

An Insider's Guide to Tuition Assistance

A free guide to help you navigate the tuition assistance process.

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We appreciate that by downloading this guide you've made a choice to invest in your child's future. Families have many reasons for investigating independent schools. Enrolment at an independent school, regardless of a family's available resources requires a financial commitment. In fact, it's not unusual for a family to make personal sacrifices in order to allow their child to benefit from an independent school education.

For some families, planning an independent school education for their child has been in place for years. You may be like many families that have a long history of independent school education or, like others, your independent school search may not have been planned and began quite unexpectedly. Regardless of your experience, learning about an independent school should be an enjoyable process! It can, however, be intimidating because it not only involves finding a best fit school for a loved one—among many options—it involves a considerable financial investment.

Often, when families visit an independent school campus and see the impressive grounds and facilities, there is a perception that these schools have infinite funds at their disposal. The reality is that, as non-profit organizations, this is not often the case. Independent schools dedicate incoming school fees to recruit and retain top staff and teaching faculty, invest in innovative programming and co-curricular opportunities for students, continually improve facilities and grounds, provide ongoing professional development and, of course, dedicate money towards a tuition management program to help ensure that deserving students—regardless of economic background—have an opportunity to experience the very best education available.

The process of applying for tuition assistance can be, at once, both straightforward and complicated. It goes without saying that you should feel supported throughout the process. With that in mind, the following guide has been created to help answer some of the most pressing questions families have that relate to affording an independent school education.

While you will undoubtedly find some differences in how schools approach tuition management, we hope that you find the information found in this guide informative. If this document prompts further questions, all the better! That provides one more reason to find out more about how you can partner with a school to help your child reach their individual potential in mind, body and spirit.

1. How can I find out if I should apply for tuition assistance (also commonly referred to as financial aid, need-based funding or a bursary)?

First, consider the total annual cost of an independent school education. Schools will typically provide an overview of fees on their website. More often than not, you'll find this information under 'Admissions' on a school's website. In addition to tuition, make sure to contact the school to ask about any standard or incidental fees that may exist. Then, calculate your ability to cover these costs. When doing so, it's important to consider all sources of income and assets that may be leveraged to cover school fees.

Schools work hard to partner with families, but with limited tuition assistance budgets, families are asked to adjust their spending priorities. When determining your ability to afford an independent school education, it may be helpful to consider current expenditures that may no longer exist upon enrollment. For example, if your child participates in programs like dance or hockey outside of school, there's a good chance that school fees will cover these costs (or the cost will be significantly subsidized). For families that are investigating boarding, think about the food and water savings alone! Not to mention the time and energy that is often dedicated to driving your child to and from after school co-curricular activities.

Following your personal financial review, if you find that you cannot cover all of the educational expenses, the vast majority of Canadian independent schools will ask you to complete an [Apple Financial Services](#) application.

2. How can a family apply for tuition assistance?

In order to receive consideration for tuition assistance, many Canadian independent schools require families to complete the online application found on the [Apple Financial Services](#) website. There are also other applications for assistance that may be accepted by schools. For example, SSS by NAIS and ISM Fast are two examples. Other schools, particularly outside of Canada, may complete their own internal review.

While some flexibility may exist—in terms of the application that will be accepted by a school—don't be surprised if schools insist on a specific application to be submitted. This helps to ensure consistency during the review process.

The benefit of submitting a tuition assistance application to a third party, such as Apple Financial Services, is that it helps to ensure that each and every family receives an objective, unbiased review based upon facts. In this way, families can rest easy knowing that the review process involves due process.

3. How much tuition assistance can I expect to receive?

Unfortunately, it's difficult to predict how much assistance a family might receive—based upon salary alone—because there are so many variables that are involved in determining a funding amount (e.g., salary, housing expenses, vehicle purchases, savings, RRSP contributions, debt, etc.). It's also good to know that the majority of independent schools adhere to a co-pay model. This means that every family, regardless of financial means, contributes something to the education of their child. Ultimately, everyone's financial situation is unique and is considered individually. For this reason, the financial need for each family may differ significantly.

Upon enrollment, most schools work diligently to continue to assist each family. At times, life throws families an unexpected challenge. When this happens, independent schools make every effort to support families through brief periods of financial turbulence. Alternatively, when families experience a financial upturn, schools might look to them to increase the amount they contribute to their child's education.

4. If it costs money to complete an application for tuition assistance, can this fee be waived?

Many schools don't provide fee waivers for tuition assistance applications. This is in line with the co-pay model adopted by schools.

5. Who can apply for tuition assistance?

It is important to check with each individual school. Some schools place restrictions on who is able to submit an application for tuition assistance.

