

## Minutes

Atlanta Archdiocesan Schools' Advisory Council Meeting

Tuesday, 1-12-2021

Zoom Meeting – 7:30-9:00am

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

- **Call to Order and Opening Prayer**

Beth called the meeting to order, welcomed everyone and asked Fr. Neil to lead the council in prayer.

- **Approval of Agenda**

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

- **Approval of the Minutes from the August 2020 Meeting**

Beth asked if there were any changes to the November 2020 ASAC Meeting Minutes. With no changes stated, Beth asked for a motion to approve the November meeting minutes. The motion was given and seconded and all were in favor to approve the November minutes.

- **Superintendent's Report**

Hal began by saying that all of our schools opened up on time after the holidays with the exception of Blessed Trinity and St. Pius X who are on delayed in-person return and are virtual for now. Collectively, our positivity rate is under 2% in our schools. Hal said the number of cases are constantly being updated and monitored by our COVID task force, who is doing an amazing job at keeping everyone safe.

Hal gave an update on the Southside Consolidation project and said the recommendations have been delivered to the Archbishop. It is now his decision as to what happens next with this consolidation. Hal gave credit to the team that worked tirelessly on this project and said he would keep the council informed of the Archbishop's decision. Marcos Arias also gave kudos to the team saying even though the recommendation was completed ahead of schedule, it was done in a very methodical way staying considerate to all stakeholders involved. Beth Morrison asked for Hal and Marcos to give a little background information for the benefit of our new council members who may need a better understanding of this project.

Marcos said from a viability perspective, the Southside schools (Our Lady of Mercy Catholic High School and Our Lady of Victory Regional Catholic Elementary School) have been hurting with enrollment for a number of years. The task force assigned to this job was asked to see if it was viable to bring these two schools together as a PreK-12 academy. The Archdiocese believes it is critical to our system to keep the presence of these Southside Catholic schools. He said there were many factors to look at and consider and to be cognizant of the ripple effect this consolidation would bring. Marcos said that other dioceses' PreK-12 Catholic school models were researched and studied. Hal added that if approved, this will be considered a mission-based school. Hal is expecting a decision from the Archbishop soon and a press release will follow. Hal said once approved, he would like to see this council involved with the project moving forward.

Hal gave an update on the leadership replacements. Steve Spellman is now retired and John Favier is the acting president at St. Pius X. Edye Simpson, who began the school year as Interim principal at St. Pius X has been confirmed as the permanent principal. The principal search for Immaculate Heart of Mary and St. Catherine of Siena has begun. He said the first round of zoom interviews for SCS begins this week. Brian Hershberger asked Hal about the amount of interest we received for these principal openings. Hal said he has received quite a few qualified applicants. He is sending all qualified resumes' to the pastor for approval before going forward in offering an interview. He added that the president's position at Blessed Trinity has been posted and a search committee is now being formed. Hal said he has lifted the criteria of being an educator for the BT president position. Instead, he wants to focus on a Catholic who will carry out the social teachings of our faith and who knows how to raise money for the school.

As far as curriculum development, Hal said there is no intentional plan in place right now on how to work with special needs children. He would like to see a more unified approach including parent support groups for those having children with disabilities. Hal said he will have more information regarding this in the spring.

Hal asked Brian if he had anything to add. Brian spoke of the plans in place to honor the employees of the year at all our schools since there will be no banquet this year due to the pandemic. He said the honorees will be recognized on social media along with being presented with an award at their school. Our principal of the year, George Wilkerson, was surprised with the announcement by Hal, Kellie and Connie in December at Our Lady of Victory School. George's wife, along with the mayor of Tyrone were present for the announcement. The OLV students were watching the surprise announcement live on video, cheering their principal on from their classrooms. A large banner was displayed at the school honoring George as Principal of the Year. Brian mentioned that also in December the Office of Catholic Schools management staff divided up and delivered lunch and a small gift to each principal at their school since they were unable to meet as a group before Christmas.

