

## ISACS Heads Council: PechaKucha Lunch Conversation

1. I like the phrase “more perfect”. Not just because I am a history teacher, but because I believe in the hope that this phrase represents. To me, it captures two thoughts – it acknowledges the achievements we’ve made, but it also reminds us that we have the potential to be better, no matter how good we are.  
My presentation is inspired from my own experience: Starting in catholic school to public school to private university to teaching in an amazing independent school and now doing homework nightly with my 2<sup>nd</sup> grader who attend an intergenerational charter school. My presentation will also ask lots of questions in the hope of inspiring answers. So, for 19 slides, let’s dream, together, about a more perfect school.
2. And by school, I mean what if not just one school – but all schools – could be like this. I admit I am a bit bias – this is a picture of where I work. But fundamentally I am talking about the aesthetics of this – and the philosophy and mission that drives this. The devotion from all constituents. And the power that privilege, access to resources and a rich lineage provide. What if we could provide this kind of experience for every child?

I’d like to thank Claudia Daggett for inviting me, Karen Zeitlin, and my head of school, Dr. Fran Bisselle

3. What if we were all more kid-centric?

What if we could get everyone else outside of this room to put kids' education as THE top priority? My parents were essential and critical to my life – but so were all the other people I came into contact with on the day-to-day basis. The mailman became my best friend when I was waiting for my college acceptance letters! I posit that you don't have to immediately *like* kids to care for their well being and safety, you just have to recognize their importance to the health of our community. Allow the idea to grow on you. We all have a responsibility to the next generation and there's nothing better than a village's full focus and support.

4. A more perfect school is beautiful. It is a place that shelters and inspires you in its beauty, as you daily create your own. My ideal school has enough space - be that dedicated or multipurpose. While this point may seem inconsequential, learning in a place that's ugly quietly whispers to you that you are not enough to deserve beauty. We have to be aware of the implicit messages and explicitly work to make them say what we want them to say.

5. What if we didn't have to choose? While it is wonderful to have choice, choice is a privilege. And education, ideally, should be a right, not a privilege. So how can we get to a place where all kids can have access to great education? Bryan Stevenson, author of *Just Mercy*, gave an amazing talk this year at the NAIS People of Color Conference, and he talked about being proximate to those whose need is the greatest. So I pass that question to you – how do we become more proximate? Maybe it's through partnerships with the schools in our community. Maybe exchange students don't have to come from over seas, but right down the street.
  
6. In my more perfect school, teachers are happy. They geek out in their classrooms and laugh with their students. They have what they need all the time. And they HAVE time. More perfect teachers are allowed to be thoughtful and critical of their curriculums because they are smart, so schools trust that THEY, and not federal mandates, will make the right decisions. We see that this works in our own independent schools. How do we convince others that this is the right model?

I'd like to thank Claudia Daggett for inviting me, Karen Zeitlin, and my head of school, Dr. Fran Bisselle

7. In my more perfect world, teachers are able to make a wage that echoes the true value of being an educator. And I know that so much of our operating expenses already go towards teacher pay. But I posit to you that wage is not always monetary – what else do your teachers need to feel valued?
  
8. A more perfect school would align developmentally with kids' needs. We wouldn't have kids waking up at 5 and 6am because we know that's too early; they need more sleep. As a side note, this idea aligns serendipitously with my happy teacher idea mentioned previously. Just saying. But back to the kids – we would start school later, make recess a mandate, and offer naps beyond primary school. And, while I begrudgingly admit this, we would attend school year round, erasing those long brain-draining breaks for shorter ones. No more summer breaks, because we aren't an agrarian society any more.
  
9. But maybe we kind of should be because my more perfect school has recognizable, organic, local, and sustainable food practices. But the school's garden would also be a neighborhood garden, again, bringing us proximate to those around us. We would, in such a school, consider the nourishment of the bodies as equal to the task of feeding the mind.

