

Saint Thomas the Apostle Board of Education Minutes from the Third Regular Meeting of the Board, Thursday, Thursday, November 10, 2016

The meeting began at 6 pm and concluded at approximately 8:15 pm.

Board Packets submitted to members: Minutes on November 4, 2016, Principal's Packet on November 9, 2016

E-mails to members: October 19, 2016 (regarding technology position remaining unfilled) October 20, 2016 (regarding enrollment) and October 24, 2016 (regarding technology position being filled)

HOMEWORK/TO DO LIST:

- 1) Be prepared to review proposed tuition rates information that will be submitted by e-mail. If Board members have any questions, suggestions and/or comments on the proposed rates, please submit them by e-mail prior to the next meeting. The goal is to be finished with deliberation prior to the December meeting so that all Board members are prepared to vote on the tuition rates at the December meeting.
- 2) Suzi submitted confidential (for now) information regarding the schools' strategic planning process on November 18, 2016. Board members are to supplement items in the relevant areas designated "TBD".
- 3) Board members are also to suggest possible candidates who should be invited to populate the Strategic Planning Committee and prayerfully consider leadership of said committee. This will be different from the standing Policy and Planning Committee.
- 4) Reply to survey regarding dates for December Board meeting.
- 5) For the President only: thank and respond to Jennie Micus for her presentation on the writing curriculum.

CALENDAR ITEMS:

School Events: Teacher Conferences on November 17 and November 22, 2016; Giving "Too-sday" on November 29, 2016; Advent by Candlelight on December 2, 2016; a Posada will held December 15, 2016

Next Board Meeting: On December 9th the business portion of the meeting was changed to Monday, December 12, 2016 at 6 pm in the Faculty Lounge (or by phone for those who cannot be present on short notice) due to the Finance Council moving their meeting from December 15 to Tuesday, December 13, 2016. The meeting will be held on Wednesday, December 14, 2016. The previously chosen date of December 1, 2016 conflicts with the band concert. The Board needs to meet before the December 15, 2016 parish Finance Council meeting to vote on proposed tuition rates for the 2017-2018 school year so that those rates can be presented at the Finance Council meeting. Suzi sent a survey to determine possible December Board dates. The meeting will be half business and half social. A social gathering will be held on Thursday, December 14, 2016 at Derby Station.

Next Committee Meeting(s): Please provide Committee meeting dates to Christi for inclusion in the minutes.

TAKE NOTE ITEMS:

Liz is making PDF copies of the Diocesan Draft Strategic Plan which will be stored on the Board's Google

drive. The draft plans may be useful as the goal for the Saint Thomas strategic plan is for it to dovetail with the Diocesan plan. The PDF colored copies are enlargements of the four areas of Tactics for Strategic Priorities delineated on the back side of the Diocesan Draft Plan/Map: A Plan for Catholic School Vitality from the Bridging Faith and Future Initiative. The four areas are: 1) Catholic Culture and Mission, 2) Programmatic Excellence, 3) Affordability and Accessibility, and 4) Stewardship and Sustainability.

CARRY OVER ITEMS: Continued discussions on strategic planning, setting tuition rates, and discussion of a technology committee are anticipated.

Meeting Agenda

- I. **Opening Prayer-** Fr. Jim Chelich
- II. **Local Superintendent's (aka Pastor's) Report--** Fr. Jim Chelich
Fr. Jim spoke on three topics, but asked that one topic be treated as confidential in the short term. Father also mentioned his pride in the championship performances of the volleyball and football teams.
 - A. Fr. Jim spoke again on his desire to turn challenges into opportunities. In particular, he addressed the challenges faced in the Spanish and Technology positions this year due to Grand Rapids Public Schools' failure to maintain adequate teachers in the Shared Time program. Fr. Jim stated that this challenge has caused him to begin looking at the budget "across the board" for the parish and school. He concluded there is a need for increased giving and stated his intention to revitalize a stewardship appeal in January.
 - B. Fr. Jim spoke on his desire to build a strong sense of identity in each child. He therefore will be submitting a series of three letters in the Pieces newsletter. He is also preparing an evening presentation to inform parents of how to talk to their children about their bodies. Fr. Jim intends to address the children's identity as a whole as well as to fight potential gender identity issues. Fr. Jim sees that the development of children's individual identities is under attack from the isolation children may face. In their isolation, children may receive undue and improper influence from unhealthy beliefs on the internet that the children then decide to appropriate for him/her self. Fr. Jim sees a need to ground each child in his/her objective reality (i.e., "This is the body I have been given, with the following traits: height, coloring, gender, talents, etc.") and then to present to the child the subjective reality of who each child is and who each child may become. (i.e., "This is what I can do with my objective reality.")
- III. **Approval of Consent Agenda Items-** John Schuring
 - a. Approval of the October 13, 2016 meeting minutes. A clarification was proposed that Board members should speak at Tuesday Talks sometime after January with the goal of encouraging parent participation on Board committees. After that clarification was acknowledged the minutes were motioned, seconded, and adopted.
- IV. **Administrator's (aka Principal's) Report-** Suzi Furtwangler
 - a. The Principal's written report was used as a springboard for Suzi's presentation and further questioning by the Board.

