

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

Every student is entitled to benefit from the education system in Ontario without the payment of fees for learning materials, supplies, activities or textbooks to successfully complete a course leading to graduation<sup>2</sup>. The basic costs of materials and activities for elementary and secondary education are provided to schools by the Province through the funds governed by the Grants for Student Needs and should be reflected in school board operating budgets.

In general, there should be no fees charged for regular day school programs. This guideline does not apply to tuition fees for visa students, international students, first nations students who are living on reserve, or continuing education students. It does not address fees for early learning programs offered outside the regular school day or other before or after school programs.

When schools or school boards choose with the support of the school community to offer enhanced or specialized 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. This guideline serves as an aid to help school boards determine fee eligibility, effectively administer fees and be accountable to the school community.

Where fees are appropriate, they should be minimized as much as possible, with the goal of full 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.

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

- Have guidelines to help ensure that fee charges are consistent with the purposes and principles of public education;
- Seek advice from school staff, parent involvement committees, school councils, 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 these activities.

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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> Any student who is qualified to be a resident pupil of the board is entitled to attend a regular day school program without payment of a fee.

## Definitions

### Student Activity Fees

Student Activity fees are voluntary amounts that are used to enhance a student's school experience through materials and activities such as student agendas, student recognition programs, yearbooks, extracurricular activities, school dances, theme days or other school council activities. If students are able to pay but choose not to, they may not have access to these additional activities or materials.

### Enhanced Programming

Enhanced Programming represents an enrichment or upgrade to the curriculum or co-curricular<sup>3</sup> activities. 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 that upgrade.

Similarly, schools may offer voluntary field trips or excursions as curriculum enhancements.

Where students choose not to access the enhanced programming, an alternative must be available as essential course materials are to be provided at no cost to students for any regular course leading to graduation.

### Specialized Programming

Specialized Programming is optional 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 include International Baccalaureate, 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

### Guiding Principles

With the support of the school community, schools and school boards may wish to provide programming and materials beyond the basic school experience to students. For these enhancements, it may be appropriate to collect a fee to offset the additional costs. The development of a distinct board-wide student fee policy will ensure consistency and transparency in the application of fees and should reflect the following principles:

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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.

### Complementary to Public Education

- The purposes for which funds are collected are consistent with the school board's mission and values.
- Fee proceeds are used to enhance student experiences, options and resources.
- 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.
- Fees for course materials and learning activities are appropriate only for enhanced or specialized programming, materials or activities.
- All school boards should address financial hardship in their fees policy.
- School principals should ensure the dignity of every student and parent is honoured in the school fee collection process, develop collection methods that afford reasonable expectations of privacy for students and parents, and develop and communicate clearly a practice for discreet identification of students/parents who may be experiencing financial hardship.

### Accountability & Transparency

- Boards should have a separate and distinct policy, that directly addresses 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 must be in place.

### 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 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 may be permissible for an activity, material, course or program if it is:

- Not part of the regular day school program;
- Voluntary, and alternatives are offered;
- Non-essential, supplementary or extracurricular in nature and is not required for graduation by an individual student;
- An upgrade or substitute of a more costly material to the material provided for course purposes; or
- For the replacement or repair of lost or damaged loaned materials such as library and text books. These charges should not exceed the replacement or repair cost.

Parents, guardians and/or students are also responsible for providing school supplies, materials, clothing, footwear, outerwear, and equipment for personal use or consumption such as pens, paper, notebooks and rulers.

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

- A registration or administration fee for students enrolled in any regular day school program;<sup>4</sup>
- A textbook fee or deposit;<sup>5</sup>
- Fees charged for the creation of discretionary accounts by teachers or departments;
- Mandatory flat fees for any course leading to graduation other than specialized programming;
- A fee for a guest speaker, visiting teacher, or in-class field trip where the material being presented is a mandatory element of the course;
- Mandatory learning materials that are required with the textbook for completion of the curriculum such as workbooks, cahiers, musical instruments, art supplies, science supplies, lab material kits and safety goggles;
- Items that are funded through the allocated budget of a school board including, but not limited to, core learning materials for regular classroom programs such as computers, workbooks, textbooks, staff development and training costs; or
- Learning materials that are consumables, that is, are essential to the delivery 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

- Specialized programming such as International Baccalaureate, 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 (e.g. trips abroad);
- Specialized art or music supplies or higher quality woodworking, design or technology materials; while ensuring basic materials for course completion are available at no cost;
- Co-curricular activities, special events, program enhancements or field trips, if alternative programming and assignments are offered to students who choose not to participate; these fees may reflect the costs of participation fees, materials, resource persons, rental of equipment and travel;
- Student agendas, yearbooks; or
- Voluntary flat fee for bulk purchase of additional school supplies beyond the supplies funded through the school board allocation. Parents or students may choose to opt out of this fee and provide materials other than those provided by the school

### Best Practices

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

- Seeking the advice and assistance from school staff, parent involvement committees, school councils, student councils and the school community;
- Establishing a limit on student activity fees;
- Setting limits for families with more than two children attending the same school;

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<sup>4</sup> This guideline does not apply to tuition fees for visa students, international students, first nations students who are living on reserve, or continuing education students. It does not address fees for early learning programs offered outside the regular school day or other before or after school programs.

<sup>5</sup> Schools may recover the costs for the replacement or repair of textbooks, library books or any loaned materials.

- 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
- Requiring fee amounts to reflect the cost of the service or materials being provided to the student.

School fee policies should 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 (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;
- Modest student activity fees for student agendas, student recognition, yearbooks, school dances, student council activities and clubs, photographs, extra-curricular activities and athletics; and
- Providing without charge, school agendas or planners if they are deemed as a mandatory learning resource by the principal or a teacher and used as an essential learning tool as part of course requirements (e.g. calendar of course assignments).

### **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 in June and to new students and their parents in September. 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.

Schools should make every effort to communicate with the school population by providing materials in multiple languages and formats.