

Locals rally to raise \$184K for schools

by Grace Adams



A week of making phone calls, sending texts and wearing money leis paid off for Santa Monica public school parents, teachers, staff and students who managed to help raise \$184,855.05, plus an additional \$50,000 in matching gifts, through the Santa Monica Education Foundation's recent Pledge Week fundraiser.

The money will be used to fund programs in Santa Monica's public schools, which has been the mission of the Ed Foundation since its founding 40 years ago. The recent pledge week came just after the organization reported a successful first quarter thus far at last week's School Board meeting, having raised \$852,000 as of Sept. 30.

Ed Foundation Executive Director Mikko Sperber, who just recently took over leadership of the foundation, gave the presentation and said he was pleased with the numbers, but also noted the pace of money coming in was 11% behind that of the previous year, which was one of the best fundraising years in the organization's history.

Sperber said he hopes to raise a total of \$2,000,000 for the 2023-24 school year. So far, as reported at the meeting, 18% of SMMUSD district families in Santa Monica had already contributed to that goal, with the largest portion of those donors being elementary school families. Among District staff, 22% had already donated, 44% of District management and 36% of teachers.

"So that culture of philanthropy from this community for the schools is wonderfully strong," Sperber said.

However, he cited current economic turmoil, specifically, inflation, stock market volatility and rising interest rates as cause for concern.

"When all of these factors come together, it means that people at the high end of our donor spectrum – who equate a lot of their wealth with the stock market – they're not feeling that, and

people at the low end of our donor spectrum are really getting hit hard by the inflation and recessionary fears, so, we are getting squeezed,” he said.

He noted this is the case for many other non-profit organizations as well and is reflective of larger trends with unclear implications for fundraising efforts.

“The concern for us is if these trends continue throughout the year that may mean we don’t hit the \$2,000,000 goal,” he said.

Increased community participation, Sperber said, is key to ensuring that is not the case. School Board President Maria Leon-Vazquez echoed this sentiment.

“I think we just have to put out the word that all of this goes toward a lot of the programs for our students so we really appreciate whatever people can give – we’ll take it,” she said.

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