

**Immaculate Heart of Mary Education Advisory Board Town Hall Meeting
IHM Britt Hall
(April 21, 2015)
Summary & Responses**

The following document contains the comments/questions/concerns (**in bold print**) raised at the Education Advisory Board (EAB) town hall meeting (THM) that was held on April 21, 2015. Each comment is followed by the response provided by the EAB at the THM and may also include additional information that we felt it necessary to include since the conclusion of that meeting. Naturally, EAB members could not speak specifically about some of the topics raised. The meeting was intentionally held without the directors of the various religious education programs, the school principal and Father Rottman to enable all in attendance to speak freely.

Attendance:

EAB Members: Chris Goddard, Jackie Dusing, Krista Kahmann, and Mike Wallenhorst
Parishioners: Approximately 45 (including five IHM Parish Council members)

Meeting: 7 - 8:30 pm

Chris Goddard opened the meeting with a prayer and a brief overview of the IHM EAB and accomplishments to date. The remainder of the meeting was spent reviewing and discussing the 18 returned parishioner "Comments/Question/Concern" forms. Upon entering Britt Hall, everyone was provided an opportunity to fill out the form. Several of the forms contained multiple comments. The forms were reviewed and categorized for reading and discussion.

Topics

School:

- **Approximately eight comments/questions/concerns were voiced related to why tuition was increased, yet "specials" like music and Spanish and now staff continue to be cut. The comments reflected concerns about getting less for the money and questions about whether their children are getting the best possible grade school education at IHM versus another Diocesan grade school.**

Response: The EAB was not involved in creating the school budget. It was developed by the Finance Council and Mr. Jacks and approved by Fr. Rottman. The EAB has recommended that it be involved in the process beginning the 2016-17 school year. It was explained to the EAB that due to the projected enrollment for the 2015-16 year, budget cuts would be required. As a result, different options were evaluated, priorities considered, and a very difficult decision was made. A major goal of the EAB is to assist Fr. Rottman and Mr. Jacks in increasing enrollment, especially in the lower grades. The upper grades continue to maintain steady and appropriate numbers. As the goal is achieved, then the school will consider adding back specialty programs. The EAB feels strongly that IHM students receive

significant value for their tuition based upon the very strong Catholic environment, standardized test results and students' success in high school.

- **Negative information continues to be disseminated to parishioners and school parents about the financial situation of the parish and school, staff cuts and other areas. What are the problems in our Parish that don't appear to be impacting other Diocesan schools? Has IHM School benchmarked the school investment being offered to IHM families against other Diocesan schools?**

This point was well taken. A few comments in response. First, the EAB has been working more closely with Father Rottman and Mr. Jacks to coordinate communication and messaging, being especially mindful of how the reader is receiving it. There are several positive things to report regarding the school. The favorable article in the Boone County Recorder (see the link <http://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/local/burlington/2015/02/09/catholic-school-embraces-new-teaching-methods/23122549/>) and the promotion of the IHM Open House in January was the direct result of the EAB's marketing/PR committee's work. Mr. Jacks has also communicated school successes throughout the school year. We will continue to do better in this regard and continue to take advantage of our many talented parishioners. We gained one new volunteer from the town hall meeting. Of course, we promise to be candid and timely with sharing information and responding to questions. We are investigating using the IHM website and possibly other tools like Facebook to communicate updates on all the areas under the EAB's responsibility, including the religious education programs and the school.

Secondly, the EAB acknowledges the fact that it has been a challenging period for IHM School and parish; and that was a main factor in why Fr. Rottman formed the EAB a little over a year ago. It must be said that all parishes and schools face their own unique issues over the course of time. Members of the EAB speak to parishioners of other parishes in the Diocese and it is clear that none are perfect and all are constantly striving to make improvements. While there have been several factors that have impacted the IHM school enrollment in the last five years, two things in particular have been more significant: the considerable loss of jobs due to the airport downsizing coupled with the fact that several new public schools have opened in new neighborhoods, including the Hebron area, which compete for students. These are not offered as excuses, but reflect the reality of our changing environment.

Thirdly, although the EAB did not have specific benchmark and comparative measures at their fingertips to share at the THM, we have spent time discussing data throughout the past year. We compare favorably in many regards, including student-to-teacher ratios, and prior to the recent teacher aid staff reductions we had the highest teacher aid ratios in the Diocese. We will also continue to look at new indicators.

