

May 2023

Dear St. John Fisher Families,

As we begin the last month of school and look forward to celebrating the many achievements of all our Falcons, especially our incredibly talented, hard-working, and well-rounded soon-to-be graduates, we also look ahead to next year. That involves many aspects of planning, including setting a budget. As you all know from your own lives, budgeting is not a particularly fun or easy process. At St. John Fisher, we spend countless hours collecting and analyzing data and input from many sources, benchmarking ourselves against our peers and our strategic plan, and making sure our efforts to provide a best-in-class educational offering match our community's needs and our means as best as possible.

We do this work with our **guiding principles for financial decision-making** in mind:

- Maintain as affordable tuition as possible to be able to serve the maximum number of families.
- Maintain small class sizes to best enable individual attention and differentiated learning.
- Ensure necessary resources are available for our faculty and student body to thrive.
- Provide transparency in financial communications no matter how difficult.

We publish these principles every year to provide insight into how we balance the various competing interests involved in making budget recommendations and to hopefully reinforce the spirit of openness and inclusivity with which we share this "State of the School" update.

### **OUR FINANCIAL BACKDROP: EVEN WITH RECENT SUCCESSES, WE REMAIN IN A STRUCTURAL DEFICIT.**

For several years now, we have operated the school with a structural deficit. This means **the cost of providing the high-quality, faith-based education our community deserves and needs is higher than the tuition and fees the school charges our families.** We have knowingly and purposely operated this way by using up some of our school savings, aggressively securing available government funds and grants, and starting the Fisher Falcon Education Foundation to provide a direct avenue for the broader parish community to help subsidize school operations. These efforts have largely been successful, literally bringing in hundreds of thousands of dollars from revenue sources that did not exist or were not fully utilized five years ago. They have allowed us to limit the full financial impact our deficit would have otherwise had on school families. Nonetheless, we have reached a point where that status quo is no longer feasible. **Without any changes to revenue or spending, the funding gap will rise to over \$650,000 next year, or more than \$1,200 per student.**

There are four main reasons for this gap, the first being the most impactful but all contributing:

1. **Enrollment is down:** Just 7 years ago, St. John Fisher School served over 700 students. Next year, our projected enrollment is just over 500.
2. **Excess government funding is gone:** Post-COVID funding to help maintain payrolls and address potential learning loss from remote and/or limited touch education appears unlikely to continue.
3. **Education is evolving:** Accelerating technological and curricular changes designed to serve the modern student require constant spending on materials, people, and professional development.
4. **Inflation impacts everything:** Nearly all our costs – utilities, benefits, maintenance, etc. – have risen more than originally planned for this year, and that is expected to continue next year.

**2023-24 CHANGES IN BRIEF: ALL STAKEHOLDERS ARE ASKED TO HELP BRIDGE OUR FUNDING GAP.**

We are making four “headline” changes to our budget and operations for next year. These changes will require all of us stakeholders to embrace a theme of “shared sacrifice.” While none will be easy, we strongly believe these sacrifices are worthy investments in our school and, most importantly, for our children. We also believe the mix they represent is the best way to ensure the entire \$650,000+ funding gap burden noted above is not solely borne by our school families.

- We summarize our four main changes here and provide additional detail on each below:**
1. Tuition will increase by approximately \$600/student for the average family.
  2. Staffing levels will decrease by an equivalent of approximately four full-time paid positions.
  3. The Manna program is being simplified in an effort to make it more profitable for the school.
  4. A year-long 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary raffle will seek to raise at least \$200,000 for the school.

**TUITION WILL INCREASE; FEES WILL REMAIN THE SAME.**

Our 2023-24 Tuition & Fees Schedule is below:

Full-time Tuition	2022-23	2023-24	% Discount	Per Family	\$ Change	
					Per Family	Per Student
1st Student	\$ 6,015	\$ 6,500	--	\$ 6,500	\$ 485	\$ 485
2nd Student	4,270	5,000	23%	11,500	1,215	608
3rd Student	3,515	4,000	38%	15,500	1,700	567
4th Student	2,300	2,500	62%	18,000	1,900	475
5th+ Student	-	-	100%	18,000	1,900	380

  

Part-time Pre-School	2022-23	2023-24	% Discount	Per Family	\$ Change	
					Per Family	Per Student
3 Day Full-day	\$ 3,900	\$ 5,000	23%	--	--	\$ 1,100
5 Day Half-day	3,325	4,000	38%	--	--	675
3 Day Half-day	2,200	3,000	54%	--	--	800

  

