

AISGW STATEMENT ON “RANKING”

AISGW has long recommended and continues to recommend against member schools participating in ranking exercises because such exercises can be misleading for individual students and families. With this question, as with all questions related to elementary and secondary education, we must keep our focus on childrens’ best interests. The “best” school - public, parochial, or independent - is the one that uniquely meets the needs of each particular child.

In the independent school sector, each institution, in its mission statement, defines its own objectives: the kind of program and campus culture the school provides and, often, the qualities that will help a student to succeed there. These schools were not created from one mold. They have different missions and offer different grade ranges, curricular emphases, pedagogical approaches, and extracurricular programs. Some schools are highly competitive by design, others intentionally create a nurturing atmosphere in which certain students will thrive; some focus on the arts, some on mathematics and science, others on outdoor education. Different schools offer programs for different types of students.

Independent schools are to be judged, through their rigorous accreditation processes, according to what they individually set out to accomplish. Ranking such wonderfully different schools against one another misrepresents the institutions, misleads consumer-minded parents about the factors that should be considered in the complex process of choosing a school, and most importantly, can hurt children. Ranking elementary and secondary schools is a *de facto* labeling of vulnerable children and adolescents and is inherently wrong.

For these reasons, AISGW recommends the following:

1. AISGW encourages prudent involvement with the media by its member schools. Especially in the Greater Washington area, there is both opportunity and need for articulate public comment regarding the role, contributions, strengths, and core values of independent schools. Whether talking about their particular school or commenting more broadly on educational issues and community concerns, representatives of the independent school community can contribute greatly to the goal of furthering thoughtful and straightforward public discourse.
2. AISGW recommends that each head of school ensure that the school’s beliefs and practices in regard to public inquiry be thoughtfully considered and periodically reviewed with that school’s Board and faculty, staff, and administration.
3. So that no school employee unwittingly responds inappropriately to media questions, the entire school community should be aware of how media requests are to be handled. AISGW recommends that one person be authorized to speak on behalf of the school and be adequately trained and prepared to do so.
4. AISGW recommends that school personnel speak respectfully about peer schools, being mindful of the shared strengths and educational importance of each school. Grace and respect are qualities we teach our students and we should model as leaders and as institutions.