

Minutes

Atlanta Archdiocesan School Advisory Council Meeting

January 21, 2016

In Attendance: Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory, Diane Starkovich, Dr. Tom Burns, Augusto Elias, Brian David, Lou Delfino, Betsy San Miguel, Brian Dooling, Jeff Thomas, Jeff Gregor, Maureen Schumacher, Joe Villarreal, Rebecca Hammel, Connie Urbanski, Ramon Villacura. Absent: Msgr. John Walsh, Diedra St. Julien, Brad Wilson.

- **Welcome & Opening Prayer**

The meeting was called to order at 7:33a.m. In carrying out the Holy Father's theme of Mercy for this year, Diane Starkovich led the council in a prayer on Mercy.

- **Approval of Agenda**

Tom Burns asked if there were any changes to the agenda. Diane requested to add New School/Expansion Committee to the Committee Reports section of the agenda. Tom reminded everyone that the Council Visits Feedback section from last meeting was carried over to this meeting. Therefore, he suggested giving a brief summary, only focusing on the main highlights of each meeting in order to have enough time to get through them all. Tom then asked for a motion to accept the agenda. The motion was given and seconded.

- **Approval of November, 2015 Minutes**

Tom asked if there were any changes to the November minutes. With no changes, the motion to approve minutes was given and seconded.

- **Ramon Villacura, Principal, St. Joseph Parish Catholic School – Request for IB Program**

Diane introduced the new principal of St. Joseph Parish Catholic School in Athens, GA to the council. Diane said that she, along with Rebecca and Connie met with Ramon in December to discuss the possibility of an IB program at St. Joseph's. Diane said she wanted Ramon to present this idea to the council to get feedback and ask questions. Tom asked for the council members to introduce themselves and state the school and parish with which they are affiliated.

Ramon referred to the printed copy of the power point presentation he distributed to each member. He said that when he first got the idea of an IB program at St. Joseph's he approached his pastor, Fr. David McGuinness, and the Office of Catholic Schools. Fr. David thought it was a great idea and Diane was interested, but asked Ramon to present this idea to his local advisory council. Being new to Athens, Ramon said he did research to determine the feasibility of an IB school in the Athens, Georgia area. Ramon stated that in analyzing the school's strengths and weaknesses it became clear that a major strength of theirs is the strong curriculum and a main weakness is the feeling of not having enough professional development for staff and faculty. Also in studying the local environment, Ramon realized the unique opportunity they have in Athens with the University of Georgia.

Ramon said he has been involved with an IB diploma program for the last 8-10 years and said that the program's approach is more about learning rather than teaching. This student-centered approach focuses the attention on the way the curriculum is being delivered to the student rather than changing the content of the curriculum. Ramon said the Archdiocese of Atlanta's curriculum is very strong and would not need to be changed. The IB program is a collaboration of the students with not only their peers, but to their community and their world. He said bringing IB to the school would bring validation

to the great school they already have at St. Joseph's. Ramon said it's the 21st century approach would bring global understanding and give St. Joseph Catholic Parish School both national and international recognition. Ramon explained that although the students are the primary beneficiaries of the IB program; the faculty would benefit from the professional development opportunities and the community would also benefit from the strong service-oriented culture this program provides, which goes hand in hand with the Catholic Church's social teachings.

Ramon went on to say that the IB program can be implemented in either the lower grades K-5, or the middle grades 6-8 and can be done in sections. It is a long process to get accredited as an IB school and the first step is to apply to become a candidate. Once accepted as a candidate, it takes about 3 years of hard work to complete the process and there is a cost involved. Ramon said he feels it is well worth the work and cost when ones takes into consideration the many benefits resulting from having an IB school. It does involve risk, but it also is very much in line with the Holy Father's statement that we must be willing to "take risks." Ramon opened the floor up for questions and comments.

Betsy San Miguel stated that she is a parent of IB students in both the lower grades and high school and highly praised the success of this unique program and said it provides the ability to increase enrollment and attract high quality teachers and high-performing students. Tom Burns asked if this would be the first school in the Archdiocese of Atlanta to offer an IB program. Diane answered saying that Notre Dame Academy, one of Atlanta's independent Catholic schools, offers an IB program. They started in sections with the elementary grades and now working toward implementation in the high school.

