

Affirming our Values

While AMC support for Mennonite education expands beyond elementary and high school into college and seminary, the tension around the policy in effect since 2016 is centered primarily on K-12 education. Therefore, the focus of the *Student Aid Advisory Group* and of this interim policy is K-12 education. Our policy concerning college and seminary tuition support will remain the same, as well as our tithing support for minority students in college and seminary.

As we do the hard work of designing a Student Aid Policy that reflects the many diverse perspectives within the congregation, the *Student Aid Advisory Group* has found it helpful to name the values that they have heard throughout the process. A summary of these values can be found in the following affirmations. While not every member of AMC identifies with every value mentioned below, they represent a broad cross-section of the congregation.

Affirmations for Public Education

- An adequately funded public education system serves the common good and is a cornerstone of a democratic society. Its mission to tend to the education, development, and well-being of *all* children in our community – no matter their race, income, and ability – advances our biblical notion of justice. They also help students learn how to interact with and value a wide cross-section of the community. Few public institutions in our society have such an important and noble mandate.
- Public school teachers and staff are engaged in an important and difficult ministry. They serve our community and the country by working to ensure students of all backgrounds can learn and grow in safe, welcoming environments. We honor their dedication and their calling.
- Quality and equitable public education is being threatened by the Indiana state legislature which is inadequately funding public schools while expanding public funding for private schools which can set their own enrollment policies. These moves by the state (via school vouchers, property tax cuts, ...) make it harder for public schools to operate, undermine equal opportunity in education, and tend to disproportionately benefit wealthier families.

Affirmations for Bethany Christian Schools

- Mennonite education expands and enhances the educational opportunities for children by offering a Christ-centered, Anabaptist education – something public schools are forbidden to do – with a structure that may meet the needs of children who do not thrive in public schools. Its focus on academic excellence and Anabaptist values helps to instill Christ-centered values in the next generation, thus advancing the future health and vitality of the church.
- BCS teachers and staff are engaged in the difficult dual-ministry of academic formation and faith formation; preparing young people to both engage the world and be part of the church. They do this important work for less pay than those serving in public schools receive. We honor their dedication and their calling.
- Our support of BCS is connected to our hopes for the well-being of the church and for their students' spiritual formation. It is also connected to our desire to assist Assembly parents who choose this for their children but for whom tuition costs are a financial strain. While BCS cannot serve everyone, scholarship funds help make this option available to children from diverse economic backgrounds.

Proposed Student Aid Policy

College and Seminary Education

Assembly will provide 8% of base tuition for students attending Mennonite seminaries and colleges. College students may receive aid for no more than 8 semesters. Aid for minority students outside the congregation will total approximately 10% of total aid designated for college and seminary students. This money is channeled through the Mennonite Education Agency.

K-12 Education

We value the missions of both public schools and BCS, and lament that our state's policies have harmed public education and enlarged the sense that these two goods are pitted against each other. In response we propose the following K-12 education policy for our congregation:

1. **Education Needs for our K-12 students (General budget line item)**

- a. *AMC provides an Education Needs line-item in its annual budget from which any K-12 student in a covenanted family can apply for up to \$250, twice a year. These funds can be used for any educational need, including tutors, music lessons, choir fees, instrument purchases, or tuition.*
- a. *The amount budgeted would be \$5,000, and can be increased by request of the Student Aid Committee during budget build time in the Fall. (This amount is roughly equivalent to providing an average of \$90/year of support for each student in a covenanted family in 2026, but is a fixed amount to simplify the budgeting process.)*
- a. *The first deadline for applications is January 31st, and the second deadline is August 31st. A Student Aid Committee will review all requests and distribute 50% of the budgeted amount in February, and 50% in September among the requests received.*
- a. ***The spirit of this line-item is a needs-based honors system. We will not be asking people who are requesting this support to provide income information. The process for applying for these funds will be to fill out a form describing the need and the amount requested. The funding will be distributed in proportion to the requests received. So, for example, if \$3,000 of requests are received for a semester, and the budget for that semester is only \$2,500, each requester will receive 83% of what they requested.***

0. **School Support for K-12 Teachers and Staff (General budget line item)**

- a. *AMC provides a School Support Budget in its annual budget for teachers and staff working in K-12 schools. Any teacher or staff person within AMC can request or sponsor a request for a project or need in a school.*
- a. *The amount budgeted would be \$3,000 and can be adjusted by request of the Student Aid Committee during budget build time in the Fall.*
- a. *A Student Aid Committee would review the requests and distribute the money as they come in throughout the year. The Committee is also empowered to decide what to do with unused funds. Requests can be for any project or need within the educational context, including materials, supplies, training, equipment, events, clothing and food for students, etc.*

3. **Bethany Tuition Support Fund (Outside the budget)**

- a. *Given the high cost of tuition for those who choose to attend Bethany Christian Schools, an outside-the-budget Bethany Tuition Support Fund is available for AMC members to contribute to and request support from.*
- a. *Pledging for this fund will be done in the same Pledge Form that is used for the General Fund and 2% Fund every year. Once the pledges have been finalized, the Student Aid Committee will determine how much can be distributed to each BCS student in covenanted families for the following school year.*
- a. *The amount given to students in grades K-5 will be approximately half of the amount given to students in grades 6-12. Results from our recent questionnaire suggest that for 2026 we can raise approximately \$23,000, which means we would be able to provide approximately \$500 per student in grades K-5, and approximately \$1,100 per student in grades 6-12.*

FAQ

Why do we remove the support for BCS tuition from the General Budget and set up a separate outside-the-budget fund? Why can some money in the General Budget still be used for BCS tuition?

