

## **2011 Synopsis of Freedom Academy Donations, Volunteerism, and Sustainable Funding**

The purpose of this letter is to discuss with our families the policies and procedures relating to the volunteer hours, donations and fundraising activities that are a vital part of our school. An outline of this information follows:

1. Charter schools do not receive state funding equal to district schools.
2. We ask that each family give \$200 per year donation to the school. (\$100 for single parent families) This cannot be worked off by volunteering more hours
3. This year's annual \$200 donation can be earmarked for one of three areas
  - \*\*The Freedom Academy Endowment Fund
  - \*\*The "project of the year" (the gym floor for 2011-12)
  - \*\*The general school budget for use in classrooms and teacher expenses
4. Other fundraising projects sponsored by the school may happen throughout the year. 20% of all school level funds raised will be put into the Sustainable Funding/Endowment fund and the remainder will go towards the current school project (gym floor).
5. The PTO is a separate organization that exists to support the school and teachers. They will also hold a fundraiser each year to earn monies which they then give to the teachers (they have bought microscopes and software programs in the past two years) and pay for the programs they sponsor; i.e. Red Ribbon Week, Love of Reading Week, Teacher Appreciation, Book Fairs, and Family Activities.
6. All families have a quota for volunteer hours each year. If, beginning May 1, that commitment is not fulfilled, parents are allowed to buy-out their hours at the rate of \$10/hr.
7. Donations and volunteer hours may be given between August 1 and June 30 to be credited to a single school year.

Please read the following pages for history and details concerning these areas.

## **INTRODUCTION**

When our school was established in 2003, charter schools were severely underfunded in comparison to their counterparts, the traditional public schools. The founders of Freedom Academy and many succeeding charter schools deemed it important that parents who were choosing the charter setting, donate \$200 per family each year to help offset the lacking monies from the state. The charter schools in the state formed a charter school association to be our voice on Capitol Hill in seeking recognition for this important educational movement and seek funding parity and support for these new schools.

## **FUNDING & FUNDRAISING**

Charter schools do not have a tax base as do traditional schools; therefore we are dependent on the state to allocate local replacement funds to charters, which in the early years were still far less than the tax dollars that were going to the other schools. We continued to fight this battle each year to gain slowly increasing funding. Today we are closer at closing that gap but still have a ways to go.

We will continue to address this inequity until we are equally funded. Our students are no less important than any others. Taken together, the charter population is the fourth largest district in the state. Please note that traditional school districts receive additional transportation funding that charters do not. Also, school districts can raise their property taxes to increase revenues where charters have no taxable way of increasing funding.

The anticipated family donations would provide our school with somewhere in the neighborhood of \$70,000 – 80,000, but each year parent donations have only averaged \$25,000-35,000. This money has been well spent. One project purchased with the donation funds was playground equipment at the old school which we brought with us to our current location. Other years, the donation monies were used in the general budget to run the daily operations of the school, purchase curriculum and plow much needed money into the classrooms and teacher salaries. In 2009, the state made major budget cuts to education, which continued the following year. At that point, Freedom faced hard decisions. We were still underfunded and now were having cuts that would impact the programs at the school. On top of this, though our volunteer hours were increasing, the parent donations were far below what we anticipated, and we soon found that we did not

have the budget to fund the specialty classes that had become traditional at the Academy.

During the spring of 2009 it was determined that specialty classes would not be part of the following year's schedule. Everyone was greatly saddened by this loss.

As we wrestled and worried over the decreased budget it became apparent that if the school could find a way to raise \$100,000 to put into an endowment fund we could return the specialty classes to the schedule.

We looked at a model for creating a sustainable/endowment fund but felt that the cost was prohibitive and decided we could create our own program. A plan was made to create a sustainable funding committee. The Governing Board approved this in the fall of 2010. The committee met but did not gain ground in any area other than implementing the idea of a \$1 free dress day which got underway in December. It was a great success in the following months, collecting nearly \$6,000.

However, it was still unclear if the monies raised would be put into the sustainable account, or if it would be spent on specific school items and projects.

