



Frequently Asked Questions

On school donations and student fees

Classroom Supplies

Q: Can schools require students to have certain classroom supplies as they begin the year or semester?

A: Any supplies (including paper, pencils, protractors, novels, or workbooks) that are required for a class must be provided to students if they do not voluntarily bring them in as a donation. (E.C. 38118, 60070)

Student Planners

Q: Can students be charged for academic planners?

A: If students are expected to have and use an academic planner they should be treated as a necessary school supply and provided for those students who do not wish to donate funds for their purchase. (E.C. 38118)

Science Labs

Q: Can students be charged for science lab materials?

A: Donations on a voluntary basis can be accepted for science lab materials but required fees are not permissible. A fee waiver system does not make the fee allowable. A fee can be charged for eye safety devices, at a price not to exceed the direct cost. (E.C. 32033, 38118, 60070).

Physical Education

Q: What is permissible with regard to P.E. uniforms and P.E. locks?

A: If a P.E. uniform with school logo is required for all P.E. students, it must be provided as a necessary school supply. If students are required to have "standardized physical education apparel" of a particular color, but can purchase the apparel from another source, then a school uniform can be offered for purchase to students as an option. However, a student's grade cannot be adversely affected based on failure to wear standardized apparel when the failure "arises from circumstances beyond the control of the student." Students cannot be required to purchase locks, but can be required to pay for loss or damage beyond normal wear and tear. (E.C. 38118, 48904, 49066(c))

Athletic Transportation

Q: Can student-athletes be charged a fee for transportation to athletic events?

A: The courts have determined that extra-curricular activities, including athletics, are educational in nature and an integral part of the educational program. Fees are therefore not permissible. (Hartzell)

Sports Spirit Packs

Q: Can schools charge for sports spirit packs or for uniforms?

A: Donations are allowed but participation cannot be linked to funds raised. A requirement to raise or provide funds in order to participate is the same as requiring a fee, which is impermissible. (Hartzell)

Projects/Personal Property

Q: Are fees allowed for personal property the student makes and wishes to keep, such as ceramic or woodshop projects?

A: A charge may be made for personal property from, for example, a ceramics, sewing, or woodshop class that the student chooses to take home. Such materials fees cannot be charged in advance and should not exceed the direct cost of the materials used and provided by the school. Students should not be charged for items which remain at school. (E.C. 17551)

Parking Permit Fees

Q: Can a high school charge parking permit fees?

A: A school can charge parking permit fees. It is one of the twenty permissible fees. (Vehicle Code 21113)

ID / ASB Cards

Q: Can a school charge students for ID or ASB cards?

A: A school cannot charge students for ID or ASB cards if they require them of all students. Requiring the purchase of an ID or ASB card as a prerequisite for participation in any curricular or extracurricular activity is prohibited as well. If an ID or ASB card is a voluntary option they are permissible. Replacement of lost cards can be charged a fee. (Hartzell, E.C. 19910-19911, 48904)

Fieldtrips

Q: Can schools charge a fee for a fieldtrip?

A: Fees for field trips and excursions in connection with courses of instruction or school-related social, educational, cultural or athletic activities are permissible, as long as no student is prevented from making the fieldtrip or excursion because of a lack of sufficient funds. (E.C. 35330(b))

Other Trips

A: If students take a trip through National History Day or a Spelling Bee competition, is it considered a fieldtrip – and thus a fee can be applied – or is it something the school needs to cover with the help of donations?

A: Assuming this type of competition is voluntary, and it is not a regular, pre-determined requirement for participating in an event like History Day, it can be considered a “field trip or excursion” and it is thus permissible to charge a fee, so long as no student is precluded from attending based on financial inability to pay.

Lost or Damaged Books / Locks

Q: Can students be charged a fee for replacing a lost or damaged book or other school issued supply?

A: Yes, students can be required to pay the replacement cost for district books or supplies that have been loaned to the student if the book or supply is lost, cut or defaced. (E.C. 19910-19911, 48904)

Science Camps

Q: Can a school continue to charge students for attendance at science camps?

A: A school may continue to charge for school camp programs like an elementary school science camp. A student cannot be denied the opportunity to participate for non-payment of the fee. (E.C. 35335)

Attendance at Games or Performances

Q: Can an admission fee be charged for a sport or performing arts event?

A: A fee may be charged for a sporting or performing arts event that is not a required component of a course or school. A distinction is made between a participant and an observer/audience member. (Hartzell)

Duplication of Student Records

Q: Can a school charge for reproduction of student records?

A: A school may charge for the actual cost of duplicating public records, student records or a prospectus of the school curriculum. (Government Code 6253, E.C. 49091.14)

Caps and Gowns

Q: Can a student be charged for the rental of graduation caps and gowns?

A: Students may be charged for the rental or lease of personal property needed for district purposes, such as caps and gowns for graduation ceremonies. (E.C. 38119)

PSAT/PLAN/AP Tests/SAT/ACT

Q: Can students be charged to take a college readiness test such as the SAT?

A: Tests administered by third parties that are not required or associated with a grade in a course may be offered for a fee. The organizations that administer these tests generally have a waiver policy to provide access for all students. (Hartzell)

Prizes as Incentives

Q: Can we continue to offer incentives during our school fundraisers? For example, students may earn chances to win a raffle prize, or a classroom is at the top in sales so they win a pizza party.

A: AB 165 actually makes it clear that the new law and practices regarding fees are not to be “interpreted to prohibit solicitation of voluntary donations of funds or property, voluntary participation in fundraising activities, or school districts and schools from providing pupils prizes or other recognition for voluntarily participating in fundraising activities.” The important distinction is to give recognition rewarding outstanding fundraising efforts, and not to draw attention to those who are not as successful.

Afterschool Courses

Q: We offer after-school classes like jazz band, drum ensemble, a MathCounts team, drama and others. If these after-school classes are run through our PTA, or as an Afterschool Classroom Enrichment (ACE) class through IPSF, are we allowed to charge a fee?

A: The answer depends on whether the activity, at its core, is a district program or a program offered by another entity that happens to occur on district property. If the activity is in no way related to school activities other than its location, it isn't for credit, and it isn't run by the district, then it can be run through contributions from parents in the form of fees. However, any advertising by the district should emphasize access to the program no matter the ability of family to provide funds. If it is a PTA- or IPSF-sponsored educational activity offered by the district and/or run by district staff, a donation model should be utilized instead of charging a fee. However, a charge for tickets to see performances may help sustain the program.

Clubs and Membership Dues

Q: Key Club and CSF Club both have collected dues from students in the past because they pay annual registrations to organizations on the national level. Is it still permissible to collect these dues from students?

A: Students cannot be required to pay the dues as a condition for membership in the club at the school level. If the national level club/organization collects dues, the students should be directed to pay them directly to the organization, but membership in the national level club/organization cannot be a requirement for membership in the school level club.

Other Questions

Q: I have a question that isn't answered above, what should I do?

A: Parents, guardians, students, faculty and staff should direct questions about school-specific matters needing clarification/explanation directly to the school's principal. Principals should contact the Director of Secondary Education for guidance and support with responses to school-specific questions about student fees, charges, deposits, donations and fundraising.