

## Overnight Field Trips Board Presentation June 9, 2010

School Council inquired about the history of the decisions around the European trip and other overnight field trips. Here is that history from the Board's perspective. The Board's involvement with this issue has been fairly limited. The Administration brought their concerns about the annual European trip to us last spring after the trip to Italy. Their concerns fell into three categories:

- Equitable access to this opportunity. 31% of last year's grade 9 class attended. Many girls were extremely upset to be excluded due to the cost.
- No Curricular content of the trip. European history is not part of the grade 9 curriculum. No extra lessons were added to cover any topics related to Italy, as the majority of the class was not attending the trip.
- Burden on teachers in planning and chaperoning this trip. The trip leader managed all the paperwork throughout the year, which was a tremendous amount of work. The trip always took place over a vacation period, and was certainly not restful for the teachers!

These concerns are operational, and the responsibility for operational decisions rests with the Principal and Superintendent. The Board supports their decision to suspend the Europe trip. However, because it was an operational decision, the Board did not need to pass a policy governing a decision on international trips. Policy 801, which governs field trips and school activities, remains in force and is followed for all field trips.

Subsequently, two attempts were made to organize parent-led trips to Europe. First, a parent of a rising grade 9 student began planning a trip for grade 9 CGS students only. Caroline raised concerns with us about duty of care and liability issues in a trip that did not include school staff. We concurred that this was a problem. In the end, we determined that this would breach our duty of care to the students and that the school's liability insurance would not be in force. This was confirmed with our insurance agent.

Later, another parent with considerable experience organizing and leading international field trips through EF Tours approached the Board with an offer to lead a trip through EF Tours and invite CGS girls, as well as other participants. The Board met with him and discussed this offer at length. We told the parent that we could not endorse this trip as a CGS-sponsored event. We suggested that he could advertise an EF trip in the school, but could not hold planning meetings on school premises, involve the school staff or Board members in any way, or represent the trip as being for CGS students only. As far as we know, this protocol was followed. We asked not to be informed, since that would imply Board consent and oversight of the trip, so I don't know if any CGS students enrolled in the trip he planned to offer. We do understand that this kind of trip offer does not meet the expressed wish for a grade 9 "farewell tour".

It is important to note, and Caroline has confirmed, that overnight field trips have not been cancelled. There is neither a Board policy nor Administrative procedures that prevent trips from being run. The only thing that has changed is that teachers are no longer *required* to plan and deliver an overnight field trip for each grade each year, as

was previously the case. However, **for a trip to be offered, the school must be in charge of the activity and any proposed trip must address the three concerns raised above.**

Thank you to all parents and teachers who took time to attend tonight or to write to express their opinions on overnight field trips. Caroline and I received some very thoughtful responses. I think this is the right way to open a dialogue on this issue, with a view toward developing program delivery options that benefit all students but are supportable by staff.

I have noticed, though, that support for overnight trips is not unanimous among parents. Both last year and this year, I have received a few letters from parents praising the decision to suspend the Europe trip. Based on the rest of my mail on this topic, I don't believe that a majority feels that way, but I encourage you to take others' views into account when crafting a new approach. Of course parents can always opt not to send their girls on trips, but it might be useful to understand their concerns in order to find an optimal balance.

Any next steps are, I believe, between Parent Council and the Administration and staff. Operational programming remains the responsibility of the Principal and Superintendent. Collaboration with stakeholders is a key CGS Charter value, so I expect that all stakeholders would be consulted. I encourage parents to consider how they can contribute to a program review process, and what they could offer in terms of trip management. However, we trust the Administrative team to deliver programs that best support the School's Charter, optimize student outcomes, and support staff wellness.

Items in which the Board does have a governance duty concern the School's compliance with the School Act; its duty of care and liability; financial management; and whether a program supports or detracts from the school's charter goals.

We will review any plan crafted to deliver overnight programs to ensure governance issues are met, but we will not lead development of program options. The Board will also conduct a review of policy 801 to determine if additional provisions are needed around affordability, the requirement that school trips be supervised by school staff, or other provisions.

Thank you again for your interest in this topic.

Nancy Morton

CGS Board Co-Chair