

Fuel My School: Not Your Momma's Philanthropy⁰

It's not a surprise to say the economy is still not doing great. It's not a surprise to say that even though we're making strides, there are still holes that need patching. But it may be a surprise to say that for our local schools, there are people in the community who are doing everything they can to alleviate some of the school's (and its staff's) financial shortcomings. One such organization is Fuel My School, and for them failure is not an option.

It all started with football helmets. Lisa Hilgenfeldt, co-founder of Fuel My School, is a mother of four, all of which attend Orange County Public Schools. In other words, she has spent her fair share of time working within the schools and trying to make a difference.



FuelMySchool was awarded the 2010-11 OCPS District Wide Outstanding Partner Award. From left to right: Pamela Carson, OCPS Senior Manager Community Resources, Anna Diaz, OCPS Superintendent of Exceptional Education Services, Lisa Hilgenfeldt, Co-Founder of FuelMySchool, Kathy Palmer, OCPS Chief of Staff, Daryl Flynn, OCPS School Board Vice Chair.

“About three years ago I had heard a story about a handful of freshmen that were being cut from a football team at one of the public schools,” says Hilgenfeldt. “It ended up being because they were seven or eight helmets short. And it hit me that seven or eight football helmets is all that’s needed for these kids that want to in this program to get in and to keep them engaged.”

She realized the community wasn’t aware of this issue, or similar obstacles just like it. She thought if she could just get the word out about what schools needed certain things, the

community may be willing to help. Thus, the creation of Fuel My School, a website to generate funds and resources and pump them back into local schools.

Along with the company's co-founder, her sister, they approached the Partners in Education Program in Orange County Public Schools with the idea. The group gladly embraced it. Next, they built the website, began to manage wishes from schools and then expanded to create additional programs that help fund the schools. Since the group's inception, more than 200 school wishes have been granted through the website.

Hilgenfeldt says things as grand as picnic tables and as small as basketballs or socks or shoes have been donated to schools. In April, the school board unanimously approved an agreement with the organization to become the "Online one-stop-shop for school needs and fundraising" in Orange County. "That was a great day," she says. "Because it was basically letting the community know that Fuel My School is the future of how we are going to make a difference."

Today there are more than 200 Orange County schools registered with Fuel My School. "Every school in Orange County current has a micro-site on Fuel My School and today any parent or community member can look on Fuel My School and find their school and begin supporting it."

The community has given rave feedback to Hilgenfeldt, recognizing that Fuel My School takes an innovative approach to fundraising. "Once they understand who we are, what we are, what it means, and how easy it is to support the schools that they love, I personally have not encountered one person that typically says anything short of 'It just makes sense,'" she says.

In addition to praise from the community, Hilgenfeldt has received many letters of gratitude from the schools themselves Fuel My School has helped. "Personally I believe everyone should be entitled to that intrinsic feeling that says 'Oh my god, I've done something great,'" she says.

Fuel My School has the potential to help schools nation wide, but for now Central Florida will be the main beneficiary as the program continues to grow and offer more schools the chance to have their wishes granted.

To learn more or find out how you can help, visit www.FuelMySchool.com.

Article by Katelyn Dobkin