



School of St. Mary
Meeting of the School Advisory Council (SAC)
May 21, 2025 Minutes

Council Members Present: Fr. Mike Nacius, Kathy Thompson, Clare Giannelli, Eileen Weber, Michelle Kijek, Kate Burke, Katie Feeney, Maeve Curran, Diana Hand, Peter Hartman, Rob Busam, Margaret Hogan, Natalie Agostinelli, Ashley Madsen, Kelly Graham, Jimmy Griffin, Dale Lyons, Kathleen Brill, Courtney Bott, Sabrina Jerina, Justin Fisk, Kristina Madsen Lowery, Brittany Ruef, Mandy Castle, Chris Schenkel

Council Members Absent: Heidi Christen, Meredith Leggitt, Brian Perry, Christine Porter, Jenny Walsh, Liza Jessen

SOSM Visitors Present: Carol Teitz, Emily Sturges, Carrie Oates, Bridget Leffingwell, Shelly Reynolds, Rebecca Hartman, Eloise Hartman, and Lucy Chekouras

Agenda Highlights

1. Opening

- Chair Eileen Weber called the meeting to order at 7:03 PM and led the opening prayer. She reviewed SAC meeting norms and guest protocols.
- The March meeting minutes were approved and will be posted on the SOSM website.
- Vice Chair Michelle Kijek reviewed the purpose of the SAC Monthly Newsletter, emphasizing its role in providing clear and transparent updates to school families.

2. Principals Report (Kathy Thompson and Clare Giannelli)

- **Staffing and Hiring**
 - Assistant Principal Clare Giannelli announced she will not return for the 2025–2026 school year. Her final day is June 30, 2025. The Council thanked her for her contributions and wished her well.

- o Hiring is off to a strong start, supported by SAC-recommended tools and strategies.
- o A 5th grade teacher (Jennifer Bobay), full-time Spanish teacher (serving both campuses), and a UGC math teacher have been hired.
- o The Administration is actively working with the Archdiocese to fill the Assistant Principal role and remaining open teaching positions.
- o The Blackbaud IT Specialist role remains unfilled, but is included in the FY25–26 budget, effective July 1, 2025.
- **Celebrating Success**
 - o The Administration thanked all SAC committees for their efforts and highlighted key accomplishments:
 - **Teacher Recruitment & Retention:** Interview processes were improved, OAD surveys implemented, and demo lessons were added to the candidate vetting process.
 - **Curriculum:** SAC supported planning for the new K–5 math curriculum and professional development for the incoming Spanish teacher.
 - **Catholic Identity:** The Hallow App was successfully integrated and is set for expanded use next year.
 - **Student Life:** The new *Heart of a Crusader* award, now in its second month, is positively impacting student culture.
 - **Marketing & Enrollment:** The Rising 4th Grade Night was a successful event to support families transitioning to UGC.
 - **Parents Association Support:** Generous contributions included 1:1 iPads, locker room updates, faculty computers, teacher gifts, and upcoming air purifiers.
 - **Additional Donor Gifts:** Recent contributions include new 5th grade furniture, science tools, and library books.

3. Committee Reports

Student Life (Peter Hartman, John Hancir)

- The Committee shared their enthusiasm for planned enhancements to the Athletic Program and expressed a desire to identify opportunities to grow the program in the years ahead.
- They also echoed the Administration’s excitement about the *Heart of the Crusader Award*, noting its early success and the positive momentum it is building. The Committee looks forward to its continued impact in the next academic year.
- Two members of the current SOSM Student Council, Eloise Hartman and Lucy Chekouras, presented a thoughtful summary of the year’s highlights and offered suggestions for future improvements:
 - o 2024–2025 Student Council Highlights:

- Student Council participation increased across all eligible grades at the UGC.
- Council members supported multiple school events, including Career Day, the May Crowning Mass, and Open Houses at both campuses.
- The Council raised over \$10,000 in charitable giving, including \$2,000+ for Lurie Children’s Hospital in honor of their classmate, Drew Janos, who has been bravely battling cancer. The SOSM community has continued to support Drew through visits, the creation and wearing of “Drew Strong” gear, and consistent prayer.
- Opportunities for Growth:
 - Council members identified a need for improved publicity and communication around monthly meetings.
 - They suggested moving the meeting location from the art room to a larger space, such as the conference room near the library. They also requested help with organizing meeting structure to make the meetings more efficient and productive. Additionally, setting Executive Council member role expectations boosts responsibility and formality of the position.
- SAC members expressed their appreciation for Eloise’s and Lucy’s poise and well-organized presentation. Their leadership and thoughtful reflections were commended, and SAC noted that these qualities will serve them well as graduates and future ambassadors of the School of St. Mary.

PGC & UGC Reports (Natalie Agostinelli, Margaret Hogan)

- Faculty representatives from both the PGC and UGC expressed heartfelt gratitude to the Parents Association and to Kelly Graham for their ongoing support throughout the year, with special thanks for the recent Teacher Appreciation Week activities.
- Events such as *Muffins with Mom* were highlighted as meaningful opportunities to foster community engagement. Faculty and SAC members plan to continue exploring collaborative projects that strengthen the school community.
- Suggestions for future collaboration included leveraging local Boy and Girl Scout troops for service projects—such as beautifying the UGC picnic table area. Another Council member proposed the idea of establishing a Garden Club in the coming years to further enrich the school environment.

