotates responsibility for offices through all the boys. Accordingly, success is defined not by winning an election but by contributing to the good of the whole through participation, both as a leader and as a follower.

**In All Divisions**

- At Landon, we believe that character education is the most important teaching we do. We strive to instill in our boys the values of honesty and respect that guide their actions and relationships with others. Our Code of Character provides a model for daily ethical conduct. It brings together the principles of respect and honesty that are central to the school's Civility and Honor Codes. At the beginning of the school year, every member of the community signs the Code of Character, pledging to live by and model these principles.
- Community service is considered a key component to our character education endeavor. Participation in service to others helps boys develop three fundamental service skills: the compassion to see the need, the confidence to address the need, and the conviction to meet the need. Our "helping hands" approach under the guidance of Landon teacher-coach-mentors, often working in conjunction with parents, encourages boys to develop a calendar of unique opportunities to actively serve the local community. While programs in the Lower and Middle Schools are structured and required for our students, participation is not mandatory for boys in the Upper School. The vast majority of Upper School students demonstrate that such a mandate is unnecessary. Boys are able to initiate their own service project, which enables a greater responsibility of ownership and commitment. Some service projects, such as Landon's Thanksgiving Food Basket drive, are school-wide initiatives. All divisions support the homeless in age-appropriate ways and often visit senior communities. Other projects are specific by division, such as "Pennies for Patients" in the Lower School (where they collect change to benefit the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society). There are several Special Olympics projects available to students in the Middle and Upper Schools. Our Upper School boys tutor children of special needs and mentor others from low-income housing communities. They also organize large projects, including Stop Hunger Now, and support Wounded Warriors at nearby Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. Through the choices they make to participate in service activities at the expense of their free time, study time, time on the field or practicing of the arts, Landon boys learn the meaning of social responsibility to make the world around them a better place.



## **LOWELL SCHOOL**

***How does your school define success for its students? Does your school have specified core principles for the “successful” student?***

Lowell values individuality - there is no ‘one way’ to be successful. Lowell thinks about success in terms of being intrinsically motivated to learn, curious, open-minded, persistent, caring, civic-minded, and flexible. Every person is on their own path and a successful person keeps moving forward and growing. Success is visible when a child feels as his voice matters and he/she is an active participant in the learning experience. We listen, observe and support every child’s interests and help develop skills in an environment that is responsive, caring and nurturing.

***Is the definition of success the same for all students? If so, in which areas?***

We have core values, but these really look different depending on each child. Every child is unique and every child follows its own learning path, in order to respect this individuality success might look different per every child but what children have in common is the joy of learning. Students work toward the development of critical and creative thinking skills and self control.

***How does your school identify strengths and goals? How are students encouraged? How can each child feel successful?***

Teachers develop strong, close relationships with students. During daily morning meeting and time with our school counselors, we talk about our strengths and challenges and strategies that different people use to help them reach their goals. We meet with students in small groups and individually to guide them towards greater self-knowledge. We emphasize a growth mindset in our feedback with students so rather than showering them with empty praise; we draw students back into their work by asking questions and offering specific feedback. We strive to use positive language and discipline techniques, always focusing on ways in which the child can learn from mistakes. Each child is known and ‘seen’ by their teachers as an individual with strength and potential. We place emphasis in a child-centered education and curriculum and we create a classroom environment that mirrors children learning and reinforces skills and awaken curiosity.

***How does your school help students understand that there are different types of success?***

This happens through myriad small and large conversations through a child’s career at our school. It is explicitly and intentionally talked about. We value allowing the students to be thinkers but also it is important to help them develop critical thinking skills so that they can evaluate information and evaluate their thinking. This is a way to honor a democratic classroom environment. Teachers create an environment that welcomes all different learning styles and that is responsive to a wide range of needs and skills development, by

that exposure children experience how children learn in different ways, non is better then the other.

***How does your school help students achieve balance?***

We work hard at Lowell, but we also play hard. Time is given for free exploration and outdoor play every day. Students are given modest amounts of meaningful homework to practice skills, but are also encouraged to take time to be with friends and family and explore pursuits outside of school. We focus largely on effort instead of achievement when we look at a child's work. Every child is capable of effort and growth – success is possible for everyone. We do not give letter grades until Middle School. This helps students focus on learning for it's own sake and not panic about how they might measure up to their peers. Teachers are facilitators who help, support and gently guide the discovery of the world around them and allow their inquiries to find a space to grow. It's by allowing this process to take place that the students can go on and develop critical thinking skills and form their own unique knowledge and understanding. Teachers monitor children's development and create opportunities for the students to work on different skills depending on their needs.

***How does your school address the concept of success with students, faculty, and parents? What challenges does your school face?***

The concepts around success are frequently discussed although we may not always use that specific terminology. It is an inherent part of our culture to think of children as individuals on varied paths. These values are discussed when we interview new faculty and during new faculty orientation. This attitude towards our students is discussed with faculty explicitly at times, but is core to all of our work, and in this way permeates every discussion about students and curriculum. These values are shared with parents during admissions, back to school night, and at times, parent events although we have never had a parent event that was geared specifically towards the topic of success. For example, a recent workshop on sharing mindfulness practices with children gave parents ways to help their child be more successful, but was not billed as a workshop solely about raising successful children.

