

Dear Somerset Friends and Fellow Parents,

Welcome to Somerset! I am honored to serve as the Chair of Fall Fundraising Drive for the school year 2019-2020. And I am committed to make this year's Fall Fundraiser Drive the best year ever.

I am a proud parent of a Somerset graduate and a fifth grader. My family started at Somerset in 2013 when my oldest daughter entered the first grade. Over the years, my daughters' academic progresses are impressive. My girls have participated in the Math Adventure, Math Olympiad, Global Reading Program, Robotic Program, Art Reflection, Choir, Orchestra and I walk to school with them in this beautiful neighborhood on the Walking to School Day. They have attended Chess Club, Passport Club, Holiday Kids Marketplace, STEM fair, and Engineering Night. They have learned to play ukulele on music class. What makes them most exciting is to go to the field trips. They went to museums, theaters, zoos, botanical gardens and many more places. They enjoyed the Story of Independence told by the best storyteller in the area, scientific exhibits and workshops. Our family has attended Festival of Culture, Book Fairs, Ice Cream Social, Family Game and Movie Night, Pizza and Bingo Night, etc. Their favorite place is the spacious playground secured by 360° cameras. Gradually I learned that all these activities and programs are supported by Somerset PTSA and they are only a portion of the what the PTSA provides to school.

As many other parents in this school, I grew up in another country. Although my mother was an elementary school teacher for over 40 years, I didn't have a frame of reference on how school systems and PTSA works here before I started getting involved. It has been a learning experience for me. And the more I learn, the more I am amazed by how much PTSA can make a different to our school. Somerset is a tuition free public school. However, limited public funds only support core curriculums and district wide projects, don't cover the school specific enrichment programs that we want our children to experience. Remember that Washington residents do not pay income tax and our real estate taxes are modest. In 2017 the State of Washington spent \$12,763 per student, which ranks 19th in the U.S. Our PTSA is an organization that is completely operated by parents and funded by parent's donation. 100% of the donations to PTSA stay in Somerset and to fill an unavoidable gap between public-funded programs and parents' expectation and support numerous school-wide academic, extracurricular and social programs. All the PTSA funding depends on donations from each and every parent and corporate matching every year.



Vivian and Ivy's 1st day at Somerset on Sep 4th, 2013

My children have been at Somerset for over 10 years combined. My children's early years at Somerset were supported by generous donations of families that have come before us. I hope

that chairing this fundraiser will be my parting gift of gratitude for the experience my family has had at this amazing school.

Somerset is among the top elementary schools in the state. The generous financial support provided through the years by parents - along with the dedication of our teachers and the hard work of our students - fuels the incredible success. Fall Fundraising is a relatively new fundraiser for Somerset. This year is the fourth in our history. Traditionally biannual auction itself can generate enough revenue to fully fund PTSA's programs and services, although the bulk of the proceeds from the auction have been donated by a very small percentage of Somerset's families. All the students benefit from their great generosity for years. In recent years, more and more busy working parents with school age children move to Somerset for excellent education. Many of the new families are immigrant families like mine. Not all of them are interested or able to attend the auction and make big donations. Auction itself is no longer able to raise enough money to fully cover PTSA budget needs. Besides, it takes a lot of work and cost to put on the auctions. Fall Fundraising Drive was launched four years ago to diversify our fundraising and allow all the parents have opportunities to financially contribute to PTSA. Direct donation is also an efficient way to raise money for our busy parents and students.

During the Fall Fundraising Drive in the recent couple of years, around 60% enrolled students donated to the PTSA. In 2018/2019, our received donation was about \$50K less than actual spending. Somerset PTSA has been running a deficit for years. Thanks to previous Somerset parents' generosity, PTSA had some savings in the account to pay for the deficit for one or two years to maintain our staffing plan and quality programs. The current situation is CRITICAL if we don't take action to improve the donation participation. If you could help us reach the 100% participation goal and majority of the donations are over \$200 per student, together we can turn the table, break even and make history this year. As the chair of Fall Fundraising Drive this year, I hope I could do the best job to keep the situation and communication completely open to all parents. If you haven't got a chance to donate to Fall Fundraising Drive before because you have not been aware of the PTSA's causes and efforts and have not been informed on the PTSA financial status, please [start to donate](#) this year.

As you can find more details in our previous [brochure](#), PTSA spends over \$350 dollar per student every year. We suggest \$200 donation for each student at Somerset. Any amount of money you can give is great, whether it is \$10 or \$10000. Any donation is meaningful and appreciated.

Donations will fund our beloved Instructional Aides who work and support throughout ALL of our classrooms. For \$150,000 per year, \$220 per student, PTSA supports to hire 6 full-time Instructional Aides, equivalent to one additional staff for each grade. Public Schools' Teacher and student ratio are regulated by the state. By Hiring additional teaching supports, the ratio is literally reduced from roughly to 1:19 to 1:16. AI allow teachers to focus more on individual

needs. It is proven that smaller classes lead to higher test scores and happier teacher. This spending is expensive, but it has big positive impact to classroom education quality.

PTSA also supports Curriculum Enhancement like Field Trips, In House Activities, Guest Speakers to enrich classroom learning. Somerset Elementary has the highest amount of enrichment programs in the district. Our PTSA goes above and beyond to bring the best experiences to students because we believe our children deserve the best. For many students, the most unforgettable moments in school are from these field trips and activities. We raise fund to purchase library books, music and art supplies, tech equipment, playground equipment and to pay for teacher Development. We sponsor many academic and social programs throughout the year.

Our PTSA volunteers work tremendous hours for free to keep our administrative cost extremely low (less than 5%). Every dollar you donate are spent on every student at school. And PTSA's finance is complete transparent to all the members. If you have ideas, feedbacks or questions, you are more than welcome.

As you can see from our budget and spending, \$200 is a very conservative suggestion. And consider how much we pay for children's activities. Parents pay on average \$1000 for 10 months of dance classes at PNB, over \$800 for a season of soccer, \$500/month for after school, over \$50 for 1-hour musical instrument or sports private lesson. \$200 before tax for 35 weeks of better classroom quality, field trips, STEM, music, art, technology, safety and so much more is a super good deal to have! You will get a lot from it. If you can, please donate at least \$200 per student to cover most your children's cost or consider donating more to help families in need. Your generosity will be sincerely appreciated. Somerset is diverse community. If you are not able to, please give any amount. I personally experienced financial hardship due to job changes and medical bills in recently years so I know there are difficult times in life. I believe 100% participation is an ambiguous but achievable goal. Let's take our responsibilities to do our share, invest together, support each other and give 100% as we expect our children to give 100% at whatever they try. It might sound like a cliché, "Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss it you will land among the stars." Your donations, big or small, will be 100% directly invested to our Somerset Super Stars.

Please help ensure the strength and sustainability of this top-quality school that has benefitted our child and our family. If you haven't already done so, please [start to donate](#), from here and now!



Sincerely

Jackie Gao

Chair of Fall Fundraising Drive 2019-2010

