Diocesan Catholic School Board (DCSB)
Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, September 14, 2021

I. Prayer offered by Sue.

II. Roll Call

Present: Andrew Blum (virtual), Damon Bouwkamp, Cheryl Butkus, Dave Faber, Sarah Grey, Sue Haas-Williams, Kristina Martinez-Precious, Rev. Godfrey Onyekwere, Patty Schrand (virtual), Tim Thimmesch, Leah Wareck

Absent: Rev. Darrel Kempf, Sterling Morse

Others Present: Shelley Hofmann, Luzia Tartari (virtual)

III. Parent communications about masks and vaccine requirements for fall
Sue opened the session with a welcome to guests and reviewed the process for the eleven parents addressing the board. Sue explained to guests that our Diocesan Catholic School Board is advisory in nature and has no jurisdiction over the topics being presented. She reiterated that the board was happy to listen to parents’ concerns, but there would be no response from the board related to the issues being addressed.

Eleven parents addressed the board regarding mask usage in Catholic schools.

Dave thanked the presenters and made closing remarks emphasizing that ultimately, our unified goal must be to achieve the mission of the Church and to prepare our students to fulfill God’s purpose in their lives. Dave asked parents to recognize the impossible task of meeting the individual demands of all families on this polarizing issue. We need to give each other grace, and pray for one another, our schools, and our families as one Body of Christ.

IV. Admissions and Enrollment Update
Luzia addressed questions about her written report.

Do we know the number of students we have lost due to the mask mandate? Our schools lost a total of 82 students between the order date August 20 and September 3. Eight of those students were not enrolled in a Kent or Ottawa county school. We lost 74 students who were enrolled in our schools within Kent and Ottawa counties (We have 19 schools in these two counties.), which averages out to about 3.8 students per school. Schools outside Kent and Ottawa counties lost an average of .9 students per school. The Admissions & Enrollment team will survey families of no-show students to get more information about why they left.

A board member commended the Admissions & Enrollment team on the work they have done to keep families and attract new families in light of the challenges of
COVID and the mask mandates. We are only 83 students short of pre-COVID enrollment, and we have 246 more students than last year.

- **Are there certain schools that lost more students than others?** Yes, Our Lady of Consolation, St. Mary’s in Spring Lake, and Divine Providence Academy have lost the most students.

- **Do you think we will redeem any of the families who left once the mask mandate is lifted?** Yes, many families have said they will return.

- **Where are the families who left our schools going?** Homeschooling or virtual schooling.

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

VI. **Committee Reports: Questions from written report**

A. **Mission Effectiveness (ME)** - Dave shared Sr. Rosita’s one page summary of the 2020-21 Program Effectiveness Survey results. This will be an important focus for the ME committee. The board is recruiting a new ME chair as Sr. Rosita has stepped down from that role but will remain on the committee.

B. **Strategic Planning** - The Strategic Planning committee has synthesized the notes from Dave’s “Emerging from COVID” interviews into ten major themes. The committee will begin using these themes to update the BFF plan in an upcoming work session. In addition, the committee will offer strategic planning support for four schools this year: West Catholic, St. Thomas, IHM, St. Mary (Spring Lake).

VII. **Superintendents’ Report** - there were no questions from the written report.

Dave shared some high level results from the school board survey conducted in the spring. This year the Office of Catholic Schools created new charts comparing the diocesan results and individual school results.

The highest results included:
- The principal shares a detailed report of the state of the school at each meeting.
- The board has a positive working relationship with the principal.
- I have a thorough understanding of our school’s Catholic identity.
- I have a thorough understanding of philosophy, mission, and vision.
- I personally feel well-vested in the philosophy, mission, and vision of Catholic schools.

Lowest scores:
- The board is involved in oversight of major gift solicitations.
- The board has approved and instituted a program of planned giving.
- I have an updated copy of the comprehensive development plan.
The board has a process for training new members.

