

Minutes

Atlanta Archdiocesan Schools' Advisory Council Meeting
November 7, 2017

In Attendance: Archbishop Wilton Gregory, Diane Starkovich, Augusto Elias, Marcos Arias, Fr. James Duffy, Jeff Thomas, Mark Uebelacker, Brad Wilson, Brian Weick, Robert Heilmann, Connie Urbanski, Maureen Schumacher, Craig Wade (by phone), Paula Brosnan (by phone). **Absent:** Diedra St. Julien, Betsy San Miguel.

- **Welcome & Opening Prayer**

Augusto called the meeting to order and Diane Starkovich led the council in a prayer.

- **Approval of Agenda**

Augusto asked for a motion to approve the agenda. The motion was given and seconded.

- **Approval of the June Meeting Minutes**

Augusto asked for a motion to approve the August 2017 meeting minutes. Diane had one correction to the Council Assignments section of the August minutes. Betsy San Miguel is actually going to stay on the Finance Committee. The minutes stated that she was now going to join the Marketing Committee. With that correction noted, Augusto asked again for a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was given and seconded.

- **Committee Reports**

Marketing Committee – Marcos Arias talked about the positive feedback results from the Council In-Service regarding the presentation of the survey results on the public's perception of Catholic Schools. He said one school has already put together a video addressing the 2 key factors and drivers in selecting a school which are the quality of the teaching staff and academic excellence. St. Jude has this video on their Facebook page. The link to the video is: <https://youtu.be/MVtZzfQ3-lk>

Marcos asked Diane if she had any other feedback regarding the In-Service. Diane said there were about 140 people at the in-service and the responses were very positive. She said they too were surprised to hear that the general public is unaware of our Catholic Schools, their academic excellence and the quality of the teaching staff. Diane said her and Connie just returned from NCEA's Leadership Conference and found out that there was a nationwide survey done by NCEA with very similar results. There was a difference in the national data when it came to religiosity showing that most people felt there was too much emphasis on religion which did not show up in our local survey. Augusto said he was planning to attend a meeting the following day regarding this and expressed concern that decisions will be made on these unbalanced results. Diane that we should base our conclusions and decisions on the results received in our local study. The thing that all surveys revealed, including individual studies done by Boston and 2 other dioceses, is that the general population don't know about Catholic Schools, are not aware of the excellence of Catholic Schools and do not consider their teachers qualified. Diane said we have marketing opportunity here to get the message out about Catholic Schools. Augusto said he feels the surveys should focus more on the Catholic population who have school-age children. Marcos added that we need to be careful not to put all our focus on the academic excellence and teacher

quality and forget about the Catholic faith aspect which is also very critical to the basis of Catholic Education.

Diane said in an effort to get the message out about our Catholic Schools, the back page of the November 2nd issue of the Georgia Bulletin gives the statistics of our qualified teachers and administrators and student achievements. Flyers will be provided to the parishes to hand out to new families and especially PSR families and the schools have been asked to work with the DREs of their parish or in the case of regional schools, their surrounding parishes. Marcos said that the Marketing Committee viewed each school's advertisements to see how well they addressed these must-have elements for parents in choosing a school and found that most were lacking this key information. This summary proves that we still have a way to go in improving our marketing techniques. Augusto said we should be flooding the PSR families with information about the schools' open house dates etc. They are our primary target and captive audience.

Archbishop suggested that it may be beneficial to compare our averages to the premiere schools in the area such as Woodward, Westminster, Pace Academy, Lovett etc. Diane said this data has already been done on the high school level and that we stand up very well alongside these schools. She also explained that many of these schools are very selective in their enrollment, only accepting students who are high performing. For many parents the belief is that you get what you pay for and therefore feel they are getting a higher quality education because they pay more. Diane said that we have a good relationship with many of the private schools and we do get occasional transfer students from them. On the other hand, they have been known to target some of our higher performing students at St. John the Evangelist and St. Peter Claver - occasionally offering these families 100% paid tuition. In such cases, it is difficult for us to compete. Diane said our individual school scores won't be posted because one school will always score the lowest and families may be reluctant to enroll their child in the lowest performing Catholic school, even though all of our schools score above national averages. A discussion followed in regards to the declining statistics of practicing Catholics/Catholic Marriages/Baptisms etc. and how this ultimately affects Catholic School enrollment. Archbishop noted that the Jewish community is experiencing the same disconnect and he said it's not only the United States but a Global problem.

Diane said that the Partners in Mission meetings have been great in providing school principals and staff with wonderful tools to use in promoting enrollment. She said we know what we need to do and now we need to put more concrete plans in action. The school open houses are great opportunities to show off our students/faculty/staff and Catholic culture.

Marcos wrapped up his report by saying that the Marketing Team continues to work with individual schools who have asked for help. Brian Weick is presently working with St. Mary's and St. Joseph-Athens. Marcos also said that he is adding a member to the Marketing Committee from St. John the Evangelist and is looking for a second member from the south side of Atlanta. He said getting voice from the south side is critical to the overall view that we want to have over the Archdiocese.

