

Saint Thomas the Apostle Board of Education Minutes from the Regular Meeting of the Board on Thursday, January 11, 2018

The meeting began at 6 p.m. and concluded at 8:15 p.m.

Board Packets submitted to members on: January 8, 2018 with a revision/ supplemental materials on January 9, 2018.

1/5/18 - Reminder of January 11th Meeting and call for materials

1/10/18- Question regarding Enrollment fees

1/10/18- Request for revisions to minutes

1/10/18- Draft of Proposed Parent Survey circulated

1/11/18- Summary of Feasibility Study coming to meeting

HOMEWORK/TO DO LIST:

Provide input on the “Whom to Contact List” to Christi Blum by Jan 17th.

CALENDAR ITEMS:

School Events: MKL break from 11 am January 12, 2018 to January 15, 2018

Catholic Schools Week January 29, 2018 to February 2, 2018

Next Board Meeting: Thursday, February 8, 2018 at 6 pm

Meeting Agenda

I. **Opening Prayer-** Suzi Furtwangler

II. **Pastor’s Report-** Fr. Jim Chelich

a. Capital Campaign Conclusion-

Fr. Jim announced that the Capital Campaign exceeded its \$500,000 by \$50,000 a mere two months after its commencement. The brevity of the campaign allegedly answered the criticisms that the campaign was not glamorous/ambitious enough. The campaign will secure the Saint Thomas infrastructure for the next 4 years. Half of the \$500,000 raised is intended to address school capital needs as designated by the campaign. The surplus \$50,000 has been designated to cover the anticipated cost of a new roof for the school and Ministry Center. A Mass of Thanksgiving would be offered that coming weekend for the success of the campaign.

b. Technology Fee Proposed-

Fr. Jim strongly encouraged implementing a technology fee to address rapidly rising after-purchase expenses associated with technology (for example: repairs, updates/upgrades, maintenance, etc.). Catholic Central reportedly has a fee of \$175 per student. Fr. Jim also suggested that perhaps families who donated to the capital campaign could have the technology fee rebated. The Board discussed this proposal later during the Finance Committee report.

c. Commentary on Welcome and Bishop’s Scholarships-

The parish continues to receive significant monies from the Welcome and Bishop’s scholarships. Fr. Jim views the scholarship programs as “tuition abatement” for parents rather than a source of revenues for the school. He remains dubious about whether Saint Thomas School (versus Saint Thomas parents) receives any benefit from the program. Information provided later in the meeting by the Superintendent of Catholic Schools however, indicated the Bishop’s plan provides long term vitality to Catholic schools (rather than a short term budget transfusions) by reversing the decades’ long decline in enrollment in Catholic Schools and thus halts/reverses the corresponding declining tuition revenues. No

report was made of families discontinuing Catholic education after the incentives/tuition abatement ended when any family's individual Welcome Scholarship expired.

d. Ongoing Operating Budget Concerns-

Fr. Jim remains concerned about uncertainties the school may face in the next three years and the effect that those uncertainties may have on the operating budget. Despite the success of the Capital Campaign, the parish offertory collection remains lower than projected. He senses a lot of good will in the community and views it as a key piece in Saint Thomas' financial stability. He approves of the proposal to disperse the duties of the assistant principal among existing staff for the present and re-evaluate the need to fill the position in the fall.

e. Inclusive Education-

Fr. Jim praised Suzi Furtwangler's vision and work making it possible for students with impairments to attend Saint Thomas. He is concerned about the financial sustainability of the Inclusion efforts. Fr. Jim mentioned that (unspecified) grants from 4 years ago had added half a million dollars to the Inclusion budget and that some (unspecified) 3 year grants were being looked into.

f. Holland Home-

Fr. Jim indicated that he thought the possibilities for the Holland Home properties were being well explored and laid out.

