

Determining right tuition number a challenge

Sister Shawn Marie Maguire feels it is an unprecedented time in the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

Many families who have sent their children to Catholic schools throughout the years have struggled with tuition payments because they have a breadwinner out of work.

Sister Shawn Marie, headmistress of all-girls Maryvale Preparatory School , is watching over one of the higher-priced Catholic high schools. The school has a base tuition of \$15,415 and another \$500 in fees for technology and activities.

Still, the school barely raised its tuition just more than 1 percent from last year.

"Tuition dollars are what, in many ways, fuel the school," Sister Shawn Marie said. "We just work really long and hard on a final number."

Some tuition rates have jumped 5 percent from last year, while others remain the same.

Either way, families are scratching their heads trying to come up with the money to keep their children in school.

Sister Shawn Marie has personally worked with families who are struggling.

"We've seen more requests for financial assistance than ever before," Sister Shawn Marie said. "Your heart just aches."

Most schools have financial committees and boards of trustees that help set the budget and tuition numbers. Maryvale's process begins in the fall and a final decision is made in January.

Sister Shawn Marie said Maryvale is small by design, with 373 students, "so we can really know the individual young person and bring her to her fullest potential."

All-boys Calvert Hall has a tuition rate of \$11,500 after fees. It also offers a program for students with learning disabilities, which cost \$18,500 a year. Calvert Hall's tuition number is board approved based on the school year's budget.

Similarly, all-boys Mount St. Joseph's learning disability program, the DePaul program, cost \$6,000 more than the base tuition of \$11,300, which is before fees.

Both learning disability programs are heavily sought by families.

Schools find ways to help families make ends meet. Maryvale, for instance, has laptops available in carts, but does not require purchases of laptops.

Notre Dame Preparatory School's tuition stands at \$15,750, a rise of 3.3 percent from last year. The vibrant all-girls school has families facing the same financial challenges as Maryvale.

"We are very aware to the continuing economic realities of the time, and sought to keep Catholic, independent education affordable for our families, who are very loyal to us," said NDP's director of communications Cami Colarossi. "Our incoming classes have exceeded our expectations and our student population remains very strong for the upcoming school year. We believe that this strong enrollment reflects not only our affordability but also our outstanding academic and extracurricular program."

Some schools, like co-ed St. Maria Goretti in Hagerstown, are finding creative ways to address tuition.

This year, a new multi-tiered plan that will include one rate for Catholics of \$10,000 (with fees adding another \$200) is being offered there. Non-Catholics will pay \$12,200 this year.

A \$1,000 multi-child discount is offered at St. Maria Goretti for each child enrolled at the school.

Seton Keough High School raised its tuition just \$500 from last year. Tuition is \$10,450 and \$12,450 for the Marillac Program, which serves students with learning differences.

“Seton Keough’s mission is to provide a first-rate, Catholic, college-preparatory education to young women and remain affordable,” said the school’s director of communications, Jane Ponton.

Faced with that same mission and challenge in Catonsville, Mount de Sales Academy raised its tuition 2.9 percent above last year, the lowest percentage there in 10 years, according to its principal, Sister Anne Catherine Burleigh.

The Dominican Sister of Saint Cecilia said, “We have worked diligently to manage the tuition as the cost of operations increases due to rising expenses, such as gas and electric, and providing a qualified faculty and staff.”