

Saint Thomas the Apostle Board of Education Minutes from the Regular Meeting of the Board on Thursday, December 13, 2018

The meeting was conducted from 6 pm until 8:20 pm.

Board Packets submitted to members on: December 10, 2018.

Board Homework:

For the December 13, 2018 meeting, please prepare your Board profile information. The profile will be a brief overview of: 1) why you serve on the Board, 2) your committee assignment, and 3) your occupation to be posted on the school's website under the Board of Education section with your photo. An e-mail requesting this information was first sent on November 8, 2018.

CALENDAR ITEMS

Next Board Meeting: Thursday, January 10, 2019 **at 5 pm.** Dave Faber, Superintendent of Catholic Schools will make his annual visit and report.

Catholic Schools Week Events:

Attend Community Dinner on Saturday, January 26th following Mass.

Mingle with parishioners after the 7:30 am, 9 am and 11 am Masses on Sunday, January 27th.

Attend the Vocations Luncheon with keynote speaker, Fr. Durkee on Friday, February 1st.

Meeting Agenda

- I. **Opening Prayer-** Fr. Jim Chelich
- II. **Pastor's Report-** Fr. Jim Chelich
 - a. Fr. Jim has been discussing the challenges of the budgetary process with the President of the Finance Council. Improvements are coming, including a proposal to share a calendar/timetables among Saint Thomas groups regarding when information and decisions may be needed.
 - b. Fr. Jim spoke about his vision for a joint approach with the teachers regarding discipline/personal responsibility. He would like to shift the paradigm of how mistakes are viewed from a negative focus on errors and mistakes (which creates a desire to avoid or shift responsibility) to a more positive outlook of acknowledging mistakes and focusing on how a mistake can lead to growth, learning, or innovation in relationships and other aspects of life, such as actual experiments. The inspiration came from his talks with college students about peer review processes. He wants to foster creativity, ingenuity and innovation in the children from an early age. Fr. Jim wants children to develop skills for critical analysis and competency that looks back, implements corrections, and moves forward. An example of possible questions children should consider: What didn't work? Why didn't it work? How does one move ahead?
 - c. Fr. Jim also wants to provide talks with an overview of chastity.
 - d. Fr. Jim spoke on how vigilance is built into what the school is doing from both a cultural awareness and safety perspective.
- III. **Partner Organization Reports-** Matt Maczka
 - a. **Middle School Representative-** Ian Richthammer
 - 1) Middle school students seem calm as exams approach. Ian spoke in favor of having the exams prior to Christmas break and that exams offer beneficial preparation for high school.
 - 2) Ian also reported on aspect of technology use in the school. He spoke in favor of the Clever Touch large smart boards which have less lag are more responsive than prior smart

boards and which allow simultaneous participation by multiple students. He also spoke to the shortfalls, benefits, and correlations he sees between the current technology class offerings in coding, robotics and the mechanical aspects of robotics.

3) When asked for ways to turn around a perception that the students have been less welcoming to unfamiliar adults within the building, especially vis a vis prospective families touring, Ian suggested advance notice to the students at Chapel or via announcements to encourage more welcoming behavior. The Board requested that the student council be consulted to see if it brainstorm inspiring ways to have students be welcoming, considerate, and show leadership towards guests at all times and not merely when given advanced notice.

b. **Parish Finance Council-** Nancy Kennedy

1) As Fr. Jim mentioned, the Finance Council is working to develop a parish wide calendar so that everyone can know which groups need information or decisions and when the information is needed. Additionally, an organization chart for the whole parish is being developed. One significant change is that the Finance Council is providing the Board of Education with a firm projection of the offertory so that the school can budget on a fixed projection for the upcoming year.

2) The efforts to secure additional CSA pledges seem to be effective.

3) There has been a drop in the total number parishioners. This may, at least in part, explain the decrease in offertory giving. The losses haven't been put into a pattern and may be due to a variety of reasons. The parish may try to start tracking population changes. This observation raises the question of whether growing the parish membership would address any financial concerns.

