

St. Luke School Commission Meeting Minutes

Wednesday June 3, 2015, 7:00 PM

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM.

In attendance: Andy Bauer, Matt Behringer, Andy Borland, Sue MacGill, Tim O'Brien, Phil Poirier, Msgr. Schaedel, Jen Schaefer, Teresa Schutzman, Suzanne Sherby, Rob Shumaker, Steve Weber; Wendy Mehringer. Also in attendance: 2015/2016 board members Vernon Back, Valerie Esposito and Dan Heslin.

The May 5, 2015 meeting minutes were offered and approved.

Commission member Andy Borland resigned from the School Commission as his wife was hired as our new Assistant Principal. Dan Heslin was the runner up in the recent election and has agreed to take his place.

Principal's Report – Steve Weber

Prayers: Fr. Noah Casey, our former pastor, is losing his battle with cancer and has been moved to hospice care. Please keep him in your prayers.

Assistant Principal: I am pleased to announce that **Mrs. Beth Borland** has accepted the position as Assistant Principal for St. Luke School. Beth is a nineteen-year veteran teacher. Beth has worked in Franklin Township as a science teacher and department chair. She has also worked as an interim Assistant Principal, while working on her administrative license. She has experience with curriculum development and team leadership. Beth is a member of St. Luke parish. Her oldest daughter, Katie, graduated from St. Luke and is student at Cathedral High School. Her youngest daughter, Sara, will be a sixth grader at St. Luke this fall. She and her husband, Andy, helped to chair the parish Fall Festival.

Throughout the entire interview process she was consistently identified as the strongest candidate in a field of strong finalists. I am confident that she will make a positive difference at St. Luke and welcome her to our faculty. I want to thank Beth Leffler for her leadership in the final interview process.

Text Adoption: Teachers in grades 3-6 reviewed new **language arts** materials and selected Loyola Press (Jesuit publishing) *Voyages in English*. This matches the materials used in grades 7 & 8. It is a traditional text but also includes six-trait terminology that we use when working on written expression. It also teaches sentence diagramming which is also used in middle school. We will use this year's budget for this adoption.

Latin was introduced this year in grades 3-8. We learned a lot about how to best integrate it into classroom instruction. We were pleased that several of our students were placed in second level Latin in high school. Not bad for one year of instruction. We will add *Second Form Latin* for our incoming eighth grade Latin students. As was noted earlier, Latin will be added to grade six as an option with Spanish. About 2/3 of the students selected Spanish and 1/3 Latin.

We are reviewing the Rod and Staff publishing company **math** materials for grades 3-5. It is a fairly traditional math series that does cover the standards. We have had a hard time getting materials to review, since it is a very small company.

SGO: We received notice that the state has almost reached the limit for tax credits for this fiscal year. The new fiscal year for the state starts July 1, 2015. The amount of tax credits for next year is up to \$8.5 million. We will start requesting donations after July 1 to preserve the tax credit for the donors.

Middle School LA: I've started interviewing for the open full-time middle school language arts position. I'm pleased that Mrs. Chapman will be around both to mentor and work with students on a part-time basis. Mrs. Chapman will be doing support and enrichment in the middle school two days per week.

Enrollment as of June 1: Please note that enrollment is still very fluid and there are families still in process. Several families confirmed that they were moving during the last week of school.

K	60	
1	63	
2	59	
3	63	
4	76	
5	68	
6	76	
7	63	
8	63	Total 591

Financial Aid: As of June 1 the following numbers are receiving financial aid.

State Choice Scholarship	84 students	\$284,382 in tuition assistance
St. Luke SGO Grants	27 students	\$33,433 in aid committed to date

The number of students receiving the State funding is up from 72 last year. Steve did not have an exact number, but stated that in the past school year, about 80% of the students receiving State funding were parishioners. A question was raised as to whether we are leaving potential funds on the table due to the tuition structure. Steve said that the way the law was written requires that the actual tuition you would pay is the only amount which can be reimbursed by the state. For instance, the State benefits from the tuition structure we have in place for parishioners, including sibling discounts. In theory, yes there might be more available, but we receive the fullest amount possible given the language of the law.

Facility Upgrades:

- 1) The south gym floor is being replaced this week.
- 2) The closets in first and second grade are being replaced
- 3) Those same rooms will be painted
- 4) The shelving units in fifth and sixth grade will be replaced
- 5) All door trim and metal doors will be painted.

Tech Upgrades:

- 1) We will be adding a 25 student Mac-Air mobile lab
- 2) First and second grade will be getting document cameras. Third grade already has them and has liked them very much.
- 3) We will be switching to Rediker as our data management and communication system.
- 4) The grade 5-6 iPad labs will be deployed

The very good math scores of our outgoing eighth grade students were mentioned. Valerie Esposito complimented Charlie Babcock and asked if there is a plan to keep him in place, as he's been so effective. Steve stated that we do everything we can as he is a valued teacher.

