

The School Advisory Council (SAC) Handbook

St. Mary of the Assumption Parish

Lake Leelanau, Michigan

2022-2023

I. THE STRUCTURE OF THE SCHOOL:

St. Mary School, as all Catholic schools, is a part of the larger mission of the Church to teach and to spread the Gospel. On the local level, St. Mary School is connected to the parish St. Mary Church of the Assumption of Lake Leelanau. Here, it is administered by both the pastor, in his role as canonical administrator, and the principal. On the diocesan level, St. Mary School operates within the diocesan system of Catholic schools under the supervision of the bishop of Gaylord. The bishop, in turn, is responsible for implementing the norms provided by the Congregation of Catholic Education in Rome, itself overseen by the Holy Father.

II. THE PASTOR, PRINCIPAL, TEACHER AND STAFF

Employment relationship:

- i. The Pastor has one school employee — the Principal
- ii. The Principal has responsibility for all school employees

III. THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PASTOR

The ultimate responsibility for the parish and school rests with the Pastor who is appointed by the Bishop. The pastor supports the work of the council and should be regularly consulted and informed on the work of the council. The Pastor approves, or vetoes, local school advisory council decisions. The Pastor attends all meetings, represents the interests of the parish to the council as well as the interests of the school to the parish. He serves as an *ex-officio* member of the advisory council.

IV. THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

The Principal provides the overall leadership for the parish school. The Principal, along with the faculty and students, ensures the development of religious attitudes and values, fostering community, worship, service to others and educational excellence. The Principal's responsibilities to the council include: (1) apprising the council on the implementation of policies, (2) informing the council about school programs, events and needs, and (3) preparing the council agenda in collaboration with the pastor. The Principal serves as an *ex-officio* member of the council.

V. THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Each Catholic school shall have a local SAC. The SAC assists the Pastor and the Principal in promoting the mission of the school and assists the school in achieving its goals to provide a balanced, Catholic education.

VI. MEETINGS:

President: All meetings shall be led by the pastor.

Time: The SAC shall meet quarterly, with other meetings as needed. Dates for meetings shall be established by the beginning of the academic year and distributed to members at least one month prior to the first meeting. Meetings may be cancelled, or rescheduled due to severe weather, or the unavailability of the pastor, or principal for grave reason.

Place: Meetings will be held in the library of the school, unless necessity dictate otherwise.

Attendance: The school advisory council meets in private. Only duly appointed members shall be admitted to SAC meetings. Those wishing to address an issue pertaining to the school may speak with the principal, or pastor. Special permission may be granted by the pastor to attend the SAC meeting.

Absenteeism: All members are expected to attend. Excessive absenteeism, defined as two or more missed meetings in a year will result in dismissal from the SAC.

Minutes: Minutes for all SAC meetings will be posted on the St. Mary School website, once approved.

VII. Council Formation:

1. Council Composition:

i. Standing Members:

- a. Pastor
- b. Principal
- c. SAC chairperson
- d. SAC vice-chairperson
- e. SAC secretary
- f. Business Manager
- g. Development Director
- h. Parish Council Liaison
- i. Finance Council Liaison
- j. Three at-large members of the community chosen for their experience and expertise in an area pertinent to the scope of the SAC

ii. All members of the SAC must be practicing Catholics in good standing with the Church, but not necessarily members of St. Mary Parish. Prospective members must have an interest and meet council member expectations in the following areas:

- a. Commitment to Catholic school education and its mission
- b. Expertise in an area of school need

- c. Objectivity in making recommendations
 - d. Willingness to dedicate time to the work of the SAC
 - e. Respectful and collaborative approach to serving
 - f. Several years' experience serving on other parish/school committees, or the equivalent
- iii. SAC member composition may include individuals from the various constituencies represented in the school community, including professionals and alumni. It is also useful to consider individuals from the wider parish community.
 - iv. The Executive team shall comprise the chairperson, and officers of the council. The executive may be called upon at the discretion of the pastor to advise on major issues impacting the school, such as scandal, or controversy.
 - v. The chairperson and the officers of the council shall be appointed by the pastor in consultation with the principal, and administrative team of the parish. These roles within the SAC are also for a three year term
 - vi. The SAC shall be limited to 12 members

VIII. BECOMING A MEMBER OF THE SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCIL:

There are nine ex-officio seats on the SAC. These individuals are appointed to their primary position by the bishop, or pastor, and as a result of that appointment serve also on the council. These individuals shall continue to serve on the SAC for as long as they continue in the above stated positions.

The following procedure shall be followed in the admission of new at-large members:

- a. The interested party shall submit a written application with three references to the parish office and agree to a background check pursuant to diocesan policy;
- b. The pastor, together with the principal, and the executive of the SAC shall convene to discuss the application;
- c. Based on the recommendation of this meeting, the pastor will accept, or reject the application.

Membership on the SAC is for a three-year term. This term may be extended, or curtailed at the discretion of the pastor in consultation with the principal and executive.

IX. REMOVAL FROM THE SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCIL:

The following reasons shall constitute grounds for dismissal from the SAC:

- a. Moral turpitude
- b. Publically espousing beliefs contrary to the teachings of the Church
- c. Illegal activity, including, but not limited to: drug use, drunken and disorderly conduct, driving while intoxicated, etc.
- d. Insubordination to the instructions of the pastor, bishop, or requirements lawfully imposed upon the school by the State which do not contradict the law of God

- e. Rude or disrespectful behavior to any member of the St. Mary school and parish community, including social media postings
- f. Missing two or more meetings in a 12 month period
- g. Breach of confidentiality
- h. Consistent lack of preparation

Should a disciplinary issue arise in the SAC, the case shall be referred to the Pastor, who will investigate the matter and decide upon an appropriate course of action.

