



School of St. Mary  
**Meeting of the School Advisory Council (SAC)**  
September 17, 2025, Minutes

**Council Members Present:** Fr. Andre Beltran, Kathy Thompson, Maria Monroe, Eileen Weber, Michelle Kijek, Kate Burke, Natalie Agostinelli, Rob Busam, Brooke Bonker, Courtney Bott, Mandy Castle, Maeve Curran, Justin Fisk, Kelly Graham, Jimmy Griffin, Diana Hand, John Hancir, Sabrina Jerina, Ashley Madsen, Kristina Madsen Lowery, Christine Porter, Brittany Ruef

**Council Members Absent:** Margaret Hogan, Peter Hartman, Peter Hartman, Liza Jessen, Meredith Leggitt, Chris Schenkel

**SOSM Visitors Present:** Andrew Bohnker, Amanda Carson, Rob Damrat, John Feeney, Karah Franklin, Bridget Leffingwell, Jana Nickle, Lauren Perkaus, Jimmy Porter, Rebecca Quakenbush (Operations Director), Molly Sarmas, Derek Sarmas, Ann Sandretto, Kirk Sheppard, Emily Sturges, Vidush Talwar, Chris Woock, Jennifer Zeit, Nell Zeit

**Agenda Highlights:**

**1. Opening**

- Council Chair Eileen Weber called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM
- Fr. Andre led the Council in the CoSM 150th Anniversary Prayer
- Council members introduced themselves, sharing their school connections and professional backgrounds
- Chair Weber reviewed SAC meeting norms and guest protocols and meeting minutes from the June 11, 2025, meeting were approved

**Pastor Administrator Comments (Fr. Andre)**

- Reaffirmed that the school is a mission of St. Mary's Parish, asking for continued support for both school and parish collectively
- Reported visiting all classrooms since the school year began; emphasized the holistic value of a Catholic education and strong parish support
- Over 500 attended the CoSM parish picnic on September 14, reflecting the vitality of the community

- Stated his approach in his role as Administrator is to listen, learn, and collaborate with SAC as well as Parish Councils
- Reiterated SAC's role: to promote and support the Catholic mission, assist in long-term planning and school improvement, serve as a bridge among school, parish, and parents, and observe principles of good governance

#### **Principals Report (Kathy Thompson and Maria Monroe)**

- Implementation of mySOSM (Blackbaud) is progressing smoothly. The transition from grade books to report cards is underway, with noticeable administrative efficiencies already gained. A mobile app will be evaluated in Phase II. Isa Dewar is serving as the designated point of contact for troubleshooting
- Back-to-School Nights were well attended and filled with energy, fostering meaningful connections between teachers and parents. New faculty and returning teachers are working well together, creating strong momentum for the year
- The 8th Grade class participated in the September 14 CoSM 150th Anniversary Mass presided over by Bishop O'Malley. Students represented SOSM with exemplary values, behavior, and faith, reflecting the formation they have received throughout their years at the school
- Assistant Principal Maria Monroe shared that at Carmel High School, parents present diplomas to their graduating students. The Council expressed enthusiasm for this idea and would like it considered for SOSM's graduation ceremonies.

#### **Faculty Comments (Natalie Agostinelli)**

- The school year has begun with strong momentum. Staff enthusiasm is high with the addition of new hires, Fr. Andre's presence, and enhancements funded by the PA—including new Chromebooks for UGC students, laptops for faculty, and upgrades to teacher lounges on both campuses (including an ice maker)
- Teacher retention remains the top priority. Compensation challenges are the leading factor in staff departures. While teachers value the community, family support, and students, sustainable wages are critical for long-term retention
- After-school clubs have been instrumental in helping teachers supplementing their income. Teachers currently receive 90% of club fees, with 10% allocated to operating costs.
  - Rebecca Quakenbush clarified the 10% fee went to help cover employer costs incurred (7.25% FICA and 8.5% benefits) with total fees equaling more than the 10% taken from the teacher's earnings causing the school to lose money on the after school clubs
- Suggested improvements to the club billing process to ensure timely payment to teachers for their services include:

- Leveraging Blackbaud to enable upfront payment at the start of a club session rather than at its conclusion
- Providing reimbursement for club supplies at the outset rather than the conclusion
- Maintaining the 10% fee, or looking at other ways to offset it, rather than increasing it, as a higher rate could reduce teacher participation and earnings
- Eileen Weber suggested the SAC Finance Committee review the matter further and provide recommendations

## **2. Committee Reports**

### **Finance (Rob Busam)**

- Going forward, the Finance Committee report will follow Enrollment, as student numbers drive tuition revenue, which directly impacts finances
- Year-end financials were received midday today, September 17, but not in time for thorough committee review.
- An internal review with Kathy and Rebecca will follow; monthly financials are still pending
- Committee goals for the year include improving financial transparency, establishing a regular financial review cadence, and ensuring that school administration originates budget drafts before broader review from parish council
- Rebecca Quakenbush noted that financials close on the 15th of each month, which may create timing challenges with SAC meetings. The team agreed to prioritize timely monthly reviews despite this constraint
- Proposed SAC representation at Parish Finance Council meetings was discussed; Administrator Fr. Andre was supportive, provided this aligns with Archdiocese of Chicago best practices
- Teacher retention was identified as the most critical issue, closely tied to student retention

