



#3 The Impacts of Private Money in Public Education: Fees/Fundraising

As Educators we must begin by working w/in our Sphere of Influence and Be Allies to Low-Income Students

Who We Are:

- Social Planning Network of Ontario (SPNO) Host of the Knowledge Network for Student Well-Being (KNSWB) Equity and Inclusion Community of Practice with a focus on Low-Income Students and Families.

Objectives

- To bring knowledge and awareness on the inequitable and exclusionary experiences of students from low income families to educators at the local level in our communities (teachers, principals, superintendents, trustees).
- To build a base of awareness and commitment among educators, parents and students in our communities that could advocate for systemic change in the education system to end/reduce inequitable and exclusionary treatment for low income students and families.
- To interrupt biases, assumptions and commonly held misconceptions of low-income students and parents which serve to undermine student achievement, well-being and meaningful parent engagement.

What is fundraising?

“Fundraising is any activity, permitted under a school board’s policy, to raise money or other resources, that is approved by the school principal, in consultation with, and upon the advice of the school council, and/or a school fundraising organization operating in the name of the school, and for which the school provides the administrative processes for collection.” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 2).

While fundraising can be used to raise money for charity and research, this document focuses on fundraising to enhance students’ learning experiences and schools.

How common are school fees and fundraising?

People for Education’s 2016-17 survey of fees and fundraising in Ontario schools found:

- ◆ 99% of elementary schools and 87% of secondary schools fundraise
- ◆ Almost a quarter of elementary schools raise \$20,000 or more.
- ◆ 87% of secondary schools have student activity fees (which may be up to \$300 per year) (People for Education, 2018)

People for Education, 2018

When can a school charge fees?

“A fee charge shall be permissible for an activity, material, course or program if it is:

- Not required as part of the regular day school program;
- Voluntary, and alternatives are offered;
- Non-essential or extracurricular in nature and is not required for graduation by an individual student; or
- ◆ A voluntary upgrade or substitute of a more costly material to the material provided for course purposes.”
- ◆ (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 3).

The Ontario Ministry of Education expects school boards to have policies related to school fees and fundraising on their websites.

How does school fundraising typically happen?

School staff, school councils, charities linked to particular schools, Home and School Associations may all fundraise for a school, with the principal’s permission. Fundraising activities may include product sales; special events; applying for grants; soliciting donations or sponsorships; and more. School boards, governments, businesses, or other non-government organization may offer grants.

Why do schools fundraise or charge fees?

Schools and parents often fundraise to address perceived funding shortfalls arising from inadequate funding of schools, increased expectations of what schools will offer, increased costs of providing education, and greater constraints on how public money can be spent.

(Brent & Lunden, 2009; Carpenter, Weber & Schugurensky, 2012; Sattem, 2007).

Ontario's Ministry of Education allows fundraised dollars to be used to purchase materials and opportunities not required by students to learn the curriculum and/or meet graduation requirements.

What are benefits of school fees and fundraising?

Benefits of fundraising and fees include: providing students and teachers with access to technology, books, and other materials and opportunities not provided through school budgets; engaging parents and community members in schools; enabling alumni to 'give back' to public schools; and avoiding potential conflict.

What are some concerns about school fees and fundraising?

- ◆ Many critics argue school fundraising exacerbates disparities in resources and educational opportunities within and across schools and school boards.
(Winsa 2015;2016).
- ◆ The schools raising the largest amounts of money are typically those with affluent families ***(People for Education, 2018; Social Planning Toronto, 2011).***
- ◆ School fees and fundraising present financial burdens for families with middle and low incomes ***(Social Planning Council of Ottawa, 2007; Social Planning Toronto, 2011).***
- ◆ School fundraising by middle class parents can result in marginalization of low-income parents within schools and may threaten democratic decision-making if parents who help fund school programs feel that they are entitled to a greater say in how schools are run ***(Posey-Maddox, 2016).***
- ◆ Furthermore, school fundraising compromises the ideal of quality public education for all students because it constructs education as a private rather than a public good by shifting the responsibility of government funded education supported by collective citizens to individual students and their families ***(Winton & Milani, 2017)***
- ◆ Finally, time and effort dedicated to fundraising may take time away from teaching and learning ***(Pistiolis, 2012).***

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