



THE STEWARD SCHOOL

# Managing School-wide Ethical Conflict in the Age of Identity Politics

Presenters: Dan Frank, Head of School / Paul Yoon, Board Member

# Overview

1. Context: The Steward School & CharacterWorks
2. Traveling the case
3. Specifics at Steward
4. Questions and discussion
5. Best practices and Reflections

# The Steward School

## Mission Statement:

Our mission is to prepare our students for college and for life in a community defined by robust academics, inspiration, engagement, and care.

## Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity Statement:

The Steward School is committed to diversity and the development of an educational environment that fosters mutual respect, responsibility, and empathy in our school and in life. We value the presence of individuals whose differences include, but are not limited to, age, ethnicity, gender, learning style, talents, physical ability, political views, race, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and family structure.

We expect that all members of the Steward community – students, faculty and staff, administration, parents, and trustees – keep their minds and hearts open to difference as a source of strength and a means of growth for the entire community. We recognize that fulfilling this mission is an ongoing process that requires open dialogue and constant attention.

# CharacterWorks & The Steward School

CharacterWorks (CW) is a non-profit afterschool, youth theater program offering classes, camps, and productions for students ages 4-19 years old. They started in 2001 as an affiliate of Christian Youth Theater and became independent in July 2013.

Until 2019, CW contracted with The Steward School to put on three productions a year.

# CharacterWorks' Statement of Faith

By the summer of 2018, CW's Statement of Faith was changed to include this assertion:

“God wonderfully created each person male or female, and instituted marriage between one man and one woman as the foundation of the family. For this reason, we believe that marriage is exclusively the union of one man and one woman in a covenantal relationship with God.  
*Genesis 1:26-27, Genesis 2:24, Mark 10:6-9, Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11”*

# Traveling the case

- What are the problems in this scenario?
- What resources would you need/do you have to tackle this situation at your school?
- Discuss similar situations that have arisen or might arise at your school.
- Consider scenarios where values clash:
  - Religion & LGBT rights
  - Culture & Sex Education
  - Transgender & Sports participation
  - Other?

# Specifics at Steward

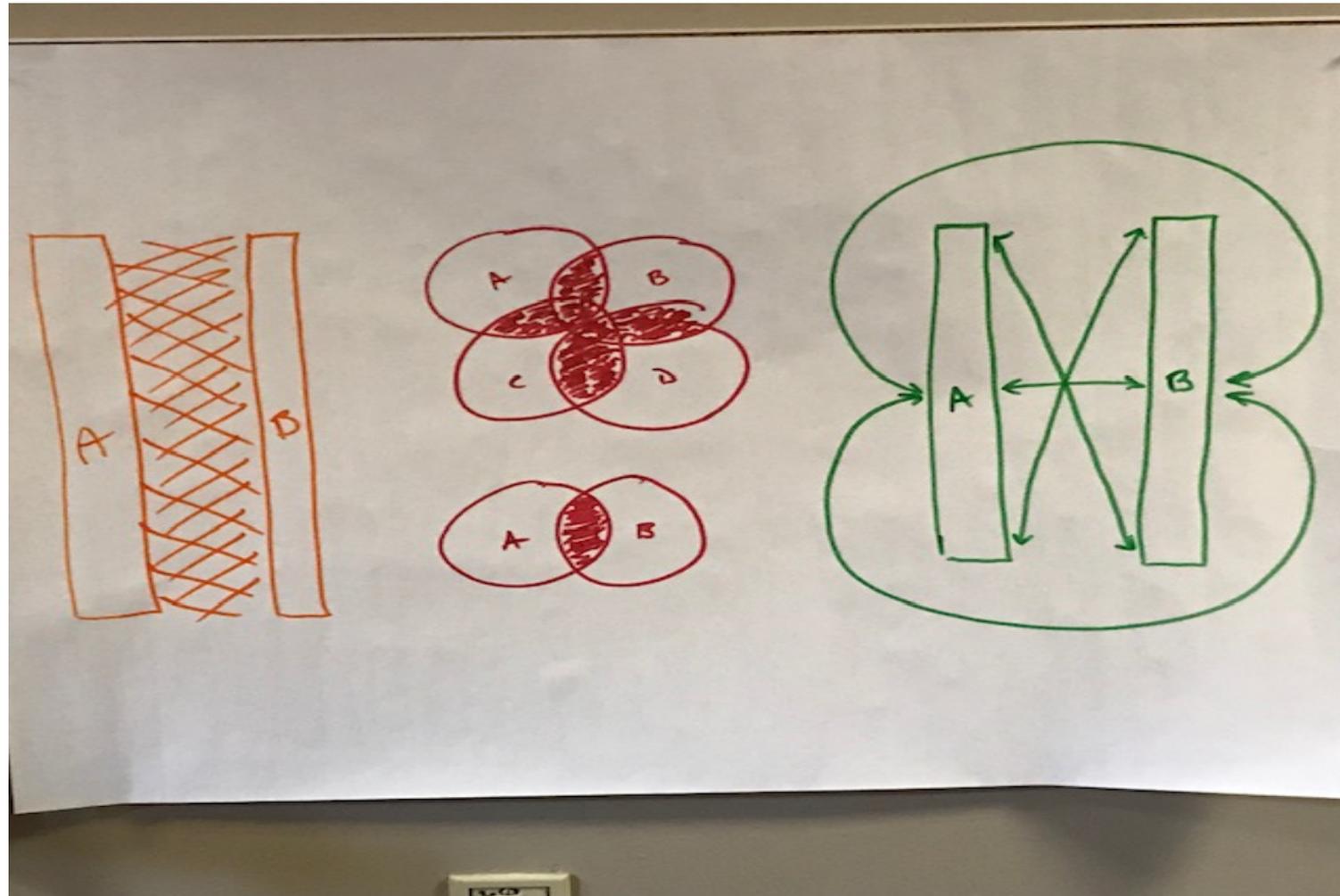
- 10/2018 Learned of print story on CW's Statement of Faith
- 10/23/2018 Board of Trustees meeting/ Board informed of situation
- 10/30/2018 Letter sent to Steward community concerning CW & est. of ad hoc
- 10/31/2018 1<sup>st</sup> ad hoc committee meeting
- 11/2/2018 HoS meets with faculty and staff/ Continued discussions with PR firm, attorney, and back-channel communications with CW
- 11/7/2018 2<sup>nd</sup> ad hoc meeting
- 11/19/2018 3<sup>rd</sup> ad hoc meeting
- 12/3/2018 4<sup>th</sup> ad hoc meeting/ Approval of "Facilities Use Guidelines"
- 12/4/2018 Board of Trustees meeting/ Guidelines presented and approved
- 1/15/2019 Letter to the Steward community

