

ST. ALEXANDER SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCIL MINUTES
October 24, 2017

Call to Order:

Secretary Nicholson called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. in the School, 7025 West 126th Street, Palos Heights, Illinois. Present were School Advisory Council (SAC) Members: Maria Anderzunas, Christopher Montell, Dan Nicholson, and Carol Reckwerdt. Also present were Father Michniewicz, Principal Cathy Biel, Assistant Principal Mary Dombrowski, and Parish Finance Director Paula Somers.

Opening Prayer: Father Michniewicz lead the opening prayer.

Minutes: There were no minutes from the September meeting, as it was an executive session.

Principal's Report: Principal Biel noted that 5th-7th graders began the DARE program the previous week, and reminded the Council that the Student Council will again prepare a Mass in honor of Veteran's Day. Principal Biel also reminded the Council of the upcoming Mom's Night Out and Dave and Buster's Night, both sponsored by the Family School Association. She also reminded the Council that our School Counselor, Michelle Murata, is working with students at all ages to choose kindness, and that she is qualified to provide academic/social/emotional testing for students at no charge. Principal Biel also announced that a portion of the 5k proceeds were used to purchase a 3-D printer, which will benefit children in all grades.

Illinois Tax Credit Scholarships: More information was released by the Archdiocese regarding the Scholarships, but more will be needed to determine whether St. Alexander School is likely to benefit from interested parties being granted the Scholarships. Availability will begin in January 2018, with interested families being directed to the Illinois Department of Finance's website to apply for the need-based Scholarships. The pool of Scholarships is centralized to the Archdiocese, and priority will go to neighborhoods with at-risk schools and to lowest income families. Families/individuals interested in donating to the ITCS fund can direct the donations to benefit St. Alexander families specifically, but corporate donors have no such option. Rather, corporate donations are directed to the general fund for the Archdiocese-wide pool of applicants. This program will sunset in 5 years. More information will be shared with St. Alexander families as it becomes available, via e-blast or e-envelope.

Archdiocese Strategic Plan: The new Superintendent of the Archdiocese of Chicago Catholic Schools, Dr. Jim Rigg, has released a new strategic plan. The key focus areas are on student enrollment, retention of top administrative and teaching talent, variation in approach and effectiveness of academic practices, and the affordability of tuition at Catholic schools. Several Council members lead a discussion about whether the Strategic Plan could use an additional focus area: helping suburban Catholic grammar schools specifically, where competition from quality public elementary schools is often high (thereby making the decision to not pay Catholic/private school tuition easier for families). Principal Biel said she would share the Plan with School families via e-blast or e-envelope.

Facebook: SAC members lauded the use of the School's Facebook page to publicize the events, experiences, and achievements of the St. Alexander School community. They encouraged Principal Biel and Ms. Pam Kennedy to keep up the great work, as the Facebook page is an excellent source of information about the vitality of the School community for families looking

for a Catholic Parish and School. They also discussed ideas for posts. One idea offered was ‘Two Minutes with a Teacher,’ where students would interview St. Alexander School faculty as a way to introduce them to St. Alexander School’s Facebook page followers/viewers. This and other such ideas are currently being developed/lined up.

Parent Education Night: There was a discussion about having a special Parent Education Night focused on STEM-based concepts, perhaps involving scientists and/or engineers as a way to stir up even more excitement for the successful Raider 5k Run/Walk in the Spring of 2018 (tentatively May 10, 2018). Other ideas were discussed, to which Principal Biel said she would be supportive of more than one Parent Education Night if the interest warranted.

Pastor’s Report: Father Michniewicz updated the SAC on the Renew My Church program, where our team-based grouping is Incarnation Catholic Parish. He reported that the grouping has not yet been activated, reiterated that the program is a Parish pairing not a School pairing (St. Alexander School remains independent of the program), and was not sure when it would advance to the active phase. Sharing of resources and priests is needed, as retiring priests are outpacing the number of newly ordained ones. He also announced that the Parish Mission is January 29-31, and encouraged interested individuals to participate.

Comments from visitors: One visitor suggested reaching out to School parents as a way to gauge interest in Parent Education Night topics. There was also a request for teachers to upload test/homework grades in relative close temporal proximity to their being graded. Though the common rubric is at least once a week, less frequent uploading than that can often mislead parents about a student’s performance, thereby creating a missed opportunity to provide help with a struggling subject. Another visitor suggested making the School website more user-friendly and informative. This is particularly important for new School families, who often bombard established families with questions that could be easily addressed via a FAQ or New Family section on the website. Other information, such as student:teacher ratio, number of aides and enrichment faculty, would be helpful as well. Some information, however, is best kept behind a log-in wall (e.g., family directory, e-envelope, etc.) for safety reasons. Another parent suggested that Principal Biel provide an annual State of the School Address during Catholic Schools week. The same visitor reminded Principal Biel about the importance of informing donors/participants of the 5k Raider Run/Walk how the proceeds will be used (e.g., donor participation is often more enthusiastic when there is a clear plan for the proceeds).

Father Michniewicz ended the meeting with a Closing Prayer.

Adjournment:

Council Member Montell moved and Council Member Reckwerdt seconded a motion to adjourn. On a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 8:27 pm.

The next Council Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, November 29, 2017 at 7:00pm. It will be an executive meeting, so no visitors will be in attendance and no minutes will be taken.

Respectfully submitted,
Dan Nicholson