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GIRLS TOGETHER: POWER THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

June 2013

Girls Together: Power through Partnership has been a two-year initiative to support, model and share effective partnerships between public and private girls' schools. Led by the National Coalition of Girls' Schools and Wingspan Partnerships, the initiative was made possible by a sponsorship grant from a generous donor.

We are excited about the progress made towards our goals and are committed to continuing to:

- Strengthen and develop public-private partnerships for girls
- Recognize the benefits of partnerships for girls
- Advocate nationally for partnerships for girls

We are particularly pleased that the National Network of Schools in Partnership (NNSP) will now partner with NCGS to advance this work going forward.

The group focused on the particular meaning and value of partnerships for girls. The *Girls Together* partnerships exist between girls' schools (see list below); they clearly also show potential benefits for girls within co-ed schools.

Key observations:

1. Expand opportunities and overcome risk factors across the social divide

- Girls in many cultures and economic circumstances are consigned to roles that subvert their education; partnership relationships allow access to a wider wealth of opportunities.
- Girls are at risk because of limitations that include reduced opportunity, gender stereotypes, poverty, and - in new ways - social media. Their vulnerability is lessened through relationships developed in partnerships.

2. Reinforce resilience

- Girls together can reinforce each other in developing a “growth mindset,” rather than taking themselves out of the game.
- Partnerships require communication, tenacity, patience and collaboration. Schools that engage in partnerships model co-operative learning and active, just, connected and mutual relationships. (“How a girl learns and develops resilience should drive how the institution operates”).

3. Develop social capacity and self-advocacy

- It is vital to bring girls across the economic spectrum together early in life so that they discover their common situation and work together to realize their potential and achieve equity. In intentional partnerships “peer pressure,” so often a negative force, is flipped to a positive; girls come together to discover who they want to become, not who others want them to be (promoted by intense messages about female roles).
- Relationship is a powerful factor in girls’ learning. When girls in independent and underserved schools come to know each other, assumptions about race, class and privilege begin to shift. All participants discover that they have more in common than they have differences
- Social capacity is developed through two-way visits and ongoing engagement. “Once or twice is not enough.” More exemplars of girls outside one’s own environment provide an affirming influence.
- With girls and women’s voices still not heard in proportion to their numbers, girls must learn self-advocacy. A larger world of girls cooperating strengthens the capacity for self-advocacy in work, in relationships and in beliefs.

4. Foster college aspirations and impact college and career choice

- College aspirations are fostered by exposure to college-bound girls; intentional curriculum focusing on college opportunities enhances these aspirations.
- Girls who assume that college is in their future expand the vocabulary and awareness of younger students, creating an “informal surround” of girls who are at the point where younger girls hope to be some day.
- Engaging colleges with the school partnership furthers these aspirations
- Girls who have experienced partnership are choosing colleges where they can continue to advocate for educational equity and consider education as a career option

5. Assessment

A holistic model of assessment – focused on academic, social and physical wellness, which contrasts to a purely academic skills-based assessment, is a distinguishing characteristic of the *Girls Together* partnership approach.

Summary

Well-designed partnerships between public and private schools for girls, linking institutions across the socio-economic divide, are a powerful means of strengthening education for all involved. They expand the web of relationships for students and adults. The key benefits of this are the expansion of opportunities and the development of social capacity in girls, a complement and pre-requisite to academic growth.

The *Girls Together* Partnership schools:

Partnership programs are - and should be - varied, informed by core values and regional needs and opportunities. Three very different partnership models formed the *Girls Together* group:

- North Star Collaborative, a program in the Cleveland area linking Laurel School and Warner Girls Leadership Academy;
- Garrison Forest School with a) City Springs School and Collington Square School, as members of the Middle Grades Partnership of Greater Baltimore; and b) Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women; and
- Excel Academy Public Charter School and Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart, Washington D.C.

The National Coalition of Girls' Schools is a leading advocate for girls' education... [acting] at the forefront of educational thought, collaborating and connecting globally with individuals, schools, and organizations dedicated to empowering girls to be influential contributors to the world.

Wingspan Partnerships narrows the education gap by developing and supporting partnerships between public and private schools.

The National Network of Schools in Partnership provides thought leadership, advocacy and implementation support for public-private partnerships.