

## Minutes

Atlanta Archdiocesan Schools' Advisory Council Meeting

Tuesday, 1-7-25

7:30-9:00am

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

- **Welcome and Opening Prayer**

Brian Hershberger welcomed everyone to the first ASAC meeting of 2025. Patty led everyone in prayer, followed by the recitation of the mission statement.

- **Approval of Agenda**

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

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

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

- **Committee Reports**

### Strategic Planning Committee – Joey Nordmark

- The current Strategic Plan for the Office of Catholic Schools was renewed through the 2024-2025 School Year.
- The new OCS 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.
- The timeline for the strategic planning process is as follows:
  - December 2024 - Diane Starkovich to lead the “envisioning”
  - Q1 2025 – Formation of Committees
  - Q2 2025 – Formation of Narrative (ex. Strategic Priorities)
  - Q3 2025 – Socialization with the Schools (ex. Advisory Councils)
  - October 2025 – Presentation to Bishops
  - December 2025 - Promulgation
- There have been various surveys conducted within the past 12 months that will be leveraged as sources of feedback to inform the strategic planning process.
- There are some key topics that will be top of mind as part of the strategic planning process:
  - Increasing Enrollment
  - Marketing our strong accreditation and our solid Catholic identity to the growing Atlanta market.
  - Utilizing Georgia GOAL, Georgia Promise – school affordability and accessibility
  - Recruitment, Retention, and Development of Mission-Driven School Leaders, Faculty/Staff
  - Facilities => Safety and growth/updating

- Accessibility to Endowments/Funding
- Academic Excellence & Formation – Campus Life
- Athletics
- There will be school visits conducted by the Office of Catholic Schools and ASAC Members to help inform an understanding of the opportunities and challenges that need to be addressed as part of the strategic planning process.

#### Next Steps

- Create ASAC Task Force to visit schools
- “Envisioning” exercise in December – was led by Diane Starkovich and Patty Childs; reviewing the SWOT analysis and the “envisioning” exercise
- Formation of Committees in Q1

Patty added that in meeting with the principals and presidents in December, two groups were formed to ask questions of their needs and visions for the future. Patty said she was surprised to find that both groups desired more centralization related to marketing & branding. Also, a desire for day-care at the schools was expressed. Patty said each school has their own special features and personality and we don’t want to lose that but there are advantages in collectively working on marketing efforts that promote all of our schools.

Brian Hershberger suggested we may want to update the form used when visiting local school councils to include information specific to the school’s strategic plan. This may help in determining a common need.

Alex Balzer asked Patty if there were any themes that were common among the schools in expressing their need for more centralization. Patty said it seemed to be geared more toward marketing, advertising, publicity and communications. Patty feels that staff development could also be more centralized.

Fr. Valery spoke on the importance of Catholic Identity in our schools, especially those regional schools where there is no pastor involvement. A greater emphasis needs to be made on getting priest presence on campus to offer sacraments to the students. Patty said she plans to visit feeding parishes to promote our schools and ask for priest support. The shortage of priests is an ongoing issue for schools.

John Cryer asked if the survey data is accessible to review. Patty said that she and Karen Vogtner can access data for each school on the Cogna website. Another valuable resource is the Catholic Identity Surveys that will go out to all the schools, students, parents, faculty and staff during Catholic Schools Week. Patty said she would like to get more voice from the students. Some other tools that may help us in gathering data are parent exit interviews and admissions data from families that do not choose our school.

Brian thanked Joey for his excellent work on this important project and said that strategic planning touches every committee. Brian told Joey to reach out to council members if more support is needed.

### Policy Committee – Patrick Lowther

Patrick stated that an AI policy draft was sent to all members to review. He asked for comments, suggestions or questions once reviewed. Alex Balzer asked how teachers and staff use AI. Patrick said they did not include teachers and staff in this draft, but it can be included or there can be a separate AI policy for teachers and staff. A lengthy discussion followed regarding the increased use of AI.

Patrick said next steps should be once the ASAC council approves the policy to get feedback from the principals, especially on the subject of including staff and teachers. Patty said she will send the draft to the principals and will make that a topic for discussion at the next principals' meeting. The schools must be aligned with the archdiocesan policy. They can be more restrictive if they choose to be but must at least meet the standard given in the Archdiocesan policy.

Brian thanked Patrick for all his work on the AI policy. More to come after the principals review the policy.

### Marketing Committee – Tony Bonta

Tony asked John Cryer to fill the council in on the Marketing Committee report. John said there is an open invitation to anyone who might have marketing experience to be involved. The plan is to have a 3-hour workshop in the next couple of weeks to pull some survey data together, along with some feedback from our consultants from Partners in Mission. Patty said there is a meeting with Partners in Mission soon to see where our needs are before the remaining two sessions. John said at the workshop they will discuss branding and ways of getting our message out to the public. During this workshop we will look at each school individually and target those that need special care in the way of marketing. John said once they determine a date/time for the workshop, an open invitation will be sent out to everyone.