X. THE ROLE, PURPOSE, AND FUNCTION OF THE SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCIL

A parish school is part of the educational mission of the parish for which the pastor is the canonical administrator. He delegates, according to diocesan policy, administrative responsibilities to the school principal, who is accountable to him.

The SAC is advisory in nature. The SAC operates in the policy-making process by formulating and adopting, but never *enacting* policy.

Further, the SAC shall not take up issues pertaining to:

1. The day to day administration of the school,
2. disciplinary situations involving students, or faculty members,
3. The advisability of following state and diocesan policy requirements,
4. Personnel issues in the school.

Advisory implies that the pastor will listen to the advice of the SAC in certain designated matters prior to a decision being made. The operating principle is that the pastor will accept the advice which has been given, especially when there is a consensus, unless the pastor has an overriding reason. It is customary, but not obligatory, for the pastor to communicate this reason to the advisory body.

The umbrella role of a SAC is to provide policy direction for the school. This very general responsibility resolves into seven distinct functions:

1. Assure mission effectiveness
2. To participate in and encourage strategic planning (establishing goals and objectives, long and short range)
3. To develop and defend policy
4. To provide for good public relations
5. To evaluate itself
6. Provide accountability for school committees
7. To participate in the process of selecting the principal, by suggesting members for the hiring committee.

XI. THE PRINCIPAL AND THE SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCIL

The Principal is the educational leader and executive officer of the SAC. As such, he/she provides educational direction to the SAC. He/she is the link between the SAC and the school with its faculty, students and parents, as well as the inspiring force which helps the SAC to lift itself above budget and finances and see its role in the mission of the Church.

The agenda for SAC meetings is a way in which the principal can provide solid training and guidance for the SAC, by helping to see that it is drawn up with care and that it distinguishes carefully between the various types of agenda items that can be included. It is crucial that the principal phrase recommendations carefully so that all can tell the difference among items that are meant to be information, discussion, advice or action.

The Principal keeps the SAC informed about the operation of the school and about diocesan processes and procedures. He/she prepares and submits policy recommendations and is responsible for policy implementation after ratification by the pastor.

XII. EXPECTATIONS; THE CHAIRPERSON AND THE SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCIL

The Chair of the school SAC plays an integral role of leadership. He/she is expected to work with the Pastor, Principal, and SAC members in a relationship and process that is supportive and goal-oriented.

The chair should see his/her role as a facilitator who helps the SAC organize itself to serve the needs of the school community.

The specific responsibilities of the chairperson are:

- a. To represent the views of the council to the pastor and principal, as well as to certain other parties namely the annual parent meeting and visiting accreditation teams
- b. To consult with the pastor and principal on serious matters as part of the executive team
- c. To ensure that all information regarding the SAC on the school website is complete and up to date. This should include:
 - i. A current copy of the SAC handbook
 - ii. Approved minutes of council meetings
 - iii. Current membership
 - iv. Dates of meetings

The Council chairperson never sets himself/herself up (or by the expectation of others) as a "power broker" who vies for authority which is not properly his/hers to possess. Therefore, the Council chairperson must be a person who can collaborate effectively with the council and the administration.

XIII. THE PASTOR AND PRINCIPAL SHOULD BE ABLE TO EXPECT THAT THE ADVISORY COUNCIL WILL:

- Acknowledge that the school is a significant expression of the teaching mission of the Church and functions within its structure;
- Model a faith community in the spirit of interdependence with the Pastor and Principal;
- Act in an ethical and responsible manner, and at all times observe confidentiality;
- Acknowledge the administration of the school to be the Principal's responsibility and support him/her in his/her efforts;
- Furnish objective counsel and advice;
- Have an established set of policies to guide the Principal in performing his/her role; Give honest feedback on the Principal's policy implementation on a regular basis;
- Adhere to diocesan policy and develop local policies which will enable the school to reach its goals;
- Follow agendas or expected procedure in SAC meetings so the Principal can be adequately prepared to respond to questions, issues, etc.;
- Be fully and carefully prepared for each meeting by doing the required readings and completing necessary tasks for committee work and reports in a timely manner;
- Be loyal to SAC decisions even when personally opposed to the final recommendations and decisions;
- Review and update the local bylaws when necessary, and as approved by the pastor; Collaborate in the school's five-year planning endeavors;
- Pray often for other members of the SAC, their Catholic school and the community it serves.

XIV. THE SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCIL SHOULD BE ABLE TO EXPECT THAT THE PRINCIPAL AS AN EXECUTIVE OFFICER WILL:

- Prepare the SAC meeting agenda in collaboration with the pastor and the chair in a businesslike manner to keep meetings to a reasonable length;
- Treat all SAC members alike and not show preference to individual members; Strictly enforce or implement the policies set by the SAC and ratified by the pastor as well as all diocesan policies;
- Keep the membership informed on SAC matters;
- Avoid unexpected issues, topics and areas of action at SAC meetings, so the SAC can have adequate time to respond after being fully advised of all the facts;

- Support SAC recommendations;
- Keep the SAC advised of changes, innovations and trends in education that might be applicable to the school;
- When appropriate, keep the SAC informed of serious or potentially serious issues;
- Operate the school in a fiscally sound and responsible manner;
- Provide leadership in the implementation of the school's five year plan.
- To provide for good public relations
- To evaluate itself (mission and responsibilities)

