



**ST. FRANCIS HIGH SCHOOL**  
THE SCHOOL OF THOUGHT

September 8, 2011

**To:** The KHSAA Board of Control and Julian Tackett, Executive Director

**From:** Alexandra S. Thurstone '84, Head of School  
Tony Butler, Athletic Director  
St. Francis High School

**Re:** Petition for exemption of the St. Francis High School Merit Scholarship Competition and its recipients from KHSAA Bylaw 13

**Dear KHSAA Representative,**

This petition describes the rationale for the exemption of the St. Francis High School Merit Scholarship Competition from the KHSAA Bylaw 13 restrictions regarding merit aid. The enclosed documentation demonstrates that our Merit Scholarship Competition is long-standing, far pre-dating Bylaw 13, and it is intended to recruit and retain academically gifted students. It is in no way used as an athletic recruiting tool. We base our petition on the following rationale: the ongoing history and consistency of our Merit Scholarship Competition; the clear academic aptitude of all Merit Scholarship recipients; our tuition costs (even with a merit scholarship); and the unfair penalty that it puts on our Merit Scholars for the entirety of their high school careers.

History of the Program: St. Francis High School has hosted a Merit Scholarship Competition for the last 21 of the school's 35 years beginning in 1990 as a means to attract and enroll academically talented students. The school has consistently used the same standardized test as part of the criteria to determine each year's winners. Our Merit Scholarship Competition is based on objective criteria, and a committee considers contestants anonymously (a detailed description of scholarship awarding procedures follows). The Competition is designed to attract and award scholarship monies to students who excel on standardized tests and who demonstrate a history of excellent academic performance. We select winners who have demonstrated the ability to excel in our rigorous educational environment, and will contribute positively to the school community.

Academic Aptitude of Merit Scholarship Recipients: As you will see in Appendix A, St. Francis Merit Scholarship recipients have all scored in the highest percentiles on the SCAT exam that we administer as part of our Scholarship Competition. Most score in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile or better on this exam. In addition, these students have a history of exceptional scores on other standardized tests, as administered by the students' respective middle schools.

Winners typically place in the top five on the science and essay portions of the competition. They also generally have 4.0 grade point averages in middle school, have a history of academic accolades, and have received outstanding letters of recommendation from their middle school teachers.

SFHS tuition cost: In order to deliver upon our mission, we keep class sizes small (average of 11), have a low student:teacher ratio (8:1), employ a highly qualified faculty and staff (30% of full-time teachers have Ph.D.s), and maintain an impressive downtown facility. The result is a premium tuition that ranks as the second most expensive in the state (2011-12 tuition is \$18,200). The overall winner of our Competition each year receives a 50% scholarship. While this is a significant discount, this reduced tuition is still extremely high (\$9,100), and in fact is similar to or higher than the full tuition at most of our competing private high schools in Louisville, and the entire state. Our Merit Scholarships certainly make the school more affordable for families, but still require each family to make a substantial financial commitment to their child's education.

SFHS athletic program/merit scholar-athletes: With a total student body of 123, we have a no-cut policy for our sports teams. Even with the no-cut policy, we sometimes struggle to field a full team in each sport. We were unable to field a Girls' Basketball team at all (varsity or JV) two years ago, and had only a JV team the year after; our Boys' Tennis Team has not had a full team of seven players for many years; our Track Team also is so small that we cannot compete as a team, or even have a relay team; and we had to eliminate Volleyball, Cross-Country, and Boys' Lacrosse from our athletic program entirely in the last ten years due to lack of participation.

Clearly, we have not improved this situation through our Merit Scholarship Competition: of the 39 students who have received Merit Scholarships over the last 15 years, 18 have played a KHSAA sanctioned sport for one or more years, making only 46% of winners KHSAA athletes.

Bylaw 13's restrictions are too harsh: It is also important to note that Bylaw 13 imposes the harshest restrictions of any KHSAA bylaw, with the exception of the age restriction, in that it rules a student ineligible for their entire high school career. We have been abiding by Bylaw 13 for the last three years, so we now have a junior who has not been allowed to participate in a KHSAA sanctioned sport for three years. She had played basketball in middle school and may be interested in joining our team, but so far, she has not been allowed. In addition, our current sophomore winner was on the Bowling Team in her freshman year. As Bowling will now be a KHSAA sanctioned sport, she will not be able to participate.