4) Additionally, the parish with the parish Executive Committee (comprised of leadership from various Saint Thomas groups) continues discussions to explore whether the services of a development person would be beneficial, and how the services, benefits, and expenses of such a hire might be shared. An uncertainty is whether Saint Thomas or the development person would identify what information should be track and organize and how to best organize and cull through the desired data. Would the development person offer advice and set it up a system for Saint Thomas to manage or should Saint Thomas pick someone to manage and apply the data it according to Saint Thomas' specifications? An additional consideration is the role of technology in this process. The current parish software/technology may be older and limited. Additionally, there were concerns about whether the current data can be used easily and efficiently as it may be both duplicative and disorganized due to technological limitations. Later in the meeting, Margo and Pauline were mentioned as possible resources to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the current parish software.

c. **Education Foundation-** Erin Schmuker on behalf of Kristi Irwin

The Foundation would like direction from the Board regarding budgetary needs that the Foundation maybe able to address for the 2019-2020 school year. However, the Foundation also expressed a wish to continue to address one time needs rather than ongoing/recurrent budgetary needs. Additionally, the parish and Education Foundation continue to work through questions and possible tax ramifications regarding the Foundation's status as either an integrated or separate 501(c)(3).

d. **Home and School-** Shawn Schuring

No written or verbal report was submitted.

e. **Boosters-** Matt Maczka on behalf of Kyle Wohlgemuth

The Booster's traditional fundraiser of a spring golf outing has not been planned yet. The Boosters are aware of the need to raise the funds and are seeking someone to plan an event.

f. **ESS Fund-**

The ESS fund will begin to join and/or provide a partner report at future Board meetings in the new year.

IV. Concerns of Visitors- Matt Maczka

No visitor concerns presented.

V. Approval of Consent Agenda Items- Matt Maczka

The November minutes were motioned, seconded, and approved.

VI. Administrator's Report- Suzi Furtwangler

a. Middle School Band & Choir Surveys-

Middle school parents responded to surveys about middle school student participation in early morning diocese wide band and choir opportunities at Catholic Central (CC). Families were surveyed last year when the CC program was proposed, and re-surveyed to see if there had been any change now that the program at CC was in operation. To send middle school students to CC for band and choir, parents would need to make arrangements to drop the students at CC before 8 am. The students would be returned to Saint Thomas by bus. There would be fees (to be met by either the families or the school) for participation in the program and the busing to Saint Thomas. Saint Thomas is one of 2 schools not currently utilizing the services proposed by CC. The survey results indicate parents prefer to keep the middle school students at Saint Thomas for band and choir. Therefore, the school plans to make investments in our own programming where possible.

b. Sue Ysasi to retire at years' end-

The Board learned of school secretary, Sue Ysasi's, plans to retire at the end of the school year. Sue's warmth, welcoming nature, and dedication were roundly affirmed. The retirement raises budgetary question of whether the school's future needs would be best served by a salaried employee or one receiving hourly compensation.

c. Holland Home/Possible Family Promise Homeless Shelter-

The Board received an update about a prospective use of Holland Home in the Principal's report. Family Promise petitioned the Grand Rapids Planning Commission for a special land use to use a portion of the Holland Home property as a temporary homeless shelter for families on December 13th. The special land use permit was granted. Many questions about the details and ramifications of the proposed use of Holland Home by Family Promise and partner organizations for a year as a temporary homeless shelter (housing homeless families for a short duration) were raised. Central themes in the discussion included: whether there had been adequate information and communication to the Board and/or the school community about this possible use and/or the affiliated the open house and public hearing, whether the Saint Thomas community's response to the shelter would be a consistent (or inconsistent) expression of our Catholic faith, whether additional safety considerations would arise for our campus and students and if contingency security plans were in place, whether marketing efforts and/or enrollment might be negatively affected, and how and when to inform the community of the news. Suzi Furtwangler planned to prepare a letter for her and Fr. Jim to sign to be sent to families discussing this topic.

