

4/5/10

Dear Parent/guardian,

The following philosophy/explanation is to help clarify the why and how of roommate selection for this year's trip to Washington D.C.

In the past there were apparently two ways of assigning roommates for the D.C. trip: First, names were put in a hat and four student names per room were randomly picked. Barring any significant prior issues between students, students were expected to get along for the two nights they had to room together. While this may be the "fairest" method, it gives students no input into the process and may keep many from having a friend in their room. Second, students created their own groups of four friends which required that they pick their three "best" friends which sets up its own social dynamic.

This year we asked the kids to choose four students they would like to have as roommates with the understanding that every effort would be made to give each student at least one roommate of their choosing and to determine appropriate groups. This selection process is unfortunately a type of social sorting exercise which has the potential to cause people to be unkind. Philosophically, it was important to us, and in keeping with the WMS guiding belief, "Compassion and kindness must be the fabric of the learning community", that every student get at least one friend as a roommate and if not, that the student have roommates who would be kind. Some students are fortunate in that they are popular and have a network of friends that allow for flexible groupings. There are also students who struggle socially for a variety of reasons, who do not have a lot of friends or who are not popular enough to be chosen by any other student as a roommate. These students still need to be placed with kids with whom they can get along, who will be kind to them, and who do not single them out as "not fitting in" or as "outcasts".

As we began the grouping, it was assumed that the first possible roommate a student listed on their "wish list" was in fact their first choice, and preference was given to pairing with that student when possible. We then moved to matching up pairs of students if possible and worked in individual students as needed. At times foursomes had to be broken up into twosomes and students moved around so that everyone got at least one person/friend they wanted as a roommate. The process is not formulaic and was not always an easy one even though a considerable amount of time was given to making reasonable decisions for all. While not every student was able to be placed with their top three choices for roommates, there have been very few issues with the groupings that were made. As the students can sit where they want on their busses, mix and mingle with individuals and groups during activities, and visit each other in the hotel until curfew, it is hoped that the few hours on the two nights they are confined to their rooms with their roommates will not be too restrictive or difficult. In fact, it is hoped that students will get the opportunity to develop or strengthen friendships that they can take forward for the remainder of the year and beyond.

Sincerely,
Eric Bergeron