

ACCESS, AFFORDABILITY, INCLUSION AND SUCCESS
An Independent School Path To Reflecting Today's, and Tomorrow's, America

It is understandable that most independent schools serve a large majority of wealthy families, a small number of poor families, and few in between, and that the economic distribution of independent school communities is often described as “bi-modal,” or shaped “like a barbell.” This is true because of the limited amount of financial aid generally available and each school’s desire to direct that assistance in ways that have maximum impact on students’ lives. Hence, the bulk of financial aid budgets is devoted to the most needy families.

Thanks to its 112-year history of being accessible to students from all walks of life, including 77 years of being tuition-free, Lick-Wilmerding High School enjoys the legacy, the resources and the strategic resolve to push the limits on what it can mean to be a truly accessible independent school. Today, 23% of L-W’s operating budget is devoted to Flexible Tuition, 42% of its families benefit from the school’s *Flexible Tuition Program*, 40% of its students matriculate from public and parochial schools, 50% of its students identify as being students of color, and its student population of 425 hails from over 60 Bay Area middle schools.

One thing we have learned during my two decades as Lick’s head is that language of discourse really matters – especially when talking about accessibility. Based on feedback I received from parents during my first year at Lick (1988-1989), we have, for the past eighteen years, eschewed the use of the term, “financial aid,” in favor of “flexible tuition.” The reason is very straightforward. We have been told repeatedly that it feels much more welcoming for a prospective family to hear, “Tuition next year will range between \$1,000 and \$28,980, depending on your family’s ability to pay,” than to hear, “Tuition next year is going to be \$28,980, BUT we have a good deal of financial aid.” This alternative language was prompted by a father at a town meeting I hosted those many years ago. He said, “Al, I don’t care how much financial aid you have; I am never going to ask for it. To me ‘financial aid’ sounds like a handout and would make me feel like a second class citizen.”

Another thing we have learned is that providing access to less-than-affluent families is not, in the end, about the school “doing good.” It is, instead, about enriching the learning and living environment for all of our students. Every student and her/his family bring a special set of gifts to contribute to the mosaic of the school community. Diversity, whether economic, racial/ethnic, educational preparation or neighborhood is, in the end, a vehicle for introducing students to experiences, understandings, ways of thinking and ways of being that are different from their own.

At the beginning of my first year teaching in an independent school (1969-1970!), an older friend who was familiar with the independent school world chided me, “Are you sure you want to devote your career to helping rich kids learn how to stay ahead?” Another fortuitous “learning” for me these past two decades is that the greater the diversity of a school’s student body, beginning with economic diversity, the broader the band of teacher backgrounds that will be attracted to

the school. Teachers are, on the whole, an idealistic lot and are ideologically most comfortable serving students from across the economic spectrum. In addition, those teachers who are of color, who come from modest means or from public school backgrounds are also more likely to find peace in the independent school world if they encounter students and families like themselves on a daily basis.

L-W's recent twenty-year journey through the diversity labyrinth can be traced by following the evolution of its board's standing committee devoted to this realm. Looking back, I see that the name of this committee has morphed to reflect the changing foci of its work about every seven years. For the first chapter, roughly 1988-1995, we referred to it as the *Access and Affordability Committee*. Our primary concern during these years was to develop a flexible tuition distribution formula, and to provide sufficient funding, to ensure that we would be able to sustain the school's historic level of economic diversity. Most important was to make certain that our families would robustly represent the full continuum of economic circumstances, especially seeing that the middle class would continue to be fully present. Our underlying premise, which has been born out over the years, was that it is middle class students and families who provide a literal and metaphorical bridge between the most, and least, affluent members of our community.

Access and Affordability

Our first major challenge was to create, and then to adhere to, what we called our "1-1/2 X" formula, whereby the annual flexible tuition budget would increase 1.5 times the difference between inflation and the percentage of tuition increase. (i.e. if inflation for a given year is 3%, and tuition is increasing by 5%, the flexible tuition budget must increase by 6%.)⁽¹⁾ This formulation was driven by our understanding that, should tuition and the flexible tuition budget increase at the same rate, there would be insufficient funds to support families on the margin who fall into the need category in light of increased tuition. Were we to lose these families, middle class representation would shrink, and our school would become less economically diverse.

