

Saint Thomas the Apostle Board of Education Minutes from the Ninth Regular Meeting of the Board on Thursday, May 11, 2017

The meeting began at 6 p.m. and concluded at approximately: 7:45 p.m.

Board Packets submitted to members on: May 5, 2017 with minutes supplied separately on May 10, 2017.

E-mails to members:

April 20, 2017: Annual Diocesan school board survey forwarded to members

April 25, 2017: E-mail reporting on adoption of proposed budget by Parish Finance Council

May 2, 2017: Meeting reminder

May 5, 2017: Meeting reminder

May 9, 2017: Diocesan enrollment update

HOMEWORK/TO DO LIST:

- **Diocesan Board Survey:** Please complete the survey that was forwarded on April 20.

- **Auction:** Think of approximately 5 compelling projects in the \$5,000.00 range for the Twist Tables for Auction in fall 2018 to present at the September Board meeting.

- **Strategic Plan:** Continue to think of ways to implement improvements for the Board identified goals as part of the Strategic Plan. The 5 areas for improvement came from the Accreditation Study and are: 5.1, 5.6, 10.2, 10.3 and 10.7. Please see the Minutes from the April Board of Education meeting for additional details.

CALENDAR ITEMS:

Next Board Meeting: Board Retreat focusing on the Strategic Plan on Saturday, August 19, 2017.

Meeting Agenda

I. **Opening Prayer-** Suzi Furtwangler

II. **Visitor Communications-**

a. **Multi-age Classrooms** remain a hot topic among parents. A higher number of teacher requests are anticipated this year.

b. **Twist Tables** for the 2018 Auction- Carla Grant

Carla Grant requested that the Board identify and designate 5 compelling (and promotable) projects that would be supported by Twist Tables at Auction in fall of 2018. While there is no set dollar amount, a rough guideline is 5 projects of approximately \$5,000.00 each. Carla will return at the first regular meeting in September to hear the Board's ideas.

b. **Strategic Planning: Master Site Plan Vision-** David Yocca

David Yocca works as landscape architect and planner specializing in leading-edge, sustainable, site development with an emphasis on land use and landscape. His experience is primarily with park districts and towns. However, he has worked with some churches and provided the Board with an example of the \$2 million proposal that his firm developed for the Church of the Holy Spirit in Lake Forest, Illinois. He attended the final Strategic Planning meeting and learned of the school's concerns with space. He offers his (and his firm's) services in developing a Site Master Plan for the facilities (school and parish) at Saint Thomas as a way to organize, prioritize, and align wish list

items with attempts to generate support, enthusiasm, and funding for Saint Thomas's facilities plans resulting from the Strategic Planning process. He sees connections between financial development and facilities development/enhancement. He indicated that while everything was being evaluated as part of the Strategic Planning process, it would be prudent to develop integrated and comprehensive plans for partnerships between the entities that would support the Site Master Plan.

David advised that a good Site Master Plan would be: 1) comprehensive, i.e. look at site/building repairs, renovations, and replacements as a part of a great whole rather than piecemeal and to gather/document institutional knowledge of the needs/hopes/plans; 2) have long term vision, 3) consider programming and alternative range needs/uses of the facility and grounds; 4) build upon existing initiatives and priorities; 5) consult all interested parties: students, parents, parishioners, staff, etc. to obtain all perspectives and achieve total awareness; and 6) require a committee or subcommittee to work on the plan.

He sees site planning as a natural marriage between faith and environmental stewardship as Pope Francis has urged in his environmental encyclical "Laudato Si". He presented that Saint Thomas has an opportunity to model innovative site updates to the Diocese and the rest of Grand Rapids. He stated that much of the process can be started without spending money. He offered that some of the aspects of the Site Master Plan can be adapted from his past work to reduce expenses to Saint Thomas. His proposal assumed his firm would be hired to do the planning/work that he could not donate because of other's involvement. David concluded by offering his participation in whatever manner would be helpful.

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

a. The minutes from the April 19, 2017 meeting were motioned, seconded and approved after a change correcting the salary increase to 3% (not 3.3%).

