

Minutes

Atlanta Archdiocesan Schools' Advisory Council Meeting

Tuesday, 3-12-24

7:30-9:00am

In Attendance: **Diane Starkovich, Tony Bonta, Bishop Joel Konzen, Stacy Lewis-Chair, Brian Hershberger-Vice-Chair, Maureen McAbee, Jennifer Prindiville, Patrick Lowther, Joey Nordmark, Fr. Valery Akoh, John Cryer, Kevin Murray, Michelle Raney, Pamela Tennell;**
Absent: Brad Wilson, Cathy Kennedy Harris, Beth Morrison.

- **Welcome and Opening Prayer**

Stacy Lewis called the meeting to order and Diane led the council in an opening prayer. Following the prayer, Stacy led the council in reciting the mission statement.

- **Approval of Agenda**

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

- **Approval of the January 9, 2024 Meeting Minutes**

Stacy asked for a motion to approve the January 2024 ASAC minutes. The motion to approve was given and seconded.

- **Introduction of Dr. Tony Bonta, Associate Superintendent, School Viability**

Stacy welcomed Tony Bonta as the new Associate Superintendent of School Viability and asked him to tell the council a little bit about himself. Tony greeted the council and said there are five words to best describe himself and these are: Faith, Family, Friends, Food and Fun. Growing up in Gary, Indiana, Tony received a strong foundation in Catholic Education and has had a total of 30 years of formation. He received his bachelor's degree at St. Meinrad College and his Master's of Divinity at Mundelein Seminary. He worked at Marquette University where he completed his Doctoral degree in Religious Studies.

- **Principal Opening, Update on Searches**

Diane said we have four principal openings. The Holy Redeemer search has been completed with the hiring of the current assistant principal, Jill Rice. St. John Neumann's principal interviews are scheduled for later this month with three strong candidates. St. John the Evangelist has only one strong applicant so far but we are hoping for more to come. Saint Jude has three applicants at this time but we are waiting another week to see if we receive more. Diane said the interview committees are formed for each one and the hope is to have all positions filled right after Easter.

- **Catholic Recruiters' Search Updates – President-St. Mary's Academy and Superintendent**

Bishop Konzen gave the update on these searches. Bishop said that we have contracted with Catholic Recruiters Associates to conduct these searches. They have brought forth candidates for both positions and he and Diane will meet virtually with the firm today to discuss the individuals brought forward in the hopes of narrowing down those to be interviewed. Bishop said the plan is to have a superintendent and president at St. Mary's Academy named by early April. This hiring of a president at St. Mary's Academy will complete the mission of having a president at each one of our high schools. Diane added that there is a panel already in place to interview for both positions. Diane said there is momentum at St. Mary's Academy with a projected enrollment for next year at 370. Bishop said this bump in enrollment

validates our decision to combine Our Lady of Victory and Our Lady of Mercy into one regional PK-12 school. Additional good news is that the Our Lady of Victory building will now belong to St. Matthew's Parish which is located right next to the previous school campus.

- **Superintendent's Report**

Diane told the council that Lisa Cordell has been hired by the Office of Catholic Schools as the director of our Open Doors Program. This program started at OLA under the direction of then principal, Lisa Cordell, when she accepted our first down's syndrome student. We have now extended this program to another elementary school, St. John Neumann. St. Joseph in Marietta is also interested in offering this program.

Diane thanked the council once again for participating in the accreditation interviews on February 12. There were approximately 25-30 council members present and according to the accreditation team it was a great session. We had four schools visited for STEM accreditation. Cognia has loosened up the restrictions on when you can apply for STEM accreditation. Instead of having to wait for the next accreditation cycle (6 years), you can apply any year but the school would need to reapply once your school accreditation cycle is up. Diane said three additional schools should be ready to apply in a year.

Diane directed the council's attention to the corrected confidentiality statement which she gave out to everyone. This includes council members and committee members. Diane asked them to sign and turn them in before you leave this meeting. This same statement will also be distributed to the schools' advisory council members.

Budgets are being reviewed and approved at this time for next school year. Once the school's budget is approved, the contracts can start to go out. According to policy, high school contracts need to be offered by April 1, and elementary contracts by May 1.

All school calendars have been approved for next year. Most of the schools will be starting the week of August 5, 2024 with the exception of Rome, GA which starts August 1st. Every school will be finished before Memorial Day.

The new president of Blessed Trinity is Marcos Arias. Marcos is a member of Saint Jude the Apostle Church and served on this council for many years. Partners in Mission conducted the search and Marcos started on March 4th. Diane said we are thrilled to have Marcos in this position.

Joey Nordmark asked about the procedure in searching for principal replacements. Diane said that 10 or 12 years ago the Office of Catholic Schools implemented a Principal Formation Program which includes 36 hours of classwork on the different leadership categories that NCEA states are the responsibility of a Catholic school principal. Diane said this principal formation program has proven very beneficial for us. Approximately 35 graduates of this program have gone on to be principals, assistant principals, curriculum coordinators or department heads.

For those needing a master's degree, we have partnered with Creighton University where participants completing our program can receive credit for one class toward their master's degree. We encourage those looking to complete their master's degree to enter into a Catholic program. By completing 36 hours with us, participants also receive an Educational Certificate in Catholic School Leadership. Diane said we post principal openings in the local Georgia Bulletin Newspaper as well as on the

Archdiocese of Atlanta website. In addition, we advertise on the NCEA website as well as in newspapers and websites of the dioceses in the Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Atlanta.

