



School of St. Mary
Meeting of the School Advisory Council (SAC)
November 20, 2024
Minutes

Council Members Present: Kathy Thompson, Clare Giannelli, Fr. Mike Nacius, Tammy Zurek, Eileen Weber, Michelle Kijek, Kate Burke, Katie Feeney, Dale Lyons, Maeve Curran, Diana Hand, Rob Busam, Chris Schenkel, Brian Perry, Brittany Ruef, Mandy Castle, Peter Hartman, John Hancir, Kristina Madsen Lowery, Ashley Madsen, Heidi Christen, Natalie Agostinelli, Liza Jessen

Council Members Absent: Justin Fisk, Meredith Leggitt, Margaret Hogan

Each present Council Member received a SAC binder. Conflict of Interest, Code of Ethics, and Confidentiality Statements were included. Council Members should review, sign, and return these materials to the office at either campus ATTN: Kate Burke by November 30, 2024.

Agenda Highlights

1. Opening

- o Meeting called to order at 7:00 PM by Council Chair Eileen Weber
- o Fr. Mike Nacius opened the meeting with a prayer

2. Key Updates

- o **Meeting Norms & Objectives:** Eileen Weber emphasized goals for the year and SAC by-laws
- o **Guest Presentation:** Tammy Zurek, Archdiocese of Chicago Director of School Operations, outlined the Council's role in providing strategic guidance on the school's mission effectiveness, resources, advancement, and long-term goals

3. Principal's Report (Kathy Thompson and Clare Giannelli)

- o Positive progress this academic year: capital improvements at both campuses and a recent donation to improve UGC science resources
- o Challenges: fifth-grade teacher resignation six weeks into the year, which has caused some families to leave the school

Committee Reports & Goals

1. **Ad Hoc: Teacher Recruitment/Retention** (Liza Jessen)
 - o Conducting feedback meetings (with Mark Stanwood) among current SOSM teachers as approved by Kathy Thompson
 - o Report of findings with actionable solutions to be shared post-Thanksgiving with the pastor and principals only
 - o Meetings to date have demonstrated opportunities for refinement are consistent, enlightening, and manageable as the administration considers and prioritizes suggestions
2. **Catholic Identity** (Katie Feeney)
 - o Prioritizing Catholic identity in staff hiring and retention; suggested use of software tools to help assess Catholic identity among candidates, as well as for training and team-building with existing staff; Katie's family owns a software company that could be considered
 - o Planning a coordinated parish-school service project, which could include a SAC retreat or mass
 - o Suggested the opportunity to consider exit interviews with departing families and/or staff to understand the nature of departures, to potentially help address future improvements
3. **Curriculum** (Dale Lyons)
 - o Assessing math curriculum effectiveness; possible extended timeline for changes
 - Liza Jessen noted the opportunity to collaborate, as she has received input on curriculum needs in her teacher interviews
 - o Assessing language priorities (e.g., Spanish, Latin) with Justin Fisk (not present)
 - o Kathy Thompson noted she and Clare Giannelli are reviewing foreign language providers beyond current Fun Fluency contract
4. **Finance** (Rob Busam, Chris Schenkel)
 - o Current budget on track; adjustments may be needed for enrollment impact
 - o Tuition recommendations for 2025-2026 provided to Father Nacius and Kathy Thompson in December-January
 - o Final 2025-2026 budget due to the Archdiocese by end of March 2025
5. **Marketing & Enrollment** (Mandy Castle, Brittany Ruef)
 - o Enrollment: started the year at 416 students, now 404
 - o Focus: improving 4th-5th grade transition from PGC to UGC, family and community building events
 - o Re-enrollment is now open and new family enrollment begins Dec. 1
 - o Goals:
 - Increase rising 5th grade retention to 95%; members noted this goal may be aggressive given current 5th grade challenges and suggested rising 5th grade parents be provided with more information about the 5th grade teachers in early 2025 to assure them the classes will be covered adequately, as well as more opportunities for rising 4th grade parents to

engage at the UGC to understand the environment before the new school year starts

- Maintain kindergarten retention at 83%.

6. **Student Life** (Peter Hartman, John Hancir)

- Expanding extracurriculars, including both athletics and after-school clubs across all grades, with an emphasis on grades at the UGC with fewer activities
 - Members noted teacher responsibilities are significantly different at the UGC, and they currently do not have teaching assistants – which affects their ability to lead after-school clubs (like at the PGC)
- Considering positive behavior recognition rewards that focus on kindness, leadership, and faith to exemplify our values and showcase those students who do so
 - Clare Giannelli noted she and Joe Byers are considering a similar initiative addressing positive behavior integration systems, so they can collaborate
- Enhancing 3rd-to-5th grade transitions and fostering community at the UGC
- Members suggested the opportunity to invite the Student Council to a future SAC Meeting to see an adult council meeting “in action”-- and for parents to see how inspiring and impressive this group is

7. **Technology** (Ashley Madsen, Kristina Madsen Lowery)

- Conducting tech surveys to guide LMS/software improvement recommendations
- Ensuring safety and effective classroom tech use are top priorities

8. **Parents Association** (Heidi Christen)

- Community-building and fundraising goals
- Upcoming events: PGC Book Fair, Fish Fry, Annual Crusader Gala & Auction

Development and Legislative Committees will report in January.

Guest Comments

The meeting was opened to guest comments, with the SAC Executive Committee committing to follow up directly with each guest regarding their questions or concerns.

