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Michael T. Miller
University of Arkansas

Mei-Yan Lu
San Jose State University, mei-yan.lu@sjsu.edu

G. David Gearhart
University of Arkansas

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From the Chalkboard to the Bank: Teaching Educational Leaders to be Effective Fundraisers

Michael T. Miller
University of Arkansas

Mei-Yan Lu
San Jose State University

G. David Gearhart
University of Arkansas

The effective use of financial resources is critical for all educational institutions, especially those K-12 schools that rely on public funding for their main operating revenue. As public entities and state governments increasingly struggle to find the revenue necessary to operate prisons, fund Medicaid/Medicare, improve an aging infrastructure, support social welfare programs, and recover from the Great Recession, educational institutions are finding themselves directly competing with other public agencies for scarce resources. These factors resulted in 29 states reducing funding for public education (Evans, Schwab & Wagner, 2019; Leachman, Masterson, & Figueroa, 2017). In the face of fierce competition, educational leaders must learn how to effectively compete for scarce funds in order to provide the necessary resources that will allow their schools to flourish.

Keywords: fundraising; school leadership; school funding; alternative revenue streams

Traditionally, public educational institutions have been subsidized through a society's willingness to tax itself. Most states identify an appropriate personal or property tax rate that all individuals pay, and these funds are then allocated for commonly used services, such as providing free education to all children under a certain age; in most states, this provision is a constitutional requirement of the government.

Despite the long-standing tradition of funding education, public schools are often underfunded, especially given the wide range of students these schools attempt to educate. This underfunding leads to cutting and eliminating programs, partially funding other programs, and having to make difficult decisions about how to educate students. Additionally, it also forces public schools into educational fundraising and creating independent school or school district-wide foundations.

The fundraising process is not new to education, and higher education in particular has over 200 years of history aggressively seeking contributions to underwrite their activities, programs, and personnel. And yet, despite the growing need for K-12 schools to diversify their revenue streams, they have engaged in relatively few fundraising activities. Part of the reason for this lack of aggressive fundraising by K-12 schools is the lack of education about how to raise private funds by principals and superintendents.

The process of qualifying an individual to be a school leader is increasingly regulated, increasingly challenging, and has been historically debated for reform for 30 years (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 1989). Much of the regulatory creation for school leaders has come about due to legal challenges and errors of the past, including concerns over child welfare, fiscal management problems, risk management, etc. Recent regulations placed on school leaders hinder their ability to creatively solve problems, resulting in a strong national movement to completely deregulate school leadership, allowing politicians, former military and business leaders, for example, to assume these leadership positions with little to no experience in education. Some of these individuals have been highly successful, and others not successful at all, but the common theme throughout the process of assuming a school or district leadership position is that there are minimum necessary skills that an individual must hold to be effective. The current discussion is framed around the skills necessary to garner private resources for schools, and the purpose for conducting this study is to identify and compare methods for teaching K-12 leaders about how to be effective fundraisers.

Background of the Study

Fundraising has become prominent in all sectors of education and has taken on visibility not realized in previous decades. Part of this growth has been due in part to the rising costs of energy and technology, in part due to increased competition for and regulation of public funds, and in part due to the growing competitive environment of K-12 education. There is, however, a legacy of fundraising in K-12 education, with sports, activities, and clubs all having a long history of asking for parental and local business support for field trips, programs, and the "extras" associated with student organizations. The current and coming period of fundraising, however, is more directly related to school operations and the direct cost associated with schools.

K-12 schools have steadily increased their reliance on external benefactors to support their programs. This support has ranged from individual donors providing their endowments towards schools to pay teachers' bonuses, to creating endowed positions so as to support school

leaders. The result of this type of giving is largely realized in the talent a school can recruit and retain, and this, in turn, has direct bearing on student achievement and the perceptions of the community as to how well a school performs.

Educational leadership and administration programs have been criticized in recent years, along with the entire teacher preparation process. Increasingly, calls for alternative approaches to school leadership have been framed around questions of whether or not there is a distinct set of skills or a knowledge base that informs educational management. Critics, for example, highlight the strong leadership skills in industry and the military, and suggest that these leadership skills are (or should be) transferable directly to school administration.

The Education Commission of the States (2018) created a rubric on educational leadership position requirements and regulations, indicating that virtually every state requires at least a master's degree to hold a principal position and graduate credit hours beyond the masters to hold a superintendent position. States such as Florida do note that, "School districts have the authority to appoint persons to the position of school principal who do not hold educator certification." States such as Connecticut, Georgia, and Alaska also allow for temporary waivers or grant the local school board the authority to appoint a school leader as they deem appropriate.

Of the states that reported requiring a certain degree area (typically educational 'leadership' or 'administration'), most required a number of graduate credit hours to have been earned, although most did not stipulate degree area content. Degree content is typically focused on the Educational Leadership (ISLLC (The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium) standards that were re-designed and issued in 2014 and approved in 2015. These standards tend to focus on the operational elements of leading a school vision and mission, instructional capacity, curriculum and assessment, operations and management, equity, etc.), but do not include any specific knowledge standards on resource improvement.

