



## Guide to Financial Aid at Westridge

Westridge School is committed to enrolling a strong, dynamic student body that reflects the cultural and socioeconomic diversity of the Greater Los Angeles area. To make Westridge accessible to qualified girls, over \$4 million in financial aid has been allocated to approximately one quarter of Westridge families this past year.

In this document, you will find important information about financial aid and financial considerations at Westridge. We expect that all families who believe they may need financial aid at any point during their time at Westridge will read this document so that both the school and the families can operate from a place of shared understanding, language, and expectations.

### **Table of Contents**

- Need-based Financial Aid
- Financial Considerations and Expectations for Families
- Calculating and Determining Awards
- Two Households or Single Parent Families
- Admission and Financial Aid
- Annual Process and Timeline for Financial Aid
- Confidentiality
- Supplemental Fees and Costs Above Tuition

### **Need-based Financial Aid**

All of Westridge's financial aid is need-based and in the form of awards that do not require repayment. Westridge does not offer merit-based scholarships for academics, athletics, or other endeavors. All awards are based on the demonstrated financial need of the families.

### **Financial Considerations and Expectations for Families**

The primary responsibility for financing a student's education costs lies with the family. It is the school's expectation that parents have prioritized the financial responsibility of an independent school education and pay the educational costs for their children to the extent they are financially able.

- Westridge strives to maintain stability and equity in the financial aid program by allocating financial aid thoughtfully throughout the grade levels. Because of this, if a family believes they may need financial aid at any point during their time at Westridge, they must apply for aid at the time of admission.
- If financial aid is not applied for at the time of admission, it is assumed that the family is capable of covering all tuition and program costs for the duration of their time at Westridge. Westridge will not consider a financial aid application for a family if they did not apply at the time of admission unless there is a significant and unexpected change in the family's financial circumstances.

- If a grandparent, family member, or other external support contributes to a child's tuition, it is assumed that this support will continue through the duration of the child's enrollment at Westridge. A change in this family arrangement will not be viewed as a change in a family's financial circumstances nor their eligibility for financial aid.
- Westridge will not subsidize with financial aid a parent's voluntary reduction of income, i.e., voluntarily terminating or reducing employment, separating from employment to become self-employed or start a new business, or enrolling in college or graduate school. It is assumed that a parent who has made this choice has done so without depending heavily on family resources that could otherwise be directed toward their child's tuition.
- Westridge will not subsidize with financial aid a parent who is under-employed or unemployed. The school will impute a minimum income for each non-working parent, unless there is a child under the age of six living in the home who is not enrolled in school full-time or if the parent is the primary caregiver of a child or parent that requires constant care.
- Westridge will not subsidize with financial aid the tuition costs for siblings at other schools, including colleges and universities. A family must apply for, and most likely receive, aid at all tuition-charging schools to be eligible for financial aid at Westridge.
- In order to support socio-economic diversity across the school, Westridge limits the amount of financial aid awarded to any one family, and therefore, will only support two students from any family with very few exceptions.

### **Calculating and Determining Awards**

The school understands the sacrifices that parents make to pay for an independent school education. Factors such as family size, number of children in tuition-charging schools, and cost of living expenses are all taken into consideration when determining a family's level of need. The school uses consistent guidelines to evaluate financial aid requests and reviews the income, expense, asset, and liability data presented by each family. Awards are based on a family's ability to pay, which includes their ability to draw from other financial resources such as rental properties, liquid investments, and 529 plans.

While Clarity, our third-party financial aid system, collects the required documentation and computes a suggested award, the school audits each financial aid application and makes financial aid decisions based on the information provided and other personal information shared by the families. Once a preliminary award is calculated, the school considers individual circumstances in determining the final award.

Examples of circumstances where the school may make accommodations and adjust the suggested award include, but are not limited to:

- Involuntary job loss or unexpected and significant reductions in income
- Medical conditions requiring significant uncovered care or treatment
- Care of an aging and/or disabled parent or other family member
- Temporary but severe financial difficulties

The school typically will not consider adjusting a suggested award or subsidize tuition for reasons such as, but not limited to:

- Voluntary reductions in income, such as retirement, going back to school, changing careers, choosing to start a business, and other personal choices
- Lifestyle choices that utilize resources that could be used for educational costs (expensive cars, homes, vacations, extra-curriculars, etc.)
- Accumulation of debt, unless related to items outside of the family's control (as noted above)
- Parent student loans

### **Two Household and Single Parent Families**

Financial aid applications must be submitted by both custodial and non-custodial parents. The Financial Aid Committee will consider the income and assets of all parents before making an award. In general, if one parent does not complete the financial aid application, the file is incomplete and will not be considered for aid. An exception to this would be if one parent has no contact with the family. In that case, the custodial parent should submit documentation from a third-party verifying this to be the case, such as a court decree, a letter from a school administrator, clergy, or other credible individual with knowledge of the situation.

