

November 5, 2011

People for Education Conference 2011

Public school. Private money. The fundraising dilemma.

Notes from the session

What role does fundraising play in public schools? Is it an educational enhancement? A necessary evil? An unacceptable inequity? If fundraising is banned, what would we lose and what would we gain?

Presenters: Lesley Johnston, Researcher and Policy Analyst, Social Planning Toronto
Catherine Parsonage, Executive Director & CEO of the Toronto Foundation for Student Success (TFSS)

Moderator: Anne Kidder, Executive Director, People for Education

Catherine Parsonage

- Toronto District School Board (TDSB)-sent out a discussion paper to every parent council-feedback indicated that fundraising was a voluntary collaborative activity, also a community building activity
- additional response-fundraising should be used for enhancements
- corporate presence was the most debated issue-worried about exploitation of students-the conclusion was that there was a need for advocates from other sectors in society, but there needed to be limits
- Issue of equity constantly came up-parents did not want to be taxed or tithed-it needed to be voluntary-central equity fund was not successful
- New solution-arms length foundation to remove barriers and to promote advocacy-buffer between the corporate world and the school board-programs-afterschool programs, hearing aids, helping local school communities to apply for grants
- Most important point-parent involvement in fundraising should be voluntary
- Products should be suitable for student consumption-no trans fat policy
- Concern from parents-transparency regarding how the money was spent-board policy-money has to be spend within 2 years
- Maybe we should consider raising funds for our own emergency funds instead of raising funds for other charities

Lesley Johnston

- TDSB- 20 least marginalized schools raised 36 times more than 20 most marginalized schools
- trend- less marginalized the school, the more money that is coming in through fundraising
- private charities connected with schools operate outside of the supervision of the school board-raises questions regarding transparency
- fundraising capacity is leading to inequitable opportunities and outcomes for students within the system-capacity in TDSB ranges from \$0-\$350, 000
- need to reconsider having a centralized equity fund-amount fundraised above a preset amount goes into a central fund

Discussion

- We need to be clear about the fact that schools are raising funds for charity, school graduation trips and for their school community and the figures do not always distinguish between these funds
- We need to be careful in defining the difference between equality and equity in defining what is necessary for successful schools
- We need to consider issues related to disparity related to school size, school location (urban vs. rural), ability to fundraise
- The potential role of social innovation (public/private partnerships) and related issues is still being explored-taxes, zoning, long-term commitment of private partners
- We need to consider if fundraising is addressing the needs of education or larger socioeconomic deficits-potential solution is getting other ministries involved
- Issues related to taxation and funding-need to consider if fundraising is making up for the unwillingness to pay taxes and if the government is underfunding education based on the willingness of schools to fundraise to make up for deficits