



BY JON KRUEGER

Controlling Your School's "Fundraising Noise"

Principal involvement and focusing on fewer and more profitable projects are the keys to successful school fundraising.

School fundraising is a topic likely to elicit a variety of responses from principals. Some shrug it off as a responsibility of their school's PTA or PTO. Others may chuckle at the memory of kissing a pig or shaving their head. Of course, some principals will probably grumble at the thought of activities that are perceived as annoying "fundraising noise" by parents, teachers, and the community.

Though principals have conflicting feelings about fundraising, the vast majority agrees that the results are worth the effort. "The Value of Fundraising," a nationwide survey of more than 1,000 principals conducted last spring by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), revealed that almost all schools (94 percent) in the United States raise funds to pay for classroom equipment and supplies, along with important "extras" such as new playground equipment and field trips. While most principals report they would rather not have to raise funds, 87 percent believe fundraising provides valuable returns.

NAESP Executive Director Gail Connelly was not surprised to learn that so many schools have fundraisers. "For many principals, the revenue that's generated from fundraisers provides them with sorely needed resources for their students and teachers," she says.

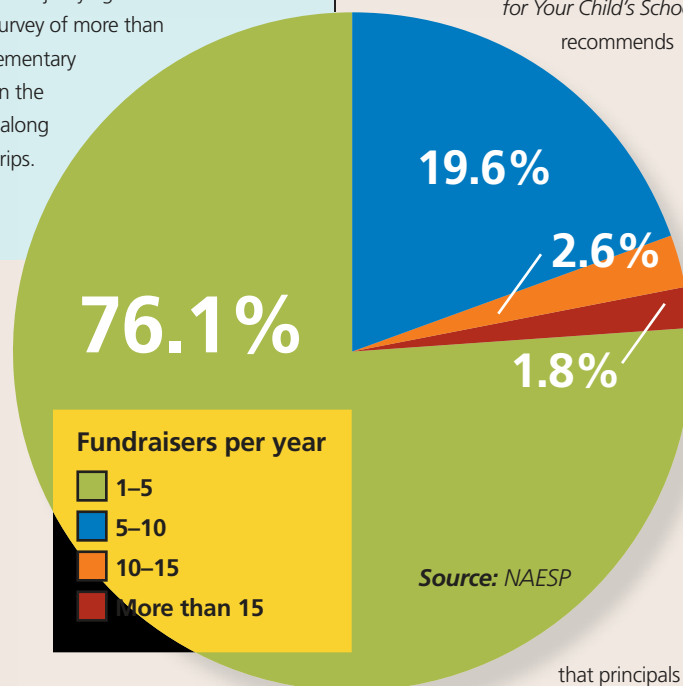
Fundraising Facts

According to "The Value of Fundraising," the majority of schools in the U.S. (76 percent) conduct one to five fundraisers each year, and one in five schools taps its families and communities up to 10 times annually. Collecting box tops, labels, and supermarket receipts, retail store affiliations, and sales from school stores are the most popular year-round fundraising methods. For annual fundraisers, sales of consumer items, such as gift wrap, cookie dough, magazine subscriptions, candy, gift items, and other products, earn schools about \$1.4 billion each year, according to the Association of Fund-Raising Distributors and Suppliers (AFRDS).

Staying in the Loop

Today, many principals would rather delegate fundraising responsibilities to others, usually the school's parent-teacher organization. NAESP's fundraising survey found that 67 percent of principals turn fundraising decisions over to their PTO or PTA, even though experts believe this hands-off approach actually hampers a fundraiser's success. They advise principals to be involved from start to finish.

Cynthia Francis Gensheimer, a parent and author of *Raising Funds for Your Child's School*, recommends



IN BRIEF

This article synthesizes the findings of NAESP's "The Value of Fundraising" survey and a nationwide survey commissioned by the Association of Fund-Raising Distributors and Suppliers. It summarizes the pros and cons of school fundraising and offers valuable tips for running an efficient and successful fundraiser.

Product sales are popular because they require less time from volunteers, and parents get the dual benefit of contributing to their child's school while often receiving a reasonably priced, practical item. In fact, during the 2005-2006 school year, nine out of 10 parents purchased a product to support a school fundraiser, according to a nationwide survey commissioned by AFRDS. Furthermore, 71 percent of parents said they also sold fundraising products to friends, family, and co-workers.

that principals participate in setting fundraising goals. "They understand the school's overall fiscal picture and can best identify shortfalls," she says. "The principal's endorsement is also crucial in committing school personnel—from teachers to custodians—to any school project."

