



Submission to the Ministry of Education on Fundraising, corporate partnerships and fees in elementary and secondary schools

The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation is pleased to present its recommendations on the development of guidelines related to fundraising, corporate partnerships and student fees.

OSSTF/FEESO is a trade union which represents 60,000 members across the Province of Ontario. The union works to protect our diverse membership which is represented in 140 bargaining units across the province. OSSTF/FEESO bargaining units represent both English and French members in public and separate elementary and secondary school workplaces, private schools and consortia, offering support services to school boards and universities.

Introduction

Unfortunately, charging fees and fundraising have become common practice in elementary and secondary schools in Ontario. People for Education has tracked fundraising by Ontario schools for over a decade and its *2009 Annual Report on Ontario's Schools* draws attention to the fact that 87% of Ontario school councils fundraise and these schools and parents raised \$595 million dollars in 2007-2008 through fundraising, fees, vending machines and corporate/charitable donations.

The Grants for Student Needs are designed to provide equitable funding for all students in Ontario regardless of their urban or rural setting or their grade level. The chronic underfunding of the elementary and secondary school system has forced school and school communities to supplement the funding from the pockets of students, parents and school supporters to provide everything from library books to sports equipment. In many secondary schools, the equipment and supplies that are needed for credit courses now come with a fee attached under the guise of education enhancement. Again the People for Education Annual Report emphasizes that 63% of secondary schools charge fees for labs and course materials and 54% of secondary schools charge fees for art classes while 23% charge fees for music classes. This is not publicly funded education; it is a well-rounded education for sale to those who can afford it.

Guiding Principles

The three general categories in this consultation can be addressed both as a group and individually. The overriding guiding principles must include equity and transparency.

School boards must weigh the benefits of fundraising for enhancement of the students' educational experience against the financial pressure placed upon students and/or communities. Ideally all fundraising and corporate partnerships would be channelled through the school board to enhance baseline revenue which should then result in equitable allocations to schools being guaranteed. This would prevent a two tier education system from being further embedded in our current education system – one for students whose parents and communities have the skills, resources and time to fundraise large amounts of money, and one for students whose parents and communities do not possess the same skills, resources and time to fundraise. Because this process is unlikely to be adopted, it is essential that school boards be responsible for the oversight of any fundraising to ensure that fundraising for enhancement in one school or community does not adversely impact the education experience of students in other schools or communities.

This cannot be a voluntary exercise for the school boards and there must be a requirement for documentation to support that premise. Transparency is also central to these types of activities. In each case, whether it is fundraising, a fee structure or a proposed partnership, the goals, criteria, and accounting must be shared up front and be approved prior to the process starting.

Fundraising

School-level fundraising must be tied to detailed board policy. A fundraising drive must be approved by both the principal of the school and the school council. Information must be provided to the school community regarding the fundraising drive prior to the start of any campaign with a complete accounting of the results of the drive upon its conclusion. All fundraising must be voluntary, with no negative consequences to the students or staff for non-participation. No employee group of the board should be targeted for fundraising through payroll deduction and all school boards should refrain from using or transmitting for use by others, the employee or student database containing personal contact information for the purpose of fundraising solicitations without the expressed permission of those same individuals.

Capital fundraising projects must not involve compensation other than notification of the donations made. Purely philanthropic donations should not require lingering ties like naming rights or a requirement of the school board to follow any particular practice. Both in fundraising and in corporate partnerships, the captured audience of school-age children and the potential for developing brand loyalty should not be a motive for donations. When undertaking fundraising for capital projects, consideration must be made for the ongoing maintenance costs of a facility or a renovation. Capital fundraising projects should be confined to education enhancement projects and must not offset the costs of traditional board maintenance and upgrading of existing facilities.

Corporate Partnerships

OSSTF/FEESO absolutely does not endorse the prospect of public services being tied to private-public partnerships. Introducing for profit companies into the realm of public education will drive the decision-making from a student achievement, educational opportunity scope to a return on investment agenda. Corporations may participate in the enhancement of public education in one way only ...through donations. Protocols should be developed to appropriately recognize donations made by corporations and individuals. These protocols should be consistent across all school boards and should not be left to local school boards to develop individually. Corporations and individuals must not make financial contributions to the education system with the expectation of a “return on investment” through advertising or recognition. OSSTF/FEESO believes that all commercial advertising aimed at children be banned in public schools and that commercial signage be prohibited on school property and school buses.

Fees

School boards charging fees for learning materials is a great concern to OSSTF/FEESO. There should be no fee attached to the supplies or materials needed for a student to achieve all of the required aspects of the course curriculum. Fees should be voluntary and only for enhancement opportunities beyond the base curriculum. Schools must provide all students and parents with a fee structure, including fees for extracurriculars prior to the beginning of the school year. Funds must be made available to allow all students to participate in all fee-related activities if fee affordability is an issue. A student should never be disadvantaged academically because of fees.

Conclusion

To ensure student success, public education must provide equal access to a comprehensive and well-rounded education. This fundamental principle of publicly funded education cannot just be a convenient catch phrase that is pushed aside when funding issues arise and the immediate solution becomes corporate sponsorships and fundraising. We are striving to ensure that students are put first and given every opportunity to succeed in every school. We still have work to do that ensures this is true for all students across Ontario. Allowing corporate sponsorships and fundraising without carefully delineated and monitored guidelines makes that work all the harder to complete successfully.

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