If either parent is remarried or lives with a partner, the income and assets of this adult are considered. Marriage to, or cohabitation with, another adult by either parent creates a new family unit with new relationships. In such cases, the financial resources and responsibilities of the entire family unit, including stepparents and stepchildren, are viewed as relevant for purposes of calculating a family's level of need.

The school considers the obligations of each parent and their individual need in determining the aid award, but the school will not allocate the award on a proportional basis among the families involved.

### **Admission and Financial Aid**

Westridge offers financial assistance to families who meet both of the following criteria: (1) An academically strong student applicant who will make a significant contribution to the Westridge school community through her talents and personal attributes as determined by the Admission Committee, and (2) A demonstrated financial need as evaluated by the third-party system Clarity and the Westridge School Financial Aid Committee. The responsibility of evaluating financial need is taken very seriously, and substantial thought, care, and time is devoted to this process each year.

Admission and Financial Aid are two separate but interdependent processes that run concurrently. The Admission Committee evaluates candidates on the basis of their admission application without information regarding the financial need of families. However, Westridge has finite resources and the Financial Aid Committee is unable to offer financial aid to all applicants who meet our admissions criteria and qualify for need-based aid. If it is determined that Westridge cannot meet a family's demonstrated need, admission will not be offered to the applicant. Decisions in these circumstances are based on the relative strength of the applicant and the school's enrollment goals.

## **Annual Process and Timing for Financial Aid**

New families apply for financial aid at the same time as they apply for admission and must meet all published deadlines. Families will be given their financial aid award when they receive their offer of acceptance to the school. In general, the financial aid budget is fully awarded at the time admission offers are made in March, and it is unlikely that new applicant requests arriving after the financial aid deadline for prospective families will be accommodated due to budget restrictions.

Returning families receiving or requesting financial aid must apply for financial aid each year so the school may determine if there is continued need. Current families receive priority in the financial aid allocation process, but they must meet the early January deadline to do so. The Financial Aid Committee re-evaluates financial aid awards each year based on families' financial resources. Awarded families can expect continued support at a level that reflects their demonstrated financial need based on their Clarity application each year. The Financial Aid Committee may adjust its award accordingly should a family's financial circumstances change, e.g., job loss, employment change, or an increase in income or assets.

The Clarity application asks families to estimate income, expenses, assets, and liabilities for the current year. To help verify information provided in the financial aid application, Clarity will pull the previous year's tax returns and forms directly from the IRS with permission granted by the family. If a family estimates their income will change by more than 10% for the coming year, there will be a few additional income estimate questions.

## **Confidentiality**

Families can trust that all information provided through the financial aid process will be kept in confidence. In return, the school requires families to keep details of financial aid awards confidential. Each family has a unique set of circumstances and allowances that led to their final award which cannot be equally compared to the circumstances of other families. The giving and receiving of a financial award is a contract based on mutual trust and respect, which is essential to a positive relationship between the school and family. If a family chooses to make an award public, the school reserves the right to rescind the award in violation of this trust.

## **Supplemental Fees and Costs Above Tuition**

Westridge aims to ensure all students can fully participate and engage in the Westridge experience. To this end, financial assistance may be requested for costs above tuition for families receiving financial aid. Westridge seeks to partner with families and have an open dialogue about any areas of financial concern. Areas which are generally considered for additional assistance may be: the new student fee, academic and student life events, bus service, and Discovery Week (for grades 10-12). Aid is generally not given for uniforms, computer/laptop technology, books (Upper School only; books are provided for Lower and Middle School), or optional student travel opportunities. For grades 4-9, all costs associated with Discovery Week and Class Trips are covered by the trips fee found on the enrollment agreement. For grades 10-12, financial assistance may be requested for Discovery Week and is a separate process from financial aid for tuition.

Please feel free to email [financialaid@westridge.org](mailto:financialaid@westridge.org) with any questions you may have about our financial aid practices or procedures.