

**Fees Charged to Parents**

**Report**

**Working Group on  
Fees Charged to Parents**

**August 2004**

**Reach for your dreams**

**Québec**



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## **KEY POINTS**

### ***Comprehensive data***

- Data taken from financial reports produced by the school boards over the past four years show a continued increase in the fees charged to parents for exercise books and other types of materials, as well as for noontime supervision. Likewise, there has been an increase in all other fees charged to parents, with the exception of those charged for noontime transportation.
- According to the school boards' financial reports, the total amount of fees charged for exercise books and other types of materials, together with those for noontime supervision, noontime transportation and other activities, rose from \$100.1 million in the 1999-2000 school year to \$143.9 million in 2002-2003.

### ***Regular study programs***

- The 2004 study indicates that the average minimum and maximum overall fees related to regular study programs were, respectively, \$39.55 and \$78.96 for preschool and elementary education, and \$70.73 and \$114.95 for secondary school education.

### ***Noontime transportation***

- The study shows that, on average, the maximum annual fees that school boards and schools charged for noontime transportation amounted to about \$137. A comparison of the data from 1999 and 2004 for francophone elementary schools indicates that, on average, the minimum amount charged for the same service rose from \$119 to \$120, while the maximum amount climbed from \$122 to \$137.
- Data taken from the school boards' financial reports reveal that the revenue from fees charged to parents for noontime transportation has declined over the past four years, dropping from \$6.8 million in 1999-2000 to \$5.7 million in 2002-2003.
- Given the increasing numbers of families in which both parents work, the drop in the school population and the rise in the number of requests for childcare services, the demand for noontime transportation will continue to decline.

### ***Noontime supervision***

- Data collected in 2004 indicate that, on average, schools charge a maximum of \$172.37 annually for noontime supervision. A comparison of the data from 1999 and 2004 for francophone elementary schools indicates that, on average, the minimum amount charged for the same service rose from \$90 to \$139, while the maximum amount climbed from \$106 to \$186. With respect to anglophone elementary schools, average minimum fees increased from \$136 to \$158, while the average maximum fees went from \$148 to \$182. This rise can be attributed to higher fees as well as to an increase in the number of students requiring such services.
- Data taken from the school boards' financial reports show the costs for noontime supervision rising from \$17.4 million in 1999-2000 to \$25 million in 2002-2003. This rise can be attributed to higher fees as well as to an increase in the number of students requiring such services.
- Although the amount charged to parents for noontime supervision generally represents less than \$1 per day of school, this amount must be added to the total bill they are required to pay.

### ***Individualized study programs***

- On average, the minimum and maximum fees charged for individualized study programs in preschool and elementary school were \$99.57 and \$173.63 respectively. Comparable figures for the secondary level were \$144.01 and \$259.27.

### ***Fee-monitoring measures***

- Data gathered in 2004 show that both school boards and schools have sought to keep fees as low as possible by establishing fee-monitoring measures. The study reveals that 88.49% of schools and 71.2% of school boards have taken steps to monitor the fees charged to parents.
- Moreover, the governing boards of 28.91% of schools at the preschool and elementary levels and of 21.50% of secondary schools have set fee ceilings.
- These amount, on average, to \$98.28 for preschool and elementary schools and \$89.86 for secondary schools.
- All public school stakeholders represented in the working group recognize the need to restrict fee increases. Although the *Education Act* stipulates that parents may be responsible for some fees, these should not become an obstacle to the principle of unimpeded access to public school. This objective will, of course, require the cooperation of the school boards and governing boards, which are jointly responsible for the organization of services.
- The working group is also mindful of the key role that parents can play in this matter. The creation of governing boards has given them a forum where they can influence the decisions made within their schools. They are encouraged to suggest ways of reducing school fees and to require greater accountability on the part of those who set them.

### ***Topics requiring further consideration***

- The group is of the opinion that individualized study programs, vocational training and the organization of noontime services require further consideration.

## Introduction

For several years now, the issue of fees charged to parents has come under frequent scrutiny. This issue is one of parents' chief concerns, causing them to wonder about the principle of free education and the total amount of the bill they are required to pay.