James Hodge, an elementary school principal in Bridgeport, Connecticut, agrees that principals should be involved with fundraising. "Ultimately, I'm responsible for everything that happens in and around this facility,



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including fundraising,” he says. “I delegate as much as I can, but fundraising is just too important. I never let go completely.”

According to Hodge, the principal plays an important role in selecting the fundraising program and the service provider. “When it has this school’s name attached to it, I have to know what’s going on—what products we sell, what vendors we use—because when someone has a question, they call me. If I don’t know what’s going on, I can’t respond.”

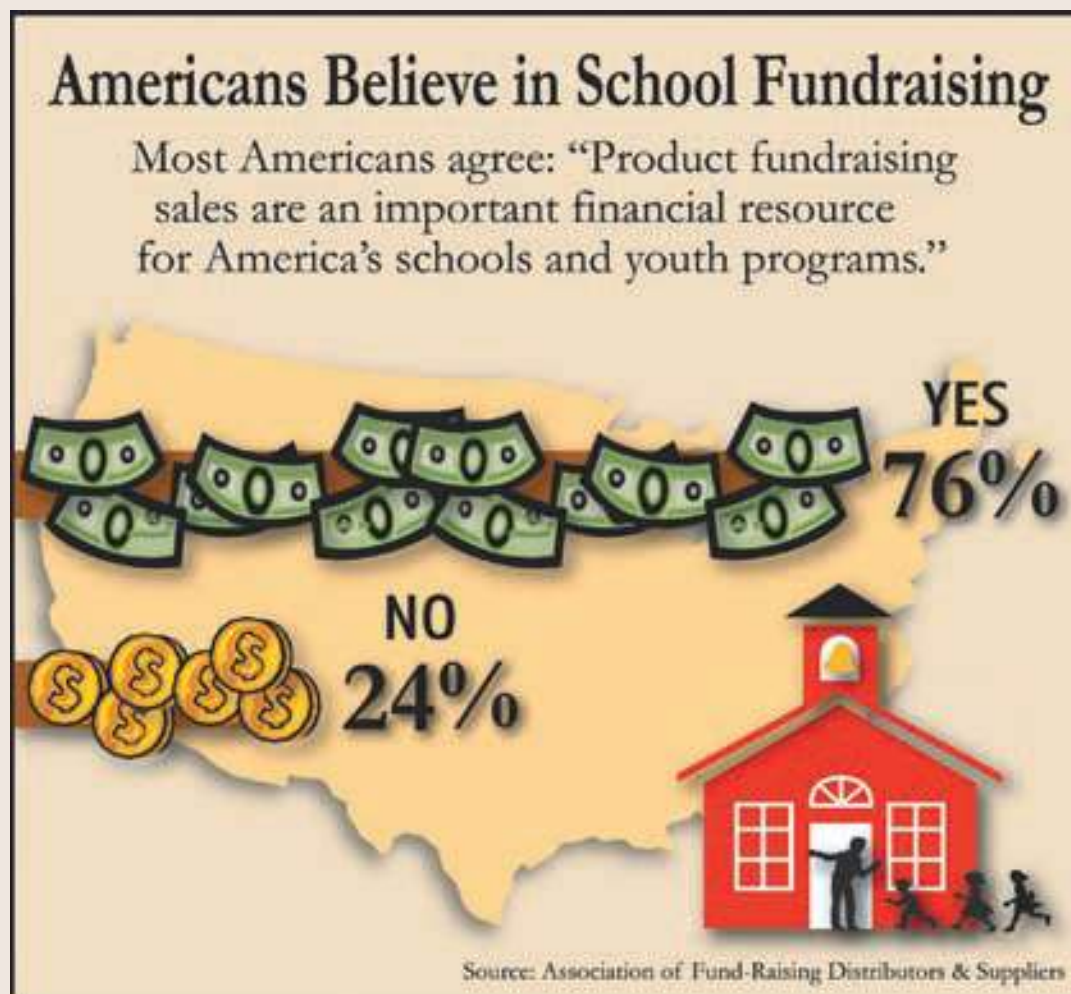
According to professional fundraising companies, the principal is often the only constant from year to year, and therefore is in the best position to provide valuable experience

and historical perspective to parent volunteers charged with selecting a fundraiser. “Many times, principals choose to wash their hands of fundraising, and parent organizations think this is great because they really want the final say,” says Bob Rumberger, a supplier of fundraising products. But he believes they’re doing each other a disservice because a principal is in a position to warn a fundraising committee if the school or other schools have had a bad experience with a particular company, program, or product. He recommends that principals serve as their school’s fundraising gatekeepers, and that they should be responsible for developing and monitoring a fundraising schedule.

