

What You Need To Know About School Fees

Your rights: School Fees in Elementary and Secondary Schools in Ottawa

During your child's school year, you will be asked for money for different types of things. Depending on the type of expense, there are different possible ways of getting help if you can't afford the fee.

The new Ontario Ministry of Education *Fees for Learning Materials and Activities Guideline* states :

- 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

School supplies, backpacks, and other things

Parents are expected to provide their children with things like backpacks, lunch bags, and indoor shoes for school. The 4 school boards in Ottawa have different ways of dealing with this issue.

- **The English Catholic Board (OCSB)** provides free school supplies to **all** students from JK to grade 8. Any lists sent home from school are optional and parents **do not** have to provide these items
- **The French Catholic and Public boards (CECCE and CEPEO)** provide free school supplies to **all** students from JK to grade 6
- **The English public board (OCDSB)** has provided a standard list of supplies for all children from JK to grade 8. These lists are optional. This means that parents **do not have to buy** the items on these lists. All primary and middle school have received funding from the OCDSB to provide these supplies to their students.
- **High School Students:** None of the 4 boards has a policy around supplies for high school students. If you cannot afford the supplies, please call 211 and you will be directed to a community program in your area that can help you.

Milk, lunch programs and extracurricular activities

Some schools provide extra programs for a fee. Some examples are: lunch programs, milk programs, lunch hour activity program, school club activities (including sports, band, and arts).

Some schools offer subsidies to families who would like to participate, but cannot afford to. Other schools consider programs like these "an extra" and will not provide subsidy help. This varies greatly from school to school.

Agendas, timetables, report cards, and extra learning materials

Some schools may ask parents to pay for other materials and activities that support their child's learning. These can include: agendas, timetables, workbooks, science supplies, and craft materials.

The Education Act of Ontario [s. 170 (1) 13], as well as the new Ontario Ministry of *Education Fees for Learning and Activities Guideline* state that students do not have to pay for materials required as part of the curriculum.

Schools may not withhold a student's report card, timetable or agenda **for any reason, including not paying fees.**

If you cannot come to an arrangement with the school, you can contact the school trustee responsible for your child's school. School board trustees are locally elected by the general population. They serve as the link between the community and the school system. You can find out who your trustee is by going to your school board's website or contacting them by phone. You can also ask someone you trust at your school.

Field trips

Parents are often asked to pay for field trips during the course of the school year. Whether or not they have to pay depends on if the trip is part of the curriculum.

If the trip is part of the curriculum, then it is covered under the *Education Act of Ontario* and is an optional fee. All school boards provide funds to their schools to cover the cost for students who cannot afford the field trips. If you are unable to pay this fee, you can contact the school to see what arrangement can be made. If you are unable to come to an agreement with the school, you can contact your school trustee.

If the trip is not part of the curriculum, it is considered an "extra". Some school will provide subsidies so all students can participate, others will not.

What will happen if I don't pay these fees?

The outcome can vary greatly depending on the type of fee and the school your child attends.

- In the case of "extras", (like milk and lunch programs, extra curricular programs and some field trips), your child may not be able to participate. You can try to contact the school to see if subsidies are available. The school, however, is not obligated to provide help.
- In the case of things that are part of your child's curriculum and learning experience (report cards, agendas, timetables, and some fieldtrips), these are considered optional fees under *the Education Act of Ontario*, as well as the *Fees for Learning Materials and Activities Guidelines*. **Your child should not be prevented from participating, nor have these things withheld from him/her.** If he or she is being prevented from participating or having these things withheld, you can contact the school to discuss the situation. If you cannot come to an agreement with the school, you can contact your school trustee.