Finally, we are committed to facilitating improvement where and however possible. While all the religious education programs are very important, we have admittedly focused most of our

time on developing a plan to achieve our goals for the school. We will continue to seek your feedback and help moving forward.

- **Concern re: the loss of so many teachers over the past two years - mainly Junior High. Believes the math program has suffered due to the loss of these teachers.**

The EAB could not specifically address the loss of teachers at the THM, but did note the concerns and shared them with school administrators. Since the THM, the EAB learned that, at the end of the 2013-2014 school year, three teachers retired, two teachers left for the public school system, and one changed careers. The vacancies gave IHM the opportunity to carefully choose teachers who aligned themselves to the mission and vision of our school. As with change, there is a period of transition. Our three first-year teachers successfully completed their Kentucky Internship Program. With their first year behind them, they are moving forward with perfecting the craft of teaching so that they remain focused on student learning.

- **Nice to hear that the standardized test scores are going up for IHM students but concerned that IHM is only "teaching to or focusing on the test."**

The EAB noted the concerns regarding testing and shared the comments with IHM School Administration. We have received the following response:

The ITBS (Iowa Test of Basic Skills) that all diocesan schools take in the spring of each year provides a snapshot of how our students are doing as compared to the diocese and to the nation. As a Catholic school in the Diocese of Covington, we follow the framework of standards that all Catholic schools are required to follow. Quality instruction of these Framework Standards will naturally lead to a positive increase in testing scores. Although some test taking strategies may be taught, a positive increase is not possible based on strategies alone. Scores increase only when students have a deep understanding of knowledge and critical thinking skills. We are pleased that our students are learning at high levels and performing well on the IOWA test.

Once we receive the scores, there are two ways to utilize the data gathered from a standardized test like ITBS. The first is to look at the data through a summative lens, looking at the results as an end product and how our students scored in comparison to others. The other way to look at data is through a formative lens, finding areas of strength and need, and using the data to guide instruction. Both are useful. AT IHM, we use the data more formatively to help us adjust our instruction according to the needs of our students. The data helps us identify gaps of learning in subject areas and specific concepts. Once a gap is identified, we can focus our instruction in that area and improve student mastery of that skill. We do not teach to the test, rather use the data to fine tune instruction and meet the needs of our students.

- **Concern that a small group of people runs the school "and do not really include all others.**

The EAB noted the concerns regarding this issue and has passed it along the school administrators. Since the THM, Mr. Jacks has taken all the feedback he has received seriously. He has met with the entire faculty and they openly discussed this and other issues. More importantly, they mutually agreed to develop a process and structure to address any concerns. More information will be made about this process as details are solidified and a complete explanation can be given.

- **Concern and question about the school staff. Qualifications, roles and responsibilities need to be clarified. (Specifically mentioned Asst. Principal)**

The EAB noted the concerns of the THM participants. Mr. Mike Wallenhorst., Chairperson of the Assessment Committee, a sub-Committee of the EAB, spoke on the EAB's behalf. He explained the process and purpose of the Assessment subcommittee and the information gathering that has taken place to date. The Assessment subcommittee has not yet completed their work, but a full report will be given to Fr. Rottman, the EAB, and school administration upon completion as well as to Mike Clines, Superintendent of the Diocese of Covington Schools. Specific recommendations will be made based from the information gathered.

- **When cuts need to be made are all parish staff positions being considered - secretarial, administration, maintenance, janitorial, etc? Positions across the parish need to be considered.**

This was addressed earlier. The EAB was not consulted regarding the 2015-16 school year. The EAB has recommended that it be involved in the process beginning the 2016-17 school year.

- **Concern about "money mismanagement." Tuition continues to increase yet staff being cut. Text book money used for operating expenses - when new text books are needed. The school budget, balance sheet, account receivables need to be made available and/or discussed (possibly a town hall meeting venue).**

The EAB noted the concerns. Again, the EAB did not play a part in the recent budget decisions that were made. That said, the Finance Council takes seriously the responsibility for scrutinizing the budget before approving it. The budget is also reviewed and approved by Parish Council. Everyone involved in the budgeting process is committed to keeping tuition as low as possible. The unfortunately reality is that rising costs cannot be completely avoided. In comparison to the rest of the Diocese, IHM school tuition is in the middle. There are schools that have higher tuition rates as well as schools that have lower tuition rates.

