

## **PCO Meeting - January 12, 2017**

The PCO welcomed two guests to the meeting: James Fogarty from A+ Schools and Gail Brown from Pittsburgh Action Against Rape.

### **James Fogarty, Executive Director of A+ Schools**

Mr. Fogarty explained the organization's mission: A+ Schools is the community advocate and leader for educational equity and excellence in Pittsburgh's Public Schools. The core purpose and focus of their work is to remove any barriers to equity in our schools. They are dedicated to educating the public, increasing awareness and engaging the community in efforts to advance change. Read more on their website at <http://www.aplusschools.org/>

Mr. Fogarty discussed the meaning and importance of equity in education. A+ Schools also works as an advocate for policy change and fair education funding at statewide and local levels. He briefly mentioned the organization's TeenBloc and Parent Nation programs.

Each year, A+ Schools releases a report to the community (copies distributed at meeting). This report provides families with accessible info about Pittsburgh schools (traditional public and charter). It includes data-based facts, comparisons, and trends about each school. Extra copies are available at the Upper School and online at <http://www.aplusschools.org/research-and-reports/report-to-the-community/>

Mr. Fogarty outlined and examined the data about ECS from the report. He discussed the racial achievement gap that exists, along with equity indicators such as teacher/leadership stability, student academic growth, school climate and resources allocated to students. See ECS report on pages 3-4 here: <http://www.aplusschools.org/wp-content/uploads/Charter-Schools-2016.pdf>

A main point of discussion was the need to correct the achievement gap at ECS. How can parents address this issue? We should ask each of our children's teachers what they are doing to hold all students to a high standard of achievement. We should talk to the principals about this topic. We should encourage the school to learn from other schools who are doing well. We can help make connections with experts who can work with our staff to close the gap. If the achievement gap is not addressed, it will jeopardize our next charter renewal (in 2 years).

Parent comment: if asked, all teachers would agree that they are holding their students to high expectation equally, so we need to go back and see where the gap gets created. Is it an inherent bias? Are kids getting started on the right foot from pre-K? Do we need to do more family support?

Mr. Fogarty emphasized that the A+ Schools report does not reflect the best school for everyone. Each child works differently in different environments -- some may succeed better in schools with poor data but different methodologies. There is no right answer for everyone.

See Mr. Fogarty's Powerpoint presentation from the PCO meeting: <http://ecspco.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Aplusreport-ECS2016.pdf>.

The PCO hopes to continue this conversation in the coming months.

## **Gail Brown, Pittsburgh Action Against Rape**

Ms. Brown introduced PAAR as an education and advocacy organization working in the Pittsburgh area to end sexual violence. Read more at <http://paar.net/>

PAAR is back at ECS for another year of education in the Upper School classrooms. They are working with each class in 4th through 8th grades, engaging in age-appropriate discussions. Each grade has between 1 and 4 extended class blocks of time with PAAR, no more than once a week, starting in January (4th - 1 block, 5th - 4 blocks, 6th - 2 blocks, 7th-8th - 4 blocks).

In 4th grade, they start with very basic talk: What is sexual harassment? What are talking/writing/touching examples? They have found that 4th graders are very aware of these issues and are able to provide examples. They discuss how to handle such behavior and how to talk to adults about it.

In 5th through 8th grade, they broaden the scope of the issues each year, starting with personal boundaries, how do we interact with each other, what consent is, and bystander intervention (how to step up and help?). This empowers kids, who usually see more harassment behavior than adults in school situations.

In 8th grade this week, they discussed gender stereotypes: what is media teaching us? We need to respect people for who they are, people don't need to fit into stereotypes. Ms. Brown had awesome conversations this week with all three 8th grade classes - they were excited to engage in these conversations and eager to participate.

6th-7th programs will start next week.

Ms. Brown distributed a parent handout with info on how to talk about bullying and sexual harassment with children. Just as we ask kids to intervene as bystanders, parents can also be bystanders when they hear language or talk by their children and friends, for example in the carpool. See handout here: <http://ecspco.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/PAAR-parenthandout.jpg>

PAAR also offers programs to any group of parents - schools, churches, community groups, any group of 5 or more parents, to discuss child safety and prevention of child sexual abuse. See flyer here: <http://ecspco.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/PAAR-flyer.jpg>

Parent question: has PAAR worked with ECS staff?

PAAR: Yes, they did a staff training session last year and likely will again this spring.

They may expand into the Lower School next year with 3rd grade. They have age-appropriate programs for grades 1 and up.

Parent comment and question: PAAR is a world class organization and is recognized nationally. Just last week, the Exec Dir. was invited to participate in a summit at the White House. Can you talk about other services PAAR provides besides education?

PAAR: PAAR does crisis intervention, providing medical and legal assistance in any hospital in the county at any time. Advocates can also come to a school in case of any incident disclosed to a school staff member, and the people involved will be treated just like victims at hospitals. PAAR also offers counseling services for men, women, boys,

girls, regardless of ability to pay. They have child therapists, and counseling for children is family-focused, providing support and help for child and their family members. They have a confidential helpline for questions as well as crises available 24/7: 1-866-END-RAPE.

Parent question: Is the talk really appropriate for 4th graders? My son isn't ready for this, and I would have appreciated being informed before the presentation.

PAAR: It is absolutely appropriate, 4th graders see more than you realize and need to know how to respond. We start by defining "harassment" as teasing, bothering or annoying. We define "sexual" as being focused on gender (picking on someone specifically because they are a boy or girl). We go over talking examples: talking about private parts, comments that make people uncomfortable like honey, sweetie, etc., and spreading rumors (X has a boyfriend/girlfriend, who kissed who?). Kids repeat language from older kids not knowing what it means. We discuss consent for hugs and kisses. Writing examples are found on bathroom walls and the back of seats on the bus. Touching examples include touching private parts, even in a funny way, like smacking butts, wedgies, etc. Kids are very aware of all of these by 4th grade.

In 6th-8th grade, PAAR includes discussion about why nude photos on social media are not appropriate.

Parent question: what is program called when presented to students? Do you use the full name Pgh Action Against Rape? How should I ask my child about the program?

PAAR: Teachers say this is "Ms. Brown from PAAR" without using the word "rape" which can be concerning to younger students.

PAAR is happy to provide more info about the Upper School programs to parents, including outline of program, etc.