



FASTDIRECT → SYCAMORE

The Switching Playbook

A decision guide for heads of school and business offices evaluating a move from FastDirect to Sycamore. Nine sections, designed to print and forward.

TODAY

FastDirect

The 26-year parochial-school SIS

VS

TOMORROW

Sycamore

One platform, one login, one bill
\$4 per student per month, all included

Inside: the decision framework, week-by-week migration timeline, side-by-side cost worksheet, questions to ask FastDirect before you cancel, a one-page board summary, and a migration FAQ for your business office.

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Sycamore Leaf Solutions · sycamoreleaf.com · US-based support

1 Why heads of school are switching

FastDirect earned its reputation the honest way — 26 years of high-touch, US-based support for small parochial schools. If you're a 60-student PK-8 with a business manager who calls Sarah at FastDirect by name, staying put is defensible. But if your parents are living in a 2016-era portal, your report cards can't be customized, your text notifications just got unbundled to a separate line item, and you can't add a 9th grade without changing systems, that's when the trade-off flips. Sycamore was founded in 2001, serves 46+ countries on 6 continents, covers PK-12+, and includes every module at \$4 per student per month.

Across the 14 categories that private school leaders score during platform reviews, Sycamore wins on 11. FastDirect holds the lead on 3. The majority favors Sycamore on family experience, pricing transparency, support, and platform breadth.

\$4

per student per
month, all modules included

4.8 / 5

parent app rating
(Sycamore + TuitionEP combined)

46+

countries served
on 6 continents

4-8

weeks to switch
and go live

The three reasons that come up in every kickoff call

1. Families want one app. Sycamore's Parent App holds a 4.8-star combined rating with TuitionEP. The parent experience is the most frequent touch point with any school platform.
2. Pricing should be predictable. Sycamore publishes its plan at \$4 per student per month with everything included. Schools that adopt the full competitor suite often carry multiple line items that grow as the school grows.
3. Support should answer when called. Sycamore's support and onboarding teams are based in the United States and pair with Sycamore Academy for on-demand training.

2 When to switch

Schools switch from FastDirect at three common moments. Pick the one that fits your school year and contract; Sycamore's onboarding team adapts to all three.

Window	Best for	Watch out for
End of school year	Schools whose FastDirect contract renews mid-summer. Plenty of runway for staff training before fall.	Confirm FastDirect data exports are available after your contract end date.
Mid-year cutover	Schools that want to be on Sycamore before re-enrollment season opens. Cutover at the start of a term or grading period.	Coordinate the cutover with payroll and tuition draft schedules.
Summer	Schools running summer programs or year-round calendars. Compresses training into July and August.	Plan around staff vacation; lock kickoff before mid-June.

Whichever window you pick, Sycamore typically takes 4 to 8 weeks from kickoff to your first tuition cycle on the new platform.

3 What changes for your families

For most schools, parents are the most frequent users of the platform. Here is what shifts the day Sycamore goes live.

One app instead of many

Families currently install FastDirect's parent experience. After the switch, they install the Sycamore Parent App once. Tuition balance, cafeteria balance, grades, attendance alerts, and class announcements live behind the same login.

Payment methods, depending on the processor

Whether saved cards and ACH details transfer depends on FastDirect's current payment processor. When secure token portability is supported, families see no change. When it is not, families re-add their payment method through a one-screen flow in the Sycamore Parent App. Sycamore drafts the parent communications either way.

Tuition plans are reset and recreated

Active payment plans are rebuilt in Sycamore at the same amount, cadence, and remaining balance, then reconciled against the prior platform so nothing is double-charged or missed. Families see the same payment schedule they already expected.

Fee handling becomes your choice

On Sycamore, the school decides per transaction type: absorb the fee, pass it through, or split it. Many schools use this flexibility to reduce the friction families feel at checkout.

Communications consolidate

Class messages, school-wide announcements, and teacher-parent threads route through Sycamore.

4 Migration timeline, week by week

Most schools complete a full switch in 4 to 8 weeks. The schedule below assumes a standard FastDirect migration; mid-year and summer cutovers compress to the same shape with tighter validation windows.