Beth Morrison asked Hal to explain to the council how the COVID task force leadership works so they have a better understanding of the protocols and procedures in place for administrators at the school. Hal said last spring, when the COVID shut down occurred, a task force was formed consisting of principals, medical doctors, legal counsel and OCS staff. As a result, a huge document was submitted to our 18 archdiocesan schools outlining the protocols and procedures along with sample letters to families for different scenarios. These procedures and protocols are being revised as new data comes in. Patty Childs, principal at Saint Jude the Apostle and Lauren Schell, principal at Holy Redeemer are in charge of the task force. As new situations arise, Lauren & Patty are alerted and will consult with Hal and the health experts on the task force to determine the best course of action. Hal said that with spring feeder sports coming up, there has already been lobbying efforts on the part of the parents wanting to keep all feeder sports in place this spring. Hal expressed that outdoor sports with restrictions will probably be fine, but indoor contact sports are a different story.

Plans on how graduations will look this year is another challenge. Hal said he is confident that the procedures and protocols we have in place are very effective and gave credit to our wonderful principals. Beth thanked Hal and gave kudos to Patty and Lauren who gave up their summer to work on this along with the medical personnel who donated hundreds of hours to this effort. Chris White thanked

Hal for balancing out the sports lobbying effort issue with the parents. Maureen McAbee asked if the task force recommendations are mandatory among all schools regarding events in the spring like graduations, etc. Hal said very rarely do we mandate all the schools to follow the same plan when it comes to their events. Each school is unique in what their campus can handle so one plan does not necessarily work for all. Hal said he wants to help the schools maintain their freedom while still adhering to some non-negotiables.

- **Committee Reports**

Finance Committee– Stacy Lewis, Brad Wilson & Fr. Neil Dhabliwala, Brian Hershberger  
Stacy said the finance committee met to discuss teacher salaries and pay raises for the 2021-2022 School Year. Brad spoke on block grants and mentioned that because of the greater financial need on the Southside schools, the others may see a decrease in their allotment. He said teacher salary increases have been approved for the 2021-2022 school year, which is 3% for elementary and 2% for high schools. Brad added that going forward discussions need to be had on whether salaries should remain consistent among schools in the Metro Atlanta area or should schools be allowed to set their own salary scale.

Marketing Committee – Maureen McAbee, Brian Dooling, Jennifer Prindiville, Chris White, John Cryer  
Brian said the committee met in the fall and plans are in place to revise the Marketing Toolkit. The plan includes marketing committee members dividing up and visiting each school's admissions director to answer a series of questions. This will be very helpful in determining what needs to be included in the toolkit. The goal is to have the toolkit completed by the end of this school year for use next year.

Brian said he and Hal had the privilege of being guest lecturers on the topic of Leadership at St. Pius X to a group of seniors. Other things going on in the marketing world are as follows:

- Marketing tips are sent out on a regular basis to our schools' marketing teams and periodic zoom meetings are being held to share best practices. Brian said he continues to reach out to other dioceses around the country to see what they are doing.
- Weekly newsletters from the Office of Catholic Schools go out to the principals every Friday with important information and reminders for the coming week. Brian said this new communication tool is going well.
- iGiveCatholic was a huge success. The Archdiocese of Atlanta raised \$970,000 from 4,500 donors. This was up 42% from last year. The top high school was St. Pius X raising over \$106,000 and the top elementary school was Queen of Angels raising \$80,000.
- Brian asked that the council to continue to promote GRACE Scholars.
- Web Site Reviews are being done on all schools to check their user friendliness. Virtual tours have been a popular tool this year in promoting the schools since in person tours have been limited. Brian will share the links of new videos with the council.

- Catholic Schools Week is the first week in February. Brian asked the council to raise awareness of this traditional event to celebrate Catholic Schools. Added to the calendar this year was Discover Catholic Schools Week which took place in November 2020.
- The MLK Essay and Poster Contest is being held virtually this year on Sunday, January 17.
- Our 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Liturgy, which is held annually during Catholic Schools Week, will be a livestreamed event here at the Chancery with Archbishop Hartmayer as the main celebrant and homilist.

Brian opened it up for questions. Stacy Lewis asked Brian if we have seen any effect on re-registration and applications for next school year especially among in-town schools due to the increased crime rate in the city this year. Brian said he has no new data that supports this, but said it will be interesting to see if we can retain the new families we've picked up this year because of our in-person instruction. The main concern Brian expressed is the lack of school community-based events due to COVID which is generally is a great way to bring families together and welcome newcomers.

