



# McLean County

Unit District No.5

*Educating each student to achieve personal excellence.*

**TO:** McLean County Unit District No. 5 Board of Education

**FROM:** Martin Hickman, Chief Financial Officer

**DATE:** June 17, 2026

**SUBJECT:** Recommendation to Approve Givebacks as the District-Authorized Fundraising Platform

## **Executive Summary**

Over time, our staff and supporting organizations have expanded their fundraising efforts to support classroom needs, special projects, and extracurricular activities. Currently, fundraising is scattered across highly fragmented collection methods—ranging from cash/check envelopes, personal payment apps like Venmo and independent crowdfunding sites

To protect the district’s financial integrity and shield our staff from liability, we recommend that the Board approve Givebacks, as the officially authorized fundraising platform for McLean County Unit District No. 5. Centralizing fundraising through Givebacks will significantly reduce our exposure to audit risks and fraud.

## **The Risks of Decentralized Fundraising**

When educators and staff manage fundraising across disconnected methods, the district loses visibility. This fragmentation introduces several immediate operational risks:

**Lack of Pre-Approval Oversight:** Staff may unintentionally launch campaigns that violate district guidelines (e.g., unapproved vendors, inappropriate incentives) because there is no mandatory routing for principal or district approval.

**Commingling of Funds:** When staff use personal apps or mix school-sponsored funds with those of external School Support Organizations (SSOs), it blurs the lines of financial responsibility and creates liability for both the employee and the district.

**Cash Handling and Security Risks:** Relying on cash and checks passed through multiple hands before reaching the central office naturally increases the risk of loss, theft, or accounting errors.

## **How Givebacks Mitigates District Risk**

Givebacks is specifically designed to eliminate these vulnerabilities by bringing fundraising into a single, unified platform. Transitioning to Givebacks as our authorized platform reduces our risk profile in four key ways:

## **1. Mandatory, Automated Approval Workflows**

Before a link is shared or a dollar is collected, Givebacks requires staff to submit the fundraiser for administrative approval. This ensures every initiative aligns with Section 4 (Operational Services) of our Board Policy Manual before it launches, preventing unapproved campaigns from ever reaching the community via Peachjar or social media.

## **2. Digital Audit Trails and Real-Time Visibility**

Givebacks provides a real-time, district-wide reporting dashboard. Every transaction is time-stamped and automatically logged, creating a clean, unalterable digital audit trail. The finance team can instantly see how much revenue came in, which campaigns are active, and exactly where funds are being routed, making the district audit-ready from day one.

## **3. Elimination of Personal Payment Apps**

By providing a secure, parent-friendly mobile app and digital storefront, the district can confidently prohibit the use of personal payment apps (like Venmo or Cash App) and unauthorized crowdfunding platforms. All funds flow directly into secure, district-approved accounts, eliminating the liability of staff acting as financial intermediaries.

## **4. Strict Separation of Funds**

Givebacks clearly delineates between school-sponsored funds (e.g., a teacher raising money for a field trip) and funds belonging to independent organizations (e.g., PTOs, booster clubs, or the Unit 5 Educational Foundation). This structural separation prevents the accidental commingling of money, protecting both the district and our community partners.

## **Next Steps**

Transitioning to Givebacks is not about restricting our educators; it is about providing them with a safe, simple, and efficient tool so they can focus on students rather than managing cash. Centralized reporting protects the district, shields staff from liability, and builds trust with taxpayers. Furthermore, establishing a single, authorized platform provides our community with confidence of knowing exactly where their donated money is going.

We recommend that the Board of Education authorize district administration to review and enter into an agreement with Givebacks as the district approved fundraising platform. (See the [attached quote](#). Please note, the vendor said they would honor the price even though the quote has a May expiration date).



