

SJF School Advisory Board Meeting Notes, 12/4/18 – Kane Hall Q&A:

In response to community interest, the SAB's regular meeting was moved to Kane Hall and started with an open forum for community members to share their thoughts and ask questions related to our second principal transition over the last year.

We opened with the prayer (included here for all of us to share as we come together to work on behalf of the school):

Heavenly Father,

Be with us as we meet. Guide us as we talk. Stay with us as we plan. Open our ears as we listen. Open our eyes to your vision. In our meeting Lord, help us to focus on what is important rather than just what is urgent. May everything that we discuss have a bearing on the children in our charge. Let us never forget that it is both a privilege and a responsibility to play a part in the education of the young. Grant that we may always support each other in that process.

*In Jesus' name,
Amen*

Fr. Ken reviewed the events of the past week that led to the resignation of Mr. Fornaciari and his work with the Archdiocese of Chicago Catholic Schools that led to the selection of Mrs. Maura Nash, most recently our 8th grade ELA teacher, as SJF's next principal. He then introduced Maura to those in attendance, who, in turn, described her background and enthusiasm for the new job and SJF generally both as a parent of three young children in the school and what she has experienced this year as a faculty member.

The floor was then opened for Q&A from our guests. We have done our best to summarize the Q&A thematically here:

Q&A re: Mr. Fornaciari's resignation:

- Parents voiced concerns that changes Jim wanted to make were met with resistance, leading to the "real" reason(s) for his departure.
- Fr. Ken reiterated that the reason Jim provided for his resignation was personal, namely he couldn't both fully commit himself to caring for his aging mother and serving as SJF's principal.
- Fr. Ken acknowledged all new principals typically face resistance to change, and he was sure it was no different for Jim, but nonetheless, in his short time at SJF, Jim was able to leave an imprint.
- Security of the school was one area he was passionate about and was able to make positive changes. Other areas he was focused on driving change include parent/school partnership, transparency, and a culture of continuous improvement.

- Fr. Ken, Mrs. Nash, and the faculty present at this meeting all confirmed that they were and are supportive of these changes and committed to build on the strong foundation of SJF and take the performance of the school to the next level with SJF students as the #1 Priority.
- The Archdiocese Office of Catholic Schools (OCS) is aware of the short- and long-term goals that Jim started with and is supportive of helping Mrs. Nash continue on this “Good to Great” journey and build on it in her new role.

Q&A re: Mrs. Nash’s permanency and the plan to fill her current teaching position:

- The plan and hope is for Mrs. Nash to be the permanent principal.
- Mrs. Nash is committed and motivated to help bring SJF School to the next level of performance in the long-term.
- Principal was a career goal for her and she has already been in the process to be a candidate for principalship within the Archdiocese of Chicago Office of Catholic Schools (OCS).
- Fr. Ken, the OCS, faculty and parents have faith she will be successful in role, but all principals and all teachers are on one-year renewable contracts.
- The normal time to renew contracts is February; however, in this case given her mid-year appointment, Fr. Ken would ask for an extension. To be prepared, Fr. Ken will partner with OCS to ensure we have a strong candidate pool should it be needed; however, we expect great success in the short- and long-term from Mrs. Nash.
- Acknowledgments of Mrs. Nash’s positive contributions to the classroom as a teacher were made by several 8th grade parents, with one noting if Mrs. Nash is half as good of a principal as she is as a teacher, SJF will be in great shape, but because of that, she wanted to know what the plan is to cover the English/Language arts vacancy.
- Mrs. Nash and Fr. Ken are working with Saint Xavier to hopefully bring a new, dynamic teacher on board quickly. Maura will work with the teacher hired to hand over curriculum and ensure the transition is seamless.
- In the meantime, Maura will continue teaching in her position.

Q&A re: Mrs. Nash’s background and credentials:

- Mrs. Nash attended Nazareth Academy for high school and then went on to study at Loras College in Dubuque where she obtained her bachelor’s degree. She obtained a Masters in Educational Leadership as well as her Type 75 administrative endorsement at Lewis University in Romeoville. Her teaching career began at Montini High School in Lombard where she taught for five years before joining the SJF faculty. She is a parishioner and a parent of three young Falcons, Charlie, Jimmy and Liam.

Q&A re: faculty credentials and past evaluations:

- Parents raised several concerns about administrative certification and the comment made by Mr. Fornaciari in his departure e-mail stating that teachers have not been evaluated at SJF.
- 3 teachers, including Mrs. Nash, currently in the school have a Type 75 administrative certificate.

- Contrary to what was stated in Jim's e-mail, teachers at St. John Fisher School have been evaluated annually.
- The model that has been used has evolved over the years.
- 2018 is the first year the Charlotte Danielson Model is mandatory with the Archdiocese, so the comparison to the model and output that Mr. Fornaciari was used to in his suburban public school system could have been the miscommunication.
- Formal classroom evaluation and self-evaluation has annually been a part of the review process for SJF teachers.
- Mrs. Nash looks forward to enhancing this process in partnership with teachers to ensure it is both empowering and helps raise teacher performance year over year.

