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Fees and Fundraising in TDSB Schools Create Inequity

Social Planning Toronto releases "**Public System, Private Money: Fees, Fundraising and Equity in the Toronto District School Board**", highlighting the inequities that fees and fundraising have created in Toronto's public schools.

September 12, 2011, (Toronto, Ont.) - A report released today by Social Planning Toronto entitled *Public System, Private Money: Fees, Fundraising and Equity in the Toronto District School Board* explores how school fees and fundraising activities create an unequal playing field by offering different opportunities for students in schools and between schools, depending on their ability to pay.

Inspired by the Ministry of Education's review of the *Fees for Learning Materials and Activities Guideline* and *Fundraising Guideline*, this report explores the growing opportunity gap between students from wealthier families and those who attend schools in wealthier areas of the city compared with students whose families are lower income and/or live in poorer areas of the city.

"Socio-economic, ethno-cultural and neighbourhood divides in the city are being institutionalized in a number of ways. This report is the most detailed warning yet about the growing gap in the learning opportunities for our children based on where their families live. This, as the report notes, is "segregating those who can afford to pay from those who cannot" -- something our public education system was designed to avoid. What is happening to "equal opportunity' for all?" says Dr. David Hulchanski, author of the *Three Cities* report.

The combined impact of fundraising and fees indicates a significant difference in the funds schools have available to support their programs. Across both elementary and secondary panels the wealthiest 20% of schools in the city raised three times what the poorest 20% of schools in Toronto generated.

"Equity means equal access to learning regardless of family income; in Ontario today this is not a reality..." says Sheila Cary-Meagher, Trustee with the Toronto District School Board.

Over the three years from 2007 to 2010, the twenty least marginalized primary schools fundraised 36 times more money than the most marginalized twenty schools: \$249,362.51 per school compared to \$6,922.98 per school. While secondary schools are more reliant on fees, over the same three years the wealthiest twenty secondary schools raised 920 times more money than the poorest twenty schools in Toronto: \$33,653 per school compared to \$36.56 per school. These schools can afford to provide very different learning opportunities for their students.

Toronto District School Board parent, Nadia Heyd, says "Fundraising in the schools contributes to the creation of 'Have' and 'Have-not' schools. Some schools raise \$200k. Others raise \$0. I wonder what a tour of schools at either extreme would reveal in terms of what differences you would find in the classrooms, library, gym, art supply cabinets, yard and playground. What about the before and after school activities and programs? What about lunchtime extracurriculars? What about field trips - how many, where?"



While taking little action on fundraising in the draft *Fundraising Guideline*, the new Ministry of Education *Fees for Learning Materials and Activities Guideline* attempts to set tighter limits on items for which fees can be charged. Kipling Collegiate Institute Principal, Roger Dale, warns that “to firmly establish that there should be no course fees for students in public schools is great! It further supports our belief in equity and inclusion for all students. The problem for many schools will be how to move from present practice to this different place with budgets that are already stretched thin, and with little ability or desire to burden our communities with fundraising endeavours to replace these course resources.”

Fees and fundraising undermine the principles of equity and inclusivity in our public education system, and are making our public school system less inclusive and accessible. “Education in Ontario is considered the ‘great equalizer.’ Our public system is meant to provide all our students with equal access to top quality education. In the midst of this discussion of the institutionalization of fees and fundraising to subsidize education we cannot forget that what we all need is a system that is funded properly so that it can meet the needs of all Ontario students,” says Lesley Johnston, Research and Policy Analyst with Social Planning Toronto.

For the full report see <http://www.spno.ca/pdf/public-system-private-money.pdf>

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