

School Advisory Board Meeting Minutes
March 11, 2015, 6:30 p.m.
Room 207

1. Call to Order and Prayer

Members in attendance: Lauren Beckmann, Tom Dean, Matt Hietpas, Lisa Lesjak, Laura Maly, Kelly Schmidt, Marcia Velde, Mariann Willing, Kathy Wyatt, John Dulmes, Fr. Dennis Dirks

Members absent: Molly Gallagher, Kristen Reynolds and Soley Somma

Guest attending: Margy Cain

2. Guest Comments - none

3. Parish/Pastor Report – Fr. Dennis

No updates at this time

4. Opening remarks – Matt

Yesterday Lauren, Matt, Tom, Lisa and Fr. Dennis met for about three hours and discussed a number of items. As we work on a future for SRS we need to focus on what is best for our children and staff and not on the monetary.

Introduction:

Guided by a clear mission and vision, St. Robert School has evolved over the last ten years into an innovative school that delivers to our children a faith-based education that is personalized, accessible, and well rounded with subjects like World Languages and a rich music program. Our teachers and staff are hard working and caring and our principal is full of energy and ideas and she is not afraid to roll up her sleeves and lead. Our charge as a School Advisory Board (SAB) this year has been to focus our attention on putting together a plan for a sustainable future. This plan should seek to preserve the progress that we have made in so many areas and to build a sustainable model for the future that is fiscally responsible and compatible with the path that our leadership and teachers have put us on. Carefully planning for the future will allow SRS to remain independent and relevant to our local community.

Purpose:

The purpose of tonight's discussion is to provide all present a clear picture of where we are and where we need to go. Our goal is for members of the SAB and guests to have a clear understanding of the big picture and to have

the knowledge needed to creatively provide guidance to a sustainable plan for SRS for both now and in the future.

5. **Method:** Today, Tomorrow and the Future – Matt, Lauren, Lisa and Tom

- a. What do each of us value most about SRS? What do we want the future, educational model of SRS to look like?

Matt - we could go down the paths of school choice, smaller schools like Holy Family or some other creative path. What creative path could we choose? Each path has a different financial meaning. As a group we would like to be creative and continue on our current path instead of going backwards.

Lauren - if we go the path of a smaller school it becomes generational or we move forward with staffing changes (flexible) per grade level to grade level.

Matt - smaller class size is ideal.

Lisa - challenge with this year to next year is determining the enrollment. She feels that she needs to put out a firmer message earlier in the process next year that you need to enroll within a reasonable time frame or we might not have a spot for your child.

Lauren - it's not realistic to build changes for the fall of 2015, but to build a change for the fall of 2016. We can take a look at where we are for 2015.

Our mission is to build a sustainable model we can live with for years. A three year plan would move us into the future securely. As a parish and school we need to come up with a budget together, but also separately.

- b. Recap our past discussions on the fiscal budget for 2015-2016; projected deficit for upcoming year and savings plan; and the role of the School Society Fund. – Tom, Lauren and Matt

The parish and school are in a deficit of \$350,000 this year. Last year's deficit was at \$320,000. Parish wide we cannot let this happen again. Fr. Dennis, Tom and number of others have been working on making some changes. For the parish \$100-150,000 in cost will come down. On the school side – what does it look like with current enrollment numbers? A change in revenue of \$55,000 would be based on an enrollment of 300 students and a tuition increase and \$95,000 in cost reductions.

With the way we currently spend we would be out in five years. With spending changes we can discuss going forward and sustainability. We need to control our own destiny and keep the Archdiocese out of our decision making. Let's move forward in a positive way. Father mentioned that the Archdiocese looks at us as a whole entity not as separate (school/church) entities. We want to have a flat budget – no deficit. Tom also mentioned that in Chicago, New York, and Boston many Catholic schools had to close. Parents were not given advanced notice, but instead received a letter of

notification “this is the school you will go to”. How do we communicate to the parents that we are one entity and not two? There are a number of families who receive the parishioner tuition, but also attend other churches? How do we change this? We need to get a message out that the parish would like to get back to a point in which they can subsidize the school, but we always need to keep additional giving to school outside of tuition. The parish and school need to tighten their belts. The parish has restructured their staff and has additional plans in the works. Disclosure will be provided once the changes are finalized. In 2007 there was \$1million in contributions to the church. Today’s contributions are \$700,000 which does not allow for the church to subsidize the school with a cash amount.

We have taken a look at the structure of our kindergarten classes and will be making some changes. Junior kindergarten (K4) will be a smaller class size (capped). There will be one teacher for junior kindergarten with an aid and senior kindergarten will have one and a half teachers. There will be one senior kindergarten class with a reduction in staff in the afternoons. We will utilize the staff and space within the 4 classrooms across the kindergarten classes. We will see how this works and then going forward doing the same with the first, second and third grades and then moving onto other grades. Teachers can play on their strengths. This allows for flexibility and growth, stays within our mission, and allows us to respond to future demands.