In speaking with Ramon on the topic of an IB school at St. Joseph-Athens, Diane said her initial questions and concerns were addressed. The curriculum would not be altered but provisions would need to be made on the training and re-training of teachers to prepare them for this different approach of learning/teaching. Diane said that the IB program is not for every school but said that Athens, Georgia would be an ideal location to offer an IB program with the presence of the University of Georgia.

Jeff Gregor commented that Athens, Georgia has two communities, one being the UGA community and the other being the local Athens community. He wondered if the IB program would attract people from both communities. Ramon said he felt the local community would embrace this concept due to its competitive nature and the fact that the local public schools are not perceived to be quite as academically strong. He also said that there is no other school in the area that offers an IB diploma program.

Joe Villareal said having spent time working with St. Joseph's in his marketing committee role, he feels the IB program a good idea to enhance enrollment. However, he was wondering if there are other things to consider besides the new approach to learning for sustainability purposes such as drama, fine arts etc. Ramon said that the IB program's focus is on academics and is very language arts oriented and collaborating and communicating with students around the world.

Tom Burns thanked Ramon for joining the council today and asked him to stay until the end of the meeting in case there were additional questions. Ramon agreed to stay.

- **Comments from Archbishop Gregory**

Archbishop Gregory thanked all the members of the Advisory Council for their involvement and dedication to Catholic education. Archbishop complimented St. Joseph in Athens, as well as a number of other schools, as having a very active, positive, & informative media presence and encouraged other

schools that aren't quite as active to get on board. "People shop for schools on the internet," Archbishop said, and encouraged schools to post pictures, stories, etc. to sell their product online. Archbishop expressed gratitude stating that the Archdiocese of Atlanta is very fortunate to have such excellent schools. Archbishop encouraged us to continue to find ways we can improve. In his opinion one of the areas for improvement is making our schools more available and affordable to a broader spectrum of our community - not only the families struggling financially, but also to the average middle class families that may have multiple children in Catholic schools. Archbishop again thanked everyone and said we have much to be proud of.

- **Council Visits – Feedback**

Tom Burns started the Council Visit feedback off with his visit to Queen of Angels. Tom said it was an excellent meeting with all points on the school assessment form being satisfied. The one thing that stood out to Tom was their feeling that a self-evaluation of the council was unnecessary because of how well they were doing. Tom pointed out to them that from a marketing prospective, the most important time to take stock is when you are on top and offered them the form that this council uses as a tool for self-evaluation. They did accept the offer and Tom emailed the form to them.

The second council meeting that Tom visited was St. John the Evangelist. Tom said that out of all the council visits he has made over the 5-6 years on this council, St. John the Evangelist is by far the most impressive! From the student welcoming Tom at the door with a thumb drive about the school to witnessing the wonderful diversity of the school and seeing the leadership from their principal, Karen Vogner, he was very impressed. Fantastic school, fantastic visit!

Betsy San Miguel visited Our Lady of Mercy High School and was very impressed as well. Betsy said that one of OLM's biggest challenges is enrollment. They attribute this to their location on the south side of town and the lack of feeder schools and parishes to draw from. Betsy said that she was impressed to learn that principal, Brian Newhall, teaches an AP government class every day and finds it very rewarding to develop those relationships within the classroom.

Jeff Thomas said he visited St. Jude the Apostle. It was Jeff's first visit as a member of the ASAC and the first meeting outside of St. John Neumann, where he sat on the local advisory council for many years. He said it was a different experience from what he was used to and found it very professional and informative meeting, well attended and led by the principal, Patty Childs. He said that he felt there is much to be learned by visiting other school councils and thought it would be effective to cross-train council members in schools that are struggling to see how other schools that are thriving handle things.

Brian Dooling visited St. Mary's in Rome. It was a well-run meeting with good energy and was run by the chair. They spoke of some fund-raising efforts in place right now and Brian said he thinks they are doing as well as can be expected with the limited audience in Rome, GA. Diane mentioned that principal, John Tarpley, is leaving St. Mary's after this school year and they are actively searching for a new principal. Brian mentioned that the school would like to have a stronger relationship with the parish. Archbishop mentioned that the physical distance alone between the church and the school (1 ½ miles) makes for a more difficult bonding experience.

