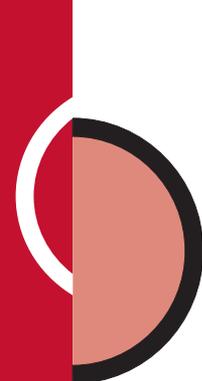




FEES CHARGED TO PARENTS AND STUDENTS FOR VOCATIONAL TRAINING GUIDELINES





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FOR VOCATIONAL TRAINING
GUIDELINES**



Prepared by: Marlène Bergeron
Luc Desgagnés

Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport
Secteur de la formation professionnelle et technique
et de la formation continue
Direction de la gestion des ressources

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The issue of free education regularly raises questions for individuals, parents, educational stakeholders and partners, who wonder what must be provided free of charge and what can require a financial contribution.

In February 2004, a working group set up by the Minister was mandated to re-examine the issue of fees charged to parents. In the winter of 2005, this group submitted its second report on free education for students, which included fees charged to those enrolled in vocational training.



In November 2004, the working group completed a data-collection survey among training centres regarding fees charged to parents and individuals for vocational training. This data provided an overview of the situation for the 2004-2005 school year.

For vocational training, the Minister accepted the suggestions of the working group, that is, to invite the school boards to take the necessary steps to ensure that fees be as low as possible and to distribute a briefing paper proposing a greater harmonization of practices.

The Minister must make sure that there is a common understanding and interpretation throughout Québec of the principle of free education, while taking into account the autonomy and responsibilities under the *Education Act* of the different authorities, that is, the school boards, the schools, the centres and the governing boards.

This document will first summarize the provisions of the *Education Act* that relate to free education. It will then deal with practices to be reviewed. Lastly, drawing upon the data gathered, the document will present some useful guidelines that certain school boards and centres have adopted and that may be used as a model by others for the purpose of establishing additional rules.

The *Education Act* states that every resident of Québec has the right to free educational services as described in the *Basic Vocational Training Regulation* (Basic regulation); however, this right is subject to certain conditions set out in this regulation if the student has reached the age of 18, or 21 in the case of a handicapped person (s. 3).

The Basic regulation states that educational services offered in vocational training include training services and student services. Training services are those related to the acquisition, evaluation and certification of competencies falling within the programs of studies offered. They also include services related to pedagogical support and the educational environment in which persons learn, from their enrollment to the completion of their studies.

The *Education Act* states that students, except those enrolled in adult education, have a right to the free use of textbooks and instructional material required for the teaching of programs of studies, up to the age of 18, or 21 in the case of handicapped persons within the meaning of the *Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights with a view to achieving social, school and workplace integration* (R.S.Q., c. E-20.1, s. 7). This means *a priori* that the textbooks and material required to meet the program's objectives must be provided free of charge by the school board.

However, the Act provides two exceptions to this right, allowing the school board to request payment for the following:

- documents that students can write or draw in or cut up, and which are not reusable;
- pencils, paper and other objects of a like nature that are not considered instructional material under the Act.

The exceptions to the right of free use must be interpreted restrictively, since the basic principle is that all required textbooks and instructional material are to be provided free of charge.

The use in the Act of the words “pencils, paper and other objects of a like nature” means that objects (and not textbooks) are not considered to be instructional material if they are similar to pencils or paper. The use of such objects may be necessary in the teaching of a program of studies, but school boards are not required to provide them.

When, however, it must be determined whether an object required for the teaching of a program is of the same nature as pencils or paper, priority must be given to the right of free use. Typically, these objects are non-specialized and inexpensive items that are used on a regular basis in centres. For instance, rulers, erasers, notebooks and tubes of glue are of the same nature as pencils and paper.

If an object is either specialized or expensive and is required for a specific course or program, then it is considered to be instructional material and must be provided free of charge; otherwise the use of the object must be optional.

Lastly, the right to receive educational services free of charge means that, among other things, a school board may not charge fees for opening a file or for registration or admission.

Financial contributions imposed by school boards

The other financial contributions that school boards may impose relate to services other than the educational services provided under the Act.

Community services

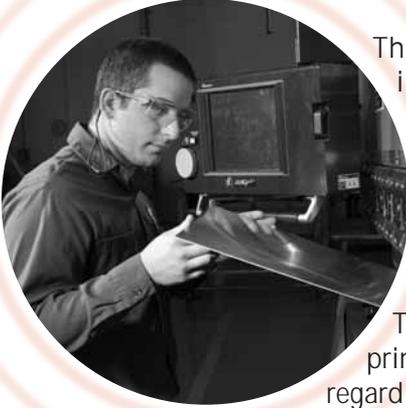
The Act lists other non-educational services that a school board may provide, such as cultural, social, sports, scientific or community services and childcare for preschool and elementary school students (ss 255 to 258). These are:

- manpower training and technical assistance to enterprises (s. 255, first para., subpara. 1);
- cultural, social, sports, scientific or community services (s. 255, first para., subpara. 2);
- participation in external cooperation programs in the fields under its jurisdiction (s. 255, first para., subpara. 3);
- childcare services in schools (s. 256);
- services to promote access to educational services, such as meals and lodging (s. 257).

