

# Parents feel school fundraising pinch

A METROLAND SPECIAL REPORT



## FUNDRAISING FEVER

HOW PRIVATE MONEY FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS IS WIDENING THE EDUCATION GAP

BY KRISTEN CALIS, JESSICA CUNHA AND ROSIE-ANN GROVER  
Metroland Staff

Parents across Ontario are feeling unprecedented pressure to open their wallets for school fundraising as families shell out money for everything from crayons and Kleenex to computers and playground equipment.

"Today, there's a bigger burden than ever before," Progressive Conservative education critic Lisa MacLeod said. "Parents are paying (more than) half a billion bucks out of their own pockets each year for essential learning tools."

Bake sales, car washes and pizza lunches generate tens of millions of dollars in fundraising that is supposed to enrich — not replace — public funding.

And "the amount of extra monies that are being raised for school purposes is steadily increasing," the Ontario Public School Boards' Association stated.

"The trend is undeniable." Parents do "have a role to play in actually augmenting the school budget," said Annie Kidder, executive director of People for Education, a parent-led advocacy group.

But she believes the education system is taking advantage of parents' willingness and ability to be involved, assuming they will put in that extra time and money.

Many parents agree.

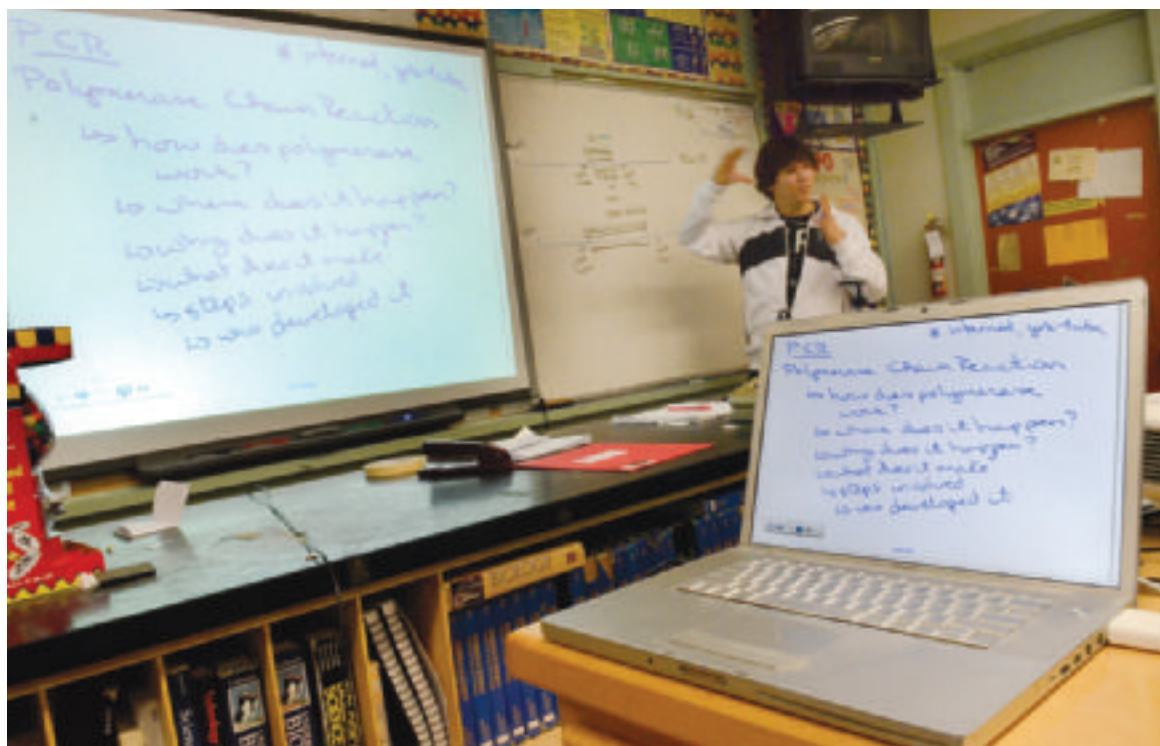
School boards know parents will fundraise, said Oshawa dad Steve Rockbrune, who believes parents will work hard to give their kids the best they can provide.

"That's why they put the squeeze on us," said Mr. Rockbrune, who was surprised when his daughter, who attends Harmony Public School, came home at the start of the year with a note requesting donations of Kleenex and glue.

Parents said drumming up dollars isn't the most popular task.

"Nobody really ever wants to take on the job of fundraising because it's a lot of work," said Catherine Scott, fundraising committee co-chairperson at Roch Carrier Elementary School in Ottawa.

"And yet we need classroom resources; we need new technology; we need to keep our school grounds up; spend money on paint for hopscotch and four square in the playground — and there's no money in the school budget for those things."



METROLAND STAFF/KAZ NOVAK

A student makes a presentation using a laptop computer and whiteboard. These are some of the items for which schools fundraise.

## FUNDRAISING FEVER

A three-part series on school fundraising practices

**JUNE 7:** Inequality in funding

**JUNE 9:** Feeling the pinch

**JUNE 14:** Funding starts with province

In the York District School Board, the Bayview Hill Elementary school council in Richmond Hill runs a weekly pizza lunch program, the main force behind the school's success at fundraising.