During our 2010-2011 budget meetings the state was telling all schools to cut, save, and be prepared for large budget cuts in January 2011 which we did by cutting in all areas at the academy. Not until March of 2011 were we told that our budgets would be kept level for the rest of our fiscal year (ending June 2011). Budgets were also kept the same for the 2011-2012 year so we were able to bring specialties back for this current school year.

During this period, the fundraising committee was split into two divisions, one to focus on corporate level fund raising and one to focus on fundraising at the school level. It was determined that the PTO would hand off the annual carnival to the school level committee and instead of a complimentary event for families, it would be used as a money-making event as many other schools do with great success. The school level committee kicked into action and Mrs. Snow became the carnival chair.

As we began the year it became clear that parents were confused about where monies like the \$ free dress days and the carnival profits were being used. The fundraising committee felt strongly that a project should be selected by the parent community so they could see how their donations were benefitting the school.

This year parents suggested three projects for the school: a school marquee, soundboards for concert performances, or a new gym floor. The parents voted at back to school night and the floor was selected as the project of choice.

Besides having a new and improved floor there is also the added perk that we have been approached by several groups to rent our gym, but they need the newer floor. So with the new floor we can rent the gym out to provide an additional source of funding for the endowment fund.

So where do we stand today? The parent community told us that they preferred to have a project towards which their donation monies would go. Since we have begun to create a \$100,000 "endowment fund" the administration, governing board and committee agreed that every year, 20% of all monies raised by the corporate level and school level committees would be earmarked for the sustainable endowment fund, to continue building that to \$100,000.

Parent donations are coming in steadily this year. For the first time since 2005 we have specified a school project for these funds and a clear path for supporting the "endowment" fund to use on scholarships for our students in the years ahead or in the event of a crisis situation like the loss of specialties.

Parents always have the choice to designate where they want their \$200 donation to go:

1. to the sustainable fund account
2. to the current school project (gym floor costing approximately \$60,000)
3. to the general budget for use in areas such as school supplies for classrooms and teacher projects.

Whether you send a single check or have monthly withdrawals, you may specify the destination of your donation. We appreciate every way you choose to donate to the school.

## **VOLUNTEERISM**

Volunteerism at Freedom has always been one of our strongest areas. We have an average of 15,000 volunteer hours per year. We believe this is one of the highest averages state wide. This outstanding resource has been of great value in seeking in-kind grant funding. More importantly, we see the vast difference it makes in our student learning, teacher support and school environment. The school parent connection at FA is a staple and one that we have worked diligently to improve each

year. We ask that every two parent family donate 40 hours per year and every single parent family donate 20 hours per year. In May of each year, we review the records and encourage any family that is under hours to get their hours completed. However when May comes around there are few activities left for parents to log in volunteer time though we accept volunteer hours until June 30 each year, the end of our fiscal year. We have had a few people ask to buy out their volunteer hours in past years and we have allowed them to do this at a rate of \$10/hr, but it has not been a significant number. We always prefer and encourage parents to volunteer during the school year but, in a last push, will allow parents to buy out the total or remaining hours.

It has never been the policy at FA for families who volunteer more than their 40 hours to put their extra hours towards their donation. We have many families that volunteer well beyond the 40 hours per year and still contribute their \$200 donation.

Freedom Academy also formed a grant writing consortium two years ago with four other schools to use that avenue for additional resources for the school and teachers. Freedom teachers jumped right on board and have received thousands of dollars to pour into their classrooms, develop new projects and bulk up their classroom libraries. Some of the grant projects beautified the school grounds, acquired bleachers, etc. This practice continues today.

Working together as a school community, we can build a base of security like a “rainy day” fund. We call ours an endowment fund.

All families should plan to donate the \$200, volunteer the expected hours and support the fundraising activities during the year. Unfortunately, some families choose to do nothing to contribute to the great benefits and education available to the children at Freedom Academy. There is another group of families that may wish to contribute but at times may be unable to do so due to unfortunate circumstances. Please evaluate carefully and do as much as is possible for you at any given time. Every little bit helps and as you contribute you will feel more a part of this great community.

**We continue to depend on parents who choose the charter setting, to choose to volunteer and donate each year. Thank you for your choice to join with the Freedom Academy community.**