In 1999, the Ministère de l'Éducation (MEQ) undertook a study aimed at taking a close look at these fees. The ensuing report, titled *Frais exigés des parents : rapport d'étude*, examines the results compiled from a survey conducted in July 1999 with school boards and schools. These data provide an idea of the fees charged at the beginning of the 1999-2000 school year.

In November 1999, the MEQ released a guide titled *Fees Charged to Parents: Guidelines*. The purpose of this guide was to ensure that everyone shared the same understanding and interpretation of the principle of free education, by identifying the financial contributions that school boards and governing boards are entitled to charge parents and by defining what must be provided free of charge. This guide is available on the MEQ Web site at [http://www.meq.gouv.qc.ca/publications/Frais\\_parents/frais\\_a.pdf](http://www.meq.gouv.qc.ca/publications/Frais_parents/frais_a.pdf).

In February 2004, a working group set up by Education Minister Pierre Reid was mandated to re-examine the issue of fees charged to parents. The group, which produced this report, decided to conduct a data-collection survey on fees associated with general education in the youth sector, and to study the fee situation regarding services such as noontime supervision and transportation, individualized study programs and vocational training.

This survey began in March 2004. Two questionnaires were e-mailed to school boards and schools offering general education in the youth sector, each group receiving a specific questionnaire. The school boards' **response rate** was **78.57%**, while that of schools was **79.77%**.

The **first part** of this report presents the chief legislative provisions and the major findings for each category of fees that are chargeable by school boards and governing boards.

The **second part** deals with the fee-monitoring measures implemented by school boards and governing boards.

Lastly, the **third part** outlines the recommendations issued by the working group with respect to the fees charged to parents.

# 1. Major findings

## 1.1 General provisions

Section 3 of the *Education Act* stipulates that all residents of Québec are entitled to receive, free of charge, the educational services provided for in the basic school regulation under section 447 and in the basic vocational training regulation under section 448.

Section 7 of the Act specifies that students are entitled to free use of the textbooks and instructional material required to teach the study programs until the last school-calendar day of the school year in which the students reach the age of 18, or 21 in the case of students with handicaps or disabilities. The Act nevertheless provides for two exceptions to this right: (1) documents that students can write or draw in or cut up; and (2) pencils, paper and other objects of a like nature that are not considered instructional material.

The publication *Fees Charged to Parents: Guidelines* mentions that the exceptions to the right of free use must be interpreted restrictively. It also recalls the following point:

If an object is 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.

The 1999 study provided an overview of the fees charged to parents for several categories of instructional material. As a result of these findings, a special allocation worth \$15 million was granted to school boards. This allocation was initially paid out in 1999-2000 and ceased in 2003-2004. An additional special allocation totalling \$13 million was awarded to school boards to help them build up their stocks of flute recorders and calculators: \$8 million was paid out in 2000-2001 and \$5 million, in 2001-2002. Despite these allocations, school fees, which amounted to \$100.1 million for the 1999-2000 school year, climbed to \$143.9 million in 2002-2003.

Data taken from financial reports produced by the school boards over the past four years show a steady increase in the fees charged to parents not only for exercise books and other types of materials but also for noontime supervision.

Data from 2004 confirm that overall fees are generally higher in secondary school than in elementary school. They also show that the fees for individualized study programs are, as one might expect, higher than those for regular study programs.

It is unfortunately impossible to produce a point-by-point comparison of the 1999 data and the 2004 data because the first study provided a more detailed breakdown of the different types of fees charged. Nevertheless, as seen in the table below, the 2004 study indicates that the minimum and maximum overall fees average out to \$39.55 and \$78.96 respectively for preschool and elementary education, and to \$70.73 and \$114.95 for secondary education.<sup>1</sup>

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1. These figures relate only to regular study programs.