Also, please remember that applying for tuition assistance doesn't guarantee that a school will be able to meet a family's demonstrated need. When awarding tuition assistance, schools look at a number of variables (e.g., amount of funding required versus available budget, entering grade, academic and co-curricular involvement and success, etc.).

It's also helpful to know that schools won't release the amount of tuition assistance made available until after a student is accepted to the school. For that reason, if you're concerned about your ability to afford the tuition, it's often good to complete the admissions process at the same time that you submit your tuition assistance application. This will provide the company performing the analysis (e.g., Apple Financial Services) and the school adequate time to review your application. If all goes according to plan, the admissions and funding reviews will take place simultaneously. This way, you will have the information you need to accept or decline an offer of admission extended by a school before the offer of acceptance deadline period, which is often one to two weeks.

If your child is accepted to a school before your tuition assistance application is complete and reviewed, ask the school if you're able to receive an extension. Knowing that space to many schools is limited, you'll likely be encouraged to complete your application for assistance as soon as possible (if it hasn't already been started). Following a grace period, you'll likely find that schools aren't in a position to continually extend the acceptance deadline.

6. When will I be contacted to learn about my child's tuition assistance amount?

This can differ by school, so it's good to reach out to individual schools to find out when you'll receive an offer of assistance. By and large, most schools will not provide you with information regarding assistance until your child receives a letter of acceptance, even if your tuition assistance amount is available before the admissions process is complete.

Canadian schools often begin reviewing completed financial assistance applications in December or January and meet regularly until their tuition management budget has been depleted. This can also vary by schools so it's always best to submit the admission and tuition assistance applications as soon as possible.

7. What should you do if your child has been accepted to a school but you don't know the funding amount that may be provided?

Not to worry, if your child was accepted to a school before it holds its first Tuition Management Committee Review meeting, schools will usually extend an acceptance deadline until one-week after a family is informed of a funding amount. Let's say, for example, that your child is accepted to a school in September and the Tuition Management Committee doesn't begin reviewing files until December, your child's acceptance deadline may be postponed until one-week after you learn of the funding amount so that you can make an informed decision.

8. How is the amount of assistance determined?

For schools using Apple Financial Services, a thorough review of a family's finances is undertaken. Their calculations consider gross income, number and type(s) of vehicle, number of properties, non-taxable income, assets, liabilities, family size, the number of children in tuition paying educational institutions below the post-graduate level, and situations where the income level does not support the spending level, among other items. It will be helpful to know that included in the calculation is an allowance for basic living expenses and taxes.

Upon completion of their independent analysis, Apple Financial Services provides schools with a recommended level of funding. Following that, schools review the data provided, along with lifestyle choices (e.g., vehicle purchases, renovations, vacations, etc.) in order to determine an assistance amount. For example, when a family opts to purchase a luxury vehicle or undertake an expensive home renovation, funding levels may be impacted. While schools aren't in a position to determine how a family spends their hard-earned money, when stewarding donor funds, schools aren't in a position to support or offset spending associated with luxury goods.

9. What if I'm divorced, separated or in a common-law relationship?

You'll find that many schools, absent of a court document specifying responsibility for educational expenses, require that both parents of a student, regardless of marital status, submit an application for financial assistance.

While it can be uncomfortable to be asked for a court document, it's standard practice when parents are divorced or separated and helps to ensure that each family is treated equitably.

10. What happens if one or both divorced parents have remarried?

In cases of remarriage, it's not unusual for all parents to be required—biological or step—to provide their financial details in the application for assistance. In the case of a step-parent, schools will typically consider obligations they have toward their biological children, should they have children from a prior relationship.

11. Are both parents expected to work in order to contribute to educational costs?

Providing that there isn't an extenuating obligation or circumstance (e.g., care for an elderly parent or ill family member, personal health concerns, etc.) preventing a parent from working, you'll likely find that schools expect both parents to work. Oftentimes, when a parent chooses to be under or unemployed, their application is adjusted accordingly. For example, schools may factor in a minimum wage salary for the stay at home spouse and subtract this from the offer of financial assistance.

12. Can I take a vacation if my family is receiving tuition assistance?

Traveling is an incredible way to strengthen family bonds, learn more about local and world history, be exposed to different perspectives and expand your worldview—not to mention relax! Depending on the size of your family, many schools allow for between \$5,000 to \$10,000 to be spent on vacation and travel.

13. Is tuition assistance continued, on an annual basis, following enrolment?

A family's financial situation can vary considerably from year to year. As a result, most schools will require families to complete a new tuition assistance application annually. While there is no guarantee of future funding, once a family is receiving tuition assistance, they will receive funding of a similar amount in future years, providing that their financial situation remains materially unchanged. With few exceptions, when schools provide funding, they are making a commitment to the student and their family until the student receives their diploma on graduation day.

