



St Stephen Catholic School

May 26, 2022

Dear Parents:

Thank you for completing the School Expansion Survey and sharing your questions and concerns. Many of you expressed concern about the timing of the project, and I do appreciate the concerns related to the current economic climate and supply shortages. If we were to move forward with this project, it would take approximately 2-3 years to complete. We agree that this may not be the best time to build a new structure, but we need to start the planning and raise the money now for a building we imagine will be completed in 3-4 years. The reality is that Angel's Wing must be replaced. If we saved money and built another temporary structure, we would be using approximately \$600K from savings on a building that would need to be replaced in another ten years. At that point, we may not have the money to put toward a permanent structure as most of the money in savings is from grants we were able to take advantage of due to Covid.

Some respondents suggested that \$2.1 million would be better spent compensating teachers. It is important to understand that the \$2.1 million would need to be raised through a capital campaign. Teacher salaries are paid from money collected in tuition. We cannot determine salaries based on savings or fundraising as those are not guaranteed. We also cannot increase salaries to an amount we may not be able to sustain. Our cost to educate students is currently more than the tuition charged. Paying teachers more would require raising tuition. This year we did have a more substantial increase in tuition, and the reason was so that we could give teachers a substantial raise. Their percent increase for next year is higher than it has ever been since I started at St. Stephen in 2003. While it may not be as much as in public schools, we also do not have access to their funding. It was also suggested that class size be reduced. While we all agree that would be ideal, it would require a substantial increase in tuition as the cost per pupil would increase.

I wholeheartedly agree with the suggestion that we do more fundraising and get the community involved in school activities so they may be more willing to support our school. I started this a few years ago with the Mardi Gras Pancake Dinner. Unfortunately, Covid stopped some activities, but I hope that we can move back in that direction. Also, I hope to see more families volunteer their time next year by getting involved in PTCO to help make these events a reality.

We may not be able to have a loan as the church is already carrying a substantial loan. The funds may need to come from a capital campaign. By building a middle school wing, we would not be expanding the school's capacity. We would just be relocating the middle school students into a permanent structure. If we were trying to expand our capacity, we would need to build a much bigger facility, and the cost would most likely triple. If we were to only double classes in the elementary grades as suggested, we would not be able to serve those students once they reached middle school.

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Mission Statement

St. Stephen Catholic School is devoted to inspiring students to achieve their full academic potential while demonstrating a desire to continue Jesus' mission by applying Catholic morals, beliefs, values, and practices in their everyday lives. We are committed to motivating students to sustain a lifelong love of learning.



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Many of you talked about parish involvement. Please know that this survey was to get a feel for what the school community thought about the project. If we moved forward, we would be asking the parish to also contribute to the cost. The school building is part of the parish. Faith formation uses the building for classes, ministries also use our facility, and young families may be considering our school for the future. Therefore, the parish has a vested interest in this project.

If we were to build a new wing or replace the current structure, the goal would be to do most of the major construction during the summer so that it would not be disruptive to the learning environment.

Finally, there were several questions regarding teacher turnover. These are the reasons given over the past two years why teachers have left:

- Family emergencies and needing to move to another state
- Moving out of the area and the distance is too great with current traffic patterns
- Transferring to a much larger school (with an enrollment of over 1000) to teach only one subject (i.e., 7th grade math)
- Changing careers as they were unable to meet the demands of teaching due to family commitments (taking care of children or elderly parents)
- Needing a full-time position
- Staying home with a new baby
- Able to make more money at a charter school

Unfortunately, as a small parish school, we cannot meet some of the needs that were mentioned, and other personal reasons are out of our control. However, it is always our goal to hire quality teachers. Most of our new hires for next year also have or will have students in our school and are committed to Catholic education.

Thank you once again. My next steps will be to seek support from the parish and bring our ideas to the Diocese for approval. I will keep you all informed of our progress as we move through this process.

With Peace,

Linda Umoh
Principal

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