



Soft Sell

How to get parents to pony up for classroom expenses without putting them on the spot.

MONEY Too often, teachers dig deep into their own pockets to pay for classroom supplies and activities. But there's a better way: Ask for help from the people who care most about students—their moms and dads. Here's how.

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS » It seems obvious, but the best way to set the table for any partnership is to get to know one another. Take the time to say hello, learn parents' names, and show interest in their lives and in their families. The more you communicate, the more parents will trust that any requests you make are with their children's interests in mind.

NO PRESSURE » Make your classroom needs apparent to parents. On parent conference nights, Los Angeles middle school teacher Carolyn Jacobson writes a wish list on her chalkboard so that parents can read it while waiting for appointments. There are no direct requests for money, which can create awkward feelings, and distributing requests to everyone creates a sense of community. Most parents end up donating.

Oakland, California, high school librarian Julia Haverstock loads book titles onto wish lists with online booksellers and puts a notice in the school newsletter linking to the lists. Parents scroll through, make purchases, and click to ship the books to the school. (It's important to update the online wish lists as newly purchased books roll in.) In return, the parents' and students' names are put on a dedication sticker bookplate, and Haverstock follows up with thank-you notes.

GIVE PARENTS CHOICES » April Flood, an assistant education professor in Illinois and mother of two, appreciated when her daughter's kindergarten teacher displayed a "giving tree" on her door and decorated it with Post-it notes describing items the class needed—CDs, baggies, and wiggly eyes for craft projects. Parents who could afford the items removed the Post-its and purchased them. —*Maya Payne Smart*



Free School Supplies: Find more tips on how to keep your class stocked at edutopia.org/donation

A PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Cheryl Bowman, mother of two in El Paso, Texas, offers this advice for winning over parents.

Be specific and make it easy for parents to help in a variety of ways.

Reaffirm the ways in which the project will help children learn a particular skill or lesson.

Send home a handwritten thank-you note from you or your students.

Recognize the project's results and project supporters in your newsletter, bulletin boards, and parental meetings, but don't publicize dollar amounts.

Don't take "no" from other parents personally. Not everyone will help all of the time, and not everyone will share why. Saying no isn't a personal rejection or a judgment on the project.