## **MARET SCHOOL**

Central to Maret School’s DNA is the belief that all children within our care are individuals with distinct needs, unique strengths, and particular areas of growth. Our flexible curriculum allows students to navigate our academic program in multiple ways; it’s rare to find two graduates from Maret whose academic programs were identical. Furthermore, Maret celebrates the whole child, so that athletic achievements, artistic endeavors, and leadership within the School community are recognized and applauded in ways both big and small.

As a result, Maret has no single notion of “success,” although our core values—*respect, integrity, joy, connectedness, the individual, creativity, and excellence*—offer students clear guideposts of what we value as a community. These words appear all over our campus, and intentional lessons through our advising programs reiterate what these words mean and how they lead to success within the context of the Maret community.

As we focus on individual students and their needs, Maret acknowledges that each student brings unique gifts, and we seek to provide opportunities for all students to shine. While these opportunities are often built around common experiences—all eighth graders complete a pencil-drawn self-portrait, and all tenth graders write a research paper focusing on *The Great Gatsby*, to give just two of many examples—they allow all students to challenge themselves and to learn and grow. Through honest but warm teacher-student relationships and a robust advising program, students learn where their strengths lie, consider how they can improve, and think about what their next steps will be. For students who face difficulties, Maret offers extensive support, ranging from one-on-one sessions with teachers to master a particular concept, to longer-term interventions that are focused on helping the student to greater academic achievement.

All kindergarten through ninth grade students at Maret study core academic subjects, take both a visual and a performing arts course, and participate in physical education. Students are thus taught to explore multiple aspects of themselves—the physical, emotional, artistic, and intellectual facets of their personalities. Naturally, this process helps students define what they’re good at and where they might improve. In grades 10-12, students continue to explore all these areas, but the greater flexibility of the program allows for more focus on areas of particular interest.

Throughout their time at Maret, students are encouraged to focus on the joy of their experience as students—the fun of learning something in science, the satisfaction of creating a beautiful mosaic, the pleasure of a good workout, the happiness of being part of a caring and cohesive community. Unfortunately, many external pressures can create barriers to students’ enjoyment of school. The news squawks with word of college admissions pressures, and our students are not immune to these and other pressures most children experience. As a School, we have made focused and appropriate attempts to counteract these anxieties—through acknowledging that they exist (as when we discussed the documentary *Race to Nowhere* as a community) and through creating policies that help students find balance in their lives (through our sensible homework guidelines, for example).

“Success” is an elusive term, of course, and there are many ways to define it. We at Maret School want all of our students to experience success, and our emphasis on students’

**MARET SCHOOL - Continued**

finding this success in a multitude of forums allows all students to challenge themselves and grow as they progress through our program.

## **McLEAN SCHOOL OF MARYLAND**

### ***How does your school define success for its students? Does your school have specified core principles for the “successful” student?***

We hear it all the time—McLean School transforms lives. While the specifics of this may differ among the divisions, the common factor is that McLean offers an environment and experience that unlocks the unrealized potential of students. In small classes with attentive teachers, individualized instruction, and a supportive social environment, we work every day for our students to be successful. We define successes as the following: Students discover their individual learning style, build self-advocacy skills, find joy in learning, and ultimately develop the necessary skills needed for success in college and beyond.

Our core principles for a ‘successful student’ involve the following: If a student understands how they learn best, what strategies and/or accommodations support their learning, are able to advocate for their needs to both peers and adults, take pleasure in learning, and thus build their self esteem, then we feel this child is successful.

### ***Is the definition of success the same for all students? If so, in which areas?***

While our definition of a successful McLean student applies for our entire community, we recognize that there will be a range in which our students develop these successful traits. When a student joins our community, and their prior educational experiences, impact how quickly a student benefits from our unique educational approach.

### ***How does your school identify strengths and goals?***

Individual academic strengths are identified throughout each year through standard measures as well as providing opportunities for students to demonstrate knowledge in less conventional ways. This in turn, helps students discover their preferred modality for learning. All students are encouraged to participate in the visual arts, performing arts, athletics, club offerings, and other extracurricular opportunities. By fostering a supportive atmosphere, our students feel comfortable to take risks and venture into activities they may not have previously experienced. These new opportunities further enhance their self-esteem and allow students to identify new strengths. Students work in concert with the classroom teachers, advisors, and support staff (learning specialist, reading specialist, writing specialist, counselor, math specialist) to establish goals for the academic year.

### ***How are students encouraged? How can each child feel successful?***

Our talented and caring teachers work tirelessly on a daily basis to ensure our students feel good about themselves and their abilities. We celebrate their accomplishments and provide positive reinforcement to allow students to feel comfortable to take risks and ask questions. Each student at McLean has a student learning profile, which is developed by the student, teacher, and parent to address specific accommodations a student may need to

## McLEAN SCHOOL OF MARYLAND - Continued

be successful in the classroom. This ensures that a student's needs are respected and met – thus in turn, helping them to be successful. In addition, teaching strategies that are most powerful for that student are also outlined and incorporated in their daily classes. Students take ownership for their learning profile and over the course of their time at McLean, develop the ability to understand who they are as a learner and develop goals for the future.