"Book Day" Fees	2022-23	2023-24	Fee Base	\$ Change	
				Per Family	Per Student
Registration / Admin	\$ 50	\$ 50	Per Family	\$ -	\$ -
Books, Curriculum, and Supplies	250	250	Per Student	-	-
Technology	200	200	Per Student	-	-
Lunchroom Supervision	50	50	Per Student	-	-
Archdiocesan Assessment	50	50	Per Student	-	-
FSA Membership	50	50	Per Family	-	-
Manna Fundraising Requirement	300	300	Per Family	-	-

For our average two-child family, the total cost of education will rise from \$11,785 to \$13,000, an increase of 10%. Based on our research, we believe that remains in the middle of our neighboring Catholic school peers, approximately \$1,000 per family below the most expensive options. Importantly, we believe our offering is as good or better than any alternative. In addition to our long tradition of academic excellence, we are particularly strong in the areas of faculty talent and experience, resource

program support, and “specials” provision. We have purposely invested in these offerings because we deem them core elements of a modern educational experience. They benefit all students and help us retain our best teachers.

The fees generally match our expenses in each category. This change was made two years ago to enhance specificity and transparency around our non-personnel costs. Importantly, in the technology area, the \$200 fee includes provision of 1:1 iPads or Chromebooks to every student, insurance to cover any losses of or damages to those devices, and certain online-based assessment tool licenses like iReady. These are costs often borne directly by families outside the published tuition and fee schedule of peers.

Lastly, as it relates to pre-school pricing, we will continue to give credit for full-time pre-school students in the full-time tuition table. We are, however, increasing the costs of our part-time offerings as the increased interest in full-time pre-school has made staffing the part-time programs relatively more difficult and inefficient. To continue to be able to afford high-quality, full-time teachers and aides for generally smaller pre-school classrooms, part-time tuition pricing needs to increase.

**Altogether, these tuition-related changes are estimated to bridge approximately \$250,000 of the \$650,000+ funding gap next year.**

#### **STAFFING LEVELS WILL DECREASE TO MATCH ENROLLMENT.**

We are planning for one fewer homeroom class next year and are making changes to how we staff our resource support program that will allow paid staffing levels to be reduced by a further two faculty members.

In the spirit of shared sacrifice noted above, we have reviewed our classroom size and staffing levels and have sought to identify opportunities to ensure we are efficiently matching both the number and cost of teaching professionals with appropriate revenue sources.

Inside the classroom, this has meant slightly adjusting our target student:homeroom ratios as follows:

- 16-20:1 per classroom through kindergarten, each staffed by a lead teacher and dedicated aide
- 18-22:1 per classroom for grades 1-3, each staffed by a lead teacher with roaming aide support
- 20-24:1 per classroom for grades 4-8, each staffed by a lead, subject-specific teacher

We have two lead teacher retirements expected, with Mrs. Nancy Fanjoy and Ms. Sue Power getting ready to leave us after many years of wonderful service to our school. Congratulations and best wishes for some peaceful and enjoyable time away from our youngest learners are in order for both – they will be missed! We are excited about filling those openings with talented faculty already on staff. Mrs. Erin Rech will leave her duties on the resource support team and once again be leading a kindergarten classroom, and Mrs. Moira Garza will be leading her own pre-school classroom on a full-time basis next year.

In 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Mrs. Courtney Namoff will be pursuing other opportunities after her maternity leave comes to an end. Mrs. Namoff has been with SJF for several years. We thank her for her service, congratulate her on the recent birth of her son, Justin, and wish her the best in her future endeavors. Her position will not need to be replaced.

Another faculty change will be in our resource support program. For nearly ten years, Mrs. Win Biernacki has dedicated her career to ensuring learners of all abilities feel welcome, supported, and challenged to grow and achieve success at SJF. She has helped create and evolve what we believe is truly a best-in-class resource support system in a Catholic school setting anywhere. Her work has integrated individualized lessons and attention into the full classroom experience and allowed our lead classroom teachers to further refine their approaches for differentiated instruction to students up and down the learning spectrum. She has also helped Ms. Mary Schiavone and Mrs. Karen Brogan, who will be expanding her role to a full-time position next year, ensure we get the testing and resulting financial and human resources offered by the state in place for all students who need it. Because of this increased application for funds, we expect to be able to back-fill Mrs. Biernacki's and Mrs. Rech's instruction support time with CPS-subsidized professionals outside our family-funded budget.

