

**Board of Education Meeting**  
**March 10, 2022**  
**Schrup Family Board Room**

**Board Members Present:** Brian Kane, Dan Walsh, John Meinert, Fr. Jim Goerend, Kelley Schiesl, Sharon Wulfekuhle-Hefel

**Board Members Absent:** Diane Rambousek, Fr. Phil Gibbs, Scott Leibfried, Todd Link

**Staff Present:** Phil Bormann, Bob Noel, Katie Jones, Mary Sulentic, Doug Varley, Mariah Reeves, Abigail Lofte, Clay Finley, Dan Mulligan

**Guests Present:** Marco Morel, Trisha and Jwan Brookins, Anderson Sainci, Sharon and Brian Hallstoos, Andrea and Collins Eboh, Danielle Moore, and several other parents and community members.

Meeting began with prayer at 5:33 p.m.

**Public Comment**

Brian Kane, Board President, introduced guest speakers that reached out to the board to share their experiences at Holy Family Catholic Schools. Brian stated the board's goal of taking everything shared during the meeting into consideration. Future actions and implementation will be discussed proceeding the meeting.

Marco Morel, a student at Wahlert Catholic High School and student leader in the Social Justice Club, spoke to the board. As a student, he has noticed a divided Wahlert and wants our school to become a community. Marco stressed to the board and parents that it's important to educate children about the meaning of social justice, racism, and what it means to be accepting of others. Marco shared his view that there is a ripple effect - students think the current racist behaviors of their peers are accepted because there aren't repercussions or actions. He also feels there is an aggressive connotation often linked to social justice, and the idea that the Social Justice Club is forcing a belief on students, which is not true. Marco shared that the Social Justice Club has received a lot of backlash from trying to spread the main message of acceptance of all races and sexualities at Wahlert. Their goal is not to have everyone agree, but instead to have all respect one another. Marco asked for additional support from parents and students. He wants more visibility and hands-on actions from peers, students, teachers, and administrators. Showing love and becoming a supportive community needs to be a priority.

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Trisha Brookins, an alumna of Wahlert Catholic High School and Holy Family parent, addressed the board. Trisha and her husband have four children in the system. She met Sharon Hallstoos at a Cub Scout pack meeting, where Mrs. Hallstoos shared her son's experience as a student at Wahlert, which compelled them to have conversations with their children. Trisha shared that her son who attends Mazzuchelli has experienced racist remarks during school and reported this incident to Principal Doug Varley. Mr. Varley told their student that he believed him and helped their student feel supported. However,

after speaking with Mrs. Hallstoos, Trisha and her husband further spoke with their children and found out that the n-word is loosely used at Mazzuchelli throughout the student body. Her children feel different from those around them and do not feel represented in the classroom, as there are no books or other learning components that show people with different skin color, hair type, or cultures. Trisha also shared an experience their son had in third grade during a culture fair project when they felt the situation was handled poorly and he was made to feel different than others. At the time, they approached their son's teacher and said that their family history included ancestors that did not come to this country by free will; however, their son was encouraged to approach the assignment differently than others, which made him feel isolated from other students. Trisha feels that everyone should feel safe and represented in every Holy Family school and that data needs to be transparent regarding how many students of color there are in the district, as well as the percentage of people of color who have transferred out of Holy family versus white people who have transferred out. The Brookins family asked that Holy Family take deliberate action against racism by creating specific policy changes and disciplinary actions for those who act in racist and discriminatory ways. They feel training is needed for all staff and teachers on how to recognize and act against racist actions in our schools.

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Anderson Sainci, a local Dubuque official, attended the meeting in support of friends who shared their experiences with him. He stated that it is the group's intent to work with the board and administrators to do what is best for all kids. He shared a summary of the Bible story of Jesus at the well with a Samaritan woman. She was seen as an outcast because she was different, but Jesus met her where she was - breaking bread with her and listening to her. This lesson teaches us how to address racial issues. Anderson asked that Holy Family begin meeting people with struggles where they are in their lives, and not to wait to solve these issues. Anderson committed to attend every board meeting until solutions are in place and change happens.

