

SCHOOL FEES & FINES - FAQ

FIELD TRIPS

Q1. Having an elementary \$10 field trip fee would be illegal, but also sending home a letter asking for \$3 per student to go on a field trip to the science center during the middle of the year would also be illegal. Correct?

That is correct. Regardless of the timing of the school's request for funds, it may not do so if the request is tied to field trips that will occur during the school day.

Q2. May I assume that if a PTA, PTO or other organization wanted to donate funding for field trips, it would be appropriate?

PTA, PTO or other organizations may raise funds and donate the money to the school district to help cover field trips or other costs. For that matter, the school district may do its own fundraising. However, whoever is raising the funds, it should not be done in such a way as to unduly pressure students or their families. For example, it is not recommended to send a note home with students that families should make a "recommended donation" for field trips. As a practical matter, administrators should also consider the complications that will arise if money is donated for the field trips of one particular class or elementary school, but not enough for others in the district.

Q3. If a parent wants to give a donation on the condition that it is only used on the grade level of a parent's child, is that legal?

Yes. However, if the school accepts the donation that has a condition, the school district would have to honor that condition or reject the donation altogether.

Q4. Food costs on field trips. Our students go to National History Day and there is no fee to the student, but the instructor does ask for \$4 per student for lunch. Can we still continue to ask for this "fee?" If not, can we simply let families know that they need to provide their student money for lunch during the day, or does the district also have to pay for this food "fee" associated with the trip/competition?

The school district would not have to pay for the \$4 student lunch, as long as it provides the students with a sack lunch from its lunch program. If the school offers to provide lunch for the students from its own program, then there is no problem with letting students know that they may alternatively bring their own cold lunch or bring money to buy lunch.

Q5. Our school usually has a field trip for students to go skiing during one day of the year. May the school district pay for the field trip to the ski slopes, but then require students to pay for ski rental and lift costs once we arrive at the location?

No. If the intent of the field trip is clearly to go skiing, and it is held during a school day, then the school should pay for the cost of going skiing. Having stated that, if a school goes on a snow tubing trip, and the school pays for transportation costs and the cost for students to go tubing, then there would not be a problem with students having the option to bring extra money to rent snowboards, or something other than tubes. In either case, schools may want to consider how they would justify the trip as a day of instruction.

Q6. We take our eighth graders to an etiquette dinner and the sole purpose is to learn manners at the table. In the past, kids have paid for half the meal (about \$5.00) and the school paid for half. Is that allowed?

Once again, if the trip occurs during the school day, then the school may not charge a fee, even for this etiquette meal. The school may want to consider using food from the school lunch program for the meal and having someone come to the school to do the training. Alternatively, if the meal occurs after school hours and is optional, then schools may charge a fee for the entire meal.

Q7. May we bring in a vendor for fundraising and have the money go toward field trips?

A. Yes, as long as the school does not require or put undue pressure on students to participate in the fundraiser.

Q8. If we make all field trips optional, and provide alternatives for students at school during trips, is it allowable to charge those students who choose to go on the trip?

A. No. Regardless of whether the field trip is mandatory or optional, if it is part of instruction and students who go on the trip are marked as present, then there should be no charge for the trip.

BAND, CHOIR & DRILL TEAM

Q9. Our band/vocal group takes a trip every other year. The students will often leave on a Friday morning, then come back on Saturday evening. The Friday they leave, class is often in session. Taking part in the trip is voluntary. Can we charge this fee since school is in session on Friday?

Yes, since the trip is not taking the place of instruction, rather the students are given an excused absence, they may be charged a fee. If, in the alternative, the students were being marked present, as would be the case with a field trip or a regularly scheduled extracurricular event, then the school should cover the charges. This answer assumes that the trip is not part of the organization's competition schedule (e.g., the choir is taking a trip to Radio City Music Hall, and not going to a choir competition in Decorah).

Q10. Our drill team normally has many different uniforms; does the school now have to pay for these uniforms?

Possibly. If the student participants keep the uniforms/outfits, then they may be charged for purchase costs. However, students must have the option to use and return the uniforms/outfits. If uniforms/outfits are the property of the school district, then participants may be charged a fee for the costs of cleaning and general wear-and-tear.

Q11. Our choir normally participates in a choral festival at an Iowa college on a Saturday during the school year. In the past, some choir members have chosen to stay at a hotel on the Friday before the event, and those members have been responsible for paying their own way. Is the school now required to pay for those hotel rooms?

If the school provides an option for participants to travel to the festival on the Saturday of the festival, then the school district would not be responsible for lodging costs. Even if travel was required on the day before the event, the school district may certainly pay or arrange for less extravagant accommodations, such as dorm rooms at the college or separate, chaperoned, male and female sleeping areas at the college or a nearby school. If students decide to upgrade to a nice hotel, then their family will need to pick up that cost.

