

Board of Advisors Agenda
Monday, February 16th, 2025
7:00 p.m. / Aquinas Conference Room

Aquinas Catholic Schools Mission Statement:

Provide a Christ centered learning environment where we develop individuals to be disciples of Christ in all areas of their lives.

Opening Procedures

1. Welcome & Call to Order (Austin Witmer- President)
 - a. The meeting was called to order at 7:02pm.
2. Opening Prayer (Father Connor led an opening prayer.)
3. Roll Call of BOA Members (Kelly Koranda- Secretary)
 - a. Present members included: Kyle Eller, Jared DeWispelare, Brian Birkel, Mike Moravec, Trent Jakub, Ryan Meister, Philip Zegers, Austin Witmer, Fr. Connor, Melissa Yindrick, Sandy VanCura, Katie Smith, Ron Mimick, Alina Strong, Colleen Storm, Maggie Miratsky, Michaela Moravec, Christina Podolak
 - b. Also present were Jessica Mill, Rachel Wisnieski, and Fr. Caleb Hile
4. Approval of Previous Board Meeting Minutes (Austin Witmer- President)
 - a. The previous Board Meeting Minutes were approved with a couple of amendments made by Austin Witmer.
5. Amendments to the Agenda (Austin Witmer- President)

School Reports

6. Chief Administrator Report (Fr. Connor)
 - a. Fr. Connor reviewed the following items from his written report.
 - i. As he has dug into it more, there are some difficulties in trying to create a balanced budget for next year.
 1. He noted that this year's budget is currently \$565,000 in the red. He reviewed several contributing factors. Parish assessments and tuition are lagging, but some of the money is still coming in. The roof revenue is around \$316,000 and expenses so far are around \$133,000. The endowment is negative \$41,000 but we are trying to take 5% so that number may improve. There are many areas where we have overspent what was budgeted, for a variety of reasons.
 2. He also reviewed some positive aspects that should help the budget: 2 faculty members will be going half time next year; administration is also looking at whether they need to reduce teaching staff in other areas, especially with some of the smaller classes, unless enrollment increases. Msgr. Tucker will send \$31,500 for 10 students from Seward this year and Fr. Kain will hopefully send some money to help support his parishioners who attend Aquinas.
 - ii. Contracts have been prepared for the Middle School and High School teachers. Elementary contracts will be prepared soon as well.
 - iii. He has been working on a Parish Verification form to try to verify that families are registered at a parish and to try to help them make a connection with their pastor and come to church if they do not already.

- iv. They have conducted some good interviews for future positions. Art will likely be harder to fill due to a small number of people going into Art Education, but there are a couple of solid applicants.
7. Jessica Miller and Andrew Wilshusen, project manager with JEO Consulting, presented information about traffic safety on the highway outside of the middle/high school.
 - a. Each year, the crisis teams observes that it would be good to have a second entrance to school in case of an emergency where the highway could be blocked off. The city is in the process of planning for a roundabout on the highway outside of the school. Construction will begin after school gets out, and the city has \$60,000 allocated for a temporary entrance during construction. Jessica Miller noted that this money could be used instead toward construction of a second entrance if the school wanted to pursue that.
 - b. Andrew presented the rationale behind the roundabout:
 - i. With the development that will be occurring on the west side of the highway, there will be more traffic and safety concerns. They have conducted a traffic study. A signal is not warranted by traffic counts; other parameters considered would include a 2 way stop and a roundabout - projecting numbers out to 2035 (including plans for future building across the street), if we leave it the way it is with a 2-way stop, the intersection would be rated at a safety level "C" whereas the roundabout would be rated at a safety level "A".
 - ii. This is a proactive rather than reactive change.
 - iii. There will be a crosswalk on the north side of the roundabout
 - iv. All of the entrances to other developments south of Casey's will come off of the street south of Casey's, so there will be no other highway entrances.
 - v. The cost for the roundabout will come purely from city funds; there will be no cost to the school.
 - c. The project starts at the end of the school year, so administrators and board members would need to decide by then if they would like to use the \$60,000 for a permanent second entrance. It was decided that we will return to this discussion at the next Board meeting.
8. Holy Family Early Learning Center Report
 - a. There are currently 51 kids enrolled, as well as 16 in after school program.
 - b. They are in the process of hiring one teacher and still looking for a director. 2 interviews went well but nothing has been decided yet.
9. Aquinas High School/Middle School - Sandy VanCura reviewed the following items from her written report:
 - a. They had an excellent interview for the art position last week, and another is scheduled for Friday, so they are hopeful of filling it.
 - b. They are advertising for a math position - Spencer Zysset will be pursuing other career opportunities, so they have posted that position as well and already received one application.
 - c. Spirit Catholic Radio will be here February 25 in the morning - tune in to hear students and teachers sharing their love for this school system!
 - d. They have not yet heard back from the security grant organization. Joe Cowan (the representative from the diocese) did a security assessment in December and they hope to have his recommendations by the end of February.
 - e. Shelly Kubicek has been selected as a finalist for the 2025-26 Golden Owl Award. The winner will be announced in June.
 - f. She also reviewed current enrollment numbers and the upcoming calendar for February and March.
10. Activities Report - Ron Mimick highlighted the following items:
 - a. Girls wrestling - Kate Neinhauser will be moving to coach and will work along with Roy to build the schedule. They are expecting 7-8 girls.