Finance Committee – Brad said two things are coming up, teacher raises and block grants. He said he doesn't anticipate much change. There will be a trimming back on the block grants to free up money for

the Welcome Grants. Brad said once he and Betsy are able to meet and put these things together he will get it out to all members via email for a vote.

Diane informed the council about her and Brad's presentation to the Superintendents at the CLS (Catholic Leadership Conference) in Phoenix. She said it was very well received and thanked Brad for taking the time to do this with her.

A short discussion followed regarding cost of medical benefits.

Strategic Planning – Diane wanted to give an update on the strategic planning and the recent town hall meetings. Bob Heilmann attended all three high school meetings and said it was great to experience the spirit and culture of the three schools. Diane said the turnout was low at all three meetings. Subjects discussed were affordability, Catholic identity, college prep, accessibility, more inclusion and marketing.

- **Superintendent's Report**

Diane said she recently met with the lead evaluator on our AdvancED Accreditation team who stated we are ready for the visit in February. One of the topics she was very interested in was our new drug and alcohol policy, how it came to be and the specifics. Diane told the council the program is working very well with zero positive results to date. The students who are already on a drug and alcohol contract are subject to being tested at any time at the family's expense. In addition, the drug dog has visited St. Pius and Blessed Trinity 2 or 3 times this year so far and has received no hits. Diane said she is very pleased with the results so far and that the message is getting out in the community. Diane mentioned that council members may be questioned on this drug policy during their interview on February 20th by the AdvancED team.

Other news given in Diane's report was that St. John the Evangelist received their 3rd Blue Ribbon School of Excellence Award in Washington D.C.

Diane asked if there were any questions on her report. Maureen Schumacher commented that she has noticed a significant drop in alcohol consumption among the parents during tailgating this year and contributes it to the new drug and alcohol program in place at the high schools. Diane also mentioned that because all of our new employees have been drug screened the schools are now considered a drug-free workplace from the State of Georgia and they should qualify for reduction in workman's compensation rates.

- **Visits to Local Advisory Council Meetings**

Diane had a good visit at St. Mary's and said there is still progress to be made but saw some positive improvements. The chair ran the meeting and the pastor and deacon were both in attendance. She witnessed a very good working relationship between the pastor and the principal. The pastor is a good supporter of Catholic Schools and was very engaged in the meeting. There was an extended discussion on enrollment management at the meeting.

Jeff Thomas visited St. Thomas More. He said there were several people absent due to illness_or travel (including the chair) and there was no clergy present. Jeff said their committees are a little underdeveloped and seem to use the meetings more for discussion rather than making decisions. He said there were discussions on enrollment, marketing, the AdvancED process and master planning at the parish

Augusto visited Our Lady of Mercy High School and said the council was a fully engaged and cohesive team. There were several presentations and less discussion. The discussions they did have were regarding the accreditation process and facilities. Good meeting! Diane said that her, Connie and Rebecca recently visited OLM to test their eleots (student engagement) in preparation for the accreditation visit and saw very impressive results!

Bob Heilmann went to St. Joseph's in Marietta and said it was a very good visit. The chair ran the meeting and it was very much focused on marketing. They also asked for volunteers for the accreditation visit and discussed Chrome Books. He said that several members who have 8th graders at the school visited BT's open house and received a follow up phone call from a BT parent asking if there were any questions about BT they could answer.

Diane said there are two schools (Holy Redeemer and St. John Neumann) that still need to be visited this year by one of our council members. She asked for those who have not signed up for a meeting yet to please consider visiting one of these schools. Jeff Thomas offered to visit St. John Neumann and Paula Brosnan offered to visit Holy Redeemer. Diane thanked the council for covering all the schools.

Brad talked about the expansion and remodeling of some of our existing schools which will not necessarily increase space for more students. This led into the subject of decreasing enrollment in some schools. Diane said that while some of our schools remain at full capacity, others are experiencing a drop in enrollment for the first time.

Diane mentioned that Ave Maria Hybrid Academy in Newnan has been given steps to become a Catholic school and they are interested in securing the Dominican sisters to staff their school. Diane explained to them that the Dominican sisters are assigned by the Archbishop and that it is a 2-3 year process. The other hybrid school in Woodstock has held further conversations with the OCS. A discussion followed.

Maureen Schumacher inquired about the 2018 Education Banquet which is Saturday evening, January 27, 2018. There is a table reserved for those members of the Archdiocesan Schools Advisory Council who wish to attend. Diane asked those interested to advise Debbie (dwheeler@archatl.com) if you would like to attend so that she can reserve seats for you and your spouse.

Diane reminded everyone that the AdvancED team will be conducting interviews here at the Chancery on February 20th and we need as many council members as possible to be present. The tentative time is set for 1pm.

There was a short discussion regarding full inclusion being considered at one of our grade schools. This information is still pending and will be announced at a later date. Diane mentioned that there is a full inclusion model presently at Notre Dame Academy, one of our independent Catholic schools.

- **Adjournment and Next Meeting Date – November 7, 2017**

Next meeting is at 7:30am on Tuesday, January 16, 2018. Meeting adjourned at 9:05am.

Respectfully submitted,

Debbie Wheeler, Schools Program Specialist