St. Mary’s School for the Deaf Board of Trustees Announcement

In September 2023, as President of the Board of Trustees for St. Mary’s School for the Deaf, I established a Search Committee to conduct a national search to find and hire the next Superintendent for St. Mary’s School. Superintendent Timothy Kelly announced his retirement after leading St. Mary’s for the last 17 years. The Search Committee was charged with the task of finding that next person to lead St. Mary’s School for the Deaf into that ever-changing world of deaf education and culture.

Co-chaired by Board members Dr. Catherine Griswold and Mr. Jacob Leffler, also a St. Mary’s alumnus, the Search Committee was comprised of St. Mary’s employees, alumni, parents, and members of the Community. The Search Committee researched and developed a Prospectus detailing the qualifications, experiences, and expectations for the next Superintendent. The Prospectus and Search were announced and publicized locally, state-wide, and nationally. Simply, it was widely known that St. Mary’s School was looking for the right candidate who was the right fit for the unique and special environment that is St. Mary’s School, the right candidate to continue the legacy established by Superintendent Kelly, and the right candidate to lead St. Mary’s School into the future.

The Search Committee engaged in a comprehensive nationwide search. The Committee screened prospective candidates, interviewed prospective candidates who met the qualifications, and then presented final candidates to St. Mary’s staff and students during a day on campus, and to the St. Mary’s Community during public forums.

During this process, the St. Mary’s Community and deaf organizations expressed their opinions on the search.

The St. Mary’s Board of Trustees conducted its own interview.

As noted in the last update to the Community in April, the Board is quite diverse, comprised of hearing, hard of hearing, and deaf individuals, St. Mary’s alumni, parents of present students and graduates, a Sister of St. Joseph, and members who work in education, medicine, the legal field, in banking, finance and business, in the government, and in employment and human resources. As proven by their years of service to St. Mary’s School, the Board members have demonstrated their commitment to deaf education and deaf culture, and most importantly to the St. Mary’s School and Community.

Finally, and as a culmination of this national search, at a special meeting on May 7, 2024, the Board of Trustees unanimously voted to name Ms. Aimee Bell as the next Superintendent of St. Mary’s School for the Deaf.

Ms. Bell has accepted the Board’s offer and will serve as the next Superintendent, starting on July 1, 2024.

The Board members are proud to welcome Ms. Bell, though she obviously is not a stranger to St. Mary’s School. She has the Board’s full support and confidence. As she discussed during the search process, Ms. Bell has a vision for an inclusive campus that prioritizes equitable access and bilingual communication in an ASL/English environment. She will ensure that St. Mary’s educates each student.

As President of the Board of Trustees, I personally want to thank the Search Committee for its meticulous work in conducting an equitable and transparent search. Although for several years I have observed her work as an Associate Principal and the respect she has earned from her colleagues, I was tremendously impressed with the breadth of Ms. Bell’s knowledge and experience, her plans and vision, and her genuine love for the work she does in the deaf community. Change can be scary and uncertain. However, I believe, and I think I speak for the entire Board, when I
say that we hired the “right person” to serve as the Superintendent for our unique and special School and Community. I am confident in Ms. Bell’s leadership, and we are excited to embark on this journey. St. Mary’s has an enduring and bright future.

A native of Western New York, Ms. Bell graduated from Canisius College, majoring in Adolescence Education and Mathematics. She earned her Masters in Education of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing with a concentration in Educational policy from Columbia University. Ms. Bell has completed her Masters of Science in Educational Leadership from Canisius College.

In July 2008, St. Mary’s hired Ms. Bell to teach 5th grade. After a year in 5th grade, she was asked to teach Mathematics for grades 6 – 12+, where she spent the next 6 years. From July 2015 up to the present, Ms. Bell has served as the Associate Principal for the Secondary Department at St. Mary’s School. During the pandemic, Ms. Bell served as interim Superintendent.

Ms. Bell is certified as an Interpreter in American Sign Language and has worked as an interpreter and in video relay services. In her spare time, she was an adjunct instructor for the Deaf Education Graduate Program at Canisius College. She was also an adjunct instructor for the American Sign Language Program at Erie Community College, Genesee Community College, Niagara University, and Villa Maria College.

Clearly, as the St. Mary’s Community and deaf groups desired for the next Superintendent, Ms. Bell unquestionably is dedicated to deaf education and deaf culture, and vastly experienced. As demonstrated since 2008, Ms. Bell is committed to St. Mary’s School for the Deaf and the Community.

Again, the Board wants to sincerely thank the Search Committee for its dedication and tireless work, and the level of detail it brought to this search process. The success of this search and the naming of this outstanding candidate are in large part a direct result of your work.

During the search so many of you in the St. Mary’s School Community, the community at large, and as members of deaf organizations, across western New York, the State of New York, and the Country offered your thoughts, opinions, and comments. Now, as we move into the future, we ask that you continue to support deaf education and culture. Please, attend the Gala scheduled for October 24, 2024, donate a basket or prize for the auctions, or just simply make monetary contributions to the School. This financial support plays a vital role in ensuring that our students have the resources to excel in academics, athletics, and extra-curricular activities.

Thank you for your patience and support during the many months of this search and thank you for your ongoing dedication to St. Mary’s School for the Deaf and its mission to always be Child First.

Brian D. Knauth
President
Board of Trustees, St. Mary’s School for the Deaf