

Diocesan Catholic School Board (DCSB)
Cathedral Square Center - Room D/E
Minutes
Tuesday, February 25, 2020

I. **Prayer** offered by Sister Rosita Schiller.

II. **Roll Call**

Present: Jill Annable, Andrew Blum, Rev. Tom Cavera, Dave Faber, Rosa Fraga, Sue Haas-Williams, Sterling Morse, Rev. Godfrey Onyekwere, Sr. Rosita Schiller, Leah Wareck

Absent: Phil May, John Vande Guchte

Others Present: Greg Ghering, Shelley Hofmann

III. **Communications: Questions related to Greg's report**

Greg shared that the new inquiry form on our website has generated over 80 prospects since July. Prior to redesign, we received 10 inquiry submissions over the course of 13 months. Overall, our web traffic is keeping pace. Greg's goal is to increase web traffic by 10% over the next 12 months. Facebook ad traffic appears to be down over 2018-19. This is due, in part, to setting initially broad targets, then narrowing targets a little too much. We have since refined the targets and are seeing better results. For December through February, our investment was lower than the previous three months, but our cost efficiency is still strong. Last year, Google ads were not targeted exactly to our counties. This year, we redefined targets and spent slightly less. Our impressions went down quite a bit, but we experienced a strong click-through rate of 5.2%. It is important to note that each year the marketing budget has been reduced while metrics have remained solid.

We are now emailing our blog posts to school families about twice a week.

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

V. **Committee Reports**

A. **Admissions Committee:** report provided by Luzia was included in the board packet. In March, the Admissions Committee will hold listening sessions for families of Latino students to learn what is important to Latino families and to better understand why our schools experienced a significant drop in Hispanic student enrollment.

We have had 10 teachers participate in the Aquinas ESL program. Jill noted that we need to consider how best to utilize these teachers.

A question was raised about the response to the Faith & Future Scholarship. Dave reported that the response of applications has been good and the distribution across grades (Kindergarten, 6th, and 9th) is relatively even.

There was significant discussion about how best to utilize scholarship dollars to meet the most need possible.

A question was raised: What is the tuition delinquency process to determine whether a school family can return? Sample letters for 30 days, 60 days, and 90 days past due have been shared with parishes. Parishes can customize these letters for each family. The greatest challenge with tuition delinquency is receiving no communication from the family. As long as families are making an effort to pay tuition and communicate with the parish, administrators are usually very willing to keep working with the families. Some families continue to make payments well beyond the years their children are in school.

The 2019 exit survey indicated that the number one reason families left our schools this year was classroom/school atmosphere. Generally, this means a student may have felt bullied or not welcomed. The number two reason is finances. The number three reason is quality of school programs. Currently the exit survey for school families does not ask for demographic information. It would be helpful to include demographic questions in the future, so we can better understand the reasons for those leaving by school.

B. Mission Effectiveness Committee:

The Mission Effectiveness Committee has planned its session for the Spring Summit, and the topic will be Theology of the Body. Jill will prepare an update of how Theology of the Body has been introduced and how it will be incorporated into curriculum for the committee to integrate into their presentation.

C. Development Committee: no report.

The topic for the Spring Summit will include an update on “Our Shepherds, Our Future” campaign and the impact of changes to the Catholic Foundation of West Michigan.

D. Finance Committee: no report.

E. Strategic Planning Committee: no report.

Ludington Area Catholic Schools and St. Mary, Big Rapids have contacted Sue about assisting with their strategic planning efforts. At the Spring Summit, schools would like more examples of strategic plans; Dave will share recent submissions from three

schools. Sue would like to ask these schools to share their process at the Spring Summit.

F. **Marketing Committee:** included in Greg's report.

G. **Executive Committee:** no report.

VI. **Superintendent/Asst. Superintendent Reports:** questions about the report were addressed.

School leader/teacher recruitment efforts: Have you given thought to having a teacher who is an alumnus of the school assist on recruiting trips?
Suggestions were offered.

The DCSB has had significant influence on the goals and activities of Dave and the entire Office of Catholic Schools.

With the Catholic Foundation of West Michigan's new model, the connection to diocesan efforts will be more visible. Fund ideas to share with the new director include: stabilization of tuition to help the middle class families, increased tuition assistance for low and middle income families, Theology of the Body, increased compensation for teachers, continuing education for teachers, inclusive education, academic advancement like inquiry in science and math, etc.

