We began our new approach to fund-raising with one simple step: All communications with fund-raising companies are now done via e-mail. The sales representatives who call the school to pitch their products are told to e-mail us and that we will contact them if we are interested.

Trash Bags and Suckers

The next step was to brainstorm ways to earn money that either showcased our students and/or provided a legitimate service to the community. One product that was mentioned time and time again as a fund-raiser was something that virtually every household uses—trash bags. We had heard that in nearby Kansas City, Missouri, many groups use trash bags as fund-raisers because the local trash bag manufacturer shares its profits from group sales.

We saw this as an opportunity not only to raise funds for our school, but to provide a service to the neighborhoods in which our students lived. Each fall, we take orders for approximately 1,000 rolls of trash bags. The time involved is minimal and one office assistant is able to handle the orders and money collection. With the money raised—from $5,000 to $10,000—I am able to purchase school yearbooks for every student in our school, a luxury some of them would otherwise be unable to afford.

Our Student Council takes advantage of winter holiday gift-giving by selling “Santa Suckers” for a dollar each to students, who use them as gifts for friends, classmates, and teachers. The proceeds fund Student Council activities and charitable contributions, which recently included donations to the victims of the 2004 tsunami.

A Profitable Walk-A-Thon

Our PTA was also looking for new fund-raising ideas. Like the rest of us, it did not support the concept of selling “useless treasures” to our families, friends, and neighbors. So, for the last couple of years our school has held a Health and Fitness Fair in conjunction with a monthly PTA unit meeting. It’s a fun event in which our physical education teacher sets up a series of exercise stations for kids and their families.

Around the same time, the PTA launches its popular Walk-A-Thon, in which students’ families and friends donate money to sponsor their participation. The goal for each student is to get five pledges at $5 each. With a population of 400 students, that’s $10,000! There are plenty of reasons why our students get excited about the Walk-A-Thon. The kids get to walk through the playground with their classmates to the beat of loud pop music and the top collectors in each grade level and class win skating party tickets, school T-shirts, and a pizza party with the principal. In addition, the top overall collector gets to ride in a decorated golf cart.

We’ve made all of our fund-raising events pleasant experiences for our parents, teachers, and especially our students... everyone actually looks forward to raising money for the school.”

Carrie Bachmeier is principal of Gladden Elementary School in Belton, Missouri. Her e-mail address is cbachmeier@beltonschools.org.

Frazzled by Fund-raisers?

It’s a problem that principals contend with each school year—how to raise money for school programs without losing credibility and/or putting children’s safety at risk. I always felt hounded by the plethora of incoming sales calls from fund-raising companies, and our parents were equally bothered by the seemingly constant barrage of school fund-raisers. A few years ago, we decided to change all that.

“We’ve made all of our fund-raising events pleasant experiences for our parents, teachers, and especially our students... everyone actually looks forward to raising money for the school.”