

School-Based Fundraising in Portland Public Schools
Report from Targeted Community Engagement & Administrator Survey
June 17, 2022

Community members proposed changes to the district's fundraising policies and practices, and the Board of Education Policy Committee has undertaken a review of school-based fundraising. The Strategic Partnerships Department, with support from Community Engagement, and a Policy Committee representative, hosted targeted community engagement sessions to hear from communities who, up to this point, have had less of a voice on this issue.

- **Student Engagement, District Student Council, 5/31/2022**
- **Targeted Parent Leader Engagement: Roundtable Discussions of School-Based Fundraising with primarily Roosevelt (6/13/2022) and McDaniel (6/16/2022) Feeder Schools**
 - School administrators and a board member selected 1-2 parent leaders from their school communities. We invited approximately 20 people to each meeting and 10-12 planned to attend. Four parents attended the meeting at Roosevelt and 13 attended the meeting at McDaniel.
 - Staff developed the following website to help provide background information to participants: sites.google.com/pps.net/ppsschool-basedfundraisinginfo, along with the slide presentation shared with the Policy Committee.
- **Administrator Survey** School administrators were encouraged to complete a survey. Providing their name was optional (questions and response highlights on pages 3-4).

Introduction

Nonprofit organizations, parent groups, and individuals make important contributions to support PPS students and school communities. Parent groups include local school foundations, independent nonprofit organizations, PTAs, PTSAs and PTOs. One element of that support is fundraising to contribute to a school or program budget.

Direct Quotes

"This isn't working. It's inequitable. It's never going to feel good." (Parent)

"My kid is your kid and your kid is my kid. These are all our kids." (Parent)

"We are all PPS, do we need to think about it as our school, or as a district?" (Parent)

"It is so incredibly confusing. Transparency from district, this is a shared value." (Parent)

"Thankful for the 1/3 Parent Grant, but still not equitable"

Theme: Collective Impact Model

There is a strong interest in shifting to a district-wide fundraising effort through The Fund for PPS and decreasing school-based fundraising, particularly for staffing and other essential services that should be provided through publicly-funded education. As long as we continue to encourage or allow Parent Groups to fundraise large sums to solely benefit their own school we will continue to see the divisive nature of fundraising in PPS. Instead of school-based fundraising the district should foster and facilitate a spirit of community and shared purpose through which the generosity of all involved in fundraising activities (e.g. citywide pizza night fundraisers, etc.) create a collective impact to better serve PPS students and schools regardless of any one community's ability to raise private resources. Most agreed that the District has a responsibility to advance equity and help maintain stable funding.

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- The majority of parent participants expressed a desire to end the practice of allowing school foundations to pay for staff positions.
- A handful of participants expressed that if the district continues to allow school foundations to pay for staffing then the percentage shared with other schools should increase to 50%.
 - After the first \$10,000, a minimum of 50% of the Staffing Funds shall be deposited into a fund that is redistributed to schools that enroll a higher number of underserved students.
 - Consider changing the formula for the distribution of the shared funds to benefit more schools, such as an amount per student eligible for free or reduced meals.
- Concerns were expressed that even though PPS might provide additional staff to school communities with greater needs they couldn't fill the positions, perhaps because schools with fewer students with need had positions that were better supported and less challenging.
- There was more of a mixed perspective about requiring a district contribution from parent groups with less fundraising capacity for capital projects, such as replacing playground equipment, as these were long-term, benefit-the-whole-school projects.
- There was also discussion that it wasn't just the total amount of money raised that created inequities but having the people and the infrastructure to fundraise and hold events. Some parent groups have access to large dollar donors, grantwriters, event planners, etc. in their individual school communities. Also, the wealth within a school community means some parent groups can have parents write big checks and others are collecting cans for recycling, staffing concession stands, etc. to earn much smaller amounts.

Theme: Community Building

Many participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to provide input and speak with their peers about these issues, and expressed a desire for additional opportunities for community building between schools. Parents hope there will be more opportunities to come together to learn from each other, build community, and collaborate either within their cohort, district-wide or both. The current system is perceived to create "silos" and "hoarding" at a school-level and a desire to be more "one district community". Many of the schools represented have a small number of parents actively involved with their parent group or school-based organization, which makes the work challenging. Oftentimes, they do not want to be fundraising because they do not want to ask their parents to give from their limited incomes, and often what they do fundraise goes to basic needs. The disconnect between fundraising to provide families with food, coats or other basic needs, versus other schools fundraising for staff and "fun things" such as field trips, travel and other extras creates animosity. Some wondered whether people truly were not aware of the differences, but they also did not feel comfortable with "poverty parades" or being viewed as or treated as a "charity case" to schools with more financial resources. There was a suggestion that schools with significant fundraising participate in a listening session with PTOs, PTAs that fundraise small, but important funds, for essential items so that they can better understand the difference in resources, parent time available (e.g. PTAs with two active members, \$10 annual PTA dues are too much in some communities) and how that impacts the student experience.

Some parents shared that the cost of their parent group events held to raise money were intentionally set so that they would be accessible to all in their community versus to maximize the amount of money raised.

Support for providing teachers with funds to purchase classroom supplies was fairly universal, although the differences in amounts available was of concern and questions about PPS guidance on this.

