

Family Support Basics

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Overall Guidance and Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide an overview for school based staff of some of the district's financial policies, guidelines, and other pertinent considerations and information relevant to supporting families' access to community resources, family privacy, and related fundraising. It also addresses specific questions that have been asked. This guidance is not comprehensive, but rather responds to some of the most common questions and concerns.

To support our students and families, MMSD staff, especially social workers in their role as resource and referral experts, provide information on resources available in the community. Because MMSD must respect and protect our families' personal information, dignity and agency, including maintaining the privacy of financial information, MMSD staff must always be careful in communicating about a particular family's needs to any outside entity. Without explicit active consent from families, MMSD staff may not communicate with any outside third party, which also includes PTOs/PTAs, about a family's needs. Instead, MMSD should use a referral system and allow families the dignity and respect to decide who their information is shared with and how much information is shared.

MMSD staff must be diligent in protecting student and family privacy and ensuring that there are financial controls in place for collecting and distributing money. **MMSD only raises funds for educational activities, the purchase of educational materials for students, the purchase of essential items for students that allow students to participate in school, or to cover expenses to be incurred by MMSD.** MMSD does not raise funds for paying rent or utilities or any other basic family needs because, as a legal entity, we exist to provide education to students and we do not have the authority to raise money or provide services outside of that. All

efforts to collect and distribute funds for reasons other than those defined above must have demonstrable, legitimate oversight outside of MMSD.

Outside oversight generally comes with working with our experienced, legally established, non-profit partners who are well versed in handling and distributing funds as part of their mission to support needs such as housing initiatives, food access, and other vital basic needs that families have during this time and during other emergencies.

Financial Considerations

Who among MMSD staff can raise money? Many MMSD staff members raise money through partnerships with the Foundation for Madison's Public Schools, writing grants, and/or crowdfunding, for example. This includes principals, teachers, social workers, occupational therapists, library media technology specialists, and more. Key factors are (a) the purposes for which staff are raising money and (b) how these opportunities are communicated. Additional information is provided below.

What ways can MMSD school staff participate in fundraising? School staff raise funds and facilitate obtaining resources for educational activities, the purchase of educational materials for students, the purchase of essential items *for students* that allow students to participate in school, or to cover expenses to be incurred by MMSD. For example, staff work with the Foundation of Madison's Public Schools through the Adopt A School partner program to coordinate donations of cash and goods and services, staff write grants, staff post projects on crowdfunding sources like DonorsChoose. The key factor here is that these fundraising efforts are *for educational activities, the purchase of educational materials for students, the purchase of essential items for students that allow students to participate in school, or to cover expenses to be incurred by MMSD*. Any fundraising done by MMSD is subject to MMSD Board of Education policies and financial controls, which will dictate (a) how fundraising opportunities can be shared and (b) how the funds are used. If MMSD staff want to participate in fundraising that is not for the purposes defined above, it is to be done as an individual as opposed to being done in their role as an MMSD staff member, and to be carried out outside of contract time.

May MMSD staff post school-related fundraising events on their personal social media? Yes, as long as it is voluntarily posted on the staff's personal social media and is posted during non-contract time. Staff must be clear that they are not posting on behalf of MMSD or in their role as an MMSD employee.

May fundraising advertisements from external agencies be featured in school media newsletters etc? Yes, partner fundraising may be advertised through school media. However, all advertising must comply with [MMSD Board of Education Policy 7041](#) regarding the distribution of materials. Additionally, advertisements can be posted as [community events or activities](#) on the MMSD District (non-school) website.

May fundraising efforts by MMSD staff be featured in school media, newsletters, etc.? No, fundraising being carried out by MMSD staff members (e.g., a DonorsChoose project) may not be featured in school newsletters, school social media, or any other school/MMSD publications. MMSD Board of Education Policies 4121 and 8251 prohibit staff from soliciting funds from either parents or students and from requesting that students solicit funds on the staff members' behalf. The purpose of these policies and practices is to respect the dignity of families who may not have the resources to donate. These fundraising efforts may be featured in PTO/PTA newsletters and/or on PTO/PTA social media.

FERPA and Data Use

Pursuant to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the MMSD is required to uphold and protect student confidentiality and privacy rights. Given the MMSD's responsibilities as a public educational institution, the MMSD strongly encourages its staff, especially its school social workers, to serve as conduits and referral experts between families and third-party agencies and community resources.