V. Board Deliberations- Matt Maczka/ Suzi Furtwangler

a. Tuition Rate Proposals for 2019-2020- Elissa Williams/ Jason Balgavy

Budget considerations influencing tuition rates: The committee talked about elements of the 2019-2020 budget in conjunction with proposing tuition rates for the 2019-2020 school year. Projected that based on declining parish offertory giving, that the school will need to address approximately \$30,000 of savings or increased revenue. A proposed consideration is whether targeted donor appeals would collectively be able to address \$20,000 to \$30,000 of the budget. One possible budget consideration was

halving pay raises to be 1.5% rather than the 3% of recent years. Another possible budget consideration is finding an alternative funding source such as fundraisers and/or participation fees for athletics. With the GRACEAC changes, athletic expenses are less predictable than in the past. Perhaps, the Boosters will be able to do additional fundraising to address some of the budgetary expenses of the program. Raising tuition rates was recognized as a low dose source of additional revenue and one that could not single handedly address the \$30,000 gap between the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 budgets.

Tuition Rate discussion: In the fall the diocese compiled its annual list of tuition rates charged by diocesan schools. This list was consulted to determine how Saint Thomas' tuition rates compared to area peers. For the last few years, the preschool rate of tuition has increased by 1% and other tuition rates have typically risen by approximately 3%. This year, the preschool tuition rates at Saint Thomas remain on the higher end of the scale when compared to others in the area. Therefore, a modest 1% tuition rate increase was proposed for both the 3 and 4 year old preschool programs. The Kindergarten tuition rate had room to grow when compared to area peers, however, the Kindergarten *enrichment* fee was on the higher side. Therefore, a 3% tuition rate increase was recommended for Kindergarten. No recommendation has been made yet with respect to the Kindergarten enrichment fee. For a single or first student enrolled in any grade from 1st to 8th grades, a 3% tuition increase was recommended. However, it was noted that Saint Thomas offered a significant discount for families with more than one child. Therefore it was proposed that the combined tuition rate for families with more than 1 student in grades 1st to 8th would increase by 4% across the board. The 4% increase would result in an additional \$263 per family for a family of 2 students, an additional \$327 per family for a family of 3 students, and an additional \$350 per family for a family of 4 or more students for parishioners. The 4% increases for non-parishioners would be an additional \$475 per family for a family of 2 students, an additional \$710 per family for a family of 3 students, and an additional \$945 per family for a family of 4 or more students. Overall the revenue change from a 3% increase to a 4% increase was anticipated to raise only \$7,000. Recommendations for rate increases for after-care and enrichment programs are still pending, but will need to be set at the January meeting in order to prepare registration packets.

The proposed tuition rate increased were motioned, seconded and approved unanimously. The proposed tuition rates will be presented to the parish finance council for approval.

Registration Fees: Registration rates will be \$125 for a single student or \$250 for a family. Fees are non-refundable. This year the registration fees will not be able to be rolled into the next year's Smart Tuition payments.

Incentives considered: The Board considered several types of discounts and incentives to remain competitive with other area schools. The Board is considering an incentive program what will recognize existing families who successfully refer a newly enrolled family. However, the details need to be worked out. The Board would like for the plan to initially be a pleasant surprise to the eligible families and for them to spread the word about how the incentive was earned.

b. Strategic Planning- Erin Schmuker

In the interest of time, the Strategic Planning session of the meeting was adjourned until the February Meeting. The review will pick up with Operational Vitality in February.

VI. Board Committee Reports and Action Items

a. **Marketing & Outreach Committee-** Judi Koepnick/ Betsy Edgerton

1. **Outreach** The Committee was sending 750 #WeAreSaintThomas postcards to Parishioners inviting additional parishioner engagement with the school.