VII. **Discussion Topics**

A. **Spring Summit Planning**

Session descriptions are due by March 13 to Renee Vaughan-Dwyer or Shelley.
Responses from the Fall Summit include: Provide more time to share ideas and less presentation, poll the cohorts for questions and topics of interest, and provide space for schools to regroup with their own members after the sessions.

There was group discussion about how the summit ends: Do we want to provide space at the end for schools to regroup with their own members? Will this be time well spent if schools have only 1-2 members attend?

A proposed hybrid solution includes a quick 5-minute wrap up as a large group followed by a few minutes for participants to share with their own school members. Individual attendees could join a group or leave after the large group wrap up. We could assign tables by school. It was suggested that a starter discussion question be left on each table.

Is there a way to facilitate remote participation? Would it be reasonable to use Facetime or is this too awkward? Using Facetime would depend on the size of the group. In addition, we do not want to discourage attendance by offering this option.

It was suggested that we wait to see if there is a request for remote participation and/or reach out to schools who have zero RSVPs and offer remote participation.

B. Stewardship Study follow-up

1. Adoration
2. Curriculum
3. Sacred Heart Stewardship Effort

Recognition was given to Sr. Rosita and the Mission Effectiveness Committee for its work encouraging local school mission effectiveness committee efforts.

Also, thank you to Jill for connecting with Janet Eaton in Wichita to access a copy of their stewardship curriculum. Thank you, too, to Jill for her efforts to integrate the stewardship curriculum into our draft Theology curriculum standards.

Dave visited Sacred Heart Academy. It was encouraging to hear more about their stewardship implementation efforts. Father Sirico and Sean Maltbie shared their process which included: five homilies, a letter to parishioners, two town hall meetings, an information packet, and a recommitment family agreement. These efforts generated initial pledges (which did not include all parishioners) equal to nearly two times the entire offertory collection of the previous year. It was suggested that we preserve Father Sirico's homilies, as they may be helpful content for a future stewardship package for schools?

VIII. Action Items

A. Plan for Talent Recruitment/Catholic College Visits

Sterling is working on getting Dave contacts at three additional historically black colleges: Central State in Ohio, Tennessee State, and Xavier University in Louisiana.

The teacher shortage is severe, not only in Michigan but nationwide. There were 23,000 students enrolled in teacher prep programs in the State of Michigan in 2008-09. In 2016-17, there were only 6,000 students enrolled. In 2011-12, 7,000 teaching credentials were issued in the state of Michigan; yet in 2016-17, 2,600 teaching credentials were issued.

The Office of Catholic Schools may want to consider recruiting teachers from Puerto Rico. Rosa has a contact who is a mayor in a small town in Puerto Rico, and Jill and Dave can reach out to the Catholic school superintendent there.

There are some marketable statistics for the West Michigan area to attract teachers shared by Andrew. These were collected by The Right Place in GR.

B. Messaging Recommendations for Pastors Update

Dave Sipka prepared some messaging suggestions for pastors to use in their homilies to promote Catholic education. Dave Faber asked Father Cavera and Father Onyekwere to review the document and provide feedback. It was also suggested to gather input from Father Durkee and Father Mulhall on how this content might be incorporated into priest formation and possibly seminary coursework.

It was agreed that it is more helpful to share these messages as “content ideas,” not actual homilies.

In our efforts to bring pastors together to share ideas and collaborate around promoting Catholic education, the question was raised: Do we use this document as a starting point to get the conversation going? Or do we share it after a conversation with pastors has begun?

Dave will share the Catholic education promotional messages in a Google doc for DCSB members to review and provide feedback.

Father Onyekwere suggested attending deanery meetings and presenting this topic.

C. Pastor Collaboration Meetings Update

We are planning two regional meetings for school pastors to come together and collaborate on best practices. We may use the messaging recommendations (described in B. above) as a discussion topic at these meetings. After some discussion, the board agreed that a productive question to begin the conversation may be, “How do you engage parishioners (not just talk about) in the importance of Catholic education in your parish?”

Should we recommend Bishop invite the priests to encourage strong attendance? Is it realistic to ask Bishop to participate (knowing he’s such an advocate for Catholic education)?

We should also be sure to ask pastors what future topics would be helpful.

D. New Business:

A recommendation for Bishop to be involved in the priest collaboration/best practice sharing meetings will be discussed at the next meeting.

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

F. Adjournment: Meeting was adjourned at 8:38pm.

The next DCSB meeting is Tuesday, March 31, 2020 at 6:30pm in D/E.