**Overall fees charged to parents  
by preschool/elementary schools and secondary schools  
Costs per student**

	Minimum fees (average)		Maximum fees (average)	
	\$	N <sup>2</sup>	\$	N
Preschool/elementary	39.55	1 259	78.96	1 324
Secondary	70.73	342	114.95	140

## 1.2 Special provisions

### *1.2.1 Community services*

Sections 255 to 257 of the *Education Act* list the non-educational services for which school boards are allowed to charge a fee, namely:

- manpower training and technical assistance to commercial enterprises (s. 255, para. 1)
- cultural, social, sports, scientific or community services (s. 255, para. 2)
- participation in international cooperation programs in fields under the boards' jurisdictions (s. 255, para. 3)
- childcare services in schools (s. 256)
- services to promote access to educational services (s. 257)

School boards may charge fees only to those who use these services (s. 258).

Childcare fees were limited to \$5 a day until June 2004, under the terms and conditions governing the annual subsidies awarded to school boards for organizing these services; as of September 2004, parents' maximum contribution will rise to \$7 a day. The revenue derived from these services has grown steadily over the years: while on the order of \$125.1 million in 2000-2001, it had risen to \$155 million by 2002-2003, only two years later.

### *1.2.2 School transportation services*

The first two paragraphs of section 292 stipulate the following:

Student transportation provided by a school board before the beginning of classes and after the end of classes each day is free of charge. Where the transportation is provided under a contract with a public transit authority or with the holder of a bus transport permit, within the meaning of government regulation, the school board may claim from a student that portion of the cost of the transportation pass which corresponds to service in addition to service before the beginning of classes and after the end of classes each day.

A school board that provides student transportation at noon to allow students to have their meal at home may claim the cost thereof from the students who elect to use that service.

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2. These figures represent the total number of survey respondents.

A working committee set up in 2000 noted that several school boards left it up to the schools or parents to organize this service with a private carrier. In 2004, 59.18% of school boards stated that noontime transportation was not one of their management responsibilities, indicating that this service has been decentralized to a great extent.

The 2004 study shows that the average maximum annual fee charged by school boards and schools for noontime transportation amounts to approximately \$137. The average minimum fee mentioned by the schools was \$120.76, while school boards put this fee at \$105.56.

**Fees charged by school boards and schools  
for noontime transportation<sup>3</sup>**

Type of expenditure	Minimum fees (average)		Maximum fees (average)	
	\$	N	\$	N
Annual per-student cost set by school boards	105.56	16	137.35	20
Annual per-student cost set by schools	120.76	193	137.51	292

Comparison of the 1999 and 2004 figures for elementary schools allows us to conclude that there was only a slight increase in the average costs for noontime transportation. In fact, for francophone schools, average minimum costs rose from \$119 to \$120, and maximum costs, from \$122 to \$137.<sup>4</sup>

**Noontime transportation fees for francophone preschool/elementary schools  
1999 and 2004**

Type of expenditure		Minimum fees (average)		Maximum fees (average)	
		\$	N	\$	N
1999	Annual fees	119	164	122	175
2004	Annual fees	120	126	137	153

Data taken from the school boards' financial reports reveal that the revenue from fees charged to parents for noontime transportation has declined over the past four years, dropping from \$6.8 million in 1999-2000 to \$5.7 million in 2002-2003. On the other hand, all other fees charged to parents have grown steadily.

The legal obligation to ensure noontime supervision but not noontime transportation has led certain school boards to decide to forego offering these transportation services (1999 study).

Given the growing number of families with two working parents, declining enrollments and an increasing demand for childcare services, it seems inevitable that demand for noontime transportation will continue to decline.

3. Averages are calculated on the basis of figures ranging from \$30 to \$315 for school boards, and from \$0 to \$627.25 for schools.

4. No data were available for secondary schools in 1999. The low number of anglophone respondents to this question does not allow us to compare the 1999 and 2004 situations.

### 1.2.3 Noontime supervision

The last paragraph in section 292 also stipulates the following:

Whether or not a school board provides transportation at noon to allow students to have their meal at home, it is required to ensure, in the manner agreed upon with the governing boards and on such financial conditions as it may determine, supervision of the students who stay at school.

