

FEES AND FUNDRAISING

Every year, People for Education conducts a survey of Ontario's 4900 publicly funded schools.

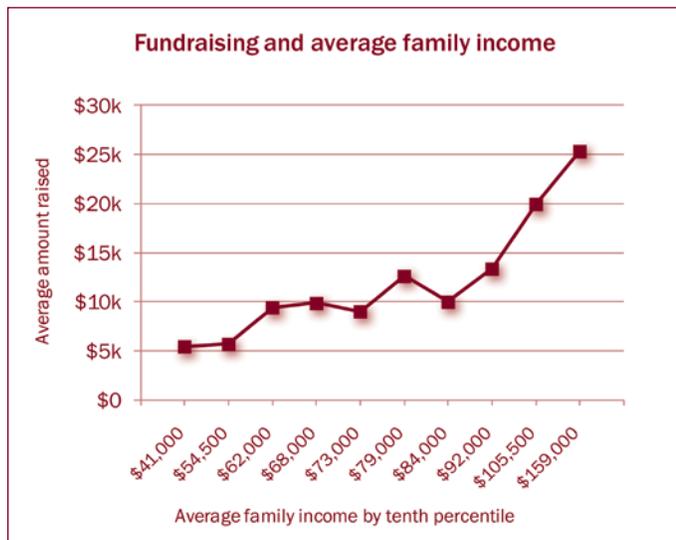
The survey asks principals for information on resources and programs in the school and about the school's connection with its community.

In 2013, 1122 schools responded to the survey. This report is an excerpt from the 2013 Annual Report on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools.

PRIVATE MONEY IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

Ontario schools continue to rely on fees and fundraising to augment school budgets and cover the cost of enrichment. This reliance increases the gap between "have" and "have-not" schools.

Many schools rely on fundraising for activities that contribute to student engagement, including school sports, arts, and trips. However, the funds are not equitably distributed across Ontario schools, and there is a wide variation in how schools subsidize activities and programs that require fees for participation.



QUICK FACTS FOR 2013

- The top 10% of fundraising schools raise as much as the bottom 81%.
- Since fee guidelines were introduced in 2011, the percentage of secondary schools that charge fees for courses has declined from 68% to 41%.
- 91% of elementary schools charge fees for field trips, and 52% charge fees for extracurricular activities.
- High income elementary schools fundraise at five times the rate of low income schools.

FUNDRAISING

There is a wide range in the amounts that schools fundraise—from \$0 to \$500,000. While 17% of secondary schools say they don't fundraise at all, nearly every elementary school reports fundraising.

The most telling difference is in the fairly small number of schools at the top end, which fundraise substantially more than all the others. The top fundraising schools also have the highest average family incomes, and the top 10% raise as much as the bottom 81% combined.

FEES

Ontario's *Education Act* guarantees resident students the "right to attend school without a fee," and requires that boards provide "instruction and adequate accommodation," and textbooks.¹

Despite this, there are many kinds of fees in Ontario elementary and secondary schools—from charges for field trips to fees for participation in extracurricular activities.

Staff members with music degrees/skills teach instrumental music to grades 7 and 8 for a fee—but no student is denied entry (school will cover fee). A non-instrumental music class runs at the same time with no fee.

Principal, Elementary School, Rainy River DSB

In 2011, the province released fee guidelines that explicitly prohibit schools from charging fees for core materials necessary to teach the curriculum.² The guidelines do allow fees for student activities, field trips and extracurricular activities. Fees for “enhanced materials” are also still permitted.

Since the guidelines were introduced, the percentage of secondary schools charging lab or material fees dropped from 68% to 41%.

Approximately a quarter of secondary schools still charge fees for art and health and physical education, and just under 20% charge for design and technology courses, music courses and family studies. Five percent of schools charge for science, and a handful still report having fees for courses such as business, English and math.

Students can pay to join a music academy which includes piano lessons.