- **Diana Pahl (SOSM Parent):** Asked if exit surveys are conducted with departing faculty to gather insights.
- **Kelly Rynes (SOSM Alumni and Parent):** Emphasized the importance of consistently prioritizing recruitment and placement of the best possible teachers to support students effectively, as well as strong and consistent communication. She noted that 4th and 5th grades are particularly vulnerable (the 5th grade class has experienced 3 teacher changes in just 5 years) and suggested the opportunity for fostering a stronger sense of community within classes, with improved communication and collaboration among administration and families.
- **Sabrina Jerina (SOSM Parent):** Highlighted that, in addition to teacher retention, family retention and improved communication should be prioritized. She expressed that losing classmates can be disruptive for students and families alike. Sabrina also asked if there

are measures that can be taken to support teachers in their use of classroom technology and curriculum tools, noting the numerous platforms they must use.

- **Carey Connolly (SOSM Parent):** Voiced concerns as a 3rd grade parent about the UGC. However, she felt encouraged by the SAC's efforts and suggested involving more 3rd grade parents in SAC and other volunteer opportunities to help strengthen the UGC and foster a sense of community moving forward.
- **Kelly Graham (SOSM Parent):** Shared a positive perspective as a 4th grade parent, noting that her child's class is thriving. She stressed that challenges can be addressed effectively with the right faculty and staff in place.
- **Kasey Morgan (SOSM Alumni and Parent):** Stressed that, in addition to teacher retention, improving transparent and timely communication from the administration should be a top priority for students' safety and education. Also noted the need to ensure the commitment to Catholic identity is consistent among current and future teachers.

Next Steps

- Committees will continue independent work and will reach out to the Executive Committee if additional resources are needed
- Next meeting: **January 15, 2025.** Pre-meeting packets with committee reports will be emailed for review

Meeting adjourned: 8:32 PM

Respectfully submitted by: Kate Burke, SAC Secretary

Parent Association Update November 20, 2024

We launched the 2024-2025 PA at Back to School Nights September, providing an overview of our calendar of events and committee leads, see attachment. Our fundraising goal this year is \$330k; we would like to continue to offer a teacher bonus at the level we did last year, as well as support the educational and scholarship needs of SOSM.

However our efforts started even earlier with a successful Used Uniform sale in early August led by Kelly Guerrero, almost all of our inventory sold out.

Our New Family Ice Cream social in August had to be canceled due to the weather, thank you to Brittany Ruef for her efforts to organize the event.

Our Teacher & Staff Appreciation is led by Kelly Graham who organized and delivered dinner for the staff for all Back to School evenings. This committee also provided the dinners for UGC parent-teacher conference night and has also shown our love of our teachers and staff with a monthly coffee cart (donated by Starbucks, Ft. Sheridan) and bagels (donated by Once Upon A Bagel, LF), thank you also to Ali Zeleniuch for her support. We continue with Stock the Lounge organized by grade level; food donations or monetary contributions for the committee to purchase items at Costco are accepted each month. We are now organizing a 'Thanksgiving Note' drive for our students to show our appreciation through thank you notes or drawings to be delivered to the teachers.

We brought back in person VIRTUS training with the support of Lore Nugent, with mixed results, and held our Room Parent training session September 18. Our room parents under the leadership of Brianne Clatch and Kim Danciu have continued our tradition of cascading PA communications and supporting our teachers along with our parent volunteers for field trips, in class such as at our Halloween parties, and celebrating teacher birthdays.

We held a very successful Trunk or Treat, thanks to Hannah Johnson and Mairin Wilkie, with 18 trunks decorated, over 200 children participating (198 tickets sold) and \$400-\$500 net income for the Crusader Fund.

Crusader Wear was sold homecoming week September 18-20 at the UGC as well as at Trunk or Treat. Thank you to Carlotta Plotner who has led this for several years and now that her last child is graduating SOSM will transition this effort to Jeannene Tornatore. Going forward Crusader Wear needs a 'store' or home where it is easier to purchase items rather than just being stored in the Crusader Closet.

Gala tickets went on sale November 15th. The cost of the ticket covers the March 1st event itself, the live and silent auction, tuition raffle and paddle raise donations contribute to the

Crusader Fund. If you are not able to attend the Gala there are ample ways to show your support either through auction or raffle participation or by donating items to be auctioned off.

Coming up is the PGC Scholastic Book Fair the week of December 2nd. It is organized by Carlotta Plotner who has led the effort for a number of years with Katie Villacis assisting, she will be leading this event next year.

Parent level gatherings, organized by Rose Hancir and hosted by parents at each grade level, will be held in January and February. Our Fall was filled with events, and Count Me In parties from last year's Gala, so we postponed the gatherings to a quieter time after the holidays.

A corporate sponsorship packet has been developed by Maeve Curran and Diana Hand and will be rolled out soon.

The PA is reviewing a 'wish list' of items with the administration to determine the optimum and maximum usage of the Crusader Fund from last years' giving campaign. We aim to make these investments as quickly, yet thoughtfully, as possible. Our intent is to invest in the school as well as continue to provide the teachers a healthy bonus, at a minimum at the same level as last year. Our initial tranche of investments are:

- 18 ipads
- Laptop refresh as needed in collaboration with SAC tech committee
- Locker room refresh
- 4 risers for PGC gymnasium

Our meetings are held the first Thursday of each month at 7pm at the UGC, our meeting calendar and meeting minutes are posted on the SOSM website, all are welcome to attend as well as volunteer to make our many remaining events successful!