



School of St. Mary
Meeting of the School Advisory Council (SAC)
March 19, 2025 Minutes

Council Members Present: Kathy Thompson, Clare Giannelli, Eileen Weber, Michelle Kijek, Kate Burke, Katie Feeney, Maeve Curran, Diana Hand, Peter Hartman, Rob Busam, Meredith Leggitt, Brian Perry, Margaret Hogan, Natalie Agostinelli, Ashley Madsen, Kelly Graham, Jimmy Griffin, Liza Jessen, Dale Lyons, Jenny Walsh, Courtney Bott, Sabrina Jerina, Justin Fisk

Council Members Absent: Fr. Mike Nacius, Chris Schenkel, Brittany Ruef, Mandy Castle, Kristina Madsen Lowery, Heidi Christen

SOSM Visitors Present: Matt and Carrie Oates, Lauren Perkaus, Mark Stanwood

Agenda Highlights

1. Opening

- Meeting called to order at 7:15 PM by Council Chair Eileen Weber.
- Council member Maeve Curran opened the meeting with The Prayer of St. Joseph.

2. Key Updates

- Council Chair Eileen Weber reviewed meeting norms and objectives, emphasizing SAC by-laws.
- The Council approved the January Meeting Minutes and they will be posted on the SOSM website.

3. Principals Report (Kathy Thompson and Clare Giannelli)

- Expressed gratitude to everyone who planned and attended the gala, noting the incredible energy in the room and thanking all for the generous funds raised for the Crusader Fund.
- Thanked the Finance Committee for their partnership and dedication throughout the 2025-26 budget process.
- Announced a 6.5% tuition increase for the 2025-2026 school year, along with a \$50 increase in comp fees. These adjustments account for new teacher hires, updated textbooks and materials, Blackbaud implementation, teacher merit increases, and rising insurance costs.

- Emphasized that teacher recruitment is a top priority. Efforts are underway to hire a 5th grade math teacher, a Spanish teacher, a full-time IT support professional, and a UGC music director for the upcoming school year.
- Confirmed that 2025-26 contracts have been sent to teachers, including salary increases of 3.5-4%; have asked for contracts to be returned in April. Mr. Manges is retiring, and Mrs. Casey (5th grade) has announced her departure, with all other teachers expected to return at this time.
- Offered prayers for Marcy Haubner's daughter, who is undergoing leukemia treatment, and led the Council in reciting a Hail Mary for the Haubner family.

Committee Reports

1. PGC & UGC Reports (Natalie Agostinelli, Margaret Hogan)

- PGC: New clubs introduced to positive feedback from teachers and parents alike; thank you to the PA for the new iPads in 1st and 2nd grades allowing each student to have their own device.
- UGC: 8th-grade musical and senior luncheon have been highlights of the last few weeks at the UGC; upcoming spring field trips include the 8th grade Washington DC trip and 7th grade Springfield trip.
- Ash Wednesday All School Mass at St. Patrick was a huge success; UGC students loved visiting the PGC and church again.

2. Executive Report (Eileen Weber, Michelle Kijek)

- Expressed gratitude to SAC members for their ongoing collaboration and dedication to supporting the administration and fostering a positive community environment.
- Shared commitment to enhancing school communication and transparency; recent initiatives include a SAC "Meet and Greet" in January and a monthly newsletter distributed via school email and posted to the website.
- Working to ensure each grade level has representation on SAC to ensure diverse perspectives from across the community are considered (adding 7th grade representative).
- Clarified recent misinformation regarding enrollment numbers: The current enrollment for the 2025-2026 school year is 371, which is on track for this time of year; stressed parents are encouraged to reach out to any SAC Executive Committee member with questions and to clarify any misinformation.
- Introduced Jenny Walsh, Christina Porter, and Kathleen Brill as leaders of the newly formed Ad Hoc Food Service Committee, tasked with evaluating and improving lunch services.
- Motion to approve the Committee was made by Sabrina Jerina, seconded by Katie Feeney, and passed unanimously.
- Jenny Walsh shared an update, noting outreach to Kiddos to adjust vendor options for healthier choices and ongoing exploration of alternative food services; community input and suggestions are welcome.

3. **Family Retention** (Sabrina Jerina)

- Since January's meeting, several initiatives have been implemented with positive results:
 - i. Teacher Swap between 3rd and 4th Grades: A successful day that fostered connections and built comfort as 3rd graders met their future 4th grade teachers, while 4th graders enjoyed the opportunity to reconnect with their former teachers; recommended to continue next year.
 - ii. Third Grade Gym Night: Students played games and enjoyed a pizza party while parents met with the 4th-grade teacher; over 25 families attended. The event was well-received and is recommended to continue next year
 - iii. PreK 4 Gym Night: Like the Third Grade Gym Night, this event served as an opportunity to parents to meet the rising grade teachers and become more familiar with the school programs. These events were highly successful at critical transition points for students. Earlier communication for all these events next year will help with attendance.
- Looking ahead, a "4th Grade Supply Drop-Off" event is being planned for August. Teachers will greet families, offer classroom tours, and ease transition anxiety. The tentative date is the Monday before school starts, with early communication to encourage participation.

4. **Catholic Identity** (Katie Feeney)

- Hallow prayer app is being introduced for grades 2-8.
- Teachers undergoing training to integrate app usage into their classrooms.
- Teacher Council representatives noted they will be a great resource for many classroom assignments (beyond Religion), including SEL and English/writing program work. More information and a permission slip for usage will be sent to parents soon.
- A Teacher Survey was suggested for after the Lenten season to understand how the app is being used, to ensure it's an effective investment.