2. **Grandfriends' Day Follow Up** - Attendees will receive personalized letters inviting them to be involved in the school and to return to the school for upcoming events. In a labor intensive effort to cultivate personal relationships, some letters included a picture of the child with the attending grandfriend; whereas others letters utilized a copy of the school's annual photo. A sample of the letter with the one on one photo was shown to the Board.

3. **Catholic Schools Week (CSW)-** The Committee is preparing for the upcoming CSW week in various ways.

a) In order to underwrite a "thank you" luncheon for the faculty for the Friday of CSW, the committee has requested \$5-\$10 donations from each Board member. Many provided their contribution to the committee at this point in the meeting. Other contributions may be given to Judi or Betsy.

b) The Daddy Daughter Dance (for the PS 3 to 3rd grade girls and their fathers) has been moved from the Saturday in Catholic School's Week to February 9th.

c) A new promotional video about the school will "premiere" at weekend masses to kick off CSW. The diocese helped produce the video that Fr. Jim narrates. The images show school life, but highlight the preparations for a Friday Mass and other aspects of prayer and faith in the school.

d) CSW provides an opportunity to begin unrolling a new marketing theme within the larger #WeAreSaintThomas campaign. The school will be promoting the ways in which it is relevant to today's families by promoting being a *modern* Catholic School, working with *modern* technologies and tools (sorry I didn't capture the exact language of what modern things the school is using) to prepare future leaders to change the world. We will also be promoting how the school helps students achieve greatness, and provides them with both the tools to handle greatness and the ability to pick themselves up and carry on when they fall.

e) School Board directors were asked to think about sign up to stay after one of the weekend masses for January 26th and January 27th to mingle with parishioners and promote interest in the school. Members are also encouraged to attend the Community dinner on January 26th. Board members are encouraged to: wear a Board name tag, introduce oneself as a member of the Board and invite the parishioners to share thoughts, questions and concerns about the school. Additionally, if appropriate, the Board members should encourage parishioners to explore any expressed interest in the school by asking for involvement, help, and/or support.

b. **Mission Effectiveness-** Jessica Poelma

The Committee submitted a written report.

1) On Friday, February 1st Board Directors are requested to attend the Vocations Luncheon for parents featuring keynote speaker, Fr. Stephen Durkee. Fr. Durkee is a highly sought after speaker, a Grand Rapids native, the Associate Director of Priestly Vocations for the diocese and the associate pastor at Our Lady of Consolation. Anticipated attendance is 30-40 attendees.

2) Suggestions were made to link Fr. Jim's "Forming Children of the Light" reflection to his welcome message on the school's webpage and to consider highlighting these reflections in the school's marketing. To promote greater parent awareness of these teachings about "Forming Children of the Light" a copy will be distributed to all parish and school families.

Copies of “Forming Children of the Light” were provided at the meeting.

c. **Curriculum Committee-** Veronica Perdue

The Committee submitted a written report. The Committee will hold a meeting on December 14th regarding reading and other assessments. Holly Lake will also be joining this committee.

d. **Finance Committee-** Elissa Williams

A written report was provided and sample budget was provided. The work of the committee was discussed during Board Deliberations regarding tuition rates for the 2019-2020 year.

e. **Policy & Planning Committee** - Christi Blum

The Committee submitted a written report. The Committee spoke about the proposed Extra-Curricular Policy and requested feedback. Board members were also reminded to submit information for the Board Profiles if they have not done so already.

f. **Building & Grounds Committee** – Matt Maczka on behalf of Josh Szymanski

The Committee relied upon its written report. The committee continues to work on developing its facilities assessment.

g. **Technology Committee-** Chuck Rushmore

The committee provided a written report. At a recent meeting, Chuck, Derek, and Brian Cooper worked on putting together a long term plan regarding the goals of the strategic plan.

Additionally, they began short term work on a budget for next year. More software needs are anticipated. Mention was made of clarifying the Capital Budget allocation for technology.

VII. **Closing Prayer-** Suzi Furtwangler

