

 THE PRAIRIE SCHOOL

Spring 2020

Dear Prairie Families,

With Governor Evers closing schools for the remainder of this academic year, we find ourselves in a difficult situation and appreciate the partnership of all of your families to help our students. In my 30 years in education, I have never seen such a diverse set of challenges and unique family contexts and we are all doing our very best to help our children learn and grow.

Our faculty have never worked harder and what they have accomplished in the last month is nothing short of amazing. I truly appreciate and admire the versatility, flexibility, and growth mindsets that they have all demonstrated by building and successfully leading our distance learning program.

They have all been exceptionally good at controlling what they can control, keeping a positive, uplifting attitude, and strengthening the relational fabric of our community. They are admirably building closer relationships, sharing important content, and developing our students' skills. I hope you will join me in thanking them for their incredible work and joyful connections within our community.

I also know that many of you have never worked harder, and like some of your families and businesses, Prairie faces strong financial headwinds. As a 501c(3) not-for-profit, Prairie operates annually on a margin of less than one tuition, and we began this year with our budget in the red.¹

Since the arrival of COVID-19 and Safer-at-Home, our endowment has taken a huge hit, we will not be able to have an in-person Premiere, and we have a number of outstanding accounts that do not look promising. The outlook for the remainder of the fiscal year is uncertain. Traditionally, the Prairie Fund's second biggest month for donations received is June, and it is possible, if not probable, that we will see a total loss of summer revenue.

On the positive side, please join us for a virtual Premiere on May 23rd!

¹ In my [State of the School address](#) in February there is an outline of this year's budget.



Currently, we are managing Prairie's finances using four financial priorities:

1. People first
2. Frugal in the short term (this school year)
3. Prepare for the uncertain medium term (next year)
4. Make strategic investments to insure stability over the long term (5-10 years)

1. People First - Prairie is an interconnected ecosystem of people committed to helping your children grow to be their best selves. One part does not work without the support of all the other parts, and we are committed to paying all of our employees through the current school year.² Because of the strength of our team, we are able to continue student learning, and now that we have clarity about how the year will end, I believe that academic growth will be what we normally expect for most of our students – and for some, there will likely be accelerated growth. If students continue to actively engage with their schoolwork, read, explore things they are curious about, and engage their creative interests, they will be on track and ready for school in the fall.

2. Short Term Frugality - We have reduced the temperature in the buildings, eliminated or reduced all service contracts to the minimum amount allowed, held all orders of supplies, eliminated overtime, and have not filled open positions. We have also participated in the federal Payroll Protection Program to keep everyone employed despite our significantly reduced revenue.

3. Medium Term - With next year's enrollment and our ability to be on campus uncertain, we have reduced costs by cutting expenses and not replacing retiring workers for a total of almost \$300,000 in savings. After an almost two-year pilot project, we are switching from iPads to Chromebook laptops. We have also increased next year's scholarship budget, and our Admission Department continues to cultivate new families. See the Financial Questions below for more details about next year's inclusive fee.

² It is also worth noting that we are self-insured for unemployment, so furloughs or layoffs would also be funded by the school.



Word of mouth continues to be our best recruiting tool, and you sharing Prairie's distance learning success with your friends and neighbors will play a key role in our ability to make our budget in the fall.

4. Long Term - We continue to gather information to inform our long-term strategic planning and investment. We are also currently completing low-cost deferred maintenance projects while the building is empty.

If you have a question that is not answered in this letter, the FQ's that follow, the End of Year Calendar, or the Pro Tips document we are sharing today — please send us an email and we will get back to you. Take care.

Sincerely,

Nat

Dr. Nat Coffman

Head of School & President

Financial Questions and Answers

(Not outlined in the letter above)

Q: Since lunch is not being served at school and I paid for the whole year, will I get a refund?

A: Yes. If you have an outstanding balance, it will be applied to that balance. If you do not have an outstanding balance, you will receive a credit for \$180. You can:

Apply the credit to next year,

Donate it to the Prairie Fund, or

Request a refund check that will be mailed in June.

Q: What if I pay for lunch by the month?

A: You will not be billed for May and you will receive a credit for \$90 to your FACTS account for April. If you have an outstanding balance, it will be applied to that balance. If you do not have an outstanding balance, you can:

Apply the credit to next year,

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Donate it to the Prairie Fund, or
Request a refund check that will be mailed in June.

Q: What can we do with unused lunch tickets?

A: Unused lunch tickets for this school year (19-20) may be used next year (20-21).

Q: With the 7th and 8th grade trips canceled, will I receive a refund?

A: Yes, you will receive a credit for \$425 to your FACTS account for a 7th grade student, and a credit for \$500 to your FACTS account for an 8th grade student. If you have an outstanding balance, it will be applied to that balance. If you do not have an outstanding balance, you can:

Apply the credit to next year,
Donate it to the Prairie Fund, or
Request a refund check that will be mailed in June.

Q: How will these refunds work?

A: A credit will be posted in your FACTS account, and if you finish this school year with a positive balance, it will automatically be credited to next year. If you would like a check cut in June or would like to donate all or a portion of your credit to the Prairie Fund, please email [Tara Nelson](#), Business Office Manager. Refund checks will not be sent until all expenses for this year are covered, including returning the school's iPad or Chromebook for 5th and 6th grade. We will outline the plan for returning the iPad or Chromebook in May.

Q: Will other grades receive a refund for a portion of their fees?