A question was raised as to whether we are thinking of getting students involved in our marketing efforts. John Cryer said that it has been discussed in the past of having student ambassadors come together for ideas and feedback. Patty said there are many questions we could ask the students' opinion on which would be most helpful. Discussion followed.

### Finance Committee – Brian Hershberger

Brad Wilson was not present at the meeting so Brian updated the council on the Finance report. He said the budget season will begin soon and tuition increases are expected to be higher than the inflation rate. This is mainly due to teacher raises for next year as well as tuition rate discounts for employees who have children in our schools.

Jennifer Prindiville asked what the status was on the proposed changes to the Archdiocese of Atlanta Pension Plan. Patty said Archbishop Hartmayer has approved the changes and the hope is that the new program will go into effect July 1, 2025.

## Nominating Committee – Brian Hershberger

Brian gave the update for nominating committee members Kevin Murray and Pam Tennell, who were absent from the meeting. Brian said that Pam sent out a sign-up genius to all council members. Brian asked all members to sign up for a local school council meeting that is not your child's school. Pam will contact the school to verify the date/time and to let them know an ASAC member will be in attendance. The school visit report form is being updated and will be available for use very soon. The goal is to have every school visited by the end of the school year. Brian thanked everyone in advance for signing up.

Brian asked Patty to get recommendations from the principals to join the ASAC council as we will have a few members rolling off at the end of this year.

- **GA GOAL & Other Updates**

Patty said she got an email from **GA GOAL** yesterday advising that they had received 14,500 tax credit applications, totaling \$125 million dollars. The cap was met easily. Patty said these are record numbers with an increase of 22% over last year but based on the cap in place now proportionality is only 53.5% per family which is disappointing. Patty said we need to work on getting the cap raised.

Tony Bonta spoke on **Georgia Promise Scholarships**. All of our schools were approved for the Georgia Promise Scholarships. The list of low performing schools on the Georgia Promise website has been taken down and seems to be on hold for now due to discrepancies. Georgia Promise has communicated to our schools to advise setting up a bank account etc., so we believe the program is moving forward but we have no other information at this time.

Tony mentioned that GEMA is offering a **security grant program** where non-profits can apply for up to \$200,000 for security needs in their school. Tony said he knows of 13 out of our 16 schools have applied for this grant. Patty said the application process was grueling so we pray that they get approved.

Tony said **Catholic Foundation of North Georgia** is offering grants to schools in February and CFNG staff will be at the January Principals' meeting to discuss these grants.

Next, Tony spoke on **Catholic Metro Sports**. It has been determined that athletic programs such as CMS serve a valuable need. History shows that Archbishop Donohue was the first to declare athletics a parish ministry. Over the years, this has created issues for the schools because many of the facilities being used for this program are in our school gyms. The question we are faced with now is whether Catholic Metro Sports should be treated as a vendor or a ministry. Better planning and communication with school & parish leaders is crucial. Policies and procedures need to be made clearer when it comes to registration, discipline, parent behavior, coaching behavior as well as safe environment requirements. A major concern is financial clarity such as budget, charges and fees, and charges put upon the schools and parishes who are providing the facilities. Tony said there are several meetings coming up with CMS to discuss how the program will operate next school year. He added that things will need to change as the way it's presently being run is not working.

## **Superintendent's Report – Patty Childs**

Patty said much of her report has already been discussed. Patty said in Brian's finance report he touched on Tuition Discounts for employees in our schools. The contracted employees (teachers) receive a 50% tuition discount, and non-contractual employees receive a 10% tuition discount for those who have students enrolled in one of our archdiocesan schools. Patty said there were considerations to raise the tuition discount for non-contractual employees but decided to raise their salaries instead to be in line with industry standards and to be more fair and equitable. A discussion followed.

Brian asked Patty to speak on the Virtual Academy options. Patty said one of Diane's special projects after retirement was to investigate virtual Catholic school options. After much research, Catholic Virtual, Inc. seemed to be the best fit. The plan is to start small with high schools for credit recovery or summer school. Also, students with medical issues who need to be out of class for a while could benefit from this option. In addition, it gives the opportunity to offer courses that would not normally be offered on campus at their school. Patty said starting small with high school makes the most sense; then if all goes well eventually move on to middle school. More information to follow, stay tuned. A discussion followed.

- **Adjournment and Next Meeting Date: Tuesday, March 18, 2025 at 7:30am.**

Respectfully submitted,

Debbie Wheeler  
Schools Program Specialist