Several ISLLC Standards do allude to skills often identified in fundraising, such as Standard 5D: "Ensures that each student has an abundance of academic and social support," (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2014, p. 18), 7C: "Builds and sustains productive relationships with families and caregivers" (p. 19), and 8J: "Acts as a steward of public funds (p. 19).

Davis (2010) concluded from his analysis of state requirements that the approach to administrative licensure has largely been one of assuring "minimal professional competence" (p. 9). Furthermore, he concluded that there was no unifying or clear rationale for the requirements for becoming a school leader, and that policies for licensure in all states "generally were not directly aligned with well-developed theoretical or conceptual frameworks for leadership development or evaluation, nor clearly aligned with standards for administrative practice" (p. 7).

The confounding result for schools, their leaders, states, and students, is that administrative personnel are trained in a wide variety of areas in which there is national agreement, but that these standards may indeed neglect key areas of importance to the contemporary school leader, such as fundraising. As schools and their districts find fundraising an increasingly important topic and skill, there must be some exploration as to how and where school leaders are expected to learn about fundraising, providing an impetus for the current study.

Findings from the study will be critically important to both school leaders and the schools that they serve; more importantly, effective fundraising skills can directly and

immediately improve the educational environment for students. Resources garnered through effective fundraising can improve the physical environment and human capital that can improve the success of the education a school can provide.

Research Methods

The sample for this study included 300 educational administration or educational leadership program faculty who had responsibility for graduate doctoral programs that prepared senior level school administrators at either the principal or superintendent level. All faculty were identified online from institutional websites, which were randomly selected by institution, including all the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AACSB) institutions using the SPSS sampler. Only full-time faculty members were selected for inclusion in the study, and the sample ultimately included 144 different institutions from across the United States.

The research team developed a three-part survey instrument based on the literature on effective fundraisers and fundraising skills (Dove, 2001; Rowland, 1977; Sargeant & Shang, 2019; Tempel, Seiler, & Aldrich, 2011). The survey was pilot-tested with an expert faculty panel and modified to clarify questions. The survey was administered in the spring of 2018 using an online survey. The first section of the survey included a listing of 15 skills important to fundraising ability and six fundraising strategies. Survey participants were asked to rate their agreement that each item was very unimportant (1) to very important (5) to school leaders to engage in public education fundraising. The second section included 12 strategies or methods to teaching fundraising skills, and participants were asked to rate their strong disagreement (1) to strong agreement (5) that each would be an effective way to teach fundraising ability. The third section included 10 'areas' where fundraising skills could be learned, and requested that survey participants rate their agreement that each would be an effective place to learn them. The definition of area was considered to be both a physical location as well as a provider, and this list of 10 was developed based on a review of where fundraising is and has been taught.

Due to the low initial response to the survey, two subsequent email administrations of the instrument were distributed to the sample of 300. A histogram of responses did not reveal any response bias based on timing of survey completion.

Findings

The first section of the survey included a listing of skills important to fundraising ability, and survey participants were asked to rate each as very unimportant (1) progressing to very important (5). As shown in Table 1 (see Appendix), 13 of the 15 skills were rated between important and very important (4.21 and 4.88). The most important skills agreed to were problem solving ($\bar{x} = 4.88$), interpersonal relationship skills ($\bar{x} = 4.86$), and verbal communication skills ($\bar{x} = 4.78$). The lowest level of agreement was expressed on the skills of multitasking ($\bar{x} = 3.99$) and attention to detail ($\bar{x} = 3.87$). A Within-group Analysis of Variance was conducted on these 15 items, identifying significant differences among the mean scores ($f = 10.38$; $p < .004$), noting differences between the skills of attention to detail and multitasking and the skills of customer service, writing, strategic planning, taking initiative, verbal communication, interpersonal communication skills, and problem solving.

Also presented in Table 1 are the agreement levels of the importance of six fundraising skills. The highest mean scores for the importance of fundraising strategies were major gifts ($\bar{x} = 4.81$), donor research ($\bar{x} = 4.68$), and annual giving ($\bar{x} = 4.63$), and the strategies with the lowest level of importance mean was capital campaign work ($\bar{x} = 4.16$).

The second section of the survey included 12 teaching strategies that could be used to help school leaders learn to be effective or successful fundraisers. The respondents agreed most strongly that using case studies ($\bar{x} = 4.68$) would be the most effective, followed by workshop, job or role shadowing ($\bar{x} = 4.50$), and field experiences ($\bar{x} = 4.41$). The least agreement was for education through lectures ($\bar{x} = 4.01$), however, there were no significant differences identified in the mean scores within the techniques identified ($p < .6382$).