Reducing “Fundraising Fatigue”

“Without some controls, it’s easy to see how a school can end up with five or six fundraisers in the course of one year,” Rumberger says. “The PTA has the fall magazine sale and the spring candy sale. The fifth-grade class wants to raise money for a field trip. The principal has a pet project that needs separate funding. Before you know it, a parent is getting hit with fundraisers once a month.”

The NAESP fundraising survey suggests that parents are getting more fundraising requests than ever before, and most principals (86 percent) say they have seen an increased number of fundraising activities during the

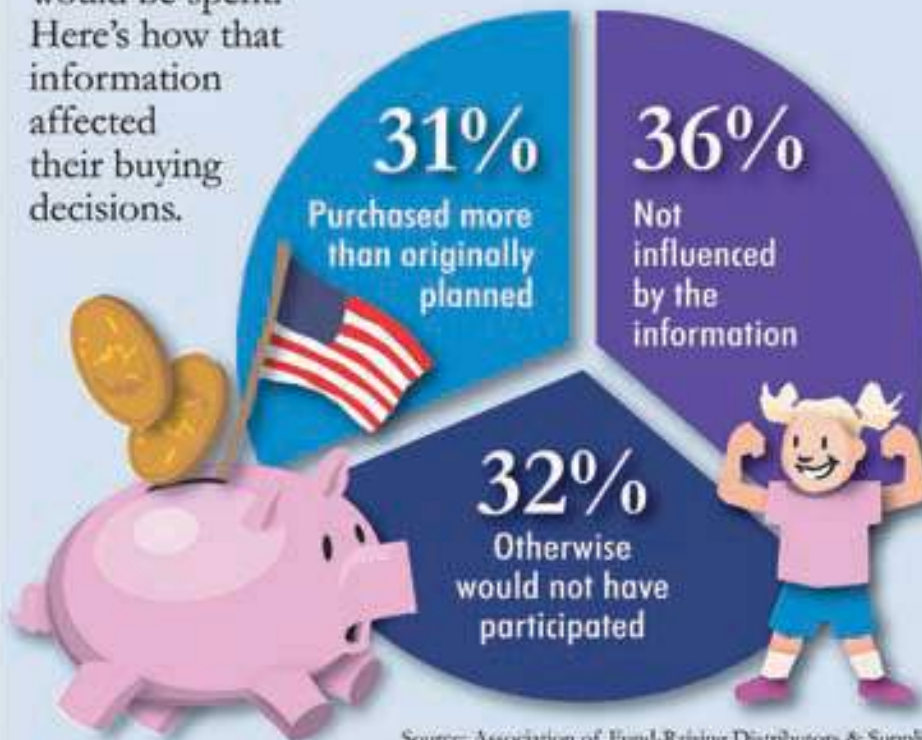




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Fundraising Supporters Want to Know “Why”

8 out of 10 Americans who supported a school fundraiser in 2005-2006 were told how their money would be spent. Here’s how that information affected their buying decisions.



ing that “fundraising fatigue” exists. Among parents who do not support product fundraising programs, about one-quarter say it’s because schools and/or youth groups run too many fundraisers, according to the AFRDS survey. Parents and other supporters report they are already being tapped by the local Little League, football teams, and Girl Scouts—in addition to a plethora of school fundraising requests (e.g., car washes, walk-a-thons, product sales, auctions, bake sales, and carnivals). As fundraising of all types becomes more prevalent, the last thing your school wants to do is create more noise in the fundraising traffic jam.

