

Board of Education Meeting
April 7, 2022
Schrup Family Board Room

Board Members Present: Todd Link, Dan Walsh, Fr. Jim Goerend, Diane Rambousek, Brian Kane, Kelley Schiesl, Fr. Phil Gibbs, John Meinert

Board Members Absent: Sharon Wulfekuhle-Hefel, Scott Leibfried

Staff Present: Bob Noel, Phil Bormann

Guests Present: Claudette Bees, Jwan and Trisha Brookins, Danielle Moore, Bob Wethal, Jim Sigwarth, Jeremy Jones, and several other parents and community members.

Meeting began with prayer at 5:34 p.m.

Public Comment

Brian Kane, Board Chair, welcomed parents and community members for public comment.

Brian read the following letter from Lori Apel, who was unable to attend the meeting but asked that her comments be shared with the board. Lori was the previous principal of Our Lady of Guadalupe and her daughter also previously attended Holy Family Catholic Schools.

“In place of attending the HF Board meeting. I will submit my daughter’s experiences of racism in letter form.

As an administrator, I do want to say that I am ashamed that I did not advocate for racial justice within the system. And as a mother, I wish I would have used a louder voice to call out racism for Arica during the tumultuous times she endured.

I continue to educate myself on ways in which I can advocate for change. For example, I have led numerous book discussion groups in the past years - *So You Want to Talk About Race?*, *Caste*, and Fr. Dan Horan’s recent book, *White Catholic Response to Racism and Privilege*. I invited Fr. Dan to present at the Sisters fall gathering. His presentation offered many insights for all and challenged us to do the necessary work if we are to wipe out the hatred of racism.

As part of my program work, I successfully planned a four-part series titled *Moving Toward Racial Equity*, reaching hundreds of people from across the nation via the Zoom platform. In addition, I was recently invited to join the Education Committee of the local NAACP, which will further outreach to the greater community.

I am happy to offer suggestions and resources that will benefit the system and administrators as they move forward to dismantle racism at Holy Family.”

Claudette Bees, who previously served as an assistant principal at Hempstead High School and is now retired, shared her disappointment in the behavior of both Hempstead

and Wahlert students during past basketball games she attended. She shared that over the years, she has experienced students using the n-word and making monkey sounds during games. Claudette feels that kids are kids and they need to be taught, and that we can change the dynamics of any culture but it has to be done intentionally. Claudette shared that she's known Lori Apel for some time and has worked with Faces and Voices in Dubuque for many years. She believes there has been a history of many people at Holy Family who have tried desperately to change the culture. In fact, most of the NAACP entries for Martin Luther King, Jr. Tributes were from Holy Family students. Claudette believes that Dubuque is changing and we are becoming more racialized. She feels we need to continue to educate our educators. She suggested book studies for educators or a book of the month with the aim of trying to teach equity, justice and diversity. Claudette believes the history of Dubuque plays a big part in current racial issues; however, she feels everyone wants growth. Claudette offered to volunteer her time to help with Holy Family's efforts.

Equity and Cultural Responsiveness

Phil Bormann updated the board on current efforts pertaining to equity and cultural responsiveness.

On May 11, a communication was sent out to the Holy Family community sharing the efforts to take a more systemic approach to making improvements across the system.

Phil is also in the process of finalizing a small committee of people to work on several goals that will include the following:

- Improve policy across the system. This will include taking a step back and reviewing all current policies as well as aligning policies across the system. The team will also work to create a thorough process for investigating as well as a retaliation statement making it clear that all individuals will be respected and protected. The committee will look at policies from other Catholic and public schools including those from Dubuque Community, Waterloo, Des Moines, Davenport and Chicago, for guidance.
- Being more transparent with data. Phil shared that data related to the Loras College study on social justice was posted on the Holy Family website to show work that has already been done.
- Training for staff – Determine what training will be used, who will take the training, how often it will be implemented, and how to take a systemic approach and do it through a Catholic lens.

The committee will include Danielle Moore (Holy Family parent), Katie O'Hea (Holy Family parent), Mariah Reeves (Wahlert Assistant Principal), Fr. Martin Coolidge and Phil Bormann. Phil is also looking for a third party person who is not associated with Holy Family but wants to assist. The committee will represent different ideas and thoughts, backgrounds and expertise and will include elementary, middle and high school representation.

All policy changes will go through the Religion and Mission Committee first, then to the Student Services Committee for their input and approval before going before the board. Phil invited those

who want to have a voice in these discussions to take part in those meetings. Meetings dates and times will be posted on the system calendar on the Holy Family website.

Phil shared that he has met with the Wahlert Social Justice Club, which includes a team of high school students who want to be a part of the solution. Phil also met with system-level directors and principals to discuss the importance of this work and what is being done.

