

Minutes

Atlanta Archdiocesan Schools' Advisory Council Meeting
Tuesday, November 12, 2019
Archbishop's Conference Room – 3rd Floor

In Attendance: Diane Starkovich, Marcos Arias, Brad Wilson, Brian Dooling, Maureen McAbee, Michelle Raney, Fr. Jim Duffy, Stacy Lewis, Catherine Kennedy Harris, John Cryer, Augusto Elias. Joined by phone: Paula Bronson, Beth Clark Morrison. Absent: Mark Uebelacker, Bob Heilmann

- **Welcome and Opening Prayer**

Marcos welcomed everyone and Diane led the council in a prayer of Thanksgiving.

- **Approval of Agenda**

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

- **Approval of August, 2019 Meeting Minutes**

Marcos asked for a motion to approve the August 2019 meeting minutes. The motion was approved and seconded.

- **Blue Ribbon Schools of Distinction – Our Lady of the Assumption, Immaculate Heart of Mary, Queen of Angels – Recognition by the Archdiocesan Schools' Advisory Council**

Diane said she leaves the next evening with OLA, IHM & Queen of Angels for a 2-day Blue Ribbon Recognition event in Washington D. C. There are 49 private schools being recognized and 39 of these are Catholic. All three of our schools receiving this award are two-time recipients and are considered high-performance schools which means they are in the top 10% of the country. Diane asked Marcos, on behalf of the council, to send out a congratulatory letter to these 3 schools acknowledging all their hard work and accomplishments in receiving this honor. Marcos suggested that we market this Blue Ribbon status more. Diane said even though it's on our website as well as heavily featured in the Georgia Bulletin, there is much more we could do. Fr. Duffy asked Diane where we stand among other diocese in the number of blue ribbon recipients. Diane answered saying the Archdiocese of Atlanta has the largest percentage (75%) of Blue Ribbon schools in the country. Diane made a suggestion for the new website that there be a tab with the question "What is a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence" giving a good explanation for those who may not be familiar with its meaning.

Diane said the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) scores came out recently. This is the nation's report card. Every state in the union except for Mississippi declined in academic performance. Math and Reading scores in 4th & 8th grades were down. With all the trillions of dollars spent on education in the last few decades, education performance continues to decline, which proves that more money is not the answer. This is a huge challenge for the future of our nation. Diane said she will forward a copy of the scores which gives a comparison of academic performance in public vs. private vs. Catholic schools. At least one of our schools each year is asked to participate in the NAEP testing.

- **Committee Reports**

- A. **Marketing** - Brian Dooling handed out copies of his report and proceeded to go over enrollment data for the Atlanta Catholic Schools (Archdiocesan and Independent) showing the change in enrollment over a one and three year period. The trend of declining enrollment is the case in most of our schools. Brian said he is working closely with the schools in the attempt to reverse this trend.

The new website is still under construction with many edits occurring but can be accessed at www.catholicschoolsatlanta.com. Brian invited the council to check it out and give feedback and suggestions. He said there will be an active marketing campaign to drive traffic to the new website once it is up and running. The website will feature our Catholic Schools' Academic Excellence, Catholic Identity,

Technology, Graduate Profile and Financial Aid. There will be a Q&A section along with a site locator to find the nearest Catholic School and the ability to set up a tour online. The site will eventually be mobile friendly.

The question was asked if the schools are willing to collaborate with each other. Brian said there has been progress in this area especially among the admissions directors. We have been more proactive in marketing our schools as a system which lessens the competition. In most cases, families will choose the school that works out for them geographically.

Brian said it is Open House season at the schools. Blessed Trinity, St. Pius X and Our Lady of Mercy had very successful open houses. The elementary schools open houses have not been as well attended with the exception of Christ the King. More families are requesting individual tours which can create problems for schools that don't have enough staff coverage to accommodate the number of tours requested.