- b. We don't have a volleyball coach hired yet - he hopes to have someone hired by May 1 to be able to plan for summer activities and camps.
 - c. Plans are underway for the Softball Coop with High Plains, Osceola, and Cross County - it will be known as Polk County/Aquinas and they will play some of the same teams we've played before.
 - d. There is some discussion of Roncalli possibly joining the Centennial Conference as well.
11. Aquinas Elementary - Katie Smith highlighted the following items from her report:
- a. Catholic Schools Week was a great success.
 - b. The 2nd grade class is small, at 23 kids - it needs to either grow or they may have to reduce it to one section.
 - c. There are 3 upcoming Open Houses, which she is hopeful will help with enrollment numbers (a regular open house, Kindergarten Roundup, and Preschool Open House)
 - i. 3 families plan to come to the Open House from Schuyler
 - ii. 14 preschoolers are enrolled for next school year already, and 21 in the 5-day PreK.
 - d. Katie has also met with a couple of families wanting to do a hybrid/part-time homeschooling and school schedule - the teachers were overall very supportive of looking into this as a possibility - they are still trying to figure out what this might look like. The families would still pay full-tuition at the school and they are working on coming up with a written agreement regarding school policies for these families. Next year would be a trial run of students in K-3.
 - i. There was some discussion of what this might look like if it reaches the middle school/high school level.
 - ii. It was noted that Nebraska Christian has a program like this where they try to coordinate with the homeschool systems, so they could be a great school to reach out to for ideas.
 - iii. For activity participation, the diocesan policy is that they have to be enrolled 4 classes a day to be involved in activities. The NSAA policy requires that they be enrolled 2 classes a day.
 - e. Katie will be visiting Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Classical School in Denver during March to get ideas for our own school.
 - f. Alison Fozzard will be moving to part time taking over the computer position for Jenna Urban; we have had 5 applicants for her elementary position.
12. Campus Ministry - Melissa Yindrick highlighted her written report -
- a. Many great things are happening and there is a lot to celebrate from Catholic Schools Week.
 - b. Laura has helped put together some videos about the Societies and their Saints.
 - c. There are 22 Aquinas students plus 2 students from Sts. Peter and Paul who will be attending the Steubenville Conference this summer.
 - d. Kids requested an adoration day in lieu of Friday, February 6th, since there was no school on the "First Friday". Many students and teachers came in to spend time with our Lord.
 - e. The staff retreat and day of recollection went well on January 23.
 - f. The Sacred Catholic Foundations Committee met and discussed their goal of adult/family formation; they want to seek ways to work within things that already exist to bring faith formation/touchpoints on faith practices to the parents and families.

Subcommittee and Pillar Reports
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13. Finance

- a. FACTS reconciliation - Philip and Fr. Connor were able to tie out all of the loose ends of the budget that were uncertain at last month's board meeting.
- b. This year's revenue will be \$200,000 short because of the ONN scholarships because we received the money last year but it was applied to this year's tuition.
- c. Financial statements were sent out for viewing.

