

Operational Services

Waiver of Student Fees ¹

The Superintendent will recommend to the School Board a schedule of fees, if any, to be charged students for the use of textbooks, consumable materials, extracurricular activities, and other school student fees. Students must also pay for the loss of or damage to school books or other school-owned materials.

Fees for textbooks, other instructional materials, and driver education are waived for students who meet the eligibility criteria for a fee waiver as described in this policy.² In order that no student is denied educational services or academic credit due to the inability of parents/guardians to pay student fees, the Superintendent will recommend to the Board which additional fees, if any, the District will waive for students who meet the eligibility criteria for fee waiver.³ Students receiving a fee waiver are not exempt from charges for lost and damaged books, locks, materials, supplies, and equipment.⁴

Notification

The Superintendent shall ensure that applications for fee waivers are widely available and distributed according to State law and Ill. State Board of Education (ISBE) rule and that provisions for assisting parents/guardians in completing the application are available.

¹ Districts must waive textbooks fees (105 ILCS 5/10-20.13) and driver education fees (105 ILCS 5/27-24.2) for students whose parents/guardians are unable to afford them. In order to effectuate the law's intent, the term "textbook" should be interpreted broadly to include fees for instructional materials, laboratory fees, and workbooks. The enforceability of 105 ILCS 5/10-20.13(b) and ISBE regulations (23 Ill.Admin.Code §1.245) requiring districts to waive "other fees" is questionable because they are unfunded mandates. ISBE regulations on school fees may not be enforceable because the General Assembly failed to make necessary appropriations. See the Weekly Message from State Superintendent Robert Schiller, 8-15-03.

A school district may charge up to \$50 to students who participate in the driver education course. The fee may be increased up to \$250, provided the district completes the requirements in section 27-24.2. The fee must be waived for any student who is unable to pay. 105 ILCS 5/27-24.2; 23 Ill.Admin.Code §252.30.

Resident tuition fees are not permissible, but a board's authority under 105 ILCS 5/10-20.13 to charge for textbooks and towel fees does not violate the Ill. Constitution's provision guaranteeing free public education through the secondary level. Hamer v. Board of Ed., Sch. Dist. No. 109, 9 Ill.App.3d 663 (2nd Dist. 1973).

² 105 ILCS 5/10-20.13(b) was added in 1983 to require districts to waive "other fees" in addition to the costs of textbooks. P.A. 83-603. The General Assembly, however, never appropriated the necessary funds. Thus, the amendment may be unenforceable because it violated the State Mandates Act. 30 ILCS 805/1; see above footnote. Use the following alternative if the board wants to make a longstanding commitment to waive specific fees, amending the list of fees that will be waived as desired:

In order that no student is denied educational services or academic credit due to the inability of parents/guardians to pay fees, the following fees are also waived for students who meet the eligibility criteria for fee waiver: athletic participation fees, lock fees, towel fees, shop fees, laboratory fees, and registration fees.

Alternatively, a board may decide to waive all school student fees and substitute the following sentence for the first two sentences of this paragraph:

All school student fees as defined by the Ill. State Board of Education (ISBE) are waived for students who meet the eligibility criteria for a fee waiver contained in this policy.

³ Districts in which a referendum was approved to provide students with free textbooks must have a policy on textbook care and preservation. 105 ILCS 5/28-17. The textbook loan program operated by the ISBE is found at 105 ILCS 5/18-17.

⁴ Required by 105 ILCS 5/10-20.13. The federal free meals program is found at 42 U.S.C. §1758; 7 C.F.R. Part 245. A board has a choice regarding verification – it may: (1) establish a process to determine eligibility for fee waivers that is completely independent of the federal free meals eligibility guidelines, or (2) tie the application for fee waivers to the free meals program and only ask for *verification* in accordance with the free or reduced-price meals program. See www.isbe.net/Pages/School-Fee-Waivers.aspx for further explanation. This sample policy assumes that option #1 will be chosen but would allow for option #2 if the alternative is used in the *Verification* section. See f/n 7.

