

## **Bill 1 – An Act to Reduce School Fees: Key Messages for Stakeholders**

- By proclaiming Bill 1, *An Act to Reduce School Fees*, the government is making life better and more affordable for Alberta families.
- All students deserve access to a quality education in an Alberta school, regardless of their individual circumstances or their ability to pay school fees.
- Through this legislation, the government is eliminating fees for specific instructional supplies and materials, as well as transportation fees for students who live 2.4 kilometres or more away from their designated school.
- Together, these fees represent more than \$50 million, or approximately 25 per cent of the fees collected by school boards on an annual basis.
- Alberta Education is working with various education stakeholders—including school boards and school councils—to ensure Alberta families benefit from these reductions for the 2017/18 school year.
- This is the first step in reducing the burden of school fees on Alberta's families. The government will continue to engage education stakeholders, including school boards and parents, in achieving additional reductions in future years.

### **Instructional supplies and materials:**

- Through the new *School Fees and Costs Regulation*, parents will no longer be charged fees for: textbooks; workbooks; photocopying and printing; or paper.
- In addition, all remaining fees must meet several criteria, including being clearly expressed in a board's fee schedule, as well as being connected to a specific good or service. Therefore, common or generic fees—often previously referred to, among other titles, as instructional fees, instructional materials, or basic fees—can no longer be charged.
- The removal of these fees will benefit the parents of nearly 600,000 students provincewide.

### **Transportation fees for eligible students:**

- Through the new *School Transportation Regulation*, fees are being eliminated for the following students:
  - Those who reside 2.4 kilometres or more from the designated school they attend for regular or special education programming;
  - Those who have a disability, or disabilities, that prohibit them from using regular transportation services;
  - Those who attend a different school, at their school board's direction, because their neighbourhood school is full; and
  - Noon-hour transportation fees for children attending an Early Childhood Services program, such as kindergarten.
- The removal of these busing fees will benefit the parents of approximately 145,000 students.
- In some circumstances, fees may still be incurred. Such situations include the following:
  - If a student resides less than 2.4 kilometres from their designated school.
  - If parents choose to enrol their child in a school other than their designated school. This includes students attending "schools of choice," such as alternative programs (i.e., sports academies, immersion programs).
  - If the parent or student requests enhanced or optional service, such as pick-up or drop off from a secondary location or, in rural routes, yard service.

### Municipal bus passes:

- If a board meets its obligation to provide student transportation through access to municipal transit, they will be required to provide parents of eligible students with—at minimum—a partial rebate or refund.
- If the student falls into one of the following categories, the net cost to the parent may not exceed the difference between the cost of a monthly transit pass and the level of provincial funding provided to the school board for that student:
  - students who reside 2.4 kilometres or more from the designated school they attend for regular or special education programming; and
  - students who attend a different school, at their school board's direction, because their neighbourhood school is full.
- For example, in Calgary provincial transportation funding is \$549 per student. If one school year's worth (10 months) of municipal transit passes costs \$700, the net cost to the parent cannot exceed \$151.
- The remaining cost represents the value-added component of the municipal transit passes; students can use municipal transit outside of school hours, a benefit when compared to yellow bus service.
- School boards will be responsible for having a policy regarding rebates or refunds in place.
- If a student does not qualify based on the above criteria—for example, if they reside less than 2.4 kilometres from their school, or they attend a school or program of choice—a school is not obligated to provide a rebate or refund for municipal transit.

### School board requirements

- School boards will be establishing, maintaining and implementing a series of policies respecting school fees.
- Included are policies which address consultation with parents, and the circumstances through which a fee may be waived or refunded. In addition, school boards will be posting their fees on their schools' website to ensure transparency.
- In addition, to ensure the overall fee burden on Alberta families is being reduced, any school board fees increasing of more than five per cent over the previous school year will require the approval of the Minister of Education. The only fee increases exempt from this requirement are fees for field trips and international travel.
- School boards will be required to submit their fee policies and schedules to the Minister on an annual basis.