# Ad hoc committee structure: Flare to Focus

Composition: Board/Foundation members, administrators, facilitated by a former VA Secretary of Ed

1. Confidentiality reminder, group norms, ethical considerations. Assigned research for statements and positions from associations, schools, and corporate CSR.
2. Define inclusivity, partners, vendors, providers, affiliation, endorsement, commercial and program-driven.
3. Discuss comparable statements from schools, associations, athletic conferences, and corporate social responsibility statements.
4. Draft Facilities Usage Guidelines. Vote to recommend to Board.

# Binary (?) Diagram



# Accusation audit if we *sever ties* with CW

## Accusations

- We have chosen against freedom of religion and free speech.
- We are making a knee-jerk decision against a backdrop of extreme socio-political partisanship.
- We are more exclusive even than the state or federal government.
- We have not honored our contractual obligations.
- We have caved to the pandering of the loudest voice.

## Worst case scenario outcomes

- The athletic department collapses.
- We lose up to 12 families.
- HoS, Board encounter extremely partisan “discussions.”
- Members of the greater Richmond religious community troll, protest, and picket.
- The press tells stories unfavorable to us.
- We set an unsustainable precedent.
- We lose key donors from the capital campaign.

# Accusation audit if we *continue* with CW

## Accusations

- Espoused and expressed values are out of sync; lack the courage of our convictions.
- We are out of date with the values of our time now and for the foreseeable future.
- We fail to follow the course set in our strategic plan.

## Worst case scenario outcomes

- We lose families.
- HoS, Board encounter extremely partisan “discussions.”
- We cede ground in our position of leadership in innovation, creativity, & future-mindedness.
- We fail in the first test of our strategic plan initiative.
- We lose key donors from the capital campaign.

# Facilities Usage Guidelines

- “The Steward School welcomes debate on all topics (controversial, political, or otherwise), but reserves the right to regulate all on-campus activities and facility/grounds usage **based on age appropriateness, educational value, the civility and openness of dialogue, and alignment with The Steward School mission.**”
- “The school’s role is not necessarily to be the source of the students’ worldview, instead we acknowledge that may be best left to the home, understanding that parents and guardians have a critical role to play and supporting that role. The school does not act as a platform for adults’ and even the greater community’s agenda, whatever that may be.”
- The guidelines are multi-faceted, and they include the need for outside parties to have their own non-discrimination clauses, that their program or service not impinge on Steward’s ability to deliver on our mission or program, and that they should include on their websites and printed materials disclaimers that separate their work, product, beliefs, and ideas from The Steward School, such that no endorsement of either party by the other may be claimed or inferred. Of course, the guidelines also address such things as cost, annual contract review, and possible conflicts of interest.

# The decision

- What we will continue to do
- The impact of CharacterWorks on our ability to deliver on the School's mission
- The change in our relationship with CharacterWorks

# Questions/Discussion

# Best practices/reflections

- From a Board member and co-chair of the Diversity and Inclusion Council
- From the Head of School

# Bibliography

Brooks, A.C., Damron, W., et al. *Love your enemies* (2019)

Haidt, Jonathan & Lukianoff, G. *The Coddling of the American Mind* (2018)

Voss, C., Kramer, M., et al. *Never Split the Difference* (2016)

Zolli, A., Healy, A.M., et al. *Resilience: Why things bounce back* (2012)

