

Minutes

Atlanta Archdiocesan Schools' Advisory Council Meeting

Tuesday, 11-5-24

7:30-9:00am

In Attendance: **Patty Childs, Tony Bonta, Brian Hershberger, Joey Nordmark, Fr. Valery Akoh, Jennifer Prindiville, Patrick Lowther, Alexandra Balzer, Brandi Kler and Vivian Vu, Brad Wilson.** By phone: **Brent Herrin.** Absent: **Pam Tennell, Kevin Murray John Cryer, Hilary Dixon.**

- **Welcome and Opening Prayer**

Brian Hershberger welcomed everyone and thanked them for being present here on Election Day. Tony Bonta led the council in an opening prayer.

- **Approval of Agenda**

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

- **Approval of the August 2024 Meeting Minutes**

Brian asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the August 2024 meeting. The motion to approve was given and seconded.

- **Brad Wilson, CFO Presentation**

Brad said the Finance subcommittee met to discuss our two annual recommendations (allocation of Block Grants and Teacher Pay raises) and to discuss an additional change for teacher/staff recruitment and retention (use of 403b for retirement contributions).

Block Grants:

Brad presented the Block Grant recommendation and said that \$80,000 had been allocated to the new Hall County School which would result in moving substantial amounts from existing schools' block grants to accommodate the new school. Now that the new school has been placed on hold for a few years, a more moderate reduction in the block grants to existing schools will take place and a "hold back" of funds will be available to Patty to be used where needed in the Fall of 2026.

A discussion was had about the school enrollment problem. Only one archdiocesan school is at full capacity. Patty said we are looking at all angles to see what is appealing to today's parents. Home schools and hybrid schools are growing exponentially nationwide. One thing that has possibly affected our enrollment is the competition with other Christian (non-Catholic) schools that are popping up.

Brian asked for a motion to approve the recommendation from the finance committee of the allocation of School Block Grants presented here today. The motion was given and seconded. Next step is to present to this recommendation Archbishop for his approval.

Teacher Pay Raises:

The finance committee recommends continuing our practice of paying our teachers at 85% of the five-county average (Cobb, Atlanta, Gwinnett, Fulton & DeKalb) with a one year look back. Mark Beno

gathered the data on current teacher pay for the five metro counties. Brad presented the full analysis and summary of increases. Estimated cost of teacher salary increase for the 2025-2026 budget year is approximately \$3,800,000. Tuition will need to increase about \$540 per student just to cover the additional pay. It creates a problem for principals who need to retain their good teachers but on the other hand need to pass on the tuition increase to their families. Salaries and benefits are the main expense in a school's budget. A lengthy discussion on salaries/benefits/retention incentives (i.e. bonuses) followed.

Brian asked for a motion to approve the proposed 2025-2026 teacher salary increases to meet the 85% of the five-county average with a one year look back. The motion was given and seconded by the council.

Lay Pension Plan:

The finance council also reviewed the current retirement plan for lay employees. The current plan includes a five-year vesting period and other traits which are no longer industry standard. The finance committee recommends a change which would deposit the Archdiocese contribution of 6% directly into each employee's 403b account eliminating the 5-year vesting period and requiring each employee to enroll in the 403b program if they are not already a current participant. If approved, the current plan's funds would be frozen and the owner would need to rollover the funds in their 403b account or a plan of their choice. Much work still needs to be done.

Brian Herberger asked for a motion to approve the new proposed retirement plan for employees. The motion was given and seconded.

- **Superintendent's Report**

Patty said she went through the feedback from the All School Council In-Service and overall the comments were very positive. The recommendations for topics at the next in-service were finances, retention, scholarships. Patty proposed to move the next council in-service to be on August 23, 2025. This would require us to move the new member trainings a little earlier in August. We would still offer a Saturday morning option as well as evening option during the week.

Patty mentioned that custody issues have increased in our schools recently. In some cases, the arrangements are very complicated and becomes hard for the principals and counselors to navigate. There are plans for Smith, Gambrell and Russell to meet with our principals and counselors to give advice on handling such difficult cases.

Patty said we are moving forward with the Open Doors Program. There is a handbook now in place for the schools that want to participate. OLA & St. John Neumann are already on board and others like St. Thomas More and St. Pius X are working toward it. It is a 2-year process to become an open doors school which involves teacher training and facility accommodations. Patty will have Lisa Cordell (Director of Open Doors) come and give a status report on the progress being made.

Diane Starkovich is still working with the Office of Catholic Schools on Special Projects through December 2024. Since the Hall County school has been placed on hold for now, Diane has been researching virtual schools for us. Also, we are also looking into a Dual Enrollment program with Georgia Tech for St. Mary's Academy. More information on these developments to come.

Several accolades to announce:

- St. Mary's Academy received gold status from the AP Exam Awards plus some other awards related to minority numbers.
 - St. Pius X and Blessed Trinity both received platinum status with the AP Exam Awards.
 - St. Mary's in Rome received "Best Private School in Rome" award.
 - St. Thomas More received "Best Private School in Decatur" award.
- **Committee Reports**

Tony spoke on the importance of Marketing. He also brought up the Georgia Promise Scholarship program and how the Center for Opportunity who will help us to market this scholarship to our schools. The scholarship will cover \$6500 of tuition per student that is enrolled in a lower performing public school. The list will come out December 1st. Tony explained that it is a two-fold process. Schools must apply to be accepted as a Georgia Promise Scholarship School. Secondly, the family of the student needs to apply to the school of their choice. Once they apply to the school, there is no guarantee that the student will be accepted into that school. There is a handbook on regulations now published and there have been two town halls explaining this process. Our schools' admission process will remain the same with these potential students.

Tony spoke briefly on Georgia GOAL and showed the council where we stand as of right now. Brad and Tony urged those council members to please sign up if they have not done so yet. GOAL has been a wonderful team to work with and is very customer service driven.

Policy Committee – Patrick Lowther said Patty had sent him a draft of an AI policy for all students. He made some edits and will circulate it to the council to take a look at it and give feedback. Patty said it will be a document that will change as technology changes. (See AI policy attachment)

Strategic Planning Committee – Joey Nordmark said the current Strategic Plan was renewed through this school year. The next Strategic Plan will be a 3-year plan, given the impact of technological advances and will align with the 6-year cycle for the Cognia District-Wide Accreditation Process. Joey said Diane will be meeting with Patty and the team to go over the process. He asked the council to review his report and reach out to him with any input especially if you've anyone has had experience with strategic planning efforts.

Council Visits – Brian Hershberger said that Pam Tennell is working on the schedule for council school visits. If you are new to this council he recommends that you buddy up with another council member for your first visit. Hopefully that schedule will get out soon so each school can be visited before the end of the school year.

- **Adjournment and Next Meeting Date: Tuesday, January 7, 2025 at 7:30am.**

Respectfully submitted,

Debbie Wheeler
Schools Program Specialist