III. **Superintendent of Catholic Schools Report-** Dave Faber

a. Dave Faber began his presentation by thanking the Board for its service and presenting a review of Review of the Diocese Annual Report and a reminder of online Board training available from the Diocese. Dave reported that Diocesan surveys show that the question with the least favorable response Diocese-wide was "Does the school consistently share its financial plan with parents or staff?" Overall, the survey response rate from parents and staff was lower this year, but the student response rate increased. Dave also presented a Saint Thomas-specific Annual Report summarizing the Program Effectiveness Survey results from parents, staff and students and summarizing Operational Excellence (as measured by enrollment- Saint Thomas is close to maximizing its enrollment) and Financial Health (as measured by average class size and % of parish support in the school budget). To read the report, Dave explained that the survey responses were on a scale of 1 to 5 and that results showing a change of .1 or .2 were insignificant and may be due to a change in participants in the respondent pools, changes of .3 to .4 showed some change, but a change of .5 or greater would indicate significant change. But with scores in the 4s across all survey results, Saint Thomas continues to do well. He also presented the Diocese-wide results and Saint Thomas specific results of the Catholic School Board assessment showing that most Boards, including ours, have a favorable view and understanding of their roles.

b. Review of the Diocesan Board Summit-

Throughout his presentation, Dave focused on the movement towards becoming an alliance of Catholic Schools. An alliance will support the existing independence and subsidiarity of Catholic Schools, but also encourage the schools to come together and be stronger. The schools need to work towards more solidarity and Dave sees an opportunity for schools to increase Operational Vitality (traditionally a low success point) by coming together and sharing experiences and resources. The goal of the Summit was to bring school Boards together to help all of them grow. The survey results evaluating the summit showed favorable support for and response to the evening.

d. Diocesan Strategic Planning Updates-

Diocesan Strategic Plan is now complete and available in three versions: the detailed "map" model for decision makers like Boards, the brochure style distributed with Faith magazine offering a narrative of the plan, and the trifold sheet which is an introduction to the plan. Saint Thomas's Strategic Planning method of three open planning sessions is being used as a possible model for other schools at the Diocesan level.

e. Review of the Superintendent's Survey-

Dave shared the results of the survey rating his effectiveness as Superintendent. In response to the survey results, changes are planned to Infinite Campus.

f. Bishop's Educational Plan-

1. The Bishop wants to make Catholic Education available to as many students as possible by increasing enrollment at existing schools and by providing new schools to make Catholic education accessible to more of the population.

2. Saint Thomas has received a combined \$57,103 from the Bishop's/Welcome Scholarships to help families come to and afford a Catholic School. The goal of the programs is to increase enrollment (turning around a decades' long decline in the use of Catholic Schools and thus a decline in tuition revenues). The Welcome Scholarship is only available for the first year a family tries a Catholic school and is not tied to financial need. The Bishop's Scholarship is need based and renewable annually. The goal of the Welcome scholarships is not to provide the schools with more short term revenue- but rather to get families to commit to Catholic schools and provide long term stability to schools by increased enrollments and the resultant long term tuition revenues that may not have come to the school without the incentive to try Catholic education. No breakdown was offered on how much Saint Thomas receives in Welcome Scholarships versus Bishop's Scholarships.

3. Catholic Service Appeal (CSA) changes-

The Bishop will institute a 4% increase in the CSA assessments for parishes without schools. The increased revenue will be used to underwrite the cost of the Bishop's Scholarships and Welcome Scholarships. The increase is also supposed to help drive enrollment into Catholic Schools because contributions will be used to credit families from parishes without schools when they enroll their children in a Catholic school.

g. Diocese Development Planning-

The Diocese is committing to a three year plan accompanied by a total of \$750,000 to begin a Diocese-wide development plan to solidify the future of Catholic Schools and innovation. The Diocese anticipates starting with three positions and will post for applicants within the next month: a) a Major Gifts Manager, b) an Annual Appeals Coordinator, and c) a Development Database Manager.