In 2000, the working committee observed that school boards were increasingly opting to decentralize the organization and billing for noontime supervision by transferring them to schools and governing boards. The 2004 study indicates that 52.27% of schools stated that they were responsible for these tasks.

The 2004 data reveal that, on average, schools charge a maximum of \$172.37 annually for noontime supervision, while school boards charge \$175.68.

#### **Fees charged by school boards and schools for noontime supervision<sup>5</sup>**

Type of expenditure	Minimum fees (average)		Maximum fees (average)	
	\$	N	\$	N
Annual per-student fees charged by school boards	62.24	19	175.68	22
Annual per-student fees charged by schools	130.70	599	172.37	760

It is possible to compare the 1999<sup>6</sup> and 2004 data concerning elementary schools. For francophone schools, average minimum fees rose from \$90 to \$139, while maximum fees climbed from \$106 to \$186. The corresponding fees for anglophone schools rose from \$136 to \$158, and from \$148 to \$182.

#### **Noontime supervision fees for francophone preschool/elementary schools 1999 and 2004**

		Minimum fees (average)		Maximum fees (average)	
		\$		\$	
1999	Annual fees	90		106	
2004	Annual fees	139		186	

Figures taken from school boards' financial reports show that noontime supervision fees rose from \$17.4 million in 1999-2000 to \$25 million in 2002-2003. This growth can be attributed not only to higher fees but also to an increase in the number of students requiring these services.

The 1999 study highlighted the fact that there is less demand for noontime supervision in secondary schools. When this service is provided, however, it costs much less than in elementary schools. This fact can no doubt be explained by the difference in the ratio of students to lunchtime monitors. Additionally, the different lunch periods set by school boards might explain why noontime supervision costs differ from one school board to the next.

5. Averages are calculated on the basis of figures ranging from \$30 to \$546 for school boards, and from \$1.25 to \$900 for schools.

6. Data from 1999 may, however, include childcare services.

The data gathered in 2004 also reveal that 7.42% of schools and 8.16% of school boards charge noontime supervision fees for all students, whether or not they use this service, even though section 292 of the *Education Act* clearly stipulates that these fees apply only to students who eat lunch at school. The working group finds this situation deplorable and believes that it should cease.

Although the amount that parents are expected to pay for noontime supervision generally adds up to less than \$1 per school day, it still increases their total school bills.

### **1.2.4 Individualized study programs**

Individualized study programs are also offered in some schools. In addition to the other educational services provided under section 90 of the *Education Act*, a school board may, with the approval of the Minister, establish a school for the purposes of a specific project (s. 240). Individualized study programs and regular study programs can be offered in the same school. This type of service offering has grown at a rapid pace over the past few years, owing to greater demand by parents for more diversified instruction. These programs belong to three different categories:

- 1) programs developed in partnership with an outside organization (e.g. a sports federation)
- 2) school-organized programs specialized in the arts, sports or specific areas of knowledge
- 3) international programs offered in partnership with international organizations (e.g. International Baccalaureate Organization [IBO], International Schools Association [ISA]).

The 2004 study provides a look at the overall fees charged for individualized study programs. In preschool and elementary education, the average minimum and maximum fees charged for such programs were \$99.57 and \$173.63 respectively. The comparable figures for the secondary level were \$144.01 and \$259.27.

**Overall fees charged to parents  
by preschool/elementary schools and secondary schools  
Costs per student**

	Minimum fees (average)		Maximum fees (average)	
	\$	N	\$	N
Preschool/elementary	99.57	122	173.63	148
Secondary	144.01	368	259.27	157

For the purposes of comparison, please note that the average minimum and maximum overall fees for regular study programs were \$39.55 and \$78.96 respectively for preschool/elementary education, and \$70.73 and \$114.95 for secondary education.

## **2. Fee-monitoring measures**

Fees charged to parents are overseen chiefly through the budget-approval process and other related measures. The *Education Act* stipulates that governing boards are responsible for adopting the annual budgets proposed by the principal of the school or vocational training centre (ss. 95 and 110.4). The budget is then submitted for approval to the school board (s. 276). In practice, however, the different

stakeholders in the school are generally consulted on the budget before it is adopted by the governing board.