Teachers also provided input on the following questions:

- What do you see or hear from staff and students related to how we treat one another?
- What do you believe are steps that can be taken now to improve our community?
- What do you believe are steps necessary for making a larger cultural shift to a more welcoming and inclusive Christian environment?
- Are there strategies/programs that have helped your school now or in the past?

Brian Kane shared that the Executive Committee has discussed having a work session as a board to adopt an equity statement on behalf of the board that could be a driver for policies so they have a central focus and theme. He also suggested that the committee working on these efforts give a presentation for the board after some of the work is done.

Jwan Brookins, Holy Family parent, shared feedback he's received since the March board meeting from friends and individuals who have been in the system. When asking others about the emails that have been sent from Holy Family regarding these efforts, he has heard people say they have received the emails but do not understand what is going on. Jwan feels the emails going out are touching on a lot of good things but thinks that Holy Family should really uncover it all and lay it all out so parents know what kids are experiencing and what is happening in our hallways and in our schools. Jwan feels that the problem needs to be fixed at home in order to make a difference and there should be more information in the emails that are going out to inform parents what is happening so it prompts them to start the conversation with their children at home.

Danielle Moore, Holy Family parent, agreed that it would be valuable to send out another bold statement or way to show that Holy Family is really behind this effort.

Bob Wethal, Holy Family parent, asked the board, as they are taking time to make policies and improve policies, what happens tomorrow if something happens in school? Phil Bormann shared that someone using a racial slur or bias-based comment will be disciplined regardless of current policy and that working on changing policy does not get in the way or prevent Holy Family from doing the right thing on behalf of the students.

Jwan Brookins shared that what they want is for classmates to feel confident enough to stand up for their peers. Trisha Brookins feels that although the communication being sent is good and valuable, it is not necessarily impacting those parents who are not aware of what's going on because they think it doesn't pertain to them. She feels parents need to be informed so they can have those tough conversations with their kids and help teach them to stand up for others. Parents need to teach their children to be defenders, to be bold and stand up for others. If one kid stands up, others will follow.

Phil Bormann clarified that, with any situation involving harassment or bullying in the system, parents are receiving direct calls and are having meetings with administrators or sometimes guidance counselors. There is always direct communication with parents.

Jim Sigwarth, Holy Family parent, addressed the board. Jim's daughter graduates this year and it will be 60 years since his oldest sister started at Wahlert. Jim shared they have been talking a lot about how to mark this moment with a possible scholarship supporting a Catholic education, but he is discouraged and disgusted with how our students treat other athletes at sporting events with jeering instead of cheering. He feels that jeering has become the norm. Jim shared that when he was a kid going through Wahlert, they took home the very first sportsmanship awards and how they felt more pride in this recognition than if it were a championship. Jim asked why high school leaders can't be pulled aside and asked - "Can we do this differently? Can we have cheerleaders again who are supportive of their team and others?" Jim feels this would be the kind of thing that would permeate down because it is the young kids who are watching their Wahlert leaders. Jim feels that nothing should be tolerated when students are jeering and putting others down. He also agrees there should be a bold statement from the board sent out to families outlining the things that have been happening and asking for parents help at home. He feels it would show support to those families who are bearing the brunt of the ill treatment.

Jeremy Jones addressed the board. Jeremy has three students currently in the system with two students in their junior year at Wahlert. He shared that his junior students were not completely aware of what has been happening, but are now more attentive to what is going on and communicating more about what they experience. Jeremy feels they need to know the whole picture of what is happening so they can help out. He also reminded the board and those in attendance that there is one group at Wahlert that is doing the cheering instead of the jeering – the show choir group is always cheering and supportive of competing schools and a great example of what to look at.

Brian Kane shared that he has received numerous calls from parents and grandparents who are aware of what has been happening and are talking to their students. However, the board can always do better and will take all comments into account. The board and Holy Family administration condemn racism and bullying and will continue to take action.

Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the March 10, 2022 Board of Education meeting were included in the packet for review.

- **Todd Link moved to approve the March 10, 2022 meeting minutes as presented. Fr. Phil Gibbs 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 administration has been in the process soliciting feedback from all faculty and staff across the system regarding our school culture and how we can become more inclusive. As mentioned previously, a small task force will assist in this process of setting goals and working through the process of improving school culture and will meet on a regular basis. Their work will be provided to the Religion and Mission Committee and the Student Services Committee for feedback and approval.

Fulton Elementary School is closing downtown and will result in 220 students displaced. Holy Family is working to create a small campaign with flyers to go out to those families via direct mail and will include information about our elementary schools and scholarships.

Owen Funke has been hired with Title IV funds to become the Holy Family Youth Coordinator. He is taking over after-school youth programming and summer camps. Camp registration opened in March and has already seen 560 student registrations. After-school programming at the elementaries is also popular with more than 60 students signed up for our new after-school track program, and science programming at the Mississippi River Museum reaching capacity within the first day of registration.