### Funding:

- Budget 2017 provides \$54 million in funding, in the 2017/18 school year, to reduce school fees.
- This funding will help offset the revenue loss projected as a result of Bill 1, and will help ensure that boards can maintain current educational programming without increasing other still-permitted school fees.
- Funding allocation to boards will be based on fee revenues as reported by boards in the Basic Instruction Fee category of their 2015/16 financial statements.
- The allocation uses 2015/16 data due to several boards having suspended fees in this category for the 2016/17 school year.
- While the decision on the allocation method for 2017/18 has been determined, it will be revisited for the 2018/19 school year.

Other school fees (i.e. lunch supervision, technology fees, etc.):

- These legislative changes provide the Minister with increased authority over all school board fee types related to publicly funded education programming.
- The current focus is on eliminating fees, as of the 2017/18 school year, for specific instructional supplies and materials, and for the transportation of eligible students.
- Beyond 2017/18, the government will continue to evaluate the effectiveness of the new school fees regulation, and will consider amendments to address other fees for future school years.
- The government will continue to work with various stakeholders, including school boards and parents, throughout the process.

## **Bill 1 – An Act to Reduce School Fees: Frequently Asked Questions**

### **General:**

#### **1. Where can I find the new *School Fees and Costs Regulation* and the new *School Transportation Regulation*?**

- The regulations are available at <https://education.alberta.ca/bill-1-an-act-to-reduce-school-fees/>.

#### **2. What fees are being eliminated?**

- For the 2017/18 school year, the following fees are being eliminated:
  - textbook fees;
  - workbook fees;
  - printing and photocopying fees;
  - paper fees;
  - fees not clearly expressed in a fee schedule, nor connected to a specific good or service (i.e., fees previously referred to as instructional fees, instructional materials fees, or basic fees); and
  - fees for the transportation of the following eligible students:
    - those residing 2.4 kilometres or more from the designated school the attend for regular or special education programming;
    - those who have a disability, or disabilities, that prohibit them from using regular transportation services;
    - those who attend a different school, which is 2.4 kilometres or more from their residence, because their neighbourhood school is full;
    - children attending an Early Childhood Services program, such as kindergarten, for noon-hour transportation.

#### **3. When will school fee reductions be implemented?**

- The reductions will be implemented for the 2017/18 school year.

#### **4. What fees can continue to be charged?**

- For at least the 2017/18 school year, fees other than those listed above are not being eliminated. Therefore, school boards will be able to continue charging such fees, if they so choose.
- In some circumstances, transportation fees may still be incurred. Such situations include the following:
  - If a student resides less than 2.4 kilometres from their designated school.
  - If parents choose to enrol their child in a school other than their designated school. This includes students attending "schools of choice," such as alternative programs (i.e., sports academies, immersion programs.)
  - If the parent or student requests enhanced or optional service, such as pick-up or drop off from a secondary location or, in rural routes, yard service.
- To ensure other fees are not being increased excessively, any fees increasing by more than five per cent over the previous year will need to be approved by the Minister of Education. The only fees exempt from this requirement are fees for field trips and international travel.
- The regulations will provide Minister with the authority to further regulate other fees in the future.

**5. Why is transportation eligibility set at 2.4 kilometres?**

- This distance criteria has been long-established in the *School Act*, as well as through the former *Student Transportation Regulation* and the newly established *School Transportation Regulation*.
- This criteria is used to determine whether a board is responsible for providing transportation for the student or whether it is the parents' responsibility. For students who are less than 2.4 kilometres, parents are responsible for determining how to get their child(ren) to school.
- The government recognizes that this criteria is the subject of much public debate.
- Moving forward, the government will engage stakeholders—including parents—in discussions regarding the suitability of this distance criteria.