Eligibility Criteria

A student shall be eligible for a fee waiver when the student currently lives in a household that meets the same income guidelines, with the same limits based on household size, that are used for the federal free meals program.⁵

The Superintendent or designee will give additional consideration where one or more of the following factors are present:⁶

- Illness in the family;
- Unusual expenses such as fire, flood, storm damage, etc.;
- Unemployment;
- Emergency situations;
- When one or more of the parents/guardians are involved in a work stoppage.

Verification⁷

The Superintendent or designee shall establish a process for determining a student's eligibility for a waiver of fees in accordance with State law requirements. The Superintendent or designee may require family income verification at the time an individual applies for a fee waiver and anytime thereafter, but not more often than once every 60 calendar days. The Superintendent or designee shall not use any information from this or any independent verification process to determine free or reduced-price meal eligibility.

If a student receiving a fee waiver is found to be no longer eligible during the school year, the Superintendent or designee shall notify the student's parent/guardian and charge the student a prorated amount based upon the number of school days remaining in the school year.

Determination and Appeal⁸

Within 30 calendar days after the receipt of a waiver request, the Superintendent or designee shall mail a notice to the parent/guardian whenever a waiver request is denied. The denial notice shall include: (1) the reason for the denial, (2) the process and timelines for making an appeal, and (3) a statement that the

⁵ This paragraph is optional and may be omitted.

⁶ By using a process for determining eligibility for fee waivers that is completely separate from the process for determining eligibility for free meals, a district may require income verification at the time an application is submitted for a fee waiver and may do so thereafter, but not more than once every 60 calendar days. 105 ILCS 5/10-20.13; 23 Ill.Admin.Code §1.245(d). Income verification may include such things as payroll stubs, tax returns, or evidence of receipt of food stamps or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

An application for fee waivers that is completely separate from the application for free lunches cannot ask whether a student lives in a household that meets free lunch eligibility guidelines and request income verification with reference to *free lunch* eligibility guidelines. In the completely separate fee waiver application, the district should supply its own income guidelines with the same limits based on household size that are used for the federal meals program and have the parents indicate if they meet the income guidelines used to determine eligibility for *fee waivers*. The independent fee waiver income guidelines should not be any higher than those for eligibility for free lunch (or reduced-price, if the district voluntarily provides fee waivers for those students who qualify), but the district should not reference or indicate that the guidelines are for the free meals program. In this completely separate application process for fee waivers, the district may ask for verification, but cannot use any information it receives for fee waiver verification though this process for determining eligibility for free or reduced meals.

Alternatively, a board should replace both paragraphs in this section with the following alternative if it wants to use eligibility guidelines for free meals as the basis for waiving school fees:

The Superintendent or designee must follow the verification requirements of 7 C.F.R. 245.6a when using the free lunch or breakfast eligibility guidelines pursuant to The National School Lunch Act as the basis for waiver of the student's fee(s).

⁷ An ISBE rule requires that the policy state that the district will mail a copy of a denial notice within 30 calendar days after the receipt of the waiver request. 23 Ill.Admin.Code §1.245(c)(3). This rule also specifies timelines and procedures, including a requirement that "the person who decides the appeal shall not be the person who initially denied the fee waiver or a subordinate of this person." Thus, a board may be required to hear an appeal if the superintendent made the initial decision to deny a fee waiver. The board's participation is avoided by the principal making initial fee waiver decisions and the superintendent or other main office administrator deciding the appeals.

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parent/guardian may reapply for a waiver any time during the school year if circumstances change. If the denial is appealed, the District shall follow the procedures for the resolution of appeals as provided in the ISBE rule on waiver of fees.

LEGAL REF.: 105 ILCS 5/10-20.13, 5/10-22.25, 5/27-24.2, and 5/28-19.2.
23 Ill.Admin.Code §1.245 [may contain unenforceable provisions].

CROSS REF.: 4:130 (Free and Reduced-Price Food Services), 6:220 (Bring Your Own Technology (BYOT) Program; Responsible Use and Conduct)