The data collected in 2004 show that both school boards and schools have sought to keep fees as low as possible by establishing fee-monitoring measures.

These data reveal that 88.49% of schools and 71.2% of school boards have taken steps to monitor the fees charged to parents. Schools seem to play a leading role in handling cases where parents are unable to pay their fees: 86% of schools have implemented measures for coping with this situation. Those mentioned most often include flexible payment schedules and appeals to charitable or private organizations. In cases where parents refuse to pay the fees, 78.85% of school boards have implemented measures such as mailing notices or raising the possibility of putting the matter into the hands of a collection agency.

Moreover, the governing boards of 28.91% of schools at the preschool and elementary levels and of 21.50% of secondary schools have set fee ceilings. These average out to \$98.28 for preschool/elementary schools, and \$89.86 for secondary schools.

### **3. Recommendations**

In view of the importance of the issue of charging parents fees, the members of the working group have expressed a desire to continue their work in this matter. All public school stakeholders represented in the working group recognize the need to stem the growth of these fees. Although the *Education Act* stipulates that some fees can be charged to parents, these should not become an obstacle to the principle of unimpeded access to public school. This objective will naturally require the cooperation of school boards and governing boards, which are jointly responsible for the organization of services.

The working group is also mindful of the key role that parents can play in this matter. The creation of governing boards has given parents a forum where they can influence the decisions made within their schools. Parent members of governing boards, when consulted on such topics as student transportation, noontime supervision, extra-curricular activities and school supplies, need to pay careful attention to this issue. The working group invites these members to feel perfectly free to suggest ways of reducing school fees and to ask for a detailed breakdown of these fees when such fees are being set.

In light of the data collected in March 2004 from school boards and schools, and considering that the *Education Act* makes it possible to charge parents fees in certain circumstances, it is interesting to note that the vast majority of school boards and schools have in fact implemented measures for overseeing these fees. Despite this, the escalation of these costs remains a matter of concern.

The group is of the opinion that certain issues require further consideration. It does not exclude the possibility of bringing forth proposals to amend the legislation.

For the time being, however, the group makes the recommendations described below.

#### **3.1 Information activities**

The working group recommends:

- 1) that the publication *Fees Charged to Parents: Guidelines* continue to be distributed. Published by the MEQ in 1999, this guide is being redistributed by the Quebec Federation of Parents' Committees in 2004 and is available on the MEQ Web site. This guide should be handed out to the members of newly constituted governing boards in October 2004.

- 2) that the associations representing school administrators, the *Fédération des commissions scolaires du Québec* and the Quebec Federation of Parents' Committees be asked to continue informing their members about the issues of free education and fees charged to parents.
- 3) that school boards ensure that schools and vocational training centres provide parents with itemized bills so that they can see exactly what they are paying for. It is known that parents who are well informed about the items listed on their bills are less reluctant to pay them.
- 4) that school boards each receive a personalized report of the 2004 survey so that they can see how their fees differ from those charged by their schools. This report will also enable them to compare their results with those achieved by other boards and schools in their networks.

### 3.2 Research activities

- ***Individualized study programs***

The March 2004 figures show that the fees charged for individualized study programs are higher than those for regular programs. Although individualized programs are developed in response to parents' wishes, the working group is concerned that these fees might hinder access to these programs.

The working group invites school boards to pay careful attention to the issue of access to these programs. The group is glad to see that certain school boards have adopted means allowing parents to register their children in individualized programs, even when they are unable to pay the fees associated with such programs.

The working group believes that the issue of individualized study programs merits further consideration. It is not raising doubts about organizing such programs; on the contrary, it reasserts the need to continue providing diversified educational services.

- ***Vocational training***

The March 2004 data collection survey was aimed primarily at examining the fees attached to general education offered in the youth sector because the original intention was to draw comparisons with the 1999 data.

