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# Why Are OKCPS Teachers Begging the Public for Basics? - Summary\*

Public school teachers persistently complain of not having the material support they need in their classrooms. Professional service workers in offices typically have necessities required to get their jobs done provided to them by employers. Items such as office equipment, paper for copiers, printers, printer ink, pens, writing paper, desks, tables, and chairs are automatically provided by employers since these are generic items that are absolutely necessary to get the job done in virtually any office. Teachers in the Oklahoma City Public Schools (OKCPS), however, evidently cannot necessarily count on basic resources being provided to them. The evidence is on the internet.

## DonorsChoose.org

The DonorsChoose.org website allows individual teachers to solicit donations for specific items. These material needs are itemized, along with their associated costs, state sales tax, and a fee to Donors Choose. Individuals, foundations, and other entities can donate, either in part or in whole, to a specific teacher's classroom. A surprising number of requests on the part of teachers in Oklahoma City's schools are obvious necessities such as basic furniture, frogs to dissect, bulbs for a classroom projector, printers due to poorly maintained district-provided machines, textbooks, math manipulatives, and more.

## Is OKCPS Impoverished?

The lack of resources in teacher classrooms cannot be attributed to "underfunding." According to state data, OKCPS spent an average of \$12,080 per student in 2018, as compared to \$10,793 per student in the state as a whole. In this all-encompassing measure of spending, Oklahoma City spent 12 percent more than the statewide average, on a per-student basis. Clearly, Oklahoma City is definitely not impoverished compared to other districts around the state.

Accounting only for "Instruction" and "Support Services" spending functions, OKCPS spent \$8,059 per student. Thus, a class of 30 children represents \$241,770 in spending. Allowing a generous \$100,000 for teachers of these children, that leaves \$141,000. One brand new \$150 book for each child amounts

to \$45,000. Electricity for lighting and air conditioning should not amount to more than \$4,500 during a school year. Another \$10,000 for administrative services still leaves \$82,500 for paper, copiers, cleaning, maintenance, and other services. Oklahoma City's public schools are anything but impoverished. The Piedmont district's per-student spending is only 70 percent of what OKCPS spends on Instruction and Support Services. These figures pre-date significant state funding increases in effect for the 2019-20 school year.

## 1889's Analysis

On August 22, 2019, the beginning of the 2019-20 school year, 1889 Institute analysts scrolled through the entire list of Donors Choose grant requests from Oklahoma City's school teachers. The effort was to identify grant requests for obvious necessities. Anything not considered a basic necessity or as parents' responsibility was ruled out.

## Printers/Print Supplies

A basic for teachers to accomplish their jobs is access to reliable document duplication equipment, well-supplied with paper and ink. Teachers need to duplicate homework assignments, tests, and supplemental curricula to hand out to students. Despite how critical paper is to current educational practice, the sad fact is that teachers have been forced to write Donors Choose requests for something as basic as copy paper. A sixth-grade teacher in Oklahoma City, at the beginning of the 2019-20 school year, has resorted to requiring students to take phone photos of homework assignments for lack of access to reliable duplicating facilities.

This year, eight different teachers posted requests totaling over \$3,600 for help to purchase printers and/or printer supplies for their classrooms, mostly due to the constant disrepair of school-based duplicating facilities. Two requests were for printing supplies for classes already supplied with printers, including a request for something as basic as paper.

## **Basic Instructional Supplies**

Math manipulatives have been a basic part of the early math-learning process now for well over half a century. Weekly Reader as part of the early childhood reading experience has been around just as long. Also considered necessities are dictionaries, a periodic table to post on a wall, frogs for dissection in a biology class, and nonfiction books in a library. OKCPS public school teachers have requested almost \$9,000 from outside sources in order to purchase basic supplies like these.

## **Furniture**

OKCPS teachers have requested donations for over \$10,000 in basic functional furnishings, including chairs appropriate for small children and that actually fit the tables available to them. A single request represents almost \$3,000 of this total, but it is a bit of a mystery how anyone playing a bass saxophone or a bassoon would do so while sitting on a bench.

## **Computers**

Most of the computer requests, amounting to over \$6,500, come from elementary school classroom teachers. To be considered a necessity, especially for elementary students, the computers requested had to be for absolutely essential purposes. Those included in this total are for test preparation, where such testing occurs on computers, and in most cases a single computer would be shared among at least five children.

## **Tech Support/Upkeep**

As noted in an earlier 1889 Institute publication, teachers often lack the proper software to interface with expensive smart boards, making the equipment nothing more than very expensive projector screens. Teachers in OKCPS requested \$600 in donations for basics to make district-provided technology functional.

## **Hygiene/Safety Supplies**

One would think that safety and hygiene would figure as basic necessities. But no, teachers find themselves responsible to collect over \$1,600 in donations to provide hygiene and safety necessities.

## **Physical Education**

Equipment for sports was not considered a necessity for purposes of this study. However, teachers requested the most basic of physical education equipment, such as simple balls and racks to store them. Thus, some requests, totaling more than \$2,300, for recess and sports equipment were deemed necessary by 1889's analysts.

## **Conclusion**

In total, 1889 analysts identified around \$34,000-worth of donation requests by OKCPS teachers for the purchase of what are arguably necessities that should be readily provided by the district. Many teachers would probably argue that this study grossly understates the needs.

When teachers have to go begging for basic equipment and supplies to make modern classrooms work in what is actually a well-funded district, it is obvious that politics and administrative convenience are higher priorities to those in charge than managerial excellence, accountability, and the educational process.