

**Middle School Student Leader Breakfast**

February 21, 2018

**EVENT OVERVIEW**

The Parents Council of Washington (PCW) hosted its annual Middle School Student Leader Breakfast on Wednesday, February 21, 2018 at Washington Episcopal School (WES). This event provides a forum for 7th grade student leaders to share ideas and discuss relevant issues with peers.

Twenty-two participating PCW member schools sent 44 students and 23 administrators to attend. Mary Cohen, a former PCW Board member and experienced facilitator, moderated the student program. The administrators and faculty members attended a separate program moderated by Danny Vogelman, WES’s Head of School.

Students were encouraged to speak openly and honestly about issues that middle school students face and to brainstorm ways to solve these problems in their school communities.

The group began by generating a list of issues common to middle school, including:

* *Diversity (students and teachers)*
* *Rumors and gossip*
* *Technology & social media*
* *Gender equality (treatment by teachers and faculty)*
* *Respect for the dress code*
* *Time management*
* *More challenging academic subjects*
* *Too much homework*
* *Conflicts with assignment due dates*
* *Phone usage during the school day*
* *Study habits/homework/time management*
* *Peer pressure & cliques*
* *Stress*
* *Respecting learning differences*

The students selected *Time Management & Stress, Rumors & Gossip*, and *Diversity & Gender Equality* as issues to discuss in depth. The students then broke into five smaller, student-led groups to discuss these topics. They were tasked with identifying why these issues were of concern and coming up with strategies and solutions to help alleviate the problems.

Time Management & Stress

The students reported that the following factors contribute to poor time management:

* *Procrastination*
* *Sports & extracurricular activities*
* *Screen time/social media/gaming*
* *Teachers in different classes assigning multiple projects and tests due on the same day*

Students then proposed a number of solutions, including:

* *Recognize when you have free time and be smart about maximizing it*
* *Find balance between doing your schoolwork and other activities*
* *Ask teachers to create an “online to do list” so kids can see assignments for the week and plan their time accordingly*
* *Ask teachers to coordinate with each other about their assignments and due dates*
* *Get as much work done as possible in study halls and free periods*
* *Ask teachers to assign homework on Monday and make it due on Friday; let kids determine how it gets done*
* *Use apps that help manage time; shut down programs and apps that cause distractions*

The students agreed that there is a relationship between stress and time management, as poor time management skills lead to increased stress. The students also identified that the following contribute to increased levels of stress:

* *Homework*
* *Trying to balance schoolwork with sports and other activities*
* *Social issues & gossip*
* *Social media*
* *Grades*
* *Stress caused by teachers*
* *Group projects*
* *Family issues*
* *Pressure to do well – both internal and external (schools and families)*
* *Missing school*
* *Not enough sleep*
* *Recess and study hall taken out of school schedules*
* *Teachers giving no homework for a few days, and then overloading on other days*
* *The struggle between the need to fit in and the need to stand out*

Students then proposed solutions, including:

* *Improve your time management skills*
* *Get organized! Keep lists!*
* *Social issues: investigate the situation and don’t spend time dwelling on things outside of your control*
* *Figure out who your true friends are*
* *Grades: push yourself, but not too hard*
* *Talk to your teachers and ask for help*
* *Limit the extracurricular activities you participate in; choose wisely*
* *Create study plans and ask school for academic support*
* *Schools should improve scheduling of classes, free periods, assignments*
* *Have teachers coordinate and talk to each other about due dates*
* *Join your school’s study club*
* *Don’t share grades with classmates; focus on doing your best and not comparing yourself to others*
* *Study halls and free time, including time to go outside, are very important during the school day*

Rumors & Gossip

According to students, rumors and gossip are issues of concern at their schools because:

* *Gossip often spreads quickly and is hard to stop once it gets started*
* *Gossip can hurt someone and damage their reputation*
* *Gossip can be used to make another student jealous, or get revenge*
* *Gossip can be made much worse and spread faster on social media; kids say things on social media that they would never say to someone’s face*
* *Gossip often starts because the person who starts it wants attention, or to deflect attention from something that they have done*
* *Sometimes kids start rumors or start gossip and think it’s funny; they don’t realize that someone is getting hurt*
* *The truth gets twisted and stretched to make it more interesting*
* *It’s hard not to join in because students can fear that they might be the next target of gossip or a false rumor*

Students then proposed a number of solutions, including:

* *Ask yourself “how you would feel if it were about you” before spreading the rumor or gossip*
* *Stop it before it starts; walk away from it, don’t engage or join in*
* *Find an adult to talk to and help you*
* *Stand up for the person affected by it*
* *Challenge the person who starts the gossip*
* *Don’t assume rumors are true*
* *Don’t post anything online that “you wouldn’t want your grandmother to see”*

Diversity & Gender Equality

The students identified the following issues around diversity and issues of gender equality at their schools:

* *Kids don’t have enough diversity in their friend groups*
* *Sports are split by gender; girls’ games aren’t as well attended as boys’ games*
* *Teachers favor girls in academics; boys are favored by teachers and coaches in sports*
* *Stereotypes about race and gender exist*
* *Boys don’t run for student council as much as girls do*
* *Schools need more diversity in leadership roles*

The following solutions and strategies were offered for helping to solve diversity and gender stereotypes at school:

* *Learn more about people’s cultural background, don’t make assumptions*
* *Multicultural nights are helpful*
* *Educate yourself about diversity and gender*
* *Have mandatory “Diversity Conferences”*
* *Talk to each other!*