



Published June 10th, 2020

ONE Orinda: a new fundraising scheme for Orinda schools

By Sora O'Doherty

It seems that the world has changed a lot since the Orinda Network for Education (ONE Orinda) was envisioned, but, nevertheless, the new fundraising model for Orinda schools will be up and running on July 1, in time to address the most severe funding crisis ever faced by the community. Although Orinda is one of the richest communities in California, and its schools are ranked in the top 1% in the state, it is almost at the bottom when it comes to state funding. This is because California schools receive base funding on a per-student basis with some districts receiving additional monies for higher-need students. Even with generous local support, Orinda is just barely better off than the average California school district.

For many years fundraising for Orinda schools has been conducted by the parents' groups for each of the five schools, plus the Educational Fund for Orinda (EFO). According to Brian Rogers, ONE board president, this fundraising model was disjointed with multiple "asks" for donations and each school depending on its own fundraising, plus the separate fundraising by EFO. This year, for example, Miramonte asked parents to contribute \$500, and EFO asked for \$650. Next year, there will be one consolidated ask from ONE. Rogers believes that confusion about where their money was going and whether it was going to go to their school led to a decrease in the amount the community donated. ONE Orinda was conceived to bring in more resources by consolidating and streamlining fundraising under a centralized foundation.

On July 1, ONE Orinda will replace the parents' clubs of the five schools and the EFO as the district's fundraising engine, but will have representatives of the EFO and each of the clubs as leaders of its efforts. Each parents' club account will reside under the umbrella ONE Orinda account to provide the backing it needs to attract community and corporate donations while maintaining local autonomy of the parents' clubs. Parent donations from each school will go into an account for that school and will be controlled by the parents' club for that school.

While EFO was completely volunteer run, ONE Orinda has paid staff, including one full time paid executive director, Darcy Taylor, and paid part-time hourly staff, comprising an administrator and a database administrator, and a bookkeeper. EFO was not able to have a community-wide fundraising event for all the schools, which ONE Orinda plans to do, as well as continuing the three traditional fundraisers: mail solicitation, online donations, and events. In addition to the executive director, ONE has a board, with Rogers as president and Clay Deanhardt as secretary, and numerous volunteer committees and subcommittees.

Rogers has said that coronavirus is making fundraising harder, but ONE still has the same fundraising goals. This is an obligation to schools for the current year that needs to be paid by the end of the fiscal year. ONE expects to increase revenues and pay for its administrative costs. According to Rogers, many of the elementary schools carry a safety net, a reserve fund, which equals about a full year of operations for the parents' club. These funds are held in checking accounts not raising money. Under the new agreement, each school will agree to pool the reserves so that they can then be invested in low risk investments, like an endowment. EFO currently has an endowment of \$1.5 million. If all of the reserves are pooled, the amount could be \$4 to \$5 million. Rogers says that the return on such a fund can pay for the professional employees of ONE as well continuing to act as a reserve.

More information about ONE Orinda can be found on their website: www.oneorinda.org

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