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## [Schools](#)

### \$4.8-million Gift to Schools Is 'Spine Tingling'

As it takes on a bigger role in leading districtwide fundraising efforts, the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District receives its largest gift ever.

By [Jenna Chandler](#) and [Devin Kelly](#) | [Email the authors](#) | September 20, 2012

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A \$4.8-million donation to local schools, inspired by a new and controversial districtwide fundraising model, was proclaimed Thursday as the largest single gift in the [Santa Monica-Malibu Unified Education Foundation's](#) 30-year history.

The gift from the estate of Peggy Bergmann, a wealthy [Pacific Palisades](#) resident who died in December, was announced at the district's Board of Education meeting. It energized the room.

"I'm ecstatic," said foundation President **Linda Greenberg Gross**.

The donation will be divided in half, with \$2.4 million earmarked for an arts endowment for students of low-income families and \$2.4 million to address the foundation's "most critical" needs.

The amount was kept secret even to the foundation's board members until just before the public meeting got underway.

Poker-faced, Gross asked each of the foundation's board members to guess the amount, according to member **Deb Love**.

Love, who guessed \$1 million, called the revelation of the amount inscribed on the ceremonial check "spine tingling."

"It's the perfect thing for launching the districtwide fundraiser," Gross said.

The foundation is gearing up for [a new "centralized" fundraising model](#) that has it taking on duties once carried out by school-specific Parent Teacher Associations. The PTAs will be barred from raising money to hire personnel, such as reading specialists, music teachers, instructional aides.

Administrators believe the new model will spread wealth across the district, raising the bar for all students and bridging the achievement gap.

Opponents have said it will reduce district fundraising overall because fewer people would want to contribute if the money were not going to their children's schools.

But Bergmann's attorneys said it was the perfect opportunity for their client, who was passionate about education, music and other youth services.

"It was Ms. Bergmann's hope that this gift would encourage others to give large and small gifts to the Education Foundation to make program equity a reality for all children in the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District," said attorney **Sonya Sultan**.

At 30 percent, the education foundation received the largest share of Bergmann's estate. The rest was divided among other nonprofits in the area.

"It's a wonderful legacy," said **Bruce Sultan**, a past treasurer of the foundation, who, along with his wife, represents the Bergmann estate as an attorney. "We're hoping this is just the beginning."

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**Alison Kendall**

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**1:11 pm on Friday, September 21, 2012**

Awesome work by Linda Gross, Deb Love, Bruce and Sonya Sultan and many others. What a generous gift to help equalize programs across our District!

Sincere thanks to all involved!

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