

**Diocesan Catholic School Board (DCSB)**  
**Cathedral Square Center - Room D/E**  
**Minutes**  
**Tuesday, September 19, 2019**

I. **Prayer** offered by Dave Sipka.

II. **Roll Call**

**Present:** Jill Annable, Andrew Blum, Dave Faber, Sue Haas-Williams, Phil May, Sterling Morse, Rev. Godfrey Onyekwere, Sr. Rosita Schiller, Dave Sipka, John Vande Guchte, Leah Wareck

**Absent:** Rev. Tom Cavera, Rosa Fraga

**Others Present:** Shelley Hofmann

III. **Communications:** Board roster was updated.

IV. **Approval of June Minutes:** approved as written

V. **Discussion Topics**

John proposed changing the order of the agenda to cover committee reports at the beginning of the meeting. John also recommended that members review the BSCI Updates (reports from Greg Ghering, Luzia Tartari and Conrad Cuncannan) prior to meeting. He proposed giving these individuals five minutes at the beginning of the meeting to address questions. He also suggested that members could pose questions ahead of time for Greg, Luzia, and Conrad at the meeting.

**A. BCSI Update – Marketing Communications Update (Greg Ghering)**

Greg’s report included in meeting packet was reviewed.

Greg highlighted that our metrics are back on track after some dips last year, and we are trending upward year over year with traffic to our website. Greg explained a more aggressive approach to improving our “Contact Us” opportunity on our website, and that we have received significantly higher number of responses.

The #LoveMyCatholicSchools social media contest was a great tactic to keep conversation about our schools going over the summer. The marketing committee is going to invite contest entrants to a workshop to continue working on how to reach more and more families.

Greg shared that we have expanded our geofencing ad areas. People who click on our geofencing ads spend more time on our site than others who access our site through other means.

## **B. Greatest Challenges Discussion**

There was continued discussion of the superintendent's greatest challenges, which are also opportunities. These challenges have been categorized as academic, financial, and social and have been mapped to the BFF Strategic Plan. Dave identified two main challenges in each of the three categories for goal setting as outlined below:

Academic:

1. School board training
  2. Growing non-Catholic and/or questioning Catholic teachers
- Financial
1. Enrollment growth - we need to look at this internally
  2. Tuition cost out of reach especially for middle income families
- Social
1. Implicit and unconscious bias of constituents
  2. Pastors report not seeing students/families at Mass

Feedback from the DCSB included the following:

Academics are a huge priority for parents. A goal of school board training needs to ensure that each board is properly performing its role in evaluation so that there is accountability. This goal is especially important with changes in school leadership.

The second academic goal is affected by teacher shortage and shortage of aspiring leaders. Is there an opportunity to retain the teachers we have and to go out to top Catholic colleges to recruit new teachers? The focus should be developing relationships with Catholic colleges and universities in the mid-west. Aquinas is developing a cohort of graduate students who completed an undergrad in a non-education based major but are in a fast-track program to obtain educational certification (AIM). Although this is a non-traditional pathway for educators, the participants in the cohort make for great educators because they truly want to teach.

We also need to consider a membership with Frontline Education, a top-notch recruiting website. Due to the high cost that many schools would not be able to afford, we need to look at budgeting this for the diocese.

In schools where the school board has been engaged and teachers are solid, there have been smoother transitions for new principals. Teachers, today, are feeling more a part of the diocese as a whole through grade-level and content-area cohorts.

On the topic of enrollment growth, a concern with a few schools losing a large number of students was raised. There are a few factors that we need to review for impact on enrollment, including the discontinuation of Welcome Scholarships and the church crisis. Are there strategies from which we need to pull back to “weather the storm” or do we press forward with even greater intensity? Dave requested the board’s input.

How can we ask Bishop to encourage his priests to talk about Catholic education? How can we help priests talk about Catholic schools in a non-offensive way to all parishioners? An opportunity may be to identify resources for homilies and other best practices of pastors to highlight the importance of Catholic education.

The DCSB asked what they can do to help; Dave asked for their expertise and advice to address these challenges/opportunities.

