

Survey Backgrounder – Tuition Discounts

We have offered tuition discounts for all of our 35 years and there are a variety of reasons for them. We would like to provide more information for you on sibling, paid-in-full, staff and bursary tuition discounts.

Sibling Discounts

All of the independent schools in town have them – some higher and some lower than us. We are a community and we want our families to be able to stay with us through as many siblings as they have! For some families, having the discount makes the difference for them to stay or leave. Families with more than one child in the school are often our best volunteers. They are involved in a variety of classes and most often develop close ties to the school and to the other parents. If we can keep them through the middle years program, we are sometimes connected to them for 13 or more years, which strengthens our school and our community.

Paid in Full Discounts

Paid in full discounts were introduced to help the school with cash flow when we didn't receive our first tuition payment from families until September each year. We used to be able to earn interest by having the payments in full in June. In these days of low interest rates, I'm not sure that there is much advantage to us in doing this. On the other hand, a number of families prefer to pay in full and it's nice to be able to offer the option.

Staff Discounts

Our records show that staff tuition discounts have long been in the employment benefits package. Just before we moved to the new school – around 1998 – the directors increased staff discounts to 100%. After we moved, with another wave of staff children coming through and money tight, we changed it to a different tuition discount for each program; higher for the older children and lower for the preschoolers. The staff with children already in the program were grandfathered. Not long ago, the board decided to change the discount to 85% across the board, which was much appreciated by staff. By having their children in the school, staff demonstrate a strong commitment and belief in Selkirk Montessori.

Bursaries

As far as I know, we have offered bursaries at Selkirk Montessori for as long as the school has been in operation. According to long-time school director Linda Birley, our school was built on bursaries and discounts. This is the information Erin and I go over with new families – some of you may remember this – in the Family Handbook:

“We are very proud of the bursary program that was established in the Pacific Montessori Society’s early years, and which has provided opportunities for children to continue their Montessori education in times of temporary financial difficulty.

Bursaries are intended only for families with children in the elementary program. Because families require different amounts of assistance, the administration uses its discretion in determining the final number and dollar figure of the bursaries for any given school year. More information about the bursary program is available at the school office.”

On January 4, 2010, the chair of the board, Richard Burton, sent a letter to families to let them know about the three-step increases in tuitions in order to improve salaries. The board wanted families who were already settled at the school to know that we were expanding the bursary program:

“The Board recognizes that even these modest fee increases may cause hardship for some of our families; therefore, we are expanding the bursary program and will continue with the current program of discounts on tuition for siblings.”

The number and amount of bursaries increased from the difficult financial times of 2008. They went up again during the three year tuition increases. This year, they have begun to decrease. As the children who were enrolled during those times move on to other programs, the bursaries will decrease accordingly.

Children who are receiving a bursary generate a government grant of \$3,650 or more for the school. If families with children on a bursary had to leave the school, or didn’t stay because there was no financial assistance, we would lose many thousands of dollars. For example, this year we have 49 students on bursaries. Regardless of the amount of the tuition and fees they do pay, we would lose \$178,850 in government grants if they left.

Some have said, “why not just replace these children with others?” These children are almost irreplaceable. They are qualified Montessori students whom we know and love. Bringing in students who do not have the Montessori foundation is something we do very carefully, as they sometimes take a full year to catch on to how things are done in the program.

These children and their families are an integral part of our school community. We lose much more than just the money if they have to make a move to another school.