Phase	Phase name	What happens
Week 1	Discovery	- Kickoff call with the head of school and business office - Inventory of current FastDirect modules and contract end dates - Source-of-truth audit for student, family, and tuition data - Switching plan with named dates, owners, and risks
Weeks 2-3	Data + setup	- Joint data extraction from FastDirect - Normalize and load into Sycamore staging environment - Side-by-side validation against the source system - Payment processor connect and test transactions
Weeks 4-6	Training	- Role-based courses for admins, teachers, and counselors - Two live working sessions with the client success team - Parent communication drafts, scheduled and approved - Cutover dry-run on a representative subset of data
Weeks 7-8	Go live	- Production cutover and final data reconciliation - Parents install the Sycamore Parent App, one balance live - First tuition cycle on Sycamore, monitored end-to-end 30-day post-launch review with the school's leadership

5 Side-by-side cost worksheet

Fill the left column with what your school pays FastDirect today. Use the right column to capture the Sycamore plan. The bottom row is the annual difference your board will care about.

Line item	FastDirect today	Sycamore
Per-student license (annual)	_____ × ____ students = _____	\$4 × students × 12 = _____
FastDirect base / SIS module	_____	Included
Tuition / payments module	_____	Included
Admissions / enrollment module	_____	Included
Communications / SMS module	_____	Included
Parent app subscription (if any)	_____	Included
Reporting / analytics module	_____	Standard reporting included
Implementation / customization fees	_____	\$2,500 minimum onboarding
Card convenience fee passed to parents	____ % × _____	School chooses; can be \$0 to parents
Other modules in scope	_____	_____
Annual subtotal	_____	_____
Annual difference (Sycamore vs FastDirect)		_____

Use your real FastDirect invoices in the left column for the most accurate comparison.

6 Questions to ask FastDirect

Send this list to your FastDirect account manager before submitting cancellation notice. The answers protect your data, your families, and your renewal terms.

#	Question to send	Why it matters
1	What is my exact contract end date for each FastDirect module, and what is the cancellation notice window?	Most FastDirect contracts auto-renew. Confirm the notice deadline in writing before you set a Sycamore go-live date.
2	Will I retain read or export access to FastDirect data after my contract ends, and for how long?	Data export windows vary. You want exports available through the final reconciliation, not just the go-live date.
3	What is the format and field coverage of standard FastDirect data exports?	Knowing the export format upfront lets Sycamore's onboarding team plan validation. Ask for sample exports if possible.
4	What happens to in-progress tuition payment plans on the day my contract ends?	Plans, autopay schedules, and saved payment methods need a clean handoff. Confirm whether the platform continues to process or stops.
5	Are there any modules, integrations, or contracts on a different renewal cycle that I should know about?	Family App subscriptions and add-on engagements can run on separate cycles.
6	What is the process for transferring saved payment methods (tokens) to a new payment processor?	Confirm whether tokenized payment data can be transferred securely. This avoids forcing families to re-enter card details.
7	Is there a fee for cancellation, mid-term termination, or data export?	Some contracts include early-termination clauses. Get the exact dollar figure in writing.

7 One-page board summary

Copy or adapt the block below for your next board packet. Replace the bracketed figures with your school's specifics.

BOARD SUMMARY · SWITCHING FROM FASTDIRECT TO SYCAMORE

Recommendation

Adopt Sycamore as the school's K-12 platform of record, replacing FastDirect. Sycamore consolidates SIS, gradebook, attendance, admissions, tuition, payments, communications, and the parent mobile app under one license at \$4 per student per month. Sycamore's onboarding team will run the full migration in 4 to 8 weeks, so the school can pick a go-live date that aligns with the start of the next term, the re-enrollment window, or the end of the current contract.

Financial impact (annual)

Current annual cost of FastDirect modules in scope: \$_____. Projected annual cost of Sycamore at \$4 per student per month: \$_____. Estimated net annual savings: \$_____. One-time onboarding investment: \$2,500 minimum.

Operational impact

Families move to a single Sycamore Parent App, which today holds a 4.8-star combined rating (Sycamore + TuitionEP). The school gains tuition refund protection (via Vertical Insure), native donations with AI donor intelligence (rolling out 2026), and US-based onboarding and support.

Risk and mitigation

Switching SIS and tuition together at a single cutover is the largest operational risk. Sycamore's standard migration includes side-by-side validation and a 30-day post-launch monitoring window.