### ***How does your school help students understand that there are different types of success?***

Because of the nature of McLean's mission– to understand and honor each student's individual learning style, embedded in our daily work is helping students to understand that there are different types of success. We acknowledge and celebrate the differences that are sources of strength in our students. We discover and develop the potential in each student.

### ***How does your school help students achieve balance?***

Our broad curriculum goes beyond essential academics. We provide opportunities for students in the performing and visual arts, athletics, STEM, robotics, and a variety of extracurricular club offerings. Our students have a healthy balance of academic offerings and opportunities to explore activities at school. Our Mindfulness program teaches students to center themselves, be present in the moment and feel inner balance. Our manageable homework load allows students to have a more balanced after school life.

### ***How does your school address the concept of success with students, faculty, and parents?***

We address the concept of success in a broad sense by looking at the potential of each child, setting individual goals and celebrating their successes. We address success with students, faculty, and parents, both on a 11 basis and as a collective community. Student's success is acknowledged formally through quarterly report cards, parent teacher conferences, and award assemblies. We always recognize when our students are successful in and out of the classroom and help students realize that success is more about the process, than an individual grade. This process will carry our students on as life long learners.

### ***What challenges does your school face?***

Our enrollment continues to increase which has made it difficult for us to make a McLean education accessible to every applicant.

## **NORWOOD SCHOOL**

Norwood School's mission is to ensure that each of its students grows intellectually, morally, physically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually, while preparing to function productively and generously in our pluralistic society. Its challenging and broad-based program is designed to provide the freedom and structure students need to succeed and flourish as they navigate paths that are uniquely theirs to follow. A successful student is a curious, confident and joyful learner who challenges him/herself, treats others with kindness and respect, and contributes positively to his/her community.

Norwood does not consider success to be a one-size-fits-all experience for its students. Recognizing that children are multi-faceted, Norwood provides many opportunities for safe risk-taking, exploration, discovery, and growth – all in a nurturing, supportive, and inclusive school community. The School has a number of distinctive characteristics that help students identify individual strengths and encourage them to stretch themselves, in order to feel successful as students, friends, family members, and community citizens. These traits include:

**Focus on K-8:** Childhood is slowed down and savored as students figure out strengths, weaknesses, talents, and interests in a supportive, family-like community.

**Child-centered Learning:** Norwood sets the same high standards of achievement and provides different routes, environments, and pacing for each child to get there.

**Challenge without Frustration:** The Norwood program involves a rigorous pursuit of learning that is challenging for each student, but meets them where they are and provides numerous routes to success.

**Leadership Opportunities:** Students have many opportunities to develop leadership skills, from serving as a “buddy” to younger students to serving on student government to participating in conferences.

**Safe, Supportive, and Inclusive Community:** Providing a safe and supportive community for all children is the cornerstone of the Norwood program.

**Student Support Services:** The School has a learning specialist and guidance counselor on staff in each division to help students achieve academic success and to provide social-emotional support and guidance as needed.

There are academic benchmarks for success, but small class sizes, teachers who know students well, and an advisory/homeroom system support each student to realize his/her own success. Differentiated classes in reading and math allow students to be successful within a smaller group while providing some students the support they need at various points in the learning process and others the challenging work to stretch their learning.

## NORWOOD SCHOOL - Continued

Norwood's whole-child approach to education develops awareness that there are different types of success. The program focuses on the academic, creative, moral, and physical development of children. Music, art, drama, physical education, science, and world languages have never been considered "extras" and are a regular part of each child's schedule. Children experience success as artists, actors, athletes, writers, mathematicians, and musicians.

Students also understand that success means making good decisions in all aspects of life. Character education plays a significant role in guiding our students to feel successful as kind, caring, honest, respectful, and responsible young people. "How you lead your life matters," the School's motto, is closely followed throughout the K-8 journey. Each day begins with an age-appropriate character lesson in a community setting, which sets the tone for the work and play ahead.

The Norwood School Community Service Program provides an opportunity for children to reach out to the broader community with a caring spirit and an active willingness to serve. Students explore opportunities in which unselfish actions and attitudes of acceptance can be practiced through school-wide drives and class projects. They quickly learn that success is as much about serving as it is about accomplishing.

Delivering a well-rounded program is the key to achieving balance in young people. Norwood's broad-based K-8 curriculum is uniquely designed to enable children to try many new activities and experiences. At Norwood, it is possible to play a sport, perform in the musical, play a musical instrument in the band or orchestra, and participate in clubs and community service activities. Students graduate from Norwood with a healthy balance of experiences and are prepared to succeed in high school with a clear awareness of their strengths, weaknesses, talents, and passions.

Norwood students are surrounded by a community of adults who support, encourage, celebrate, and love them. Lower school faculty and staff focus on young learners as they adjust to and thrive at school; the middle school team specializes in working with adolescents as they navigate a time of intense change. These teaching teams and the administration form a partnership with parents to provide a safe, positive, and nurturing school community where children are able to flourish and succeed in many ways.