In cases where a family experiences unexpected financial hardship, more assistance may be granted. Conversely, if a family's financial situation improves or new information comes to light, funding support may be reduced or eliminated. That said, increases or decreases in assistance don't occur mid-year; therefore, applications for assistance must be provided before the start of a year. Schools send out reminders to returning families to reapply for support each year—to help make sure that no one misses a deadline.

14. Are tuition assistance amounts tied to a student's enrolment status?

Funding amounts are based upon a student's enrolment status (i.e., day or boarding). This is important to know if your child changes enrollment status—from one year to the next—from boarding to day or vice-versa.

Some schools also offer merit-based awards, often referred to as scholarships or simply, awards. Occasionally, these awards are tied to financial need, as well. As such, a school may also alter the amount of a merit-based award if a student's enrollment status changes.

15. Does applying for tuition assistance impact a school's admission decision?

No. It's been our experience that, within Canada, an application for admission is treated separately from an application for tuition assistance. In this way, a family's ability to contribute to school costs does not influence an enrollment decision. That said, there may be instances when a student is accepted and the school is not in a position to meet a family's identified financial need.

Schools look to partner with families that share similar values. The partnership is seen as reciprocal. Schools aim to assist deserving families and, through their efforts in and out of the classroom, students contribute to the betterment of the school community.

16. How might a school respond when a family owns multiple properties?

While receiving tuition assistance, it is understood that families will not purchase additional real estate (e.g., rental properties, cottages, etc.). Remember, schools are working to stretch their budgets to assist as many deserving families as possible. If a family decides to purchase an additional property while receiving assistance, it is fair to assume that the family no longer requires financial support.

This same approach applies when a family decides to undertake a major renovation to a home – above and beyond regular maintenance (e.g., updating roofing, HVAC).

17. How do school's feel about families making contributions to their retirement savings while receiving tuition assistance?

Most schools will appreciate the importance of saving for retirement; however, when a family intends to contribute a RRSP amount above and beyond what may be considered reasonable—based upon a family's income and prior savings, many schools will expect a portion of the funds set aside for retirement savings to be directed towards tuition and incidental fees.

18. If I've submitted an application to Apple Financial Services, how will I know if a school has received my reviewed file?

Apple Financial Services provides you with the ability to review the status of your application (e.g. In Progress, Awaiting Analysis, Complete, etc.). When the status of your application reads 'Analysis Complete', the school has received the Apple Financial Services report.

19. Do families have to repay tuition assistance?

No. These awards are grants, not loans. If, at some future date, your family's financial situation improves, you may consider making a donation to the school's tuition assistance program or endowment to help enable other deserving students to attend the institution.

20. Is it possible for a student to receive both a need and merit-based award?

Many schools offer students both need (i.e., bursary/tuition assistance) and merit (scholarship/award) based funding. That said, the total amount of funding won't likely exceed the need of a family. For example, if a family requires \$10,000 of funding, they may receive a \$5,000 need-based and \$5,000 merit-based award. They wouldn't for example, receive \$10,000 of need-based funding and then an additional \$5,000 in merit-based aid. In this way, schools are stewarding their operational and donor funding responsibly.

21. Is tuition refundable?

In the event that a child needs to withdraw from school the majority of independent schools do not offer tuition refunds. Schools do, however, often recommend or require families to purchase tuition refund insurance. You're encouraged to contact each individual school to learn more about their tuition refund insurance program.

22. Will my tuition assistance information remain confidential?

Schools accredited by [Canadian Accredited Independent Schools \(CAIS\)](http://www.caiss.ca) take their responsibility to maintain confidentiality over all financial information and records seriously. In the same way, parents are also expected to keep their tuition assistance amounts confidential and not discuss them with other families.

On occasion, families have been known to share tuition assistance amounts with friends, family and colleagues. Unfortunately, this can create confusion amongst families applying for assistance.

There are times when a family may learn of a friends' assistance amount and approximate income and make assumptions as to the amount of aid they might expect to receive. It's fair to assume that very few people know of any family's complete financial picture. The reality is that there are a number of factors influencing the amount of funding a family receives, well beyond salary.

Ultimately, it's good to know that schools work diligently to support families that require support and equally as hard to ensure that they steward donor funds responsibly. There may come a time when you decide to contribute to a school's endowment to support tuition assistance and it's understood that you would want your investment in others to be allocated in a manner that assists the greatest number of, and most deserving students.

We hope that you found this guide helpful. If you have any questions about the tuition management process at LCS or the school in general, please contact us at admissions@lcs.on.ca.

We look forward to hearing from you!

The LCS Tuition Management Committee