- d. There was some further discussion about the board's vote regarding tuition for the 2025-26 school year.
- i. Fr. Graeve sent an email after the last board meeting, as well as some additional information regarding the proper relationship between the school and the parish. He requested a second vote about the tuition increases.
 - ii. Fr. Connor mentioned that his awareness of the budgetary situation has changed since our previous meeting.
 - iii. There was some discussion about the burden on the parishes. Parish assessments are over 85% of their weekly collections right now. St. Mary's is about 100%. Historically, this is probably the highest it has ever been at St. Mary's.
 - iv. There was also discussion about the rate of tuition increase over the past 10 years and how that has affected current and future families' views of enrolling their children. It was noted that if tuition is raised, we need to clearly advertise that no one will be turned away due to tuition needs. Communication needs to be very clear board members recommended that the tuition statement needs to include a personalized letter from administrators explaining the tuition and also reminding them of the Big Beautiful Bill's hoped-for impact for the following year.
 - v. It was also recommended that our communication continue to highlight the good things happening in our schools, in particular vocations that come from students who have attended our Catholic Schools.
 - vi. It was emphasized that we need to continue to push giving at the parish levels - not just from those current families paying tuition but also reaching out to the many people who did not pay anything to come here years ago. Perhaps some of these people are in a place where they would be able to give now. Fr. Connor noted that many of our parishes do well on campaigns but do not do well with regular giving.
 - vii. Once again recognizing that we are an advisory board by nature, in light of Fr. Graeve's request and the new financial information about this year and next year's budget that Fr. Connor provided, the board thought it appropriate to take another vote on tuition rates.
 - viii. Austin made a motion to do a 3% tuition increase per Fr. Graeve's request. Kyle Eller seconded it.
 1. This would be an annual increase of roughly \$115 per student
 2. Every 1% increase is about \$11,000-\$12,000 increase in the overall budget.
 - ix. The motion passed 11-2.
 - x. Voting FOR the 3% increase were: Fr. Connor, Austin Witmer, Maggie Miratsky, Christina Podolak, Kelly Koranda, Kyle Eller, Brian Birkel, Trent Jakob, Ryan Meister, Philip Zegers, and Mike Moravec
 - xi. Voting AGAINST the motion were: Jared DeWispelare and Colleen Storm

14. Pillar Reports

- a. Exceptional Learning Pillar - Christina Podolak highlighted the following items:
 - i. Their pillar met with the Dynamic Community Relationships pillar because of overlapping projects.
 - ii. They feel that home/school communication efforts continue to improve.
 - iii. They discussed ways to reach potential supporters - people who are not receiving PowerSchool communication through current school families.
 - iv. They also discussed more ways to recruit, including: 7th and 8th grade visiting days, swag bags, and video interviews with alumni to talk about how Aquinas contributed to their success.

- v. They highlighted the importance of public speaking skills for students. Speech will be a required course for all students beginning in 26-27 school year.

Other Items

- 15. Calendars were passed out - look at it and be prepared to discuss next month.
- 16. Board Term Length Discussion
 - a. Our by-laws state that it is a 2-year commitment for being on the Board.
 - b. Because the majority of the board members were brought on at the same time, it was suggested that some members volunteer to be done this year, and stagger it so that there isn't an entire turnover of the Board at the same time. Board members are supposed to find their own replacements, and the CAO would approve them.
 - c. New board term commitment starts in August but we might need to change that to July, with election of officers at the August meeting, considering the school year is beginning in August.
 - d. We will discuss this further at the next meeting.

Closing Procedures

- 17. Next Meeting – March 16th, 2025 @ 7:00 p.m. .. Adoration @ 6:30p.m**
- 18. Closing Prayer - the meeting ended with prayer at 8:42pm.

Listing of Board of Advisors

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| 1. Father Brian Connor | Chief Administrative Officer, Dean; David City Deanery |
| 2. Austin Witmer | Board President |
| 3. Maggie Miratsky | Board Vice President |
| 4. Kelly Koranda | Board Secretary |
| 5. Sandy VanCura | Middle/High School Principal |
| 6. Katie Smith | Elementary School Principal |
| 7. Vacant | Holy Family Early Learning Center Director |
| 8. Alina Strong | Business Manager |
| 9. Melissa Yindrick | Campus Minister |
| 10. Michaela Moravec | Alumni and Foundation |
| 11. Laura Adair | Marketing and Enrollment |
| 12. Ron Mimick | Activities Director |
| 13. Michael Moravec | Board Member |
| 14. Christina Podolak | Board Member |
| 15. Colleen Storm | Board Member |
| 16. Brian Birkel | Board Member |
| 17. Jared DeWispelare | Board Member |
| 18. Trent Jakub | Board Member |
| 19. Philip Zegers | Board Member |
| 20. Kyle Eller | Board Member |
| 21. Ryan Meister | Board Member |