The third section of the survey included a listing of 10 'locations' or ways that school leaders could potentially learn about fundraising skills and strategies. The mean scores for these 10 items were all above 4.0, indicating that as a group, they perceived "agreement" to "strong agreement" that these would be effective ways of learning. The most agreed upon locations for learning were specific off-site training, other professional association sponsored opportunities ($\bar{x} = 4.88$) followed by a single topic graduate class (such as a graduate seminar in school fundraising $\bar{x} = 4.87$), and embedded in a graduate class ($\bar{x} = 4.77$). The least agreed upon location for learning how to be a fundraiser was through a self-directed learning activity ($\bar{x} = 4.29$), and again, no significant differences were identified among the mean scores ($p < .3422$).

Discussion

The survey responses in this exploratory study provide some insights into how school leaders think about the fundraising process and what they need to be effective, or perhaps more effective, in their work. Three of the top six agreed upon skills for effective fundraising were interpersonal communication skills, verbal communication skills, and writing skills, suggesting that leaders perceive a need to understand better how to communicate the importance of their mission, vision, or calling. Where to learn about this was strongly agreed to be in the graduate classroom, either in a dedicated class on fundraising or at least with a module in a different class. This type of skill development might fit in well, for example, with a course on finance or leadership. Respondents also agreed strongly that a professional association offered fundraising program would be an effective location to learn about the activity. Such programs are currently offered by The Fund Raising School, the Association of Fund Raising Professionals, and, among others, the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education.

With such high levels of agreement across all items, these findings collectively reinforce the idea that school leaders perceive that fundraising is indeed an important part of their professional job, and that they need to be proficient in this role. The findings do not, however, suggest whether or not the current skill development that has been called on for reform is resulting in a high level of knowledge or performance. Most likely, these results suggest that financial concerns are a major issue that school leaders face, and that the generation of additional revenue is something that they must learn to pursue. Additionally, the high agreement levels for fundraising strategies suggests that these leaders see a real importance related to major gifts and the background research necessary to assure these types of gifts.

Further research into fundraising in public education is needed in several areas. First, research projects that create a base line of practices and reliance on external funds would help establish the importance of the topic and could possibly help raise awareness of the school

funding situation across states. Second, research into which practices are in use, are effective, and their impact on student learning could also help raise awareness and create a stronger understanding of the need for diversified funding streams in education. Third, studying private giving models to public education could help increase the demonstration of the need for training and professional development for fundraising skills. And fourth, the impact of a principal or superintendent suddenly engaged in extensive fundraising on a school or on staff should be examined in relation to organizational behaviors, impact, and effectiveness. Learning from their colleagues in higher education, public schools may well find that a leader highly engaged in raising funds can have a very significant impact on office roles and responsibilities.

The success of public education is predicated on the adequate resourcing of the schools and teachers who are charged with this responsibility. If public entities either choose not to resource these schools, or are unable to, then school leaders must begin to aggressively solve the problem through their own direction. Fundraising as an activity can require a significant amount of time, but it can also provide key resources to empower aspiring school leaders to succeed.

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Appendix

Tables

Table 1

Mean Agreement Levels of Importance of Fundraising Skills to Teach

Fundraising Skill	Perceived Importance	SD
<i>Skills</i>		
Problem Solving	4.88	.710
Interpersonal	4.86	.500
Verbal Communication	4.78	.619
Taking Initiative	4.55	.428
Strategic Planning	4.54	.323
Writing	4.52	.640
Customer service	4.49	.628
Organizational	4.44	.823
Teamwork	4.38	.402
Persuasive	4.34	.628
Networking	4.30	1.000
Creativity	4.26	.989
Leadership	4.21	1.009
Multitasking	3.99	.911
Attention to detail	3.87	1.111
<i>Strategies</i>		
Major Gifts	4.81	.522
Donor Research	4.68	.573
Annual Giving	4.63	.435
Special Gifts	4.22	.600
Planned Giving	4.20	.589
Capital Campaign work	4.16	.850

Table 2

Effective Teaching of Fundraising

	Mean	SD
Case studies	4.68	.283
Workshops	4.50	.439
Job/role shadowing	4.41	.633
Field experiences	4.37	.747
Seminars	4.24	.719
Experiential learning	4.23	.839
Self-Paced modules	4.22	.328
Role playing	4.20	.490
Simulations	4.20	.675

Webinars	4.18	.500
In-basket exercises	4.03	.889
Lectures	4.01	.899

Table 3
Preferred Location of Learning Fundraising Skills and Strategies

Location/Provider	Mean	SD
Specific off-site training, other professional association sponsored	4.88	.465
Single topic graduate class	4.87	.434
Embedded in graduate class	4.77	.628
Education professional association meeting/conference	4.73	.477
Specific training, state sponsored	4.69	.586
Specific training, district sponsored	4.62	.600
Professional association membership	4.45	.437
Consultant-based training	4.44	.501
Personal reading	4.30	.549
Self-directed learning activity	4.29	.555