



Edwardsville moms form group, Facebook page, to help students with 'lunch debt'

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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EDWARDSVILLE - A group of community citizens has started a movement to raise funds for those in Edwardsville School District 7 who cannot afford to pay their lunch bills.

Trish Oberweis, a Southern Illinois University Edwardsville professor, has led an effort embraced by Edwardsville School District 7 Superintendent Dr. Lynda Andre to help defray some of the school system's annual cost in this area.

"Our district quietly pays the bill for those in our community who are not able to pay their lunch bills. D7 cafeterias never shame a student or deny anyone a lunch," the group said on its You Caring Facebook page," Oberweis said. "But the cost is \$20,000 annually, pulled from other funding lines and not recovered by the district. You can help by volunteering to help with community fundraising events, or by donating. Every donation of any size helps. A donor will pay the first \$300 worth of fees so your donations go directly and totally to pay down school lunch debt."

\$675 of a \$7,500 goal has been raised so far on the page.

"After noticing that groups in various school districts around the country were crowdfunding to pay down 'lunch debt' I wondered if we had debt in D7," Oberweis said. "I wondered if our lunch debt was in the hundreds of dollars, and called Dr. Andre to find out. I was a stunned to learn that it was about \$5K per quarter, or \$20,000 annually. Dr. Andre explained how it accumulates and emphasized our District's compassionate policy of not embarrassing a student or leaving anyone to go hungry.

“Not every school district is as fortunate, and public shaming as well as food waste are more common than I had imagined. That is, some districts will take a tray of food and, upon learning that the student’s account is empty, throw the food away as other kids in line watch. I’m not sure what that is really accomplishing.

"Although I am not surprised to find our District has a more compassionate approach, I am quite relieved nonetheless. Dr. Andre schooled me in the District’s efforts to help get families approved for free or reduced lunches, but pointed out that there is a gap in time from need to relief. Information from the School Report Card and the federal poverty guidelines, helped bring into sharper focus the potential to rack up debt over the space of a year.”

Oberweis said she and a group of friends "Wanted to tap into the deeply generous spirit of our community to raise awareness, to crowdfund and to create something fun that might help relieve the debt. School Lunch Debt Solutions is a group of District moms — none of us are District employees, but all of us have kids in the district — who are working together to achieve these three goals."

For more information on the group and the fund-raising effort, see the [Facebook page](#) will continue to raise awareness and the [YouCaring site](#).

“We’re working on a community-building event that we hope will generate not just funds, but also be fun and (knowing us) nerdy,” Oberweis said. “An intra-district trivia game is our top idea at the moment, culminating in a students-versus-parents event at EHS. In all, we hope to pay down at least half of the school lunch debt in the district.”