

FEES & FUNDRAISING

From the People for Education Annual Report
on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools 2011



FEES & FUNDRAISING

Year after year, demand at food banks spikes in late August and early September as parents find themselves having to choose between purchasing food or school provisions.

Katharine Schmidt, Executive Director of Food Banks Canada

The fundamental premise of publicly funded education—that every student should have an equitable chance for success—is in danger because of an increasing reliance on fees and fundraising to support programs in Ontario schools.

Audited financial statements for 2009/10 show Ontario schools raised a total of \$588.4 million to augment school budgets and support charitable causes.¹ These dollars, known as “school-generated funds,” come from a combination of fees, fundraising, vending machines, cafeterias, grants, corporate sponsorships and money raised by schools for external charities.²

This private money is neither equitably distributed, nor consistently accounted for.

FUNDRAISING AND INEQUITY

This year, amounts fundraised by individual schools range from a low of \$0 to a high of \$275,000 per school. The wide range in fundraising—with the top 10% of fundraising schools raising the same amount as the bottom 78% put together—coupled with schools’ increased reliance on fees, raises grave concerns about students’ equitable access to a broadly based education.

And when data from the Ministry of Education’s [School Information Finder](#) are compared with individual schools’ fundraising amounts, a fundamental inequity becomes clear: Schools with a high proportion of low-income families raise, on average, less than half the amount raised in schools with a low proportion of low-income families. Thus, students whose families can fundraise or pay fees have access to better learning materials, more arts enrichment and more extracurricular and athletic activities.

The Ministry of Education released new draft guidelines for fundraising in March of 2011.³ In addition to fundraising already done in most schools, the new draft guidelines propose to allow fundraising for such core costs as:

QUICK FACTS FOR 2010/11

- 97% of elementary and secondary schools fundraise.
- Fundraising per school ranges from a low of \$0 to a high of \$275,000.
- 68% of secondary schools charge fees for courses.
- 92% of secondary schools have a Student Activity Fee, and the average fee has increased by 75% since 2000/01.
- Schools with a high proportion of low-income students raise, on average, less than half the amount raised in schools with a low proportion of low-income students.

- school improvement projects (e.g. outdoor structures and skating rinks),
- upgrades to school facilities that do not increase the square footage of the school (e.g. retrofitting auditoriums and upgrading science labs),
- upgrades to sports facilities (e.g. running tracks and specialized recreation facilities) and
- technological investments (e.g. computer and media labs).

If these guidelines are an indication of future policy, students from families with the capacity to fundraise in the hundreds of thousands of dollars will also have better science labs, new gyms and auditoriums and greater access to 21st century technological advancements.

The Ministry of Education is conducting a consultation on new draft guidelines for fundraising until August 30th, 2011.⁴

FEES AND THE EDUCATION ACT

Ontario's *Education Act* guarantees resident pupils "the right to attend school without a fee," and requires that boards provide "instruction and adequate accommodation," as well as textbooks.⁵

Ontario's new provincial fee guidelines forbid schools from charging registration or administration fees, or fees for core materials necessary to teach the curriculum. But at the same time, the guidelines allow fees to cover the costs of "enhanced programming and materials" and "enrichments and upgrades."⁶ These enhancements can include anything from physical education equipment to superior science materials. The guidelines provide no guarantee for students' equal access to "enhanced" materials or enrichments. In fact, these guidelines may create very real divisions between those students whose families are willing and able to pay for "enhanced" materials, and those whose families are not.

STUDENT ACTIVITY FEES AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Research from the OECD and the National Research Council (U.S.) shows that participation in extracurricular activities, sports and clubs are key characteristics for evaluating student engagement and students' sense of belonging at school.⁷ This research also shows that both engagement and belonging have a significant impact on students' overall success.

According to the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, "extracurricular activities can . . . foster lifelong appreciation and interests, preparing a young person for life in ways that go beyond academic success."⁸

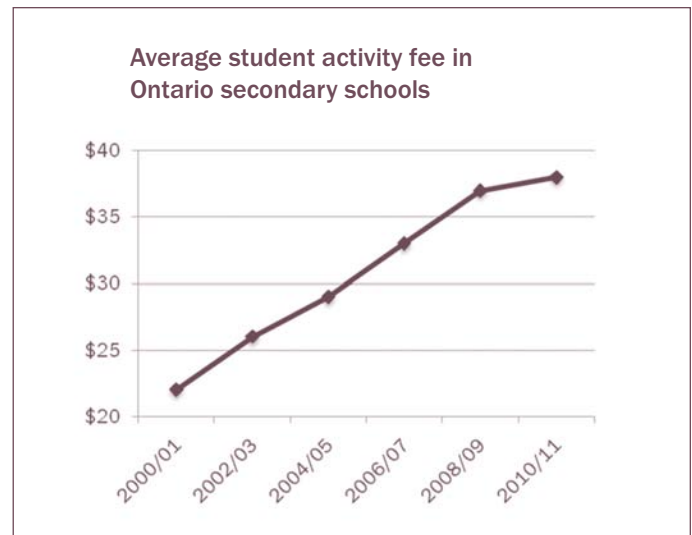
In Ontario, students do not have equitable access to these important activities. More than two-thirds of Ontario secondary schools charge fees for student activities and/or athletics. Some schools charge as little as \$5, while others report Student Activity Fees as high as \$100 and Athletic Fees as high as \$1,800 per student. New fee guidelines do not forbid these types of fees, nor do they guarantee students' access to these activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

An increased reliance on fees and fundraising in Ontario schools will lead to an increased gap between "have" and "have not" schools.

People for Education recommends

- the province specify and provide funding for the materials, programs and resources that should be available to all students in every school,
- the province ensure that every student in Ontario has access to a broadly based education that includes adequate learning materials in all subjects and access to extracurricular activities, arts programs and sports at no extra charge,
- the province prohibit boards and schools from fundraising to cover capital costs,
- the province track and publish an annual report on school-generated funds, including information on amounts raised and costs covered, and
- the province establish provincial fee guidelines that mandate that all fees are voluntary and that all fees requests from schools clearly state "ALL FEES ARE VOLUNTARY."



NOTES

- 1 People for Education. (2011). [School-generated funds from Ontario School Boards' 2010 audited statements]. Unpublished spreadsheet on file with author.
- 2 Finance Committee, Ontario Association of School Business Officials. (2009, January). *Guidelines for school generated funds*. Retrieved from http://www.oasbo.org/admin/eZeditor/files/f_10_OASBO_SchoolGeneratedFunds_Guidelines_January_2009.pdf
- 3 Government of Ontario. (2010). *Draft fundraising guideline*. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/fundraisingGuideline.pdf>
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Education Act, R.S.O. 1990, c.E.5 as amended. ss 32(1) and s.170(1)(6) and (13).
- 6 Government of Ontario. (2011, March). *Fees for learning materials and activities guideline*. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/feesGuideline.pdf>
- 7 See Willms, J.D. (2003). *Student engagement at school: A sense of belonging and participation*. Paris, France: OECD. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/42/35/33689437.pdf>; National Research Council Institute of Medicine. (2004). *Engaging schools: Fostering high school students' motivation to learn*. Washington: National Academies Press. Retrieved from http://www.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=10421&page=R2
- 8 Scott, J. (n.d). *Equitable education? The cost of extracurriculars in Ontario's schools*. Toronto, ON: Ontario Student Trustees' Association, page 5.



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

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To read the full 2011 report, go to <http://www.peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Annual-Report-on-Ontario-Schools-2011.pdf>