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

a. Suzi Furtwangler, Liz Peters, and Holly Lake are working to develop an **on-boarding document** to assist new teachers in recognizing some of the unspoken, but highly valued, aspects of the expectations and culture at Saint Thomas to assist new hires in assimilating.

b. **Diocesan Feasibility Study-** Suzi Furtwangler and John Schuring were invited to participate in initial discussions with the Milter consultant regarding the Diocesan new school feasibility study on June 2. An update letter regarding the Diocesan Feasibility Study and its proposed schedule for issuing the study and reporting the results was included in the principal's written report. The feasibility study report is scheduled to be presented to the Bishop in late October (the week of October 23rd).

c. **Education Foundation Funds Use-** \$8,000.00 from the Education Foundation will be spent on Resource Department items including sensory items. The plans are to continue to grow the Resource Department slowly. Over the next five years the school anticipates that no more than 10 special needs students will be enrolled. Additionally, the written report indicated that an interested party may begin to seek funding on behalf of the school for Resource Department supplies, resources, and aide salaries.

d. **Kindergarten Hiring-** A question arose as to whether the school could/should move from advertising the kindergarten position at 80% to 100%. Because the position is dependent upon both classroom enrollment and enrichment enrollment for this year (and there is concern about the long term sustainability of the current large kindergarten classes), the position was advertised as 80% time. At 80% time the

candidate is eligible for full health insurance and other employment benefits. The pros and cons (optics, desirability, sustainability, etc.) of whether an applicant would apply for a nearly full time position were discussed including whether applicants would even apply for the position if full time employment opportunities are available elsewhere. Response to the concerns included: some experienced educators may prefer not to be full time, the position did offer the full time benefit package, and that the position was accepted this 2016-2017 year at 80% (by a teacher who will transfer to 100% in the 2018-2019 year). Candidates will be told that the position could expand into a full time position depending on enrollment. The candidate could also be offered the After Care Supervisor position, if the candidate seeks additional hours or income.

e. **Salary Steps-** At a prior Board meeting the topic of revising the teacher's pay scale arose. The current scale has not been revised since the 2008-2009 school year. As the teacher shortage continues and the diocese considers the possibility of a new Catholic grade school maintaining fair and competitive compensation will be an increasingly important tool to recruit and retain highly effective teachers. Although teachers at Saint Thomas are well compensated within diocesan standards, the salary lags significantly behind what teachers earn in our regional Kent Intermediate School District (KISD) public school system.

Teachers at Saint Thomas are compensated based on a pre-calculated matrix system referred to as "steps." The matrix establishes a base salary at the point that a teacher is hired based upon the teacher's level of education (Bachelor's, Master's, or Doctorate degree) and level of experience. Pay is advanced annually by consulting this matrix of pre-determined "steps" that allow for increases based: 1) on a ratio accounting for the number of years taught and 2) for jumps based on receiving additional credit hours towards the next degree (Master's or Doctorate). Raises approved by the Board of Education and Parish Finance Council are in addition to the advances on the "steps" matrix. The rate at which a teacher advances between steps at Saint Thomas is also significantly behind the rate of advancement at KISD: it takes three years for a teacher at Saint Thomas to advance compared to one year in KISD. Suzi Furtwangler stated that the targeted compensation goal has always been for Saint Thomas to be at 85% of what the same teacher might earn if working for KISD and that Saint Thomas is currently behind on this goal.

Not all diocesan schools use a "steps" compensation system. The principal at Saint Thomas has some discretion on where place an incoming teacher on the matrix. The goal of the "steps" matrix was to incentivize teachers to actively work on continuing their own education (Master's or Doctorate degrees) within a reasonably compact period of time. Issues with the current "steps" matrix include: spacing the "steps" to adequately incentivize continuing education (one gets a step only at 18 credit hours of education out of the 36 credit hours needed for a Master's) and that experienced teachers can be indirectly financially penalized under this system. Teachers who were hired in when the matrix had a lower base level continue to advance without revisions to the base level at which they were hired. Over time, the new base has risen faster than the ratio compensating teaching experience has. In practice, some of the most experienced teachers receive little more compensation than some of the newer teachers. It appears that the administration may keep a "steps" matrix, but would like to update the base. Help was requested to contact the KISD for information to calculate a new base and to consider revising the current Saint Thomas "steps" system.

