

# Community Priorities

## Common Areas of Parent and Faculty Interest:

- Teacher discretionary money for classroom materials and resources
- Technology infused and applied at scale
- Supporting professional development requested by staff
- Increasing student commitment to rigorous academic expectations

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## 2004-05 Committee Work and Findings

### Taking Advantage of East's Size

This report chooses a related but slightly different point of view than last year. Yes, SME is a big place and the sheer size makes it more difficult to know that all students have the resources available that they need to excel.

However, our survey and discussion results indicate the size and scale of SME is an advantage, not necessarily a disadvantage. We

encourage the East Fund to identify strengths in the assets that SME represents and to purposely implement ideas that capitalize on our size and resources to:

1. enhance the quality of teaching and learning;
2. provide more personal contact with students by supporting excellent teachers and innovative methods;
3. increase SME's focus on understanding and

supporting individuals as learners;

4. link ambitious academic expectations with all students; and
5. engender higher levels of academic independence in each student.

Precisely because SME is large we can find the resources and connections to better prepare young people to thrive in an increasingly complex and global world.

### Technology, Appropriately Deployed

Improved technology is mentioned as a strong desire, but neither parents nor teachers seem to know precisely what would work or be effective. In investigating teacher, administrator and central office plans for expanding or utilizing technology we discovered little clarity or commitment.

However, we do encourage the East Fund to guide resources to new technologies as well as supporting better planning and application of

technology at the building level. While uncertain as to specifics or costs, there is a generalized perception that technology, appropriately deployed, can:

- increase student learning, motivation and interest;
- ease teacher burdens from excessive testing and classroom record keeping requirements;
- aide in allowing teachers to spend more time coaching students; and
- provide low-cost options for word-processing access for every student.

The East Fund does not currently command the resources to indulge in the highest level of commitment to technology

We can, however, work to explore and pilot test new alternatives; give teachers and administrators seed money to test and connect options and, perhaps most importantly, convene key players to develop a longer-term plan to provide on-demand access to cutting edge technology to every student and teacher.



*“What a fantastic organization, we are so fortunate to have our kids at SME.”*

## Key Survey Findings from Parents

Parents expressed overwhelming positive perceptions about the school. Two of the strongest demonstrations of this were the 97% who indicated that SME provides a quality education and 89% indicated that they felt the school held high expectations for ALL students.

### Strengths to Build On

Areas that may not require additional funding but are critical to maintain include our routine parent involvement and student extracurricular programs.

Both of these were cited as enormous strengths. They also were noted as the areas least in need of improvement or attention by the East Fund.

### Areas to improve

Parents ranking of the school

included a few areas that could be improved:

1. Classroom materials, technology and professional development for teachers
2. Student motivation and independence
3. All students expressing that they are safe in the school environment
4. Parents knowledge of what happens at and outside school in the lives of their children (*noted here as a creative tension with our theme of creating more independent learners*)

## Key Survey Findings from Staff

While teachers also gave SME a resounding endorsement (96% agree that a quality education is provided, 89% and 75% indicate high expectations for ALL students and innovative instruction respectively) they did not always see issues with the same lens as parents.

Teachers were less sure that parents are aware of what their students are

doing either at school or outside school. Teachers also were more likely to identify “increasing student commitment to learning” as an improvement area that would make a significant difference in their academic expectations. This, similar to parents responses, highlights an interesting creative tension – parents should be more aware of

students activities without impeding or inhibiting their ability to develop as independent learners responsible for their own work.

Staff also expressed an appreciation for a professional work environment. They are willing to grow, learn and improve curriculum and instructional methods but feel “crowded” by mandates, testing and unnecessary paperwork.

## An Important Creative Tension

### Students as Independent Learners and More Knowledgeable/Engaged Parents

Our survey elicited this interesting tension. Refining our approach, collectively, as parents to appropriately support and encourage our children while building their independence as learners may take more dialogue, creativity and tools.

Both teachers and parents want their students to have an increased commitment to more self-directed and rigorous academic goals. Parents and staff also indicate that they would like parents to “know more” about what goes on in the academic and social lives of their children. Finding a balance, helping parents and students “get it right” and building community values for these healthy relationships may be a longer term interest for the Fund.

## Classroom Climate - Materials - Supplies

We doubt we could say this better –

Survey response #22: *“Students should be the most active and prepared learners given our combined (parent and teacher) resources. Our schools should be evolving so that teachers are coaches of more active learning, the developers of more insightful lesson designs, preparing students for internships, innovative teaching/learning options, community partnerships...Students need more classes that require active learning,*

*oral communication, problem solving community commitments as well as the traditional disciplines that teach effective reading, writing, scientific inquiry and math.”*

Our classrooms are ill equipped for this challenge and our education professionals have scarce, if any, discretionary resources to bring about the type of transformation in classrooms this quote suggests.

This concept does offer some possible roles for the The East Fund. At an

individual classroom level, the department level or a cross-department project, the East Fund can support teaching innovations, research and experimentation that pioneers this type of deeper involved learning.

The East Fund could also provide discretionary funds at the department or classroom level for ancillary (sometimes critical) books, supplies or materials programs. The most highly rated improvement area measured among teachers and parents was providing every teacher and every classroom with added capacity to innovate, explore and add interest.



*What should the classrooms of teachers with a great climate and adequate materials look like?*

## Parameters for Professional Development

Both teachers and parents rated professional development for teachers relatively high. We suggest this as a focus area for The East Fund with some reservation.

Many teachers identified the scarcity of time to teach effectively, the demands of multiple classes and hundreds of students as well as new mandates for teaching to tests as keeping them from being as effective as they would like. We recognize that too often

“professional development” is just more time away from the job and an impediment to reaching students..

Still, teachers and parents both added weight to the idea that more or better professional development can make a significant difference in improving results at SME. With this in mind we suggest The East Fund actively pursue supporting quality professional development that is:

1. Teacher driven and

administratively supported;

2. Connected to unique SME issues, students and teachers;

3. Deep content in subject matter;

4. Rich in strategizing around active learning in classrooms;

5. Supports using technology or other innovative instruction to promote closer student-teacher or student-student connections.

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*“There are rare opportunities for professional development and actual time to implement new ideas or technology.”*