

Ed Foundation's Greenberg steps away after 28 years

Emily Sawicki 4/6/22



Linda Greenberg, the longtime executive director of the education nonprofit Santa Monica Education Foundation (SMEF), this week announced her plans to step away from the fundraising organization after three decades of service to local schools.

Greenberg came aboard SMEF in 1995 after serving as PTA president at Franklin Elementary, where she first learned about the nonprofit. For the past 28 years, she's been with SMEF, also called the Ed Foundation, first on the executive board before being hired as executive director.

"Greenberg has overseen the Ed Foundation's evolution from a nascent organization raising less than \$100,000 per year to a mature non-profit with an annual operating budget of more than \$3.2 million," according to a press release prepared by SMEF on Tuesday. "The Ed Foundation now provides vital funding each year for educational and extracurricular personnel and programs to benefit every student in Santa Monica public schools, generated through annual fundraising campaigns and endowment earnings."

Greenberg said her proudest accomplishment has been the success of centralized fundraising, which she said increased educational equity by sharing donated resources across all school campuses.

“We never pick and choose what we’re going to fund. We don’t say, ‘Well, this school already has this, so we’re going to fund this at this school,’ and, ‘They don’t need it, this one does,’” Greenberg said. “We kind of take the District’s lead and if they think — and I’ll keep using arts education as the example — if they think all elementary students need to have an arts education experience, then we want to fund it and make it possible for every student.”

She said because of centralized fundraising, all donors feel a stake in their giving, as it is shared throughout the community.

“Today, funds are raised community-wide, from parents, non-parent community members, businesses, property owners, and civic organizations/foundations,” SMEF’s announcement stated. “Together, these annual gifts provide meaningful additional funding for staff and programs in all of Santa Monica’s public schools, in addition to the funding generated through the Ed Foundation’s endowments.”

SMEF, formerly SMMEF (Santa Monica-Malibu Education Foundation), initially began centralized fundraising combined with Malibu, but recently split, following a request by Malibu parents.

“It was their decision to separate and it was their decision to raise money separately, and, you know, sadly, that’s where it ended up,” Greenberg said.

Despite the schism with Malibu, Greenberg said the decision to move toward centralized fundraising was good for funding levels overall and has been a success in sharing resources among all school campuses.

Greenberg said her most difficult period at the helm of the nonprofit has been over the last few years, since the onset of the pandemic.

“The first two years of the pandemic were unlike any other of my 28 years — they were probably the hardest years and, believe me, there have been hard years,” Greenberg said. “It was really difficult because things kept changing. I reached out a lot to our school community — to families and [other] people — and I found that people had lost a lot of jobs.”

But, although many families were now unable to give to SMEF, there were others who understood the need and were able to give even more.

“People’s situations were so difficult, but what was really unusual and so amazingly wonderful is that those that had the resources to give stepped up and gave more,” Greenberg said. “So, in truth, while it was a really painful two years ... The truth is the level of funding we brought in was about the same.”

When it comes to finding a successor, SMEF Board President Alison Havel said in a statement provided by the nonprofit that recruitment would begin later this spring.

“We will ensure a process by which the community, including parent and district leaders, has an opportunity to participate and have their voices heard as we launch this very important search,” Havel said in a statement provided by SMEF.

“First and foremost,” Havel continued, “we cannot thank Linda enough for all she has done for our schools and our community over the years. We know she will remain a vital and passionate advocate for Santa Monica public schools, and we look forward to honoring and celebrating her career and litany of achievements in the near future.”

For her part, Greenberg said the new executive director should be three things: outgoing, experienced with fundraising and unflappable.

“It’s about relationships,” Greenberg said. “The more that someone is able to connect with people, the better.”

Greenberg also mentioned SMEF’s upcoming wine auction fundraiser, the nonprofit’s premier annual event which was returning in-person for the first time since the pandemic began.

Learn more about the wine auction, scheduled for May 15, at smedfoundation.org.

emily@smdp.com