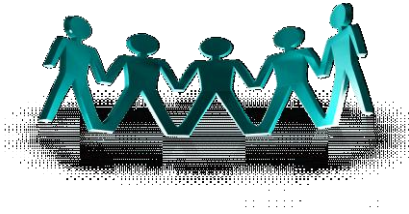


Creating a Positive and Effective Working Relationship

with your Booster Club

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As high school athletic programs look for financial help in today's struggling economy, booster clubs can provide much-needed supplementary financial support. However, booster clubs can provide more than dollars and cents. Their specific purpose and mission should be to support and enhance the school's athletic program and its teams through public relations, fundraising and special events. They should also assist in building school spirit, pride and promoting good sportsmanship.

A booster club is a volunteer service organization composed of parents, coaches, school administrators and community members. It should support all sports, and in some schools, clubs and activities, by raising funds to maintain and improve athletic facilities for example stadiums, concession stands and scoreboards. Funds raised may also be used to purchase a variety of athletic department needs beyond what the school athletic budget provides such as banners, certificates, and varsity letters. Booster clubs today are even using fundraising to off-set costs in some school districts forced to implement a pay-to-play policy.

Establishing a booster club in your school is like starting a business. It requires time and effort on behalf of the stakeholders, particularly the school administration, to ensure that state and county or district policies and procedures are strictly followed. It is imperative that the booster club have, in writing, a charter, which consists of a sound, well-written constitution and by-laws.

It is crucial that the athletic administrator read and become familiar with their booster club's constitution and by-laws in order to prevent a conflict of interest with school system policies and procedures. Many schools post their constitution and by-laws on the Internet and revise their existing charter when needed.

Booster clubs should also file for and receive a non-profit status so they can have tax exempt status for their operations. The booster club should obtain liability insurance, listing the school system as an additional insured on the policy in order to protect both themselves and the school system. It is also beneficial to have in writing the role and responsibilities of each officer, president, vice president, secretary, treasurer and at-large members, to ensure consistency and stability during a change in officers.

Booster clubs with a non-profit status should have their own checking account, separate from the school account. They should file income taxes annually and distribute a financial report to its members at each monthly meeting.

It is common to conduct monthly booster club meetings on the same day with committees meetings either prior to or after the general meeting. The committee chairpersons should create a written report to share with the members at the monthly meeting.

Booster clubs can also foster support through a variety of ways such as hosting an open house for all incoming freshman and their parents. To ensure better representation, each team should have a coach and a parent volunteer attend monthly booster club meetings. The booster club should advertise in the Parent-Teacher Organization newsletter, the school newspaper, or on the school and booster club website seeking volunteers. Membership booths can be set up at each season's sports sign-up night, each home game, new student and or freshman orientation and seasonal meet the coach nights.

There are several schools of thought as to how involved an athletic administrator should be with their booster club. It is highly suggested that the athletic director attend each monthly meeting and be the voice of the school administration. The athletic administrator sets the example and the tone for the booster club to follow.

Booster clubs cannot operate as an entity separate from the school and athletic department. The athletic administrator must be vigilant in educating, overseeing and serving as the school liaison of the booster club to ensure that they comply with all policies and regulations. It is vital that the booster club not interfere with the administration of the school's athletic programs.

The presence of the athletic administrator at booster club meetings might also ensure that the booster club adheres to its agenda. These guidelines for each meeting should be handed out to its meeting attendees and posted on the booster club website. Agenda items would include the distribution and approval of the minutes from the previous meeting, a review of the treasurer's report and committee reports.

A monthly budget report should be given to the principal and/or athletic administrator for the purpose of oversight. It is also prudent for the booster club to require two signatures on each written check, in order to authenticate its purpose. The remainder of the agenda would involve the discussion of old and new business and the motion to adjourn.

It is a wise practice for the athletic administrator to meet with the booster club president prior to the start of the school year and the first meeting to discuss the school's and athletic department's mission and philosophy, and booster club meeting objectives. This should help ensure adherence to the constitution and by-laws.

It also might be a good idea to give each attendee a packet of information including handouts pertaining to Title IX and booster clubs, the school system's philosophy, the athletic department's mission and a list of those items that are not appropriate to discuss in a booster meeting. It is also beneficial to have this information included on the school's and the booster club's website.

The athletic administrator should be involved in booster club meetings to deter discussions on issues related to teachers, the hiring and firing of coaches, officiating, or any hidden agenda items or issues which may detract from the mission of the booster club. These types of discussions should be avoided in order to focus on the intent of the meeting, which is to support the student-athletes and the school.

If a booster club meeting begins to move in an inappropriate direction, the athletic administrator may need to redirect the members back to the agenda. Members of the booster club should focus on the contributions the booster club has made and concentrate on the future goals of the booster club, which will benefit the entire athletic program and school.

Booster clubs should not determine spending priorities for the athletic program – that is the task of the principal and/or athletic administrator. This individual should ensure that all booster club donations comply with state, county or district policies and procedures, and Title IX.

Although single-sport booster clubs are not forbidden, booster club monies do count in the Title IX equation. Recent research indicates that individual sport booster clubs play a major role in sport inequities and have contributed to the increase in the number of Title IX law suits seen across the country.

Title IX legislation governs equal opportunity in, and equal funding of women's and men's athletic programs. It also dictates that booster club funds be equally shared between males and females. For example, if the booster club for the boys soccer team raises money for warm-up jackets and pants, the girls' soccer team is entitled to similar apparel.

If the girls' soccer booster club cannot afford to purchase similar warm-ups, or if there is not a girls soccer booster club, it is the school's responsibility to come up with the funds for the girls soccer team. Single-sport booster clubs can also create division within the athletic department, causing programs to exhibit the "haves and the have nots" syndrome.

Athletic administrators who have single sports booster clubs have an obligation to educate club members with regard to Title IX and in the art of fundraising. If this is not done successfully, they should be prepared to double their efforts or use budgeted funds to ensure that sport and gender equity prevails in their athletic department.

A single, unified athletic booster club is the best practice for establishing equity, proving to be beneficial to each student, the school, the community and the athletic department. Philosophically, high schools with one cohesive athletic booster club, promote and reinforce an educational approach to interscholastic athletics and activities programs.

A positive and effective working relationship with your booster club is essential to its success. This goal can be achieved through education and guidance by a well-prepared athletic administrator. The beneficiaries of a supportive booster club working in harmony with the school's and athletic department's mission will be your athletes, coaches and the athletic program.

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