



PoCC at the Crossroads

A Summary of Insights, Themes and
Recommendations Addressing the PoCC Dilemma

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Introduction

- The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), in partnership with its members, has successfully produced the People of Color Conference (PoCC) since 1986. The conference has steadily evolved and grown both in content and in the number of participants – from 100 participants at the first conference (Reston, VA) to over 3,000 participants attending the 2005 PoCC (Dallas/Fort Worth). Today PoCC continues to serve as the flagship of NAIS's equity and justice initiatives as well as a vital focal point where issues of equity and justice in independent schools are addressed.
- While the PoCC journey has enriched the personal and professional lives of many people who have experienced it over the past 19 years, a dilemma has emerged that calls forth the following questions:

What is the future of PoCC given the significant demographic shift among participants?

Has PoCC lost its original mission to serve as a sanctuary and professional development opportunity for people of color in independent schools?

How do we sustain the original PoCC mission and at the same time address the growing needs and interests of white participants and of independent schools to build and sustain inclusive school communities?

How should NAIS address and resolve the dilemma?

- In November 2001, the NAIS Board of Trustees affirmed that:

PoCC is by and for people of color and inclusive of all; its programming should include affinity group and cross-cultural offerings; its focus should be on strategies for success and leadership in the area of equity and justice.

- In November 2004, the NAIS Board of Trustees reaffirmed the mission and purpose of PoCC by stating:

Consistent with its ongoing commitment to the principles of equity and justice, NAIS sponsors PoCC for people of color to expand their sense

of belonging in independent schools, and for all people committed to diversity work to learn how to advance, build, and sustain inclusive independent communities.

The Dilemma

- Formal and informal feedback from the 2005 PoCC (Dallas/Fort Worth) pointed to a substantial concern that the conference is not meeting the needs of people of color and that the conference has lost its original mission, becoming more of a diversity conference and less of a conference “by and for people of color.” Others are of the opinion, contrariwise, that PoCC should move in the direction of a diversity conference, hence the “PoCC dilemma.”
- Following is a representative sample of comments from the most recent PoCC post-conference survey:

“There is a direct feeling that the comment, ‘by and for people of color’ [NAIS Board Resolution] is no longer true. As far as ‘for people of color expanding our sense of belonging’ this could not be true if the space that was once set aside is now being pushed aside for greater numbers which do not reflect us.”

“Since the conference is for all people, the name of the conference should reflect that it is a diversity conference to promote inclusiveness and not a people of color conference which seems limiting.”

“The attendance is becoming more than half white allies, which negatively impacts the ability of the teachers of color to achieve their goal.”

“We should not be segmented away from our colleagues; we are better off when white colleagues attend.”

“I see PoCC as a safe place to have dialogues that are needed but can’t have in schools.”

“It feels more like a diversity institute.”

“...[I]f there is no other avenue for my people of color colleagues, they did need this conference to be theirs. Their road is so different than mine. And in independent schools, their road is enormous. Thus, unless NAIS creates a conversation between our colors, I will not be attending next year out of respect for my people of color colleagues.”

“I think it is incumbent upon us to continue to deliver the message that the work of diversity is everyone’s work. The ‘naysayers’ amongst us who worry that there are ‘too many white people’ in attendance should not be allowed to prevail.”

“Having white people who are inexperienced with diversity work creates tension because they often view this as a ‘learning opportunity’ which is in direct conflict with the intended mission of the conference. I feel like the third resolution may be taking precedent over the other resolutions....”

- Given the feedback, the NAIS Leadership Education and Diversity Team (formerly the Equity & Justice Initiatives Team, now LEAD) took immediate action to examine the history and current state of PoCC, and to explore the core issues and concerns underlying this dilemma.

A Meeting at the Crossroads

This white paper captures the insights, themes and recommendations that resulted from an intentional dialogue involving PoCC stakeholders representing independent schools, current and past PoCC chairs and co-chairs, and NAIS staff.

We wish to acknowledge Marcia Prewitt Spiller, NAIS board member and head of The Children’s School, who hosted 42 stakeholders in Atlanta, Georgia, on May 12, 2006, as they participated in the PoCC Dilemma Roundtable.

The NAIS Board is committed to PoCC’s Future.