One of the main challenges with the policy in effect since 2016 is that there are strong, morally-rooted arguments for removing BCS tuition support from the General Budget (i.e. “I don’t want my tithe going to a cause that I believe is unjust – an educational institution that accepts school vouchers”) and strong morally-rooted arguments for keeping BCS tuition support within the General Budget (i.e. “I believe we, as a Mennonite community, should support K-12 Mennonite education regardless of education legislation”). In other words, for some, supporting BCS tuition from the General Budget is incongruent with their values; and for others, the prospect of NOT supporting BCS tuition from the General Fund is incongruent with their values. The compromise we came up with as an advisory group was to subscribe to the following principle: We want to support our students’ educational needs from the General Budget, whatever they may be, including tutoring, instruments, materials, educational fees, tuition, etc. All students in covenanted families (attending public or private schools or homeschooled) can apply for that help within the first month of each semester, once they have a better idea of what their needs will be, but there is a cap of \$250 per semester for each student. The roughly \$2,500-\$3,000 available per semester in the budget will be distributed among the requests received, so students might not get the full amount they ask for.

This budget line item opens the door for all covenanted families in need within the congregation to receive support for the educational activities that are important to them. In the case of BCS students, however, receiving \$100-\$500 (depending on how many requests are received) per year from this line item is helpful, but significantly less than the support they receive under the 2016 policy. Therefore, an outside-the-budget BCS Tuition Support Fund provides additional support, comparable or potentially more than what they receive under the 2016 policy. Based on the survey results, if we are able to raise \$22K for that fund in 2026, BCS students in covenanted families could receive \$500 (if they are in K-5) or \$1,100 (if they are in 6-12) in tuition support. Keeping this fund separate from the General Budget creates a clearer mechanism to garner support for K-12 Mennonite Education from the congregation while giving people who do not wish to contribute, a mechanism for opting out.

Why do we keep support for college/seminaries in the general budget, instead of moving all Mennonite Education support to an out-of-the budget fund?

Some people felt it was unfair or incongruent with the values of Mennonite education support to single out BCS only, and that if we were going to move support away from the General Fund, it would be better to move all Mennonite education and/or all education support from the General Fund. But throughout the process, the majority feedback from the congregation was to keep college and seminary aid in the General Fund.

We also got the sense from the survey around pledging that it would be harder to fundraise for all Mennonite Education outside of the budget.

Why do we support teachers/staff in any school and not just public schools?

The student aid committee wanted this budget line-item to reflect the philosophical spirit of the line-item that supports students. In other words, if support for students is to be opened to all of Assembly's covenanted members regardless of which school they attend, then the support for teachers should also be opened up to all K-12 teachers regardless of where they teach.

Why do we provide less support for K-5 than 6-12 for BCS students?

Some in the congregation would like the church to support Mennonite education at any age or stage that families believe is right for them. Others have differing assessments of the relative value of Mennonite education at different stages, and wish to support different stages differently. Because of the amount of giving interest indicated in the survey of the congregation, the advisory group thought it best to focus on continuing support for the grade levels that have already been financially supported by the congregation (grades 6-12). The survey did not indicate enough financial interest to extend the same level of tuition support to grades K-5 at this time. The proposed model is a compromise option.

What happens if the Teacher/Staff School Support budget line item doesn't get used at the end of the year?

If some funds are left unrequested, the Student Aid Committee is empowered to select how to distribute the money in ways that are congruent with the purpose of the funds. The committee can also allow those unused funds to be added to any surplus accumulated at the end of the year.

What happens if we don't come to an agreement on an interim Tuition Support plan?

The Student Aid Advisory Group has been working on this since early 2024. This group is made up of people with strong and differing opinions, but who are seeking to find a compromise way forward. The group has, at times, received strong feedback from people unhappy with some of the paths it has explored, and it has sought to balance that feedback with the preferences of the majority of the congregation. This has been hard, time-consuming work. The energy and available time of many on the advisory group is nearly exhausted, and many will soon need to leave the group.

The proposal put forward represents a compromise vision which the Student Aid Advisory Group can live with. The congregation is invited to make suggestions to improve it. And if it is then adopted, it will be reviewed in the near future. But if this effort ultimately fails, we will effectively be without a tuition support plan that has sufficient congregational support, and we will no longer have a viable Student Aid Advisory Group. The matter will then return to the Leadership Group, who can bring forth a plan that requires a majority vote rather than consensus.

If adopted, when will this interim policy take effect and for how long?

The pledge forms, which will include pledging for the BCS Tuition Support Fund, will go out to the congregation in Oct. 2025. Those pledges will support tuition for the 2026-2027 school year, the first school year under this policy. Members of the Student Aid Advisory Group will present a report between October 2026 and February 2027 on how the policy worked and to get feedback from the congregation. So, depending on when that report happens, we will have lived through one or two cycles of pledging and two or three cycles of distribution from the General Fund budget line items and the BCS Tuition Support Fund, which will allow us to have a more informed conversation about how to move forward toward a more permanent model.