- b. Due to a large graduating class of 44 eighth grade students, **projected enrollment** is conservatively projected to be at 340 for the 2017-2018 school year. Enrollment for the current 2016-2017 school year is 358.
- c. A discussion was held on the **Shared Time Program**. The Board was informed that the Spanish teacher and the technology teacher are considering applying to be Shared Time teachers next year. This would help the budget and the teachers since GRPS would pay those salaries (removing them from the Saint Thomas budget) and the salaries offered by GRPS are higher than those Saint Thomas can offer.
- d. At the Deanery meeting other Catholic schools discussed having similar issues with the Shared Time Program this year, including: vacancies for their Shared Time positions, lack of help with substitute teachers for the vacant Shared Time positions, and the sense that some of the instruction provided through Shared Time fell short of expectations in terms of either the teacher's qualifications or performance. The schools at the Deanery meeting questioned whether the Diocese should form its own pool of teachers or whether the program could be amended so that the Diocese could provide a pool of teachers to the Shared Time program in the hopes of making better quality teachers available.

A brief overview of the Shared Time program was provided. Shared Time is a program run by Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS) that provides a pool of "special" subject teachers to the non-public schools based on "special" subjects taught in the public schools: Art, Music, Physical Education, Technology and Foreign Language. The premise is that due to the specialty nature of the subject taught, a teacher might not be able to find full time employment at any one school. In exchange for providing and managing this pool of specialty teachers, GRPS is allowed to "count" the non-public school students as students within the public school system. GRPS uses the "count" as its basis to claim those educational tax dollars allocated by the state for each "counted" student and applies the tax dollars to fund the Shared Time program costs. A teacher would indicate if s/he wishes to participate in the Shared Time program versus teaching in the public schools, but cannot be forced to leave the Shared Time program to teach exclusively in the public schools when there is a teacher shortage in the public schools (or vice versa).

A Shared Time teacher is considered to be a public school teacher and is hired, paid, receives benefits from, and is supervised by GRPS and is subject to the GRPS rules and curriculum, even if that teacher teaches exclusively at a non-public school, such as Saint Thomas. These Shared Time teachers are technically are not part of the faculty of the school where they teach. As such, these Shared Time teachers cannot and do not participate in faculty meetings at the non-public school(s) and may not be asked to help with non-teaching duties such as: recess and lunch duty, car lines, etc. Moreover, Shared Time teachers, who may themselves be Catholic, are not allowed to openly participate in the faith life of a religious non-public school community, such as the one at Saint Thomas.

Saint Thomas has participated in the Shared Time Program for a long time (approximately 20 years), has an excellent overall relationship with the program (that has been tested this year). Despite the headaches of participation in the program this year, financial reality (the cost of providing a teacher's salary and benefits could *start* at approximately \$50,000 per teacher per year) compels Saint Thomas to continue to participate in the Shared Time Program to the extent possible.

- e. Grammatical changes to the draft student sports contracts were provided. It was also recommended that the student sports contract be sent to all fifth through eighth grade students (rather than just athletes as initially proposed) to re-emphasize the importance of maintaining good grades and turning in work in a timely manner to all students. Discussion also clarified the timing of when a student would be determined ineligible to practice and play sports.
- f. Saint Thomas recently received a gift of \$15,000 in stock with the provision that the gift was to be used for Science, Technology, Engineering and/or Math (S.T.E.M.) needs. The donor was willing for the gift to be applied to programming and to help fund the salary of the technology teacher this year (due to the Shared Time issues discussed previously). The school is considering purchasing a coding program called Tynker that the students would be able to use at school and access from home. At liquidation, the stock had increased in value from \$15,000 to \$23,000.
- g. The Board considered a proposal to add a fee based open gym period each morning starting after Thanksgiving. A teacher (several are interested) would be paid to supervise students from 7 a.m. to and 7:45 a.m. each morning. This program will aid parents who need to drop off students prior to 7:45. A discussion on the fees to be charged recommended moving from the proposed two rate plan (a flat rate for one child or flat rate per family pricing) to a base rate for the first child and a small fee for each additional child using the service. The amendment would prevent smaller families from being charged disproportionately for the gym period, while maintaining affordability for larger families.
- h. As a byproduct of the open gym discussion, it was mentioned that the rates for Homework Haven (\$ 0.98/ per hour average paid) may be re-evaluated to better reflect fair market rates for the service provided.
- i. New ways of partnering with the Education Foundation were discussed. Due to the successful funding of the Tuition Angel fund at Auction (\$121,000 was raised at auction, but those monies can ONLY be used for tuition support), Saint Thomas may not need to petition the Education Foundation for supplemental tuition support for the next two years. It was hoped that the monies the Foundation currently uses to support tuition could be reallocated to other school needs. Proposed alternate avenues of support from the Education Foundation in the Principal's report included: teacher bonuses; teacher salary assistance, especially for Spanish and Technology; books, materials and subscriptions for Next Gen Science Standards/STEM, writing curriculum, coding software, additional technology, etc.