Timeline

4 to 8 weeks from kickoff to first tuition cycle on Sycamore. The school selects the go-live date that fits the calendar, and Sycamore plans backward from it.

8 Migration FAQ for the business office

What's the biggest difference between Sycamore and FastDirect?

FastDirect is a bootstrapped, family-owned SIS focused on PK-8 Catholic and Lutheran schools at \$15 per student per year plus an \$800 setup fee. Sycamore is a full K-12+ platform at \$4 per student per month with every module included: SIS, admissions, tuition, native donations with AI donor intelligence, tuition refund protection, native iOS and Android parent apps, and 46+ countries served. For schools under 100 students and PK-8-only, FastDirect is cheaper on the software line; for schools growing past 100 students, adding high school, or running donations, Sycamore is the platform choice.

Is FastDirect cheaper than Sycamore?

For very small PK-8 schools, yes. FastDirect's \$15 per student per year (\$1.25 per student per month) with a \$1,500 annual minimum is cheaper than Sycamore's \$4 per student per month base rate. For a 100-student school, FastDirect is \$1,500/year vs Sycamore at \$4,800/year. The question is what each one includes: Sycamore covers native donations, refund protection, admissions workflow, and 46+ countries; FastDirect covers PK-8 basics with third-party Pace payments plus additional monthly merchant fees.

Does FastDirect have a high school module?

No. FastDirect is explicitly PK-8 only; the marketing tagline is 'School Information System for PK-8 Parochial Schools.' Schools adding a 9th grade need a different platform. Sycamore covers PK-12+ in a single platform.

How does the parent app compare?

FastDirect's iOS app rates 4.6 stars across 394 ratings, but recent 2025 reviews call it 'the worst app I have ever had to utilize' and cite unreliable notifications. Sycamore Parent App combined with TuitionEP sits at a 4.8-star combined rating across native iOS and Android with tuition, cafeteria, grades, attendance, and communications in one experience.

Does FastDirect have donations or fundraising?

No. FastDirect has no donations, fundraising, or donor management module. Sycamore is rolling out a native donations module with AI donor intelligence in 2026 from the TuitionEP acquisition.

What does FastDirect do well?

Customer support, universally. Every FastDirect review source highlights the small in-house support team (Sarah Rogers and Claire Hilleren both since 2009) as the strongest part of the product. Base price transparency is real (\$15/student/year is published openly). The 26-year operating history for parochial-specific workflows is a genuine strength for that niche.

Does FastDirect handle international schools?

No. FastDirect is effectively US-only. Every partner (Wisconsin DPI, Indiana DOE, Pace Payments) and every testimonial is US-based. No multi-currency, no multi-language UI, no non-US timezone support. Sycamore serves paying schools in 46+ countries across 6 continents with multi-currency support.

How long does it take to switch from FastDirect to Sycamore?

Most schools complete a full migration in 4 to 8 weeks. FastDirect data is exportable and Sycamore's US-based onboarding team handles the mapping and validation. The variable is whether the school is also adding admissions workflows, donation campaigns, or a high school grade level during the switch.

9 Next steps

Three ways to move forward, ordered by how ready you are. Pick the one that fits where you are in the decision.

Get a switch-now quote

Send Sycamore your current FastDirect modules and student count. We return a tailored Sycamore quote, a switching timeline, and a line-item comparison against what you pay FastDirect today, typically within two business days. This is the fastest path if you already know you want to move and you need a number to take to the board.

sycamoreleaf.com/switch-now/

View testimonials

Read what heads of school and business offices say about Sycamore after switching. Real schools, real outcomes, real implementation timelines, not curated marketing soundbites.

sycamoreleaf.com/testimonials/

Send your account executive a data export

Send your Sycamore account executive a sanitized export of your FastDirect data. We will run it through staging and walk you through exactly how easy it is to get going on Sycamore. No commitment required.

Reach out to your assigned Sycamore AE directly.

\$4

per student per
month, all modules included

4-8

weeks to first
tuition cycle on Sycamore

\$2.5K

minimum onboarding,
dedicated migration lead

100%

US-based onboarding
and support

Companion to this Playbook: the live comparison page at sycamoreleaf.com/compare/fastdirect-vs-sycamore.

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