Finally, we are also reducing the size of our administrative staff. In conjunction with the signaled retirement of certain members of our dedicated Manna team, we have decided to transition management of the Manna program from paid positions to parent volunteers with school office support. Terri Berger, Raphael Brandt, and Lynn Faculak have dutifully staffed cash-and-carry sales six days per week and grown our Manna program to one of the largest in the Archdiocese over their nearly 30 years serving St. John Fisher. The program's earnings have helped offset rising tuition over the years and partly seeded our Fisher Falcon Education Foundation's operating endowment. We thank these wonderful parishioners for their service and hope to see them stay involved in the life of our parish and school in the years to come. More information on how this will impact Manna going forward is provided below.

**Altogether, these staff-related changes are estimated to bridge approximately \$200,000 of the \$650,000+ funding gap next year.**

#### **SIMPLIFIED MANNA PROGRAM WILL AIM TO BETTER UTILIZE RAISERIGHT APP.**

We appreciate the families who have increased their Manna/RaiseRight usage in the past two years since the old fundraising fee was replaced with a Manna earnings requirement as well as the many parishioners who have been consistent participants for decades. While utilization is up, profitability remains elusive. Essentially, without the required make-up fees charged to families that do not earn the full \$300 school earnings credit, the program has been a break-even proposition after accounting for related administrative and management expenses in recent years.

We believe both the school and our families can and should benefit much more from Manna. Our goal is for the program to annually generate \$100,000 for the school and \$150,000 in tuition credits for our families. To make this a reality, several changes are in the works. Their emphasis will be on driving utilization of the RaiseRight app by all participants going forward. This will allow us to simplify ordering and bookkeeping, lower inventory risk for the school, and ultimately reduce the time demands on our Manna volunteers. For now, while immediate use of the RaiseRight app is encouraged, regular cash & carry sales will also continue through the end of the school year. More information on further changes will be announced when ready to be rolled out.

We remain committed to maintaining Manna benefits for our families. The program is an important, easy way for regular users to reduce tuition and fees. The decision to transition management to a more heavily volunteer-based model was not made lightly. It was necessary, however, as we assessed where we could find staffing efficiencies that would least impact the educational experience of our students.

**We are hopeful these Manna changes will make the \$100,000 Manna fundraising target already in the budget easier to achieve without relying as much on the catch-up fees next year.**

#### **75<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OFFERS OPPORTUNITY TO INVOLVE ENTIRE SJF COMMUNITY IN FUNDRAISING.**

We close this letter with some exciting news to share and some big plans to celebrate **St. John Fisher's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary this coming year**. We have come a long way since mass was first celebrated in 1948 and our school first opened its doors in the fall of 1950. Enrollment has gone up (to a max of over 1,500 in the 1960s somehow fitting in the same classrooms we have today!) and down. The tools used by faculty and students have certainly changed too. Whether faced with challenges or riches, though, what has stayed constant is our mission and our success achieving it.

We are privileged to continue to serve a community that seeks out our high-quality, faith-based education and supports our school with an enrollment of over 500 students. We remain among the largest Catholic elementary schools in the Archdiocese. Our population and our resources are at levels most Catholic schools, even those immediately neighboring us, dream of these days, and yet, we cannot and will not stop seeking additional areas of improvement to ensure that success continues.

We think an untapped avenue to enable further improvement and investment is building stronger connections with our alumni. We are already working hand-in-hand with the Fisher Falcon Education Foundation to share the good news (and the needs) of SJF with this group. One way we are hoping to use our upcoming 75<sup>th</sup> anniversaries to raise major funds for the school and parish is via a year-long raffle that reaches alumni and all stakeholders, so everyone connected to SJF past and present has the opportunity to celebrate and support our school, the cornerstone of our community.

**The raffle is estimated to bridge approximately \$200,000 of the \$650,000+ funding gap while also providing up to approximately \$100,000 to the parish.**

#### **THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!**

We know successfully achieving the goals in this letter will not be possible without sacrifices on your part. We also know they can't be achieved solely by you, nor should they be. Hope and faith guide us that they won't need to be. That is because St. John Fisher is not just a school. We are a community.

We know it takes countless hours of volunteerism, outreach, and service to keep our community vibrant, welcoming, and growing. It also takes continually increased financial investment to balance our budget. We thank you for these sacrifices. We share in them. This common purpose gives us confidence that together, we will remain willing and able to invest and attract the resources, talents, and capital required for success. Our success will ensure our children will continue to be provided a best-in-class education that challenges them to develop into well-rounded, curious, compassionate, and successful students and leaders that will themselves contribute to this great St. John Fisher community we call home.

**Thank you for that partnership and your continued support of us and your children.** We work tirelessly every day to return that favor, and as always, we welcome your input, feedback, ideas, and questions.

Mrs. Maura Nash, Mrs. Claire Larmon, Fr. Ken Budzikowski, and your School Advisory Board