

## FEES FOR LEARNING MATERIALS AND ACTIVITIES GUIDELINE

### Objectives and Definitions<sup>1</sup>

Every student has the right to attend a school, where they are a qualified resident pupil, without payment of a fee.<sup>2</sup> In general, there should be no fees charged for day school programs. The costs of materials and activities for elementary and secondary education are provided to schools by the Ministry of Education and should be reflected in school board operating budgets.

When schools or school boards choose with the support of the school community to offer enhanced or optional programming, parents may be asked to contribute resources in the way of time, money or materials to support these programs or activities. While no student should be excluded from participating in any school activity or event based on the ability to pay, some activities or events may require some recovery of the cost for participation.

Fees may be appropriate in cases where school boards or schools choose to offer enhancements or supplementary learning materials beyond the core curriculum. Where fees are appropriate, they should be minimized as much as possible, with the goal of supporting student participation in programs and activities regardless of individual economic circumstances.

The objectives of this guideline are to:

- Identify guiding principles and best practices;
- Provide a foundation for school boards to develop or review existing guidelines, policies and procedures with respect to any fees charged to students in the regular day school program; and
- Provide examples of appropriate and inappropriate practices.

The best practices and examples provided in this guideline are not intended to be a comprehensive list. The fees discussed in this guideline are fees other than tuition fees for visa students, international students, First Nations students attending pursuant to a tuition agreement, adult or continuing education students. Nor do they include fees for early learning programs offered outside the regular school day or other before or after school programs.

When schools and boards choose to charge any fee, it is important to:

- Have policies to help ensure that fee charges are consistent with the purposes and principles of public education;
- Seek advice from school staff, parent involvement committees, Special Education Advisory Committees (SEACs), other advisory committees; school councils, parents, students and the school community;
- Include a goal of full student participation in school programs and activities regardless of individual economic circumstances; and
- Support and protect staff and volunteers through practices that promote accountability for the handling and management of the proceeds raised from fees.

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<sup>1</sup> On all legal questions relating to the subjects covered in this guideline, boards should rely on the advice of their own legal counsel. This guideline should not be interpreted as expressing any opinion that a board may charge a fee.

<sup>2</sup> In addition, students enrolled by a board who are otherwise qualified to attend except as to residence are entitled to attend a regular day school program without payment of fee.

## FEES FOR LEARNING MATERIALS AND ACTIVITIES GUIDELINE

### Definitions

#### Student Activity Fees

Student activity fees are voluntary amounts that are used to supplement a student's school experience through materials and activities such as student agendas, student recognition programs, yearbooks, extracurricular activities, school dances, or theme days.

#### Enhanced Programming and Materials

Enhanced Programming and materials are voluntary enrichments or upgrades to the curriculum or co-curricular<sup>3</sup> activities beyond what is necessary to meet the learning expectations for a particular grade or course. For example, in some performance and production courses (for example, music, woodworking), students may wish to use a superior product or consumable than that provided by the school, in which case they may be asked to pay the additional cost of the upgrade.

Where students choose not to access these enhanced programs or materials, alternatives must be available as essential course materials required to meet the learning expectations of the course or grade are to be provided at no cost.

#### Optional Programming

Optional Programming refers to voluntary courses or activities that students normally choose to attend through an application process, with the knowledge that these programs are beyond the core curriculum. Examples may include Advanced Placement® and Hockey Canada Skills Academy programs.

### Outline

This guideline addresses the following four topics:

- I. Guiding Principles – identifies some key principles to guide school board fees policies
- II. Fee Charges – outlines criteria and examples of eligible and ineligible activities to inform a board's fee policy
- III. Best Practices – provides best practices for school boards to consider when developing or updating fee policies for learning materials and activities
- IV. Accountability to the School Community – outlines best practices for a board's policy to meet the public's expectations and uphold the public's trust

#### I. Guiding Principles

With the support of the school community, schools and school boards may wish to offer programming and materials beyond what is necessary to meet the learning expectations of a particular grade or course. In these situations, it may be appropriate to collect a fee to offset the additional costs. The development of a board-wide student fee policy will ensure consistency and transparency in the application of fees and should reflect the following principles:

#### Complementary to Public Education

- The purposes for which funds are collected are consistent with the school board's mission and values.

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<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this guideline, co-curricular activities or materials are defined as related to the regular day school program. Extra-curricular activities are defined as outside the regular day school program.

## FEES FOR LEARNING MATERIALS AND ACTIVITIES GUIDELINE

- Fees raised for school purposes are to complement, and not replace, public funding for education.