## **ST. ANDREW'S EPISCOPAL SCHOOL**

### **Challenge, Happiness and Success at St. Andrew's**

At St. Andrew's, teachers recognize that every day and every interaction is an opportunity for a student to feel successful. Walk the halls of either of St. Andrew's two campuses and you will see what we mean. A student feels success after completing his or her first chapter book, making a new friend, mastering a challenging AP Calculus problem, scoring the game winning shot in the basketball game, earning the coveted lead in the school musical, or gaining admission into an Ivy League college.

True student success requires a faculty steeped in research on how to develop students' full potential. At St. Andrew's, 100% of our faculty has training and on-going professional development in how the brain learns through its nationally-recognized Center for Transformative Teaching and Learning ([www.thecttl.org](http://www.thecttl.org)). This training led to St. Andrew's being one of only eight schools in the world (and the only school in mid-Atlantic region) named to the Harvard's Graduate School of Education's Research Schools International network. Harvard faculty now work closely with their St. Andrew's counterparts, most recently conducting groundbreaking research that demonstrated a strong correlation between student happiness, intrinsic motivation, and academic success for all of St. Andrew's Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup>-grade students.

Research in Mind, Brain, and Education Science has been valuable for all of St. Andrew's teachers, and has drawn faculty from more than 35 peer private and public schools to study at our Center for Transformative Teaching and Learning. Our faculty understands that a challenging curriculum and a warm environment are foundations of educational excellence and contribute to every student's success. Our students understand that the only true failure is the failure to challenge themselves, and graduate with the confidence and resilience and collaborative skills to succeed in college and beyond.

## **ST. STEPHEN'S AND ST. AGNES SCHOOL**

***How does your school define “success” for its students? Does your school have specified core principles for the “successful” student?***

SSSAS is an institution that blends a strong academic program with a strong moral compass. We recognize the importance of instilling in our students the value of being compassionate, global citizens. We strive to have our graduates use their education to make the world a better place. This sense of greater purpose is prevalent throughout our school and it is by this we define success.

***Is the definition of success the same for all students? If so, in which areas?***

The rich Episcopal tradition is a framework for much of our approach. A core element of our mission is *to pursue goodness as well as knowledge*. Service learning programs, an honor system, and a vibrant commitment to sustainability are all part of the daily life of SSSAS. The athletic programs as well as the fine and performing arts offerings complement the academic program for every SSSAS student. Students can find their niche in any of these areas and by doing so they define their own success.

***How does your school help students identify individual strengths and goals? How are students encouraged? How can each student feel successful?***

Our mission-driven commitment to *honor the unique value of each our members as a child of God in a caring community* invigorates our desire to support each student. Students at SSSAS strive to be their best selves. Helping support all students is the objective of our community. The challenge comes from our desire to teach individual students, not simply classes of students, within a traditional academic approach.

Character development and leadership opportunities are found across all three of our divisions. We are committed to providing opportunities for students to pursue their passion and feel successful in doing so.

***How does your school help students understand that there are different types of success?***

Each division stresses the importance of what goodness means and thoughtfully creates programs which nurture goodness in students. Through this we develop what it means to be successful for each individual. The Lower School teaches character traits of honesty, respect, compassion, and responsibility and has implemented an anti-bias curriculum. The Middle School has a Character Education Program which focuses on respect and inclusivity. The Upper School uses multicultural student groups to motivate students to build relationships and celebrate diversity.

***How does your school help students achieve balance?***

At every turn, SSSAS is *living its mission*. Our commitment to diversity, sustainability, and service and to offering its students a program characterized by strong academics and a wide range of extracurricular activities is palpable. Whether in the classrooms, common spaces, on the stage or playing fields, there is a pervasive sense of community and purpose. This dynamic learning environment invites students to be curious, compassionate, honorable, contributing members of a school community and community-at-large who are engaged fully in their learning and are encouraged to step outside their comfort level. The phrase, *pursuing goodness as well as knowledge*, eloquently captures the essence of SSSAS. Whether with a teacher, counselor or academic advisor, we emphasize the need to find balance in both academic and co-curricular activities.

***How does your school address the concept of success with students, faculty and parents? What challenges does your school face?***

Success is measured in many ways. Traditional benchmarks associated with grades, athletic accomplishments and excellence in the arts provide students and parents with acknowledgement of outstanding effort. A challenge is to convey the importance of risk, the inevitable occurrences of failure, and the importance to strive to learn from the experience. As a school we need to work with our parents and students to create an environment where we all recognize that success is never guaranteed and that the process of improving, of innovating, and of adapting are critical and worthy lessons to embrace.

## **STONE RIDGE SCHOOL OF THE SACRED HEART**

***How does your school define “success” for its students? Does your school have specified core principles for the “successful” student?***

A successful Stone Ridge student is one who lives by the Five Sacred Heart Goals related to faith, intellect, community, service, and growth, striving for excellence academically and exhibiting generosity of spirit and a dedication to serving others.