Opening PoCC Dilemma Roundtable Remarks by Marcia Prewitt Spiller Head, The Children’s School (Atlanta, GA) & NAIS Board Member

Our thanks to the following participants for investing their time, energy and funds to engage in this important discussion.

Dennis Bisgaard	Shady Hill School (MA)
Caroline Blackwell	University School of Nashville (TN)
Karen Bradberry	Greenhill School (TX)
Tiffany Bridgewater	Potomac School (VA)
Olivia Brown	The Country School (CA)
Jefferson Burnett	NAIS (DC)
Sherry Coleman	Independent School Consortium (PA)
Rebecca Coleman	Savannah Country Day School (GA)
Quanti Davis	Norwood School (MD)
Michael DeVoll	Episcopal High School (TX)
Tony Featherston	Pine Point School (CT)
Ted Ferraday	Miami Country Day School (FL)
Scott Griggs	Greenhill School (TX)

Gloria Harper	Lake Forest Academy (IL)
Marc Harrison	Wheeler School (RI)
Josie Herrera	Albuquerque Academy (NM)
Chinh Nguyen	Latin School of Chicago (IL)
Ileana Jimenez	Little Red School House & Elisabeth Irwin High School (NY)
Rudy Jordan	Bank Street School for Children (NY)
Rosetta Lee	Seattle Girls' School (WA)
Evelyn McClain	Park Tudor School (IN)
Nishant Mehta	St. Alcuin Montessori School (TX)
Jeff Mercer	Chadwick School (CA)
Pamela Buchanan Miller	Latin School of Chicago (IL)
Mark Mitchell	NAIS (DC)
Kathy O'Neal	University Prep Academy (WA)
Hank Payne	Woodward Academy (GA)
Jacqui Pelzer	Early Steps, Inc. (NY)
Amani Reed	Lakeside School (WA)
Gwen Reed	Princeton Day School (NJ)
Dan Rocha	Moses Brown School (RI)
Naomi Siegler	The Cushman School (FL)
Darnell Slaughter	Colorado Academy (CO)
Marcia Prewitt Spiller	The Children's School (GA)
Reggie Stewart	Sodexo, Inc. (MD)
Manasa Tangalin	Independent School Alliance for Minority Affairs (CA)
T.J Vassar	Lakeside School (WA)
Polly Williams	The Meadowbrook School (MA)
Nokomas Wood	Germantown Friends School (PA)
Harry S. Wright	Asheville School (NC)

Invited Participants (Interviewed in advance of the Roundtable)

Lucinda Lee Katz	Marin Country Day School (CA)
Reveta Bowers	Center for Early Education (CA)
Bob Peters	Hanahau'oli School (HA)

NAIS Staff

Pat Bassett
Gene Batiste
John Hawkins
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Why is PoCC important?

In the past PoCC has served as the gathering place for the pioneers who integrated independent schools and showed us the way; in the present as the staging area for the next portion of the journey to create more inclusive and multicultural schools and society; and in the future as the launching pad for explorations we can't even now imagine.

Opening PoCC Dilemma Roundtable Remarks by Pat Bassett, President, National Association of Independent Schools

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Representatives from NAIS member schools, NAIS staff and past PoCC chairs, co-chairs and sponsors convened on May 12, 2006 in Atlanta for the PoCC Dilemma Roundtable. The objectives of the Roundtable discussion were:

- (1) to capture the history of PoCC;
- (2) to generate key insights that address the core issues of the dilemma; and
- (3) to develop recommendations that could help resolve the dilemma.

The discussion was designed and facilitated by BHW & Associates, a Nashville, TN-based consultancy. Forty-two (42) Roundtable participants engaged in small and large group discussions to ensure that all voices and perspectives could be shared. Following is a summary of the Roundtable process as well as insights, concerns and ideas that were generated relative to the present dilemma.

Setting the Table

The PoCC Dilemma was articulated at the outset of the Roundtable discussion:

- PoCC is not presently meeting the needs of many people of color.
- Concerns have been strongly voiced that PoCC has lost its original mission and has become a diversity conference and less of a conference “by and for people of color.”
- The ever increasing number of white people attending the conference changes the atmospherics of the conference.

Insights: PoCC Across Time

Roundtable participants first captured the institutional memory of PoCC over the 19 years it has been presented:

The History of PoCC...