5. **Student Life** (Peter Hartman)

- The *Heart of the Crusader Award* will be launched in early April to recognize student excellence. This monthly award will honor students from both campuses who exemplify our school motto: "To Learn. To Serve. To Lead." More information will be shared with the school community after spring break, so teachers, faculty, parents, and other school leaders can nominate recipients.
- Recent successful events such as Pack the Gym Night, the Victory Rally for the 7th and 8th-grade girls basketball team, and the basketball banquet have fostered community spirit, bringing together students and parents from all grades.
- Beyond skill development and teamwork, SOSM athletics also prioritizes sportsmanship. SOSM has received outstanding feedback from other schools

praising our athletes' positive attitudes, willingness to help with cleanup, and exemplary behavior. This commitment reflects our mission to develop leaders and responsible citizens, not just athletes. Related to this, the Committee is evaluating ways to improve the Athlete of the Year Award to include teachers, faculty, and coaches in the nomination process (currently voted on by students only).

- The concession sales during the basketball season raised over \$1,300 for the 8th-grade fund, marking a successful effort. The committee plans to explore sustainable ways to continue the program in the future.
- A Council member suggested enhancing service hour requirements for students to help reduce the parental volunteer burden while fostering responsibility and community engagement.

6. Legislative Action (Brian Perry)

- In cooperation with Mandy Castle, Brian has been closely monitoring state and federal mandates to ensure the school's ongoing compliance. There is a potential shift of responsibilities from the federal to the state level, which could have both direct and indirect impacts on the school.
- Brian is coordinating an upcoming in-person meeting with the Archdiocese of Chicago to gain insights into their understanding of current federal and state directives. Key legislative topics under observation include potential classroom cell phone bans, sex education requirements, and the use of Title I funds.
- Brian will continue to monitor legislative developments and provide timely updates as more information becomes available.

7. Finance Committee (Meredith Leggit and Rob Busam)

- The Committee is now receiving monthly financial reports and is actively monitoring the current school year's budget, which remains on track and balanced. The Committee has received budget reports through February 2025.
- Due to successful fundraising and contributions to the Crusader Annual Fund, the PA has been able to supplement the budget, ensuring that teachers and students receive necessary resources in a timely manner (e.g., recent iPads for 1st and 2nd grades). The PA is also exploring the addition of air purifiers in classrooms.
- Current enrollment for next year stands at 371, with a projected final enrollment of approximately 402. It's essential for any families who have not yet re-enrolled to do so, as this will help make the Blackbaud rollout as smooth and seamless as possible and will allow Kathy and Clare ample time to ensure staff is in place to accommodate class sizes.
- The 2025-2026 budget process, as noted in the Principal's Report, was collaborative and efficient. Four scenarios were considered, and the team agreed on a 6.5% tuition increase, consistent with the 6% increase during the last three years. This increase will fund additional teachers, IT investments, math resources, 3.5-4% salary merit increases, and rising insurance costs.

- A Council member inquired about communicating suggested annual family donations to the Crusader Annual Fund, and the Principal confirmed that a requirement has not been communicated to ensure inclusivity. All families are encouraged to participate in supporting the Crusader Annual Fund, with time, talent and/or treasures, as the Fund fills the gap in the budget between tuition and actual operating expenses, including teacher bonuses, which are critical for their compensation package.
- The Committee is working on benchmarking teacher compensation against other Catholic schools to ensure SOSM remains competitive. Additional compensation options are being explored, such as signing bonuses, end-of-year bonuses, stipends, and more, to enhance overall teacher compensation.
 - i. A teacher representative expressed gratitude for the Committee's efforts, noting that teachers are committed to staying at the school, but they need compensation that supports a livable wage.
- Kelly Graham made a motion to approve the tuition rate, Meredith Leggitt seconded, and the Council unanimously agreed

8. Parent Association (Kelly Graham, on behalf of Heidi Christen)

- The Parent Association (PA) extends heartfelt gratitude to everyone who contributed to the success of the gala. Special thanks to Michelle Kijek for her leadership over the past three years, as well as Kate Burke for supporting the auction two years in a row, and Maria Vernon for co-chairing this year and agreeing to lead next year. This year's event raised over \$300,000 for the Crusader Annual Fund – and total funds raised to date are over \$370,000 (far exceeding the \$330,000 annual goal).
- Fund allocation includes:
 - i. \$85,000 for new laptops
 - ii. \$100,000 for school operations
 - iii. \$200,000 for teacher compensation
- Fish Fry: Friday, April 11. Ticket prices go up on March 28. A huge thank you to Molly Sweeney, Tessa Schenkel, and all the volunteers who are making this event possible.
- Crusader Chase: Mark your calendars for May 16!

9. IT (Ashley Madsen and Jimmy Griffin)

- A survey was conducted to gather feedback from teachers on IT needs and support, highlighting opportunities for more training and resources.
- The 2025-2026 budget includes funding for a Blackbaud consultant to support the Blackbaud implementation and related IT needs.
- The Committee strongly recommends hiring a dedicated IT Director to address long-term support and cybersecurity issues, hardware and connectivity issues, which is not currently in the 2025-26 budget. The IT, Finance, and Principal teams will research the feasibility and potential impact of this role moving forward. The current contract is not meeting the needs of the school with a consultant

supporting the school only one day each week, with limited availability to address urgent issues – and with no replacement if this person is sick/not available.

Next Steps

- Committees will continue independent work and will reach out to the Executive Committee if additional resources are needed
- Next meeting: **May 21, 2025**. Pre-meeting packets with Committee reports will be emailed for review. Committee members not interested in continuing for the 2025-26 school year should contact the Chair so new appointments can be made at the annual meeting.
- Closing prayer by Kate Burke

Meeting adjourned: 9:15 PM

Respectfully submitted by: Kate Burke, SAC Secretary