Given that we knew little about the income distribution of our families who did not apply for flexible tuition, we for several years asked all of our families to anonymously submit a "*financial circumstances questionnaire*." Our particular purpose was to track the number of middle class families in our community. We usually experienced about a 45% return rate and presume that our most affluent families were least likely to complete the survey. The lack of precision of this instrument notwithstanding, we did in the early '90's note a worrying trend suggesting that a middle class dip was beginning to develop. As a result, we altered our flexible tuition distribution formula, which appears to have corrected the problem. "*Affording Lick-Wilmerding*," found in the admissions section of the L-W website, provides information about the *Flexible Tuition Program* and alludes to the related brochure provided in the admissions packet.⁽²⁾ The graphs below⁽³⁾ also demonstrate that we have, over the years, been able to keep families across the economic continuum "in play."

Access and Inclusive Community

While our eye was primarily on the prize of access and affordability during those early years, we found ourselves also being increasingly drawn to the other side of the access equation: inclusion. It is one thing to open a school's doors to larger numbers of traditionally atypical independent school students; it is quite another to develop a culture that allows these students and their families to feel fully welcome and for these students to be able to bring their whole selves to school each day. During our *VISION 2002* strategic planning process, which began in 1995, we decided to change the *Access and Affordability Committee* to the *Access and Inclusive Community Committee*. This name change was intended to reflect the deep and systematic work we had begun to do to approach the day when every student and family would feel "equally cared for, equally cared about and equally celebrated." While these words roll trippingly off the tongue, the reality is much more difficult to realize.

There were many dimensions to the inclusive community challenge, beginning with the relational, the interpersonal and the intrapersonal (see our then-Dean of Multicultural Affairs, Ilana Kaufman's, Summer 2003 Independent School Magazine article, "Directing Diversity: Advice for Schools and Diversity Directors"). But there were structural innovations that were also essential, such as incorporating virtually all student expenses (textbooks, yearbook, etc.) into tuition (leading to the end of extra fees) so that these financial burdens would be mitigated by Flexible Tuition. We also committed to providing Flexible Tuition dollars to assist with the few remaining "extras," like foreign language trips and the Prom. Similarly, we redesigned our annual fundraiser so that its cost would no longer exclude a major portion of our community. In doing so, we needed to accept the fact that community building was a higher priority than raising money. As a result, the former dinner/live auction format transitioned to our annual "Culture Jam," which features food, festivity, a silent auction with something for everyone and parent/faculty/staff performances.

Access and Success

Somewhere along the way, probably around the turn of the Millennium, we determined to once again change the name of our diversity-related board committee, this time from *Access and Inclusive Community* to *Access and Success*. While less lyrical to the ear, the notion of access and success was intended to convey our increasing understanding of the academic challenges faced by less-than-privileged students and/or those who were previously unfamiliar with what an independent school is and how it operates. While such students are every bit as bright as their independent school-trained peers, and arrive at Lick boasting straight-A's from their public or parochial middle schools, they have generally not benefited from the same level of preparation as students who have previously been immersed in independent schools. Over the years, we have become increasingly intentional about designing ways to level the playing field for these students and developing ways to approach the teaching of all of our students as the unique and complex individuals they truly are.

Viewing our school through the access and success lens led us to create our *Learning Strategies Center*, directed by a learning specialist. In addition to

performing preliminary screening for learning differences and working closely with students with special learning challenges (and their teachers), he also plays a leading role in making an appreciation of metacognition pervasive at our school. To the extent that we succeed in helping all of our students to “learn how they learn,” we empower them for a lifetime and also deepen their appreciation for how other people learn, and take in the world, differently from they. Simultaneously, we developed our “Triple S” (*Student Support Services*) Team, which is comprised of our dean of students, class deans, learning specialist, counselor and director of multicultural programs. This group meets regularly to discuss and develop intervention or support plans for students who appear to be struggling – academically, socially, emotionally or culturally.

The expansion and central purpose of student affinity clubs has also been important in providing sanctuaries and support systems for students from widely varying backgrounds. This, of course, suggests the most effective palliative of all – to have a large enough critical mass of each “variety” of student, and staff member, so that students, their families and teachers see others like themselves within the school community.

