



PCW Parent Association Presidents' Forum

May 10, 2017
Norwood School

The Parents Council of Washington (PCW) Parent Association Presidents' Forum for incoming and outgoing Parent Association (PA) presidents was held on May 10, 2017, at Norwood School. Kathy Stallings, President of PCW, provided opening remarks. She then introduced the Head of School for Norwood School, Matthew Gould, who welcomed approximately 30 attendees to campus and stressed the critical importance of parent volunteers in strengthening and enhancing the mission of a school.

PCW event chair Wendy Gagnon thanked Norwood administrators and staff for their tremendous assistance then introduced the panel of current PA Presidents: Cathy Butz from Holton-Arms School, Cindy O'Kane from The Langley School, and Suzanne Gray from Flint Hill School. Each panelist provided an overview of their school and information about how its Parents Association is structured, including guiding principles and the scope of PA events (these presentations are available on the PCW website). Each panelist shared the following advice or lessons learned:

Suzanne Gray/Flint Hill School:

- Adhere/follow the mission statement of your Parents Association. It will keep you moving in the right direction.
- Collaborate with the school as one team.
- "Lean In" on the core values of the school.

Cathy Butz/Holton-Arms School:

- Delegate!
- Thank you's are critically important -- whether it's a written note, an email or phone.
- Bigger isn't always better. Small events have value too – there's no need to "up the ante" each year.
- Engaging parents is the goal – don't lose sight of that.

Cindy O'Kane/The Langley School:

- Ask for a parking space!!
- Make it fun.
- Try not to aim for perfection.

Panel presentations were followed by a lively question and answer segment. There was significant participation by the panel and audience members. Topics included:

Nominations – How does your school select new chairs for committees and events?

- Holton-Arms has a formal vote by PA members.
- Norwood PA Executive Committee puts together a slate and the full PA Board votes.

Fathers Club/Events:

- Holton-Arms, as an all-girls school, has specific events for fathers/daughters such as ski trips, Field Day and car clinics. The Fathers Club also sponsors events but all are welcome.
- Sometimes the relationship between the Fathers Club and PA are fluid – there may be a representative of the Fathers Club on the PA Board.

Room Parents:

Some schools have an abundance of parents interested in being Room Parents. In those circumstances, several suggestions were offered:

- Try to channel parents to other volunteer leadership positions.
- Work with the school administration to help identify other areas where these interested parents can be helpful.
- One school suggested a lottery to select room parents.
- Consider giving priority to new room parents vs. someone who has done it before.

Maximum Number of School Events

- Holton-Arms noted it is hard to balance the number of events. You don't want to overload volunteers but you also want to have enough events that if a parent misses one there are other opportunities.
- Langley holds about 4-5 big events annually.

Techniques to Engage/Retain Volunteers

- Flint Hill has a volunteer liaison on school staff. She is “in the trenches” and has a good sense of who can help.
- Holton-Arms recommended encouraging shared responsibility so programs/events don't seem overwhelming.
- Langley suggests being willing to step away from events if they aren't “mission critical.”
- To encourage more volunteers, one school provides childcare at events, paid for by the PA.
- “Done in a Day” list of volunteers who place their name on a list if they are willing to be called to assist with one event. Then a PA Board member who oversees the list can call volunteers to fill a gap when needed.
- Use SignUpGenius.com for events. This allows a PA and/or school to identify volunteers who have previously helped on an event. It can slowly expand the volunteer base.
- Consider where you can pay for certain needs vs. relying on an all-volunteer activity (e.g., pay for a person to staff the snack shack).
- Explore different times for scheduling events -- daytime events can be difficult for many working parents (i.e., have meeting right after school drop off).

Auctions/Fundraising activities

- At Langley and Potomac Schools auctions are a partnership between both the school and PA.
- Stone Ridge PA has nothing to do with the bi-annual auction or with any fundraising activities. Parents are asked to contribute food for various school events but no money is requested.
- Holton-Arms does not make financial asks through the PA.
- Langley PA collaborates with the Development Office. The PA President did some letter writing to parents for funding.
- Holy Trinity Home School Association (HAS) runs fundraising events, with a focus more on participation rates vs. dollar amounts.
- Foxcroft noted auctions are a tremendous amount of work. It is important to have a binder of contacts/information to pass on to other chairs.

In closing, Wendy Gagnon thanked the panelists, Norwood School and the audience for a great event. She noted the PCW theme for 2017-2018 will be "Raising 21st Century Citizens." Wendy also noted the Fall Speaker will be Richard Weissbourd, author of *The Parents We Mean to Be: How Well Intentioned Adults Undermine Children's Moral and Emotional Development*. The event will take place October 19, 2017 at Sidwell Friends School.