



RECOMMENDATIONS ON GIFTS TO TEACHERS

Many questions have come to us from PTO leaders regarding the use of gift cards for teachers, and our PTO leadership group asked us to give a written opinion about them.

The State Comptroller's office discourages purchasing gift cards out of school activity funds, largely because of lack of accountability for the purchases. While a gift card to a department store may be a convenient way to make a purchase, it's difficult to establish that the purchases were made for appropriate school purposes because receipts are often not returned. There is also the risk that a particular purchase hasn't been approved by the building leader. Therefore, WCS does not purchase gift cards with WCS funds.

Because PTOs are subject to State audit, we also discourage purchase of gift cards with PTO funds. There are other ways to achieve the same purpose without the accounting risk. Examples include making the purchases directly from a PTO account and donating the items to the school, making a restricted gift to the school for the intended purpose, etc.

During the year, many parents want to give a gift to their teacher, for holidays, birthdays, as a "thank you", etc. If a parent wants to make a personal gift of a gift card to a teacher, that should be done outside either the PTO or school process. In such a case, it's not an accounting or legal issue for either the school or the PTO.

Over the years, we have heard concerns from PTO leaders who have fielded complaints or questions from parents asking about what a Room Mother did with their money that was collected for a teacher gift. Most Room Mothers are not PTO representatives, but many parents often believe that a Room Mother is collecting funds for the PTO. To address this, we first encourage Room Mothers to suggest to parents that they just give a gift directly to the teacher, as described in the paragraph above. However, if a Room Mother insists that they want to collect for a teacher, they should clearly disclose that they are not doing it for the PTO and the money is not collected for the PTO. You may also choose to send an email or notice to your families on your website that the PTO will not be collecting holiday or personal gifts for individual teachers as a PTO but that you encourage parents to give them directly to teachers if they choose.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact us.

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