Marcos suggested to Brian that it may be a good time to market GRACE Scholars again since the government checks are coming in and families may be in a better position to contribute.

Maureen McAbee revisited a topic brought up at a previous meeting about doing exit interviews with families leaving our schools and surveying new families who came to our schools this year for reasons of getting in-person instruction. She asked if this idea had been addressed to the principals and whether or not this is something of interest to them. Brian said he would mention this idea of surveying new families at the principals' meeting later in the week. In addition to this, Brian said a standardized form (i.e. exit interview) is being developed to capture valuable data from families choosing to leave our schools. This will help in addressing areas where we see trends occurring.

#### Executive Committee – Beth Morrison, John Cryer, Hal Plummer and Brian Dooling

Beth said the Executive Committee met on January 4<sup>th</sup> to plan this meeting and discuss progress on new and pre-existing initiatives and issues.

#### Strategic Planning Committee – Cathy Kennedy Harris & Michelle Raney

Cathy mentioned her and Michelle have been discussing the Strategic Plan but need a member of the Office of Catholic Schools to assist them in this effort. Michelle added that last year they had started working with Diane on revising the strategic plan but then everything was on hold due to Diane's illness and then the pandemic. They are ready and willing to continue this project with guidance from OCS. Hal said he would be happy to get involved and will engage Brian to help as well. Cathy said she would set up something for the four of them to meet to discuss plans going forward.

Beth asked if there were any questions regarding the committee reports presented. With no questions asked, Beth moved on to the next agenda item.

- **Local Advisory Council Visits**

Beth asked if anyone was able to attend a local school council meeting since our last meeting in November. With many meetings being postponed or canceled due to COVID, Beth asked Brian to go over the communication procedures in place for members who are scheduled for an upcoming local school council visit. Brian said in keeping with Diane's tradition, he will be sending out emails to the school principal, copying in our council members scheduled to attend that meeting. In the email he will ask the principal to send any correspondence related to the meeting (i.e. agenda, committee reports etc.) to that council member along with details about the meeting (time, place, zoom or in-person etc.) In addition, Brian will send out to the council members any remaining meetings available for members that have not yet been able to attend a school council meeting.

Marcos Arias responded that he and John Cryer attended a St. Pius X meeting in December. He said it was a very well run meeting and the members are a very active and passionate group. Marcos added that they were very transparent and forthright about discussing the current challenges at the school. One thing Marcos noticed was that there are some SPX council members that have served for a long time and suggested more of a rotation among their council members.

For the benefit of the new members on this council, Beth explained that the School Assessment form is a helpful tool when visiting a school council meeting. The purpose is to document information from the meeting in order to share with other ASAC council members at the next meeting. Brian offered to send everyone a copy of this form along with a calendar of current available and rescheduled SAC meetings.

Beth asked if there were any further questions or comments. Cathy Kennedy Harris offered her services on the consolidation project for the Southside schools. Hal thanked Cathy and said he will keep that in mind as they move forward with this exciting project.

Maureen McAbee mentioned that several members along with herself are due to roll off this council in June 2021. She asked for an explanation of the process in replacing these members. Brian Dooling answered by saying that Bob Heilmann is chair of the nominating committee and he will be reaching out to those scheduled to roll off to see if they would like to serve another term. ASAC members are allowed to serve 2 terms. Once the total number of new council members needed is determined, the existing members will be asked if they know anyone that would be a good fit. In addition to this, principals are asked to nominate candidates. After all the candidates are submitted an interview process takes place keeping in mind the goal of wanting a diversified representation. Final candidates are then brought to this council for approval and then ultimately to the Archbishop for his approval. Once approved and letters go out to new members over the summer, their service begins in August.

- **Adjournment & Closing Prayer**

Beth thanked everyone for their participation at this meeting and closed the meeting with a prayer. Next meeting date is Tuesday, March 16th (7:30-9:00am) on Zoom or in person.

Respectfully submitted,

Debbie Wheeler  
Schools' Program Specialist