

May 2024

Dear St. John Fisher Families,

As we near the end of another school year, we celebrate the many milestones achieved by all our Falcons, especially our incredibly talented, hard-working, and well-rounded soon-to-be graduates. We have much to be thankful for and much to be proud of. Whether it's the big moments like First Holy Communion and Graduation or the smaller ones like one of our Falcons mastering a difficult concept or making an act of kindness on the playground at recess, we hope you and your children have shared some stories about what brought smiles to their faces this year. We have the privilege of seeing those smiles throughout our hallways every day. They bring us joy and are the main reasons each of us is so dedicated to the cause of providing our community a high-quality, faith-based education. We know we are not perfect, however, and there are always opportunities to improve, plan, and work harder for the benefit of our students and families. It is with this dual spirit of gratitude for your partnership with us and self-reflection on what we can do better that we share this annual "State of the School" update.

### **REFLECTIONS ON 2023-24: SUCCESSFUL PROGRESS AGAINST OUR STRATEGIC PLAN.**

Five years ago, we set about collecting feedback from our community and published a long-term [strategic plan](#) to set transparent goals for St. John Fisher. The plan covered a wide range of initiatives, but one common theme was **a desire to invest our community's time, money, and resources where they could make the most immediate impact on our children**. While new building projects generate exciting headlines, they are often incredibly expensive, slow-developing initiatives. Instead, we focused our fundraising efforts and spending on growing and supporting our incredible faculty and staff and investing in new reading, writing, phonics, foreign language, and math curriculum and technology. We have prioritized creating a safe, supportive, fun, and loving environment where our children can be challenged by a curriculum that will prepare them for their future. Below are a few highlights on how those investments are making a difference in the lives of our Falcons:

- **Reading and Writing:** our consistent utilization of a common HMH reading and writing curriculum over the last four years coupled with the introduction of Foundations is producing results. 75% of SJF students are now testing at or above grade level in reading, and our younger Falcons are regularly testing out of their sight words and phonemic awareness modules.
- **Differentiated Instruction:** our weekly iReady lessons – as painful as they can be sometimes! – allow our teachers to get regular, real-time data on student strengths and weaknesses and help create targeted lessons for small groups that provide both enrichment and intervention.
- **Resource Program:** we firmly believe students of *all* abilities are entitled to a Catholic education and should specifically feel welcome at St. John Fisher. Our standout resource department is a testament to that belief. Our resource team now includes two Wilson reading practitioners, one of whom is also a learning behavior specialist, an additional in-house learning behavior specialist as well as two IDEA teachers and a speech pathologist who support our students with CPS IEPs.
- **After-school Enrichment:** in addition to our Homework Club where students are paired with peer mentors, we have expanded our E.T.C. offerings to provide our Falcons exposure to topics like yoga, arts & crafts, STEM labs, and executive functioning skills that we don't always have time for in the traditional school day. We also brought back our theatre program this year with the successful production of "High School Musical, Jr."
- **SEL Traits of the Month:** we instituted a program that highlights and teaches our students about a specific "trait of the month," helping them strengthen particular social skills with different

lessons and activities at the classroom level and as an entire school. The program has allowed us to build upon the school's behavior system and school mantra: Be Respectful, Be Responsible, Be Safe. We are proud of the way our Falcons embraced the effort and all committed and contributed to our positive school culture!

### **LOOKING AHEAD TO 2024-25: CONTINUED INVESTMENTS IN PEOPLE, CURRICULUM, AND CULTURE.**

Extending our school day a few years ago created additional time in our schedule for daily common prep periods for our grade level and departmentalized teachers. Teachers also meet weekly in "Professional Learning Communities" with specific agendas and lead faculty coaches to work toward accomplishing our all-school goals. They spend time reflecting on how to improve our assessments and pacing, which initiatives are or aren't working, and what best practices to implement next. Our plan for 2024-25 is to continue building on our recent successes. Specifically, we preview the following:

- **Math Refresh:** after an extensive review of options by our math specialists, we have decided to invest in the new HMH Math program, "Into Math," for use beginning next year. Into Math provides powerful assessments, best-in-class core instruction, personalized supplemental practice and intervention, and meaningful professional learning – all uniquely connected to empower teaching and learning. We have already started onboarding this curriculum and are excited about how it will incorporate a variety of new online and differentiation resources for our teachers to ensure we are meeting every learner at his or her individual level.
- **Full-school Foreign Language:** Spanish instruction will extend all the way down to Pre-K.
- **W.Y.N. Evolution:** our upper grade students currently have a 25-minute W.Y.N. ("What You Need") period at the end of the day to ask follow-up questions, complete homework or tests missed due to absences, meet with their club moderators, etc. In junior high next year, we have decided to add a recess period in the middle of the day and increase our learning by 5 minutes in the morning and 10 minutes in the afternoon. We think more core instruction time with W.Y.N. minutes built in throughout the day vs. at the end will better serve our students and teachers.
- **Counselor Add:** we have been fortunate to have a counselor on staff for four of the last five years, but with the demand for mental health workers and compensation required to retain them rising, we were not able to back-fill the school counselor this year. We believe it is an important resource to have on campus and are seeking to add at least a part-time counselor to the staff again.

### **BUDGETING FOR OUR FUTURE: OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES ALWAYS UNDERPIN OUR DECISIONS.**

Hopefully you can see we continue to set our sights high and plan with a focus on our shared future. This planning necessarily involves making smart investments in our human and physical resources. It also involves detailed benchmarking to ensure 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 update.

