

Corporations Help Schools Combat Budget Cuts



(NAPSA)—As the economy struggles to gain momentum, state and local aid to education continues to dwindle. K-12 schools across the country are facing a budget crisis that threatens the value of education. This school budget crisis shifts the burden of providing for schools to local communities, and raising taxes or making drastic cutbacks in order to balance the budget. People in many communities are concerned with rapidly rising property taxes, and are unwilling or unable to cover the full funding gap produced by this reduction in government aid. This has resulted in recommendations to numerous school systems to cut their budgets accordingly.

The budget cuts ultimately affect students' quality of education and breadth of study options. As schools are increasingly pressured to achieve rigid reading and math standards in order to receive federal aid, other subjects and activities do not receive enough funding to continue. Schools are faced with teacher layoffs, increased class sizes, program and activity cuts, and elimination of subjects that are not considered core curriculum, such as social studies, science, art and music.

Extracurricular activities and programs are usually the first to be cut from the budget. Those programs that do survive require increased participation fees. Students are faced with new or increased costs for athletics, activities, supplies and parking. Unfortunately, these new or increased fees may deny individual students the opportunity to participate in school plays, athletic programs or educational competitions. Also, the lack of funds has caused many teachers to pay for school supplies and other materials out of their own pockets. In fact, according to a *Washington Post* poll, teachers spend an average of \$589 of their own money for classroom supplies each year.

School districts, students, parents and community members need to become creative in battling budget cuts as communities look for options other than state and federal funding to help support education. Fundraising options exist and several corpora-

tions have stepped up to help ease the funding gap. Target Stores has supported education nationwide since 1997 with the Take Charge of Education initiative. Since 1997, Target has donated \$100 million to schools across the nation. The program works like this: Target donates up to 1 percent of all purchases made at Target and target.com with the Target Visa and Target Guest Card to an eligible K-12 school designated by the cardholder. Target also donates 0.5 percent of Target Visa purchases made wherever Visa credit cards are accepted.

The Target Take Charge of Education program is one way schools across the country can bridge the public funding gap and continue to provide a quality education for students. Schools that participate in Take Charge of Education can use the fundraising dollars however they see fit. A few examples of how schools use the Target funds include new computers, art supplies, accelerated math textbooks, as well as support for extra-curricular activities and providing financial aid for students.

"The Take Charge of Education program works so well because it requires no additional effort on behalf of students or community members in order for schools to benefit," said Laysha Ward, vice president, community relations, Target Corporation. "Target guests have the ability to choose which school they would like to support with their purchases, and schools can use the funds for whatever they most need."

The Take Charge of Education program runs all year long, but schools receive Take Charge of Education funds once in September and again in March. In the most recent payout, Target guests helped donate more than \$13 million to schools. Currently, there are 110,000 schools and 8 million guests enrolled in the program. In addition, Target guests can change or amend their school designation whenever they desire. For more information on the Take Charge of Education program or to designate a school, visit target.com and click on the Community Giving page.