



St. Stephen Protomartyr School

Strategic Plan – 2025

Dear SSP Parish and School,

In 2023 our Board of Education (BOE) created and began implementing a five-year strategic plan to ensure that Saint Stephen Protomartyr Parish offers a Catholic school that is a thriving, welcoming, vibrant center for learning in South St. Louis for decades to come.

We created the strategic plan because the Archdiocese left decisions about St. Stephen's school in the hands of our parish leadership. The BOE saw in this exciting milestone an opportunity to incorporate our unique strengths and opportunities for a plan to sustain our school. We are two years into implementing the strategic plan and want to update our parish community on our Year 2 progress.

Finance, Marketing, Education, and Facilities Standing Committees Continue Work to Implement the Strategic Plan:

Each Committee has ongoing projects, and your involvement is always welcome. We encourage you to reach out to the BOE if you would like to lend a hand to one of the committees. Here is a quick look at each committee and its second year initiatives.

Committee	Purpose	Lead	Year 1 Initiatives
Finance	Scope and establish financial benchmarks for the strategic plan	Steve Bernstetter	• Examined school budget for potential cost savings • Worked with parish finance council to estimate future financial needs
Marketing	Create awareness of and promote SSP school to the broader community to grow enrollment	Phil Cervantes	• Continued promotion of school via signs, website, and social media • Advanced Ambassador Family Program • Established a relationship with Socially Inspired to improve our social media • Targeted marketing to our area
Education	Assist in identifying and shaping educational programs to enrich SSP school	Meghan Jendusa	• Recruit first volunteers to help students learn • Exit evaluations by pastor to learn about strengths and weakness of school
Facilities	Identify and scope potential opportunities for additional enrichment of SSP school environment by leveraging existing SSP community resources	Richie Nigro	• New plan for first floor to support Pre-K-2 opening fall 2026 • Ongoing work to add specialized education spaces to second floor

Our dedicated faculty have decided this year to give special attention to improving our student's academic performance. Armed with the data supplied by better and more frequent standardized testing, our homeroom teachers and learning center team plan to support student learning by interventions targeted to the needs and gifts of individual students, and also by school-wide curriculum improvements.

Goals and Accomplishments To-Date:

Growing Enrollment: Progress Despite Headwinds – As with last year, enrollment outcomes showed improvement from the years prior to the strategic plan. Before the strategic plan, K-8 enrollment declined by an average of 11 students each year. This year enrollment declined by 4 students (last year: decline by one student). We anticipated that this year might be a difficult year, as 24 students graduated from 8th grade. Pre-K enrollment declined by 1 student.

Our transfer enrollment supports our hope that we have made progress in spreading the good news about SSP and that enrollment can increase in the years ahead. Transfer enrollment measures the net change K-8 besides the yearly cycle of an 8th grade departing and a kindergarten class enrolling. Before the strategic plan, we, like other schools, would see on average three more children transfer out of our school than transferred in. This year, our transfer enrollment was +4. This was also an improvement from last year (+1). While the departure of a large 8th grade made numerical progress on enrollment difficult, and total K-8 enrollment declined from 161 to 157, we see signs that continuing effort by the BOE can bend the enrollment curve in the right direction.

Financial Sustainability: Looking to the Future – The SSP Finance Council recommended investing from Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24) through Fiscal Year 2028 (FY28) up to \$1,000,000 of our parish accumulated operating surplus to ensure the long-term future of our school. This is in alignment with other Archdiocesan schools, and the value to our parish in having a thriving, sustainable school justifies the expenditure. The Finance Council noted that the same value would not be present if it were a question of simply keeping the school open for a few more years. Our plan for our school is long-term. Success comes when our yearly parish investment in the school fits within the funds available after the parish provides for its other activities in service of our parish mission.

Currently we pay for the parish investment in the school from the \$1,000,000 set aside from our accumulated parish operating surplus, that is, funds we have on deposit with the Archdiocese because of stewardship in years past. For the final two years of the strategic plan, we estimate to have \$466,673 left of the initial \$1,000,000 commitment.

Year	School Operating Deficit	Fundraising	Parish Investment	Parish 5-Year Investment Budget Remaining
FY23*	\$255,887	\$77,728	\$178,159	Before Investment
FY24	\$165, 892	\$118,111	\$47,781	\$952,219
FY25	\$297,628	\$123,082	\$174,546	\$777,673
FY26 Projection	\$425,900	\$114,000	\$311,000	\$466,673

* Our school year aligns with our fiscal year; FY23 is the 2022–2023 school year

Additional Context on Parish Finances as They Relate to Our School:

- 1.Improvements to parish finances help our school sustainability. Our combined parish operations deficit for FY23 was \$334,227; FY24 was \$314,288, FY25 was \$65,000 (excluding a large bequest from the estate of Theresa Shurig), and FY26 is projected to be \$50,000 (excluding a large bequest from the estate of Don Occhi).
- 2.Donations to the Msgr. Vince Bommarito Scholarship Fund are steady, allowing us to continue these scholarships in the next year, helping many families offset the tuition increase.
- 3.Our school has capacity for more students, so if enrollment increases in the future, our financial sustainability will also improve.

Summary, Year 2:

The BOE believes that the progress made in the second year of our school strategic plan has laid the foundation for a successful completion of the school strategic plan in the next three years.

Exciting News for Year 3:

This year, we will continue to expand the efforts established in year two, detailed above. We will also:

- 1. Establish our Pre-K–2 classroom, extending our pipeline for K–8 enrollment.
- 2. Complete the renovation of the first and second floor of our school to support our Pre-K–2 classroom and the addition of specialized education spaces, such as a STEAM lab.
- 3. Evaluate our SSP summer camp and see how we can make it a long term success.

To keep you apprised of those who serve on our Board, here our the members: Cathy Drury (president), Richie Nigro (vice president), Dan Richter (secretary), Phil Cervantes, Ed Kuehner, Meghan Jendusa, Sara Dannan, Jenny Song, Laura Foizey, Steve Bernstetter, and Greg Sturgill (principal).

As we recommit ourselves to the vision of the 2023 Strategic Plan, we ask for your help. Please pray for our school, volunteer to help our students, and support us financially by tithing at SSP parish.

Yours in Jesus and Mary,
Father Aaron Nord