I'd like to thank Claudia Daggett for inviting me, Karen Zeitlin, and my head of school, Dr. Fran Bisselle

10. In my more perfect school, we would never think about money as the thing that determines or drives decisions. Again, we would never think about money as the thing that determines or drives decisions. We would simply find a way to fund what needed to be funded. This might mean courageous conversation about what programming is a necessity in our institution versus what is just tradition or innovation. And, perhaps exploring ways to partner with each other as allies, not rivals in the same population pool, to attain goals.
  
11. A more perfect school is diverse. Ideally, each kid would see themselves in the teachers and administration, as I did in my public school upbringing. Most – not 1 or 2 – of my teachers looked like me. And I’ve only come to recognize the incredible value of that as an adult. Beyond racial diversity, the faculty would be various ages, abilities, and genders, but more importantly all open-minded, ego-less, and thoughtful. All are willing to learn more. And everyone has done and continues to engage in EXTENSIVE professional development around identity...

12. So that cultural months are celebrations and not interruptions in our curriculums or one and done activities. Each student would see themselves in what they are learning, in a myriad of ways – as perpetrator and victim, as up stander and bystander, all year long. Narratives are challenged and critically considered. Complexity is expected and valued.

Stepping outside of comfort zones would be understood as a step into the zone of proximal development. Every teacher would know that we have a responsibility to talk about every identity at all grade levels, and would be knowledgeable enough to know how to do so in an age-appropriate way

13. A more perfect school has professional development that connects people to practice. How cool would it be to have time during the day to network – easily – with teachers outside of the building? To provide space for independent, public, parochial and charter school educators to partner collaboratively to workshop best practices and ideas on a consistent basis for all of our kids? Perhaps such partnerships could even guide political policy...

14. My school doesn't have a particular focus, theme or strand because my more perfect school has found a way to offer a liberal arts education without sacrifice. That's a really hard goal to obtain. But this school gets it, and is a place where students graduate with an understanding of how EACH subject plays a role in our world.

I'd like to thank Claudia Daggett for inviting me, Karen Zeitlin, and my head of school, Dr. Fran Bisselle

15. And speaking of graduation, think back to when you were 18. Despite how I may look, that is some time ago for me. What did you need at that age? In my more perfect school, senior year looks more experiential – and might be more than just one year. Students would do something that gives them the opportunity to apply all that they’ve learned, reflect on those experiences, and graduate knowing how to parlay that into happiness, fulfillment and ultimately success.
16. I haven’t talked much about parent’s role in all of this; that could fill a presentation by itself. But, essentially, I think that in choosing to be a parent, you are choosing to prioritize someone else’s life over your own. You are also choosing to realize that this child’s life is not a second chance for you to realize your own dreams, but instead an opportunity to participate in the shaping of someone’s unique experience. So you do what it takes to raise them well. My best students have parents who are fully committed to being parents. These parents are not their child’s friend, not breadwinners, and definitely not helicopters, but parents.

17. They are parents who don't always get it right, but it's the not getting it right that makes them more perfect. They don't coddle. They love unconditionally and appropriately. We've all heard that there is no guidebook to parenting, but there are courses in child development and education. What if my more perfect school offered professional development - to parents - on an ongoing basis?
18. Perhaps these classes would be taught by admin, because every administrator in my more perfect school would have had long careers first in the classroom. They are leaders because they are intimately aware of the daily struggles and triumphs of teaching and are inspired by the work around them to shape policy. They approach any decision about their school with unrestrained respect for their constituents, because at some point in time, they were those that they serve.

19. That's my more perfect school. You might have all kinds of adjectives for my ideas but at least I'm having them. And that's the first step. And I've shared them with someone – you. And that's the next step. And know that this was a daunting task to share such ideas with such powerful people, but I did because I care deeply about what happens to our kids and what role we all play in supporting them, just as you do, too.

And now it's your turn. To facilitate the process of reflection and innovation, I ask you to lean into the following questions with those who are at your table. Consider this a kind of "exit ticket."

**Share one word or emotion that could summarize your reaction to the presentation.**

**Share one idea from or inspired by the presentation.**

**What is one phrase from your school's mission or motto that inspires you?**