**6. Can school boards still direct students to municipal transportation? If so, will fees still be charged?**

- If the student falls into one of the following categories, the net cost to the parent may not exceed the difference between the cost of a monthly transit pass and the level of provincial funding provided to the school board for that student:
  - students who reside 2.4 kilometres or more from the designated school they attend for regular or special education programming; and
  - students who attend a different school, at their school board's direction, because their neighbourhood school is full.
- For example, in Calgary provincial transportation funding is \$549 per student. If one school year's worth (10 months) of municipal transit passes costs \$700, the net cost to the parent cannot exceed \$151.
- The remaining cost represents the value-added component of the municipal transit passes; students can use municipal transit outside of school hours, a benefit when compared to yellow bus service.
- School boards will be responsible for having a policy regarding rebates or refunds in place.
- If a student does not qualify based on the above criteria—for example, if they reside less than 2.4 kilometres from their school, or they attend a school or program of choice—a school board is not obligated to provide a rebate or refund for municipal transit.

**7. How is this fee reduction being funded?**

- Budget 2017 provides \$54 million in funding, in the 2017/18 school year, to reduce school fees.
- This funding will help ensure that boards can maintain current educational programming without excessively increasing other still-permitted school fees.
- Funding allocation to boards will be based on fee revenues as reported by boards in the Basic Instruction Fee category of their 2015/16 financial statements.
- The allocation uses 2015/16 data due to several boards having suspended fees in this category for the 2016/17 school year.
- While the decision on the allocation method for 2017/18 has been determined, it will be revisited for the 2018/19 school year?

**8. What is a designated school?**

- All students have a designated school that is determined by the attendance area set by the resident school board.
- Designated schools offer regular programming and are not schools of choice.
- Designated schools are usually, but not always, the closest school that offers regular programming to the residence of the student.

- 9. What is classified as a “school of choice” or “program of choice”?**
- Schools or programs of choice are schools that are chosen because of a particular program being offered. Some examples include, language or cultural immersion programs, sports or club academies, faith-based schools (offered by a non-Catholic jurisdiction), art or science schools, traditional learning centres, international baccalaureate programs and alternative programs.
- 10. Why are language immersion schools classified as schools of choice? Isn't this different than previous practice?**
- Immersion programming is one area where provincial policy has, to date, not fully aligned with some school board practices.
  - While the Government defines immersion programming as a program or school of choice, school boards have, over years, moved away from this view.
  - Therefore, through Bill 1, language immersion programs are not categorized as designated schools. As such, school boards may charge fees for transportation to and from these programs.
- 11. Are charter school authorities impacted by this legislation? Why or why not?**
- As per the *School Fees and Costs Regulation* and the *School Transportation Regulation*, charter schools will not be restricted in the fees they can charge.
  - However, charter school authorities will be required to submit their fee policies and schedules to the Minister of Education.
- 12. Are private school authorities impacted by this legislation? Why or why not?**
- No. Private schools are considered schools of choice, with parents and students opting to send their children to these schools for specialized programming.

For Parents:

- 13. How much can parents expect to save?**
- The amount parents will save will vary.
  - To date, the fees charged to parents have varied between school boards—and, from school to school.
  - For example, the *School Transportation Regulation* prohibits fees for the transportation of students who attend their designated school, for regular or special education programs, and live 2.4 kilometres or more away from that school. Not all schools/school boards charged fees in this instance, so not all parents will be impacted by this specific reduction.
  - Specific fee rates for the 2017/18 school year will be directly available from schools' websites in August.
- 14. Where can parents find out how much they will be charged for school fees in the 2017/18 school year?**
- By August, each school (board) will have received Government approval for its reviewed school fee policies and fee schedules.
  - Schools (boards) will then publish these policies and fee schedules on their respective websites.
  - Further questions about specific fees charged by a school should be directed to the school or school board.