Q12. May our band charge a fee to members to rent a commercial bus to go to an away competition?

No. If the competition is a required event for members of the band, then the school must use school funds, which may include the activity fund, to pay for the cost of a school bus or a commercial bus.

CLASS SUPPLIES

Q13. Students are asked to purchase their own pillow material kit for family and consumer science class. I am assuming that we can no longer do this and the school needs to pay for these “cloth sewing supplies” even though the students get to keep the final product?

Correct, the school must pay for the cost for supplies to make the pillow. However, if the school is using cotton material to make the pillowcase and the student wants to upgrade to silk, then the school may charge the student the difference in cost between cotton and silk or require the student to bring his/her own silk fabric. Also, if the school is paying for the materials to make the pillow, you would not be required to let the students keep the final product.

Q14. In our beginning woods class all students make a clock. I understand we cannot charge for this wood. However, in other woods classes all students decide what they want to build. Some build futons, some build entertainment centers, some build end tables, etc. This is an elective class and in the past the student paid for the wood. Can we still resell this wood to the students?

As long as the school is providing the students enough free wood to do the project they need to do to learn a particular skill, there is not a problem with reselling wood for more elaborate projects. For example, if the minimal class assignment is to build a bookshelf, then the school is required to provide the wood for that project. However, the school may charge additional costs if a student instead decides to make an entertainment center. As a related issue, only the time normally needed to build a bookshelf should be allotted in class. Otherwise, students should come in during their free time or use free time when they are ahead of schedule for other assignments in woods class to work on an elaborate project that takes a great deal of time. Point being, the kids that stick to the assigned project (a bookshelf) should not have to sit around and wait for those students who pay more money to make the entertainment center.

Q15. We have a voluntary middle school honor choir. A certain amount of students will be selected to be in the honor choir. Can the school charge these students \$6 for the music each individual member will need to compete in honor choir competition?

A: The music sheets may be regarded as "textbooks," and thus the district may sell the music to each student at cost or may rent the music sheets to the students. Because the cost is relatively small, selling the music and allowing the students to keep it appears to be the better option, and removes any issues of destroyed or lost music sheets. The total or partial waiver must be honored for eligible students.

Q16. In Textiles class, the students have assignments on what they are to create, but not the fabric. They have in the past purchased a wide variety of fabric. Do we buy a bolt of fabric and tell the students if they want something different, they will need to purchase?

Yes. The school must provide some type of fabric, so that the students may learn those sewing skills that are part of their instruction. However, the school may charge students for more expensive fabric alternatives, or give the option that students may bring in their own fabric.

MISCELLANEOUS SCHOOL FEES

Q17. Rather than a locker/lock fee, may a school district require students to pay a deposit for a lock, if the money is returned when the student returns the lock at the end of the year?

Yes. Schools may collect deposits for locks, as long as the amount collected does not exceed the actual replacement cost of the lock. While schools may charge deposits to all students, regardless of economic status (as every student is subject to potential fines for lost or damaged equipment or school property), you would be well advised to consider allowing installment payments or considering waiver of the deposit in whole, or in part, for students who would normally receive fee waivers.

Q18. Do the school fees requirements apply to private schools as well?

No.

Q19. Our PTO president just came in and was wondering if it was o.k. for their organization to ask for donations for field trips (at our upcoming Open House)?

Yes, it is okay for the PTO to ask for donations at the Open House or at any other time or location. Having the PTO involved in the fundraising removes the classroom teacher from the position of appearing to solicit for funds, which solicitation may put undue or unintended pressure on their students. The DE encourages booster clubs, PTOs and other organizations to get more involved in school fundraising.

Q20. Is it ok to have items like 3 ring binders on the supply list or to charge a fee for these items?

Teachers may give a suggested list of school supplies, but families should have the option to bring in new or used supplies, and students should not be punished if they do not bring in an item on the suggested list. If the school wishes, it may sell binders at cost, but, again, a student should not be forced to make such a purchase. If the binder is required by a teacher, then the school would need to provide for a fee waiver provision.

Q21. At open house most of our teachers put up a giving tree with a variety of items they will use during the year. Parents can select an item to donate to the school. They are not required to but most families decide to participate. Can we use the giving tree?

There is nothing inappropriate with using such a “giving tree” as long as the activity is optional.

Q22. For various rewards, teachers will have pizza parties and things like that. Students that are eligible for the party are asked to bring one or two dollars to buy the pizza. If eligible students cannot afford it, teachers pick up the cost. Can we do this?

As long as provision is made for students who are unable to pay for the pizza, there is nothing inappropriate with having such pizza parties.