1986 – RESTON, VA

1998 – SAN JUAN

1989 – PHILADELPHIA

1999 – SAN FRANCISCO

1990 – LOS ANGELES

2000 – NASHVILLE

1991 – NEW YORK CITY

2001 – PROVIDENCE

1992 – ATLANTA

2002 – CHICAGO

1993 – MINNEAPOLIS/ST. PAUL

2003 – HONOLULU

1994 – ALBUQUERQUE

2004 – MIAMI

1995 – PHILADELPHIA

2005 – DALLAS/FT. WORTH

1996 – BALTIMORE

2006 – SEATTLE

1997 – ST. LOUIS

- PoCC has a rich history filled with valuable insights that can inform our examination of the conference and its focus now and in the future.
- The first national conference held in 1986 addressed the needs of teachers and administrators of color. A “well” of nurturing and support began here. The conference, attended primarily by African-American teachers and administrators along with other people of color, offered a rich dialogue on survival and retention. A community was established to learn, grow and share, through mentoring and networking. PoCC was described as a spiritual experience, offering a feeling of hope and possibility to those who felt isolated.
- By 1989, PoCC grew to 200 participants and was described as a “camp meeting.” People of color began taking ownership of the conference and, by the 1990s, local committees were organizing PoCC with NAIS. Chairs and co-chairs were first appointed in 1991, and PoCC was becoming a movement and a growing network. Affinity group work emerged as a feature of the conference and more whites were attending the conference and affinity groups (to the dismay of some).
- PoCC soon found its voice and gained strength from its efforts to petition NAIS to elevate the Director of Minority Affairs position to a Vice President

- for Equity and Justice position, which happened in 2001. It was during this time that concern grew around the shifting demographics of the participants and varying motivations for participating in PoCC.
- By 1993, there was a shift in the participation, tone and contents of PoCC and the emergence of a “parallel track” to address the needs of white allies/participants. PoCC expanded to include other groups of color. It was a pivotal year, and for some the last conference as an “affirming” experience. It was the first conference that involved students. Tensions increased around the rumor that PoCC would be held every other year, which led to a caucus and later a manifesto that PoCC “must and will happen.” Behind the rallying cry was a “black cloud” and sadness.
 - PoCC continued with more and varied workshops with a focus on instructional practice and professional development – and an increasing number of white participants. Were they welcome? Political tensions heightened regarding leadership and inclusion/exclusion issues.
 - In the mid-1990s, PoCC was viewed by some as “*accommodating* the dominant culture.” More whites were “checking out” the conference as it offered an opportunity to learn what “the work” was about. By 1998, highlighting a community service organization became a PoCC tradition in response to the tragic hurricane that hit Puerto Rico. There was a large increase in conference participation. However, some people questioned the authenticity of what was going on and whether participants were motivated by the location - or was there true recognition of the work being done? Tensions continued regarding the increase in white participation.
 - NAIS Equity and Justice staff transitioned, and there was a change in the office structure.
 - By 2000, participants questioned if PoCC were really helping people of color to feel that they belong. There was a shift in quality of workshops, there were noticeable demographic changes in presenters and in attendees, and there was a shift in affinity group programming.
 - In 2001, PoCC’s mission was affirmed by the NAIS board. Affinity group work expanded. An incident occurred in which the dominant culture was asked to leave a workshop designed for people of color. Some participants of color resented the “teach me/show me” atmosphere of PoCC (in which people of color carried the burden of educating others about “minority” cultures).
 - The Hawaii PoCC (2003) was the first time the minority population was celebrated as majority. It also represented another “sea change” from PoCC as a “well” or sanctuary for people of color to a professional development conference. The behavior and subject of the conference was different. Participants “enjoyed” the conference vs. looking at it as

important work. Voices got louder. “Why are white people here?” The loss of PoCC’s “spiritual” dimension was noticed. In addition to separate affinity group sessions, a mixed racial/ethnic session was included. While some participants were pleased with the affinity group experience, this conference feature continues to cause concern. Some people were angry about inclusion of a LGBTQ constituent group and other groups felt excluded.

- In 2004, the NAIS Board reaffirmed a resolution on PoCC mission and purpose.
- Attendance tops 3,000 in 2005, and the tone of the conference changes again to some. There is “apprehension and dissonance” regarding the affinity group process. The number of black and white participants was nearly equal, causing a “buzz” about the loss of original mission and the possible emergence of a diversity conference to the detriment of the needs of people of color in independent schools.

