

Fund Development Strategies from Higher Education for K-12 Administrators

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Abstract: Increasingly, K-12 administrators must address the need for greater funding for their systems and schools. This article presents methods used in higher education that may be of use to its K-12 colleagues. It further suggests professional development to support school leaders in making use of these strategies.

Introduction

The need for increased financial resources for instructional services in public schools is a long-standing issue. Superintendents and principals identified it as a main concern in providing quality instructional delivery for students (Kieff, 2003). Higher education institutions, through the leadership of its administration, have historically marshaled financial resources for educational programs, renovation of older buildings, construction of new facilities and additions to libraries to name some popular uses of funds (Pulley, 1999). Historically, K-12 public education has not enjoyed strong financial support from public or private entities, as compared to the support received by higher education. This paper will explore some of the successful strategies utilized by institutions

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of higher education to enhance funding for their educational organizations. It will also discuss strategies K-12 administrators can employ to develop increased funding for their instructional programs. Finally, suggestions for administrative training and professional development for K-12 administrators will be provided.

Higher Education Strategies

Generally speaking, institutions of higher education raise funds through the work of specific subgroups of their fund development program. The fund development program is an Internal Revenue Service (IRS) 501(c)(3) organization designated as a non-profit entity. It is given authority to generate funds which are eligible as tax-exempt contributions by donors. A fund development subgroup sponsors a variety of fundraising activities: e.g., social gatherings, auctions, requests for annual or one time financial contributions. Another component of the fund development program serves to gather donations of real estate or other special assets such as art objects which can be sold or utilized in other ways. Another thrust of the university/college development program is the alumni association which concentrates its efforts to raise funds from former students of the institution. Donors are requested to include the university/college in their wills or trusts. The team approach to fund development is often encouraged and not only involves alumni but faculty, past supporters, students as well as friends and family of these groups (Higdon, 2003).

Not only have four-year institutions of higher education embarked on concerted efforts to increase local financial resources, two-year community colleges have become increasingly aggressive since 1980 as well. Their impetus was a general decrease in funding for public two-year institutions throughout the nation during those years. Since that time, most two-year colleges in America have become fundraising entities. These institutions have begun to compete successfully with four-year institutions to gain large gifts from donors. As an example, the William H. Gates Foundation provided one of its largest gifts to the Washington-Seattle Community Colleges (Van der Werf, 1999).

Implications for K-12 Administrators

Successful fundraising strategies utilized by institutions of higher education can be effectively implemented, with some modifications, by K-12 administrators. The fund development organizations referenced above are similar to Local Education Foundations (LEFs) currently operating in an estimated 4,000 K-12 schools and school districts throughout the

United States. These organizations are found throughout the country in rural, suburban and urban, high wealth as well as low wealth areas. They too are IRS 501(c)(3) organizations with boards of directors; generally they do not have paid staff members. Fundraising activities often include direct solicitations, dinners, golf tournaments, and activities that are particularly pertinent for the local community (DeLuna, 1998). In lower wealth school districts foundations are beneficial in helping districts enhance their opportunities to receive funds from other foundations and granting organizations. Although the activities of foundations may be different in school districts, all are helping in raising additional funds to support the educational program. Endowment programs are included in the more sophisticated education foundations. As an example, the St. Helena Education Foundation, serving a school district in northern California with approximately 1,700 students has developed an endowment of more than one million dollars. School districts raise funds on an annual basis ranging from tens of thousands of dollars to more than a million dollars. Foundations' expenditures vary from funding of educational programs to providing construction costs for facilities to offering several hundred dollar grants to instructional staff members' classroom projects.

Additional opportunities are also available to K-12 administrators as they expand the concept of education foundations to utilize some of the techniques employed by their higher education counterparts. As an example, beneficiary gifts can be requested for the local education foundation. Local attorneys who serve as estate planners can be made aware of the local education foundation as a viable option for gifts, so that a local education foundation may more likely be considered during estate planning consultation sessions with community members. This can be in the form of future gifts of real estate, special assets or monetary contributions. Community members often times have very positive feelings about the local schools and yet gifts of this nature are often not pursued by LEFs. Alumni of K-12 institutions are another viable source of donations. Many LEFs have a difficult time staying in contact with alumni, even though they may remain in the local community. Additionally, wealthy alumni, who have left the area, have found to be available to provide sizable donations and only need to be asked (Nicklin, 1998). K-12 administrators can also utilize the team approach; it can be extremely dynamic as staff, faculty and friends of the school and school district can be very helpful in identifying those who might be potential supporters.

Implications for Administrator Training and Professional Development

Generally, LEFs are independent organizations whose mission is to assist addressing the educational needs of students in a particular school community. Although viewed as independent, successful LEFs maintain a positive working relationship with the school and school district administration. Often the district superintendent or designee or school principal will serve on the LEF Board of Directors, usually in an ex-officio capacity. The administration serves as a conduit between the foundation and the school board and the foundation and the staff as well as between the foundation and the community, at least at the outset of the LEF's initial role in the community (Coventry, 2004).

As the administrator works with the LEF Board of Directors she/he can embrace the opportunity to utilize these community members as "key communicators" to share the school or school district's perspective, i.e., the successes as well as challenges. They need to have verifiable facts to speak as trustworthy sources of information for members of the community. Over time they can become some of the most trusted members of the school community. Although it is often recommended LEFs remain non-political as an organization, the individual members of LEF Boards have been a fertile ground to identify future school site council members, school district board members and community leaders in support of school district bond elections (Pinto, 1998).

Next Steps

Professors of Educational Leadership and Administration can play an important role in preparing future and current educational leaders for their roles of enhancing financial resources for educational organizations. The concept begins with the awareness that in the twenty-first century, resource development is expected of an educational leader. Practicing educational leaders can serve as guest speakers at administrative preparatory classes. The California Consortium of Education Foundation (www.cceflink.org) is an organization whose mission is to help initiate education foundations (K-12) and assist them to build capacity as they gain maturity. This organization can serve as a valuable resource to identify local school foundations in California and their school and school district administrative leadership. Additionally, the National Association of School Foundations (www.schoolfoundations.org) can provide a national perspective with regard to education foundations.

In conclusion, K-12 administrators need to view part of their role, similar to administrators in higher education, as that of a leader securing resources, which will benefit their education institutions. K-12 ad-

ministrators who serve in this role have seen a wide variety of benefits for their organizations, financial and in-kind, when they aggressively pursue a fund development leadership role.

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