

Saint Thomas the Apostle Board of Education Minutes from the Fifth Regular Meeting of the Board, Thursday, January 12, 2017

The meeting began at 6 p.m. and concluded prior to 8 p.m.

Board Packets submitted to members on: January 10, 2017

E-mails to members: -December 20, 2016 regarding the outcome of Tuition Rate Proposal from Matt Maczka,

-December 21-24 from Suzi Furtwangler (and responses from various members) regarding Technology Teacher departure,

-December 28, 2016, from Betsy Edgerton regarding Catholic Schools Week

-January 6, 2017 from Suzi Furtwangler on a confidential Diocesan matter

-January 8, 2017 from John Schuring regarding the January Board Meeting

HOMEWORK/TO DO LIST: None

CALENDAR ITEMS:

School Events: Catholic Schools Week from January 29, 2017 to February 5, 2017,

Preschool/Kindergarten Round Up on February 1, 2017

Re-Boot Boosters Meeting on February 2, 2017

Daddy/Daughter Dance on February 4, 2017

Super Sons Bowling on February 11, 2017

State of the School Meetings on March 2, 9, and 14, 2017

Next Board Meeting: Thursday, February 9, 2017, 6- 7 pm Proposed Topics from the schedule issued at the August retreat include: First reading of the proposed budget and to plan State of the School presentations for early March meetings

Next Committee Meeting(s):Please notify Christi Blum of any upcoming Committee meetings for inclusion in the minutes.

TAKE NOTE ITEMS: None.

CARRY OVER ITEMS: Continuing discussion on Strategic Planning

Meeting Agenda

- I. **Opening Prayer-** Fr. Jim Chelich
- II. **Visitor Communications-** Fr. Jim Chelich
 - a. Fr. Jim's cancer is in remission and no further treatment needed at present.
 - b. Fr. Jim plans to continue his "Open Questions" sessions with students.
 - c. Fr. Jim is concerned as offertory giving is falling beneath anticipated levels for the current budget year. His appeal to increase giving in October did not generate the hoped for response. He worries the decline in giving may continue into next year and

therefore influence the planning for next year's budget. He announced his plans to encourage increased giving by: mailing information to parishioners, speaking on the topic during his homilies, and by discussing the topic in the bulletin and in the Pieces. Father suggested that people should consider an annual increase in one's charitable giving, (just as employees are given a raise or COLA at work, they should, in turn, increase their donations to the church by the same percent of increase they received.

- d. Fr. Jim shared 2 proposed samples of his offertory campaign with the Board. The first was titled, "Offertory Mailing" and the other, "Our Support of Our Parishioners' Children Attending Saint Thomas the Apostle Catholic School". Father explained that the parish of Saint Thomas goes beyond the Bishop's call to make Catholic Education **available for most**, to make Catholic education **available to everyone** who wants it, not only those with the appropriate income level... However, one must participate in parish life (Attending mass weekly and offering financial support to the extent one is able) to get the benefit of the support (of the lower parishioner tuition rate) the parish offers.
- e. Fr. Jim also spoke to the Board regarding confidential topics proposed by the diocese. Significant Board discussion ensued. John Schuring proposed writing a letter to the diocese addressing this confidential topic.
- f. No other visitor communications.

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

- a. The November 10, 2016 Minutes were motioned, seconded, & unanimously approved.
- b. The December 12, 2016 Minutes were motioned, seconded, & unanimously approved.