Insights: The Dilemma

Following are key insights from discussions concerning the dilemma and its core issues. The guiding discussion questions were:

- 1. How do we preserve the genesis of PoCC?***
- 2. How do we continue to provide affirmation, sanctuary, empowerment, and networking for people of color in independent schools?***
- 3. What kind of conference will best achieve the NAIS Board Resolution?***
- 4. What is your vision of an ideal PoCC from the perspectives of content and attendance?***
- 5. What are desirable outcomes for a successful PoCC?***
- 6. To what extent does PoCC drive progress in diversity/inclusion at NAIS Schools?***

How do we preserve the genesis of PoCC?

- Preserve original PoCC by allowing people of color to gather without whites in a safe, protected space.
- Preserve original PoCC by acknowledging and creating programming that makes clear that people of color in independent schools are still marginalized (in many cases). Organizational and systemic analysis of our schools is critical.
- Provide a more explicit explanation of the purpose of PoCC. Also provide an explicit communication concerning what is done with information [generated at PoCC] and the outcome.
- “The well” is still needed. Teachers say it’s why they stayed in independent schools.
- Need to be clear about the mission. Communicate it in multiple ways. Need to clarify what it is.
- Need to educate people differently so people know what they’re coming to.
- Market multiple options. SDI (to learn about x); PoCC (to learn about y).
- Target certain groups and target the agenda. For example – heads one year, administrators one year, teachers one year.
- Add diversity workshops during the NAIS Annual Conference – for teachers and non-heads.
- Explore needs of veterans, leaders and mentors. What do we want? What’s missing? What do we need?
- PoCC – important for GLBT and people of color. Offers sanctuary, affirmation and dialogue. It’s difficult but PoCC allows you to have a platform to speak and connect.
- Need to address the politics of who goes to PoCC. This is a conversation that needs to be had.
- For Boston PoCC – add racial/ethnic background in call for proposals.
- We (people of color) need to become more responsible for presenting. We need to take ownership. We need to list topics that we feel are important and seek each other out.

- Need time to have difficult conversations.
- Provide specific programming for whites (e.g., white privilege).
- Offer professional facilitation of affinity groups.
- Clearly communicate PoCC's mission.
- Schools should provide the funding to support PoCC attendance.
- Re-evaluate the (NAIS Board) PoCC Resolution
- Communicate the purpose of PoCC to school heads.
- Address the reactions to Dallas PoCC.
- Offer "Club PoCC" to promote networking with everyone.
- Do not only use numbers as a measure of success for PoCC.
- Provide a space for people of color to meet without having to "take care of white folks."
- Offer some workshops for people of color only.
- Revitalize workshops to be for people of color and not only about people of color. For example, a workshop for people of color to deal with affluent white parents of independent schools questioning their competency as teachers rather than just a workshop on how to deal with white parents.

What kind of conference will best achieve the NAIS Board Resolution?

- A conference by people of color.
- Need to recapture a sense of belonging.
- The mission is a dilemma. The last line [of the resolution] creates the dilemma and promotes confusion.
- Does the Board need another look at its resolution? Will a diversity conference better suit the current Board resolution?
- Is the resolution trying to make PoCC all things to all people?

- The 2004 resolution makes people of color the “other” and marginalizes their voices as only having legitimacy around the issues of diversity.
- 2001 resolution – limits the conference. Doesn’t encompass what we’re trying to achieve.
- Revise both resolutions.
- Is it possible to do both as the resolution states? Seems like two distinct things at one event.... Is that what we want to do? How are people of color feeling about that?
- There’s an ongoing buzz, and it’s a major distraction. There have been many missed opportunities to have conversation.
- Retain original purpose of PoCC with priority given to attendance by people of color. NAIS to influence regional associations to sponsor diversity conferences by geographic regions.
- Affinity groups take on more significance and time at the conference.
- Parallel conference of strands as a structure seems to provide space for development for a variety of attendees.
- Need for clarity of purpose for each portion of conference.
- The conference needs to address the variety of continua that participants of color are on from healing to support to leadership/mentoring.
- Is there a way to know if people who attend SDI go/don’t go to PoCC?
- Offer a sequential conference - affinity and healing work first then a learning/diversity conference.
- Put a mechanism in place for framing the conference and charging schools to do more work before people get to the conference.