### **Technology (Ashley Madsen)**

- Blackbaud implementation progressing well, as previously outlined in Principal's Report
- Committee Goals: secure a full-time technology director, develop a hardware refresh plan, strengthen cybersecurity, and integrate technology with curriculum

### **Student Life (John Hancir)**

- The year has begun with strong student participation in athletics and clubs, with a goal of ensuring every grade has access to at least one school sport
- The UGC hosted a Homecoming pep rally on Friday, September 12, which boosted school spirit and highlighted student athletes

- Gym floor repairs are needed for both safety and appearance. Private donors have expressed interest in funding the project in Summer 2026
  - Rebecca Quakenbush noted that this timeline may conflict with the CoSM beautification project. The Council agreed to collaborate with school and parish staff to identify a workable schedule
- Council member Maeve Curran suggested expanding athletic opportunities at the PGC—through clinics or intramurals—as league play generally begins in 4th or 5th grade
- Council member Sabrina Jerina recommended offering coaching positions to teachers as an additional compensation opportunity
- Council member Courtney Bott proposed opening athletic teams to CoSM parish members and Religious Education, fostering a united St. Mary community and helping strengthen teams with lower student enrollment
- “Pack the Gym” nights for volleyball and basketball are planned again this year, following last year’s success in building school spirit and pride

#### **Marketing and Enrollment (Mandy Castle)**

- Student enrollment started the year at 377 (99 preschool, 222 K–5, 54 middle school), below the budgeted 400 students. A few prospective students are still considering SOSM this fall
- 2025–2026 Committee Goals include: Achieve 90% student retention, Strengthen investment in the middle school experience, Highlight alumni outcomes and enhance the buddy system to welcome new families
- Long term, the Committee also plans to look at a strategic growth plan for the preschool program
- Committee member Sabrina Jerina reiterated her idea from last year to host a Spring 2026 community open house, leveraging St. Mary’s 150th anniversary as a key opportunity for family retention and broader engagement

#### **Development (Maeve Curran)**

- SOSM Community engagement remains strong, with the committee expressing gratitude for ongoing support
- Fundraising initiatives (in addition to the annual Crusader Gala which supports The Crusader Fund) this year will include: monthly food events (e.g., Pizza Night for sports teams), “Shop for SOSM Day,” and corporate sponsorships
- Individual donor outreach is also identified as an opportunity area, with fundraising opportunity areas identified as: curriculum, salaried positions, and interior updates
- Fr. Andre shared there is an Archdiocesan Education Endowment Fund, currently valued at \$2.5M, with an opportunity to draw 5% annually to support school needs
  - SAC Finance Committee to review Arch best practices and guidelines to learn more about the Endowment

- Rebecca Quakenbush noted Endowment discussions and decisions happen at the Parish Council level, not the SAC

### **Ad Hock Teacher Retention (Courtney Bott)**

- Committee member Courtney Bott highlighted the revitalization of 5th grade as a personal highlight this back-to-school season. She noted that Back-to-School Nights fostered a strong sense of energy and community, and she expressed gratitude to Principals Thompson and Monroe for their leadership and the significant progress made over the summer
- Committee Goals for the year include:
  - Assess administrative staffing needs over the coming years, anticipating retirements and potential turnover, and establish priorities accordingly.
  - Review last year's teacher recruitment report with current Administration to identify actionable opportunities.
  - Develop a framework for teacher and staff development, including observation cycles, talent planning, and structured collaboration models.
- Council member Rob Busam will share insights and best practices from teacher retention programs at other Catholic schools

### **3. Open SAC Positions**

- Current open SAC committee positions: Catholic Identity, Legislative Action, Curriculum (specialization in Social Studies), and Security
- Appointments to be made by Principal and Administrator in the coming weeks
- Lunch Service Committee to survey parents in late fall; exploration of offering healthier options five days a week

### **4. Visitor Comments**

- **Jana Nickle:** Suggested clarifying in parent communications that after-school club fees go directly to teachers
- **Jimmy Porter:** Asked about streaming SAC meetings; Council will revisit possibility of Zoom/Teams access
- **Rob Belcore:** Expressed gratitude for SAC's work; asked about enrollment declines; raised concern about funding for security improvements
- **Fr. Andre:** Noted parish provides annual subsidy; suggested better communication to parents about parish support
- **Derek Sarmas:** Asked if SOSM is unique in experiencing enrollment decline
- **Andy Bohnker:** Spoke about the formation of a SOSM Dads Group and its role in supporting school and parish through service and security
- **Chair Eileen Weber Noted:** Once formed, the Safety Committee will review security needs and bring recommendations to SAC

### **5. Next Steps**

- Committees will continue independent work and engage with the Executive Committee, Kathy, and Maria as needed
- Next SAC meeting: October 15, 2025, Parish Center

## **6. Closing**

- Eileen Weber closed the meeting with prayer
- Meeting adjourned at 9:14 PM

**Respectfully submitted by:** Kate Burke, SAC Secretary