***Is the definition of success the same for all students? If so, in which areas?***

While the overarching definition of academic success is the same, we strive to meet each student where she is. We offer the support of Learning Specialists to those who need accommodations, and our faculty and staff have received training in differentiation. At the same time we celebrate the whole child, recognizing each girl’s special gifts as articulated by the Five Sacred Heart Goals.

***How does your school help students identify individual strengths and goals? How are students encouraged? How can each student feel successful?***

Each Stone Ridge student has one assigned adult in the community (either her homeroom teacher or advisor) who works individually with her to set goals and identify areas of strength and potential growth. This adult also helps each girl identify and celebrate her successes both inside and outside the classroom.

***How does your school help students understand that there are different types of success?***

The Five Sacred Heart Goals are central to the culture at Stone Ridge. Student understands that each of the Goals is valued and honored. Assemblies are held throughout the school year recognizing how individuals have lived the Five Goals as we celebrated the spiritual, academic, artistic, athletic, community building, service and leadership successes of our students.

***How does your school help students achieve balance?***

Health and wellness topics are incorporated throughout the curriculum and special study and focus has been placed on the calendar, schedule, and homework load of each student.

***How does your school address the concept of success with students, faculty and parents? What challenges does your school face?***

The relationship between the Five Sacred Heart Goals and the concept of success at Stone Ridge are continually reinforced with all members of our community both inside and outside the classroom. In the high-powered and high-achieving culture of the metro DC

**STONE RIDGE SCHOOL OF THE SACRED HEART - Continued**

area we strive to help each member of our community find balance through incorporating time for prayer, study, friendship, and service in their daily lives.

## **THE LANGLEY SCHOOL**

### ***How does your school define “success” for its students?***

The Langley School defines “success” for its students in a number of ways. While we certainly track student progress using traditional metrics such as standardized tests, benchmarking, and various other assessments, we view success as an individualized endeavor. Langley’s motto of “every child, every day” speaks to our commitment to meeting each child where he or she is—academically, socially, and emotionally—and challenging appropriately. As such, successful Langley students are those who not only are meeting the academic demands of our program, but also have well-developed social and emotional intelligence. We view these ideas as mutually reinforcing and essential with the expectation of graduating students who lead balanced lives of meaning and purpose.

### ***Does your school have specified core principles for the “successful” student?***

The core principles that guide each of us—faculty, staff, parents, and students—at Langley are outlined in our Community Contract. Successful students are respectful, kind, honest citizens of our school and of the community-at-large. While we have graduation requirements for our Middle School students that outline successful completion of core academic coursework, we have a far broader definition of a “successful student,” as outlined in the questions that follow.

### ***How does your school help students identify individual strengths and goals? How are students encouraged? How can each student feel successful?***

A cornerstone of Langley’s philosophy of teaching is the critical role of authentic learning experiences and assessment to guide teaching and learning. As such, the school utilizes a variety of formative and summative assessments to inform our teaching. These tests, in conjunction with a variety of formative, developmental assessments at the classroom level, provide a rich and dynamic picture of all of our students so that we teach with knowledge and intention. We regularly collect data in our classrooms to identify strengths and to refine goals, thus ensuring we are meeting students’ needs. But we certainly do not stop there. Students are encouraged to find success in a number of ways, in the classrooms, on the athletic fields, on our theatre’s stage, and in many other ways.

Families and faculty consistently identify the strength of the teacher-student relationship as the key to student success at Langley. Students are known here, and thus feel encouraged to take risks in an environment where they know they are safe and supported. The strength of the parent-child-teacher triangle is reinforced by our robust parent education program; regular PALS (Parents Association of The Langley School) meetings allow for parents to come together and work with experts in areas of particular concern to the parents of children in grades preschool through eight.

***How does your school help students understand that there are different types of success?***

The “game-show” view of intelligence —where intelligence is equated with being fast with facts—is not the only path to success at Langley. Successful students think critically and deeply, ask questions rather than just answer questions. During a recent assembly, students in grades 1-8 were recognized for their success in one of the Science Department’s regular school-wide STEAM challenges. Students at each grade level who thought creatively and innovatively in order to build the strongest and most effective model lunar lander were applauded and lauded by their peers and teachers. As one of our faculty members announced the winners, he spoke of the number of times the winning students’ models had “failed” before achieving success, and reminded students that the path to success is often fraught with many failed attempts. This moment—a fairly typical one in the life of The Langley School—highlights our philosophy that innovation and success are complex pursuits, and resilience and hard work are critical. Success looks different for each student, but we believe the way to ensure it for all is with solid effort and scaffolded support. As John Dewey wrote nearly a century ago, “Knowledge of methods alone will not suffice. There must be the desire, the will to employ them.” At Langley, we ignite that desire by creating an environment in which students can define what success means for them and caring teachers can help them achieve it. *How* students learn is as important as *what* they learn at Langley, and opportunities for students to learn in many ways abound. Our service learning, arts, and athletics programs allow for students to find success and learn in a novel context beginning at three years old, and they are encouraged to take risks and find their own success during their entire PS-8 experience.