What is your vision of an ideal PoCC from the perspectives of content and attendance?

- Need to focus on the continuum of “the work.” Can it accommodate white diversity advocates with understanding that their role in the work is different?
- Focus on affinity group work at beginning of conference to allow for intra/interaction.
- Great facilitator for affinity group development.
- Focus should be on the need to prepare our kids to live in a global society.
- Content is important to attendance.
- Priority should be people of color.
- A separate track for whites seems inconsistent with Board resolution.
- Clarification is needed. If there is a “white track,” are people of color to be presenters of these workshops?
- Require/suggest pre-conference reading.
- Have separate tracks been properly tested?
- Issue of white privilege must be addressed at the conference. It’s an underlying issue that continues to arise. Whites come and assume “expert” role (a concern).
- People of color need to “run the game.”
- There’s a place for everyone here but need to say openly to white allies that we need you to be allies and work it to our community’s advantage.
- We have to learn to take and use tools. But we’re afraid to go there.
- Why can’t people of color have four days? What’s scary/intimidating about that?
- Focus should be:
 - Issues of people of color (present and future needs)
 - Building an inclusive environment

- The future of our country needs “both/and...” [PoCC and diversity]
- “Both and” is really a false choice. It’s really about how much you can do in 3-4 days.
- Need to define what the work is.
- There are no other options locally, regionally or nationally for GLBTQ.
- What does equity look like?
- What does it mean to be fair?
- Sessions don’t address driving affinity group work.
- How are people of color understanding the conference?
- Need outside facilitators or need more training for the affinity groups. Two days is not enough time to prepare.
- Workshops for networking, mentoring.

What are desirable outcomes for a successful PoCC?

- NAIS needs to measure our progress...Where are we??
 - Are people of color attracted by leadership into the schools?
 - Are we preparing our students to live in a diverse world?
 - What is the depth and practice of diversity in schools?
 - Has the focus of heads changed?
- Should leave PoCC with sense of how to go back to school community to support inclusiveness
 - “It was a good use of my time.”
 - “We are in this together.”
 - “Made me think.”
 - “My personal responsibility to change.”
- That we set a tone that clarifies and outlines the current mission of the PoCC and establish objectives (success factor) in a way that acknowledges a “both/and” paradigm.
- There should be a “charge” for post-conference action. Website; blog. Dynamically supported.

- Struggle – is it possible to do “both and?” Should it be re-engineered or go back to the original (sanctuary).
- “The Work” – if we can define it then it would drive the conference and make clear who should be there. Perhaps this should be explored at Call to Action. The work is defined in different ways.
- Networking; build new relationships
- Leadership
- Sanctuary for people of color
- Rejuvenation
- Reconnection
- Strategies/Ideas
- Ongoing session on white privilege/power
- Inspiration
- Address key issues (e.g., immigration)
- To sustain “of, by, and for” people of color.
- Better orientation for white participants.
- Retention of people of color in independent schools
- Developing leaders of color – our responsibility to grow leaders
- Standard models and resources
- Create allies
- Support for teachers of color in their first year of teaching
- Support for teachers of color who have been teaching and want to go into leadership.
- Set tone.
- Clarify and outline the mission and objectives (the work).

- Offer a “both and” paradigm.
- Define what the work is and what it means.
- Affinity group work
- Training
- White privilege/power
- Key issues in America/world.
- PoCC is different for different individuals and for different years you come...new vs. veteran.
- PoCC for people of color = affirmation and renewal (buzz words but what does it really mean).
- Tells them they are important.
- Threat – NAIS believes it’s not important if it goes away.
- PoCC is empowering.
- Place where people of color see other people as models/mentors in the independent school world.
- Coming back more capable than they left – more skills and resources.
- Affinity groups – need good mentors and facilitators.
- It’s about us and the kids.

To what extent does PoCC “drive” progress in diversity/inclusion at NAIS Schools?