If economic diversity is the hardest of the “diversities” to acknowledge and discuss, the issue of students being “differently prepared” runs a very close second in the independent school world. Given that we have 700 eighth graders applying for 100 ninth grade seats each year, we could easily fill our school with only the best and brightest, from the most culturally privileged backgrounds and with the most excellent of K-8 preparation. We choose, however, to build our entering classes in a different way. One of our emeritus trustees and former board chair often remarks that independent school faculties have the opportunity “to serve the easiest students in the world to teach in nearly ideal teaching conditions.” Similarly, a former Lick history department chair, who now teaches in a public high school in Racine, Wisconsin, recently wrote to me that her new colleagues, having heard of her experiences at our school, often refer to Lick as “OZ.” It is clearly difficult for them to imagine teaching in such a Nirvana as we experience in independent schools.

The reality, then, is that an independent school can only aspire to, and succeed at, serving a differently-diverse student body if its faculty is willing to work harder and work differently, in more creative and flexible ways. The first part of this collegial challenge is for each teacher to be enthused about understanding the very real differences that characterize students coming from dissimilar backgrounds. As we have found, the result is an imperative to begin to think differently about teaching and learning. The presenting diversity of student needs compels teachers to develop personalized and multimodal approaches to teaching that may have appeared unnecessary in a more homogeneous school. What soon becomes apparent, however, is that such an angle of vision on teaching ultimately serves all students, including the most privileged and most exquisitely prepared, better. We have found that most teachers are “up for” this challenge because their deep-seated goal is not simply to “help rich kids learn to stay ahead” or to take credit for successfully funneling the best, brightest and most privileged to their preordained societal positions. Instead, they yearn to

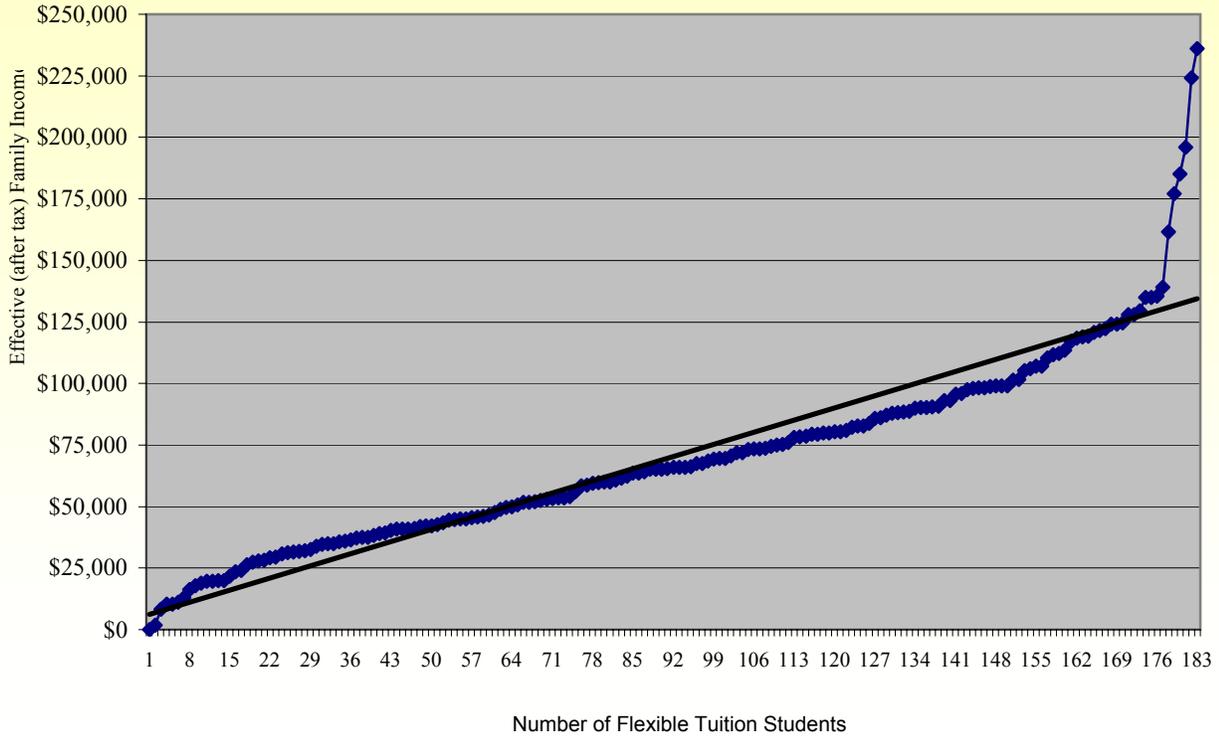
authentically be value-added in the growth and development of all of their students – to accept them for who they are, where they are and where they come from, and to shepherd them toward their most lofty aspirations.