***How does your school help students achieve balance?***

One of the hallmarks of the Langley experience is our deep respect for childhood and early adolescence. In a culture that often celebrates acceleration and overscheduling, we create a learning environment in which students can push themselves to try new things and take risks in a safe environment. Our arts program—an integral and essential piece of the overall academic experience—allows for balance in the day and an opportunity to pause and see the beauty and importance of art, music, and drama. Students participate in “arts shares” and performance beginning in preschool, and each year, two-thirds of our Middle School students are involved in the spring musical. Most of those students are also involved with sports both at Langley and outside, with jazz band, with Scouts, and many other organizations. Our dean of students works with our Athletics and Performing Arts Departments to ensure that students are not overwhelmed by schedule conflicts or pressure to be in two places at once. And while we are committed to providing a space in which students can “try on” lots of experiences during their years at Langley, we also provide guidance around the development of executive function skills such as planning and prioritizing so that students can navigate these challenges independently in high school and beyond. Childhood is meant to be a time of exploration and play, and we believe that has a place within the context of a rigorous academic program.

***How does your school address the concept of success with students, faculty and parents? What challenges does your school face?***

A challenge in any rigorous academic institution is to help all constituents understand that success is not a universal truth. Grades and test scores only paint part of the picture of a student's experience, and we encourage a view of success that is more broad and encompassing of the entire school experience. We certainly want our students to feel successful within the rigorous academic program at Langley, but we believe that students should have opportunity to find success throughout their days at school in a variety of ways. We celebrate many different types of success through our awards programs, assemblies, student activities and electives opportunities, and in the daily interactions with our students. We believe that a successful student is a happy, kind, quietly confident one.



## **THE POTOMAC SCHOOL**

### ***How does your school define “success” for its students? Does your school have specified core principles for the “successful” student?***

From the earliest experiences our students have on campus, learning for learning’s sake is strongly emphasized. We carefully design every aspect of our curriculum to facilitate our students’ acquisition of ideas, concepts, and skill sets. We keep the focus beyond letter-grades by developing rubrics, analyzing our students’ performance on assessments, and providing specific feedback to help each student meet his or her potential. Over time, our students internalize a set of principles about how learning works so that they can be successful wherever they go.

An important aspect of this process involves asking students to set goals for themselves – for their school years, for their semesters, and for their work on individual assignments. Following the completion of an extended assignment, students often rate themselves on their work based on the rubrics handed them at the outset of the assignment; these rubrics touch on multiple facts of the “successful” completion of the task. In addition, there are frequent opportunities for peer review of student work; in this way, students become a community of learners that inspires them to give their best efforts.

Additionally, our mission states that while academics are the central element of school, we value “opportunities to excel in art and music classes, on stage, and on the athletic fields.” While there are ways in which these engagements can be assessed traditionally, instructors in these areas also explicitly value effort and creativity as part of success in these ventures, and they extend our model of “teaching learning” in these contexts as well. Seeing models of excellence in many areas of life, students have multiple opportunities to affirm classmates for their efforts and to be recognized for their emerging gifts.

Potomac has, since its founding, stressed specific values in addition to academic excellence – social and emotional skills, self-knowledge, and effective collaboration. Students are held to a standard vis-à-vis these core values, and celebrated when those values are exhibited well. Our core values – courage, humility, integrity, perseverance, and respect – are recognized in many ways, perhaps the most explicit of which is through the Helen Seth-Smith Award, an esteemed prize given at the end of the academic year to that senior who has best manifested the core values of the school in his or her time at Potomac.

### ***Is the definition for success the same for all students? If so, in which areas?***

At Potomac, we assess success on a continuum largely related to the individual child. Whereas our definition of success remains constant, individual manifestations of that success will look different for each child. With over 1000 students ranging in age from five to eighteen and bringing different and individual talents, skills, and outlooks to the table, our approach is to build relationally from the reality of where our students are as people. In this way, individual success comes from calibrating challenge in order to bring out the best

## THE POTOMAC SCHOOL - Continued

in each child on his or her terms starting from where he or she is. But in addition to fostering each student's individual potential, we believe that it is equally important that our students understand the importance and power of collaboration. At Potomac, students aren't worried that their gain is someone else's loss; they grow to understand that their individual success is intimately tied to their interaction and collaboration with others. Whether in classrooms, art studios, performance spaces or on the athletic fields, we help students understand that their effort and engagement have positive impacts not only on themselves but also on others, especially when we are all working together to contribute positively to something larger than ourselves. In this way, individual success is closely related to the capacity of the whole group to move forward. For example, the student who takes the intellectual risk to offer an insight that others don't see not only "ups his own game" but everyone else's as well, while also helping to further everyone's learning. We leverage these moments in a variety of ways – through assemblies, leadership programs, class retreats, big brother/big sister programs, being a member of clubs and teams – in order to provide opportunities for students to see and experience the power of collaborative learning as it relates to their own development and growth. In this way, in addition to helping our students work toward their own individual success, we give our students a purposeful sense of being part of something that matters.