**15. Will parents still be charged for fees such as lunch-hour supervision fees, technology fees, and field trips?**

- Yes, for at least the 2017/18 school year, fees other than those listed above are not being eliminated. Therefore, school boards will be able to continue charging such fees, if they so choose.
- To ensure other fees are not being increased excessively, any fees increasing by more than five per cent over the previous year will need to be approved by the Minister of Education. The only fees exempt from this requirement are fees for field trips and international travel.
- The *School Fees and Costs Regulation* will provide Minister with the authority to further regulate other fees in the future.

**16. As a result of these reductions, should students/parents expect to see reductions to educational programs?**

- No. For the 2017/18 school year, school boards are being provided with funding to help offset revenue that will be lost as a result of Bill 1.
- This offsetting funding will help ensure that 2017/18 programming is, at minimum, maintained at previous levels.
- Decisions are forthcoming for school fee-related funding beyond 2017/18. That being said, the government is committed to working with school boards to ensure programming is maintained on a go-forward basis.

**17. As a result of these reductions, should any other fees be expected to increase?**

- The Minister, and the department, will be working with school boards across the province to minimize any potential increases.
- School boards are being provided with funding to help offset revenue that will be lost as a result of these legislative changes.
- This offsetting funding will help ensure that school boards do not need to increase other fees to offset this specific lost revenue. However, fees can increase for a number of other reasons that are not in the school's control; for example, municipal transit pass increases or increased costs from suppliers of particular products, such as agenda books.
- As per the *School Fees and Costs Regulation*, school boards will be required to submit their fee schedules to the Minister of Education for review. Increases to fees on the [schedule](#) should have an explanation provided under the "variance" column.
- In addition, if a board plans to increase a specific fee by more than five per cent from the previous year, approval will be required by the Minister of Education. The only fees exempt from this requirement are fees for field trips and international travel.

**18. How will parents, and others, know that these reductions are actually being realized?**

- The *School Fees and Costs Regulation* will include several accountability measures, including the establishment and submission of fee policies and fee schedules to the Minister of Education.
- The department will monitor the school fees collected by school boards across the province to ensure that the anticipated reductions are being realized.
- Should concerns arise, they may be addressed through future amended versions of the *School Fees Regulation*.
- In addition, the new Regulation will include a requirement for school boards to refund parents should a fee be levied that was not part of their reviewed fee schedule.

**19. How is the purchase of bulk school supplies, by a school on behalf of parents, impacted?**

- The purchase of general school supplies remains the responsibility of parents and is not impacted by these legislative changes.
- If boards are performing this bulk purchasing service for parents and charging a fee, they may continue to do so on a cost-recovery basis and must clearly communicate with parents what they are receiving for this service.
- This fee must be included on their reviewed fee schedule.

**For school boards and administrators:**

**20. Why do most fee increases over five per cent require approval by the Minister of Education?**

- The government is committed to reducing the burden of school fees of Alberta families.
- As such, Ministerial approval will ensure that schools (boards) that do need to increase certain fees demonstrate the need for such increases in a clear transparent manner.

**21. Will school boards be permitted to increase fees by more than five per cent?**

- Such increases may be permitted at the Minister's discretion.
- In the event a board requests an increase of more than five per cent to a particular fee, the board must provide justification of the increase. Increases to fees on the schedule should have an explanation provided under the "variance" column.
- For example, if an agenda book fee increase by seven per cent—due to an equivalent cost increase from the supplier—the board should submit such justification to the Minister.
- The only fees exempt from this requirement are fees for field trips and international travel.

**22. If school board fees and policies are reviewed and approved, as necessary, before the school year, what happens if a new fee emerges during the school year? Will that be permissible?**

- As per the regulations, school boards will be required to submit their policies and fee schedules to the Minister for review and approval, as necessary, by June 30, 2017, and by May 31 each year thereafter.
- The department recognizes that, on occasion, school boards may need to have an emerging fee reviewed and/or approved outside of the established review period. Should this occur, the school board should contact the department.