

# School raises more than \$16,000 for pediatric cancer research

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By Nick Mordowanec✉

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(Shutterstock image)

MACOMB TOWNSHIP — The last decade at Iroquois Middle School has been a fundraising frenzy.

Since 2007, students at the Macomb Township-based school have raised \$129,735.11 to help fund pediatric blood cancer research through the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's Student Series program.

The society is the world's largest voluntary health agency when it comes to blood cancer. Its mission is to cure diseases that are often fatal, such as leukemia, lymphoma, Hodgkin's disease and myeloma, as well as improving the quality of life of patients and families.

Anthony Lewis, a sixth-grade teacher and student council adviser, ran the initiative for the first time this year. In the past, school counselor Lynn Dawson started and ran the program for eight years, and last year eighth-grade teacher Shannon Lafrate took the reins.

Lewis said the students vote each year on who or what they want to benefit. The staff lends its support behind grades six, seven and eight — who raise money through numerous events: dodgeball, school dances, doughnut and bagel sales, flower sales, bake sales, popcorn sales, snow cone sales, and even selling the opportunity to dunk teachers.

Money began to be raised at the end of February and continued throughout March. Donations totaled \$16,298.64 this year. A few years ago, students raised a whopping \$25,000.

"It fosters a sense of community in our school and the greater community in general," Lewis said. "They want to make a positive difference in people's lives. ... It's great seeing kids work together to solve problems."

Carol McQueen, statewide director of the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's Student Series, said money helps fund research for pediatric blood cancer — such as nine different scientific grants at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

"We work with families and insurance co-pays," McQueen said. "We spent over \$900,000 in the last few years helping families with co-pay assistance. That's one piece of what we do."

“Another piece is research. Families want a cure; they don’t want to go through this.”

Many schools nationwide raise money for the cause because cancer is a disease that often hits close to home.

“There’s usually a student or family member in the school, a parent affected,” McQueen said. “That was the same with Iroquois. There was a parent who had leukemia.”

She recruits approximately 820 statewide schools annually, and Iroquois is the top fundraising school due to its long list of events and activities. Money raised stays in Michigan.

Dawson, who spent 13 years as a student council adviser, said that in the past, students participated in aiding pediatric blood cancer research, as well as the Make-A-Wish Foundation. After a sixth-grader at the school was diagnosed with leukemia many years ago, the school came to recognize the number of students stricken with the disease.

“In these years, it was near and dear to (the students’) hearts,” Dawson said.

She never imagined that the school would raise nearly \$130,000 in a decade, though the bar was set high. Due to its fundraising prowess, the school was honored with the title “Champions for a Cure.” It’s the only school to have a grant named after itself.

McQueen and the society are continually reaching out to more schools, running school-based campaigns that illuminate the importance of the issue and the individuals being plagued by illness.

“We want students to know they’re helping kids in our state — kids just like them,” McQueen said.

For more information on blood diseases or finding out how to participate in fundraising efforts, visit [www.ils.org/michigan](http://www.ils.org/michigan).



#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

*Nick Mordowanec covers Fraser, Clinton Township, Fraser Public Schools, Clintondale Community Schools and Baker College for the Fraser-Clinton Chronicle. Nick, a graduate of Michigan State University, has worked for C & G Newspapers since 2013 and has won awards from the Society of Professional Journalists Detroit Chapter and the Michigan Press Association. He has slight obsessions with “Seinfeld” and Led Zeppelin.*

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