IV. **Principal's Report-** Suzi Furtwangler

- a. A proposal for Homework Haven rates to increase by 3.5% next year. The current rate charged for Homework Haven is below the market rate. For simplicity, the increase would be the same percentage of increase as this year's proposed tuition rate increase.
- b. Principal's explanation of her New Year's Notes to parents: Suzi wanted to communicate with parents on the topics ASAP.
- c. Update provided on technology teacher's position: Two resumes were received, but one candidate "couldn't go forward". The other candidate was interviewed and offered the position, but rejected the offer because of some of the terms of the offer including wanted to start later and differences in salary and permanence of the position. The school is still trying to strike a deal with the candidate. Until a permanent teacher is found, Drew Anderson will sub. In the meantime the position was reposted locally. Suggestions were made to post the position more extensively, both at other area colleges and regional teaching colleges.
- d. Streamlined registration packets were announced. As an incentive for prompt registration, existing families were offered 1) reduced registration fees that 2) could also be deferred to be paid in the fall as part of a family's Smart Tuition payments. A another new option on the registration form was for parents, who are willing and financially able to do so, to decline/opt out of receiving the parish support differential between tuition charged and the actual cost of providing the education and thereby offer that savings to the parish.

- e. Enrollment update: 44 Eighth grade students will graduate. It is anticipated 2-4 students will dis-enroll for the 6th grade year to participate in alternate schooling opportunities offered at the Zoo/Blanford Nature Center. First grade is expected to be a large class, even if some Kindergarten students do not move forward to first grade.
- f. Preliminary discussion (with this Board) regarding the desire and efforts to become more inclusive to accept any student regardless of their educational needs, including preparatory steps already taken over the last several years in this direction. This effort is in response to several Saint Thomas families who would like to have all of their children attend Saint Thomas. Accepting all students regardless of educational need (cognitive impairments or physical challenges) would be a unique offering in the diocese and has a strong moral rectitude argument in its favor. Concerns presented included the cost and feasibility. Saint Thomas has been partnering with the Christian Learning Center (CLC) to further this desire, as the CLC has helped Christian schools become totally inclusive. The discussion included suggestions on additional models to consider and possible partners with whom to collaborate as the school explored and continues to plan for this possibility. Family Tree Therapies and St. Brigid of Kildare were mentioned as options to look at.
- g. The Board received a progress report on the status of obtaining a new writing curriculum: The Education Foundation gift of an additional \$7,000+ will be applied to obtain a new writing curriculum. Jennie Micus spoke to the faculty regarding the IEW curriculum. The faculty is considering three possible writing curriculums and plans to have a new curriculum in place next year. Input on the new curriculum will also be sought from the Diocesan Assistant Superintendent, Jill Annable.
- h. As part of the discussions regarding the technology position, the looming teacher shortage due to declining interest in studying Education over the past 10 years was discussed. The shortage is predominate in the western United States, but has begun affecting rural Michigan too. The shortage first showed in the unavailability of substitute teachers and is starting to show in full time positions too. Student teachers. Ways of dealing with the shortage were discussed: including using student teachers as substitutes/ provisional teachers, seeking variances in teacher certifications (emergency certifications, alternate certifications or seeking waivers for non-certified teachers). A Concern about salary disparity with young teachers was voiced. Again, in terms of filling positions (like Technology and Spanish this year), there was discussion of casting a broader net for applicants: by posting jobs at other teaching colleges, other local colleges, and/or seeking out other people who can teach, even if they are not formally trained as teachers. There was also discussion of how best to utilize what support may be available from GRPS Shared Time by dividing needs according to grade level and seeking subs as well as full time teachers.

V. **Committee Reports:**

- a. Outreach & Development Committee- Betsy Edgerton
 - 1. A written report submitted because of an attendance conflict. The report included a

request for servers for CWS Sunday, an announcement of the upcoming Tea with Fr. Jim and a request for follow up calls to prospective parents to promote the school.

b. Mission Effectiveness Committee- Jessica Poelma

1. Jessica announced the collaboration between the Mission Effectiveness Committee and the Curriculum Committee to develop a long term plan to systematically evaluate and update curriculum planning. She also announced plans to develop a model for “what student servants/ student leadership through a Catholic lens” would look like at each grade level.

c. Curriculum Committee- Jenni Little

1. Jennie Micus spoke at a faculty meeting on the writing curriculum.

2. The committee is attempting to create a “Welcome Home” panel of Saint Thomas alumni attending West Catholic and Catholic Central. The goal is to ask the high school students to give the 7th and 8th grade advice about preparing for High School and to give feedback/analysis to faculty and curriculum committee about how well prepared they felt for high school based on their education at Saint Thomas. This event is planned as part of Catholic Schools Week, but there has been a low response to the invitation from the alumni. Therefore, an alternate plan to seek the high school students’ input that consists of bringing lunch (like Subway) to the alumni at the high schools in exchange for feedback has been proposed.

