

Welcome everyone to our SMCHS town hall meeting for tuition assistance. This is a brand new format for us. We've noticed a few interesting little quirks, so we hope that it goes well. There is a bit of a timing delay, so we will spend the first part of the meeting presenting the information and then at the end we'll go over a Q and A. For right now, all microphones and videos are turned off.

So, if you do have a question, you can post that using the Q and A button at the top. Those will go through to our moderator, so you won't see the question and we'll do our best to answer as many questions as possible at the end of the meeting. And just a reminder, this video is being recorded and it will be available at a later date.

To get started, my name is Juliana Treadway. I am the Director of Business and Finance Operations. I worked in private school education for over 13 years, and I've been at SM for just over seven. I've worked in tuition assistance my whole time here. So hopefully I will be able to shed some light and answer any questions that you have. I would like to now defer to Kim to introduce herself.

Hi everybody. My name is Kim Read, and I've been at SM for about a year and a half. I work with our families, and I do all things "fees" including billing, payment scheduling and tuition assistance. Prior to my time here at SM, I had a long history working for non-profit organizations.

And we're going to jump right in. But if you need any of this information, it will be provided again later on. But those are our email addresses if you'd like to contact us later.

So, let's talk about the purpose of our tuition assistance program. We know that Santa Margarita Catholic High School is a choice that you can make for high school for your family. We are committed to provide this education to you, hopefully at a relatable cost for your family.

Currently, 1 in 4 students, or 25% of does receive tuition assistance in some form. The average award is approximately \$7,500. Now of course there's some that are more, some that are less. That is the approximate amount, which is about 37% of the cost of tuition.

All of our tuition assistance is needs based, meaning you must qualify based on your financial application. No one can receive tuition assistance without submitting an application first. For our new families. I do want to point out that tuition assistance award amounts are not shared with our admissions team, so it doesn't influence our acceptance decisions in any way.

All tuition assistance awards are confidential, and this is in order to uphold your privacy. We do ask our families to reapply each year. We know that some situations can occur. You know, circumstances change, they could improve, or something changes drastically. So, we do need to have an annual review to see the most up to date picture.

Please note that our current students are not guaranteed to receive the exact same award for the following year. And finally, our tuition assistance funds are limited. We want to do our best to help every family in need, but our funds are predetermined, and we do run out.

This typically occurs in the early spring. Obviously, things change as our student population changes. So, we just want to make sure that you are aware that that is a possibility that we will run out of funds.

Who qualifies for tuition assistance?

This is a very common question. The most important thing to remember is tuition assistance is based on need. As previously mentioned, no one can qualify without submitting an online tuition assistance application.

Qualifications for an award are determined based on a number of factors, including expenses, income, employment, loss or gain, changes to your family circumstances, and a number of other financial variables that are listed within our application. There are no minimum or maximum income guidelines. The reason for this is that there are many factors that are evaluated during the process. The major factors considered are income, expenses, assets, your family size, and again, some of the other application questions that you'll see.

Because many families have various levels of income and expense, income is not the only level that we review. We also look at, like I said before, some of those other circumstances, such as the number of people in your household and the support you may be having for other people like grandparents, things like that that you have within your house.

Some of the other factors reviewed include prior year awards. So, we do see similar awards for all of our individuals that are here for four years. Unless something drastic occurs, it is very similar to what you would have received previously.

We also look to see if there are any siblings attending the school. We know that sending multiple children to a private school can impact your finances. You must qualify for tuition assistance in order to receive scholarships, at least the majority of our scholarships. These typically open in December and are awarded in February.

If you receive a tuition assistance award, you are still eligible for a scholarship. Your Tuition Assistance percentage does not change whether you apply for a scholarship or not. The award percentage is simply applied after the scholarship is granted on your account.

And finally, there are guidelines for our tuition assistance recipients.

Once you are awarded something, you do need to remain in good academic and disciplinary standing. All students on Tuition Assistance must maintain at least a 2.0 GPA and abide by all the rules within the parent Student Handbook.

How do you access the application?

Applications are now available. They opened on October 1. The application is provided by FACTS Management through their Grant and Aid portal. You can access this link on the SMCHS website under the Admissions tab. You can see that here this is what it would look like when you're on our website. The drop down under Admissions and then you select Tuition Assistance and there is an Apply now button.

It is pretty self-explanatory once you access FACTS Management, you would log in with your current credentials if you're an active user. If you've applied with any other school, just remember that this is for the financial side of FACTS. It's not for the student information portal where you would access grades or admissions paperwork.

Then you'll select your school year and for this year it is the 2025-2026. You will add Santa Margarita Catholic High School. And that is very important, especially if you're applying for multiple schools. You want to make sure that you are adding Santa Margarita Catholic High School as your school. Once you've completed the application, do not forget to upload all your required documents.

The committee does review any additional information or comments that you submit. So, the more information you provide the better it gives us a better idea of your financial situation. Please make sure that you're being open and honest so that we can see that. Finally, there is a \$40 fee charged directly by FACTS Management. So, you do have to submit that before the documentation and the application gets sent over.