Development (Diana Hand, Maeve Curran)

- This year served as a baseline for evaluating and strengthening SOSM development and sponsorship strategies. Planning is underway to enhance and expand sponsorship benefits in the upcoming year.
- The team launched several fashion and dining cause marketing opportunities this year. Next year, plans will enhance the offerings to include monthly shopping and dining events to support the school while engaging the broader community.

- To increase visibility and participation, the team recommended expanding cause marketing communication to include the church bulletin, parish Guilds, and religious education families.

Marketing and Enrollment (Mandy Castle and Brittney Rueff)

- The team shared that the new Blackbaud platform will improve calendar functionality, allowing parents to subscribe directly for easier access to school events.
- Current enrollment stands at 399 students, with 383 currently enrolled for the 2025–2026 school year. The team projects starting the next school year with approximately 390 students. Increasing enrollment at the UGC remains a top priority.
- There are currently waiting lists for both PreK3 and PreK4 classes. While demand is high, space limitations currently prevent the addition of another section. The Council brainstormed the possibility of adding an afternoon preschool session utilizing the empty 2-year-old classroom as a potential solution.
- Additional ideas to support retention and early engagement included restarting a monthly toddler meet-up, engaging new mothers in the Guild, and a starting a preschool summer camp. Additional marketing initiatives discussed included:
 - Emphasizing the unique value and traditions of the School of St. Mary, including alumni success stories (e.g., graduates attending West Point) and hallmark 8th-grade experiences to parents in all grade levels.
 - Expanding visibility through testimonials, teacher bios, and student success stories on the school website.
 - Increasing outreach through Google reviews to help enhance the school's online presence and search ranking.
 - Exploring targeted outreach to additional parent groups to help promote the distinctiveness and strength of the SOSM community.
- The SAC Executive Committee will meet and continue working closely with this committee over the summer on recruitment and marketing strategies to help increase enrollment.

Ad Hoc Teacher Retention (Courtney Bott)

- The Committee recommended that the Administration develop and share a formal communication outlining plans for the open 5th grade teacher positions and the Assistant Principal transition.
 - Vice Chair Michelle Kijek volunteered to help with writing this communication, so it could be sent to parents in advance of Fly Up Day, when the Administration shared that the new teachers would be present to meet rising 5th graders.
- Additionally, the Committee emphasized the importance of clearly communicating the leadership structure and presence across both campuses to ensure transparency and continued parent confidence heading into the 2025–2026 school year.

Finance (Rob Busam)

- The school may face a deficit of approximately \$58,000 for the current fiscal year, primarily due to lower-than-anticipated enrollment.

- The focus moving forward will be on identifying and investing in key growth areas to strengthen long-term sustainability.
- Based on Committee Reports and meeting conversation, Finance recommended the formation or continuation of the following SAC committees to support enrollment and engagement: Preschool Expansion, Athletics, Alumni Relations.

Parents Association (Incoming PA President Kelly Graham)

- The PA expressed appreciation for the strong support from school parents and local businesses throughout the year, allowing the PA to meet the \$330,000 Crusader Annual Fund goal.
- The Crusader Chase fundraiser has been a major success, raising over \$44,000; the campaign officially concludes this Friday.
- The PA remains committed to funding initiatives that contribute to an environment where teachers and students can thrive. Looking ahead, the PA fully supports several key initiatives to be supported by the Crusader Annual Fund, including:
 - Welcome-back bonuses for teachers at the start of the next school year.
 - Partnering with the IT Committee to assess and support future technology investments.
 - Supporting any investments identified by the Principal that will strengthen leadership capacity, including the potential hiring of a Dean of Students.

Visitor Comments

- Visitor Shelly Reynolds emphasized the importance of clear and proactive communication with the school community to build trust and reinforce confidence in the school.
- Visitor Bridget Leffingwell noted that transparency and proactive communication helps prevent misinformation and reassures families about their choice in SOSM.
- SOSM faculty member and guest Carol Teitz suggested moving the Crusader Chase to the fall to prevent donor fatigue, which the PA noted was already in the works, beginning in fall 2025.
- Visitor Emily Sturges recalled the positive SOSM student culture she witnessed as a parent chaperone on a recent 7th grade field trip. She observed that students treat one another like family, reflecting a strong and supportive school environment at SOSM.

Pastor Comments (Father Mike Nacius)

- Father extended his congratulations and appreciation for all that has been accomplished together with the Administration and SAC throughout the school year.
- He reflected on the celebration of the new Pope and the continuity it represents within the Catholic Church.
- The school and parish community are invited to participate in the Archdiocesan Mass at Guaranteed Rate Field on June 14, 2025. More information will be forthcoming.

- Looking ahead, the Jubilee Year of Faith will launch in September 2025, marking a special time of celebration and renewal.
- Father expressed his strong support for the school's leadership, affirming the dedication and faith-driven work of the administrative team.

Next Steps

- Committees will continue independent work and will reach out to the Executive Committee if additional resources are needed.
- Final meeting of the academic year: **June 11, 2025**. Pre-meeting celebration dinner for SAC members will take place at 6 pm. More information to follow.
- Kristina Madsen Lowery offered the meeting's closing prayer, reflecting on the upcoming summer break.

Meeting adjourned: 8:50 PM

Respectfully submitted by: Kate Burke, SAC Secretary