



Product Fundraising: It's a Love-Hate Thing

Whether you go direct or online, selling stuff brings in the bucks.

VICKIE MABRY

Fundraising, in any form, is a practice principals love to hate. If you ask a group of principals—as NAESP recently did—what they think of fundraising, more often than not they'll call it a "necessary evil." If they didn't have to do it, they wouldn't. In fact, two-thirds of the principals in NAESP's survey (*see sidebar*) prefer to stay out of it and let their PTAs or PTOs spearhead their schools' fundraising efforts—a job most parent groups willingly accept. Why? Because parents and principals believe the results—new playground equipment, field trips, library books, and classroom supplies—are worth it.

Unfortunately, many parents, not as intimately involved in the workings of their children's schools, do not always see—or appreciate—the results of school fundraising. They only see seemingly endless order forms and reminders to save labels or shop at X, Y, or Z retailers.

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NAESP'S POSITION ON FUNDRAISING

The NAESP Platform for 2000–2001 states: "NAESP recognizes that programs in elementary and middle schools are not fully funded. In order to supplement the implementation of viable programs, students and parent groups are often obligated to raise funds. NAESP strongly believes that when young students are involved in fundraising efforts, they should not participate in door-to-door sales."

From Bake Sales to Gift Wrap

Decades ago, school fundraising involved little more than a bake sale or a spaghetti dinner. But these warm and fuzzy events, while still popular for building school community, just don't bring in the big bucks many schools need today. Enter product fundraising. Inspired in part by the Girl Scouts'

early success with cookie sales, schools grappling with shrinking budgets and increasing expenses saw product fundraising as an opportunity to meet their financial needs, and an industry soon grew to support it. Today, product fundraisers include sales of magazines, candy, gift wrap, and scores of other consumer products.

It's hard to find a school that doesn't sponsor at least one, if not two, major product sales each year. There are approximately 2,000 companies vying for the schools' fundraising business, and competition is fierce. Consider this: Schools net \$1.5 billion each year through product sales, according to the Association of Fund Raisers and Direct Sellers (AFRDS). That averages to \$30 million per state, \$13,000 per school, or \$30 for every student in America. NAESP's recent research and other benchmarks suggest that product sales are the most popular—and financially rewarding—way for schools to raise funds. A quick scan of many PTA/PTO budget reports reveals that product fundraising accounts for roughly 80 percent of the dollars schools raise each year.