The ACT on-site exam was taken by students on March 29, 2022, with 88 students participating. In addition to ACT prep sessions offered by teachers during Eagle time, Jason Derby (ACT Certified Prep Teacher) spent two days on general assessment strategies on campus with 63 students in attendance.

The Wahlert guidance department has created a portfolio system for students, which will begin with incoming 9th grade students in 2022-2023. Students will use their online portfolio to showcase and track their high school education including goals, activities, test scores, service, etc.

The Holy Family Computer Science team is creating a system plan for all K-8 students to engage in computer science programming. Focus is on integration into current projects. For example, instead of creating a “game” on poster board, students will create a code for a game.

Wahlert Catholic will be adding women’s wrestling as a sanctioned sport for the 2022-2023 school year. Joel Allen is excited to serve as the coach.

Phil joined Lis Ernst, Early Childhood Coordinator, as they spoke to the Board of Supervisors to request an additional \$585,000 to finish the Holy Ghost Early Childhood project. Holy Family should know the answer by the end of the month and will keep the board updated.

HR Coordinator Mary Sulentic, Finance Director Bonnie Sigwarth, and Phil hosted Zoom calls with faculty and staff to inform them of the changes to next year’s pay and benefits.

Phil congratulated Bonnie Sigwarth and Principal Barb Roling for being nominated as Women of Achievement through Women’s Leadership Network.

Fr. Phil Gibbs shared that the parishes are trying to come up with a comprehensive plan for their facility usage and it is worth further conversation to make sure there are no conflicts with after-school programming.

Advancement Update

Bob Noel, Director of Institutional Advancement, shared a document outlining the annual fundraising plan for the Student Impact Fund and the strategy for alumni and constituent engagement.

Bob commended his team for all of their hard work and shared the following highlights:

- The annual fund is currently sitting at \$1.2 million with \$50,000 to go to reach the goal.
- Sarah Martineau, Database Administrator, has been focused on applying for grants and has received approximately \$2.5 million in grants so far that will help with renovation projects at St. Joseph the Worker and Holy Ghost Early Childhood.
- Holy Family has also received \$100,000 in endowed scholarships this year that will help with scholarships for students in the coming years.
- Bob has picked up 15-20 new business sponsors.
- Circle of Celebration 2022 was a success with \$515,000 total raised from the event. The biggest struggle continues to be raffle ticket sales. Bob is working with his team on what can be done moving forward to help with this.
- Wahlert students will help with the upcoming spring phonathon by calling constituents who have not yet given. Bob commented that it is great to see the energy from students asking for money to help their school and classmates!
- Bob is working to roll out a Legacy Society, which will include guest speakers focused on planned giving. Brian Kane will give an upcoming presentation to families focused on Wills, Trusts and Estates. The goal is to get 25 people to participate with one presentation on various topics per quarter. Upcoming presentations will include information on financial planning and CFAD.
- The Advancement Department is partnering with Tom English, Wahlert Athletic Director, and the Booster Club to build up the annual golf outing with more of a focus on community.
- City socials for Wahlert alumni, which were paused due COVID, will resume. The first event will be held in Des Moines and will be hosted by Ken Quinn at World Food Pride. Upcoming events will be held in the Twin Cities and Chicago as well. Dates will be shared with the board once they are finalized.
- Christine McAllister, Director of Alumni and Special Events, is working on upcoming reunions and looking at what it would be like to engage more Holy Family alum by inviting those involved in athletics and other activities to join events.
- The Advancement team is also working on organizing a “Friendraiser,” which will include a fun activity such as dueling pianos, a band, etc. to try to engage the community.

Fr. Gibbs asked if there was a matching fund or big donor at the Circle of Celebration who was interested in the Brain Health Room. Bob shared that the budget for Fund-A-Cause (FAC) was \$200,000 and there was a donor that could not be present that helped Holy Family get the second \$100,000. Overall, FAC brought in approximately \$240,000 for the Braith Health initiative. The board thanked Bob for all of his hard work.

Candidate Approval

Administration recommended the hiring of Bridget Sullivan for a math teacher position at Wahlert Catholic High School for the 2022-2023 school year.

- **Dan Walsh moved to approve the hiring of Bridget Sullivan. Diane Rambousek seconded. The motion carried.**

J-Term Trip to Costa Rica

Wahlert Catholic will be offering a trip to Costa Rica that will take place during J-Term in January 2023, where students will work to build a home over the course of several days. A presentation with information was included in the packet for review.

- **Todd Link moved to approve the J-Term service trip to Costa Rica in January 2023. Kelley Schiesl seconded. The motion carried.**

Meeting adjourned at 6:54 p.m.