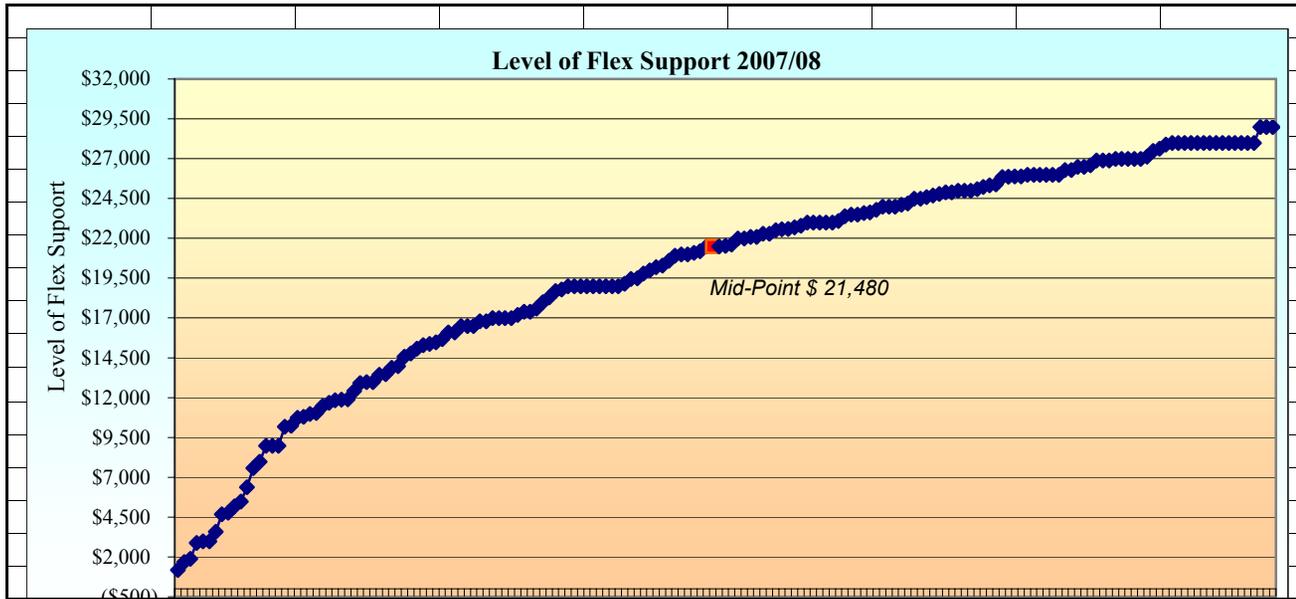
The question of financial aid in independent schools, then, relates to much more than whether schools allocate 8%, 10% or 12% of their operating budgets for this purpose. As I learned early on as a new head, a school's budget is a direct reflection of its values. It is also only a starting point, as the daily experiences of students and families are the sum total of school culture, degree of personalized and differentiated instruction, and both the kind and quality of adult:student relationships. While few schools currently have the capacity to devote 23% of their annual budgets to Flexible Tuition, there are many things they can do to make their campuses and their cultures welcoming to less-than-privileged students and families. As their non-traditional student and teacher numbers increase, they will also find that their reputation as a truly inclusive community will climb. They will further discover that their fundraising prospects grow as their school becomes recognized throughout their community as a place that serves young people from all walks of life.