- **Several comments re: students not being prepared for high school - amount of homework and pace of high school. Some comments indicated that they have seen a big difference between older children who have since graduated from IHM and younger siblings currently attending concerning homework requirements and accountability. Suggestion was made that the EAB follow-up with IHM parents who have freshman students at Diocesan high schools to obtain a wider view of this matter.**

The EAB is aware of this concern. We have provided this feedback to Mr. Jacks and we continue to investigate. St. Henry High School, along with other area high schools have been contacted to discuss the preparedness of IHM students. Also, a family survey has been developed to gain feedback from the IHM School families. Several questions on the survey concern homework and being prepared for high school. If you have not done so already, please take the survey. The EAB is eager for your feedback!

- **Appears the academic focus is now on students who struggle and the bar has been lowered for everyone. Average or above average students are no longer being challenged when in reality all the students should be challenged at their individual level. Concern is about high school readiness.**

The EAB is aware of this concern. We continue to investigate further through conversations with the high schools and the parent survey. We have provided feedback to Mr. Jacks and his response is below:

“We strive every day to focus on student learning. We have repurposed faculty and have committed schedules and professional development opportunities to meet the needs of students at both ends of the learning spectrum. Teachers have been given additional training in differentiation so that individual needs are being met and all teachers are teaching in their certification.”

- **Appears to be a lack of discipline in school. No summer reading assignments and lack of homework is not preparing students for high school.**

The EAB is aware of this concern. We continue to investigate further. The EAB has provided feedback to Mr. Jacks and had him to respond to it. The current family survey will provide additional data for decision making.

- **What actually is being done in the Intervention Block needs to be appropriately explained.**

The EAB noted the concerns of the THM participants and forwarded this concern on to Mr. Jacks. His reply is below:

“Knowing how important it is for students who did not get the essential skills taught in the classroom, and to challenge the students who already know the essential skill, we developed an intervention block (IB) time slot, 30 minutes, during the day so that the students could receive the appropriate level of instruction.

The intervention blocks are divided into three groups – strategic, on-track, and extension. Our data from our pre-assessed skills determines what group each student is placed in. Students who do not meet the required benchmark score on the pre-assessment are placed in a strategic group where they receive additional assistance on the essential skill. Students on the other end of the spectrum are those that have the essential skill completely mastered. These students are placed in an extension group where they can work to enrich their

knowledge of the essential skill. The remainder of the students are then placed in an on-track intervention block. These students proved during the assessment that they understand the essential skill, but need some guidance and practice to help master the skill. This group of students often times is the largest group, and they work with the classroom teacher and someone from the Push-in-Team.

Our intervention blocks are usually anywhere between 3-4 weeks in length, and cover one essential skill at a time. The students in the strategic group guide the instruction of the intervention. They are periodically progress monitored, and moved into the on-track category when mastery of the skill is accomplished. Our intervention blocks are a very fluid system to ensure that all students' needs are being met.”

During this IB time the PIT Crew (Push In Team) comes into the classrooms and collaboratively works with the teachers and students. Our PIT Crew consists of a math resource teacher, reading teacher, an OG specialist, resource teacher, and enrichment specialist. In our collaborative school culture, our team of teachers work together to design pre-assessments for our essential skills to answer our four main questions – What do we want our students to know? How will we know if they know it? What do we do if they already know it? What do we do if they do not know it?

These four questions drive the instruction not only in our classrooms, but also in our intervention blocks. This collaborative team works with the classroom teachers each day for the sake of each student's learning. For the strategic group our Push-in-Team and the classroom teacher provide these students receive the one-on-one researched best practice they need to master the essential skill. For our extension group, our PIT Crew Extension Specialist, helps these students use their prior knowledge of the skill and grow deeper into their understanding and application of the skill being assessed. The PIT Crew has been an essential part of the success that we've had here at IHM. They are motivated to learn the best practices, take leadership in assisting the classroom teachers to help create assessments to measure essential skills, and collaborate with them to implement IB's.”

- **How effectively are we clarifying the Mission of the school? What sort of education will it provide? An exclusive/advanced education, or a Catholic education that is here to serve all children? Do IHM parents understand what their tuition pays for? Do parents have unrealistic expectations?**

This is a big picture and multi-faceted question that Fr. Rottman, Mr. Jacks, and the EAB mutually agree needs to be discussed and pursued further. Since the THM, we decided to develop a process that engages the parish in answering those questions. As soon as we develop the process, we will communicate the specifics. More to come.