### ***How does your school help students identify individual strengths and goals? How are students encouraged? How can each student feel successful?***

Potomac prides itself on the personalized relationship between teacher/advisor and student. Teachers at Potomac have had extensive training in Social-Emotional Learning strategies that help students better understand themselves as well as their strengths and their areas of challenge and develop efficacy in working on both. Our Lower and Middle Schools both use Responsive Classroom. This program places an explicit emphasis on identifying strengths and areas for growth, and then setting goals each year aimed at improvement. Each semester, these goals are reviewed and modified according to the individual student's progress. The teacher's role here is to partner with the student in helping identify these areas, especially when the student struggles to do so, and to facilitate and monitor each student's progress toward fulfilling his or her goals.

This basic model is then extended and applied, as appropriate to the age and development of our students, throughout the rest of our program. Building on these foundations, students in the Intermediate School continue their exploration of self through surveys which help them discover how they best learn, and in our ABBS program, they study identity as it intersects with understanding themselves and others, brain development, and a myriad of developmental issues related to adolescence. Working closely with their advisers, students continue to set and tweak goals for their social and academic success. In the Upper School, students work closely with their teachers, coaches, and advisers as they begin the journey toward the place where they can independently apply the lessons they've learned and continue to learn about themselves to increasingly complex academic, social, and personal contexts.

## THE POTOMAC SCHOOL - Continued

We aspire to inculcate in all of our students the idea of maintaining a “growth mindset,” based on the work of Carol Dweck, which states that intelligence and achievement are not fixed, but are on a continuum, available to everyone. The idea is that all those who possess a growth mindset, then, can progress along this continuum toward “success” if they invest in doing so. In addition, we encourage our students to see their identities as fluidly as possible rather than narrowing their vision of themselves to something less than the totality of who they truly are. We focus explicitly on helping students see challenge as an opportunity for growth, something to be embraced rather than shied away from, a theme familiar to Potomac students of all ages. For example, teachers and advisers help students see that losing the game by one point or performing uncharacteristically low on an assessment are valuable moments from which there is much to be learned. By working closely with our students and by helping them focus their individual attention on exactly what they’re doing, why they’re doing it, and what they’ve learned from it, we hope to cement the idea that success is indeed possible for any and all who invest in it.

### ***How does your school help students understand that there are different types of success?***

What success means is a constant topic of discussion at Potomac. Teachers and advisers work with students to help them concretize their own individual pathways toward success. We help students discover what success for them means individually, for example, “staying calm while I sing my solo,” or “starting on the basketball team.” Together, we then work to identify the steps, or the next steps, toward the goal and support the student as he or she executes the plan. In this way, in age and developmentally appropriate ways, we assist our students in calibrating their challenges such that they define the milestones that resonate success in the things that matter to them. The development of the capacity to self-define is crucial in that it fosters student ownership over the process and its results. Ultimately, we hope our students are able to independently apply this process of understanding and identifying their own specific objectives as they work through challenges in any context. As a result, they will be better equipped to successfully attain both their academic and non-academic goals.

### ***How does your school help students achieve balance?***

At Potomac, we take a holistic approach to our work with students; we go to great lengths to get to know them as well as their parents and to earn their trust. In doing so, we strive to gain as complete an understanding as possible of what matters most to every student and his or her parents. We then work together, as a team, to help shape each student’s academic and non-academic choices in light of what the student’s goals are, what the parents’ goals for their child are, and what the programmatic options available to the student are – all within the context of the totality of the student’s life. We carefully consider the ramifications of individual decisions made in isolation and how they come together and impact the whole of the student’s Potomac and non-Potomac life. Throughout this process, we keep the child, and what is in his or her best interest, firmly at the center of the

## THE POTOMAC SCHOOL - Continued

discussion. In effect, we start with the child we have in front of us and move on from there in a carefully considered way rather than grooming a child we don't yet see for a specific, pre-determined outcome that may, or may not, be appropriate.

In order to maintain the best quality of school-life for our students, our teachers, advisers, and administrators monitor our students' progress through all aspects of our programs as closely and as unobtrusively as possible. While doing so, we share information, among ourselves as well as with parents, so that we can best match our students' academic and non-academic interests and goals to our programs. This work is done, of course, with a deep understanding of what's developmentally appropriate for students at all levels of our program, knowledge that also informs overall School practices like the number of AP courses a student can take or how much homework they might be assigned at various grade levels. The deliberately thoughtful relationships built among teachers, coaches, advisers, administrators, and parents enable an honest, accurate assessment of how the student is progressing through our programs as well as open, productive discussions about how to encourage the student toward further growth while maintaining balance across all areas of his or her Potomac and non-Potomac life.

### ***How does your school address the concept of success with students, faculty, and parents?***

We address the concept of success in two ways. First, we try to strive to live our mission every day so that our students engage in models of learning that foster outstanding academic achievement and a principled commitment to our highest values. We are deliberate and intentional in how we approach all aspects of our program - the classes we teach, but also our assemblies, class trips, traditions, rituals, and other aspects of school culture. We express our vision of success in countless other ways: Parent Coffees, Parent Forums, Back-To-School Night, Parent-Teacher Conferences, our Distinguished Speakers' Series, College Counseling Nights, our Orientation Programs, our Web site, the School's print materials, our Admissions and Hiring practices and so forth. We hire new teachers carefully to ensure that they will align with our mission and we mentor them systematically by pairing them with an experienced, successful teacher. We use our professional development resources carefully to continue to build upon the core strengths of our faculty.

