

Student Fees

Frequently Asked Questions

*August 2023*

Most CSI schools charge fees to families for classroom supplies and materials and for participation in school-sponsored activities and programs outside of the core academic program. These fees are permissible if administered in accordance with applicable laws and CSI’s [Student Fees Policy](http://go.boarddocs.com/co/csi/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=AV6N3W5B41F8). The policy requires that any school charging student fees adopt a fee policy and schedule. Fees collected must be used for the purposes set forth in the fee schedule. The following FAQ provides brief answers to common questions regarding student fees. The guidance is not to be construed as legal advice. Legal advice regarding any issue should be obtained from your own attorney.

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## What must the fee schedule include?

Pursuant to CSI’s [Student Fees Policy](http://go.boarddocs.com/co/csi/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=AV6N3W5B41F8), the schedule must detail: a complete list of the student fees, the purpose of each fee, whether the fee is voluntary or mandatory (See #2 below), and the specific activity from which the student will be excluded if the fee isn’t paid. The board-adopted fee schedule should remain in place until modified or removed by board resolution. A sample schedule can be found at the bottom of the [Student Fees Policy](http://go.boarddocs.com/co/csi/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=AV6N3W5B41F8).

## What fees are considered “mandatory” and what are considered “voluntary”?

Fees are considered “mandatory” when associated with programs, activities, or materials/supplies that are essential to the educational program. In other words, if families cannot (absent a waiver) opt out as a practical matter without thereby limiting their child’s ability to participate fully in the school’s educational program, the activity is considered mandatory. Common mandatory fees include fees for:

* Classroom or course-specific materials/supplies
* Graduation ceremonies
* Technology (e.g., Chromebooks, laptops, online learning apps/platforms)
* School uniforms
* Summer school (when participation in summer school is required for student advancement)
* Textbooks

Fees are considered “voluntary” when associated with optional programs, activities, or materials/supplies outside of the educational program. In other words, if families can (absent a waiver) opt out as a practice matter, and thereby decline to participate in a particular activity but still have their child participate fully in the school’s educational program, the activity is considered voluntary. Common voluntary fees include fees for:

* Admission fees for school events
* Before and After-school Care
* Extracurricular activities (athletics, clubs, etc.)
* Food services
* School swag
* Sports team uniforms
* Transportation
* Tutoring
* Voluntary field trips or other school-sponsored trips
* Yearbooks

## How can we ensure the fees administered at our school do not deter student enrollment, place an undue burden on families or unnecessarily exclude students from participation in activities?

Some schools opt not to administer student fees at all. When administered, fees should be waived or reduced for eligible families. CSI schools:

* **must not** charge a fee as a condition of enrollment or re-enrollment and should not require payment of fees until after families have a chance to apply for, and receive notification of, Free or Reduced-Price Lunch (FRL) status.
* **must not** charge a fee as a condition of attendance in a course that is part of the academic portion of the school’s educational program, except where authorized by law.[[1]](#footnote-2)
* **must waive** all mandatory fees for FRL-eligible students, including homeless and foster children. Students who are FRL-eligible but who are not actually participating in the lunch program must still be granted the fee waiver.
* **must make every effort** to ensure no student is denied the right to participate in school-sponsored activities outside of the core educational program because of a lack of funds. This could include, for example, waiving the fee or implementing a sliding fee scale for FRL-eligible students.

## What considerations should be made for preschool?

If a school offers priority enrollment for current preschoolers entering Kindergarten, the preschool program must meet the public program requirements and waive non-tuition fees for qualifying preschool families.

## What fee information must the school communicate to families?

Schools should include their board-approved policy and fee schedule in the family handbook and on the school website. Schools must also provide information to parents about how to obtain a waiver of mandatory fees and should also provide instructions for notifying the school if/when additional support may be needed to cover the costs associated with other optional school-sponsored activities.

## When should a school collect mandatory fees?

To ensure fees are not collected from families eligible for waivers, it is recommended that schools collect the fees after FRL eligibility is determined. Schools collecting fees early should waive fees for families indicating FRL eligibility and charge the fees only if FRL (or some other qualifying) status is not subsequently confirmed.

## Can a school charge a single student fee that encompasses multiple items?

No. Pursuant to CSI’s [Student Fees Policy](http://go.boarddocs.com/co/csi/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=AV6N3W5B41F8), the student fee schedule must detail a complete list of the student fees, the purpose of each fee, whether the fee is voluntary or mandatory, and the specific activity from which the student will be excluded if the fee isn’t paid, shall be adopted by the school’s governing board. Fee transparency cannot be accomplished by charging a single student fee that encompasses multiple items. Schools should break the fee into smaller subcategories.

## Can a school require parents/students pay a deposit to cover lost/damaged textbooks (including Chromebooks, laptops etc.) and other nonacademic equipment that are provided on loan?

Yes, but not in all circumstances. Pursuant to CSI’s [Student Fees Policy](http://go.boarddocs.com/co/csi/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=AV6N3W5B41F8), schools may require students who are not FRL-eligible to make a reasonable loss or damage deposit to cover textbooks and nonacademic equipment. This can include deposits for Chromebooks, laptops, etc. The deposit is an advance payment, refunded to the student when he or she has returned the textbook or equipment in good condition. However, schools cannot require students who are FRL-eligible to pay a loss/damage deposit for these materials.

## Can a school charge fines/fees for lost/damaged textbooks (including Chromebooks, laptops, etc.) and other nonacademic equipment that are provided on loan to students/families who are FRL-eligible?

Yes. Although schools cannot charge loss or damage deposits (i.e., advance payment, refunded when returned) to students who are FRL eligible, they can charge all students regardless of FRL status fines/fees for lost/damaged textbooks and other nonacademic equipment provided on loan. However, the inability to pay fines or fees should never be an impediment to a student’s full participation in the education program. It is incumbent on the school to ensure that a student’s ability to pay any repair costs is considered and that the school ensures a student is not singled-out or excluded from participation in the educational program on the basis of an inability to pay these fines/fees. The school should establish and follow appropriate processes to ensure the necessary level of individualized consideration to avoid undue hardship on a student or family.

## Can a school require repayment from students who do not complete concurrent enrollment courses or earn a failing grade in a concurrent enrollment course?

No. Due to the passage of [HB 22-1390](https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb22-1390), schools can no longer require repayment for tuition paid by the school for a concurrent enrollment course if a student withdraws or receives a failing grade in the course. For additional information, see [ASCENT & CE Programs Update](https://www.cde.state.co.us/postsecondary/ascent_changes).

## Can a school charge fees for transportation services?

Yes. However, pursuant to CSI’s [Student Fees Policy](http://go.boarddocs.com/co/csi/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=AV6N3W5B41F8), transportation fees shall be waived for homeless and foster students, students who have transportation as a related service on their IEP, and students qualifying for FRL.

## Can a school withhold records, diplomas, transcripts or grades for failure to pay an outstanding fee or return outstanding items?

No. Pursuant to CSI’s [Student Fees Policy](http://go.boarddocs.com/co/csi/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=AV6N3W5B41F8), schools cannot withhold records required for enrollment in another school or institution of higher education, the diploma, transcript, or grades of any student for failure to pay a fine or fee or to return or replace school property. Failure to pay must also not impact a student’s “Good Standing” status.

**CONTACT INFORMATION**

For additional questions, please contact the Legal and Policy Team at [LegalandPolicy\_CSI@csi.state.co.us](mailto:LegalandPolicy_CSI@csi.state.co.us).

1. Detail where it is authorized by law – PreK, Summer school, etc? [↑](#footnote-ref-2)