Schools like ours make this commitment to inclusion because we believe we have a moral imperative to do so and because it enriches our learning communities. But, there is also an enlightened self-interest dimension that resembles putting positive karma into the universe. As a school becomes known as a truly meritocratic place that embraces students and families from across the economic continuum, it is soon seen as a good and faithful neighbor that enhances the life of its community at every level, rather than being viewed as a bastion of privilege. To my mind, there is no more powerful way to touch and to shape a school's soul than to open its doors widely and to, as a consequence, become the embodiment of the very future we imagine and hope for.

⁽¹⁾ Rick England, L-W's CFO who has masterfully shaped and guided our Flexible Tuition Program for the past fifteen years, notes that "We have found that in recent years, as the ratio between what flex families and full-tuition families pay has changed (from a 2:1 ratio closer to 10:7) the 1.5X formula isn't as accurate." Another way to explain this would be to say: "as the average level of support for flex families has moved from 66% (2:1) closer to 70% (10:7) the 1.5X formula isn't as accurate." Therefore, in recent years we have adopted the following approach, which is very close in results: multiply the current average level of contribution by flex families by the rate of inflation; then subtract this inflation adjusted figure from the new tuition to determine the average level of support. Our basic assumption here is that flex family income increases at the rate of inflation; therefore, if tuition is increasing at a higher rate, the funding portion per family is actually increasing at a higher percentage." Or, more simply stated: "To determine the average funding level for the up-coming budget year we increase the current average flex family contribution by the inflation rate - then subtract this figure from the new tuition to determine the average level of funding."

Flex Families Effective Income 2007/08







how flexible tuition
can make a difference



LICK-WILMERDING
18 HIGH SCHOOL 25

our unique historical mission



James Lick and Jellis Wilmerding wanted a school that would be accessible to students from all walks of life. In fact, Lick-Wilmerding was tuition-free for the first 77 of its 112 years. While tuition income is now necessary, L-W's mission remains unchanged—to serve a highly qualified and diverse student body.

This commitment to inclusion is an essential element of L-W's distinctive educational program and atmosphere. The school's endowment earnings are dedicated almost exclusively to making the school more financially accessible. As a result, 40% of families enrolled in 2007-2008 school year participate in L-W's Flexible Tuition Program.

"Many parents fear that they cannot afford private schools because of high tuition...a few private schools, like Lick-Wilmerding High School in San Francisco, have adopted indexed or flexible tuition plans that avoid the distribution of direct financial aid. The school adopted a flexible tuition program that assigns a sliding scale of tuition based on parental need."

—New York Times, Sunday, March 3, 2002



WHAT IS FLEXIBLE TUITION?

We recognize that many families who might not expect to be eligible for "financial aid" still qualify for a tuition break. The Flexible Tuition Program allows families to apply for reduced tuition, which, for the 2007-2008 school year, ranges from \$1000 to \$27,980. Full tuition is \$28,980. The school encourages families to apply if they think they may qualify. L-W is determined to keep the school accessible to families from a wide range of economic backgrounds, so we offer a wide range of tuitions, which include fees and expenses for books and supplies.

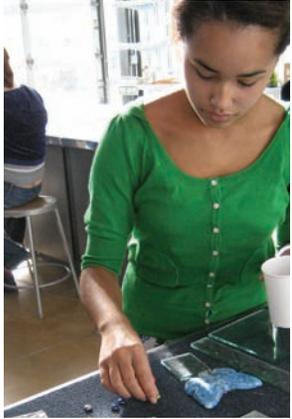
ARE YOU ELIGIBLE FOR FLEXIBLE TUITION?

The complex formula used to calculate the exact Flexible Tuition level considers many factors that affect a family's ability to pay. It is impossible for the school, or for a family, to determine the level of tuition for which they qualify unless the entire Parent Financial Statement (PFS) application is completed. In mid-December 2007, the L-W Admissions Office sends out our Flexible Tuition application, which includes the PFS. The form can also be found at www.nais.org.

An application for Flexible Tuition does not affect a student's admission selection. The Flexible Tuition Committee calculates Flexible Tuitions and operates separately from the admissions process.

CASE STUDY This is an example of a family of four, with two children attending a tuition-charging school. The combined income of the parents is \$154,000. The family owns a home with a net equity value of \$293,000. State and federal taxes amounted to \$43,000. There were no unusual expenses. According to the School and Student Service for Financial Aid (SSS) calculation, which is adjusted for the Bay Area cost of living, the estimated family contribution for educational expenses is \$17,214 or \$8,607 per child.