Nevertheless, the principle of free education also applies to vocational training. This principle is entrenched in the *Education Act* and in the *Basic Vocational Training Regulation*.

The fees in question are those charged to parents or to students themselves. Students up to the age of 18 are governed by section 1 of the *Education Act* and are therefore entitled to free educational services to the same extent as their peers in general education. Students over the age of 18 are entitled to free educational services provided that they fulfill the conditions defined in the *Basic Vocational Training Regulation*. The working group recommends that a guide be developed to define what constitutes free educational services in vocational training. This guide would have the same purpose as the publication *Fees Charged to Parents: Guidelines*, which is to ensure that everyone shares the same understanding of the principle of free educational services.

- ***Noontime transportation and supervision***

As mentioned earlier, major social changes have had an impact on noontime services: declining enrollments, more working parents, greater demand for childcare services, etc. Other factors also affect

the organization of services: availability of premises, provisions in basic school regulations and in collective agreements, etc.

The working group recommends that a comprehensive review be conducted of the organization of noontime services. Ideally, this review would also cover cost sharing by parents and the government. Any recommendations should be made as early as possible in this school year so that they can be taken into account as school boards develop their budgetary rules for 2005-2006.

### 3.3 Best practices

The 2000 report and the 2004 study revealed some measures and best practices that were instrumental in reducing parents' fees.

The 2000 report mentioned the following practices, which continue to be of interest:

- 1) The school boards' adoption of a policy direction and framework (standards, maximum amounts, service guidelines)
- 2) Billing that reflects real costs, without the addition of charges for other services
- 3) Presentation of detailed cost breakdowns
- 4) Differentiation and description of service offerings
- 5) Adoption of approaches fostering close collaboration among school administrators, staff and parents

The 2004 survey, for its part, identified some of the measures that can be taken in the case of parents who are unable to pay their fees:

- 1) Flexible payment schedules
- 2) Appeals to charitable or private organizations, or fund-raising campaigns
- 3) Special agreements with parents
- 4) Financial assistance offered by the school board or school

Over the past few years, different measures have been adopted so that parents are not obliged to pay for exercise books. First, instructional packages developed since 1990 have had to contain a sufficient number of exercises in order to be approved by the MEQ.

Second, teaching staff have been relying more heavily on reproducible handouts in recent years. Lastly, within the framework of the education reform, some teachers have developed their own exercise material, leading to a significant reduction in the bills parents are required to pay.

Despite all these efforts, it must be acknowledged that fees for this type of material have risen constantly for the past four years. Consequently, the working group recommends that steps be taken to make school administrators more aware of this phenomenon.

### 3.4 Recommended follow-up

The working group recommends that the issue of free education become an integral part of the work entrusted to the *Comité directeur conjoint MEQ-CS* with respect to strategic planning and accountability, so that the MEQ and the school boards can jointly ensure that all those involved in public education are complying with the law and that every effort is being made to reduce the fees charged to parents.

## **APPENDIX**

**APPENDIX: MEMBERS OF THE WORKING GROUP ON FEES  
CHARGED TO PARENTS**

<b>Organizations</b>	<b>Representatives</b>
Fédération québécoise des directeurs et directrices d'établissement d'enseignement	Laval Perreault
Association montréalaise des directions d'établissement scolaire	Benoît Bussièrès
Association des directeurs généraux des commissions scolaires	Louise Boudreault
Association of Directors General of English School Boards of Québec	Léo La France
Fédération des commissions scolaires du Québec	Réjean Morel
Quebec English School Boards Association	Jeff Polenz
Association québécoise du personnel de direction des écoles	Michel Bertrand
Fédération des comités de parents du Québec	Diane Miron
Association des cadres scolaires du Québec	Bernard Laflamme
Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec Bureau du sous-ministre	Julie Gosselin Sous-ministre adjointe aux réseaux
Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec Direction générale des régions	Marie-France Benes
Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec Direction des affaires autochtones et des services administratifs	Claudie St-Hilaire
Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec Direction générale du financement et de l'équipement	Joëlle Jobin
Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec Direction générale des régions	Luc Desgagnés