

**In 1998 when the funding formula was introduced Ontario schools faced unprecedented challenges in fitting their school budgets to educational requirements. Schools began to charge fees and fundraising to subsidize their operations. This practice, subsequently institutionalized by the Ministry of Education, has led to deep inequities in opportunities and outcomes across the system between schools that could raise funds and those that could not. In 2011-12 the Ministry has been conducting a review of their Guidelines on Fees, Fundraising and Corporate Partnerships.**

### **Examining the Ministry of Education’s Draft Guidelines for School Fees and Fundraising**

In 2010 the Ministry of Education released draft guidelines for school fees, which were followed by the release of draft guidelines for fundraising in 2011. Student activity fees, enhanced programming fees and specialized programming fees are voluntary amounts paid by students. The fees are meant to enhance a student’s school experience by covering the cost for materials and activities, enrichment or upgrades to materials and programs beyond the core curriculum (Draft Fees Policy, Ministry of Education, Ontario, 2010). Fundraising raises money or other resources for external charities, field trips, student activities and resources, and capital assets. These activities are supported by the parent council, with administrative support for collection provided by school staff (Ministry of Education, Fundraising Guidelines, March 2011). Many schools, however, have charged fees for activities and materials defined as ineligible for fees within the Ministry’s guidelines, and parents may not know that fees and fundraising activities are voluntary – not mandatory. Parents are also becoming increasingly concerned with the amount of money they are expected to provide out of pocket to schools for fees and fundraising initiatives.

### **Learning Opportunities, School-Generated Funds, and the Toronto District School Board**

School fees and fundraising activities create inequities between students, among schools and make the public school system less inclusive and accessible. Marginalized students suffer. The amount of money entering schools through grants meant to assist vulnerable students, such as the Learning Opportunities Grant, are often used to balance budget shortfalls across the system. Meanwhile private money entering schools through fees and fundraising is kept in the schools that raise the money.

The TDSB uses a measure to evaluate external challenges experienced by students. This measure, the Learning Opportunities Index (LOI), positions each school within the TDSB based on six measures affecting student success. The variables measured and combined to create the LOI are:

- Median income
- Percentage of families whose income is below the Low Income Measure (before taxes)
- Percentage of families receiving Social Assistance
- Percentage of adults without a high school education
- Percentage of adults with at least one university degree
- Percentage of lone parent families

(The LOI measures challenges in the students’ neighbourhood of residence, rather than in the neighbourhood where each school is located.)

Research has found that fees and fundraising in the TDSB vary significantly, and the highest LOI-ranked schools (the schools where students are most likely to have the lowest socioeconomic status, etc.)

generate far less in school-generated funds than the lowest LOI-ranked schools. We also found that on average high LOI schools charge lower fees than low LOI schools. While it means students who can least afford to pay are charged lower fees than their peers this leads to inequities in the learning materials available to students in their courses and affects their learning opportunities and experiences in school.

The following tables illustrate the differences in parent council generated funds for the top and bottom 20 LOI schools in the TDSB. The first table shows the differences for elementary schools, and the second shows the differences for secondary schools.

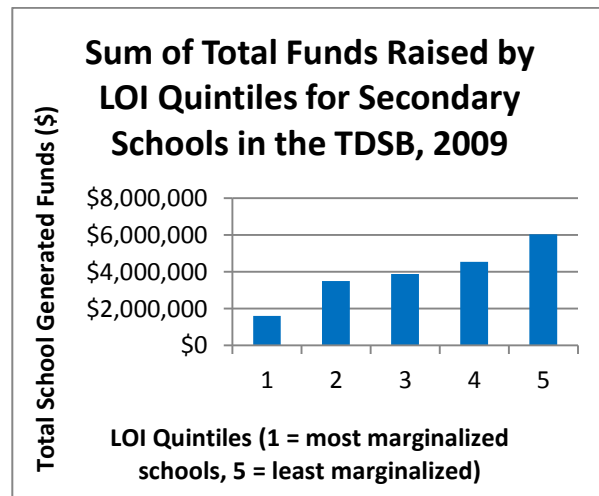
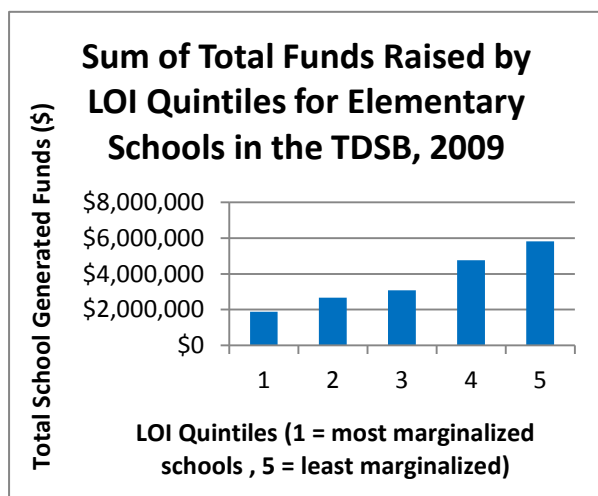
| <b>Parent Council Generated Fundraising Dollars within TDSB Elementary Schools, 2007-10</b> |                |                |                |                       |   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------------|---|
|                                                                                             | 2007-08        | 2008-09        | 2009-10        | Total                 |   |
| Top 20 LOI                                                                                  | \$43,633.94    | \$47,012.74    | \$47,812.95    | \$138,459.63          |   |
| Bottom 20 LOI                                                                               | \$1,901,422.55 | \$1,614,035.18 | \$1,471,792.46 | \$4,987,250.19        |   |
| <b>Fundraising Disparity</b>                                                                |                |                |                | <b>\$4,848,790.56</b> | * |

