

Anonymous \$100K donation spurs SMMEF drive

Jeff Goodman



The Santa Monica-Malibu Education Foundation doesn't want to be tracking down last-minute cash at the end of the school year to reach its goal.

After falling short of its target last year, the fundraising arm of the Santa Monica-Malibu school district has rolled out several successful promotions in the early months of the 2015-2016 school year to kick off its annual campaign.

The education foundation raised \$439,950 during its inaugural Pledge Days drive, which began Sept. 28 and wrapped up Oct. 9. Donations were spurred on by a \$100,000 matching gift from an anonymous donor, according to SMMEF officials.

More than 700 district families, employees and community members pledged money during the campaign, officials said, and campaign contributions are 70-percent higher than they were at this time last year.

"We are thrilled that the community came together so positively for our first Pledge Days event and we are grateful to our anonymous donor for such a generous and inspirational match," SMMEF board president Kathleen Rawson said in a press release. "The donations will not only support extraordinary programs for all our students, but will also show potential corporate and major donors how committed this community is to providing an outstanding education to each and every child in our schools."

In its previous cycle, which ended June 30, the education foundation raised about \$2.36 million, well short of its goal of \$4 million. That 2014-2015 campaign, which lasted 17 months to align the annual fundraiser with the school district's calendar, supported arts and enrichment programming, as well as academic support staff and

professional development.

The latest SMMUSD budget reduced the foundation's expected contribution to \$2.5 million from its annual drive.

Money raised will now support arts education for the district's 4,900 or so elementary students, 87 instructional assistants and enrichment grants for all district schools, many of which use the discretionary funds for STEM and performing arts programming. Literacy coaches and professional development will be covered through the district's general fund, SMMUSD officials have said.

Foundation officials have said that the previous campaign failed to reach its goal in part because district stakeholders and the community at large were confused about the new centralized fundraising system. The recently implemented model was a particularly sore subject in Malibu, where participation rates were glaringly low amid concerns over chemical testing and cleanup at local schools.

Starting last month, foundation representatives and Parent Teacher Association leaders visited many district campuses to explain the new system to parents and encourage them to donate.

Families are asked to give \$700 per student per year, although foundation officials have said donations of any amount are welcome.

Donors from each SMMUSD elementary school who contributed money between July 1 and Oct. 9 were entered into drawings for four passes to Pacific Park at Santa Monica Pier.

SMMEF still needs to raise another \$1.7 million by June 30, executive director Linda Greenberg said. Proceeds from a fashion show at the Santa Monica Place mall Oct. 18 will benefit the foundation.

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