

TEACHER STATEMENT – JUNE 9, 2010 – CGS BOARD MEETING

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the subject of International and Overnight field studies at CGS. This statement was written by committee and teachers have had the opportunity to contribute to its contents.

OVERNIGHTS

We greatly appreciate the work our administration and the board have done in making CGS an employer of choice, particularly with regards to trusting in the professional judgment of teachers around the planning of overnight field studies.

This year, many teams decided to offer more day field trips in place of the overnight because they offer a variety of rich learning experiences, without the distractions and extraneous planning requirements of an overnight field study. Overnight trips include extra fees for families to cover meals and accommodations, as well as a significant cost in time and energy to teachers who must now focus not only on the meaningful work of making curricular connections, but also on planning for the supervision and entertainment of girls in the evenings.

We value the engaging academic culture of our school and the amazing work that we are able to do here with students, because we work with talented, dedicated, passionate professionals. We do not want this to become a place where excellent teachers won't choose to come because they know they would be forced to devote their time to event planning, rather than quality inquiry work with students.

That being said, overnight field studies are still an option for teachers, should the educational value of an overnight enhance the program being offered by any particular grade team.

INTERNATIONAL TRIP

On the subject of a Grade 9 International trip, it is the perspective of teachers that the International Trip contradicts the inclusive philosophy of the school and its Charter. We consider the notion of equity to be central to our work with girls, and we believe creating an inclusive environment that honors individuals equally, is the cornerstone of the school's existence. The cost of the trip is significant and thus prohibitive for many within our population.

In looking back at the numbers, in 2006, 12 of 39 grade 9 students participated, a percentage of 30. In 2007, 34 of 95 students participated, a percentage of 35. The following year we had 55 of 82 students participate (61%) and in 2009, 27 of 82 students went on the trip, a percentage of 32. What the statistics reveal is that over

the years, an average of 60 percent of our population voiced their opinion against the international trip by not participating. Apart from the one year, participation has been between 30 and 35 percent, and although there are many reasons why families have chosen not to participate, feedback we have received would suggest that cost is a major issue.

We would not argue the merits of the opportunities for those who have been able to attend, but would also like to present the perspective of girls who do not get the opportunity to go, and the impact that has on their experience in the school. Because of the high profile nature of the trip, as well as the excitement it generates, girls who do not attend are continually put in the position where they have to re-experience the feeling of not being included, over and over again.

For girls who are able to go, there is understandably a great deal of excitement. Conversations in preparation for the trip, school communications, meetings, stories when the group returns, lunchtime and graduation ceremony slide shows, have been common practice, and you can't blame them for their excitement. What this creates for those who do not go is the reality of prolonged exclusion. In light of these issues, we would ask, how does an International trip enhance community at our school, if the experience is only provided for a minority of students?

It bears mentioning as well, that teachers who have participated in the past, have found the trip to be both physically and mentally taxing, as have parent chaperones who have attended. Teachers who go on the trip are away from their families, and in taking on the supervisory role, experience a great deal of stress around 'duty of care' responsibilities. It is not that teachers object to hard work in the service of students, but rather that we worry about being diverted away from work that is very meaningful, towards work that is only meaningful for part of the population. Diverting resources away from the learning of all of our students towards a trip for only 1/3 of our students reflects an inequity that does not match with our school's philosophy.

It is for these reasons that we have supported the decision that was made to discontinue the International trip.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer our perspective here this evening.