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Sharon and Brian Hallstoos addressed the board regarding their son Joplin's experience as a student at Wahlert High School. Sharon shared that this year, Joplin has been subjected to racist remarks and lack of support by peers and administration. The heavy stress, hurt, and worry from these incidents and lack of support impacted Joplin to the point of him missing several days of school. Sharon shared that they learned of several incidents where Joplin was subjected to racist remarks and actions, including Snapchat posts of a monkey's body with a black person's face attached and consistently hearing the n-word said in the hallways and classroom settings when teachers were not present, as well as lack of response and support from Joplin's friends and peers when incidents occurred. Sharon and Brian made a commitment to Joplin to speak with administration to resolve this so Joplin did not have to consider transferring. Sharon shared that they became aware of what took place at the Waterloo East basketball game last fall and understood it from administration to be a misunderstanding; however, it was portrayed differently on the news. Brian shared that there is a long history of people not believing black people, and they believe that the incident was not a misunderstanding.

Sharon and Brian transferred Joplin out of Wahlert because they felt they did not gain support from administration. Sharon shared that she sent emails to administration immediately letting them know that the n-word was being used throughout the school in different contexts. She shared that students seated behind Joplin in Spanish class were chanting the n-word and making monkey noises, similar to the allegations at Waterloo East, leaving Joplin afraid to look behind him to see which students were chanting these racist remarks because he did not know what they were going to do. Joplin has also heard the n-word during his lunch time around other students and peers; however, no one said anything to stop it. He has also heard it from his bowling teammates. Sharon shared that she had confidence that administration would fix this and gave the student names to administration, expecting suspension and expulsions; however, nothing happened. They also arranged for the administration to speak with Joplin directly; however, no one met with him. Joplin then decided to transfer to another school and is now adjusting to a new environment at Dubuque Senior High School.

Sharon and Brian shared their hopes of leaving Wahlert a better place than they found it. Sharon requested that Holy Family share alerts for allegations of racism, similar to how other alerts are shared. She also suggested creating a Student Ambassador Club where students are trained to be assertive and promote/encourage students to be good to one another, which she said was declined by administration previously. She also suggested creating a Posse Club where minority students bond with each other in support and have a safe place to share their experiences. Sharon pointed out that Holy Family's current policy does not protect minorities and LGBTQIA+ students and feels that all students need support and allies. The Hallstoos family shared their hopes that Holy Family works with existing parents to ensure that all students feel included and safe.

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Andrea and Collins Eboh, parents of two students at Wahlert and a possible incoming student at Our Lady of Guadalupe, addressed the board. Andrea shared their appreciation for the Holy Family education for their children - they feel their students have had opportunities to excel academically and with their faith. However, in speaking with their older sons regarding enrolling their youngest in the Holy Family system, both of their sons felt that it was not a good idea and worried that their younger brother would have a bad experience. Andrea shared that their sons have heard the n-word used by other students and have pushed back against it because they understand the violent nature of the word. Andrea shared her concern that teenagers cannot be the only ones asked to stand up in their community and feels there are not clear guidelines or consequences for actions and words that may happen to their youngest son if he enrolls at Holy Family. Collins Eboh expressed the need for clear consequences for incidents of racism and discrimination, including immediate suspension, and requested an immediate policy change stating that verbal and physical racist acts will not be tolerated. Students need to learn this lesson before they start careers or go off to college where racism has much bigger consequences. Holy Family needs to stress the importance of sanctifying every life. Collins suggested the need for required Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) training, as well as bias interruption training amongst teachers and staff. He asked the board to share data from the 2021 DEI survey in which several community members

participated in and completed, as well as what Holy Family is doing about the results and what they have learned from the results.

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Danielle Moore, parent of three students in the Holy Family system, shared how appalled she was at hearing and learning of racism at Mazzuchelli and Wahlert. She specifically shared an incident where her oldest son, who is in fifth grade, was upset when the n-word was said out loud in a book they were reading in class. While the teacher handled the situation appropriately, consequences were not enforced for the student who used that word in class. Danielle asked that policy changes be put into effect with clear repercussions for bullying and racism. She expressed the need for these policy changes to be in documentation just as Holy Family specifies and outlines their school uniform policy. Danielle shared that if she does not see these changes within the schools and policies, her children will no longer attend Holy Family. Danielle is committed to attend every board meeting until change happens.

Brian Kane concluded the public comment portion of the meeting to gravely empathize and apologize to everyone in attendance whose families experienced racism or any act of unkindness. Brian shared that everyone who shared their experiences are right that their families should not have to deal with this type of behavior and actions. The Holy Family school board has condemned racism, bullying, and sexism. Brian shared that the board is going to do everything they can to deliver on the requests of those who spoke. Brian welcomed the public to attend all upcoming board meetings to see the process of these initiatives and expressed the board's understanding that silence regarding this issue is part of the problem. The board understands the amount of work that needs to be done as well as the flaws and disappointments of the current environment.