Please remember a timely complete submission gives you an advantage for a possible early award notification. This does include all your required documentation. The following documents are required so you do need to have a completed FACTS Grant and aid application and then new this year we are requiring the 2023 tax returns and the 2023 W2s. Previously we asked for the current year documentation. We will no longer ask for that. We will only require the 2023 information. But you may want to notify us if something has changed since that time.

You'll also need to include a recent pay stub since this allows us to see if there is a change in your income from that 2023 information. You will also need a copy of your mortgage statement and/or your rental agreement. If you don't have one of those, then please provide a written documentation noting the reason why you may not have that.

I'd also like to add that it's very important that you apply as soon as possible. There have already been 120 completed applications that have been submitted. Applications did open on October 1st. Last year we received 635 applications, and we expect more this year.

All right, moving on to our important dates. So just a reminder like we talked about, incomplete applications will not be reviewed. So that does include all the supporting documentation that is being sent to you by FACTS Management reminding you every time if you are missing something. So, if there is something missing, the application will not be reviewed.

New this year we are offering a rolling notification system so you will be notified on the 1st of every month depending upon when your application is complete. Our first notification date is going to be December 2nd and that is simply because the 1st falls on a weekend. If your application is complete by November 15, you will be notified of an award decision on December 2 and that will be by the end of the day by 11:59pm. That is important to note that it will be by the end of the day, which is just before midnight. We will do our best to make sure that that email notification comes to you on that date.

Just for our new families, please note that you will receive an acceptance notification before you receive any decisions on financial aid, so that will come first and then your email for tuition assistance after that.

If you complete your application by the 15th of the month, you will be notified of the 1st of the month following. If you submit your application on November 16th and by submit, I do mean completed application with documentation. If it's on the 16th, then you won't be notified until the following month, which would be January 1st.

Okay, who reviews our applications?

The initial review does take place by FACTS Management Grant and Aid. So that is both the document review as well as an initial numerical assessment. So, any notifications being sent by FACTS Management are not controlled by Santa Margarita. So that is all those notifications you get telling you that you're missing a document, those all come directly from FACTS. We don't see them, so we're not sure what they're asking for. We just want to make sure that you do have a completed application on file with them and that will stop all notifications coming to you and allow us to review your application.

Once FACTS Management does the document review as well. The SM Tuition Assistance Committee then reviews the recommendation from FACTS and looks at it through a less numerical lens and a more realistic lens based on written information and your extenuating factors that have been provided. The committee is made of less than 10 members of the of SM employees. They do remain anonymous. Myself and Kim distribute information to them as needed, so any information so please use us as your resource for any concerns.

Just a note on the appeal process is if you receive an award and you feel as though you have questions about it, you might want a second look at that information. We do anticipate that our funds will be exhausted like we mentioned. Appeals must show us a significant change in your situation than what was already submitted in the original application. They will not be reviewed until after our re-enrollment begins, which is in March. Appeal notices will be sent out April 1st. If you need to bring something to our attention before then, please email either of us. If you do need something prior to that, like we said before, feel free to reach out to myself or to Kim. And we can try to assess that at the time. But as of right now, we're sticking with that April 1st date.

Okay, what happens next?

So like we mentioned, award notifications are always sent by email. There will be no verbal notification or commitment to any awards that are granted to a family. Those do come from the business office in an email form. December 1st is our notification date. It will be followed by any notifications on the 1st of the month after. Awards are granted in a percentage form. Since we do not know the tuition rates yet for the 2025-2026 school year, those are published sometime in February, but as of right now we don't know. Therefore, any awards granted would be in a percentage.

Typically, our awards do not exceed 50% of the cost of tuition and they can only be used for tuition.

All other programs and activity fees are at your expense throughout your time here. You do still need to pay the enrollment fee even if you have yet to receive an award. So, the enrollment fee is not covered by tuition assistance. It is at your expense.

And now let's talk about discounts. There are some discounts you can receive if you're receiving tuition assistance. That includes our Catholic tuition discount, which is a verified registration at a local Orange County Diocese of Orange Parish.

You can also receive the high school placement test discount as well as the academic decathlon discount. Those are also kind of scholarships that we offer. And scholarships are available to you even if you qualify for tuition assistance. So, those are things that are still able to be added to your account.

The tuition assistance award is then calculated after these discounts have been deducted from the full tuition rate. Some of the discounts that you're not eligible for if you receive tuition assistance are the sibling discount and the pay in full discount.

Okay, so I think that wraps up the major important information that we have for you now. We are happy to take questions from the group. Again, no one will see your questions and we will do our best to answer as many as we can.

We still have about 12 minutes for the time of the call. This meeting is being recorded, so hopefully you can review these at a later date if necessary. And then please keep in mind the email address that you see on the screen here at **smchstuitionassistance@smhs.org** should you have any additional questions. We will give it just a few button at the top of your screen.

So there was a question that came in regarding extra mortgage payment options and if that would be considered?

Any expenses that a family has would be considered within your application. So as Juliana mentioned, make sure that you submit open and honest and the more information is, the better so that the committee can truly understand what your expenses are. Everything's going to be looked at, so don't count yourself out. Make sure that you submit as much information as possible. We really do our best to distribute as many funds to as many people as we can.