In the meantime, all parents with children at the IHM School will receive a *PARENT SCHOOL SURVEY* to complete. It will provide important feedback on a number of topics. It will help us frame the conversation about the school mission. It is extremely important that we have a high participation rate. This is another opportunity for your voice to be heard.

School (maintenance):

- **Mold issue in school classrooms, library, and cafeteria. Is mold gone, has the mold issues been resolved? Ceiling cut out inside cafeteria door is still covered with plastic and not yet fixed. Was told carpet was going to be replaced due to concern for mold and do not believe it ever was replaced. One parent stated their child has asthma/allergies and has a concern about potential mold issues. Some parents believe school administration or head of maintenance need to inform school families as to the status of the mold issue (specifics) other than "it has been taken care of."**

The EAB noted the concerns of the THM participants and investigated further. These are our findings:

An inspection for mold was conducted when these incidents occurred and the building was considered clear for mold. IHM has had the classroom air quality tested twice and the classroom has been cleared. With the extensive concerns aired at the THM a new visual inspection will be conducted in May of 2015. The hole in the cafeteria ceiling was from a copper water line that had a small leak. The ceiling was cut open to fix the leak. All the mold and potential for mold was cut out. The ceiling was left unrepaired to make sure there were no other leaks and that the mold did not return. The ceiling is scheduled to be repaired this summer.

Confirmation Program:

- **Seven comments that the IHM confirmation program should be conducted in the 8th grade. Many of the Sophomores are working or involved in other high school activities and trying to get them back to IHM and interested in confirmation is a challenge.**

The EAB is very interested having a discussion regarding the Confirmation Program. We have committed to begin those conversations next. Some of the questions on the Parent School Survey are relevant to this issue. Please complete the Parent School Survey and give us your feedback so some progress on school relate issues.

Adult Catechesis:

- **Interested in adult catechesis. If adults do not know their faith they cannot pass it on. Writers own children are grown and he wished he had known as much about the faith as he knows now when raising his own children. To many years of "Catholic Lite Catechesis" has led to many ignorant Catholics. Came to meeting for Religious Education. "Build The Community!"**

The EAB is thrilled that an interest exists to evaluate and discuss our adult catechesis programs. The parish survey we did last year indicated much interest in Adult Faith Formation sessions. This past year, we offered several programs, both in the morning and evening. We also opened our RCIA program to the entire parish. We will again be offering programs as we go forward. The pastoral staff is currently reviewing the programs we have recently purchased, and is looking at new programs that may be worthwhile for a large percentage of the parish. We are also looking into the possibility of re-starting Christ

Renews His Parish as a faith formation and community building effort. We will probably conduct a new survey combining this and several of the other religious education programs later in the summer.

Miscellaneous:

- **Lines of communication between Parish and families and IHM School and school parents need to be more open and transparent. It appears many things are kept secret or hidden. If everything was addressed more openly many parents and parishioners would feel better and/or accept the difficult situations and issues.**

The EAB appreciates the feedback and is committed to improving communication and obtaining a better understanding what the issues are. We welcome ideas on how to open the lines of communication. Naturally, in order to effectively respond, we need to have specific examples where someone believes the transparency is lacking. Parishioners can directly approach Father Rottman, a member of the EAB, or anonymously email your comment, question or concern to the EAB on the website.

- **Word of mouth is the most effective form of advertising. If parents/parishioners/faculty are spreading negative vibes about parish and school matters perception becomes reality and will drive away perspective parishioners and school families. We are our own worst enemy!**

AMEN to that! Hopefully soon everyone in the parish will know that a process, structure, and plan is being developed not only to communicate our successes but also to address any challenges before us. We ask for support, which includes talking about the positive, recent developments.

One attendee advised that when she came to visit the school to discuss a child beginning pre-K it was an extremely unwelcoming, hurried experience. Was even told prior to leaving, that she should probably consider other options as her child probably would not get into IHM.

The EAB noted the concern aired at THM and has since shared this information with the appropriate people. We would be interested in learning the name of the individual so that we can personally reach out to them. Obviously, all are welcome at IHM and our school visits, and all interactions with our school, need to be positive.

Closing prayer by Krista Kahmann

Note: Many of the attendees expressed appreciation to EAB members for holding the meeting and giving them the opportunity to be heard and to ask questions. Several participants stated they enjoyed the face to face format of the THM.

Submitted by Mike Wallenhorst
4-22-2015