Judi indicated that the Foundation is willing and excited to help bring new curriculums and programming to the students as supplementing educational support was ultimately one of the goals the Foundation had at its creation. A formal proposal would need to be made to the Foundation for any monies sought. The Foundation is less willing to help with staffing related expenses such as faculty salary and bonuses, but would consider doing so in a true crisis. Thanks to the Education Foundation for providing an additional \$7,278.00 for programming to be used this year!

- j. Suzi's sons have been donating advertising (given to them as a perk of their employment) to the school. Analytic help is sought to review the statics generated from these online ads. A parent with a technology background who is seeking further involvement with the school was identified. The parent will be approached to determine his willingness to assist with analytics from Saint Thomas' online presence.
- k. As a later tangent to the Board's discussion of GRPS teachers, curriculum changes, and meeting date discussions, the Board also heard about the discontinuation of the Christmas Vesper's program, changes to the musical Spring Program, and a parent proposed and organized introduction of a Posada procession.

V. Visitor Communications-

- a. Jennie Micus presented her thoughts on the need for a change in the writing curriculum. Jennie relayed that the middle school Language Arts teacher, Mrs. Zoppa, and other faculty members have had difficulty finding a good writing curriculum and therefore are using "piecemeal" supplements to strengthen the current writing curriculum. Jennie is on the curriculum committee, has taught writing in grades K-8, and has taught writing when she home schooled. In addition, Jennie has also volunteered in the Publishing Center at school and seen the strengths and weakness of Saint Thomas students' current writing. Jennie sees that the students possess a strong love of writing, but perceives weaknesses in the underlying structures of the students' writing. She proposes combining effective teaching with an effective curriculum. She indicated that an effective writing curriculum incorporates the structure of language, vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, varied sentence structure, knowledge of the part of speech and how to employ them, and an understanding that writing will take different forms for different purposes. (For example: a scientific report's style differs from that employed in a persuasive essay or in creative writing). She also presented that an effective curriculum is consistent from grade to grade, builds a knowledge base early, and then challenges students with increased depth and complexity as they grow in confidence and ability.
- b. Jennie proposed adoption of a K-8 curriculum from the Institute for Excellence in Writing (I.E.W.). In addition to her presentation, Jennie provided Board members with a folder with sample writing curriculum materials. Jennie stated that she would be sending an accompanying e-mail to the Board secretary for distribution to Board members. Jennie sent her e-mail on November 16, 2016 and it was forwarded to Board members on November 18, 2016. A subsequent e-mail from Suzi indicated that a sample curriculum from I.E.W. was requested for the teachers to review.

VI. **Committee Reports:**

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

A written report was issued describing the Fall 2016 Development and Outreach activities and the number of participants at each event. The report also indicated efforts to move to using the school's website as the primary communication tool. Although the website is effective at reaching prospective parents, current parents are not utilizing the website in either the manner intended or with the frequency hoped for when the website was redesigned. The goal is to make the website the go-to source for parents for everything from the Pieces newsletter, to volunteer opportunities, to hot lunch ordering and payment, and more. There was discussion on preferred parent communication methods and some of the potential reasons parents may not go to the website first including, but not limited to being accustomed to receiving e-mails, links and text messages and the fact that some areas (such as the faculty member page) have not been updated. Special planning has been done to ensure the website is fully functional when accessed by mobile phone.

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

Progress continuing on the adaptation of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and Theology of the Body to the curriculum. Jessica will be working with the curriculum committee on the curriculum aspects of the Mission Effectiveness Committee's work.

c. **Curriculum Committee-** Jenni Little *The following summary report was provided by Jenni Little on 11/11/16.*

The curriculum committee continues to gather writing materials and science materials that align with the Next Generation Science Standards for administrators and teachers to review.