Principal, Elementary School, Ottawa Catholic DSB

FEES FOR ENRICHMENT

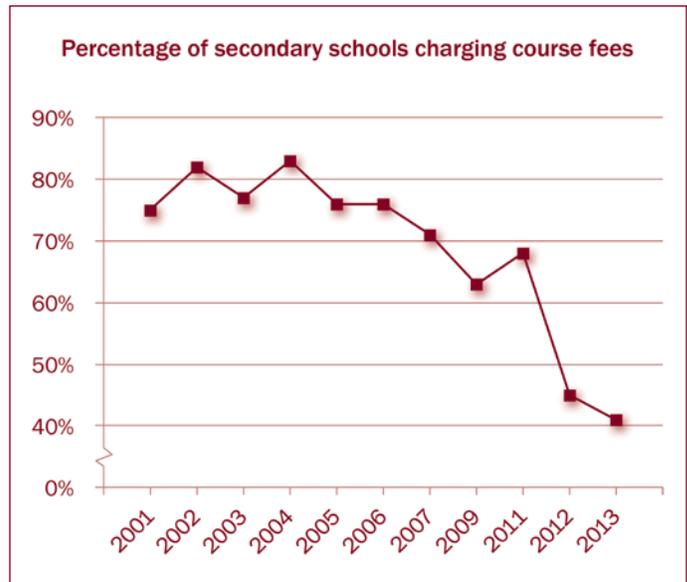
Participation in activities outside the classroom is strongly linked to engagement in school and academic success.³ Unfortunately, this is also the area where fees are most common:

- 93% of secondary schools charge a student activity fee ranging from \$10-\$100 each year.
- 71% of secondary schools charge athletic fees, ranging from \$4-\$1500 per student.

Elementary schools also charge fees for a range of activities:

- 52% have fees for extracurricular activities.
- 91% charge fees for field trips.
- 47% have fees for lunchtime programs.

A number of principals raised concerns about the high costs of busing for sports and field trips. These costs are often covered by fundraising.



Busing is incredibly expensive and it costs a fortune to ensure that all students get to participate in field trips and sporting events. Most of our fundraising goes towards busing and smartboards.

Principal, Elementary School, Hastings and Prince Edward DSB

The cost of busing is so high that it is affecting programming at the school. We are very small and want to provide as much as possible to our students in the area of experiential learning...but we are now cutting back due to costs.

Principal, Elementary School, Rainy River DSB

Fees are also creeping into new areas. For the first time, this year, a number of principals report that some students attend fee-based instrumental music lessons at school during the school day, while the rest of the students in their class participate in other regular programming.

A student can learn an instrument during school hours if the parent pays for the individual student.

Principal, Elementary School, Limestone DSB

FEES AND FAMILY INCOME

It is far more likely that a secondary school will charge fees—and, presumably, offer enriched materials and experiences—where the average family income is higher. For example, in the secondary schools where family income is in the top 10%, 85% charge Athletic fees. In comparison, only 45% of schools where family income is in the bottom 10% charge Athletic fees. This may mean that expensive sports, such as hockey, are simply not offered in schools with lower average family incomes.

Elementary schools where family incomes are in the top 10% are more likely to charge for extracurricular activities and lunch programs.

In comments, a number of schools with lower average family incomes indicate that they have dealt with affordability issues by not charging any fees, or looking for ways to minimize them.

“Schools in needy communities like ours go without many activities. We look for FREE events. We limit the number of out of school trips. We try and bring in cheap presentations.”

Principal, Elementary School, York Catholic DSB

When schools charge fees, they are likely to create barriers to low income students’ participation in the full life of the school.

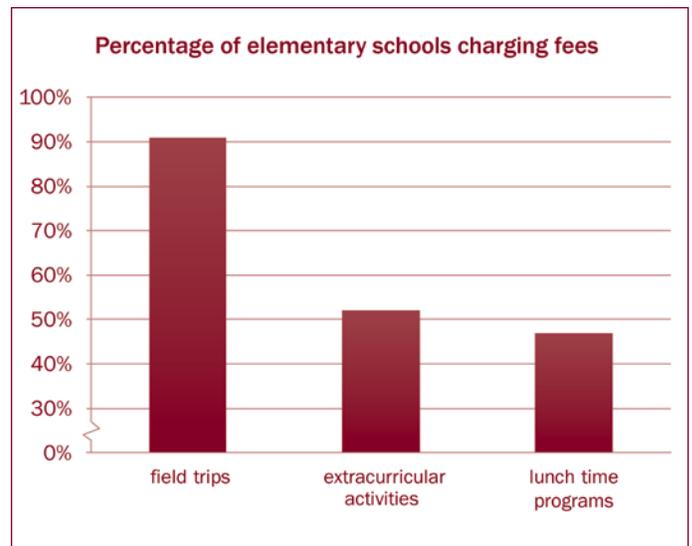
In a survey of Ontario secondary school students in 2011, 36% responded that fees were a barrier to participating in some activities at school.⁴ Almost all schools in Ontario include at least some children directly affected by poverty.

WHAT IF STUDENTS CAN’T PAY?

We asked principals how their school deals with fees for students who can’t pay.