**Conclusion:** The St. Francis High School Merit Scholarship and its scholarship recipients should be exempted from the restrictions of Bylaw 13 for the following reasons: it has been in existence for 21 years; it is administered objectively and anonymously, and all winners have outstanding standardized test scores and middle school academic records; even receiving the overall St. Francis Scholar award means a family is still responsible for \$9,100 in tuition, which still makes the tuition after the scholarship higher than almost all private schools in the state; fewer than half of the Scholarship recipients (including winners, runners-up, and honorable mentions) have participated in a KHSAA-sanctioned sport in the last 15 years; the penalty for receiving one of these Scholarships is too great in that it prevents them from participating in KHSAA sanctioned sports for their entire high school career.

## **St. Francis High School Merit Scholarship Background, Process, and History**

### **Background**

St. Francis High School has held a Merit Scholarship Competition since 1990. The overall winner, or St. Francis Scholar, has been determined the same way for the entire history of the competition. From 1990 to 2003, St. Francis Scholar received a four-year full tuition scholarship. Beginning in 2003, the committee reduced the St. Francis Scholar overall winner scholarship to a 50% tuition scholarship due to the school's financial position. The winner is chosen from a group of Finalists who are chosen based on having been outstanding in all aspects of the competition. The winner is the one who has the highest scores across the board, combined with an outstanding middle school academic record, awards and accolades, outstanding teacher recommendations, and stellar application essays.

In addition, throughout the Merit Scholarship Competition's history, we have always had either one or more Runners-Up, and/or one or more Honorable Mention Scholarships. All of these are determined from the group of Finalists in the Competition. We have varied the number, types, and amounts of our Runner-Up and Honorable Mention Scholarships. From 1990 to 2003, we awarded one or more Runner-Up scholarships, and they varied from a few thousand dollars to up to 25% of tuition. In 2008, we re-structured the Runner-Up scholarships to be subject-specific. We classified one Runner-Up as an English/Humanities Scholar for a 25% tuition scholarship, and one as a Runner-Up Math/Science Scholar for a 25% tuition scholarship. As always, Finalists who show exceptional promise, but who are not awarded the winner or runner-up scholarships, receive Honorable Mention awards that range from \$1,000-\$3,000. Awards that are declined are not awarded to another Finalist.

### **Process**

The annual Merit Scholarship Competition is open only to incoming 9<sup>th</sup> graders who have applied to the school, and is held on a Saturday in January, with one make-up date. Competitors are considered anonymously and scholarship awards are granted to students who demonstrate academic excellence, leadership, and the desire to contribute to the school community. The winners are determined by a Scholarship Committee that is made up of a veteran teacher, the Dean of Students, the Head of School, and a senior student who is that class's St. Francis Scholar, and is administered by the Director of Admissions.

Since the beginning of the Merit Scholarship Competition, we have used the School and College Ability Test (SCAT) Intermediate Level exam as an assessment tool in identifying students with exceptional academic aptitude. In addition to this standardized test, since 1990 students have had to complete a creative writing essay that is designed and graded by our English Department. In 2008, when we added the Math/Science Scholar Runner-Up, we added a science experiment that is designed, administered, and graded by our Science Department. Students receiving top marks on the SCAT, the creative writing essay, and now the science experiment are identified and named Finalists, and the Director of Admissions creates anonymous files highlighting the Finalists' achievements. The files include each

students' standardized test scores, middle school GPA, awards won and activities participated in, application essay, and teacher recommendations (with names/school information blacked out). The anonymous files are circulated to the Scholarship Committee members who then meet together and come to a consensus to determine the winners.

### **Merit Scholar History**

Appendix A includes the winners of St. Francis Merit Scholarships for the last fifteen years. We have records for the SCAT results for the last ten years, essay rankings for the last ten years, and science experiment rankings for the last four years (the entire time it has been administered). We do not have records on who won the scholarships prior to 1996, but we confirmed through our archived school newsletters that the first St. Francis Scholar was named in 1990.

