

The Theresa Hessling Charter School Project dba San Diego Cooperative Charter Schools

School Fees

School Fees Information

The intent of this Guidance is to emphasize that the question is not *whether* schools and their communities can raise money to support programs – they can – but *how* funds can be raised through lawful means.

Summary of Rule

The California Constitution mandates that public education be provided to students free of charge, unless a charge is specifically authorized by law for a particular program or activity.

This constitutional right of free access encompasses all educational activities, whether curricular or extracurricular, and regardless of whether credit is awarded for the educational activity.

The right of free access also prohibits mandated purchases of materials, supplies, equipment or uniforms associated with the activity, as well as the payment of security deposits for access, participation, materials or equipment.

Finally, a process that allows for a waiver process for an otherwise mandatory fee, charge or deposit does not render it constitutionally permissible.

Exceptions: Permissible Mandatory Fees/Charges/Deposits

The following are specific exceptions to the prohibition on fees, charges and deposits at the kindergarten through 12th grade level (some legal provisions related to child care programs and adult education are not listed here). These fees, charges and deposits are legally permissible because they are specifically permitted by law. (Note: This list is based on legal authorizations, but the inclusion of a permissible fee, charge or deposit on this list does not necessarily mean that schools currently assess the fee, charge or deposit). The following fees, charges, and deposits are permissible:

- 1) Charges for optional attendance as a spectator at a school-sponsored activity.
- 2) Charges for food served to students, subject to free and reduced price meal program eligibility and other restrictions specified in law.
- 3) Paying the replacement cost for District books or supplies loaned to a student that the student fails to return, or that is willfully cut, defaced or otherwise injured, up to an amount not to exceed \$10,000.
- 4) Fees for field trips and excursions in connection with courses of instruction or school-related social, educational, cultural, athletic, or school band activities, as long as no student is prevented from making the field trip or excursion because of lack of sufficient funds.
- 5) Medical or hospital insurance for field trips that is made available by the school.
- 6) Charges for required medical and accident insurance for athletic team members, so long as there is a waiver for financial hardship.

- 7) Charges for standardized physical education attire of a particular color and design, but the school may not mandate that the attire be purchased from the school and no physical education grade of a student may be impacted based on the failure to wear standardized apparel "arising from circumstances beyond the control" of the student.
- 8) Charging for the parking of vehicles on school grounds.
- 9) Charges for the rental or lease of personal property needed for school purposes, such as caps and gowns for graduation ceremonies.
- 10) Fees for school camp programs, so long as no student is denied the opportunity to participate because of nonpayment of the fee.
- 11) Reimbursement for the direct cost of materials provided to a student for property the student has fabricated from such materials for his/her own possession and use, such as wood shop, art, or sewing projects kept by the student.
- 12) Reimbursement for the actual cost of duplicating public records, student records, or a prospectus of the school curriculum.
- 13) Fees for transportation to and from school, and transportation between school and regional occupational centers, programs or classes, as long as the fee does not exceed the statewide average unsubsidized cost per student and provided there is a waiver provision based on financial need.
- 14) Fees for transportation of pupils to places of summer employment.
- 15) Tuition fees charged to pupils whose parents are actual and legal residents of an adjacent foreign country or an adjacent state.
- 16) Tuition fees collected from foreign students attending school pursuant to an F-1 visa, equal to the full unsubsidized per capita cost of providing education during the period of attendance.
- 17) Fees for an optional fingerprinting program for kindergarten or other newly enrolled students, if the fee does not exceed the actual costs associated with the program.
- 18) Fees for community classes in civic, vocational, literacy, health, homemaking, and technical and general education, not to exceed the cost of maintaining the community classes.
- 19) Deposits for band instruments, music, uniforms and other regalia which school band members take on excursions to foreign countries.
- 20) Charges for eye safety devices, at a price not to exceed the district's actual costs, in specified courses or activities in which students are engaged in, or are observing, an activity or the use of hazardous substances likely to cause injury to the eyes.

IV. Donations

School districts, schools, programs and classes can and do seek and accept donations of funds and property, and this practice is permissible as long as it is *truly voluntary and in no way a prerequisite* to participation in the program or activity. Therefore, any statement or explanation related to a donation that could lead a reasonable person to believe the donation may not be truly voluntary is to be avoided.

Examples of things to be avoided include but are not limited to:

- a specified minimum amount of a donation
- a date by which a donation is due
- a lesser donation amount if funds are received prior to a certain date.

- any statements or actions that exert explicit or implicit pressure on students or parents to make a donation are to be avoided. The reason a student or family does not make a donation is not a subject for inquiry.

V. Fundraising

As with donations, school districts, schools, programs and classes can and do engage in fundraising activities and programs, and this practice is also permissible as long as the raising of funds is voluntary. A student who is asked to but does not raise funds may not be denied participation in an educational activity. A requirement to raise funds in order to participate, even if there is no mandated amount to be raised, is the same as requiring a fee. The prohibition on the requirement for an individual student to raise money is to be distinguished from a requirement to attend a fundraising event as an element of participation in an activity, in the same way attendance at practices, games, rehearsals or performances are an expected aspect of participation. For example, expecting the members of a vocal ensemble to attend a fundraising concert that is on its calendar of events does not violate the “free school” guarantee, so long as attendance is the only requirement. Another example is when members of an athletic team are expected to help out with a fundraising sale at a Back to School Night or Open House – just as a coach can expect players to attend practices and games, he/she can expect players to attend a fundraising event as long as the requirement is to attend rather than to raise money as a condition of participation in the activity or program.