

I'm here to speak tonight as we have put a question to the board: **QUESTION:** There are a large group of parents at CGS who would like to see overnight educational field trips reinstated for all grades and in particular the *grade 9 trip*. What will it take to make this happen?

Parents remain unclear on the hows and whys. How did overnight field trips (with the exception of band camp) come to be discontinued for all grades? Rumours abound. Most parents feel out-of-the-loop and have queried school council. We are unable to answer.

A survey was conducted by CGS in 2007 asking parents questions about their support for field trips. "Overwhelmingly, parents and girls were of the opinion that overnight field study trips should continue." That is a direct quote from *Girls Talk*. And yet, three years later, here we are.

Overnight field trips have been a part of the CGS culture from the beginning and were one of the many offerings boasted about at past parent information nights. It was in fact one of the things which set CGS apart from other schools. Overnight trips to destinations such as the Tyrell Museum, Camp Chief Hector, Bamfield, Head Smashed In and the Frank Slide Interpretive Centre were very successful and fun for the girls as well as curriculum-based. Camp Chief Hector had the added benefit of providing staff to run programs for the girls. Teachers attended in a minimal supervisory capacity.

While all grades enjoyed overnight field trips of varying durations, students who began at CGS in Grade 4 spent 5 years anticipating the Grade 9 trip in particular. Some began saving several years in advance to help pay for this trip.

I attended the Tyrell Museum trip with my daughter's class in grade four and thought it was an excellent opportunity for the girls to have fun together and learn in a great team-building atmosphere. I don't believe that day-trips offer quite the same opportunity. Overnight trips foster bonds between students, encourage the development of problem-solving skills, and foster a culture which combats the development of cliques. An example of this was evident during the trip to the Tyrell Museum. One of the students had food restrictions and could not eat everything offered on the dinner buffet. The other students ensured that this student was able to fill her plate with food that met her requirements. It made me proud to see this kind of teamwork, empathy and compassion.

This sort of "caring for others" is part of our school culture and is definitely brought to the fore when girls know that they are the ones who need to care for their peer rather than believing, "She's leaving school at the end of the day; her parents will deal with it." Learning how to cope on an overnight field trip empowers our girls and lessens judgmental tendencies; the better we know someone the more we are able and willing to be compassionate. Overnight trips build a sense of community and are valuable because they allow for team-building amongst the students and with their teachers.

With our school's one-to-one computer initiative we also have a fantastic and unprecedented opportunity for sharing. Webcams and blogging can offer an almost instantaneous connection between girls and opportunity for dialogue about the educational experience.

In regards to the grade 9 trip I would like to constructively mention a letter which was sent home on May 28, 2009, addressed, "Dear CGS Families" and regarding cancellation of the trip for 2010. This letter was given to the grade 8 students only. The majority of the school population was not aware of the cancellation until well into the fall.

The letter stated that "the Grade 9 Europe Trip is not inclusive and accessible to all Grade 9 students due to its expense". This same "all-inclusive" statement could be applied to several other activities being offered at CGS including the Women's Eve Gala, the band program, our various sports teams, the Senate, and "Human Sexuality." These are offered to all students however, students either opt not to participate or are not chosen to participate (teams for example). We continue, as we should, to offer these programs and activities.

Parents make decisions about their child's participation in field trips and other activities based on a variety of reasons including culture, finances, religion, scheduling conflicts, ability (in the case of sports and the band program) and personal reasons. CGS offers activities to all students. It is then the personal and private decision of each student and their family whether or not they participate.

Administration was concerned that there was (and I quote) "significant involvement from CGS staff" regarding the organization of the trip. Liability was brought into the fray if the trip was "parent-run." School council actually proposed the trip be parent-organized, not parent-run.

Other schools, public, private and public charter, offer overnight field trips as part of their curriculum. Some avoid the issues of organization and liability by successfully using educational tour companies. We can work together to find a solution to these problems.

Please do not discount the ability or the willingness of students to actively fundraise in support of a trip. As mentioned, some students had already saved a significant amount of money towards paying for their much anticipated grade 9 trip.

Student fundraising for trips teaches our girls leadership skills, gives them an opportunity to plan finances and to save money on their own. Fundraising also contributes to team-building and a sense of pride and ownership. These are attributes that both parents and CGS aim to develop in our children.

We want to educate our children in an engaging and fun way and I believe overnight field trips and a grade 9 trip greatly facilitate that. Parents are not necessarily asking for the reinstatement of the grade 9 trip, organized and managed as it was in the past. Trips do not need to occur during spring break (or any other teacher or family holiday) in order to garner volunteers. The educational component means that the students are not "missing" school. Trips within Canada are a viable option. Our nation's capital offers a wonderful array of museums and educational opportunities, just to name one city.

The fundamental principles of CGS to provide excellent education in an all girls environment Trips are a great opportunity for girls to "try on" their "Go Girls" ideas and ideals beyond the walls of the school.

We are troubled by the shift in practice away from overnight trips. We are concerned about the loss of these valuable learning experiences. Having said that, we are optimistic that having voiced our sentiments we can look forward to the return of overnight trips.

I have always thought of CGS as being a very capable “we can” school. I have never before thought that CGS has hurdles that CSS and the CBE schools don't.