

Ed Foundation navigates a new landscape

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For nearly 30 years, the Santa Monica Education Foundation has funded programs in local schools, but the recent Covid-19 outbreak and safer-at-home orders have had quite an effect on the longtime 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

During a quarterly update to the district's board of education, Executive Director Linda Greenberg detailed how the foundation has found itself in a situation it did not predict back in March when the coronavirus was just getting more attention in the US and officials were unprepared for schools to shut down just 10 days later.

"As you can imagine, this pandemic has seriously affected our fundraising efforts and it's been quite a roller coaster these past few months," Greenberg said, describing recent weeks as a "one-step forward, two-step back scenario."

More than 40 donors have announced they couldn't fulfill their pledges and nine businesses couldn't renew their donations this year, which represents almost \$40,000 in lost revenue, according to Greenberg.

"Despite these setbacks, the education foundation board and staff, obviously, are still looking to raise as much as we can for our students," she said.

In March, an email to the community asked locals to patronize businesses who have supported students, and Greenberg said they had a tremendous response.

She said that on April 3, they sent out a fundraising appeal asking for donations from those who were in a position to help and residents once again came through in the clutch to raise more than the foundation typically had in years prior.

"We moved our annual wine auction to a live online event and it was a great success given the situation. We knew we had two choices: to either cancel or get creative with the event,"

Greenberg said. She said the foundation was humbled when it decided to move forward with the online auction and saw the number of people who eagerly took part.

Thanks to the graciousness of the community, the foundation still hopes to raise close to its planned \$2 million, Greenberg added.

“We look forward to sharing our final grant number with you in mid-August once our books are reconciled and we’ll do a check presentation at that point,” she said.

Greenberg read a letter with two requests.

“One, we asked that the Board of Ed ensure that any new approaches to implementing foundation-funded programs are coupled with the accountability of clear expectations and measures of success for all contracted providers and staff,” Greenberg said, detailing the importance for the board to ensure that all foundation-funded programs are consistent with the foundation’s mission and the wishes of its donors.

“We believe that the challenges created by the pandemic must be met with innovative responses focused on the best educational outcomes for all students. We acknowledge that this may require some changes – for example – arts education may be provided through new and different methods or that teaching assistants may support student engagement in different ways,” Greenberg said as she read the letter. “Two, we ask that the Board of Education not provide additional funding to pay for programs in the 2021 school year that were designed to be funded by donations,” because the redirection of funds could force the district to make additional cuts in other areas without input from the public.

“Moreover,” Greenberg said, “it misleads our donors and potential donors to think that SMMUSD does not need additional resources,” which could be deceiving since most do not see the true financial picture of the district. “We thank you for the opportunity to continue to fulfill our mission during the ongoing challenges of the pandemic and we are eager to continue to engage our community for the benefit of all Santa Monica students in the year ahead.”

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