What are the ways that schools and third-party agencies in the community can share information? There are a number of ways that the MMSD schools can collaborate with third-party agencies or community resources. However, the MMSD and its staff are not permitted to share student and family information with third-party agencies and community resources without obtaining prior written consent from a parent or eligible student (student who reaches the age of 18) to do so and only when it relates to educational activities, is a school-related activity and/or is for a legitimate educational purpose.

May MMSD staff, within their job capacity, share student data and family information to obtain external resources to support families, even if they get consent?

MMSD staff are not permitted to share student information that is acquired from or within their professional capacity as an MMSD employee to any third-party agency or community resource. MMSD staff members have access to student information for the sole purpose of providing an educational benefit to our students within their job capacity as MMSD employees. Thus, MMSD staff may not release or share student information, including lists of student names, email addresses, home addresses, etc., to any third-party agency without prior consent from a parent or eligible student (student who has reached the age of 18) and only to those third-party agencies that the District has determined that meet the following criteria:

- When the agency or program is, offers, or relates to educational activities,
- When the agency or program is a school-related activity and/or
- When the agency or program is for a legitimate educational purpose.

Remember: MMSD staff are not permitted to share student information with third-party agencies or use student information for the benefit of the third-party agency, particularly when the MMSD staff member is affiliated with or is acting as a member of the third-party agency (i.e., staff working on behalf of collaborative activities).

To ensure an equitable approach when assisting families in need of support, the District strongly encourages its staff to notify our families of the community resources that are available to them. The MMSD staff may decide to direct families to contact the third-party agencies themselves or refer the families to the third-party agency.

Knowing that this is not always feasible, nor do we want to put extra strain on the families, the next best is to get their express consent (this can be done regardless of whether there is a data sharing agreement). FERPA requires written consent acknowledging that the family is requesting that staff submit information to a specific named organization for a specific purpose. The consent must also specifically detail the information that will be released. This information needs to be done for each organization.

If staff want to share addresses, does that require a release of information form? Yes, sharing a family's address requires active written consent from the family, because the release is not for an educational purpose. Staff cannot disseminate MMSD student data on behalf of MMSD. Also, the MMSD staff may not disseminate information gained in their capacity as an MMSD staff member in furtherance of work on behalf of the collaborative.

What circumstances would require a signed release? All instances in which the release is not for an educational purpose would require a written release of information form signed and dated by the parent or legal guardian. For questions, please consult with your school principal and/or the Legal Services Department.

Staff Participation

Can staff make a decision to determine who gets gift cards/rental assistance etc? Staff may not determine which families receive gift cards/rental assistance. Rather, as indicated above, MMSD staff serve as a referral source for families. Determining which families are eligible for basic needs assistance is not a decision that MMSD staff can make.

Partners

What are the parameters of our relationships with community partners? There must be an MOU/MOA in place to support the partnership between MMSD and the community agency or organization. If there is no MOU/MOA or data sharing agreement between MMSD and the community agency or organization, then it is not a partnership and we cannot share data with the agency or organization.

What different kinds of agencies, organizations are there and do the differences between them make a difference in how we can interact? If MMSD and the agency or organization have an MOU/MOA in place, that means that MMSD and the agency/organization have established a way of working together and the expectations are set for these relationships with the Strategic Partnerships Department.

We have asked for an MOU with JFF for many years, can this be a part of the work moved forward now? Yes. All entities interested in partnering with MMSD should fill out a [partnership inquiry form](#). From there, a member of the Partnerships team will be in touch regarding next steps. [MMSD BOE policy 7544](#) is the relevant BOE policy regarding partnering with MMSD.

Specific PTO/PTA Guidelines

Grant and funding recipients risks and responsibilities (i.e., needing to file taxes)

In the case of the West Collaborative, it is not established as a legal entity. If a PTO/PTA is receiving grants and/or accepting donations on behalf of the West Collaborative, an organization that does not legally exist, the PTO/PTAs are legally liable and responsible for answering questions about how the funds are spent, how they are distributed, how the grants were obtained, etc.. The PTO/PTA is assuming any related responsibilities and/or risks. The PTO/PTA will be responsible for understanding and filing the appropriate state and federal taxes and understanding and completing any other obligations.

Decisions on money expenditures

The PTO/PTAs can accept money but they, and not MMSD social workers or other MMSD employees, have to choose who receives the funding. Parents/families must directly request the funds from the PTO/PTAs.