3. The process of looking at the scope and sequence of textbook adaption raises the need to revise the technology committee in order to obtain continuous review of the technology program. Suzi informed the Board that currently, Brian Cooper has been: surveying teachers for technology needs/wants, monitoring the condition of the Saint Thomas equipment and would, ideally, partner with technology teacher to support the needs of the program. A proposal was made to see if Brian would like the support of a committee to assist in his review efforts and to develop a plan for the future?

VI. **Board Deliberations and Committee Action Items-** John Schuring/ Matt Maczka/Suzi Furtwangler

a. Tuition Rate Increase: Matt Maczka/ Suzi Furtwangler

A significant portion of the meeting discussed the outcome of the Board’s presentation to the Finance Council recommending a 2.5% tuition increase for the 2017-2018 year. The Finance Council responded with its preference that the Board to approve a 3.5% tuition increase for the 2017-2018 year. The finance council is concerned due to the decrease in offertory giving mentioned by Fr. Jim (offertory collections funds are applied to fund up to 37% of the school’s budget) as well as additional expenses incurred by the school due to having to pay for salaries and benefits previously paid for by GRPS Shared Time. The practical reality that the Finance Council controls the bottom line and must approve all school spending was acknowledged.

Significant discussion ensued with many Board members expressing concern about the counter proposal when the basis for the lower rate increase already incorporated conservative budget figures (Counting on low enrollment and high expenses) as well as incorporation of a number of allowances to cover “worst case scenarios”. This led to a

related extended discussion about school budget goals and priorities, how to right size the school year budget to address those goals and priorities, how to maximize budget spending on behalf of the school, and the possibility for a “true up” budget review process in the future.

- b. A motion to amend the proposed tuition rate increase for the 2017-2018 school year from 2.5% to 3.5% was made, seconded, and ultimately approved by a majority vote.
- c. Discussion on Strategic Planning: Suzi proposed that the Strategic Planning should be chiefly done at Committee level and that that committee should not just be a subset of the Board alone. Discussion was held on the fact that the process is not “starting from scratch”, but a matter of putting things together. Discussion was held as to how to structure the committee meetings for maximum input and efficiently based on similar efforts at the diocesan level and by the Education Foundation. Leadership of the committee is still sought.

VII. **Closing Prayer-** Suzi Furtwangler

ATTENDANCE:

Voting Members:

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

Non-Voting Ex Officio Members:

Additional Attendees: None	Pastor, Fr. Jim Chelich: Partial
Principal, Suzi Furtwangler: Present	Assistant Principal, Liz Peters: Present
Home & School President, Amy Ziemer: Present	Education Foundation Pres., Judi Serba: Present
Development/Outreach, Betsy Edgerton: Excused	Dir. of Rel. Formation, Patti Reynolds: Absent

Proposed Schedule of Topics for the 2016- 2017 Year

August 27	-Retreat
September 8	-Strategic planning begins
October 13	-Budget process begins
November 10	-Propose tuition for 2017-2018 year
December 1	-Proposed social meeting
January 12	-MAP results, -Possible class/ teacher configurations, programming, and marketing,
February 9	-First reading of the proposed budget, -Plan State of the School presentation
March 9	-Review Board term charts, suggest and contact possible new Board candidates establish Executive Committee for following year -Begin review process for principal (to be complete by May Board meeting) -Second reading of the proposed budget -State of the School meetings for parents
April 19	-Approve budget
May 11	-Vote and welcome new officers and Board members -Year-end wrap up