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Grace

Mercy

Virtue

Love

Dear Families,

This past summer (7/31/23), I announced a change to our tuition structure following the significant expansion of EdChoice. This change was the elimination of the multi-child discount, as it no longer served its function and would only deprive our school of revenue being freely offered through the EdChoice Program. We enacted this change in a way that did not result in any of our families--EdChoice recipients or not--paying a higher rate of tuition in 2023-2024 than they would have paid prior to our deletion of the discount.

At the same time, I explained that EdChoice only reimburses up to a school's reported tuition amount. This amount for us in the 2023-2024 school year is \$4,456 for an individual student. What does this mean? It means that EdChoice does not write us a check any larger than \$4,456 for any single student, even though the program is willing to write a check for higher amounts, capping out at \$6,166 per student.

We had the opportunity to raise our tuition rate immediately to this \$6,166 figure, but opted against it. We did not want to impulsively override our new tuition model without proper consideration of the impacts, especially with all the nuances of Participating and Non-Participating Rates, Stewardship, and beyond. Furthermore, it was not clear back in July how many of our families would apply for EdChoice and what the varying award amounts might be.

But what was unknown in July is now known in January. The VAST majority of our students have been approved for substantial EdChoice scholarship awards.

**So.....the three schools in the St. Stephen Family (Queen of Peace, St. Joseph Consolidated, St. Peter in Chains) will set tuition next year at \$6,166 for a single child. This will become our reported tuition amount to EdChoice in 2024-2025.**

*Why can't QP just charge EdChoice students one tuition rate and everyone else a lower one? We can't do this. It's against the law.*

*But I have my own personal reasons for not applying to EdChoice. Now I feel punished for it. First, if you change your mind due to the tuition increase, you can send in application materials for 2024-2025.*

*Second, if you do not want to use the program, but will feel financial pain due to the large increase in tuition, you should apply for funds from the Catholic Education Foundation (CEF). Application information will be sent out on January 28th. Even if you do not qualify for funds after your application is reviewed, you could still be eligible for tuition aid from Queen of Peace Church.*

***This big increase looks kinda shady.***

*It might look this way, but the reality is something different. The Archdiocese has advised each school to set its tuition equal to the "per-pupil cost to educate." For Queen of Peace, this figure is functionally equivalent to \$6,166.*

***With EdChoice raining down dollars, it is obvious that QP School will have more money in its pot. What will this money be used for?***

*First, we are investing in our staff. We will share information soon to demonstrate this concept.*

*Second, we are also creating a new scholarship fund called the EdChoice Financial Assistance (EFAS) Scholarship. Students who applied for EdChoice in 2023-2024, but did not receive a full scholarship and therefore owe an out-of-pocket balance to the school, will be eligible to apply for additional dollars from the EFAS fund. We will share information very soon on the application process.*

***QP is putting a lot of eggs in this EdChoice basket. What if the whole thing falls apart?***

*EdChoice has been around since 2007. It has weathered economic recession and other political storms. The broadening of EdChoice over the last several years, and in particular over the last 6 months, is effectively baking the program into the state budget. While the longevity of any government program is never guaranteed, EdChoice has practically entered too-big-to-fail territory.*

*Furthermore, the Catholic Conference of Ohio (the government lobby for Ohio's Catholic Schools) does not see any "time bombs" tucked into EdChoice legislation that would be detrimental to the long-term health of our state's Catholic Schools. Nor do they see any evidence of conspiratorial maneuvering to bring Catholic schools under the thumb of the state or inject secular ideology into our Catholic school curriculum.*

*The simpler reality is that Ohio's state legislature is dominated by proponents of school choice. They have a strong enough majority that they have threaded school choice into the fabric of Ohio's education system.*

***Is there ANYTHING that QP is doing differently because of EdChoice that the school would not otherwise do?***

*Yes, but mostly No.*

*The YES part: We must administer certain assessments to our students because we are an EdChoice Provider with a large percentage of our students receiving EdChoice dollars. The good news is that almost all of these assessments (MAP, CogAT) are ones we administer*

*anyway. None of the assessments conflict with our Catholic culture or Catholic belief system. Nor do they bog our students down under an oppressive regime of endless testing.*

*The NO part: Queen of Peace retains full discretion over how we operate. We are not required to accept students whose needs we cannot serve. We are not required to accept students from families that oppose our religious mission and refuse to participate in it. We are not required to sell any part of our souls in exchange for EdChoice dollars. In short, taking advantage of the EdChoice program does not require us to do anything that compromises our identity.*

***Does this mean the tuition system QP put in place last year is now a thing of the past?***

*Yes. The tuition system with Participating Rate, Non-Participating Rate, Mass Attendance, and Stewardship. It's all gone.*

*This deserves some explanation.*

*The original purpose of the new tuition system (implemented in October of 2022) was to get on the same page with St. Peter in Chains School and St. Joseph Consolidated School. July of 2022 marked the beginning of our formal family relationship with these schools and parishes (along with St. Aloysius) under the Beacons of Light initiative. Our C-6 (now St. Stephen) schools could not continue operating with different philosophies about Mass attendance and its relationship to school tuition. At the time, QP was not factoring Mass attendance into tuition rates. We rectified this with a new tuition system better aligned with St. Peter and St. Joseph schools.*

*To make it possible for our non-Catholic families to achieve the Participating Rate, we introduced the Stewardship option. However, the Archdiocese does not sanction this sort of payment-in-kind since it is frowned upon by the IRS. So, we cannot continue this practice.*

*Furthermore, the only way to continue with a non-participating rate of any kind is to set it at a figure beyond \$7,000. After discussions with Father Walling and the other principals in our family, we decided not to do this.*

*Another original reason for the two separate rates is the fact that our church has historically subsidized our school. As a ministry of the church, we could not turn and use church dollars to help lower tuition rates for families not attending Mass and not otherwise participating in church or school life.*

*Queen of Peace School will continue to be a ministry of Queen of Peace Church. However, under the new realities of EdChoice, the logic of the tuition plan installed in October of 2022 no longer applies.*

***Do you have questions about anything presented here? If so, please ask. Your questions make everything better.***

Sincerely,  
Josh