• Income	\$154,000
• Net Assets	\$293,000
• Taxes	-\$43,000
• Unusual Expenses	\$0
• SSS calculation for educational expenses	\$17,214
• L-W Flexible Tuition per student	\$ 8,607



Unfortunately, we do not have the resources to offer Flexible Tuition to every student who qualifies for both admission and a reduced tuition. A student may be admitted to the school but wait-listed for Flexible Tuition.

A copy of your 2007 federal income tax return must be submitted to the Admissions Office by February 15, 2008 so that Flexible Tuition award information can be sent with the admissions decision letters in mid-March.

DEFINING THE FLEXIBLE TUITION RANGE

Income means pre-tax earnings from wages and business investments. The formula that determines a family's ability to pay considers different expenses than the IRS uses to calculate taxable income. Therefore, all tax schedules must be submitted. If two parents reside in separate households, the income and expenses of both households are considered in the calculation.

ASSETS If a family has major assets, savings, or investments, the formula computes an income supplement that is added to the gross income. This income supplement varies, but usually net assets of \$50,000 or less will have little impact on the computation. Home equity is based not on market value but on the price paid for the home and the years it has been owned. Generally this will undervalue the equity. The income assumed to be generated by assets also takes into account parent age, leaving retirement savings intact. For most, but not all, applicants, the additional income inferred from assets is a small factor. However, if the student has assets (savings, trust accounts, etc.), the formula includes them in calculating the amount the parents can pay.

FAMILY SIZE Living allowance estimates are based on the number of people in a student's household(s). Income is adjusted by expenditures for housing, food, or medical needs to obtain the available discretionary income.

UNUSUAL EXPENSES The formula for determining the parent contribution for educational expenses takes into



account certain "unusual expenses" such as care of an aging grandparent, parent educational loan payments, legal fees, closing costs, and other expenses listed in the application instructions for the Flexible Tuition Program.

OTHER DISCRETIONARY COSTS The formula expects a family to allocate only a portion of discretionary income to tuition payments.

NUMBER OF PRIVATE SCHOOL OR COLLEGE TUITIONS CURRENTLY BEING SUPPORTED The ability to pay is divided by the number of tuition-paying family members at any elementary school, high school, or college (including any adult students) to determine the Flexible Tuition rate for each student.

DIVORCED, SEPARATED, OR NEVER MARRIED PARENTS Flexible Tuition is based on the family's ability to pay as demonstrated by the information submitted in the Parent Financial Statement (PFS). Both custodial and non-custodial parents (regardless of legal settlements) who are divorced, separated, or never married are required to submit the PFS. In exceptional cases where one parent cannot comply, the custodial parent should submit a written explanation. Lack of information from either parent may significantly affect the Flexible Tuition amount.

The Flexible Tuition ranges shown in the case studies are based on calculations made for families who applied to L-W, although not all were accepted or chose to attend.

CASE STUDY In this example of a family of four (two parents with two children attending tuition-charging schools), the parents' income is \$95,000. The family owns a home with a net equity of \$205,000. State and federal taxes amounted to \$22,000. According to the School and Services for Financial Aid (SSS) calculation, which is adjusted for the Bay Area cost of living, the estimated family contribution for educational expenses is \$7,500, or \$3,750 per child.

- Income \$95,000
- Net Assets \$205,000
- Taxes -\$22,000
- Unusual Expenses \$0
- SSS calculation for educational expense \$7,500
- L-W Flexible Tuition per student \$3,750

frequently asked questions about flexible tuition



DOES EVERY L-W FAMILY SUBMIT FINANCIAL FORMS?

No, only those families who feel they are unable to pay full tuition and want to apply for a reduced tuition amount need to submit the forms.

WHAT KIND OF ECONOMIC SITUATION QUALIFIES A FAMILY FOR ACCEPTANCE INTO THE PROGRAM?

There is a wide range of families who qualify, from those who can afford only minimal tuition to those who can afford almost full tuition. In calculating each family's ability to pay, the school considers many factors.

WHEN WILL A FAMILY LEARN IF IT HAS BEEN OFFERED FLEXIBLE TUITION?

