

Student Fees Frequently Asked Questions

Question: Can a district charge an annual party fee to students to cover the costs of classroom celebrations?

Answer: No. That is not a fee authorized by Code.

Question: Can high school student clubs charge membership dues?

Answer: If joining the club is voluntary and it is not necessary for some classroom purpose, then yes, the club can charge dues to students who want to join the club.

Question: Our band goes on a trip every 4 years. They fund-raise those four years to pay for the cost of the trip (does not include spending \$). One of our students has raised money above and beyond, as she was raising the extra money thinking her mother would go along as a chaperone and this would help with her mothers' expenses. This mother was not selected to go and wants her daughter to have the excess money raised as her "spending money". Can the district do this?

Answer: No. Money cannot be given to a student nor used for that student's personal benefit. All of the money raised belongs to the district, is under the control of the board, and needs to be used according to law, board policy, and what was publicized during the fundraisers.

Question: Can students be required to pay class dues in order to participate in events like Prom?

Answer: Class dues are not mandatory dues. There is no way to compel any accountability related to payment or nonpayment, and there can be no repercussion related to nonpayment.

Question: May a district charge a participation fee to students for student activities or student athletics?

Answer: No. Students cannot be charged to participate in district-sponsored or provided activities. However, a district could have a sharing agreement with another district under certain circumstances and charge the resident district for the cost of the student participating.

Question: Can a district charge a field trip fee to students for the year's anticipated field trips?

Answer: No. That is not a fee authorized by Iowa Code.

Question: Can a board require parents to pay a fee for children to go on a field trip that is scheduled during regular school hours?

Answer: No. Any field trip offered on a day of school and for which the students have been counted as present and the school day has been counted as a day of instruction, would be paid by the district instead of a student fee.

Question: Can a board require parents to pay a fee for children to go on a field trip that is not part of the school day and participation is voluntary and is not connected to the classroom?

Answer: Yes. The parents could be charged actual costs for their students to participate in an optional field trip outside of school instruction. For example, weekend enrichment or day camp activities.

Question: Can a district require students to bring a sack lunch or to pay a fee for a district-provided sack lunch to go on a field trip that is scheduled during regular school hours?

Answer: No. If the day of the field trip is a day of attendance, the district is required to provide the school lunch program the same as any other day. The district could provide a sack lunch from the school's kitchen, or purchase a lunch during the field trip for students. The student may, but cannot be required to, bring a sack lunch from home or bring money to purchase lunch if there is a place to purchase lunch during the field trip.

Question: May organizations donate money for field trips?

Answer: Yes. Organizations may raise funds and donate that money to the district to cover costs of field trips.

Question: May the district share costs with students for a field trip during the school day? For example, the district pays for the ski slope entrance fee and transportation, but requires the students to pay for ski rental and lift costs once at the ski slope location?

Answer: 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 the costs of skiing. However, the students could be required to pay for optional activities available at the slopes, unrelated to skiing, such as snow tubing or snowboarding equipment and fees.

Question: May a district take students to an etiquette dinner where the sole purpose is to learn table manners, and require the students to share the costs of the meal?

Answer: If the trip occurs during the school day, the district may not charge a fee and must cover the costs. If the meal occurs after school hours and is optional, then the district may charge a fee for the entire meal. The district may want to consider using food from the school lunch program for the meal and having someone come to the school to provide the etiquette lesson.

Question: If a district makes all field trips optional, and provides alternatives for students at school during the field trips, is it then permissible to charge a fee to those students that chose to go on the field trip?

Answer: No. If the field trip is during the school day and students that go on the field trip are counted as in attendance for a day of school, there can be no charge to the students for the trip, whether it is mandatory or optional.

Question: Can we charge a late fee to parents that do not attend our registration day and come in later to register their children for school.

Answer: No.

Question: Is there a limit on how high a fee could be, such as a textbook fee?

Answer: There is not a dollar amount in Code. Instead Iowa Code chapter 301 refers to "cost" when selling and "reasonable" for fees. Reading "reasonable" and "cost" together would suggest that a fee should be no more than the cost spread over the years the textbook is expected to be used (similar to straight line depreciation) and could be less.

Question: Can a district charge a rental fee for students to use football helmets and pads after the season is over for a post tournament football tournament that the school is not associated with?

Answer: Yes. This is equivalent to a normal rental fee for using district equipment by outside parties. The fee would be allowable as long as it is a reasonable fee and your district normally charges such fees for rental of school equipment by the community.

If your district does not normally charge rent for the community using school equipment, then the district could consider a deposit instead of a rental fee to cover any repair of damage if necessary and then return the deposit when the equipment is returned in good shape.

Question: Does Iowa Code section 279.8A give districts authority to charge parking fees, sell parking permits, or assess fines?

Answer: Iowa Code section 279.8A gives boards the authority to regulate parking on district property. Regulating parking can be accomplished without any fee charges to students or staff. However, the board can charge a fine for damage that occurred as a result of something the individual did. The fine could not include a penalty, such as a punitive amount, where the violation did not cause the district to incur a cost as a result of the violation by the individual.