Theme: Increased transparency

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Increase transparency regarding all parent groups that fundraise including how much money they raise and how they spend the dollars to benefit their schools. Information is difficult to find on pps.net. Collect and make information available to the public because public education should not have hidden dollars flowing to schools without transparency. The lack of an easily accessible, centralized source of information on all fundraising groups leads to confusion, misinformation, and rumors. Some parents suggested:

- Nonprofit and other groups that fundraise for PPS schools/programs should provide information about the amount of money they raise and how it is spent.
- PPS should track and make publicly available the amount of money invested by Parent Groups for:
 - Staff positions
 - Contracted services
 - Playground and facility improvements
 - Plus, to the extent possible: Field Trips, academic and co-curricular travel, Materials and Supplies, and Other Purchases

Parents had questions about the discretionary funds that school administrators had available to them from the school district and how those are utilized to support students and how it intersects with parent group fundraising.

Administrator Survey

1. What challenges and successes have you observed in the current structure of school-based fundraising (e.g., foundations, PTAs, other independent parent groups)?

Challenges

- I have seen many inequities in the amount of money raised by schools in different neighborhoods and the ways they are able to spend that money. Allowing foundations to raise money for staff is the greatest inequity.
- Very inconsistent and schools that are not Title/CSI/TSI have a bare bones crew of staff. It would be nice to have enough staff to run the building safely and we should not have to fundraise to get basic staffing.
- PPS needs to staff ALL buildings - not with necessarily the same level of support, but at appropriately proportional levels.
- It is a challenge that schools are relying on families to maintain current/adequate staff - it is a burden on the community.
- Fundraising capabilities are very school specific. The fundraising activities take up a significant amount of family volunteering time and effort, which limits family participation in other social activities or engagement in other sociopolitical change movements. Site specific fundraising activities promote a "me" (my school, my class, my student) vs. a "we" (our district, our city) mentality.
- Schools "in the middle" (socioeconomically mixed) don't receive support from PPS through SUN programming, Parent Fund grants, and other key supplemental funding and activities sources, but their parent communities are also not wealthy enough to provide significant funding for after-school activities and supplemental student supports. This is inequitable to students at these schools.

Successes

- Our PTA has been able to raise funds to help with our SUN programming and Equity work. The school program has been improved by this fundraising.

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- Our PTA helps to fundraise for student activities such as field trips and school supplies for all students, yearbooks for all students, etc. We do not fundraise for staff positions.
- We partner very well with our PTA, Foundation, and Booster Club. Also, I feel that our clubs and athletic teams do a great job communicating with staff on their fundraising efforts.
- Foundation fundraising enables us to provide more support to our students than what we receive from PPS general funds. We do not receive any additional FTE beyond classroom teachers for instructional interventionists; however, we have students who need additional support in reading and math. Without Foundation fundraising, we would not have the opportunity to hire Educational Assistants in our K-1 classrooms, or academic interventionists.

2. How can PPS progress toward greater connection and innovative collective impact in school-based fundraising?

- Maybe fundraising should be regional, or more sharing for equity. Maybe there should be district-wide fundraising events that share funds on an equity-based formula.
- It could all be done as PPS community fundraising - speaking of Foundations, where it all goes into a Community Fund and distributed equally. I also think we should not allow schools to create their own "Foundation" where they don't need to give any to others. And, currently I am in a school with a Foundation and still strongly believe this.
- All children are "ours" and we must stop having schools act like charities in order to serve them equitably. When public schools become mini private schools because the families are paying for staff, computers, security systems, playground equipment, etc., it undermines the very idea of public schooling.
- Limit school-based fundraising, to smaller immediate use activities, under \$10,000 for equipment, school based activities, t-shirts etc. Have larger fundraising initiatives be district wide to support big ticket items - all schools get playground updates, all schools should have an intervention teacher, mental health provider, etc.
- Provide avenues for families and schools to have more insight into independent parent groups' use/spending of donated funds.

3. In an ideal state, what would responsible fundraising look like?

- Fundraising that is focused on all students.
- Either having a district foundation that is managed centrally or do not allow foundations to exist or fund staff.
- I understand the concern about foundations, but they should not be broken up as many schools benefit from the contributions that these foundations provide. Instead, increase the amount they contribute... maybe 50%?
- I believe increasing the percentage of Foundation funding allocated to the Parent Fund to 50% is more equitable. However, I do not believe we should be limited in the amount of FTE we can fundraise for. If we are limited in our Foundation FTE we will not raise as much for the Parent Fund, which will decrease the money for our students in need.
- In an ideal state, there would be no need for private fundraising and all schools would be funded for amazing student learning experiences, including overnight travel, robust arts experiences and properly equipped classrooms, labs, auditoriums, and other spaces.
- Well, we would have ideal funding from the federal and state governments for an abundance of certified educators, so fundraising would be totally supplementary and be distributed between all schools evenly.
- Working with the legislature to adequately fund schools, then fundraising could be for innovative endeavors that enhance student's experience.

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4. What policies or structures could be put in place to bring us closer to the ideal state?

- Funding and staffing schools so that parents do not feel the need to supplement school staffing allocations.
- Limits on what can and can't be purchased with fundraising. Explicit connections between activities paid for with private funds and the graduate portrait or learning outcomes. Higher baseline of services and programming across all schools. Programs like Oregon Trail Overnight included in all school budgets and required like Outdoor School (or abandoned entirely).
- Streamlining/aligning purchasing of regular and more desirable school supplies.
- Work with PAT/OEA to advocate with the state legislature and make parents aware of funding structures so that they can become partners in advocacy.
- More action taken at the state level to require minimum funding levels that match student needs.
- Talk with principals and examine unintended consequences before moving on any fundraising decisions. White supremacy will always find a way to use the system to maintain power.