### **Approval of Minutes**

Minutes from the February 17, 2022 Board of Education meeting were included in the packet for review.

- **Sharon Wulfekuhle-Hefel moved to approve the February 17, 2022 meeting minutes as presented. John Meinert seconded. The motion carried.**

### **Consent Agenda Items**

Committee minutes and reports from system administrators were included in the packet for review.

- **Dan Walsh moved to accept the meeting minutes and system reports as presented. John Meinert seconded. The motion carried.**

### **Chief Administrator Report**

Holy Family expanded its definition of need to families who are within 600 percent of the poverty level, which will allow assistance for more middle-income families.

In January and February, principals provided more than 15 tours to interested families. Elementary sites also hosted their kindergarten visit days, where more than 60 families attended. Enrollment is currently at 87 percent of the goal.

Wahlert Catholic held an electives fair that showcased to students all of the options for next year, which include internship and college credit opportunities.

ISASP tests will be taken in the spring and all certified staff are getting trained in its administration.

Phase I of Holy Ghost is finished and students will be transferring into their new rooms after spring break. St. Joseph the Worker is in its planning stages for renovation.

The central kitchen project is taking form. Christin Smith, Director of Nutrition Services, has visited five sites and is in the process of making recommendations for changes to the initial proposed plans. The direction will not be determined until all costs are considered and the organization, flow, and food quality needs are understood.

Holy Family Catholic Schools welcomes three new administrators for the 2022-2023 school year: Our Lady of Guadalupe Principal - Kathleen Konrardy; St. Columbkille Principal - Sr. Catherine Stewart; and Wahlert Catholic Principal - Mariah Reeves.

The Finance Committee has been working to improve pay and benefits for all certified and non-certified staff. The process has been thorough and based on the assumptions and money-raised so it is sustainable.

Holy Family Early Childhood is seeing a return on the investment of raising early childhood employee rates. Since the hourly rate increase went into effect on February 1, a total of 36 early childhood applications have been received, compared to 25 received from October 15 - January 31. There has also been a notable increase in qualified candidates with previous early childhood experience.

The State of Iowa has released funds to directly pay teachers a bonus of \$1,000 for working through the pandemic. This is only allocated for full-time certified staff and Holy Family has decided to offer this to part-time certified staff as well.

The board congratulated Holy Family's superintendent, Kim Hermsen, who recently won the Lead, Learn, Proclaim Award.

### **Equity and Cultural Responsiveness**

Phil Bormann shared that Equity and Cultural Responsiveness will be an ongoing agenda item for the Board of Education meetings going forward. The State of Iowa has come up with new administrative standards and equity/cultural responsiveness is one of them. The Social Justice Club, moderated by Heather Trees, is a step in this direction. The overall goal with this initiative is to create a more welcoming, loving, and inclusive environment. Phil shared that administration will be meeting with the Social Justice Club after spring break in an effort to understand how to get to the student level with the issues shared at the board meeting.

Phil shared a letter that will be communicated out to families on March 11 regarding the ways in which Holy Family is recommitting to best efforts and ways that Holy Family can systematically improve how we raise our children. The goal is to share how all mistreatments of race, bullying, and sexual identity will not be tolerated. While Holy Family schools act independently of each other, there needs to be consistency across the system on how we raise leaders in our community and schools. This will entail a long-term process and will not be a quick-fix. Policy can be changed in a day, but changes need to happen on a longer systemic level, with opportunity to hear from parents, students, teachers, staff, and community members. Phil stressed the importance of using Holy Family's faith and Catholicity as a catalyst for how the school district can make an impact.

John Meinert requested that specific action items be shared in the letter to parents to back up the promises made. Phil shared that the communication will declare long-term systemic actions and moves that will take place before the end of the school year, including sharing data from the social justice survey distributed to parents a year and a half ago. John Meinert also expressed his hope that an extra pillar regarding inclusion be moved to the top of Holy Family's pillar structure.

Brian Kane stressed the importance of driving parents and community members to Holy Family's website as a way to maintain consistent communication, as well as empowering board members to speak about this in the community as spokespeople of Holy Family Catholic Schools. It comes down to consistency and persistence in sending the message to parents about how actions are being met to solve these issues.