While the vast majority of schools report that fees are subsidized to ensure that all children can participate, their responses reveal a patchwork of policies and resources around subsidies.

Some schools provide flexible payment plans, and in several secondary schools and one elementary school, students who can’t pay are asked to do service or community work or volunteer hours in return for a subsidy.⁵



But there were some cases where principals report that students “opt out,”⁶ or “they pay or they are not in the program.”⁷ Other schools report providing “an alternative activity” for students who could not afford to participate in fee-based activities.⁸ A number of schools also say they only subsidize classroom or curriculum related activities.⁹

We arrange for payment, no questions asked. Our School Council subsidizes programs it runs, our school subsidizes programs we run, and any outside agency must do the same to be considered to be a part of our community.

Principal, Elementary School, Ottawa Catholic DSB

Several schools said they publicize the availability of subsidies whenever there is a request for funds; far more mentioned “quiet conversations” or a “private chat” with parents or students. One school stressed that they tried to ensure the student did not know about any subsidy (and dealt directly with parents).¹⁰

Some schools rely on teachers to identify students who may need financial support. Others have a formal application process. Some principals have a process where requests are “assessed;”¹¹ far more say subsidies are handled on a “no questions asked basis”.

RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE

There are schools that stress that all fees are voluntary, for example: “All requests for funds are completely voluntary. No students are ever exempted from a program, or denied resources, based on this voluntary payment.”¹²

A few mentioned more formal policies at the school: “No child is excluded. School Council is also committed to this principle.”¹³ One school noted that the “right to participate” is a board policy.¹⁴

WHO FUNDS FEE SUBSIDIES?

Schools subsidize fees in a variety of ways. Some use school budgets or grants from their boards for poverty intervention, while others use school-generated funds such as cafeteria revenues. Many schools use funding raised by the school council to offset the cost of subsidies. Some schools report getting financial support from external agencies—either a foundation associated with their board, service clubs, municipalities, or a local First Nation. A number report receiving donations from individuals in the community to meet this need. Several schools reported that staff routinely contributes, for example: “Teachers pay into a fund (\$30/year) and we pay the cost of field trips, schools supplies, sports, etc. for students who can’t.”¹⁵

NOTES

- 1 Education Act, R.S.O. 1990, c.E.5 as amended, ss 32(1) and s.170(1)(6) and (13).
- 2 Ontario Ministry of Education. (2011) Fees for learning materials and activities guideline. Retrieved May 2, 2013 from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/feesguideline.pdf>.
- 3 See e.g., Willms, J.D. (2003). *Student engagement at school: A sense of belonging and participation*. Paris, France: OECD; National Research Council Institute of Medicine, see note 15.
- 4 Ontario Student Trustees' Association. (2011) OSTA-AECO Student and parent survey—Analysis and results. Toronto: author, retrieved May 2, 2013 from <http://www.peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/OSTA-P4E-Student-Parent-Survey-Final-Report.pdf>
- 5 Eg. Secondary school, Upper Grand DSB; Secondary school, Lambton Kent DSB; Secondary school, Toronto DSB; Elementary school, Greater Essex DSB
- 6 Elementary school, DSB of Niagara
- 7 Secondary school, Trillium Lakelands
- 8 Elementary schools, CSD catholique de l'Est Ontarien and Durham DSB
- 9 Eg. Elementary schools, Durham DSB and London District Catholic DSB
- 10 Eg. Elementary school, Huron-Superior Catholic DSB
- 11 Elementary school, Durham Catholic DSB
- 12 Principal, Elementary school, Ottawa-Carleton DSB
- 13 Elementary school, Ottawa-Carleton DSB
- 14 Elementary school, Lambton Kent DSB
- 15 Secondary school, Avon Maitland DSB



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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RECOMMENDATIONS

A reliance on fees and fundraising in Ontario schools increases the gap between “have” and “have-not” schools. The current patchwork of policy and practice around fee subsidies undermines the idea that every child should have a right to participate in all activities offered in their public school.

People for Education recommends that:

- the province develop policies to 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 develop policy guidelines around fee subsidies in schools, based on the principle that all students have a right to participate in all curricular and extracurricular activities in their public school;
- the province publish a detailed annual report on all school-generated funds, including all fees and all fundraising;
- the EQAO include questions on its student and principal surveys that will allow it to track the enrichment opportunities—and levels of participation—available within each school; and
- every school council develop and publicize a fundraising and fee policy that clearly outlines how students can participate in all activities in the school, regardless of their families' financial capacity.