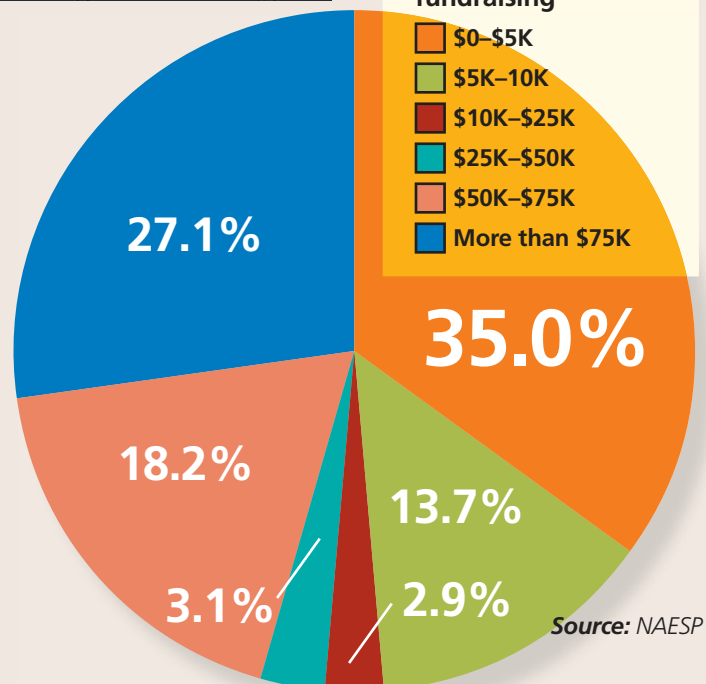
Fundraising experts recommend that to reduce the “noise factor” principals should work with their parent groups and faculty to focus on those fundraisers that can make the most money with the least time commitment from volunteers. “Communities are motivated to support school fundraisers, but for many people there are limits as to the number of times each

past 10 years. Many principals are concerned that fundraising can be burdensome to parents, teachers, and community members, and 56 percent of principals report they also are concerned about the increased number of schoolwide fundraisers.

“A lot of schools and school groups today are doing too much fundraising,” says Rich Freeman, a fundraising professional from Indiana. “Parents are getting so many requests to support so many programs that after awhile they start to ignore everything.” Too many fundraisers also will create burnout of volunteers, parents, students, and teachers, according to Freeman.

Unfortunately, there’s no deny-

Schools’ average annual earnings from fundraising





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How to Run an Efficient Fundraiser

Here are some fundraising tips collected from principals, parents, teachers, and fundraising professionals:

- **Set clear goals.** Work with your PTA or PTO to establish a clear financial goal before evaluating products and programs. Knowing how much money you need to raise will help make these decisions easier.
- **Plan early.** Select your primary fundraising program early to assure ample time for planning. If the school or community does not have a planning calendar, create one. Be sure all of your school's fundraising events are included. Whenever possible, stagger fundraising activities to avoid competition among other groups.
- **Identify the start and finish.** Set specific beginning and ending dates for primary fundraising activities that happen only once during the year, and stick to them.
- **Rely on your fundraising professionals.** Rely on your product fundraising professionals for suggestions and advice. They often know what other neighborhood schools and sports leagues are doing. Tapping this knowledge will help avoid going head to head against another school's fundraiser.
- **Keep energy levels high.** Communicate with parents, teachers, and volunteers before, during, and after the program, reminding them of the fundraiser's goals and deadlines. Provide regular status reports and updates.
- **"Here's what you missed."** Find ways to communicate with those who miss the program's kick-off or other important meetings.
- **Remember to say "thanks!"** Don't forget to thank all your supporters. Let them know, when the new computers are installed or the new playground is ready to open, that it wouldn't have been possible without their support.
- **Have fun!** With the right approach, fundraising itself can bring ownership and pride to parents, teachers, and students.

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year they will participate," says Russell Lemieux, executive director of AFRDS. Among the majority of Americans who support school fundraisers by purchasing consumer items, more than half (54 percent) do so only once or twice each year, according to the AFRDS survey.

Why Fewer Fundraisers Makes Sense

Lemieux suggests that schools reduce the total number of fundraising efforts and focus only on those programs that are most efficient and yield the most funds. "By putting a greater effort into a fewer number of

fundraisers with very specific goals, schools will find that they can successfully raise the money they need and get greater participation in their fundraisers from school families and the community at large," he says.

Reducing the number of fundraisers and increasing their efficiency can help prevent burnout of your parents, teachers, and community, while increasing the chances that your school will meet its fundraising goals.

There's no question, when it comes to school fundraising, principals should stay involved. Whether it is setting goals, coaching parent volunteers, or motivating students, parents, and the community at large, when the principal plays a strong role in the school fundraiser, it could mean the difference between success or failure. **P**

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Web Resources

The press release detailing the results of NAESP's 2007 survey, "The Value of Fundraising," can be downloaded from the NAESP Web site.

www.naesp.org/ContentLoad.do?contentId=2211

Information and tips on how to find and run an effective fundraising program are available on the Web site for the Association of Fund-Raising Distributors and Suppliers. www.afrds.org