

Saint Thomas the Apostle Board of Education Minutes from the Regular Meeting of the Board on Thursday, January 10, 2019

The meeting was conducted from 5 pm until 8:20 pm.

Board Packets submitted to members on: January 9, 2019.

Board Homework: Please submit names of at least two prospective school families to Betsy Edgerton.

CALENDAR ITEMS

Next Board Meeting: Thursday, February 7, 2019, at 6 pm.

Catholic Schools Week Events:

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 and Supper- Dave Faber

Dave Faber opened the meeting with prayer and then everyone was invited to enjoy a meal during the meeting. Many thanks to all who helped provide the meal, particularly to Suzi Furtwangler for the delicious soups, salad, and breads and to Erin Schmuker for the beverages.

II. Visit of Superintendent of Schools, Dave Faber- Matt Maczka

Dave Faber's presentation relied upon slides to convey most of the information. Paper copies of the reports presented were left with the Principal and Board Chair to be shared electronically with the Board.

Dave spoke about the goals and successes of the Diocese through the prism of the 4 pillars of Catholic education: Mission Effectiveness, Programmatic Excellence, Affordability, and Stewardship/Sustainability. Featured successes included: efforts to provide opportunities for shared services (and therefore shared savings) to all schools and co-branding for increased credibility. Other information included the success of the network/cohort groups for Board to share information and consideration of possible feasibility studies for new schools in the North of the Diocese (possibly in Fremont) and the SW of the Diocese (near Byron Center, Jenison and/or Grandville).

Discussion of the Bishop's Schools initiative confirmed a three year success at turning around the decades-long decrease in enrollment in Catholic schools and good enrollment projections including the largest preschool enrollment in 18 years and the highest Kindergarten enrollment in 6 years. Dave recognized the role of preschool ministry, such as Saint Thomas' exemplary 0-5 programming, in attracting families to Catholic schools. He spoke on marketing and enrollment efforts at the Diocesan level and answered questions arising from the data presented. Dave noted that before focusing on marketing and enrollment, the Diocese had 15% of baptized children enrolling in Catholic schools. Currently enrollment has grown to 16.5% of baptized children- which is nearing the 17%+ set as a long term goal. He noted that if a school can convert preschool enrollments into enrollment to Kindergarten/first grade, a family usually remains with Catholic education and that a retention rate of 75% of preschool families coming into K/1st grade is considered good.

Dave also spoke on evolving changes to the Bishop's Schools Initiative, including how the Diocese would be encouraging schools to invite families into relationship through additional welcome, recognition, and encouragement to participate efforts. Dave also mentioned that

funding, in part, for the marketing and Bishop's scholarships would come from increased CSA assessments on parishes without schools. (The Diocese has 81 parishes, but only 31 schools- some of which are supported by multiple parishes.) The current 4% increase CSA assessment for parishes without schools was expected to generate \$400,000. He spoke on the efforts to bring the parishes without schools to understand the value of the investment they are being asked to bear (especially as an additional staged increase to 8% overall is planned, although its implementation has been delayed to allow the Diocese to focus on the pending campaign for Priests that will begin to roll out in September for seminary expenses, ongoing formation, and retirement funds).

A theme throughout the evening was the Diocese's desire to reflect more of the universal church in both our student/family populations and in the role models and leadership our schools provide, with special emphasis on recognizing and including "silent populations" within our community. While 25% of the student population identifies as minorities, only 2% of the faculty/ school leadership do and that is one targeted area for growth. The due to high baptism rates, but low enrollment rates among those identifying as Hispanic, the Diocese is encouraging all schools to increase outreach to Hispanic families. Additionally, to better reflect the universal church, Dave spoke to efforts to grow to be able to provide opportunities for cognitively and physically diverse students to attend Catholic schools, ideally at the same attendance percentage rate of public schools. Dave answered questions about the role of MAP scores and spoke about families desires to be informed about ROI and value of Catholic education vis a vis public school options. He also spoke on efforts and desires of the schools to track classroom efficiencies, track teacher raises, and desire to create and compare development efforts. Throughout his presentation, Dave made reference to Saint Thomas' leadership, exemplary efforts, and successes.

III. Pastor's Report- Fr. Jim Chelich

a. Fr. Jim spoke in support and thanksgiving for Nancy Kennedy's efforts to standardize and centralize relationships and information exchanges among all Saint Thomas organizations and groups, including formation of the Parish Executive group.

b. Fr. Jim also extended gratitude to those who have been working on the regularization of the tuition rate form and to refine the meaning and understanding of "parishioner" in order to qualify for a reduced tuition rate.

c. Fr. Jim also previewed his planned support for the Family Promise project at Holland Home in a two part article and accompanying sermons on "Embodying the Word of God" and "Overcoming Fear Through Faith" that will feature Nativity based and other scriptural references in support of the theme. Additionally, the bulletin will have an insert introducing Family Promise and providing facts to address anticipated curiosity about the use of the Holland Home facility as a shelter for homeless families. Additionally, he planned to invite the head of Family Promise for a welcome and informational session.

d. Programming for parents was highlighted, including a Love and Logic class on Sunday afternoons (registration open, child care provided) and plans to offer a Dave Ramsey financial planning course too.

IV. Partner Organization Reports- Matt Maczka

Due to the Superintendent's visit, the partner organizations did not attend the meeting or submit reports this month.

V. Approval of Consent Agenda Items- Matt Maczka

The December minutes were motioned, seconded, and approved.

