

Just say No to Student Accounts

One of the main functions of most booster clubs is raising funds to supplement the school budget for a particular student group. Some booster clubs and their corresponding school program are quite small and fundraising efforts are minimal. For example, a small booster club may want to fundraise to throw an end-of-year party honoring students. Some clubs are very large and have ambitious fundraising goals, such as sending a band across the country (or across an ocean) to march in a holiday parade and provide special uniforms to be worn for the occasion. Whether your club's fundraising goals are large or small, there are some hard and fast rules that must be followed.

- The kids can't be charged to participate - This is often misunderstood by booster leaders and parents are often unaware that in California public schools, there are no charges for participation in school programs. This means that kids are entitled to participate, whether or not their parents paid into the booster, showed up to a meeting, or sold a single roll of gift wrap.
- Nonprofits are for the "public good" – The "public" in this case, refers to the entire group of students that your booster represents: the Girls Water Polo booster represents every student on the Girls Water Polo team. No one member can benefit. In other words, parents cannot buy their child a seat on the bus. Money given by a parent to support the booster club benefits all children on the team equally. By the same token, money is not refunded if the child quits the team. The parent's payment was considered a donation and the IRS does not allow refunds of nonprofit donations.

These rules can rub some booster leaders the wrong way, especially if the fundraising goals for the year are very steep. It can seem blatantly unfair that some parents will donate hundreds of dollars and many hours of snack bar duty and other parents will skate by without contributing at all. It is true: it would be better if everyone contributed their fair share.

The best rule of thumb here is to tread lightly. You may create a letter that spells out the financial commitment that the group has made, the number of children who will benefit and the average cost per child of participation. You may even ask the parents to pledge a donation or to sign up for fundraising or volunteer activities. For your convenience, we've designed a template called Fair Share Pledge Letter, which helps your club with the wording on this delicate subject.

Bear in mind, there may be parents who ignore the letter, or fail to live up to the responsibilities they pledge. If this happens, try not to get overly frustrated. Remember that you are serving because you believe in the program and are trying to provide a great experience for a great group of students.

Important Takeaways

- *This is public school. Our tax dollars entitle kids to a free education, including school-sponsored extra-curriculars. Booster clubs exist to supplement those tax dollars, but students are still entitled to participate, whether or not their parents contribute financially or otherwise.*
- *Create a positive environment that encourages parent participation and then let it go. There will always be those parents who will carry more of the burden. Be proud that you've done your part and helped maximize the student experience at your school.*