Admission acceptance letters sent on March 10, 2008, will include a separate response regarding Flexible Tuition. Responses to families will fall into three categories: an offer of Flexible Tuition; notification that the family does not qualify for Flexible Tuition; or notice that the family is wait-listed for Flexible Tuition. A wait-list designation means that a family will be considered for Flexible Tuition if additional funding becomes available.

ARE ALL STUDENTS WHO ARE OFFERED ADMISSION ALSO OFFERED FLEXIBLE TUITION IF THEIR PARENTS QUALIFY?

Unfortunately, no. The number of accepted students whose families qualify for Flexible Tuition usually exceeds the school's budget. The school does not guarantee funding for, nor is able to fund, all deserving students. Most years, Flexible Tuition is offered to a high percentage of accepted students whose families demonstrate need.

DOES AN APPLICATION FOR FLEXIBLE TUITION AFFECT A STUDENT'S CHANCES OF ADMISSION TO THE SCHOOL?

A family's financial need does not affect a student's acceptance by the school. Flexible Tuition is determined separately.



IF A NINTH GRADER'S FAMILY PARTICIPATES IN FLEXIBLE TUITION, DOES THE STUDENT STAY IN THE PROGRAM UNTIL GRADUATION?

Provided family circumstances remain the same and the school's resources can continue to support the program to the same extent, the school intends to fund a student's L-W education for four years. To continue in the program, the family must reapply each year.

IF A FAMILY DOES NOT RECEIVE FLEXIBLE TUITION ONE YEAR, CAN IT REAPPLY THE FOLLOWING YEAR?

Although a family is welcome to reapply or apply for the first time for Flexible Tuition in any year, the school is seldom able to accept families into the program after ninth grade.

WHAT IS TUITION FOR THE 2008-2009 SCHOOL YEAR?

Tuition and payment dates, established in late January, are included in the acceptance letter mailed in March. As a reference, the tuition for 2007-2008 is \$28,980. Each year, tuition is affected by factoring in the increase of the Bay Area cost of living. Two payment plans are available: monthly or three times a year.

WHO HANDLES QUESTIONS REGARDING FLEXIBLE TUITION?

General questions about Flexible Tuition should be addressed to the Admissions Office at 415.337.9990 or lwadmit@lwhs.org. In addition, a Flexible Tuition Workshop is scheduled for Monday, January 7, 2008, at 7:00 pm at Lick-Wilmerding's Ehrer Theatre.

CASE STUDY In a family of three, with only one child attending a tuition charging -school, the combined income of the parents is \$149,700. The family rents and has investments of \$104,000 and home equity of \$240,000. There are no unusual expenses. State and federal taxes amounted to \$43,700. According to the School and Student Services for Financial Aid (SSS) calculation, which is adjusted for the Bay Area cost of living, the estimated family contribution for educational expenses is \$19,255.

• Income	\$149,700
• Net Assets	\$344,000
• Taxes	-\$43,700
• L-W Flexible Tuition	\$19,255

2007-2008 FLEXIBLE TUITION | FAMILY INCOME GROUPS

Family Income Range	No. of Students
<\$40,000	12
\$40,000 - \$60,000	26
\$60,000 - \$80,000	13
\$80,000 - \$100,000	26
\$100,000 - \$120,000	32
\$120,000 - \$140,000	18
\$140,000 - \$160,000	15
\$160,000 - \$180,000	7
\$180,000 - \$200,000	8
\$200,000>	12

HOW TO APPLY FOR FLEXIBLE TUITION

Parents who wish to apply should complete the online Flexible Tuition application request form at www.lwhs.org/admissions or complete and return the enclosed card (just add postage). Flexible Tuition application packets will be sent in mid-December. They will include information on how to apply, a Parents Financial Statement (PFS), the 4506 tax form, a booklet about the Student Scholarship Service, and a checklist for L-W Flexible Tuition deadlines. **The PFS must be submitted to School and Student Service for Financial Aid by January 25, 2008. A copy of your 2007 tax forms (1040 and 4506) are required and must be submitted to L-W by February 15, 2008.**

The Lick-Wilmerding students pictured in this brochure do not necessarily represent students receiving Flexible Tuition. Photo credits here...