Stacey thanked John Cryer for being the Master of Ceremonies during the awards ceremony at the 16th Annual Celebration for Catholic Education. It was a lovely event enjoyed by all.

- **Committee Reports**

Finance Report – in Brad’s absence, Diane gave an update on GRACE Scholars. Diane said that March 8th was the last day you could get your pledge in and have it recorded for this year. The final numbers are not in yet but an estimate is approximately \$950,000 more than last year. Diane added that there are two bills in the legislature right now and one of them is to increase the cap on programs like GRACE. The second one is the school voucher bill. It has passed the Senate and is now sitting in the House. We should know about that by the end of this week. If passed, it is a \$6,500 voucher for any student that is attending a failing public school. We anticipate a rise in enrollment if passed.

Local Council Visits – Maureen McAbee said there has been three school visits since the last meeting. First up was Jennifer Prindiville who visited St. John Neumann School. She said the meeting was well run and the council was very engaged. The principal had recently announced his decision to resign at the end of this school year so much of the meeting was discussing the new principal hiring process and the effect this might have on teacher retention.

Michelle Raney visited St. Mary’s in Rome, GA and said it was a very well-run meeting with clergy present. The principal presented a power point on the school’s viability index. Concern of losing middle school students was expressed and how adding a football team for middle school might help retain some of those students. A vote was taken at the meeting and they decided to move forward with exploring the possibility of a football team. Great school, great meeting with lots of enthusiasm.

Cathy Kennedy Harris attended St. Thomas More School. They discussed their new building for primary and intermediate grades. Attention was given to security measures, 21st century learning and social/emotional awareness. There was also discussion about budget, retention of teachers, tuition, lunch vendors, etc.

Maureen said there are quite a few visits coming up for the end of the school year. Several schools have not had a visit yet this year. Visits coming up before the end of this school year are IHM, BT, OLA, SPC, SPX, QA and St. Joseph-Athens. Maureen requested that the principals (especially the new ones coming on) be told the reason behind our visits to the local council meetings. Brian asked if there is a standard number of meetings for each local council to have in a school year. Diane said that five meetings during a school year is standard.

Recruitment of Council Members

Stacy mentioned that visiting the other schools is a great opportunity to meet council members from other councils that may be interested in joining this council when their commitment to the school is complete. Brian Hersberger said we’ve received a possible candidate from St. John the Evangelist and asked the council to send Diane any others prospective candidates. Brian & Maureen will then contact all the candidates and have definite names by our next meeting in June.

ASAC Self-Evaluation

The self-evaluation is conducted by the ASAC Nominating Committee. Diane said the survey should be sent out to all members via Survey Monkey by the end of April to allow enough time for the results to be tabulated and a report given by Brian Hershberger at the June ASAC council meeting. Diane asked for 100% participation.

Policy-Draft of Tuition Policy

Patrick Lowther spoke on the progress of the Tuition Policy. The goal of this policy is to have more uniformity across the board with respect to tuition payments and parish verification form due dates, etc. The policy is still being drafted but once we have a final draft, Diane will run it by the principals at the April 11th principals' meeting. In addition, this council will receive the policy to review and give comments/suggestions. The policy will include a 30-60-90 day rule. The schools will have discretion to be more restrictive than what the Archdiocesan policy states but will not be able to be less restrictive. A discussion followed on different possible scenarios. Ultimately tuition debt should not be extended past a 12-month period. Diane has access to a printed report showing the numbers of families who are behind in tuition payments.

March 1st of the previous school year is the date that has been proposed to turn in the parish verification forms in order to allow families to obtain the participating Catholic tuition rate. Diane said the reason for this is to avoid a situation where parents start out with the non-catholic rate because their pastor could not sign off on the form and come in several months later (after contributing) requesting the tuition rate be reduced to the Catholic rate and make it retroactive from the beginning of the school year. This is not allowed. A discussion followed.

- **New Business**

Meitler Study

Stacy asked Diane to speak on the Meitler study. Diane said that the recent Meitler study revealed that there is enough interest in the Flowery Branch/Gainesville area to open a school. The remaining question is "where would it be?" Diane said that she, Tony & John Schiavone (Catholic Construction) went to Prince of Peace in Flowery Branch last week to view the facility. Prince of Peace had operated a preschool with 250 students several years back. They have 10 classrooms (4 of those with bathrooms), a separate reception area, clinic, & principal's office. In addition, the preschool room has direct access to the playground. Next step is to meet with the pastors of the surrounding Gainesville parishes. Bishop Konzen said Gainesville has a huge Catholic population (many of them Hispanic) who are underserved with Catholic school options. In meeting with these pastors, we hope to determine what would be needed to best serve the Gainesville families if a school were to open in Flowery Branch at Prince of Peace. The idea of a bus between the two locations is a very viable option. Diane said the governance needs to be determined first (regional or parish school) before they can move forward. Once that is determined, a bilingual principal would need to be hired as soon as possible. A discussion followed.

Partners in Mission

John Cryer asked Diane to speak on Marketing and Partners in Mission. Diane said that the schools need to have a marketing plan within their strategic plan. She added that Partners in Mission will be here at the Chancery for four full days next school year. The president, principal, advancement and admissions folks will be mandated to attend. They will be given proven strategies on how to increase

enrollment and how to maximize donations to the school. Diane invited anyone from this council who may be interested to attend.

- Adjournment and Next Meeting Date – June 11, 2024

Stacy asked the council to turn in their signed confidentiality statements before leaving today. Bishop Konzen led the council in a closing prayer. Next meeting is June 11, 2024 at 7:30am.

Respectfully submitted,

Debbie Wheeler
Schools Program Specialist