\*Note the fundraising disparity is almost **\$5,000,000** for elementary schools.

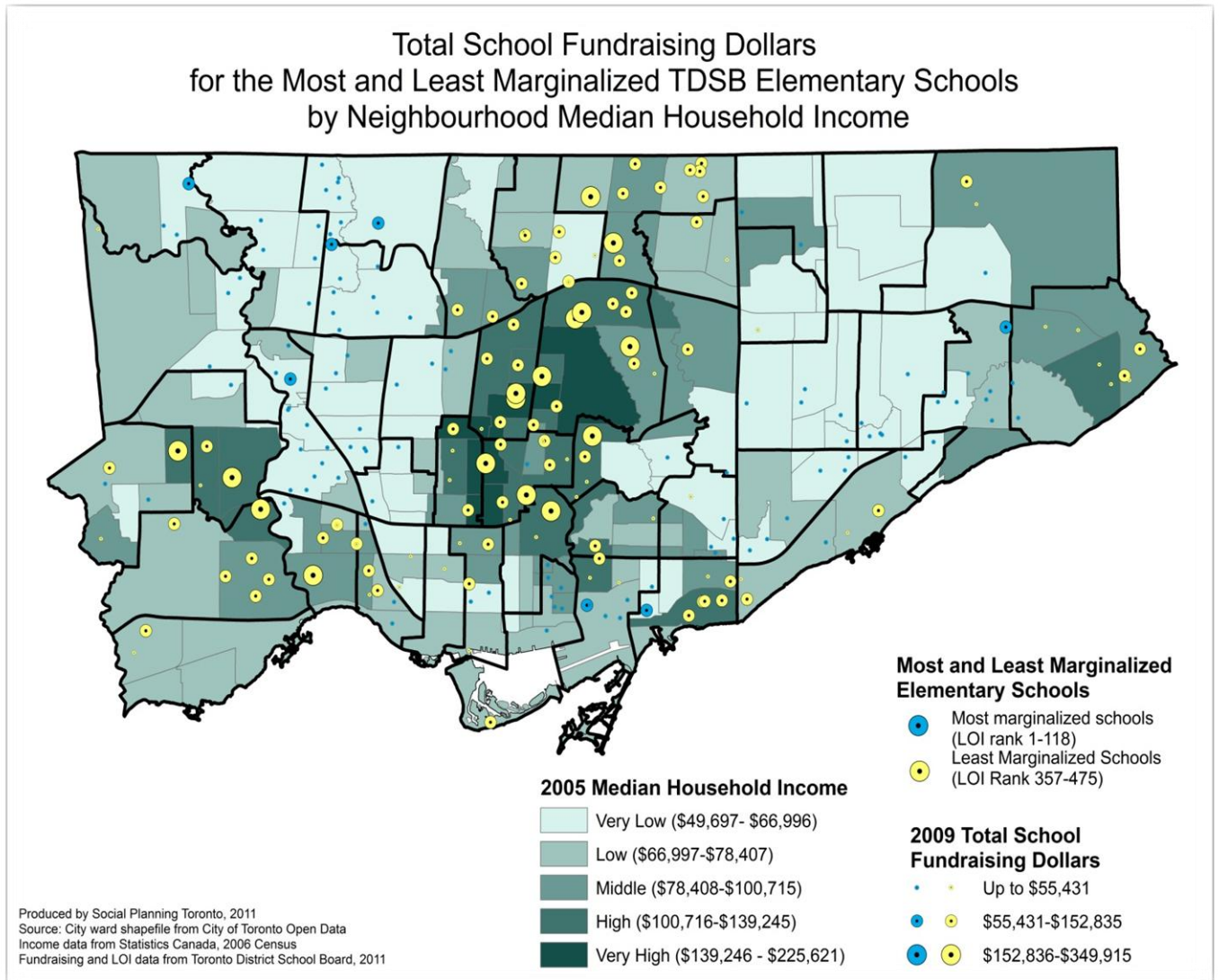
| <b>Parent Council Generated Fundraising Dollars within TDSB Secondary Schools, 2007-10</b> |              |              |              |                     |   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------------|---|
|                                                                                            | 2007-08      | 2008-09      | 2009-10      | Total               |   |
| Top 20 LOI                                                                                 | \$731.30     | \$0.00       | \$0.00       | \$731.30            |   |
| Bottom 20 LOI                                                                              | \$206,164.98 | \$242,887.91 | \$224,020.82 | \$673,073.71        |   |
| <b>Fundraising Disparity</b>                                                               |              |              |              | <b>\$672,342.41</b> | * |