Q&A re: faculty and staff contracts and school administrative structure:

- Individual contracts and evaluations are private personnel files, but the base contract used by the Archdiocese for faculty and staff members can be found on the Archdiocese web site.
- All contracts are for one year, renewable by the principal and pastor.
- Teachers report to Mrs. Nash, and Mrs. Nash has the authority to work with the principal on school staff changes as part of the normal review process.
- All new principals are asked to complete a year of observation and evaluation before making recommendations or requests regarding any school staff changes.

Q&A re: the role of the school board:

- School Advisory Board purpose is to collaborate with the leadership team for development and oversight of the school's fidelity to mission, academic excellence, and operational vitality.
- The board may not discuss issues of school personnel, an individual family or a particular student's needs.
- This board was formed in September and was trained under new guidelines in October.
- Committees were kicked off in November.
- With the leadership transition, we are aiming to continue the work that was started with Jim and increase transparency and involvement.

Q&A re: transparency and communications from the pastor and school board:

- Concerns were raised that it was not until a mid-year principal resignation occurred that the community has heard from either Fr. Ken or the school board.
- Both Fr. Ken and the school board acknowledged we can and need to be more vocal and visible in the community to give the community the confidence we are actively working to support the mission and vitality of the school and earn everyone's trust to actively partner together in this work.
- A number of positive changes have been made" in the spirit of increased transparency being one of the school board's top goals for the year. Interested stakeholders should notice these changes and the impact immediately.

- Everyone was reminded that if you ever have a concern or a question – whether it be about a teacher, the principal, pastor, school board, etc., to first, directly communicate with the person the question or concern is about.
- When escalation is necessary and it pertains to something within the school, the principal is the right point of contact.
- The board cannot comment on personnel or specific issues for students.

Q&A re: the school's and Mrs. Nash's top short and long-term goals:

- Initial top goal for Mrs. Nash: transparency and frequent communication is key to building trust with the parents and community of SJF.
- Given the very recent transition, the board recommend we all give Mrs. Nash time to get into her new role and first work to continue the great journey that's been started this year.
- She is committed to reporting out to the SJF community more formal short- and long-term goals in August.
- Similarly, the board is in the process of beginning a long-term strategic planning effort to help Mrs. Nash in this regard and will be reporting more on our plans for that over the next 3-6 months.

Other Q&A re: specific aspects of school and/or parish:

- Guidance counselor position – was a top past priority for Sr. Jean and Jim and SJF leadership still sees this as a top priority; it is being worked into the budget for next year.
- Convent usage – due to fire safety concerns, we moved children out of the convent and it is currently not being used. Related to future goals with the convent, it will require fundraising and evaluating options is the next step for Fr. Ken.
- Traveling math program – the SJF math faculty is partnering with the local high schools to evaluate our math curriculum; they are telling us to go back to the basics. We are working to bridge the gap between teaching Common Core for purposes of ASPIRE testing and a more traditional approach that seems to be favored as a prep for high school.

Thank you and next steps:

- To all parents and parishioners who came out in support of our school, thank you for taking the time to share your perspectives with the board and parish and school leadership
- To our dedicated teachers and staff members, who also came out in support of our shared mission, thank you for all that you do for our children. You have a resource of interested parents to make sure SJF students excel and continue to be the #1 priority.
- We need to move forward as a united front. The kids are counting on us!

After the Q&A session, the board held its regularly scheduled executive session. Next steps coming out of that session were mainly focused on our prioritized committee work:

- **Strategic Planning Committee**, led by members, Joe Goldrick and Joan Rogers, is aiming to partner with faculty, staff, parents, and community to set 3-5 year goals to ensure the vitality of the school. Next steps include focus groups and research for benchmarking and goal setting.
- **Mission Committee**, led by members, Carrie Nowicki, Katy Spreitzer, and Mary Neumannn, Kathleen Girzadas. Next steps include focus group comprised of alumni, students, faculty, and staff aimed to understand and enhance SJF Mission. Goal is to use feedback to drive enhancements and jumpstart improved climate at SJF.
- **Communication Committee**, led by members, Nikki Carey, Sara McGann, Molly Condon aimed to identify a primary platform for communication for SJF stakeholders, partner with other SJF organizations to improve consistency and alignment, create platform for increased communication for parents such as townhall or roundtables. Next step: online survey to SJF parents and faculty to understand current state and desire for improvements.
- **By-laws**: Joe Goldrick working with Archdiocese resources to finalize and present new SAB By-laws for confirmation before next meeting.
- **Transparency**: Commitment to increase transparency on meeting times and agendas. Next step is to expand SJF School Board Section of Website to allow for additional information to be featured.
- **Next Meeting**: Jan 15th 7 pm. Topics: Committee report out and ensure direction is aligned with Mrs. Nash's observations during the first 30 days.
- **Feedback**. To provide input and to volunteer for a committee @ e-mail SJFSAB@gmail.com.