**6 Steps to Start a Parent Organization at Your School**

 **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

**Question:** Can a school administrator or staff member organize a parent organization at their campus?

**Answer:** Yes. Parent organizations are a collaborative effort, they are welcome to include school staff as members, yet parents should be driving the action plan.

**Question:** Can a school administrator or staff member join a parent organization?

**Answer:** An ideal parent organization should include teachers and parents.

**Question:** Can a school administrator or staff member be elected as an officer of a PTO?

**Answer:** It is up to the members of the PTO whether or not district staff can be elected officers in a PTO. This should be written into a PTO’s bylaws. HISD discourages any person with a conflict of interest, such as being employed by the district, to become the organization’s treasurer.

**Question:** Can grandparents of children at the school be PTO members?

**Answer:** Grandparents and any other guardians of children at the school should be welcome to become PTO members.

**Question:** Can other community members (business owners, church members, civic leaders, etc.) join the PTO?

**Answer:** The PTO should vote on this issue and write it into their bylaws.

**Question**: Who should open the bank account?

**Answer:** It is highly recommended that you have two members open the bank account for accountability purposes. This also comes in handy when you need to sign a check and one member is unavailable. Ask your bank about their recommendations for opening the account and signing the checks.

**Question:** Can our PTO be covered with the school insurance?

**Answer:** No. The PTO is an independent and separate organization from the school.

**Question:** Do PTO fundraising events have to be approved by the principal?

**Answer:** PTO fundraising activities should be approved by the principal, but the principal and staff cannot control or account for the money. The treasurer should manage all funds raised by the organization.

**Question**: Does HISD provide lawyers or accountants or other professional to help manage the legal and/or financial status of a school’s parent organization?

**Answer**: Parent organizations are completely separate entities from HISD. The district does not provide lawyers or accountants or other professionals to help manage the legal and financial status of the parent organization. We recommend parents and community members seek the services of an attorney, accountant or other relevant professional if they need help.

The Houston Bar Association, the Mexican American Bar and the Hispanic Bar, offer low cost or free services to parents and community members that may be helpful in establishing or managing a parent organization ([www.hba.org](http://www.hba.org)).

Community members can find general legal guidance on LegalLine, Houston Lawyer Referral Service or the Houston Volunteer Lawyer Saturday clinics:

* LegalLine occurs twice a month on the 1st and 3rd Wednesday from 5pm to 9pm. Parents can call at 713-759-1133 to speak to an attorney.
* Parents and community members can also call the Houston Lawyer Referral Service at 713-237-9429 and conduct a 30-minute consultation with an attorney for $20.  They can then decide if they want to hire them.
* Finally, parents can attend one of the Houston Volunteer Lawyer Saturday clinics and receive free legal advice from an attorney.  In order to have an attorney take their case on sliding scale (low- or no-cost,) they would have to meet certain financial qualifications.

***Employer Identification Number (EIN)***

For all EIN-related questions, please visit [http://www.irs.gov/Businesses/Small-Businesses-&-Self-Employed/Online-EIN-Frequently-Asked-Questions](http://www.irs.gov/Businesses/Small-Businesses-%26-Self-Employed/Online-EIN-Frequently-Asked-Questions) or <https://sa.www4.irs.gov/modiein/individual/index.jsp>, contact the IRS at 1-800-829-4933, or consult an accountant.

***Federal Tax-Exempt Status***

For all Tax-Exemption-related questions, please visit <http://www.stayexempt.irs.gov/StartingOut.aspx>, contact the IRS at 1-800-531-5441, or consult an accountant.

***State Sales Tax Exemption***

For all State Sales Tax Exemption questions, please visit <http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/exempt/> or contact the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts Office at 1-800-252-5555, or consult an accountant.

***Nonprofit Incorporation or 501(c)(3) Status***

For all questions on Nonprofit Incorporation, please visit <http://www.sos.state.tx.us/corp/nonprofit_org.shtml> or contact the Texas Secretary of State Office at 1-512-463-5583, or consult a lawyer.