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AAEF sets a goal for donors

Goal of 1st annual campaign: \$200,000 for foundation by end of the year

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In the last couple of weeks, the Ann Arbor Educational Foundation has received donations as small as \$5 and as big as \$10,000.

The foundation, which supports the Ann Arbor Public Schools, is going to need several more donations of both kinds to reach its goal of raising \$200,000 by the end of the school year.

In order to make the goal, the foundation has launched its first annual campaign.

The foundation is running ads on local radio stations, sending out direct mail pieces to potential donors, plastering bumper stickers on cars and speaking to any group that will have them.

It's all part of the plan this year to raise the profile of the foundation as it charts a new course, said Executive Director Wendy Correll.

"What we're trying to do is to create an awareness of the foundation by being as visible as possible," Correll said.

Parent Tim Coleman said the plan is working.

"I've heard more about them recently than in the last several years," said the parent of two Huron High School students. "I think it's a great idea to privately support the schools."

The foundation has long been known as the place for teachers to apply for small grants for classroom projects.

Earlier this year, it announced it would give the district \$50,000 to cover the cost of a software program used to help in literacy efforts.

In future years, the foundation hopes to up that level of support. That could include looking at helping to pay for teachers.

Correll said the foundation has asked Superintendent Todd Roberts to look at how the foundation could mitigate some of the cuts to the district's teaching staff being made because of a shrinking budget. Correll said many people are concerned about class size.

Any such an effort could cost a substantial amount of money.

For now, the foundation will work on containing to raise private funds to help the district out.

"We do need to support excellence," Correll said.

Foundation supporters argue that's needed because of the change in the way the state funds local schools.

Before the passage of Proposal A in 1994, local school districts could ask voters for money to cover operating costs, including launching new programs. But Proposal A shifted funding from local property taxes to the state and eliminated local districts' ability to go directly to the voters.

Correll said the foundation is not competing with each school's Parent Teacher Organization, which traditionally does a lot of fundraising.

"We serve district initiatives," Correll said. The PTOs "serve site-based initiatives."

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