**OUR FINANCIAL BACKDROP: INTENTIONAL, COORDINATED PLANNING AND FUNDRAISING HAVE HELPED US NAVIGATE A CHALLENGING COVID PERIOD AND TARGET ENROLLMENT TRANSITION.**

It is these principles that have guided our financial plans over the last 3-5 years during which we’ve had to weather the ups and downs of COVID while simultaneously planning for a transition of our school from an enrollment of over 700 students 8 years ago to ~500 students today. As we covered at length in last year’s State of the School, successfully navigating these financial challenges has required all stakeholders to accept and embrace shared sacrifices. We balanced our budgets through a mix of spending down savings, increasing tuition & fees, aggressively seeking government funding where available, deferring non-emergency maintenance, and *materially* increasing our community fundraising efforts. These have not been easy decisions for us in school leadership, and we know their impact on many of our families have not been easy to accommodate either.

That said, we are happy to report that our efforts are bearing fruit. We are cautiously optimistic that we have now reached a roughly steady enrollment state, and we have just completed what we believe is the most successful fundraising year in St. John Fisher’s history. **Thanks to your generosity, the work of countless volunteers, the growth of the Fisher Falcon Education Foundation, and great participation in some fun events and campaigns, we raised over \$300,000 for St. John Fisher School this year.** If we can keep these efforts up, we are hopeful we can keep tuition and fee increases roughly in line with general inflation. This is a major accomplishment, something we could not have done without your partnership and trust over these last 3-5 years.

**TUITION AND FEES UPDATE: 4% TOTAL COST INCREASE FOR “AVERAGE” TWO-CHILD FAMILY.**

Our 2024-25 Tuition & Fees Schedule is below:

K-8 Tuition	2023-24	2024-25	% Discount	Per Family	\$ Change	
					Per Family	Per Student
1st Student	\$ 6,500	\$ 6,750	--	\$ 6,750	\$ 250	\$ 250
2nd Student	5,000	5,250	22%	12,000	500	250
3rd Student	4,000	4,500	33%	16,500	1,000	333
4th Student	2,500	3,000	56%	19,500	1,500	375
5th+ Student	-	-	100%	19,500	1,500	300
<b>\$ Change</b>						
Pre-School Tuition	2023-24	2024-25	% Discount	Per Family	Per Family	Per Student
5 Day Full-day	\$ 6,500	\$ 6,750	0%	--	--	\$ 250
3 Day Full-day	5,000	5,000	26%	--	--	-
5 Day Half-day	4,000	4,000	41%	--	--	-
3 Day Half-day	3,000	3,000	56%	--	--	-
<b>\$ Change</b>						
"Book Day" Fees	2023-24	2024-25	Fee Base		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	75	Per Family		25	-
Manna Fundraising Requirement	300	300	Per Family		-	-

On a per student basis, tuition rates will increase between \$250 and \$375 depending on family size. **For our average two-child, K-8 family, the total cost of education will rise from \$13,000 to \$13,525, an increase of 4%.** That keeps us in the middle of our neighboring Catholic school peers, ~\$1,000 per family below the most expensive competing options on a dollar basis, and at the lower end of expected percentage increases this year. We believe this is as good or better value than any alternative. We have a long tradition of academic excellence, and we benchmark as particularly strong in the areas of faculty talent and experience, resource program support, “specials” provision, and SEL curriculum integration. 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.

Our fees are set to generally match expenses in each essential non-personnel cost area. We want families to have specificity and transparency around the true costs of an education, so there are no surprises about the sacrifices required to invest in your children’s St. John Fisher education. Despite these costs rising over the last 2-3 years, fees have been able to be kept flat due to the leadership team securing increased title funds and EANS grants from the government to cover certain curriculum and facility costs. The only “fee” change will be a \$25 per family increase in FSA membership dues. FSA dues provide faculty members with classroom supply stipends and a small gift at the time of their birthdays. After evaluating what FSA was able to provide this year, it was deemed necessary to increase the dues to maintain the impact FSA gifts make in our wonderful teachers’ lives going forward.

Lastly, as it relates to pre-school pricing, after forgoing this change for as long as possible, we have decided it is in the best interests of our students to follow the Archdiocese’s recommendation and charge pre-school tuition on a standalone basis outside of the K-8 family discount schedule. As each pre-school classroom is staffed by at least two faculty members, charging tuition on this basis will better match the revenue and costs of our early education program and allow for continued investment in all the resources needed to maintain our desired class sizes and quality of instruction. **This change will be implemented over time and affect new families only next year.** Current Falcon families with K-8 students and full-time pre-schoolers will continue to have their past multi-student discounts honored.

**THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU! WE COULD NOT DO THIS WITHOUT YOU.**

We know it takes a village to successfully achieve the progress noted in this letter. In addition to the selfless effort given by our faculty and staff, success requires countless hours of volunteerism, outreach, and service on your parts to keep our community vibrant, welcoming, and growing. It also takes continually increased financial commitment. We thank you for these sacrifices. We share in them. They are priceless investments in our children, and they give us hope and confidence for our future.

They ensure our children are provided a best-in-class education that challenges them to develop into well-rounded, curious, compassionate, and successful students and leaders. Please take the time to celebrate this, recognize our children’s individual and collective achievements, and keep spreading the word about all the great things happening at St. John Fisher. It will only push our children to fly higher.

Finally, **thank you for your continued partnership and support.** We know you are making a choice when you pursue a Catholic education for your children, and we work tirelessly every day to pay back your trust in us. If you ever have input, feedback, ideas, or questions on how we could do that better, they are always welcome.

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