- f. The Principal's written report also included:
- an enrollment update: at least 348 students (a update from after the report was written indicates 351 students) with a wait list for 1st, 3rd and 7th grades;
 - a document from the diocese showing the financial support the diocese has provided Saint Thomas families this year. The report indicates a total benefit of the BCSI (since 2015) of \$102,743.92. Saint Thomas contends that BCSI program did not benefit the school or parish, but rather is a benefit neutral fund shifting because the Diocese supplying funds that the parents would have otherwise paid. Additionally, tracking by Saint Thomas indicated that there are not any new enrollments exclusively from the BCSI as Saint Thomas was recruiting well with its own personalized approach to families prior to the initiative which relies more on mass marketing techniques.
 - the continuation of ACRE testing (an assessment of faith knowledge, practices and perceptions) administered to 5th and 8th grade students;
 - a summary of the first two (of three total) strategic planning general meetings.

V. **Committee Reports:**

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

Enrollment is strong at 351.

b. **Mission Effectiveness Committee-** Jessica Poelma

Jessica Poelma reported that further implementation of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) is underway. Ultimately the program will need to have 3 connected atriums corresponding to the three developmental levels of the program. Ideally, the atriums need to be moved from the basement because of space limitations (each atrium has different needs) and because CGS is a showcase program. It was queried whether the school space currently dedicated as a small chapel could be used for the atriums as it would maintain the chapel's use for theological/ sacred purposes and increase use of a valued but underused space.

c. **Curriculum Committee-** Jenni Little (by phone)

Additional work on CGS and Theology of the Body programs will occur over the summer. The committee has received a text book Google Document. Over the summer the committee plans to use the document as it refines the text book/curriculum review and replacement schedule. There is also talk of adding additional educational subscriptions from IXL.

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

a. **Finance: 2017-2018 Budget Approved by Finance Council-** John Schuring

John Schuring summarized the school budget approval process on Matt Maczka's behalf. The finance council approved the school budget as presented without changes including: a 3% salary increase, \$12,000 for programming, and an agreement that the school can make further revisions to the budget in the fall based on enrollment changes. In order to get the budget approved, the disenrollment cushion (which was instituted a number of years ago in response to the then ongoing recession) was decreased.

Concerns over the parish meeting its target for the Catholic Services Appeal (CSA) linger. A renewed suggestion that that school families could be made aware of the importance of contributing to the CSA was made.

John further noted that "budget snapshots" will be featured next year as a regular part of the Board meetings, so that adjustments to maximize full use of the budget can be planned throughout the year as needed.

b. **Board Terms-** John Schuring

Since no one has notified the President of his/her intent to step away or of an expired term, it is assumed that all current Board members will return in the fall.

c. **Strategic Planning-** Suzi Furtwangler/ John Schuring

i. Suzi Furtwangler, Liz Peters, and Jo Jones were thanked for their prominent roles in the Strategic Planning process. The process was affirmed as having value.

ii. The principal promised that the strategic plan would be available to the Board by fall. (An extension will be sought from the Diocese.) Offers to help with the Plan to that it could be circulated sooner among the Board for thoughts on implementation and developing talking points were made. The Board wants to present a unified vision for the plan and develop a set of cohesive talking points for how the Plan should unfold over the next 5 years. The Board feels that families need to see movement and progress towards the goals and concerns raised in the planning process. The Board will dedicate its retreat to the Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan will be presented to families at the start of the 2017-2018 school year (unveiled at the Taste of Saint Thomas) when all parties would be energized and looking ahead.

d. **Next Board Meeting-**

i. As the strategic plan would not be completed in time for the Board to vote on whether to approve the plan at a June Meeting and no one was stepping away from the Board, a June meeting for either business or in recognition of member's completed service became unnecessary.

ii. A retreat date of Saturday, August 10, 2017, was chosen at the meeting. (Please note that although the proposed calendar in the year end Pieces listed the Retreat as the 19th, the school office verified the retreat is on the August 10th.)

VII. **Closing Prayer-** Suzi Furtwangler

ATTENDANCE:

Voting Members:

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

Non-Voting Ex Officio Members and/or Guests:

Additional Attendees: Carla Grant for Auction and David Yocca for Strategic Planning Visioning
Pastor, Fr. Jim Chelich: Absent
Principal, Suzi Furtwangler: Present
Education Foundation Pres., Judi Serba: Present
Home & School President, Amy Ziemer: Absent
Co-ordinator of Finance, Marie Miller: Absent
Assistant Principal, Liz Peters: Excused
Development & Outreach, B. Edgerton: Present
Boosters President, Amy Bocian: Absent
Dir. Religious 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