VI. Administrator's Report- Suzi Furtwangler

(The Secretary stepped into the hallway during a portion of this report to overview the proposed Amendments to the Bylaws with Dave Faber. She regrets any omissions or inaccuracies in this summary as a result of stepping out.)

a. Family Promise/ Holland Home update- Suzi shared a draft of proposed facts that would appear on the informational sheet Fr. Jim envisioned for bulletin and which would also be sent to school families about Family Promise's use of Holland Home as a family homeless shelter. The Board provided feedback and recommendations regarding the draft document. She indicated that Family Promise hoped to obtain security services from the Spectrum Health Safety. Suzi also spoke of her plans to invite the head of Family Promise to speak to school families and students about the family homeless shelter, perhaps both as a speaker at Chapel and/or at a welcome and informational meeting as proposed by Fr. Jim.

b. Anticipated Job Postings- Suzi reminded the Board that the school would need to post for two job positions: school secretary and director of Educational Support Services (ESS). Sue Ysasi plans to retire as school secretary at the end of the school year. Missy Meighan's plans to depart as Director of ESS (due to her spouse obtaining a new position requiring relocation out of state) have advanced from the end of the school year to Spring Break. Suzi informed the Board she will be seeking someone with a special education background to fill the ESS director's position. Suzi plans to hire a new Director ASAP so the new Director can shadow and transition with Missy for continuity prior to Missy's current plans for an April 1 departure.

V. Board Deliberations- Matt Maczka/Suzi Furtwangler

At the end of the meeting, the Board discussed whether to hold its regular meeting as normally scheduled on Valentine's Day or a week earlier, on Thursday, February 7th. Usual Board Deliberations were suspended due to the Superintendent's visit. Strategic Planning was suspended due to the Superintendent's visit. The strategic planning review will pick up with Operational Vitality in February.

VI. Board Committee Reports and Action Items

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

The Committee submitted a written report. The committee reported on the school's successful advertising with GR Kids.com. Three new families have begun attending 0-5 programming. Betsy Edgerton requested Board members submit the names and contact information for at least two prospective school age families. An e-mail encouraging consideration of the school was sent to parishioners with school age children. The Committee also requested the Board members plan wear their name tags and mingle after Sunday Masses on January 24th to answer questions and promote interest and goodwill toward the school.

b. Mission Effectiveness- Monica Morin for Jessica Poelma

The Committee submitted a written report. Monica Morin spoke about the plans for the upcoming Vocations luncheon on February 1st part of Catholic Schools Week.

c. Curriculum Committee- Veronica Perdue

The Committee submitted a written report. The Committee provided an update on its ongoing efforts regarding reading assessments and the potential involvement of another informed parent familiar with reading assessments.

d. Finance Committee- Elissa Williams

The Committee submitted a written report and provided drafts of the proposed tuition forms clarifying how one could qualify for the parishioner (reduced) tuition rate. The Committee wanted to regularize matters and was anxious to strike the appropriate balance of setting reasonable levels of financial support and/or participation expectations. The Committee was also concerned with sensitivity to families and with appropriate language to avoid offense and/or misstatements. The current methods used determine whether a given family qualifies for

the parishioner rate when there are questions about whether the family is participating in the life of the school and parish life are time consuming and vary in effectiveness. Additionally, sometimes letters changing tuition rates have been send in error or too precipitously. One part of the regularization process would be to check on levels of participation at two points in the year and to make sure that incoming parishioners know that they will have 6 months to transition into expected participation levels. One of the considerations was whether and at what specified level could financial support be requested. If the requested donation was not financially feasible, parishioner status would alternatively be determined by looking to the level of attendance/ participation in parish life (such as Mass attendance) at a recommended level. The Committee conveyed Father Jim's recommendations for giving (an average of \$15 total / per week/ per family) with recommendations of those at other parishes with schools (a base tithe *plus* \$35/ per week/ per family.) The Committee asked on suggestions regarding the appropriate recommendations. The Board offered feedback and recommendations regarding wording of the proposed form and suggested giving levels. Other considerations raised during the discussion included: taking a mentoring approach to those not adequately participating, making auto pay for offertory giving easier to use (without phone calls to the parish office) both for initial enrollment and to adjust giving levels and/or the possibility of sending a form with the enrollment packets to allow for autopay adjustments, and making sure that the expectations regarding participation were clear and avoiding acting too hastily in changing status from parishioner to non-parishioner tuition rates.

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

The Committee submitted a written report, including copies of a draft of a proposed Extra-Curricular Eligibility Policy and Contract and the existing Sports Eligibility Policy and Contact as a point of comparison. The Committee highlighted proposed revisions and features of the proposed policy. Voting on the draft policy is proposed for the February meeting.

f. **Building & Grounds Committee** –Josh Szymanski

The Committee submitted a written report. The Committee has been regularly working with Ted Coon of the Maintenance team for information to inform the site plan. A written site report will be presented to the Board in April. The Committee noted that while mechanical systems needs had been budgeted as part of the parish's capital campaign that the actual costs may be higher than planned. The Committee also reported on a request from Parish Finance Counsel President, Nancy Kennedy, to generate provisional budgets for a new gym, a playground, and/or a standalone preschool to aid in having informed discussions and making future financial decisions.

g. **Technology Committee**- Chuck Rushmore

The Committee held a meeting the night prior to the Board meeting, which included Committee members, Brian Cooper, Suzi Furtwangler and Nancy Kennedy. The Committee planned to have revised budget numbers shortly, with a goal of planning ways to maximize and capture designated technology funds from the capital campaign. The Committee indicated that it was looking for ways to streamline paperwork for Brian so that he could focus on the technology needs of the school. Additionally, the Committee reported that the school would shift to leasing printers as the manpower savings in shifting maintenance from in house to the lease alone would offer greater efficiencies.

VII. **Closing Prayer**- Suzi Furtwangler