h. Diocese-wide projects-

Dave mentioned that the Diocese generally is cash strapped right now due to a variety of exciting projects:

1. Needs for increased funding for seminarian training due to projected growth in the number of seminarians;
2. Construction and growth at Aquinas;
3. Construction and growth at St. Mary's Hospital;
4. Expansions at Catholic Central and West Catholic High Schools;
5. Saint Robert's School (aka: the new Catholic School in Ada); and
6. Creation of the Diocesan Development plan

j. Questions to the Superintendent-

In response to questions from Board members, Dave commented that Saint Thomas excels at creativity/vision, leadership, and the creation and/or rapid adoption of best practices and is always supportive to the Diocese. He noted that Saint Thomas is known for being a catalyst for change and growth, especially in innovative programming. The biggest challenge he sees is space since Saint Thomas has been at capacity for 15 years. The discussion of space started an extended discussion on the desirability, practicality, challenges, and affordability of acquiring property from Holland Home.

IV. **Concerns of Visitors**

- a. A parent had an attempted communication bounce back from the Board E-mail address. The account was tested and appeared to be in working order. The address provided in

the Pieces has been verified as well. The e-mail was to express concern was over dangerous driving in the parking lot when a group (possibly a men's group?) was leaving early one Wednesday morning as students were beginning to arrive.

b. The Finance Committee may be growing in membership. Members of the Finance Council have expressed an interest in attending Board of Education meetings. Matt Maczka is considering creating a Finance committee with members of the Finance Council and possibly Education Foundation members to provide consultation/information as appropriate.

V. **Approval of Consent Agenda Items-** John Schuring

a. The minutes from the December 13, 2017 regular meeting were motioned, seconded, and approved without amendment.

VI. **Administrator's Report-** Suzi Furtwangler

a. Administrative Update and Succession Planning-

1. The transition away from having an assistant principal has "seamless" due to faculty members who have voluntarily absorbed various components of the assistant principal's duties. Betsy Edgerton has taken on many of those duties including: making notification calls to families about various matters as well increased duties in marketing and touring of prospective students' families. So far, teachers have volunteered and not been forced to take on more services.

2. Suzi Furtwangler sought the Board's support for her proposition that the assistant principal position remain open for the rest of the school year. Rationale for this proposition included:

i. The main duties of the assistant principal have been distributed among willing faculty members. So far the changes have been effective. The role of assistant principal remains relevant and necessary, but time is needed to assess how and when to fill the role. The goal is to keep the assistant principal salary available as part of the budget for this year and next to allow the school to hire someone should the need arise and/or the right candidate emerge. Evening meetings that were previously shared with the assistant principal may be shared with Betsy Edgerton and some faculty leaders.

ii. Registration is an incredible busy time of year already and there is no time to spare to identify (much less effectively train) a new assistant principal.

iii. The goal is to find the right person for the position, not just any person. The available candidate pool would be limited in a mid-year search.

iv. The remaining budgeted salary for the assistant principal position could be applied to budgetary needs including making up any deficit and/or advancing the purchase of textbooks and/or addressing technology needs.

v. Families have relationships with existing staff assuming these duties.

vi. There is concern about timing the replacement properly- with enough time to learn and become comfortable in the role to be able to assume leadership when Suzi chooses to retire, but with a short enough time that the person does not receive training at Saint Thomas and then vault into the anticipated spate of principal vacancies that are projected in the next 3-7 years as current principals transition into retirement which could leave Saint Thomas to repeat the training process.

vii. Consideration is also being given to moving towards a "Dean of Students" option -i.e. someone who would be a good supportive "second" who might possess the skills and analytical abilities desired, but who would be uninterested or unqualified in assuming the leadership role of principal.

viii. The Board agreed to the proposal and to reassessing the decision quarterly and prior to the beginning of the next school year. A “Who to Contact List” was proposed to be distributed the change in semester so families would know how to reach out to the right person with any school-related ideas and questions.