About 500 kids participate in the program, and on average it brings in \$40,000 each year.

The council also runs an annual dance-a-thon, diversity night and barbecue, which has allowed it to, among other things, build a main playground and an enclosed kindergarten play structure in the past seven years. In just one council meeting alone earlier this school year, the council approved \$81,000 worth of items teachers requested for the classroom. The wish lists included: LCD-mounted projectors, Macintosh computers, iPads, iTunes gift cards, DVDs for the library, stacking cups, kidney tables and yoga kits for the primary students.

Many parents say they are feeling the pinch with schools continually asking for more money.

It can seem endless, said Greg Weiler, a father of two at the primary level and president for the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario

### SCHOOL FUNDRAISING: Bake sale bonanza

This chart shows the amount of money parents, students and teachers generated in 11 boards last year through fundraising for everything from SMART boards for their schools. The almost 800 schools took in more than \$26 million through a range of events including bake sales, pizza days, auctions and dance-a-thons. That fundraising money is 21 per cent of the total of \$125.5 million in extra revenue that the 11 boards brought in from all sources — known as school-generated funds.\*

SCHOOL BOARD	TOTAL SCHOOL-GENERATED REVENUE in \$ millions	MONEY RAISED THROUGH FUNDRAISING in \$ millions	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS
Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario	4.9	1.0	49
Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board	25.2	2.5	146
Halton Catholic District School Board	11.2	1.5	49
Halton District School Board	19.0	6.5	98
Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board	9.5	1.7	57
Hamilton Wentworth District School Board	12.7	3.3	113
Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board	9.9	2.2	94
Nipissing-Parry Sound Catholic District School Board	1.1	0.24	13
William Lakefields District School Board	5.9	1.3	48
Willingham Catholic District School Board	3.2	1.2	20
York Catholic District School Board	22.9	4.8	101
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>125.5</b>	<b>26.24</b>	<b>788</b>

\*School-generated funds are the extra dollars over and above what the province provides to public funding. This revenue comes from things like student fees, cafeteria, fundraising, governance and other activities.

NOTE: Of 11 school boards surveyed for this Metroland Special Report, three (11 were the only ones that provided fundraising totals.

SOURCES: VARIOUS ONTARIO SCHOOL BOARDS, 2010-2011 FIGURES

By Ian Gowat, Staff Writer / THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

(ETFO) in Waterloo.

"I can't think of a week where there isn't some fundraising initiative," Mr Weiler said. "It puts an unrealistic expectation on parents and family and the community."

NDP education critic Peter Tabuns believes the government relies on parents to fundraise.

"You almost think they quietly approve. This is a way of reducing the pressure on them for proper funding of education. Leave it to the parents. The parents will raise the money and won't squawk about the fact that their school isn't getting enough. But it means a lot of children get shortchanged."

The ETFO said school fundraising lets the provincial government "shirk" its responsibility to properly fund schools and puts pressure on everyone in the system.

"The funds have to come from somewhere," said Durham ETFO president Gerard O'Neill. "People have to go out and raise them."

Filling this funding gap often comes down to teachers, many of whom end up paying for essential classroom items, such as pencils and paper, out of their own pocket, Mr. O'Neill said.

Some manage the entire fundraising procedure, which takes time away from teaching.

School councils are finding new ways to raise money.

At Terry Fox Public School in Ajax, school community council chairperson Sandra Fletcher has become familiar but not comfortable with soliciting friends and family.

"The SCC relies on parents and grandparents and sisters and uncles and cousins," she said.

When the school opened, the gym didn't have a sound system and the library didn't have enough books. After years of fundraising to add these items, Ms Fletcher said she has found parents have reached fundraising fatigue.

The school council of St. Patrick's Catholic High School in Ottawa doesn't do any fundraising for the school. Instead, it lets the students decide how to raise funds and how to use the money.

"It's hard to get volunteers, so it would fall on a few people's shoulders," said Joanne MacEwan, chairperson of the school council and co-chairperson of the Catholic School Parents' Association.

Leaving it up to the students teaches them responsibility and keeps parents from burning out, Ms MacEwan said.

However, not everyone agrees that the problem is a funding shortfall. Joe Allin, chairperson of the Durham District School Board, believes current government funding is sufficient and fundraising is a long-standing practice in schools that will take place no matter what.

"I'm not convinced it's associated with need," Mr. Allin said. "That isn't to say there aren't needs. I'd say this activity would go on regardless of the level of funding that comes into the schools."

Fundraising is a way for parents to be active and feel like they're contributing to their child's school, said Ms Kidder, of People for Education.

"I think it's a really nice, understandable way to be involved in our kids' school."

In Woodbridge, St. Clare Catholic School spent funds on school improvements, arts enrichment, security cameras and healthy-living initiatives such as yoga in recent years, according to a school council letter to the community.

"Fundraising is so important to our school," the school council stated. "Through it, our children are able to access many enhanced resources and programs that only serve to enrich their educational experience."

Muddying the issue further is determining the must-have items.

For example, the Ministry of Education doesn't consider technology an essential item for schools. In fact, it slashed the budget for that line item by \$25 million for the 2011-12 school year.

In turn, the ministry's guidelines deem it acceptable for schools to acquire technology with fundraising.

Care to comment, Whitchurch-Stouffville? E-mail letters to the editor to jmason@ymg.com