Should we submit HOA and home insurance expenses?

Yes, submit any expenses that you might incur.

What is the amount of the Catholic discount?

We currently do not have our rates for next school year for the 2025-2026 school year that does come out in February, so it would be posted on our website at that time. Currently, it's \$1,800 for the discount for this school year. It could be around that amount. We just don't have the concrete numbers for next school year.

Is the award 50%? Is there a maximum award allowed?

So actually, the average award is about \$7,500 going back to Juliana's slide, which comes out to be an average of 37%. The average award is not 50%. That is typically the maximum that we provide. Yes, that's something to just keep in mind. Although we do sometimes go over based off of information, I would recommend that as a family, you really look at your finances and kind of assume 50% would be what you would pay.

If 2023 W2's income versus 2024 does not reflect the current financial situation, how do you best express this?

There is a space on the application where you have comments, a section where you can truly describe to the committee what your current situation is. Explain exactly why it would look differently for the 2024. If for some reason you have to appeal at a certain date and you have your 2024 taxes, you can always resubmit those additional supporting documents. Yes, and make sure to bring light to that in the comments. Also, because you're also providing a current pay stub, if you had a job loss and a job change and it's less, that would be reflected in that information as well.

Can we still appeal for financial aid this school year?

Unfortunately, we have completely exhausted our tuition assistance budget. Of course, if something does come up that's very drastic, you can reach out to Juliana or I and we can review and bring it to the attention of others if there is something that we can do. I cannot guarantee that as we have exhausted that budget. Also, if you ever need to have an adjustment to your payment schedule, a pause in the payment plan, or changing the dates to maybe modify it to match your pay schedule, those are some ways we can accommodate. Even though we don't have funds to apply to your account, we might be able to make some changes. There's always possibilities.

Are the current rates published on our website?

And yes, the answer is yes. So if you go to smhs.org and then you go to there is a dropdown where you can click on tuition and also more information on tuition assistance. And I can drag that over here so you can see this is our webpage and you can under admissions the tuition assistance section is there where it has the easy click button to apply. But then also there's the section for tuition where you can see all the information for the current school year. This will be updated as soon as we have the rates for the 2025-2026 year.

I'm self-employed 1099 and do not receive a pay stub. What is the best documentation?

Would you like to take that on Juliana? Sure. If you're self-employed, FACTS management will actually probably give you this information when you submit your documentation, they will want you to submit possibly your business tax return that will provide enough detail. If you do not have that then they'll offer you additional options. And if you still don't feel like you have the appropriate and we can see if what you have submitted is enough for review.

Is November 15th deadline soft since there is rolling future notifications?

So essentially that's the first deadline that will start actually reviewing the applications and then beginning December 2nd we will send out notifications. This will continue to happen until funds run out. So that is the reason why you want to apply as soon as possible so that you are part of that first group of people that are going to receive that notification on December 2nd. Again, it needs to

be a completed application meaning that FACTS is requiring as well as the school is submitted and verified.

Will HSPT discount reduce previously awarded financial aid award?

No. Essentially any discounts that you are provided, whether it's the HSPT discount, Catholic tuition discount, those are deducted before your percentage of tuition assistance is applied. So, it will not reduce your award.

The other question is what were the other tuition discounts other than the Catholic discount?

Essentially, if they were awarded a scholarship, you can include that tuition assistance. The ones that are not available for those who are awarded tuition assistance is a sibling discount and a one-time payment discount. If you choose not to apply or you don't receive an award, you would then be eligible for the one time pay in full discount or a sibling discount as well.

What documentation is needed to receive the Catholic discount?

The purpose of the Catholic tuition discount is essentially for all members who have registered at a parish within the Diocese of Orange. We do send out verification to our parishes. If a family says that they are actively registered at a certain parish, we do send those lists to the parishes with the student name, sometimes the parent's name that's provided for us. The parish then just responds to us, says yes, this family is registered with our parish.

Are there any discounts for the ASP?

Unfortunately, there is not. The tuition assistance is purely for the tuition rate. It does not apply to any extracurricular activities or programs. It is purely just for the base price of tuition. I will say on that note though, especially with ASP because it is such a large expense for something that is necessary. If you do have questions about a discounted rate, please feel free to reach out to Kim or myself. Sometimes the budget exceeds what they were expecting and there may be the opportunity something to be offered if you qualify for tuition assistance. But it is, you know, case by case and year by year because we do need to see what the budget is at that time.

Again, if it does offer some of the information provided today, there's the apply now button as well as all the eligibility important information and then just a quick FAQ.

If you click on this link here, it offers answers to a lot of the questions that we went over today as well as just some things that come up while you're, while you're starting to think about applying for tuition assistance.

If a younger sibling is applying to a K-8 private school for 2024-2025 season, will the tuition expense be taken into consideration?

Yes, it will. Any private school and or college that is an expense to the family will be taken into consideration.

Okay. With that, I think we are finished. Thank you everybody for your time and your questions We are always here to help, so feel free to reach out to either one of us and we'd be happy to help. Hope everybody has a great day.