Last year was the first year we took \$100,000 out of the School Society Fund. In prior years we only took out \$60,000. The funds we use are from interest and not principle. The current year’s budget includes \$300,000 which does affect the principle.

c. Enrollment projections for 2015-2016 – Lisa

As of March 10, 2014 we have 247 students registered for the next school year. If the probable, incomplete, verbal, and non-registered were to 100% commit we would have a registration of 315 students. For junior kindergarten we have 15 who are siblings of current SRS students with four new students. We are seeing the recession reflected in our kindergarten classes. The birthrate prior to the recession was 2.1 which reduced to 1.8 after the recession. The birthrate of 1.9 is projected in the next couple of years. Matt mentioned that for junior kindergarten a cap of 22 students with a wait list offered is our plan. We would then open up another room once we reach 34 students. There would be no changes to other grades. We have already sold our school to the families. We are not seeing additional enrollment of new students for our current fourth grade, but have seen so in other classes. Even though we have people who have registered for the next school year, some will change their mind before the new school year. Our budget is based on 300 students.

John – really feel that we should look at adding a K3 program. Lauren mentioned that if space allows we could possibly look at that. With a K3 program we would also have specific requirements we would have to meet based on daycare licensure. A K3 program is not something we would currently consider, but will put on the list of future possibilities.

d. Tiered tuition model – Tom

Tom provided us with the tiered tuition model and rates for the 2015-2016 school year. Tom, with Lauren’s help, will draft a letter explaining what is happening in the classrooms and parish wide that will be signed by Father Dennis, Lauren, Tom and the other parish trustee, Joe O’Neill. Tom’s ideal timeline is having the draft done by this Monday for people to look at and then sending out to the families before spring break. Someone mentioned adding an expanded detail section of costs. Cost you pay, Annual Fund, Home and School fund raising, School Society Fund and the parish. The last four items add revenue towards the total cost of education that helps to keep our tuition costs as low as possible.

e. Fall of 2016 – short term planning process of new ideas to deliver our innovative educational model for years to come – SAB members

Part of our short term planning process may include a focus group of parents and educators to provide feedback on new ideas to deliver our innovative educational model for years to come. The goal timeline is to complete this process so that feedback can be presented at the State of the School meeting in the fall of 2015, which is currently scheduled for Thursday, October 15, 2015. The subject matter for the meeting: “We have talked with a number of you and these are the results.” Why a focus group? Last year the marketing group utilized a focus group, which generated the new marketing campaign “Life Smart”. We need ideas from teachers and parents. We could enlist the teachers to determine which parents would be ideal to participate in the focus group. We seem to have the same parents who participate in the school, which is great, but we would like to hear from other parents as well. We would also like to see some of the young, new families involved. Not sure who would facilitate the focus group. We need an ad hoc group to structure the focus group. Need someone who knows how to run a focus group. Lisa will check with Kramer Crasselt for ideas of who would be a good coordinator. What do we value the most that has to be there? Marketing utilized a professional for their focus group. How long did it take? Get guidance from professionals; responses might be better if questions are asked by an outside source.

What would be our timeline for starting the focus group? Let’s try for early May. Molly, Soley and Kelly could lead the planning process. About a week or so after Tom’s tuition letter send out a separate email to the parents

informing them about what we are doing and who is interested in participating. Instead of a school wide notice have the teachers send the email out to their parents, but also tap some parents on the shoulder and say, “Hey, you would be a good source”. Make sure we also have a good balance of non-volunteers and parishioners vs. non-parishioners. Let families know that we value their opinion to help plan for a sustainable future.

f. Future tuition models – Tom

We are just starting to change things. What are some future ideas for other tuition models? Parishioner vs. non-parishioner – if you give to the parish then x dollars can be taken off of your tuition. Need to verify the legality of this. The School Society Fund – if x income than this dollar amount will go towards your tuition. Set tuition at one rate (ex. \$6-7,000) and if you donate x dollars to the parish and so on, x amount would be taken off of your tuition rate until the bottom line is x, then this is the dollar amount you will pay. We need to find a way to make sure the school can function independent of the parish cash subsidy.

6. Parent Survey - Lisa

The Parent Survey has been moved out another month. Lisa is hoping to have a draft of the survey completed within the next week and emailed out to several parents for their review and comments. The new time line is as follows: April 2nd – survey finalized; April 14th – send survey out to all SRS families; April 21st – email reminder; April 27th – closing date and review of the survey results completed and distributed to the SAB before the May board meeting.

7. Meeting Dates

The SAB will continue to meet on the second Wednesday of each month at 6:30 p.m., with the exception of July, when no meeting is held. Therefore, the meeting dates are:

- April 15, 2015* – Kristen will provide the snack and prayer
- May 13, 2015 – John will provide the snack and prayer
- June 10, 2015 – Tom will provide the snack and prayer

The meeting adjourned at 8:39 pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Mariann Willing, School Advisory Board Secretary.

*Due to the timing of Spring break, the SAB meeting has been moved to the third Wednesday in April.