The committee has proposed a "Welcome Home Day" for Saint Thomas alumni now attending West Catholic and Catholic Central High Schools. The high school students would meet with the current eighth grade students to explain the transition to ninth grade. The alumni would also meet with administrators and members of the curriculum committee to describe the academic transition from middle school to high school.

VII. **Board Deliberations and Committee Action Items-** John Schuring

a. **Finance: Budget and Tuition Discussion-** Matt Maczka

Due to the staffing transitions/restructuring at the parish bookkeeper and parish financial coordinator positions, a financial packet to discuss the proposed tuition rates for the 2016-2017 school year was not available at the time of the November meeting. The information will be provided to Board members via e-mail when it is ready. (Information was sent December 9, 2016.) The Board was reminded that setting the tuition rate is separate from setting the school budget. The budget will also need to be approved later in the year (February/March).

In the last 5 years, the tuition rates have usually increased 3% to 7% per year. The projected proposed increase for the 2017-2018 school year is 2.5%. The Board's formal recommendation for tuition rates needs to be presented to the parish Finance Council by the Finance Council's December 15, 2016 meeting. (The Finance Council meeting has

changed to Tuesday, December 13, 2016.) In order to facilitate voting on the proposed tuition rate at the December meeting, **Board members should communicate their questions, comments or suggestions regarding the proposed tuition rates VIA E-MAIL PRIOR TO THE DECEMBER 12th MEETING.**

Due to a larger than projected enrollment this year, the school is \$83,000 over budget currently. The parish finance council was informed that part of this projected budget overage will need to be used to fund the unexpected cost of the technology teacher's salary.

Board members were reminded that the school may receive **up to** 35% of its budget funding from the parish offertory collection according to Diocesan guidelines, but that Father Jim will allow the school **up to** 37% of the offertory collection. It was proposed that in light of the costs of assuming the "Shared Time" salaries for Spanish and Technology and the potential costs of updating the writing, science and religious curriculum and adding coding to the technology curriculum that the school should consider finding ways of using the projected budget overage to fund these needs. Practical logistics of how the 35-37% is calculated and distributed (i.e., obtaining the projected overage from the parish and the limitations of how the parish has funds available) and the impact of seeking to so on the symbiotic relationship between the parish and school were briefly discussed.

b. **Strategic Planning Process-** Suzi Furtwangler

The Board discussed the need to form a strategic planning committee that would meet at least monthly (but possibly bimonthly or weekly) and report back to the Board. The composition of the committee will ideally have members from other parish organizations and participation/input from parents. The goal is to create a 5 year strategic plan that will dovetail with the diocesan strategic plan, but yet be tailored to the needs of the Saint Thomas community.

Leadership from the Board for the committee was requested. Additionally, the Board was asked to refine the S.W.O.T. analysis from the retreat. Portions of this discussion were characterized as confidential. Suzi sent an e-mail to Board members with her slide presentation and requesting refinements to the S.W.O.T. analysis on November 18, 2016.

c. **Technology Committee-** John Schuring

Discussion deferred to a future meeting.

d. **December Meeting-** John Schuring

The Board needs to use the December meeting to address setting the tuition rate for 2017-2018 and to address strategic planning. Social time will occur at the end of the meeting for those who can stay. The Band Concert and the Board meeting were both scheduled for Thursday, December 1 and many Board members have a student in the band. The Board will move its December meeting to either Wednesday, December 7 or Wednesday, December 14. Ultimately, December 14th was chosen, location to be determined. Subsequently, the business portion of the meeting was moved to Monday, December 12, 2016 at 6 pm in the Faculty Lounge (or by phone) and the social portion

remains on Thursday, December 14, 2016 at 6 pm at Derby Station. The change was due to a change in the Finance Council's meeting date.

VIII. **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: Absent
Mission Effectiveness chair, Jessica Poelma: Present
Curriculum Committee chair, Jenni Little: Present
Joanne Swan Jones: Absent
Tracy Bandlow: Present

Non-Voting Ex Officio Members:

Additional Attendees: Jennie Micus
Principal, Suzi Furtwangler: Present
Development/Outreach, Betsy Edgerton: Present
Present
Co-ordinator of Finance, Marie Miller: Choose an item.
Director of Religious Formation, Patti Reynolds: Choose an item.

Pastor, Fr. Jim Chelich: Partial
Assistant Principal, Liz Peters: Present
President of Education Foundation, Judi Serba:

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	-2017-2018 tuition approval, strategic planning and 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