### ***What challenges does your school face?***

We face the same complex challenges that all schools in our milieu face. We live in an achievement orientated culture that prizes outstanding outcomes. Our challenge is to humanize this quest for achievement so that our students can lead healthy, balanced, and morally principled lives, even as they stretch themselves to meet their highest possible potential. Learning necessitates cycles of trial and error. Setback and/or failures can weigh heavily and stressfully on students as they navigate a busy world of quizzes, papers, projects, tests, sports, and other kinds of interests and commitments. There are no easy

## **THE POTOMAC SCHOOL - Continued**

answers to helping students - and their families - navigate these demands. We know that, by creating a climate where each student is known and supported by a caring faculty member, we can do a lot to mitigate the stressors that can interfere with our students' well-being and their academic progress. We also deal with this challenge by asking our faculty to be as focused and purposeful in designing lessons and curriculum to make our students' learning experiences as effective, engaging, and meaningful as possible. We do as much as we can to ensure a positive school climate, which visitors describe to us as exceptionally warm and friendly. A signature expression of our commitment to this kind of ambience is our practice, in the high school, of changing classes at the sound of good music instead of a bell. There are, however, dozens of ways in which we address these challenges, and our solutions are constantly evolving.

## **THE SIENA SCHOOL**

***How does your school define “success” for its students? Does your school have specified core principles for the “successful” student?***

The Siena School serves bright, college-bound students with mild to moderate language-based learning differences, such as dyslexia. The academic program is college prep and intellectually rigorous. However, Siena emphasizes core principles that focus on students' multisensory strengths (they tend to be very creative, very strong visually, very good experiential learners) to help them master curriculum. A successful student is one who can:

- understand his/her learning style
- recognize his/her strengths
- self-advocate
- problem solve and persevere
- demonstrate effective organizational and study skills

***Is the definition of success the same for all students? If so, in which areas?***

For all students, success includes becoming good self-advocates with the ability to articulate an understanding of their strengths and areas of challenge. Siena's goal is that all students can independently use their strategies and tools in college and in life, and will discover and enhance their areas of strength in addition to improving their areas of challenge.

***How does your school help students identify individual strengths and goals? How are students encouraged? How can each student feel successful?***

All Siena students arrive at Siena with psycho-educational testing (WISC, Woodcock Johnson, all required as part of the admissions process) that details their individual strengths and challenges. At Siena, teachers help students explore their strengths and ensure that each day they spend time working on areas of strength. Hence, the arts are a part of every student's daily schedule (art, music, photography and/or drama, both as a separate class and also integrated into their academic classes). Since many Siena students have struggled in more traditional academic settings, Siena's small class sizes (10 in a class) and emphasis on the arts helps each student access the material and feel more confident and successful academically. High school students undertake a 2-week internship program every year in an area of strength (in areas including the arts, architecture, technology, video, the sciences, etc.).

***How does your school help students understand that there are different types of success?***

Siena students—all of whom have mild to moderate language-based learning differences—tend to be creative, out-of-the-box thinkers, and they tend to be entrepreneurial. Siena

## THE SIENA SCHOOL - Continued

gives its students the opportunity on a daily basis to be creative and to engage in hands-on, experiential learning. Field trips are taken monthly. Younger students undertake a "Strengths" project each year based on their area of strength, and the internship program allows high school students to experience a variety of work experiences that reflect different ways to be successful. When high school students return from their annual 2-week internship, they formally present their experience to middle school students, parents and other high school students.

### ***How does your school help students achieve balance?***

- Homework is limited to 1.5 hours for middle school and 2 hours per night for high school (as the research shows that more than 2 hours is less effective)
- The arts are part of each student's daily schedule—including one specific arts class every day (and sometimes 2 per day) as well as art and music integrated into the academic classes.
- Although time is spent on students' areas of challenge, significant time is also spent on areas of strength.
- The ability to participate in sports and the arts (often areas of strength) is not limited by their academic success.

### ***How does your school address the concept of success with students, faculty and parents? What challenges does your school face?***

- Siena believes that success does NOT mean 4-5 hours of homework a night in content-focused academic subjects (rather than skill-oriented) and learning limited to content-acquisition. Siena emphasizes the many measures of success, including finding students' strengths and engaging in hands-on, experiential learning. During their time at Siena, students engage in dozens of field trips, hear numerous guest speakers, explore their strengths in both core subjects (math, science, humanities) and creative subjects (Maker activities, videogame design, the arts). Siena graduates have gone on to art schools and culinary schools in addition to academic experiences.
- Siena is in its 9<sup>th</sup> year, having grown from 15 students to 100 students, and is preparing to build a new wing that will increase enrollment to 170 students and beyond. Challenges include: helping prospective parents understand the great benefit of allowing their child to learn in an environment that meets their learning style; and helping parents understand that "covering content" is not necessarily the same thing as learning.