School boards may impose a financial contribution on users for such services (s. 258), but only on those persons who choose to use the services. These are not services for which the fees may be imposed on everyone.

Student transportation services

Student transportation provided by school boards before and after classes each day must be free of charge (s. 292).



The right to free student transportation implies that school boards may not require students and their parents to pay incidental fees to benefit from free student transportation, such as fees for mandatory identity cards, photographs and so on.

The Act provides for an exception to the principle of free student transportation in regard to transportation provided by a public transit authority. In this case only, school boards may claim part of the cost of a pass which corresponds to a service over and above the provision of transportation before and after classes each day.

It should be noted that persons enrolled in adult education are not entitled to free transportation, and school boards may claim the cost for such a service (s. 293).

Financial contributions imposed by governing boards

Section 110.3 allows the governing board of a vocational training centre to organize social, cultural or sports services. The governing board may contract with a person or organization for the provision of goods and services, and may require a financial contribution from users of such goods and services. Revenues derived from the provision of such goods and services are credited to the appropriations allocated to the centre.

ADOPTION BY THE SCHOOL BOARDS OF A POLICY ON FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Recent amendments to the *Education Act* stipulate that the school board shall adopt a policy on the financial contributions that may be made for the documents and objects mentioned in the second and third paragraphs of section 7, or that may be claimed for school transportation.

This policy must respect the powers of the governing board and promote accessibility to the educational services provided for in the Act and prescribed by the basic regulations adopted by the government. Finally, it must be submitted to the parents' committee for consultation before it is adopted.

POWERS OF GOVERNING BOARDS WITH RESPECT TO FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

For students covered under section 1 of the Act, the governing board establishes the principles governing the cost of documents mentioned in the second paragraph of section 7, and also approves the list of articles mentioned in the third paragraph of section 7, taking into account the school board's policy and other financial contributions charged

to students (ss 77.1 and 110.3.2). These principles are taken into account by the centre's director during the process used for approving the choice of textbooks and instructional material (ss 77.1, 110.2 and 110.3.2).

Findings of the working group on fees charged

The working group found that vocational training centres charged various fees to students and adults enrolled in their programs. These fees vary widely for the same program of studies, and from one program to another.

Items that are charged vary widely from one school board to another.

The data collected indicates that several school boards and training centres have set their own guidelines for fees charged in vocational training, that training centres use different means to inform those concerned about the fees charged, that most of the centres have set up measures in the event students or their parents cannot pay these fees and that, in many cases, the governing board is consulted about fees, and also sets or approves the fees.

The working group recommends harmonizing practices and encouraging school boards and training centres to respect the principle of free education for students 18 years old or younger who are enrolled in vocational programs, and to limit fees charged to adult students as much as possible.

Findings

Several findings were drawn from this review of the provisions of the *Education Act* and current practices.

Lecture notes, books, instructional materials and equipment are taken into consideration when setting out the fee parameters, and should not systematically be charged to the student. The organization guide should be referred to when available.

However, if a book were indispensable in the exercise of a trade (e.g. a security code), it would be of help if the person could obtain it at the centre. Such a purchase may be desirable, but must not be obligatory.

For safety equipment and various articles of clothing, practice dictates that the cost of personal items for the individual be assumed by that person.

Some fees cannot be charged to the student who has a right to free education, in accordance with section 7 of the *Education Act*. No fees may be charged for:

- lecture notes and books;
- registration and admission;
- student ID card.

Useful guidelines

Certain school boards and centres have adopted guidelines that are worthy of consideration. It should be mentioned that these school boards and centres facilitate discussion among those who wish to have additional rules.

The Minister learned about the following from the data gathered in November 2004:

- Training centres use several methods to inform students about fees (on their Web site, at information meetings, during open house, in a brochure provided during the registration process, etc.).
- Centres have adopted various measures in the event students or parents cannot pay fees (possibility of installment payments, payment agreements, acknowledgment of debt, etc.).

Moreover, many centres spread out the fees over the various semesters, trying to keep expenses at a minimum during the initial semesters, when students are still deciding on a trade.

- Certain centre administrations prefer to purchase the activity books and other types of materials themselves because the savings can be passed on to parents and students.

By means of this document, the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport aims to achieve two main goals: first, to promote a common understanding of the provisions of the *Education Act* pertaining to the right to free education and discuss certain practices, and second, to ensure that all school authorities comply with those provisions. To accomplish this, the Ministère counts on the collaboration of its partners—the federations and associations.



School boards and training centres must respect the principle of free education, in accordance with the *Education Act*. It is incumbent upon everyone to maintain the lowest possible fees charged to parents and individuals, to ensure transparency regarding these fees, and to ensure that they not become an obstacle to enrolling in vocational training.



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