

Parent involvement at school: Supporting our children through fundraising

“Goodnight, sweetheart – sleep well.” “Goodnight, Mom. Oh, Mom? I forgot to tell you, we’re having a bake sale for band tomorrow. I volunteered to bring two dozen healthy muffins. Can you make them please?”

I remember that first day of Kindergarten, when I naively believed that feeding my child a healthy breakfast and dropping him off at the front doors of the school on time meant that I was doing my part to help things run smoothly. I soon realized the parent role in the public school system is much more. Somehow, in no time at all, I found myself buying poinsettias to raise money for the new playground, selling raffle tickets to good-natured co-workers in support of the class trip to McQueen Lake, and filling the back of the truck with sticky cans and bottles for the athletics department. How did this happen?

Parent involvement at school can take many forms, but fundraising seems to be a given. Good ideas for improving our children’s educational experience seem to be limitless, while the money to pay for them is definitely not. Many Parent Advisory Councils (PACs) step into this gap, putting their energy and enthusiasm to work in order to raise funds. And we’re not talking chump change: in School District 73, it’s not unusual for school PACs to have a budget of \$20,000 or more. With the economy as uncertain as it is now, PACs have to be especially careful to maximize their fundraising results, both in terms of dollars and in terms of precious volunteer hours. Given the limits of the current economy and the never-ending demand on parents’ time, PAC fundraising needs to be smarter and more targeted. But how?

To offer PACs some guidance on making the most of their fundraising efforts, the local District Parent Advisory Council (SD73 DPAC) is offering a workshop entitled **Fundraising 101: More Juice for the Squeeze!** on Saturday, March 7th. The one-day session will run at the Henry Grube Education Centre from 8:30 to 3:30 (lunch will be provided). Participants will learn best practices for establishing fundraising goals and leveraging success through strategic partnerships, as well as the nuts and bolts of organizing rewarding events. Guest speakers will address the topics of grants, sponsorships, and signature events. Interested participants can R.S.V.P. or ask for more information by sending a note to sd73dpac@gmail.com.

SD73 DPAC Chair Paula Schmidt hopes the sessions will encourage PACs to ask themselves the “big questions” before they start fundraising. What is our role? What are our goals? What’s the best way to achieve them? Says Schmidt, “Fundraising by PACs should be an intentional decision that fits the group’s current needs, rather than a tradition that gets carried on from year to year.”

Ideally, each PAC will have an annual plan, or set of goals which define where to target the group’s efforts. Some years, especially when large capital projects like playgrounds are on the list, the PAC’s activities will be heavy on the fundraising side. Other years, the PAC may choose to focus more on its advisory role, working with school staff to build community or take a deeper look at issues like social responsibility.

Whatever form parent involvement takes, the goal is always to enrich the learning environment for children. Along with advising school staff through School Planning Councils and providing input on policy decisions at the PAC table, parents advise the school indirectly with their funding choices. The bottom line is that parents fundraise because they care.

As I walk out of the school, I smile at the fresh faces of those new Kindergarten parents anxiously saying goodbye to their youngsters. They’re just starting on the often busy, occasionally frustrating yet always rewarding journey that is called parent involvement. They don’t know what they’re in for.