

Minutes

Atlanta Archdiocesan Schools' Advisory Council Meeting

Tuesday, 8-17-21

Zoom Meeting – 7:30-9:00am

In Attendance: Hal Plummer, Beth Clark Morrison-Chair, John Cryer-Vice Chair, Brad Wilson, Brian Dooling, Maureen McAbee, Michelle Raney, Brian Hershberger, Fr. Neil Dhaliwala, Stacy Lewis, Cathy Kennedy Harris, Christopher White, Bob Heilmann, Kellie DesOrmeaux, Marcos Arias. Absent: Jennifer Prindiville.

- **Call to Order and Opening Prayer**

Beth Clark Morrison called the meeting to order and Fr. Neil led the council in prayer.

- **Approval of Agenda**

Beth asked for a motion to approve the agenda. The motion was given and seconded and all were in favor to approve the agenda.

- **Approval of the Minutes**

Beth asked if there were any changes to the August 2021 ASAC Meeting Minutes. With no changes stated, Beth asked for a motion to approve the minutes. The motion to approve was given and seconded and all were in favor to approve the minutes.

- **Superintendent's Report**

Covid

Hal Plummer said he sent out a letter to the school communities on July 23rd stating that we were taking a hybrid approach on masking for the new school year. This means that masking at certain times would be required but broad discretion would be given to local schools on determining the flexibility of mask requirements based on their campus and classroom layout. He said that he expected there would be parents who would disagree with this new protocol because there are vocal parents on both sides of this issue of masking. Hal said his decision to go in this direction for the new school year is strictly data driven and that we will continue to monitor our data each week and make necessary adjustments as needed. Hal then asked Associate Superintendent, Kellie DesOrmeaux to give an over-view of the data we have collected and where we are right now.

Kellie started off by saying thus far we have had a successful first week of school with no in school transmissions. Kellie explained that what they are constantly looking for in their data collection is where the transmissions are occurring. In looking at our data from last year and over the summer, all of our positive cases have occurred outside the classroom setting. The transmissions happen mostly at home or other outside events. There was an outside of school event at one of the high schools last week which involved a number of students and faculty where there was a transition. The school went into a temporary full masking mode for everyone due to this occurrence. Kellie said all positive cases are reported immediately and we continue to monitor the number of quarantined students as well. All of these numbers are combined and reported to all schools on a weekly basis.

Kelly said that Blessed Trinity and St. Pius have offered to keep a record of the students who have been vaccinated in order to help with contact tracing and quarantining implementation when a positive case does happen in the school. So far about 2/3rds of the St. Pius students have sent in their vaccination cards as opposed to only about 1/3rd at Blessed Trinity. Hal asked if there were any questions for Kellie regarding Covid data.

Maureen McAbee asked if there were parents last year that questioned our data. Hal responded that we did have parents question our process and quoted what other communities were doing along with medical opinions to back up their argument. As we appreciate their input and concern, we continue to work with the data coming in from our schools and base our protocols on that data.

Cathy Kennedy Harris said that her daughter attends St. Pius X and is vaccinated. She said the guidelines are changing constantly and asked for clarification on the protocols for vaccinated vs. unvaccinated in the high schools. Kellie shared that the schools have worked very hard on the multi-layered mitigations for the safety of all which includes; air filtering, meeting outdoors whenever feasible, controlling the flow of traffic when students transition around the building to prevent bottlenecks, etc. Kellie reiterated that the majority of the transmissions are occurring at home or outside of school events. Beth Morrison added that her daughter, a St. Pius X student, is definitely in the minority being one of the few wearing a mask all day at school but she has not received any blow back from her peers. Beth said this is an added protection for those that live with vulnerable relatives or have concerns. Marcos added that communication from the school is key in keeping parents comfortable and aware of any changes. He added that since there are parents on both sides of this issue, a balanced approach is necessary along with a place to go at the school to ask questions or express concerns.

Chris White commented that the principals and administrators have been under tremendous stress and hardship for the last 2 years and deserve our utmost appreciation and respect. He also said he understands that every campus is different in how they implement the rules but what parents are confused about is why in parish schools there are conflicting rules for the school vs. the parish. Hal responded that communication went out recently to all parishes strongly recommending masks for all but only mandatory for the unvaccinated. This communication also stated that schools are using a separate protocol based on their research and unique situations and that each school and parish should communicate clearly to their communities the exact protocol being enforced.

Beth clarified that any one on this committee who is approached by a parent regarding issues on protocols to refer them back to the principal. Hal added that he is always willing to hear from any council member that may have a question in this area.

St. Mary's Academy

Hal said we now have the Archbishop's blessing to move forward with St. Mary's Academy. The logo has been selected and approved and Brian Dooling offered to send a picture to everyone. On September 7th there will be a meeting with all of the south side pastors at Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Peachtree City with hopes to get their support and involvement. There will be a meal along with a presentation which will include an architectural design of the new school and a question and answer session. Our Lady of Mercy enrollment continues a downward trend with 30 less students this year. A \$4.5 million budget has been approved for renovation of the campus to accommodate an elementary school. This

renovation will include a separate entrance for the elementary school, a playground, tennis courts, soccer field etc.

