



School Casino Nights: Safe Bet? *Concerns and alternatives*

Thank you very much for your consideration on this important issue. We know it is a challenge to plan successful, fun events, and we appreciate your dedication to the health and well being of the students.

“What’s the big deal about having a casino night?”

In an effort to make alcohol-free events attractive to teens, well-meaning communities often offer casino nights and other gambling-related events as replacement activities. Youth who gamble excessively are prone to problems in school, work, and with peer and family relationships. Those who take gambling too far may commit crimes to finance their gambling, are more at risk for alcohol and drug abuse, and are much more likely to commit suicide.

“These events are harmless compared with kids drinking or using drugs.”

As with alcohol and substance abuse, accessibility and acceptability are key factors in increasing the rate of youth gambling and associated problems. The reality is that there is little difference between the consequences of an addiction to substance abuse and the consequences of an addiction to gambling.

“Yes, but the students aren’t even exchanging real money!”

Think of this, would you consider holding a mock-tail-gate party for kids where non-alcoholic umbrella drinks and near-beer were served? Probably not, for fear it would give kids the wrong message. The same is true for casino nights or other school organized gambling activities. Even while real money isn’t being used, casino nights or other gambling related activities and fundraisers promote a behavior that is potentially dangerous and sends the wrong message that gambling is risk free.

“So how can we still have a successful event AND attract the kids?”

Students and parents have offered us a number of suggestions that would be both effective and FUN. These alternatives include activities like:

Movie night	Athletic center activities (swimming, racquetball, Sumo wrestling, etc.)
Video game night	Silent auction (for fundraisers)
Board game night	Night at the Zoo
Game show madness	“The Bachelor” theme/date auction (for fundraisers)
Survivor theme	Game tournaments (e.g., dodge ball for fundraisers)
Fear Factor theme	
Amazing Race theme	
Whodunit mystery night	

Our thanks to the Oregon Dept. of Human Services for permission to adapt their materials on youth poker.

**For free confidential information and referral
regarding a gambling problem, call
1.800.NEXT.STEP (1.800.639.8783) or
www.problemgambling.az.gov**