Dave’s goal is to share these board survey results with each school board and encourage them to think about how to address these results at the local level.

Dave also plans to follow up with community partners about the themes that emerged from the “Emerging from COVID” project.

Dave addressed some questions about COVID and the public health order.

- **How did superintendents give input to the Kent County Health Department (KCHD) mask mandate?**
  Dave explained his participation in the Kent Intermediate Superintendents Association (KISA) (approx. 23 members). KISA discusses a range of topics that are mostly relevant to public schools only, but are important for Dave to be aware. COVID has been an important topic. KISA has had regular meetings with the KCHD and leaders of major health systems in West Michigan.

  As the 2021-22 school year was about to begin, Kent and Ottawa counties began to see spikes in COVID cases. Looking at data from schools down south that had already been in session, the KISA wanted to determine how best to preserve in-person instruction. KISA felt it was in the best interest of schools to write a letter to Adam London. In the letter, KISA asked Adam London for a public health order that mandates masks for students if he believed there was imminent danger for students. Dave advocated for a “release valve”, a broader exemption, for parents who believe the mask is detrimental to their child's health. Unfortunately, Adam London did not include this exemption in the order. Despite this exclusion, Dave did not oppose the letter.

- **Are we seeing cases among 7-12th graders?** Yes, there have been some cases mainly at Kent County schools; almost 70% of cases within our schools have been among students, not staff.

- **What are schools doing about virtual learning?** Teachers are using Canvas or other student management systems to deliver instruction and compile work packets for younger students. Most schools are not providing a synchronous virtual option as this year we do not have a widespread need for virtual learning.

- **Can we prepare a list of people who would be willing to support teachers? How do we support and recognize our teachers?** Support is best offered at the local level as school communities vary in need.

  Our schools have taken advantage of some federal funding and grants available to increase resources in our classrooms. Although there are significant opportunities, receiving the grants requires a lot of work for school leaders. In EANS I, our schools
will receive about $6 million in benefits. Examples of improvements include: portable air conditioning/purification units in classrooms, connectivity, one-to-one devices, Smartboards, etc. Also, some of our schools are using the diocese as a third party employer to strategically hire staff to help students with learning loss, special needs, etc. It is expected that our schools will be able to apply for EANS II funding and it is our hope that schools will use these dollars strategically for current and additional student support services staffing needs, allowing schools to strategically strengthen these programs having long-term benefits on the students and school programs.

The board went into closed session to discuss outside educational service providers.

VIII. Discussion topics
A. **Update on schools and COVID** - addressed in discussion of the Superintendent’s Report

B. **Update on Bridging Faith and Future (BFF) Plan** -
   An update of the BFF Plan will be based on the ten themes from the “Emerging from COVID” project. The goal is to prepare a draft plan to use for Board Summits this year. We can use these sessions to get feedback on the refreshed plan, make changes, and use it next year to develop tactics.

C. **Summit Planning**
   Board committees may be able to plan breakout sessions based on the BFF refresh. Sue will put together a framework for this following the Strategic Planning work session on Thursday (9/16) and share it with board members.

IX. **Action Items**
A. **Work Plans** - updating each committee’s work plan by October meeting
   Sue suggested that it may make more sense to base committee work plans on the BFF refresh.

XI. **Closing Prayer**: Prayer for *Bridging Faith & Future* was prayed by all.

XII. **Adjournment**: Meeting was adjourned at 8:41pm.

The next DCSB meeting is Tuesday, October 19 at 6:30 p.m. at Cathedral Square.

**2021-22 Meeting Schedule**
- September 14, 2021
- October 19, 2021
- November 3, 2021 (Fall Summit)
- November 30, 2021
- January 18, 2022
- February 22, 2022
MISSION
We prepare students to seek and fulfill God’s plan for learning and life.

VISION
Be a collaborative and strategically focused body delivering leadership, mentorship and expert recommendations that enhance the quality and growth of our Diocesan schools.