OCS

We have been able to convert our Director of Parish Preschools, Mary Jo Nichols, to a full time position by adding Special Programs to her duties. The first project that she will be working on this year is Inclusion for Exceptional Learners in our schools.

Compensation Study

Hal asked Brian Hershberger to give a brief report on the committee's work on this project. Brian said he is putting together a letter to the business managers in order to gather data. Once the data is collected he will get the committee together to review and come up with some recommendations. Brian H. suggested that an HR person be added to the committee and Brad will be involved as well.

Racism/Diversity Issue

Hal said that he is working with the schools on how to address micro-aggressions in our schools and had them change wording in their handbooks. He has expressed to the principals that when any violation in this area comes up to address it immediately. In October, we will be hosting a Diversity Discussion where we will have an open forum involving people who have been affected in this area. Cathy Kennedy Harris asked if there is a specific person who deals with Diversity and Inclusion in the Archdiocese. Hal said that although we may be short staffed, we are committed to ensure a focus on this issue and Archbishop Hartmayer has put a high priority on this as well. Beth added that at her work a diversity person has been assigned to address these issues and it has made a tremendous difference.

- **Committee Reports**

Marketing Committee – Brian Dooling

Brian started off by giving an enrollment update. He said the schools are up by 9% overall or 68 students. This includes a drop of 30 students at Our Lady of Mercy. He added that some schools are holding the own and some have dropped a little while others are experiencing growth. We have opened up a few PreK-4 programs in our elementary schools which has attributed to increased enrollment in those schools. Ten of our eighteen schools are at 90% or greater capacity. Our focus now is on the two southside schools (Our Lady of Mercy and Our Lady of Victory) and several others that need help in turning things around.

Peer Pal Ambassador Programs are being introduced at about half of our schools. The marketing committee is working on revising our Marketing Toolkit. Presently there is a video campaign going on our social media platform called "Come & See" where every couple of days one of our school's video is featured. There will soon be an ad on the back of the Georgia Bulletin to promote our schools' open houses. Brian will be hosting meetings soon with Admissions Directors and Advancement Directors to collaborate and discuss best practices. Brian reminded everyone to continue to promote GRACE Scholars program which is still open and the cap has not yet been met. Lastly, Education Banquet will be held at St. Catherine of Siena on January 29, 2022. The format will be a little different this year and more details will be coming in the near future. Also in the works is a developing a new "Bobcat" mascot logo for St. Mary's Academy.

Beth Morrison expressed congratulations on the 9% increase in enrollment across the board and asked Brian what attributed to the increase. Brian said he thought that some of the gain was from offering in-person learning last year when public schools were mostly virtual. This allowed families who had never considered Catholic schools to give us a try. As a result, we have retained some of those families. Also, as mentioned before, adding a few PRE-K4 programs to our elementary schools has also been a factor.

Maureen McAbee asked if we knew why Our Lady of Mercy lost 30 students. Brian replied that part of the reason was that a number of graduates from St. John the Evangelist were being recruited by Woodward Academy and decided to go that route. Some of the families who left were not Catholic and may not value the Catholic identity piece and others may have had apprehensions about the new school.

Policy Committee

Marcos Arias said he met with Hal & Brian on June 25th to look at the current policies and see where updates are needed. Their focus was on the student area (Section 5000) of the policy manual; particularly Elementary Admissions, High School Admissions & Exceptional Learners. He said they are interested in looking at other diocese' policies to get ideas and best practices. Any suggestions will be brought back to the council for discussion.

Maureen asked if the policy committee foresees any permanent policy changes that may take place as a result of Covid. Marcos said that they are considering current conditions but that caution and diligence need to be practiced when changing policies due to the pandemic.

Finance Committee

Brad said he is happy to report that \$300,000 has been contributed to GRACE Scholars for St. Mary's Academy. He said Archbishop has sent out a letter to all current GRACE Scholar donors asking them to prayerfully consider St. Mary's Academy in their donation.

Brad said that he will help line up the proper people, including HR, to help Brian Hershberger and his committee with the Teacher Pay Scale Project. Brad said this is a big part of the next budget season and considering the current inflation rate, we're looking at 4-5 percent increase which will also affect tuition rates to go up 3-6% depending on what happens.

- **Other Important Items of Interest**

Beth asked if anyone had any other items to share before adjournment. Beth shared some important dates for the council to place on their calendars. Two New Advisory Council Member Training Sessions will be taking place. The first on Thursday, August 26th and the other option is Saturday, August 28th. Brian Dooling said he is leaning toward having both of these sessions via zoom. Anyone from the council who would like to participate is welcomed. Also, on Saturday, September 25th, the All Local Advisory Council is scheduled to be in person at the Chancery. If anything changes with that event, communication will be sent out.

Marcos inquired about the status of the Local Advisory Council Sign-Up Form. Brian Dooling responded and said we are currently collecting all the dates and times from the schools and will put together a google form for members to sign up for the school they wish to visit this school year. He hopes to send that out within the next couple of weeks.

Adjournment – Next Meeting Date

The next meeting date is November 16, 2021 at 7:30am. We will advise everyone closer to the date as to whether the next meeting will be in person or on zoom.

Respectfully submitted,

Debbie Wheeler
Schools' Program Specialist