### **C. Review of BFF Mission and Vision**

The question of whether the BFF Mission truly reflects our mission was raised by Dave. A proposal was presented to consider a more student-focused mission: *An alliance of Catholic schools inspiring (and preparing) students to fulfill God’s purpose for their lives.* There was support to continue this discussion with many different groups throughout the diocese.

Further discussion included:

Pastoral councils, finance councils and deanery meetings should reflect an “all-in” focus and priority of Catholic education.

Many marketing strategies today focus heavily on sharing stories. We should be sharing stories of our students fulfilling God’s purpose for their lives. Children’s salvation should be everyone’s goal.

How do we create new energy and refocus? Keep the BFF Strategic Plan a living document.

The DCSB’s strategic planning committee will suggest a process for discussing these changes to the BFF mission with a broader diocesan audience.

### **D. Annual BFF Plan Progress Report**

Tactics have been identified as green (solid progress); yellow (activity begun, some progress); or red (no activity, no progress).

Dave shared some vision metrics that he will be using to continue to update school boards on BFF strategic plan progress.

## VI. Committee Reports

A. **Admissions Committee:** no report.

B. **Finance Committee:** no report.

C. **Strategic Planning Committee:** no report.

The committee will be inviting schools that will be doing strategic planning this year to session(s) to help provide guidance and resources. Hopefully the schools going into strategic planning this year will attend. Ludington Area Catholic School has contacted Sue to consult on their strategic planning process.

D. **Executive Committee:** no report.

D. **Mission Effectiveness Committee:** report included in packet was reviewed.

The mission effectiveness committee has identified a responsibility of schools to work with students who have same-sex attractions. Sr. Rosita shared an excellent article to keep DCSB members informed on the issue from a Catholic perspective. Bylaws include a responsibility to provide spiritual development for the DCSB. John suggested the January meeting could serve more as a retreat.

F. **Marketing Committee:**

Report was included in Greg's presentation.

G. **Development Committee:**

The Development Committee held a development cohort meeting in August. All Saints Academy was only school in attendance. The September cohort meeting will be moved to the November Summit.

## VII. Superintendent/Asst. Superintendent Reports:

Dave shared external versus internal messaging about enrollment and asked for feedback. There is an important distinction between external messages that allow us to keep positive momentum and perception in the community and internal messages that allow our school decision makers to address our critical realities. These messages need to be clear for principals and other school leaders. Several suggestions were made to improve the external and internal messaging that will be used following our final count day.

There was discussion about getting a report of national trends of Catholic population versus local trends to compare how our local numbers might be impacted by nationwide trends?

The ACRE (Assessment of Children/Youth Religious Education) results for 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade student populations were reviewed. The results tell us how our students are performing on parts of the catechism. This is valuable information for teachers.

The Inclusion Work Group is working to address diversity, inclusion and equity in our schools. The group has created a diversity calendar that highlights important cultural events and figures. Gloria Purvis spoke to our teachers and principals about the pastoral letter, "Open Wide, Our Hearts", and conversion of heart. Bishop Walkowiak has asked the Office of Catholic Schools to review a workbook to go along with "Open Wide, Our Hearts".

A climate survey was conducted at Catholic Central High School and West Catholic High School. The results affirm the need for our schools to do more in addressing racism and inclusion efforts. Through our Theology of the Body training, the lessons link back to "Open Wide, Our Hearts." Teachers are growing in their understanding which will help to address these issues in the classrooms. There was discussion about how these issues are addressed at the elementary level. Dave F. emphasized that we cannot ignore these issues, and we need a better understanding of these issues to determine how to create a true culture of belonging for the students and their families.

The response at the deanery meetings was positive, particularly with the alignment of religious education with what is being taught in Catholic schools.

Dave F. was appointed to a 4-year term on the Grand Rapids Promise Zone Authority Board.

VII. **Action Items:**

1. Dave to share OCS Survey results with the DCSB.
2. Dave to ask Renee Vaughan-Dwyer to assist with the November Summit.
3. DCSB Committees to begin planning their breakout sessions for the November Summit.

VIII. **New Business:** no new business.

IX. **Closing Prayer:** Prayer for Bridging Faith and Future was prayed by all.

**Adjournment:** Meeting was adjourned at 8:27pm.

**The next DCSB meeting is Tuesday, October 15, 2019.**