VII. **Board Deliberations-** John Schuring/ Suzi Furtwangler

a. **2018-2019 Tuition Rate-** Matt Maczka

The Parish Finance Council agreed to the proposed tuition rate increases of 3% for grades K-8 and 1% for preschool. The 3% tuition raise aligns with the proposed 3% payroll increase. The Board was reminded that each .5% raise in tuition only generates about \$5,000 in income.

VIII. **Committees and Organizations: Reports and Action Items**

a. **Outreach & Development Committee-** Betsy Edgerton

1. The promotional campaign #WeAreSaintThomas is being followed by the Diocese and has gotten some attention outside the Diocese from shares on Facebook. A school in Jackson, MI has asked permission to copy the idea.

2. One Lap Time outreach will move from St. Robert’s to Heather Hills Nursing Home and will include Saint Thomas parents. The program will now be offered weekly rather than monthly and on Thursdays rather than Fridays. Lap Time will continue to be offered at Holland Home on Tuesdays as well.

3. A Summary of the feasibility study for the Ada Catholic School/ St. Robert’s school was distributed at the end of the meeting. The report summarized the projected demographics, the projected enrollment and its effect on other schools, and some of the decision factors. Permission was given by the Superintendent of Catholic Schools to share the whole report with the Board for planning purposes, provided the Board keeps the information confidential.

b. **Mission Effectiveness-** Jessica Poelma

In the interest of time, the Committee relied upon its written report.

c. **Curriculum Committee-** Jenni Little

The Curriculum Committee proposed a school wide survey modeled on the recent three question Parish-wide survey designed to obtain open-ended parent feedback on what families like at Saint Thomas and what they would like to see. Concerns raised in response to the proposed survey included: whether a survey was needed and would be answered; possible parental confusion between this survey and the year-end Diocesan survey; possible lowered participation in the Diocesan survey if the committee’s survey was issued first; possible challenges associated with an open-ended survey namely directing the results, tabulating and analyzing the results, and the ability to quantify, compare, and analyze annual results. Stacy Slomski and Jo Jones offered to provide copies former parent surveys they created/used. A suggestion was made to issue a blended survey with some multiple choice answer options for each question followed by a comment field for each question. Jenni planned to provide the Board’s feedback to the Committee and see if the Committee remained willing to develop and score the survey.

d. **Finance Committee-** Matt Maczka

1. Discussion of Registration Fees-

Registration fees generate approximately \$25,000 of the school’s budget. A question arose as to whether to move to a fee of \$75 per student for every student or to cap the enrollment fees at a max \$150 per family as previously done. The Board recommended maintaining the \$150 per family cap. The Board also discussed and recommended

continuing the proposed incentive for early registration for existing families by allowing the registration fee to be rolled into the next year's Smart Tuition payments. The Board also inquired whether the registration fees covered the clerical cost of the enrollment process, how many families registered but then did not attend, and how much revenue was might be lost in this process for no-shows/de-commits.

2. Draft Budget Introduced-

The goal is to present a 2018-2019 school year budget at 35.7% of parish offertory. The Board was reminded of the importance of accurately anticipating enrollment/tuition dollars so as not to throw the budget into surplus or deficit. More details will be discussed at future Board meetings before voting on a final Budget in April.

3. Discussion of how to keep and/or apply the remainder of the assistant principal salary in the current year's budget and in next year's budget-

The Administration and the Finance Chair recommend holding the budgeted funds for the assistant principal salary in the current budget in case the position needs to be filled. Due to the enrollment mix being different from projections, the school has a budget deficit this year. The funds budgeted for the Assistant principal's salary will first be applied to any remaining deficit at year end and then applied to either technology expenses or textbook purchases.