\*Note the bottom 20 LOI schools fundraise nearly **ten times** the funds than the top LOI schools.

This trend continues across the whole public school system. The most marginalized 20% of the schools in the system raise less than 1/3 of the funds that the least marginalized 20% of schools raise. The difference continues across primary and secondary schools.



Then mapping schools' fundraising capacity against neighbourhood income in Toronto, it becomes clear that most of the schools generating the most funds are located in wealthier neighbourhoods, while the schools generating the least funds are in poorer neighbourhoods. The lowest LOI schools raise more in school-generated funds than the highest LOI schools. Additionally, there are approximately 30 schools in the city that have another income source through private foundations. Because this income stream is outside of the school board's purview we have no way of monitoring their additional funding impact.



**The Impact of Fees and Fundraising on Students and their Families**

Social Planning Toronto and the Laidlaw Foundation asked parents and students to tell their stories about their experiences with fundraising and fees in TDSB schools. Their experiences tell the very real story of opportunity gaps that exist for students attending schools that do not benefit from fundraising and/or are not able to pay school fees.

“The public school system has become multi-tiered. In affluent neighbourhoods, the school can offer an enriched learning experience with better classroom equipment, better fitness facilities, and more field trips. In poorer neighbourhoods those opportunities would not be unavailable. In a public school system, is it acceptable to offer the children in Forest Hill a better education than those of Jane and Finch?”

We also hear concern on the part of parents that fees and fundraising in schools have become too expensive for many families. Others reported feelings of humiliation because they are unable to contribute to the frequent fundraisers within their schools, in which all students are heavily encouraged to participate.

Other community members highlighted the reasons why schools are relying on fees and fundraising:

“Currently, school boards are not able to cover the cost of the capital repairs needed so school buildings are not safe. School budgets must cover operational costs like heating and course materials (i.e. textbooks) needed for graduation but this means that there is not enough left in the school budgets to cover capital repairs like a new roof. If water fountains are already in ill repair, if paint is already peeling around the school, if mould is between the portable's walls, if there is no sod on the dirt ground, if broken glass is left taped up, if musical instruments are in ill repair, if there are never any locks in the bathroom stalls, can we then guess that maintenance and repairs will fall even further behind when already underfunded schools will have to cover activity fees, trips for those who cannot afford them, and materials needed to complete course requirements. Fundraising subsidizes the school budget freeing up extra money to be redirected to repairs.”

While our schools are falling into poor condition if we rely on fundraising to cover the cost of maintenance then only the wealthiest schools will be in good repair. To achieve equality across the system school budgets must be enhanced, rather than continuing reliance on fees and fundraising which leads to inequitable opportunities and outcomes. Fees and fundraising cannot be used as a funding stream.

One parent reminded us of *the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternative* study which found that:

- Ontario schools are funded at approximately \$10,000 per student. Schools in New York are funded at nearly double the rate.
- Ontario ranks 46th out of all the US states and Canadian provinces and 9th out of 13 Canadian provinces/territories for spending per student.<sup>1</sup>

Public schools have been underfunded for too long, leading to deep seeded inequities. Fees and fundraising are not the answer.

**To share your views about Fees and Fundraising in schools contact your local MPP or the Minister of Education, the Honourable Leona Dombrowsky at [minister.edu@ontario.ca](mailto:minister.edu@ontario.ca). You can also contact Lesley Johnston at Social Planning Toronto at [ljohnston@socialplanningtoronto.org](mailto:ljohnston@socialplanningtoronto.org) or 416-351-0095x.216 for more information.**

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives:  
[http://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/reports/docs/Education%20Funding%20Formula%20Review\\_0.pdf](http://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/reports/docs/Education%20Funding%20Formula%20Review_0.pdf)