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ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

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October 11, 2024

Dear St. Stephen Community,

Last fall our Board of Education (BOE) created and began implementing a five-year strategic plan to ensure that St. Stephen Protomartyr Parish offers a Catholic school that is a thriving, welcoming, vibrant center for learning in South St. Louis for decades to come.

While the Archdiocese elected to close some schools in the 2023-24 school year, it left decisions about St. Stephen Protomartyr School in the hands of our parish leadership. The BOE took this as an exciting opportunity to design our own strategic plan, incorporating our strengths into a unique vision to sustain our school.

We are one year into implementing this strategic plan and want to update our parish community on our progress.

Four standing committees are actively working to implement the strategic plan: Finance, Marketing, Education, and Facilities

Each committee has ongoing projects, and your involvement is always welcome. We encourage you to reach out to the BOE if you would like to lend a hand to one of the committees. Here is a quick look at each committee and its first-year initiatives:

COMMITTEE	PURPOSE	LEAD(S)	YEAR 1 INITIATIVES
Finance	Scope and establish financial benchmarks for the strategic plan	Jason Chierek	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborated with parish Finance Council to determine availability of potential parish support as we solidify the strategic plan
Marketing	Create awareness of and promote SSP School to the broader community to grow enrollment	Phil Cervantes Michael Dauphin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Created signs to promote the school in parishioner yards, on our campuses, and in area businesses Launched new school website Secured staffing to empower marketing efforts Restarted Ambassador Family program
Education	Assist in identifying and shaping educational programs to enrich SSP School	Maria Howe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spearheaded Summer Camp 2024 pilot program to be a school option for more families, particularly those in need of a year-round option Conducted survey to understand how to refine summer program features
Facilities	Identify and scope potential opportunities for additional enrichment of SSP School environment by leveraging existing SSP community resources	Richie Nigro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explored feasibility of expanding youngest grade levels into unused parish office space in the former SSP rectory

Goals and accomplishments to date

Growing enrollment: We are bending the curve in the right direction.

Perception matters, and factors such as the uncertainty in recent years about which grade schools might close as the Archdiocese worked through the All Things New initiative contributed to many schools across the St. Louis region seeing their enrollment decline. We are pleased to share that the decline in K-8 enrollment at SSP this year (-1) was much lower than our average for the past five years (-11). Even more promising are the following outcomes:

- Net enrollment change from transfers this year was positive (+1) and better than our average for the past five years (-3).
- Pre-K 4 enrollment this year (19) was higher than last year (15).
- Kindergarten enrollment (17) matched the past-five-years average (17).

Total K-8 enrollment declined (-1) from 159 in 2023-24 to 158 in 2024-25. While it is our aim to start seeing overall enrollment growth, it's exciting to see numbers in our younger classes growing in a way that offsets the loss of our older, larger classes. Similarly, our Pre-K enrollment declined (-1) from 31 to 30, but it's important to remember that we often see that enrollment grow throughout the school year as 3-year-olds age into the program.

These early results are an exciting sign that we are bending the enrollment curve in the right direction. The BOE and the strategic plan will continue to focus on growing enrollment.

Financial sustainability: We are forging a bright future.

The SSP Finance Council recommended investing from Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24) through Fiscal Year 2028 (FY28) up to \$1,000,000 of our parish's accumulated operating surplus to ensure the long-term future of our school. This level of support aligns with other Archdiocesan schools, and the value to our parish in having a thriving, sustainable school justifies the expenditure.

The Finance Council noted that the same value would not be present if it were a question of simply keeping the school open for a few more years. Our plan for our school is long-term. Considering the \$1,000,000 commitment from the parish's accumulated operating surplus, we estimate we will have \$825,000 to invest for the next three years (FY26-FY28).

YEAR	SCHOOL OPERATING DEFICIT	FUNDRAISING	PARISH INVESTMENT	PARISH FIVE-YEAR INVESTMENT BUDGET REMAINING
FY23*	\$255,887	\$77,728	\$178,159	Before investment
FY24	\$165,892	\$118,111	\$47,781	\$952,219
FY25 Projection	\$249,000	\$122,000	\$127,000	\$825,000

* Our school year aligns with our fiscal year; FY23 is the 2022-23 school year

Additional context on parish finances as they relate to our school:

- Improvements to parish finances help our school sustainability. Our combined parish operations deficit for FY23 was \$334,227; FY24 was \$314,288, and FY25 is projected at \$99,000.
- Donations to the Msgr. Vince Bommarito Scholarship Fund exceeded expenses, allowing us to grow this program in the next year, helping many families offset the tuition increase.
- Our school has capacity for more students, so if enrollment increases in the future, our financial sustainability will also improve.
- We have drawn down the \$1,000,000 commitment more slowly than expected. This opens the possibility of using some of the commitment for campus improvements or other one-time expenses in support of our strategic plan.

Summary

The BOE is pleased by the progress achieved on the school strategic plan in our first year. We look forward to even more progress in the second year of our five-year plan.

This year we will continue to expand the efforts established in Year 1, detailed above. We will also:

- Explore expanding the campus of SSP, giving us more space for high-impact, cost-effective educational opportunities, such as a STEM lab and a larger preschool program.
- Determine how to make our SSP summer program enrollment options more flexible.
- Expand the Msgr. Vince Bommarito and Multi-Child scholarship programs to give more support to families.

St. Stephen Protomartyr Board of Education

Find contact information at www.sspstl.org/parish-board-of-education

OFFICERS	GENERAL MEMBERS	
Cathy Drury, President	Steve Bernstetter	Richie Nigro*
Michael Dauphin, Vice President	Phil Cervantes	Pam Ryan
Dan Richter, Secretary*	Meghan Jendusa*	Chad Wilcox
Maria Howe, Outgoing President	Ed Kuehner	Greg Sturgill, Principal

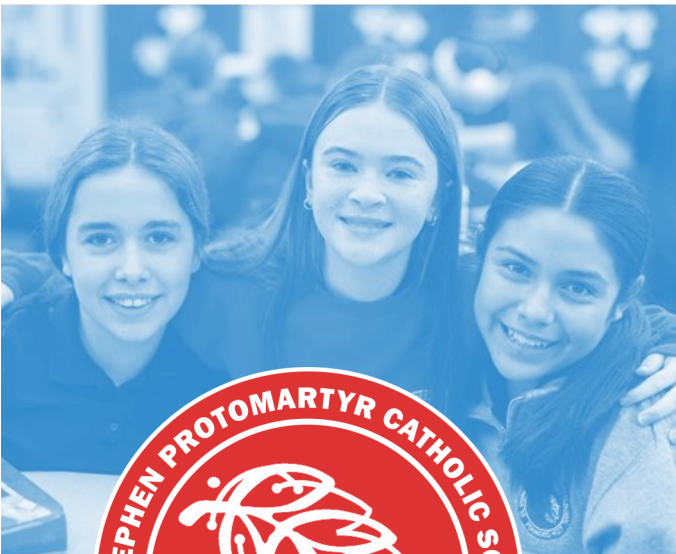
* New member this year

As we recommit ourselves to the vision of the 2023 Strategic Plan, we ask for your help. Please pray for our school, volunteer to help our students, and support us financially by tithing at SSP Parish.

Yours in Jesus and Mary,



Rev. Aaron P. Nord, Pastor
St. Stephen Protomartyr Catholic Parish



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