**St. Francis High School  
Merit Scholar History\***

<b><u>2011 (class of 2015)</u></b>	Student	Verbal percentile (100)	Math percentile (100)	Essay rank	Science rank	KHSAA sanctioned sports played (# of years)
St. Francis Scholar	Nina Erbes	99+	95	1	3	
Humanities Scholar	Tinsley Nugent	99	91	3	1	
Math/Science Scholar	Did not enroll	94	98	6	2	
Honorable Mention Scholar	Michelle Jones	98	96	3	1	
Honorable Mention Scholar	Ben Anderson	88	95	/	2	
<b><u>2010 (class of 2014)</u></b>						
St. Francis Scholar	Kinsey Morrison	99	99+	4	5	
Humanities Scholar	no longer enrolled	99+	99+	2	1	
Math/Science Scholar	Did not enroll	96	99+	6	3	
Honorable Mention Scholar	Olivia Beres	96	99+	6	1	
<b><u>2009 (class of 2013)</u></b>						
St. Francis Scholar	Kathryn Klinge	96	99+	5	6	
Humanities Scholar	Teddy Finklestein	97	99+	2	/	soccer (1)
Math/Science Scholar	Rob Jamner	94	99+	2	2	soccer (3), basketball (2), track (3)
Honorable Mention Scholar	Matthew Linkous	91	98	2	5	soccer (3)
Honorable Mention Scholar	Lora Rosenberg	91	87	5	1	track (1)
<b><u>2008 (class of 2012)</u></b>						
St. Francis Scholar	Eli Beard	96	93	5	3	track (1)
Humanities Scholar	Katie Cote	93	71	2	5	soccer (4), tennis (4)
Math/Science Scholar	Griffin Cote	94	99+	4	4	soccer (4)
<b><u>2007 (class of 2011)</u></b>						
St. Francis Scholar	Chris Cappiello	97	99+	3	2	tennis (2)
Runner Up	John Klinge	99	99+	4	5	

**2006 (class of 2010)**

St. Francis Scholar	Wyatt McMurry	97	95	3	soccer (4))
Runner Up	Hannah Ritter	91	96	4	

**2005 (class of 2009)**

St. Francis Scholar (tied)	Elizabeth Denny	94	96	2
St. Francis Scholar (tied)	Rachel Linkous	94	99+	4

**2003 (class of 2007)**

St. Francis Scholar	Did not enroll	99	99+	1
Runner Up	Julia Nazrenko	99	99+	3

**2002 (class of 2006)**

St. Francis Scholar	Carly Russell	97	99+	4	soccer (1)
Runner Up/ Hon. Men.	Dylan Holland	97	95	1	
Runner Up/ Hon. Men.	Hannah Wells	98	96	5	

**2001 (class of 2005)**

St. Francis Scholar	Amelia Nordmann	94	99+	1
Runner Up/ Hon. Men.	Maria Kupper	96	95	2
Runner Up/ Hon. Men.	Hilary Stotts	96	98	4

**2000 (class of 2004)**

St. Francis Scholar	Callie Heffer				volleyball (2)
Runner Up/ Hon. Men.	Cassie Finger				basketball (4)
Runner Up/ Hon. Men.	Jack Byers				

**1999 (class of 2003)**

St. Francis Scholar	Bill Wells				track (4), cross country (4), soccer (4)
Runner Up/ Hon. Men.	Chase Golding				basketball (4)
Runner Up/ Hon. Men.	Raul Reid				

**1998 (class of 2002)**

St. Francis Scholar  
Runner Up/ Hon. Men.

Becca Bryant  
Harding Ison-Bowman

cross country, crew\*

**1997 (class of 2001)**

St. Francis Scholar  
Runner Up/ Hon. Men.

Noah Edwardsen  
Lora Goldsmith

\*  
volleyball, fencing\*

**1996 (class of 2000)**

St. Francis Scholar

John Shumate

track\*

\*Do not have records on how many years they played

1990-1995

Do not have  
complete records  
on winners