4. Technology Fee Discussion- Fr. Jim recommended institution a technology fee to assess the growing expenses associated with servicing/supporting, maintaining and updating the school's technology needs. Previously all technology funds (equipment, programming, and support, repairs, maintenance, and service/support) have come from the parish-wide capital campaign, but this being transitioned to the school budget, particularly as the needs are growing. Catholic Central reportedly has a \$175 per student technology fee. Jo Jones discussed that Corpus Christi previously used a joint field trip/technology fee, but ultimately found it more effective to factor those expenses into the tuition rate. The Board agreed that the Finance Committee and/or Administration should meet with Brian Cooper to request his help in determining the costs of technology expenses prior to further discussion/decisions about whether to implement a fee in future years.

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

The Committee referred the Board to its report for three upcoming action items: the need to update/clarify the Bylaws/Constitution; the need to receive plans for next year; and the need for help in "developing annual assumptions concerning the internal and external environments surrounding the educational ministries of the school".

f. **Building & Grounds Committee** - Tracy Bandlow
Deferred to the Holland Home Report.

g. **Holland Home**- John Schuring

The action group has asked Holland Home to consider selling the parking lot contiguous to the rear of the school/preschool playground space. The action group is striving to come up with a creative vision for what the Fulton/Carlton corner would look like if some or all of the current Holland Home property along Fulton were to be acquired. Holland Home has asked Saint Thomas to issue a proposal if the school is interested in some or all of the property. The action group wants Holland Home to reveal more of what contents it would be seeking in a proposal and to provide Saint Thomas with either the specific number (or a ballpark number) that it would take to acquire the property.

- h. **Fundraising/ Development**- John Schuring
Report deferred in the interest of time.
 - i. **Education Foundation**- Judi Serba
 - 1. More mini grants requests have been turned in including a request for 7 tablets for Holly Lake's classroom.
 - 2. The Education Foundation sponsoring an educational session for parents concerning the expanded availability of 529 plans for elementary and high school educational expenses.
 - h. **Boosters**- Amy Bocian
Nothing to report.
 - j. **Home and School**- Amy Ziemer
Nothing to report.
- IX. **Closing Prayer**- Suzi Furtwangler

ATTENDANCE:

Voting Members:

President, Board Effectiveness Committee chair, John Schuring: Present
Vice President, Finance Committee chair, Matt Maczka: Present
Secretary, Policy & Planning Committee, Christi Blum: Present
Development & Outreach co-chair, Bryan Rellinger: Present
Development & Outreach co-chair, George Sharpe: Excused
Mission Effectiveness chair, Jessica Poelma: Present
Curriculum Committee chair, Jenni Little: Present
Curriculum Committee, Stacy Slomski: Present
Policy & Planning Committee, Joanne Swan Jones: Present
Building and Grounds Committee chair, Tracy Bandlow: Present
Finance Committee, James Leonard: Present
, Chuck Rushmore: Present

Non-Voting Ex Officio Members and/or guests:

Additional Attendees: Dave Faber
Principal, Suzi Furtwangler: Present
Development & Outreach Dir., Betsy Edgerton: Present
Home & School President, Amy Ziemer: Excused
Co-coordinator of Finance, Marie Miller: Absent
Pastor, Fr. Jim Chelich: Present
Assistant Principal, (Vacant)0
Education Foundation Pres., Judi Serba: Present
Boosters President, Amy Bocian: Present
Dir. Religious Formation, Patti Reynolds: Absent

Proposed Schedule of Topics for the 2017- 2018 Year

August 30 -Retreat
September 14 -Facilities planning and annual goal setting
October 18(W) -Vote on Adoption of Strategic Plan
November 9 -Diocesan Board Training/ Board Summit at Cathedral Square
December 14(W) -Implications of Holland Home Move discussion
January 11 -Visit from the Superintendent of Catholic Schools
-Setting the tuition rate for the 2018-2019 school year
February 8 - Initial 2018-2019 Budget Discussions
- Ongoing Holland Home Property Discussion
-Continuing Strategic Planning
March 1 - 2018-2019 Budget Planning
-
-
-
April 12 -
May 10 -
June 14 -Year-end wrap up