



## **Frequently Asked Financial Aid Questions for 2012-2013 Admission Season**

Explorer West Middle School is committed to socio-economic diversity. We believe that the financial aid program benefits all students and families – whether or not they are financial aid recipients since we are able to enroll outstanding students from a variety of backgrounds who otherwise would not be able to afford the full cost of tuition.

Explorer West also believes that the obligation for financing a child's education rests primarily with the family, including parents and extended family when appropriate. We expect that a family will be willing to make significant adjustments in the use of its discretionary resources—and access supplementary resources where appropriate. The financial aid committee seeks evidence that a family's commitment to their child's education is at least as strong as the school's.

During the 2011-2012 school year, 27% of our families received some form of financial aid, ranging from financial awards of \$1,000 to nearly the full cost of tuition. Although we cannot afford to give financial aid to all who apply, we encourage all families who feel the need for assistance to apply.

### **Should I apply for financial aid?**

The most helpful guideline comes from personal knowledge of your family's finances. If your family can pay roughly between \$1,400 (for 6<sup>th</sup> grade) and \$1,500 (for 8<sup>th</sup> grade) each month for 11 months, you are probably not a good candidate for financial aid. If, after reviewing your situation, you feel you will need aid but are uncertain whether you will qualify, it is generally best to apply.

### **Must both parents be employed to receive financial aid?**

The assumption is that both parents of school-age children have the ability to contribute to the family's income and aid awards are adjusted accordingly. We do realize that there are special circumstances that may make it very difficult for both parents to be employed. Explaining such circumstances on your application better enables us to understand your unique situation.

### **What if I am divorced or no longer with my child's other parent?**

Generally we feel that both parents are equally responsible for their children regardless of marital status. Therefore each parent will need to complete the Parents' Financial Statement and submit it to SSS and Explorer West. If your former partner's mailing information does not appear on the application for admission, we will request it from you. We will then ask your former partner to complete a financial statement to provide a realistic picture of total family resources. We recognize that there are unique family situations and urge you to contact the school's Business Office if you have questions.

### **How is financial aid determined?**

We receive information back from the Parents' Financial Statement (PFS) that helps us determine your family contribution towards educational expenses. We then use those results, along with a copy of your completed tax return, W-2's, and schedules, as a guide in allocating financial aid. Please know that the more information or explanation you can provide regarding your individual circumstances, the better we will be able to assist you.

### **Are decisions regarding admission and financial aid related?**

Please be assured that the admissions committee does not know which families are applying for financial aid. Once admission decisions have been made, the Director of Admissions and the Financial Aid Committee will work together to determine how many and which new students requiring financial aid can be accepted within the limits of our financial aid budget.

## How do I apply for Financial Aid?

Families applying for financial aid must complete the Parents' Financial Statement (PFS) each year and submit it to School and Student Service for Financial Aid (SSS). Additionally, a copy of your tax return (with all tax schedules filed with the return) and W-2's, need to be submitted directly to SSS.

Families have two options for applying for financial aid: you may request a financial aid packet from Explorer West at 206.935.0495 or you may submit the Parents' Financial Statement online. Completing the online forms is strongly recommended as it is faster and results in fewer processing errors. You can apply online at [www.sss.nais.org](http://www.sss.nais.org). You will need to create a password and will be given a PIN when you apply online. Please keep the PIN and password so that you can access this information at a later date, if necessary. The same deadlines apply for online application as for print applications, including the requirement to print a copy and mail it to Explorer West. Whether applying online or on paper, you will need Explorer West's school code. **Our school code is 3095.**

## What deadlines do I need to be aware of?

Your completed Parents' Financial Statement (PFS) must be completed online or sent to Student Services by **Thursday, February 2, 2012**. Note: if you are submitting an application for the early sibling decisions, the due date for all financial aid materials is Thursday, January 19, 2012.

In addition, the following documents need to be sent directly to SSS – **also by February 2, 2012 (or January 19, 2012 if using the early sibling process)**:

- A copy of your completed 2011 tax return and all supporting forms sent to the IRS with your return
- A copy of all W-2's reported on the tax return

Requests for financial aid always exceed our financial aid funds available; therefore, there is always a financial aid wait pool. Submitting your information after the deadline will place your application at the end of the financial aid wait pool.

## What if I have not completed my tax return?

Many families have not yet completed their tax returns by the financial aid deadline. We recommend that you use your best estimates in completing the application. We ask that you include the prior year tax return and your current year W-2's. Once you have completed your tax return, you will need to remit a copy to SSS. **All aid awards will not be considered final until we receive a copy of your completed tax return.** Unless your estimates vary considerably from the completed tax return, you can expect your aid award to remain unchanged.

## Must I apply for aid again the following year?

Yes, you must apply for financial aid every year, even if you have received aid in the past. Families who qualify for aid generally continue to receive it throughout their child's enrollment at Explorer West. However, awards often fluctuate to reflect changes in a family's financial circumstance, available funds and community need.

## When will I be notified if I have been awarded financial aid?

Financial aid award offers – for new and returning families – will be **mailed on March 15, 2012**. For new families, they will be mailed along with enrollment decisions. Note: if you are submitting an application for the early sibling decisions, the financial aid award offers will be mailed February 10, 2012.

*Explorer West Middle School does not discriminate on the basis of age, color, creed, disability, national or ethnic origin, race religion, sex or sexual orientation. This policy applies to all areas of student concerns (admissions, athletics, educational policies, financial aid, and other school-administered programs).*