### Inclusive Education

- Each student should have an equal opportunity to benefit from the education system without being required to pay a fee. Students must be able to participate in school activities and access resources regardless of personal financial barriers.
- School board fees policies should address financial hardship and support student participation in activities regardless of economic circumstances.
- The dignity of every student and parent should be honoured in the school fee collection process, collection methods afford reasonable expectations of privacy for students and parents; and a respectful practice for discreet identification of students/parents who may be experiencing financial hardship is clearly communicated.

### Accountability & Transparency

- Board policies should address all student fees for learning materials and activities.
- The policy should be publicly available on the school board's website.
- Financial reporting practices to the school community are in place.

## II. Fee Charges

School boards should develop strategies to recognize and reduce barriers to participation and work to effectively include all students in programs and activities. Successful completion of a required grade or course leading to graduation cannot be dependent on the payment of any course fee.

When determining whether fee charges may be appropriate, the following criteria may be considered. A fee charge shall be permissible for an activity, material, course or program if it is:

- Not required as part of the regular day school program;
- Voluntary, and alternatives are offered;
- Non-essential or extracurricular in nature and is not required for graduation by an individual student; or
- A voluntary upgrade or substitute of a more costly material to the material provided for course purposes.

### Examples of Activities, Programs or Materials Ineligible for Fee Charges

- A registration or administration fee for students enrolled in any regular day school program;
- A textbook fee or deposit;<sup>4</sup>
- Learning materials that are required for completion of the curriculum such as workbooks, cahiers, musical instruments, science supplies, lab material kits and safety goggles;
- Fees charged for the creation of discretionary accounts by teachers or departments;
- Mandatory flat fees for any course leading to graduation other than optional programming;
- A fee for a guest speaker, visiting teacher, or in-class field trip or presentation where the material being presented is a mandatory element of the subject or course;

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<sup>4</sup> Schools may recover the costs for the replacement or repair of lost, damaged or broken materials such as textbooks, library books, music or science supplies or any loaned materials. These charges should not exceed the replacement or repair cost.

## FEES FOR LEARNING MATERIALS AND ACTIVITIES GUIDELINE

- Items that are funded through the allocated budget of a school board including, but not limited to learning materials necessary to meet learning expectations such as computers, workbooks, textbooks, staff development and training costs; or
- Learning materials that are required to meet the learning expectations of the course, but are consumed by the pupil and cannot be used again by another student in the next semester, e.g. a chemical used in a chemistry experiment.

### Examples of Activities, Programs or Materials Potentially Eligible for Fee Charges

- Optional programming such as, Advanced Placement courses or Hockey Canada Skills Academy program;
- Extracurricular trips, events or activities that are extensions to the curriculum and not required for graduation (e.g. dances, school clubs, theme days, athletics, drama, student council activities);
- Extended student trips or excursions that are not necessary to meet the learning expectations of a particular grade or course (e.g. trips abroad);
- Optional art or music supplies or higher quality woodworking, design or technology materials that students choose to use for course completion, as long as the required materials are available at no cost;
- Student activity fees
- Co-curricular activities, special events, program enhancements or field trips (e.g. for costs of participation, rental of equipment or travel), if alternative programming and assignments are offered to students who choose not to participate; or
- Student agendas, yearbooks.

### III. Best Practices

School boards may consider the following best practices when developing board-wide policies for fees for learning materials and activities:

- Establishing a limit on student activity fees;
- Setting limits for families with more than two children attending schools in the board;
- Creating a central fund or subsidy program to support the full participation of students in activities regardless of economic circumstances;
- Implementing a confidential process to support full participation of students regardless of economic circumstances; and
- Fee amounts should reflect the actual cost of the service or materials being provided to the student.

School fee policies must be compliant with the school board fee policy and school board guidelines. In addition, school principals may consider the following best practices when implementing board fee policies in their schools:

- Minimizing, where possible, costs related to enhanced programming and materials (for example, speakers, dance instructors, in-class field trips) that are optional to a course;
- Making every effort to ensure all students can participate in student activities regardless of ability to pay;
- Where a student chooses not to participate, alternative assignments should be provided for students to meet the expectations of the course; and
- Modest student activity fees for student agendas, student recognition, yearbooks, school dances, student council activities and clubs, photographs, extra-curricular activities and athletics.

## FEES FOR LEARNING MATERIALS AND ACTIVITIES GUIDELINE

### IV. Accountability to the School Community

Fees should reflect the actual cost of the services or materials being provided to the student. A transparent accounting of the amounts collected and expenditures allocated must be made available to the school community.

Members of the school community should be consulted in the development of a school's fee schedule and made aware of the use of student fees. Fee schedules for the upcoming school year should be made widely available to the school community. For example, fee schedules can be included in fall school newsletters, posted on school websites and referenced in student agendas.

These fee schedules should include:

- An itemized list of fees that states the rationale and purpose of each fee; and
- Information about the process to confidentially address financial hardship.