A: No, by spring break each year we have spent all or almost all of your student's annual fees on a range of things depending on their age: field trips, snack, school supplies, iPads, Timber-lee, the Washington DC trip, the Cincinnati trip, Camp Manito-wish, their school t-shirt, yearbook, service activities, art supplies, costumes, scripts, athletic equipment and uniforms, standardized tests, club activities, non-athletic teams, competitions (math, language, *Books, Alive!*, etc.), student conferences,



community activities (Convocation, Fall Fest, Diwali, 12 Days, FCD, speakers, etc.), textbooks, workbooks, and software.

Q: What if I need help paying my bill for this school year?

A: Email [Molly Lofquist Johnson](#), Senior Director of Admission, with the details of your situation. She will follow up with you and then contact the Scholarship Committee on your behalf.

Q: What will happen with Hawks' Haven and other summer programs, and what if I have already paid for a camp?

A: Our summer programming will be impacted by the state and federal mandates in place at that time, and we are currently exploring multiple programming options, including 1:1 activities. More information will be available in May. We will also address financial questions and refunds when we have more clarity.

The 2020-21 School Year

The governor mandated that all schools be closed for the remainder of this entire academic year. It is unclear what he will do in the fall, and whether we will be able to begin the school year on campus.

On-campus learning is not possible if the CDC social distancing guidelines of staying six feet apart are still in place in August. Prairie's rooms and hallways are not big enough to maintain this distance and children are uncontrollably drawn into physical contact like magnets. Limits on gathering sizes are also problematic, but potentially manageable, within our current facilities.

I am optimistic that at some point in the next 12 months, scientists and doctors will figure out COVID-19 and we will be able to return to learning on campus with our full array of classes, co-curriculars, activities, and events.

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Throughout the coming months, we will monitor all government mandates and other available information that might impact our school. The situation will likely remain fluid throughout the summer, and we will keep you informed of the latest developments.

We will need your continued flexibility and support. It is possible that the school calendar could be modified to create more time on campus. Here are a few questions you might be thinking about:

Q: What are the potential changes to the 2020-21 calendar?

A: It is possible that we will not be able to start on-campus learning in August, and we will adjust the calendar if it helps us increase time spent in the physical classrooms. Thanksgiving Break, the New Year Break, and Spring Break will remain as scheduled. It is possible that the starting and ending dates, along with long weekends and one-day breaks, could be canceled or changed to increase the amount of time we are able to spend on campus.

Q: Why haven't you published fees for next year and what will they be?

A: We have not published fees because there are too many uncertainties for next year related to whether or not we will start the year on campus. Middle and Upper School class retreats and Primary School field trips and supplies are large portions of the fee, and we want to avoid billing you unnecessarily.

We are also switching from iPads to Chromebook laptops. One aspect of this change is switching from leasing and returning the device to the school, to now having each family own the device at the end of the lease. Unless prices change in the next few months, the device, school operating system, and necessary software will cost \$305. After a two-year pilot project, we are making the switch for five primary reasons:

1. The promise of interactive textbooks was never realized.
When we first picked iPads eight years ago, it was because they promised to deliver high-quality interactive textbooks and create a paperless school. That has simply not happened; the textbook industry has not changed. We are now in a position where we have to spend tens of thousands of dollars each year to replace textbooks that in some cases are ten years old. Chromebooks will allow us to invest more in new textbooks. We also can't afford to spend money on devices that were not designed to support our primary learning management system, Google Classroom.
2. Growth of reliance on and incorporation of Google Apps and Google Classroom at TPS.

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The Google Apps suite of products offers a variety of productivity, communication, and collaboration tools that are super reliable and accessible anywhere, and these tools are used in practically every Middle and Upper School class.

3. Chromebooks are fast and reliable.
They take eight seconds to start up, and users are off and running. Our students and faculty testers have found them difficult to break (please don't take this as a challenge).
4. The "2-in-1" nature of the Chromebooks.
Doing substantial word processing on an iPad is challenging, and Chromebooks give us the best of both worlds: apps, touch screen, and a full keyboard.
5. We are able to extend Internet security protection inside and outside of the school.
We will be able to push only the apps needed for classes to the devices and disallow anything else. Currently, we are not able to protect devices off campus. With Chromebooks, we will be able to ensure that our safety settings travel with the devices, and are enacted anytime they connect to the Internet.

If you have any questions about the Chromebooks, please contact [Klay Shannon](#), Director of Technology.

We are excited about this change, and if every trip and activity goes forward as scheduled next year, there will be an increase in the fee to cover the increased textbook investment and the one-time cost of the Chromebook. Students will get a new Chromebook every two or three years depending on which year the student receives their first one.

In the meantime, we are going to bill a portion of the inclusive fee for next year at the following levels, according to the payment plan you have chosen:

| | |
|--------------------------------|-------|
| Early School and Kindergarten: | \$300 |
| Primary School: | \$400 |
| Middle School (5-6): | \$700 |
| Middle School (7-8): | \$900 |
| Upper School: | \$900 |

This includes the \$305 for the Chromebook for grades 7-12 and is not a new or additional fee. It is the first and possibly only installment of the inclusive fee for next year depending on what we are able to do as a school. If we are not able to go to Manito-wish or have many of our on-campus events, programs, and field trips, there

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will not be a second installment. If we are able to do everything scheduled for next year, there will be an additional installment and the total (20-21) fee should be within 10% of this year's (19-20) total fee.

Q: Is it too late to apply for a scholarship for next year?

A: No, it is not too late to apply for a scholarship for the 2020-21 school year. Please email [Molly Lofquist Johnson](#), Senior Director of Admission, for more details.

Q: If I already applied for a scholarship and my situation has changed, what can I do?

A: Email [Molly Lofquist Johnson](#), Senior Director of Admission, with the details of your situation. She will follow up with you and then contact the Scholarship Committee on your behalf.