Business Items

Election of officers for 2015/2016 school year: Nominations were requested. Rob noted several times that the rules also allow self-nomination. After brief discussion, the existing officers were all nominated to serve again in their present positions. Each was duly elected. The positions for 2015/2016 are as follows:

President:	Rob Shumaker
Vice President:	Tim O'Brien
Treasurer:	Wendy Mehringer
Secretary:	Suzanne Sherby

Facilities Issue: Phil Poirier raised a concern about teacher access to all areas of the building. It seems that a safety audit revealed these concerns some time ago. The issue centers around the fact that teachers cannot lock their classroom doors from inside. The limited access teachers have is in place because of several teachers having had their keys lost or stolen in previous years, which resulted in significant expense re-keying all the locks they had access to. It was not felt that their access was too limited to be effective during a disaster of some sort. Steve said that they have thought about moving to a keycard/electronic system which would eliminate the need to re-key in the event of lost or stolen keys. He believes the cost would be nearly \$1000 dollars per door.

Monsignor stated that he thinks classrooms with doors that cannot be locked without a key are unquestionably a problem. Andy Bauer will bring the issue to Buildings and Grounds and ask that it be studied. A concern about kids locking teachers out was also raised, if traditional locks were employed. Phil stated that he is still uneasy about the potential for safety concerns, given that it was formally raised, and remains unresolved, but glad that it is under consideration.

Year End Report from Academic Excellence Committee:

Phil Poirier delivered the committee's report and prefaced it by saying that we found many, many things that we do very well which are not reported in this report, as its purpose is to focus on areas for potential improvement.

The Academic Excellence committee of the St. Luke School Commission has conducted an extensive investigation and review process related to the Academic Excellence pillar of the Strategic Plan. This review has involved visits to numerous peer schools, formal interviews and informal conversations with interested parents, and discussions with more than half of the faculty of the school. The committee would like to thank the Principal for his participation in this process.

The committee's review uncovered many issues related to the composition of our student body. These include our admission and discipline policies and their execution in practice, and the matching of resources available to the needs of the student body. Certain issues relating to teacher oversight, hiring, and support were also raised. The substance of our findings on these matters has been communicated to the Pastor.

The substance of the committee's public report, however, relates to the curriculum and academic schedule. The committee's review process revealed widespread frustration among both teachers and parents centering on these issues. Some specifics that have been raised include: the schedule changing significantly from year to year and even from week to week, often in order to accommodate initiatives that are not part of the core academic curriculum; ad-hoc changes to the curriculum without overall coordination; movement of lower-grade children (grades 1-4) from classroom to classroom; and specials classes being given preference over core academic subjects in schedule planning. The current academic schedule has generally been described as chaotic and rushed.

The committee therefore respectfully recommends that the School undertake, as soon as possible, a thorough curriculum review and mapping process, which would result in a document much more detailed and extensive in scope than the "scope and sequence" document anticipated in the Strategic Plan. This process would result in a thorough map of the curriculum to be taught on a weekly basis, and would permit the substantial elimination of redundancy or gaps in the curriculum, both within and across grade levels, as well as ensuring that the time during the school day that is dedicated to the instruction of core academic subjects is effectively employed. We recommend that this process be led by the incoming Assistant Principal, and to the extent that additional expertise is required, that a consultant skilled in the development of such curriculum maps be retained on a short-term basis to assist in this process. Because the process will require significant input from the current teaching staff, we recommend that facilities be provided within the school over the summer for meetings required for this process.

The committee further recommends that the school schedule be revised in concert with the curriculum map, with a priority being placed on scheduling of core academic subjects, preferably in common blocks of time that will allow teachers to undertake appropriate ability or other grouping that may be useful to improve educational outcomes. We recommend that the schedule vary as little as possible from week to week, and that non-core academic activities present as little disruption as possible. To the extent possible, we recommend that student movement among classrooms be limited, and especially that teachers in lower grades undertake all core academic subject instruction of the students in their homerooms.

The committee believes that these initiatives, if pursued seriously and energetically, would greatly improve the educational experience for St. Luke students, while reducing the level of frustration we have observed among the staff.

Vernon Back stated he feels there is a real need for more academic differentiation, or ability grouping as many parents see a wide disparity in preparedness and academic ability among children in any given classroom. Steve said that many of the changes under discussion for scheduling are intended to allow for more academic differentiation, although in many cases, the current schedule should allow for this. Particularly in the lower grades where they do have blocked time for reading and math which is concurrent. Steve said that some of the frustration attributed to the schedule is related to an experiment we have been conducting in recent years with using a modified block schedule. It is generally agreed that while the extra time is beneficial for science classrooms, it is problematic for just about every other subject.

A question was raised as to how the idea that the kids in the lower grades should be moved around less for core subjects. Suzanne Sherby stated that we heard directly from many teachers that the busyness of the schedule keeps them from forming the relationships they need to really know and serve the kids well. Several teachers told the committee that they wish they could keep their homeroom kids close all day. She also said that the committee was truly moved and inspired by the passion our teachers have for the children of Saint Luke and that though we are sure some teachers might disagree, the idea of keeping kids in lower grades with their homeroom teacher should be given thorough consideration as the schedule problems are evaluated and addressed.

