



## Virginia Association of Independent Schools

### *A Workshop with Dr. Michael Thompson*

Hampton Roads Academy,  
Newport News, VA  
February 19, 2010

#### *Tentative Schedule*

8:30 Registration Table Opens

9:30 Welcome/Introductions  
Morning Session

#### **"Best Friends/Worst Enemies: Friendship Development, Popularity and Social Cruelty in Childhood"**

Children don't want adults to be involved in their social lives. They hate it when teachers "interfere." Yet teachers are witnesses to the exclusion of low-status children in elementary schools and the popularity wars of middle school and they must act to protect the weak. Parents also see the friendship difficulties of their own children. Some take their children's social ambitions to heart and worry that their children are not popular. Other parents hope the school can protect their children from all social pain.

Social cruelty among kids is one of the most difficult things that adults have to confront in raising or educating children. Experienced teachers can be confused about how to protect a child in class, for fear of putting a rejected or controversial child in "the limelight." They can also feel defensive when parents of neglected or victimized children come to the school for help.

This presentation walks teachers and parents through the complex social world of childhood and addresses a number of questions: What do social relationships in school predict about happiness in adult life? What is the normal sequence of child friendships, from the parallel play of the two-year-old to the intimate self-disclosure of the adolescent? Why do cliques form and what are the differences between boy and girl groups? Why are children scapegoated and how can their parents and school protect them? Dr. Thompson will draw on research to highlight the differences between friendship and popularity. He makes suggestions about the management of social problems in schools and makes the case that while all children yearn for popularity, it is friendship that helps children survive and thrive.

12:00 Lunch / Book Purchases

12:45 Afternoon Session

## **"Coming to Grips with Underachievement in Boys"**

What's the matter with my son?" Why is he an underachiever in school?" Why are boys so violent?" "Why won't boys talk to adults?" Educators and parents in the United States are engaged in an important debate about the way we raise and educate boys. After twenty years of illuminating research on girls and debate about gender equity in schools, it is time to consider some of the risk factors that afflict the lives of boys. They are four times more likely than girls to be sent to a school psychologist; they are diagnosed with 60-80% of learning disorders. Their areas of strength, physical activity and visual-spatial perception, are not as important as verbal skills in the feminine, quiet, word-dominated environment of schools. Boys do not do as well in school as girls, from elementary school through college and they are at risk for concluding that schools don't work for them and becoming withdrawn and bitter.

In early adolescence most boys begin to attach their sense of status to mastery and achievement. They are subjected to a powerful "culture of cruelty" which may require boys to adhere to a narrow ideology of masculinity: avoidance of feeling, avoidance of anything feminine, fear of personal weakness. The result may be a boy who is or appears closed and often angry. In this talk, Dr. Thompson gives suggestions to teachers, fathers and mothers about how to support a boy in the early years of school and how to help a boy remain emotionally open in adolescence.

2:30 Questions and Answers

3:00 Conclude