

schools have significantly enhanced resources, such as better stocked libraries and enrichment programs.

The past decade has also seen an increased reliance by public schools and school boards on philanthropic donations. At least 12 school boards in the province have established charitable foundations as a source of education funding, and some boards are issuing charitable receipts for donations to support capital costs for things like new science labs or libraries.

Ontario has no overall policy about private money in public schools. As boards wrestle with the funding fallout from declining enrolment, they may look more and more to the private sector for assistance. This form of private funding may create a growing gap between “have” and “have not” schools. Before this happens, it is imperative that the province has adequately explored the consequences of philanthropy, charitable donations, and private funding in public education.

# fees and fundraising

*from The Annual Report on Ontario's Public Schools 2008*

## Fundraising and fees in Ontario schools

- ❑ Fundraising totals for elementary and secondary schools range from \$0 per school to \$500,000.
- ❑ The percentage of elementary schools raising over \$20,000 per year has more than doubled since 2001.
- ❑ In fundraising in high schools, the top 10% raised as much as the bottom 90% put together.
- ❑ In 2006/07, school boards' audited financial statements show a total of \$596 million in “school-generated funds,” a 5% increase from the previous year.

**The full report is available at [www.peopleforeducation.com](http://www.peopleforeducation.com).**

*People for Education is a registered charity working to support public education in Ontario's English, French and Catholic schools.*

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# fees and fundraising

Almost all of the province's publicly-funded elementary and secondary schools raise funds for various reasons, ranging from school trips, to team uniforms, to library books, computers, and even upgrades to the school building or grounds. Many secondary schools also fundraise for charities.

## Private money in public schools

In 2004, the provincial government directed school boards to change their accounting practices. All fund-raised money and other

“school-generated” funds, such as vending machines, school fees and donations from businesses, must now be included in boards' annual financial statements.

In their audited financial statements for 2005/06, school boards reported a total of over \$567,000,000 in school-generated funds. This year, that amount has grown to \$596,000,000. Even this total may underestimate the amount of private money in public schools because it does not include funds raised by autonomous Home & School

Associations, the parents' groups that pre-date school councils and that continue to exist in many schools.

## Fees

Fees are also endemic in schools across the province. They are requested for things like student activities, labs, art supplies, music

and athletic programs, workbooks, agendas, outdoor education programs, and field trips.

These fees force many families to choose between a number of unpleasant options: pay the fee and experience financial hardship, go through the sometimes demeaning process of requesting help from the school to cover the costs, or have their child miss the enrichment program and possibly feel stigmatized. In interviews with over 200 parents, the Ottawa Social Planning Council found that fees were cited as one of the biggest barriers low income parents experience in the education system, intensifying the feeling that they “didn't belong” in the same way others did.

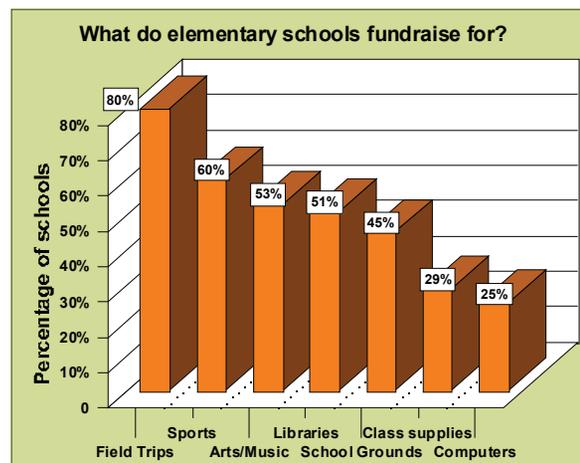
In 2006, to address concerns about fees, the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board developed a new policy for permission forms and requests for money. Now every notice home with a request for money is supposed to carry a statement upfront that the fee is voluntary.

The interpretation and application of policies about fees var-

ies from board to board and from school to school.

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## Growing inequities

While fundraising has been common-place in Ontario schools for many decades, the growing amounts raised are cause for concern. Some affluent neighbourhoods have the capacity to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars for their public schools; other neighbourhoods, where parents' incomes are lower, raise little if any money. Thus, some