Monsignor asked how the teachers the committee interviewed were selected. Invitations were issued to various grade levels and teachers essentially came if they were interested. Resource and enrichment teachers were also interviewed. Additionally, two teachers were assigned to attend each of the peer school visits the committee did, so input from these teachers was also available. The committee believes it was able to talk to over half of the faculty. One group that was missed due to time constraints was the Special area teachers (art, PE, music and computer). The committee regrets this and would like to rectify this failure early in the next school year.

It was noted that Beth Borland was chosen as the new Assistant Principal for her strength in curriculum development and planning and that her appointment to the role will be a good foundation from which to build and to address the areas of concern. Steve also noted that the Strategic Plan spans a three year timeframe, and that it is important to remember we are just finishing the first year. Tim O'Brien noted again that the committee firmly believes that there must be a sense of urgency about these matters of curriculum mapping and scheduling and that we should not lose sight of that sense. Beth and Steve were asked to work to create a strategy for addressing these issues and will be able to communicate as to its progress regularly.

Committee/Liaison Reports

- **Finance** – Wendy Mehringer – The parish subsidy for the year was budgeted at \$450,000 and the actual number is \$390,000. The general sense is that most needs are met and that we are not creating any use it or lose it type mentality.
- **Nominations** – Phil Poirier – Phil will be developing a memo with election procedures for future so that elections will be both easier to conduct and consistent with all expectations.
- **Faith Formation** – Teresa Schutzman – No report.
- **Buildings and Grounds** – Andy Bauer – A new grill was purchased for hot dog nights. The installation of the new gym floor is underway. Buildings and Grounds has discussed the potential of having a parental cleaning day over the summer for hard to access or irregular items which need attention. This effort could involve both parents and children. It was felt it was too late to get something like this underway for this year, but that they may pursue the idea with PTO for next year. Martin was again recognized as having been a wonderful and much appreciated addition with regard to the building staff this year. We have let the cleaning company know that we very much want to keep him.
- **Stewardship** – Matt Behringer –
- **PTO** – Jen Schaefer –
 - PTO brought in the Snow Shack for the year end festivities. This was very popular with the children.
 - PTO implemented a recognition award for teachers with long service. This was the first time this has been done. The PTO purchased crosses for teachers with 20, 25 or 30 years of service. They gifted Steve with cooking classes (due to his love of and skill at – not due to need) in recognition of his long standing contribution.
 - Anne Horton will be the PTO president for the 2015/2016 school year
- **Pastoral Council** – Rob Shumaker – Pastoral council successfully conducted elections. The church did purchase the home near the playground. Monsignor said it will most likely be used for the Sisters who are currently living in a generously donated home, but that the fact that we do not own the home leaves their living situation more unstable that we would like. We were able to procure the home for \$25,000 less that our original offer. A parish budget was approved. Tim O'Brien suggested that we consider moving the parish offices there to free up some much needed

space for school needs. Monsignor said in general he feels that buildings intended for dwelling usually don't work well due to narrow hallways etc.

- **SLAC** – Andy Borland – new gym floor.
- **Parish Communications** – Suzanne Sherby – A new communications committee is focused on marketing, branding and reworking the parish/school website.

Pastors Comments -

- Monsignor thanked Matt Behringer and Andy Borland for their years of service on the school commission.
- Monsignor asked Beth Borland to share her background with the commission:
 - 19 years of teaching experience, with administrative license.
 - Service as an interim Assistant Principal
 - Department chair
 - Experience in curriculum development at all grade levels 1-8 in multiple schools as well as work in Professional development
 - Experience in curriculum mapping
- Monsignor said he interviewed the top three finalists for the Assistant Principal position and could have been happy with any of them, but that he is truly delighted with Beth and her experience, her faith, and her ability to be a direct and good communicator. He believes her insight as a parent will help her as well. It was noted that Martin might have been the runner-up in the Assistant Principal race.
- Monsignor believes we have seen a good end to what was a tough year due to the absence of an Assistant Principal.
- 8th grade graduation was changed to an on-site event rather than an off-site dinner as in the past. Monsignor believes the parents involved did a nice job with the change.
- Monsignor said that with regard to admissions, we need to always keep in mind that the school is a very effective evangelization tool. We have had multiple families convert to the faith and in recent years children have chosen to be confirmed due to their exposure to Catholicism at school as well.
- Monsignor said he is glad to see us moving away from the modified block schedule as he felt all along it was not a good idea.

A question was raised about a whether a survey was conducted this year for parental comments and feedback. Steve said that we were asked to use an Archdiocesan survey related to the School Improvement process. This survey did not seem to translate well to parental interests and did not result in meaningful feedback or actionable items. He intends to go back to a better format for next year.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:00 p.m. The session was then closed to all but voting members for the annual evaluation of the Principal.

Respectfully submitted by Suzanne Sherby, School Commission Secretary