

CLIENT NEWS BRIEF

State Department of Education Issues a Reminder that Parents Can Not be Forced to Volunteer at School

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For some parents, volunteering at their child's school is a luxury they cannot afford. At many charter schools, however, it has been alleged that volunteering is required of families, and some families feel forced to perform service or risk penalties such as disenrollment. According to a recent advisory by the California Department of Education ("CDE"), these practices should end.

The CDE's advisory seems to have been issued in response to a recent study by Public Advocates Inc., titled "*Charging for Access: How California Charter Schools Exclude Vulnerable Students By Imposing Illegal Family Work Quotas*". In their study, Public Advocates allege that at least a third of the California charter schools they polled have illegal parental service requirements. The CDE has made it clear that students, and their families, are entitled to a free public education without having to volunteer against their will.

The CDE first addressed this issue, as well as the overall issue of student fees, in a 2012 advisory. In 2012, the CDE issued "[Fiscal Management Advisory 12-02](#)", which stated that course credit or privileges related to educational activities should not be offered in exchange for money or donations of goods or services from a pupil or a pupil's parents or guardians.

Nearly three years later, the CDE has now decided to augment that advice. In "[Fiscal Management Advisory 15-01](#)", the CDE stated that forcing parents to volunteer as a condition of enrollment, or for otherwise receiving an educational benefit, is contrary to state laws prohibiting impermissible student fees. School districts, county offices of education and charter schools may not impose parental service requirements. However, students and parents are still free to volunteer at their school so long as their choice to volunteer is not a prerequisite to access to educational activities. Although the CDE's recent advisory was issued to all public schools, the primary focus appears to be on charter schools.

In light of the new advisory, school districts and county offices of education that authorize charter schools should pay particular attention to charter school policies and/or practices where families are expected to volunteer as a condition of enrollment or matriculation.

Our attorneys have substantial experience handling all aspects of charter school issues. If you have any questions regarding these issues, please feel free to contact one of our [eight offices](#) located statewide. You can also visit our [website](#), follow us on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#), or download our [Client News Brief App](#).



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