

# SOS Reporter

“ Save Our Schools By Supporting Our Schools “

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EDUCATIONAL ISSUES NEWSLETTER

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## LET'S REFORM SCHOOL CAMPAIGN FINANCING

By Mary Brubaker

The last S.O.S. Newsletter contained the quotation: *Money talks, but does it always tell the truth?*



Mary Brubaker

When it comes to recent campaigns for school board, money does talk; however, it does not always tell the truth; and the results can be disastrous.

Money buys radio, television, newspaper advertising, yard signs, and many flashy mailings. Voters are influenced. But should they be? I say NO!!!

School board elections have become too expensive. Money can elect unqualified candidates, those with hidden agendas and conflicts of interest, and those attempting to *move on up* the political ladder. In the last election, two candidates outspent all the other candidates combined. The average cost of a school board campaign in Des Moines usually runs \$6,000 to \$8,000, and even that is more than many good candidates can afford.

Money alone should not make the difference in who wins this important post. Money alone should not buy a seat where personal integrity, moral courage, knowledge, and genuine concern for the welfare of children should be the prime requirements for service.

The one-month campaign period is too short for well-qualified people to run and win unless they also can compete with candidates backed by deep-pocket political/business interests, certain unions or organizations buying favors in future SB decision-making.

We can change such campaign practice by questioning the sources of funding for expensive yard signs and multiple slick mailers with little relevant content. We can question who pays for expensive television ads prior to reporting deadlines.

We can call for expanded news media and more general attention to school board elections. We can encourage more public forums, enough so all voters have a chance to become informed. We

can identify special-interest money. A general website can be available to all candidates. Q & A on issues will be possible for everyone with a computer. Candidates can reach voters directly through personal emails, phoning, walking the precincts, and letters to those editors.

One month in late summer is too little time for people to get to know the candidates. Next year, we can lobby for earlier dates for candidates to announce and a longer campaign period. With more time, we will hold more informal gatherings, more neighborhood and home-based receptions, picnics, more forums and smaller gatherings in free venues.

The final number of votes which candidates garner should not depend on the size of their campaign funding.

Now money buys votes. And look what it bought us!

Let's start working together on democratic ways to elect well-qualified people to run our schools.

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## IS EDMUNDS NOW HISTORY?

**Following is background about Edmunds since the school was changed to a Fine Arts Academy.**

Edmunds Academy began with the following:

1. All staff were required to have a fine arts background and/or high interest in the arts, and three years of teaching experience.
2. Eligible students were to be no more than one year below grade level (six months was preferred).
3. Parents and students signed a binding contract that indicated they would adhere to discipline and grade expectations. If the expectations were not met, students were counseled and, ultimately, could be asked to leave the program. When students moved from the neighborhood, they were allowed to stay in the program if they had been productive members of the school.
4. Spanish language and a Gifted & Talented (GT) program, led by one full time GT person, were parts of the curriculum.
5. The Fine Arts were integrated into the classroom

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# IS EDMUNDS NOW HISTORY?

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curriculum by all classroom teachers; and collaboration was ongoing with the fine arts staff.

## Many outstanding achievements in all departments included:

The first award ever given by the State Music Educators for the Most Outstanding School Program in Iowa.

Award from the State Music Educators to Principal Frances Hawthorne as the school administrator most supportive of the arts in Iowa.



Award to Edmunds Music Department for most outstanding music program in Iowa.

Guest residencies by nationally recognized dance companies and visual artists in conjunction with state, federal, and corporate sponsors.

When an Edmunds music teacher and a founding member of the Iowa Composers Forum taught music composition, some students were so advanced that they were given private lessons and ten elementary students each wrote a piece for the Pioneer String Quartet from the Des Moines

Symphony. These pieces were performed for the public at the DM Art Center

In Edmunds, music played over the intercom for the last three minutes of every day with selections ranging from Bach to rock to pop to Jazz - whatever seemed appropriate for the day!

Evidence all around Edmunds shows what remains of outstanding and unique creative art projects once guided by visiting artists in sculpture, murals, tiles, and much more. The art and music departments worked together constantly with projects such as The Pioneer String

Quartet playing Debussy and showing slides of Impressionist artists and Edmunds students creating their own Impressionist art.

The Edmunds music department was known for the outstanding choral program. Also harp, Suzuki violin, and piano lessons with outstanding teachers helped children to experience training not available to many, even in the most affluent schools around the U.S. Major productions at Hoyt Sherman place pulled together the entire school, parents and staff and culminated in performances which rivaled high school productions.

Anna Belle Wonders, then Executive Director of the DM Women's Club, allowed Edmunds to use the Hoyt Sherman facility several times a year. She praised the student body, in earning this opportunity, as the most talented and well-behaved children in town.

Edmunds steel pan program was one of the top elementary programs in the country. The Father of the Steel Pan built and tuned the pans and traveled to Edmunds. Students were thrilled to be able to meet the only pan inventor alive from the 20th century. Edmunds hosted guest clinicians from all over the country. They often said *These students accomplish more in one hour than middle schools elsewhere have done with us in a week.*

The list of accomplishments goes on and on and on. Those first five or six years were phenomenal. Naturally, there were problems, but Edmunds' staff were committed, highly experienced, and eager for opportunities for unique educational programs for children. This program worked educationally.

Every time Edmunds teachers talked about their program, no matter where, the response was: *What a wonderful program, and how lucky for the Des Moines Public School District to be able to make this program available to children.*

Those outstanding teachers and programs no longer are available.

### *This Week's SOS Reporter .....*

- Campaign Financing
- Is Edmunds Now History?
- Upcoming Issues;
- The Cotton Report
- SOS Profiles
- SB Candidates

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