



PCW Orientation Summary

Tuesday, October 5, 2021
Zoom Webinar

Guest Speaker: Amy McNamer

Introduction: Connectedness in Our Independent School Community

Parents Council of Washington (PCW) President Elizabeth Savage welcomed PCW Representatives and Parents Association Presidents from member schools to the first program of the 2021-2022 school year.

Ms. Savage announced this year's theme, "Connectedness." She says "It is our hope that we can truly reconnect this year. If not always in person, then in spirit. Together we can seek a sense of Connectedness."

PCW Representative Training

Katrina Holliday, PCW Board Member and Orientation Program Co-chair, spoke about maximizing the PCW partnership with your school community and, more specifically, how schools can best benefit from being a PCW member. She also reviewed the Orientation materials distributed to Reps in advance of the program, including the Job Description, the Program Schedule, and the Month-to-Month Guide.

PCW is a non-profit organization, comprised of 15 volunteer board members and one part-time administrator. The mission of the organization is to promote excellence in education by fostering communication among parents, students, and independent schools. Over 50 member schools pay annual dues to support 8-10 PCW programs each school year, including two new programs this Fall. Board members serve as liaisons to member schools and welcome questions and suggestions from PCW school representatives throughout the year.

Featured Guest Speaker – Amy McNamer

Amy McNamer, the Executive Director of the Association of Independent Schools of Greater Washington, spoke with PCW Board Member Jenn Lustbader on the topic of “Connectedness in Our Independent School Community.” It was an engaging conversation that covered topics that are top of mind for parents, students and schools.

- What does the 2021-22 school year look like for students in Greater Washington area independent schools?
- What are some best practices you have seen for maintaining (and maybe even strengthening) community during Covid?
- How are schools responding to the movements for racial justice and the divided political climate?
- From your vantage point as Executive Director of AISGW, what do you think are the top challenges and opportunities for independent schools in the next decade?

What this school year looks like

- All 78 schools are in person five days a week.
- There is a variation in COVID testing at schools.
- Seeing a return to sports on campus, mostly outdoor sports to-date given it is the fall season.
- Many schools are not providing a virtual option for students who cannot be in person.
- The big takeaway from COVID is the need for community.

Best Practices for Maintaining Community during COVID

- Parents and students seeking in person connection.
- Schools are evaluating which events are best held in person versus virtual based on whether the purpose is information sharing or community building.
- Finding creative ways to get back together.
- One head of school is holding small gatherings to meet parents face to face.

Best Practices around Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

- DEI in member schools is not new, but there has been a renewed urgency and commitment to making sure schools are pushing forward in this important work in light of recent tragic events.
- Schools are doing curriculum audits, asking consultants to review their current programs and events, increasing roles for DEI directors, and moving DEI into the role of governance by getting their boards involved.
- Schools are listening, absorbing what their communities are telling them, and also providing opportunities for dialogue.

- It's been challenging for schools to move in the DEI space and keep the conversation open for everyone while acknowledging that we as a nation have a long way to go.

Challenges and Opportunities for Independent Schools

- Finding creative ways to keep communities connected.
- Dealing with real issues of trauma and loss due to Covid.
- Heads of School are being relied on to provide a moral direction for the community.

Conclusion

Connectedness is a priority for independent schools. They are stepping up during a difficult period of trauma and loss to reconnect the community.