Other updates from Brian:

- Marketing and Enrollment tips are sent out to advancement and admissions directors on a regular basis.
- Parent Ambassador Programs have been launched at Holy Redeemer, St. Joseph-Athens & Our Lady of Victory. St. Pius and BT are already active while others are in various stages of launching a program.
- Catholic School Fairs have been conducted at St. Ann, St. Brigid, St. Thomas Aquinas & Our Lady of Vietnam Parishes. Most of these were combined with their parish ministry fair and all Catholic schools in their geographic area were invited to participate.
- Georgia Bulletin's October 17th issue shows the map of all our schools and their open house dates on the back cover.
- NCEA has a new program called "Discover Catholic Schools Week" with day to day free resources the week of November 17-23. This is a way to promote Catholic Schools a little earlier than waiting until Catholic Schools Week in late January.
- Welcome Grant checks were delivered to all schools that participated. Looking into expanding qualifying criteria to grades K-7 next year based on feedback from schools. (A discussion followed regarding the challenges Welcome Grants have produced.)
- Martin Luther King Jr. Youth Day Program will take place at St. Peter Claver on Sunday, January 19th at 3pm.
- Fast Facts Sheet are being developed for the schools to feature key selling points about the school in a concise, accurate way. Examples of a few were passed around and comments and ideas were shared. A long discussion followed about different marketing strategies, VIRTUS and school safety.

B. Finance – Brad Wilson said the focus right now is on distributing block grant checks and looking at teacher pay raises for next year. Pay raises will most likely be 2-2 ½% for high school and 3% for elementary. Teacher retention has become a challenge especially this year as all Georgia public school districts gave their teachers a \$3000 raise as promised by Governor Kemp. We are unable to compete with this as our income is funded by tuition and higher salaries mean higher tuition. Diane said that we are fortunate that most of our teachers are mission driven and want to be in our schools. Once the finance committee has determined their salary

recommendations for next year, an email will go out to the council for approval. Once approved by the council, it then goes to Bishop Konzen for approval. Brad encouraged everyone who does not already contribute to GRACE Scholars to please consider as it is free money.

C. Strategic Plan Update - Catherine Kennedy Harris gave an update on the Strategic Plan. She said Diane supplied the Strategic Planning Committee with a document that was very informative as to what needs to be done. Catherine said she will be presenting the council with recommendations from the Strategic Planning Committee at the January 14, 2020 meeting.

- **Superintendent's Report**

Diane drew the council's attention to the All-Schools Advisory Council In-Service feedback sheet and said the results were very positive. She said there will always be a few negative comments, but overall she was very pleased with the results. There were lots of interest in finance and academic data & test scores where both areas scored high. This in-service is an accreditation requirement.

Also in her packet, Diane addressed the teacher/counselor attrition graph. There were about 100 teachers that did not return this year and the graph shows the different reasons for them not returning. Diane said there has been a national teacher shortage and that it continues to grow. Our schools have been blessed with some 2nd career teachers who have retired from public school education and are now enjoying the mission of Catholic schools. There are many advantages in teaching in a Catholic school, including the benefits. Our mission continues to be keeping schools affordable and accessible.

Diane brought up the concern about St. Pius being moved up to 6A classification in sports next year. Steve Spellman is appealing this action today and presenting his case to the Georgia High School Athletic Association. Results of this meeting to be advised.

Diane gave the council a handout with history on viability factors and a color coded data-based graph indicating where our schools are over a 5 year period. Diane said we have quite a few in the green area which means outstanding and healthy, other schools are experiencing student retention problems, not adhering to the salary scales or low class sizes which drops them into the yellow or pink area indicating "fragile". As far as the high schools go, Blessed Trinity and St. Pius are good in all areas and much effort had been made to raise the viability at Our Lady of Mercy. Diane said she will recommend to the new Archbishop that we continue with the school assessment process and continue to give support to minority schools. She also recommended that schools in the pink and yellow area get visited by members of this council to offer help where needed. Diane asked if there were any questions. A discussion followed.

- **Evaluation of September All Council In-Service**

Diane previously addressed the All Schools In-Service feedback earlier but asked if there were any questions regarding this evaluation. The date for the All Council In-Service next fall is Saturday, September 26, 2020.

- **Visits to Local Advisory Council Meetings**

Marcos asked those that visited schools recently if there was anything that should be shared with the council. Stacey Lewis commented on her visit with St. Jude and said it was a lengthy meeting. Catherine Harris shared her experience at the St. Thomas More meeting and said it was run by the chair who kept everything on task and very time-sensitive. All the committees were very engaged. Marcos went to the St. Pius council meeting and there was discussion about all the support they provide for students with learning challenges and how best to communicate that message appropriately since they aren't equipped for severe learning disabilities. Marcos

suggested that Brian Dooling might want to give some support to their marketing committee on how best to communicate that. Diane said all schools are booked for a visit this year and she will send reminders at the beginning of each month.

- **Adjournment**
- **Next Meeting – January 14, 2020 – 7:30am**