Q23. Can we collect a fine from students who break school materials? Examples: An overhead bulb is broken when a student pounds on a projector. Library book has pop spilled on it. Student breaks a fence when trying to jump the fence (shouldn't have been jumping the fence).

In each of these incidents, the school is within its authority to charge a fine for the damaged or destroyed property. Fee waivers do not apply in these scenarios.

Q24. In the past, teachers have assigned students a snack day and parents send something. May the teachers still have these snack days and ask parents to send snacks? Also, if it is a voluntary activity, may teachers recommend that students bring in a \$2 gift for a holiday gift exchange?

As long as neither activity is mandatory, they are both okay. However, teachers are encouraged to remain sensitive to the varying socio-economic backgrounds of their students and not putting students in an unnecessarily stressful or awkward position.

Q25. We currently have parents that volunteer to help build elementary floats for the homecoming parade. Those parents send a note home with students asking for a dollar or two to help cover their expenses. Also, we have three classroom parties throughout the year. Those parents also ask for small amounts of money to help cover expenses. Are these requests allowable?

There is not a problem with parents raising money for parties or floats, but if the party is occurring during the day, then everyone needs to be welcome to attend, regardless of whether they give money or not.

Q26. May our school district charge a per student fee to put on prom (not for admission, but for decorations)? In the past, some school districts have charged per student prom fees, even to students who did not attend prom.

No, while the school district may charge for the cost of admission to prom or any other dance, it may not charge an additional fee for any costs associated with having prom or other dances.

Q27. May school districts still charge nonpublic schools for the use of buses to transport nonpublic school students to their extracurricular activities?

Yes.

Q28. May a school district charge a fee for providing transportation to various locations within its school district after extracurricular practices?

Yes, but only for the actual cost of transportation.

OTHER TRIPS

Q29. Our 8th graders go on a trip to Washington, D.C. the day after school gets out, and they normally raise money for the trip and/or pay for it out of their own pockets, is this still OK?

Yes. As long as the trip is optional and school days are not missed to go on the trip, then the school is not required to incur any of the associated financial obligations. For instance, an optional trip may occur after the school day, on a weekend, or during some other school break (e.g., winter break, spring break, summer break, etc.).

Q30. For the past 20 years our 5th graders have been taking an overnight trip to the Y-Camp up in Boone, Iowa, for some nature education that also goes along with our Iowa curriculum in social studies. In the past, we've asked each student to give \$50 to go on the trip to defray the cost and so we don't have to do any fundraising. We've never turned down a student for going because of money, and if the family can only pay \$1 then that's what we'll take, and we figure out other ways to pay for that child. Can we still ask parents to pay \$50 for their kid to go, with the knowledge that if they can't pay they will still go and the school will figure out a way to make up that difference? Would it make a difference if we called the \$50 a "donation" rather than a "fee?"

Despite the school's past gesture of waiving the fee for those students who were unable to cover the \$50, if the trip is part of the 5th graders' curriculum, the school should not ask for the payment of a "fee" or a "donation" in relation to the trip.

Q31. Our middle school has an incentive program where students with good behavior and achievement qualify for an end-of-the-month activity. We travel 2-3 times a year by bus to a theater or bowling alley, etc. We have had the students pay \$1 to \$5 to help cover the cost of renting a theater or bowling alley. We take the trips during the school day. The students who don't qualify stay at school in

a study hall. May we continue to take these incentive trips and charge the students for going?

This is okay if the students are marked as an excused absent and instruction is provided for those students who are not eligible. Otherwise, the school would have to pay for the trip and there would be legitimate questions whether going to a theater should count as a school day, due to the tenuous position that this is an educational activity.

Q32. Davis County FFA is planning on attending the National FFA Convention at the end of October. This is an optional trip, application must be completed. Students are marked excused absent. The students would miss school Wednesday through Friday and come back Saturday. May the FFA advisors charge a small fee for registration and hotel?

Yes they may. This question addresses key distinctions that allow for there to be a charge (e.g., optional, marked "excused absent" rather than "present").

Q33. What if we have a team that attends the state tournament (that they are not participating in) during the day? Or if the junior high wrestling team wants to attend to support a high school wrestler during the day? May the students be charged for the trip to the state tournament? Can the Activity Fund support???

Students attending the state tournament may be charged, if they are marked as "excused absent" and there is still instruction back at their school on the day of the tournament. If a school bus is used for transportation (e.g., like a "pep bus"), the school board has to make a finding that the bus is not needed for school transportation during the school day, and the school district would be required to charge a nominal fee for travel on the pep bus. Alternatively, if this is a team-building activity (e.g., the volleyball team is going to learn from the play of other teams at the tournament and to build camaraderie), then it would be appropriate to use the Activity Fund to pay for the travel.