- Perspective
- Bring back ideas
- Sets tone for schools
- Relationships with other schools
- Look how far we've come
- Resource
- Speakers
- Safe
- Empowers attendees
- Mentoring
- Direct return
- Connections
- Schools send people to PoCC for diversity training. Why?
- PoCC is happening for the individual. How does it allow you to move forward?
- Need to find out who we (people of color) are first before we can go and do the work.
- Infuses energy
- Effect depends on the school and where they are, and the role of who attends. SLDC probably drives impact.
- PoCC is a powerful force in the NAIS world.
- It energizes people.
- It's different from all other conferences. Has a different feel and is a different experience.
- Motivations are different.
- “The Rub” – What is this about (for School? For people of color?)
- Resources, networking, dialogue, empowering, regional caucuses – allows deepening of dialogue.
- Are we shaping the conference to be effective and meaningful?
- Are there other places for “the well?”
- The work shifted. Randolph and the office closing. “The work” became politically charged.
- Driving question at NAIS – what does the customer need?

Additional Questions & Concerns

- Message for NAIS – make role clear. What’s the mission for each conference? PoCC? SDI? Annual Conference?
- What is more important? Attendance vs. revenue?
- Concern – shift in balance. How do we manage numbers so scale doesn’t tip in the other direction, losing people of color?
- What is the responsibility of the NAIS Annual Conference for the work of diversity?
- Fear & concern – “pleasing the masters.”
- Be explicit – what numbers we’re comparing?
- Balance – “I honor the history but I feel as though my voice is small (being new).”
- Concern – Would a move back further isolate people of color?
- Money should not be a driving factor.
- Would you be better served if PoCC were exclusively for people of color? Or predominately people of color with white allies?

Roundtable Themes

- PoCC is viewed as being less for people of color and more for training/learning about diversity work. It is viewed as less of a support system (1986 to 2000) and more for learning/professional development experience (2000 to present).
- PoCC meets more and different needs today than when the conference first started. There is a dual need for this conference, and the challenge now is to determine how to balance the needs of veterans and new comers, people of color and white participants.
- “The work” needs to be defined, clarified, illuminated and communicated so that PoCC participants understand the depth and breadth of diversity, inclusion, equity and justice.

- Affinity group work represents the best and worst element of PoCC. It is an important feature but should be reviewed to ensure consistency, effectiveness and quality of facilitation.
- Participation of white allies has reshaped PoCC. What are the implications of this dynamic on the mission of PoCC?
- Communication is an essential element in positioning PoCC and managing expectations regarding the conference experience. Communication is key...here's where the Board sits. Here's where Gene [Batiste] and Pat [Bassett] sit.

Roundtable Recommendations

The PoCC Dilemma Roundtable culminated in a request of each small group to generate one recommendation to move from dialogue to action. It should be noted that these recommendations do not represent a consensus of the entire group.

1. Review the NAIS Board Resolution. It should be changed to language that explicitly empowers people of color to plan, execute and be given priority in attendance at PoCC. And with the majority of presenters being people of color.
2. NAIS President should issue a recommendation to the heads of schools that all faculty/staff of color at their schools should be provided with the opportunity to attend PoCC first before "allies" are considered.
3. Allocate more time for affinity groups and have professional facilitation for affinity groups.
4. Focus "the work" of PoCC on racial identity development not on learning about diversity programs for schools.
5. Establish workshop criteria. Identify intended audience, encourage richer content dialogue and focus more on needs of people of color.
6. The NAIS national conference should be the primary vehicle for education on diversity topics.

Next Steps

At the close of the PoCC Dilemma Roundtable discussion, we (NAIS) restated that some of the issues and concerns raised could be addressed for the 2006 PoCC (Seattle, WA). But most of what is under review will impact future PoCC's beginning with Boston in 2007.

1. PoCC Dilemma Roundtable Summary/White Paper will be sent to Roundtable participants.
2. NAIS Board will review PoCC Dilemma Roundtable Summary/White Paper, review resolutions, and offer support to LEAD team for implementation of NAIS approved recommendations.
3. Call to Action will review PoCC Dilemma Roundtable Summary/White Paper and NAIS Board recommendations, offer suggestions for next steps, and give support for implementation of NAIS approved recommendations.
4. LEAD team will present PoCC Dilemma Roundtable Summary/White Paper and recommendations to NAIS leadership and staff.
5. Final implementation of approved recommendations will begin with the planning of PoCC 2007 (Boston).

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