- **Committee Reports**

Executive Committee – Executive Committee action item was preparation for the January meeting. Tom Burns referred everyone to his written report.

Marketing Committee – Augusto reported on 3 proposals from the Marketing team, they are as follows:

1. He suggested that a quantitative marketing study be done to gather data at a macro level across the Archdiocese of Atlanta in order to understand barriers, drivers and the perception of Catholic Schools. He said that he is working with a colleague to get this study done at either cost or pro-bono. Diane added that this study would be released widely across the Atlanta Metropolitan area reaching Catholic as well as non-Catholic population and said this data would be valuable information for strategic planning purposes. Diane expressed a desire to move forward with this project and asked Archbishop Gregory for his approval on extending this to the Atlanta community. Archbishop inquired as to which geographic areas would be targeted in the survey and said he thinks it should only include areas where Catholic schools are accessible. Diane agreed that the concentration must be on the areas where schools are located but said she would like to have two levels of the survey to also target all the parishes, including the ones who do not have access to Catholic schools. She said this could be done through either pulpit announcements or bulletin announcements and mentioned that even if many of the parishes do not have a school nearby they are participating in the school assessments. Diane said this survey would help us on many different levels. A discussion followed.
2. Secondly, Augusto proposed that the marketing committee divide and conquer with the schools that are struggling. Diane remarked that there are a few schools in mind, but that this hands-on approach is much easier in the regional schools than in parish schools.
3. Lastly, Augusto suggested that the marketing toolkit be updated specifically to reflect the fast-changing digital/social media world today. He said he would like to get volunteers to make up sub-committees for this endeavor. Rebecca added that we also need to make sure it is updated to show our new VIRTUS Safe Environment policy.

Finance Committee - Brian David reported that there was wonderful participation this year in GRACE Scholars with 2200 donors amounting to \$5.6 million, but only \$3 million is allowed by the state to be redirected To GRACE. The pro-ration is 53% this year compared to 64% last year. Diane expects it to be even lower next year.

Archbishop mentioned that one of the things he was involved in November was the Holy See's delegation at the United Nations Geneva presence. He was invited to give a presentation and his report was on the challenge of the Blaine Amendment in the United States, which are amendments created specifically to prohibit Catholic schools from accessing any public funds. Archbishop challenged both the legality and fairness of those laws. He said that the report was sent to the Wall Street Journal which prompted them in doing an editorial on the Blaine Amendments. It is not yet clear what kind of action will result. A discussion followed.

Brian David said that Brad and Diane are in the process of working on the budget internal reviews with the schools and a report will be given at the next meeting.

Nominating Committee – Brian Dooling said there are 4 individuals that have expiring terms in June 2016. These include: Tom Burns-Chair; Brian David, Vice-Chair; Brian Dooling, Nominating Committee; and Jeff Gregor, Policy Committee Chair. Brian asked the council to keep in mind that we need nominations now to fill these positions. He recommended we seek diversity and try to pull from schools/parishes that are not yet represented. Diane plans to reach out to the principals to nominate

candidates. In addition, as suggested by Bishop Zarama, Diane may send a personal letter to the pastors in targeted zip codes asking them to nominate individuals to this council.

The Nominating Committee is also responsible for the Council's annual Self-Evaluation and this will take place in May 2016. After this review, since the assessment form has been consistent for three years, we will begin to see potential trends and take appropriate action.

New School/Expansion Committee – In Diedre St. Julien's absence Diane referred everyone to her report. Diane said that she and Archbishop met with the pastor of St. George in Newnan regarding a group of individuals that want to start an independent school in Newnan. Diane said she has sent them the 12-step process and as of this date have not heard back from them. Holdheide School in Woodstock has also been given the information on the 12-step process.

- Superintendent's Report

Diane referred everyone to her written report. She said she had a wonderful experience at her meeting in Rome in November and that the Georgia Bulletin did a nice article on her trip.

- Adjournment

Due to a scheduling conflict, Diane asked that the next meeting date be changed from Thursday, March 17th to Tuesday, March 15th at 7:30 at the Chancery. All agreed and the meeting adjourned at 9:33am.

Respectfully submitted,

Debbie Wheeler
Schools Program Specialist