

**DATE:** March 31, 2020

**TO:** Board of Trustees

**FROM:** Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

**SUBJECT:** Transportation Fees  
(Response to Request for Information #059)

**ORIGINATOR:** Dr. Lorne Parker, Assistant Superintendent, Infrastructure

**RESOURCE STAFF:** Alison Cheesbrough, Geoff Holmes, Christopher Wright

**REFERENCE:** [HNR.AR](#) School Fees

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## ISSUE

The following information was requested:

Given provincial budget cuts to Edmonton Public Schools that have impacted both classroom and transportation funding, the Board has had to consider how to manage transportation fees for families. Fees impact families differently and can present a significant burden for low income families.

There is concern among Trustees about how increased student fees may disproportionately impact low income families and the following information was requested:

1. What is the process for low income families to receive school fee and transportation fee support? How is this communicated to families?
2. What percentage of students request a fee waiver or reduced fee? How does this compare to the 1 in 5 children in Edmonton living with low income, as defined by EndPoverty Edmonton?
3. Can a school principal waive or reduce fees for up to 100% of students in their school if all students are living with low income?
4. What is the annual amount of fees that are waived or reduced? Does this shortfall come from operational funding or from increased fees to other families?
5. What are the costs/benefits of structuring fees based on family income?

## BACKGROUND

Student Transportation reviews transportation fees annually, and in mid spring presents recommendations regarding the next year's fee schedule to the Board of Trustees for approval. Fees are based on a number of factors, such as the cost of providing transportation and amount of provincial funding.

## CURRENT SITUATION

Transportation fees are collected by schools. Any decisions regarding waiving fees for individual families are made at the school level and follow the fee waiver process outlined in Administrative

Regulation HNB.AR – School Fees. The school principal is a central part of this process and is in the best position to understand the circumstances of families in the school community. The regulation also specifies record keeping and accounting requirements. If a principal grants a fee waiver, reduction or alternative payment plan, they must fill out the Alternative Payment Plan and Refund Form. Money for fees waived comes from funds allocated to schools.

Information regarding the fee waiver process is also outlined on the Division website. If parents indicate to Student Transportation staff that they are unable to pay fees, staff outline the process to them and offer to help connect them with their school principal to discuss options.

### **City of Edmonton**

Note: Information in this section refers to programs and costs prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has temporarily impacted ETS fare collection.

There are programs that assist low-income Edmontonians with transportation costs. The City of Edmonton runs the Ride Transit Program, which is offered in conjunction with the Leisure Access Program. These programs provide low-income Edmontonians with a reduced-rate transit pass and a leisure access pass. The Ride Transit pass costs \$34 per month. Additionally, children under the age of 12 can now ride ETS at no cost when accompanied by a fare-paying customer. A sibling over 12 years of age may be considered the fare-paying customer.

The Ride Transit Program began in 2017 and many schools have referred families to it on a case-by-case basis. Ride Transit is open to a greater partnership with Edmonton Public Schools, and Student Transportation is pursuing how we could help ensure wider distribution of Ride Transit print materials through a centralized approach. Beyond the City's Ride Transit Program, all student ETS bus passes sold by the Division are also subsidized by a minimum of \$15 per month.

### **Alternative Approaches – Calgary Board of Education**

The Calgary Board of Education (CBE) does not provide any subsidy to parents for any transit passes they sell to students. Any need for a waiver is handled through the City of Calgary's Fair Entry program for low income Calgarians, which allows families to apply for multiple programs and services with one application.

The CBE has a centralized process to waive yellow bus fees for low-income students. They publish a list of eligibility criteria on their website and include considerations such as receiving assistance from Provincial Social Services or eligibility for the Alberta Child Health benefit as eligibility criteria. If a family applies for a waiver and provides supporting documentation, the waiver is granted automatically. Families that are not low-income but find themselves in temporarily difficult circumstances also have the option to apply for a waiver through their school principal rather than through the central service. CBE Student Transportation budgets for these waived fees on a yearly basis, including associated administrative costs, and estimates that it is approximately 13 per cent of their transportation fee revenue.

### **Helping Low-Income Families**

Within the Edmonton Public Schools model, a principal is able to waive or reduce transportation fees for one hundred per cent of students in their school community, if needed. Currently, the percentage of transportation fees waived relative to fee revenue collected is approximately three per cent (or \$225,000 in 2018-2019). When looking specifically at yellow bus fees, the proportion of fees waived

relative to revenue collected was 7.2 per cent. Money for yellow bus fees waived comes from funds allocated to schools. The associated administrative costs of bus pass sales and fee waivers is difficult to quantify because it is a component of many different individual positions at schools. For comparison, Calgary Board of Education has seven central administrative positions dedicated to processing fee waivers.

EndPovertyEdmonton reports that the number of children and youth under age 18 that live in low income situations is higher than the overall population (16 percent versus 11 per cent).

**KEY POINTS**

- The process for waiving Student Transportation fees at Edmonton Public Schools is outlined in administrative regulation HNB.AR and the school principal plays a central role.
- In 2018-2019, Edmonton Public Schools waived approximately three per cent of bus pass fees, equivalent to approximately \$225,000. Money for fees waived comes from funds allocated to schools.
- Through the Ride Transit program, the City of Edmonton provides reduced rate ETS passes for families below the low income cut off, including youth passes.
- One example of an alternative approach to waiving transportation fees is the centralized process used at the Calgary Board of Education. CBE currently waives approximately 13 per cent of transportation fees.

**ATTACHMENTS and APPENDICES**

n/a

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