Phil shared that the Social Justice Club is looking into creating an equity statement, a draft of which will be shared with the board. There is potential for teachers, staff, parents and students to have a part in designing the statement as well.

### **Faith Formation Update**

Katie Jones, Campus Ministry director at Wahlert, joined the meeting to share an update on faith formation.

Katie is currently working to create a faculty faith formation program that can be used for years to come. Katie attended a national conference in Nashville in October, along with Andrea Kirby, Fr. Andy Upah and Fr. Martin Coolidge, where they connected with other schools to learn their efforts in faculty faith formation. Katie has been exploring several different platforms to help design Holy Family's approach. She met with local priests in February to share this initiative and learn their hopes of what faith formation could look like for faculty and staff in terms of building a connection between faith and the subject matter they are teaching. Priests are also willing to speak and present in classrooms as a resource for teachers. Kate shared the importance of faith formation including discipleship, community, prayer and food. This will also be essential to consistently communicate the "why" behind Holy Family's faith formation efforts.

John Meinert asked Katie what her call to action is with the plan in place for faculty faith formation. Katie's goal is to gauge where faculty members currently sit with their own faith formation, as well as creating a yearly retreat for faculty and staff at the beginning of the school year. Katie also would like to implement regular faith formation meetings and retreats.

### **Verify Email Votes for 2022-2023 Parish Assessments**

The 2022-2023 parish assessments were shared with the board previously and approved through email vote.

- **Dan Walsh moved to verify email votes approving the 2022-2023 parish assessments. Kelley Schiesl seconded. Fr. Jim Goerend abstained. Fr. Phil Gibbs was not present but abstained through email vote. The motion carried.**

### **2022-2023 Capital and Operating Budget**

The 2022-2023 Capital and Operating Budget was sent to the board electronically for their review. The Finance Committee approved the budget through email vote and recommended it for board approval. Significant changes from previous years include salaries and benefits with a larger than normal percent increase for certified and non-certified staff, as well as the addition of a 401(k) match and increased health benefits. This will follow the Platform for Excellence initiative to put in place better salaries and benefits for all staff. In addition, benefit dollars will now be rolled into salaries for all employees, which will also increase salaries and help with employee recruitment.

- **Dan Walsh moved to approve the 2022-2023 Capital and Operating Budget as presented. Kelley Schiesl seconded. The motion carried.**

### **Parish Employee Tuition Discount**

The Finance Committee also recently approved a 30 percent tuition discount for full-time contributing parish employees and recommended it for board approval.

- **Kelley Schiesl moved to approve the 30 percent tuition discount for full-time contributing parish employees. John Meinert seconded. The motion carried.**

### **Teacher/Administrator Contracts**

- **Sharon Wulfekuhle-Hefel moved to approve all contracts as presented not to exceed a total full-time equivalency of 118 FTE. Fr. Jim Goerend seconded. The motion carried.**

### **Board Designated Funds - Proceeds received from employee theft claim**

Restitution money in the amount of \$503,000 was received from the Wessels employee theft claim. It was recommended by the Finance Committee that funds be classified as Board designated funds for Platform for Excellence.

- **John Meinert moved to approve the acceptance of the proceeds received from the employee theft claim to be classified as Board designated funds for Platform for Excellence initiatives. Sharon Wulfekuhle-Hefel seconded. The motion carried.**

### **2022-2023 Substitute Handbook**

A draft of the 2022-2023 Substitute Handbook was shared with the board and was approved by the Student Services Committee. Phil Bormann highlighted changes including the addition of the Cold Weather Policy as well as the Archdiocese policy on Gender Theory.

- **Kelley Schiesl moved to approve the 2022-2023 Substitute Handbook as presented. Sharon Wulfekuhle-Hefel seconded. The motion carried.**

### **2022-2023 Volunteer Handbook**

A draft of the 2022-2023 Volunteer Handbook was also shared with the board and was approved by the Student Services Committee.

- **Kelley Schiesl moved to approve the 2022-2023 Volunteer Handbook as presented. Sharon Wulfekuhle-Hefel seconded. The motion carried.**

### **Executive Session**

At 7:50 p.m., Dan Walsh moved and Fr. Jim Goerend seconded to convene to Executive Session.

At 8:05 p.m., John Meinert moved and Sharon Wulfekuhle-Hefel seconded to conclude Executive Session.

Meeting adjourned at 8:05 p.m.