

The new *Education Act*

INFORMATION SHEET – School representative bodies voluntary contributions and charges for optional extra items

A new *Education Act* has been passed by the Northern Territory Parliament and is now the law. This information sheet tells you about some of the changes for school councils in the *Education Act* and Education Regulations.

- Government school education is free and no charges are allowed for any instruction, materials or services that are part of the standard curriculum program.
- School representative bodies (school councils and independent public school boards) can decide whether to request voluntary contributions (donations) from parents, or charge for optional extra items a student may choose as part of their education.

Government school education is free (section 75, regulation 15)

The *Education Act* states that government school education is free for Australian citizens or permanent residents living in the Territory who are enrolled in a Northern Territory government school.

Government schools cannot charge for any instruction, materials or administrative or other services or facilities provided as part of the standard curriculum program.

The definition of standard curriculum includes the provision of teaching and learning activities, instructional support and instructional materials for the delivery of the Early Years Learning Framework; the Australian Curriculum; the senior secondary Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training; and Vocational Education and Training (see Table 1).

The Act does not impose any new charges or fees for parents with children at Northern Territory government schools. It sets out the details of existing Northern Territory Government policy and practice.

School representative bodies (section 75)

School councils and independent public school boards can choose to request voluntary contributions (donations) from parents, or charge for optional extra items a student may choose as part of their education. Each school council or

board decides whether and how much to request or charge but they must not include anything which is part of the standard curriculum.

Charging for optional extra items (section 107(1)(m) and regulation 31)

Charging for optional extra items that a student may choose as part of their education is new to the Act but has been standard practice in schools. The materials, services or facilities approved for this purpose include:

- the provision of instructional support or instructional resources not part of the standard curriculum, e.g. *printing for personal use and internet access for recreational purposes*.
- extra-curricular programs or activities, e.g. *instrumental music tuition*.
- entry costs associated with performances, productions or events;
- the provision of materials or services that are a higher cost alternative to those required for the standard curriculum program, e.g. *the use of mahogany in woodwork instead of standard pine*.
- the provision of equipment or of other materials, services or facilities, e.g. *hire of a notebook computer or musical instrument*.

Requesting voluntary contributions (section 107(1)(n) and regulation 32)

School councils and independent public school boards can request voluntary contributions from parents. This is new to the Act but has been standard practice in schools. The types of items that can be included in voluntary contributions:

- donations to a building or a library trust fund, if the school council or board is a deductible gift recipient
- financial contributions for a specific purpose designated by the school council or board
- financial contributions or donations of any kind to the school council or board.

School contributions are voluntary and payment is a decision for parents. Principals are to ensure that no student or family suffers any discrimination or embarrassment should they choose to not make a voluntary contribution. Confidentiality, privacy and dignity will always be maintained concerning contributions.

Power to exempt, waive or refund fees (section 181)

Any fees charged under the Act can be cancelled, waived or refunded where there is hardship or other special circumstances. Parents should talk to their school principal if they have questions about payment of fees or charges.

Further information

For further details talk to your school principal.

Information is also available at www.education.nt.gov.au, email legislation.services@nt.gov.au or phone (08) 8901 4990.

TABLE 1: What is the standard curriculum program?	What costs are not part of the standard curriculum?
<p>The standard curriculum is the provision of teaching and learning activities, instructional support and instructional materials for the delivery of the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Years Learning Framework • the Australian Curriculum • the senior secondary Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training • Vocational Education and Training. <p>Free instruction includes any instruction, materials or administrative or other services or facilities provided as part of the standard curriculum program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the provision of teaching and learning activities • instructional support • instructional materials • administration and facilities associated with the standard curriculum program. • administration and coordination of the standard curriculum program are part of free instruction. 	<p>There are three areas for which parents/carers may be requested to make a contribution or reimbursement:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Educational items which parents are expected to provide or reimburse the school to provide for their child, for example stationery, text books and school uniforms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Items which students take possession of, including text books and student stationery - Materials for teaching and learning where your child consumes or takes possession of the finished articles (for example, home economics, ceramics, photography, catering) - School uniform (where applicable) - Travel costs incurred in order to receive instruction, for example, the cost of a student ID card if this is required to access free bus travel - Services associated with, but not considered to be part of, 'instruction' in the standard curriculum program, such as costs associated with camps and excursions (for example, transport and entrance costs). 2. Optional extra items are those that are provided in addition to the standard curriculum program and are offered on a user-pays basis and which parents may choose whether their child accesses or participates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Instructional supports, resources and administration beyond the provision of the standard curriculum program (for example, student computer printing for personal use, internet access for recreational or non-school use) - Extra-curricular programs or activities offered in addition to the standard curriculum program (for example, instrumental music tuition) - Entry costs associated with performances, productions and events - Materials for subjects where the payment sought is the difference between the basic materials or services required for the standard curriculum program and higher cost alternatives which may be more desirable (for example, requesting payment for the use of mahogany in woodwork instead of the standard pine) - Materials and services offered in addition to the 'standard curriculum program' (for example, school magazines or school photographs) - School facilities and equipment not associated with provision of the 'standard curriculum program' for example, hire/lease of equipment such as musical instruments or notebook computers. 3. Voluntary financial contributions which parents may be invited to contribute to the school: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contributions to a building or a library trust fund (Australian Taxation Office approved and tax deductible) - Contributions for a specific purpose identified by the school (for example, equipment, materials or services in addition to those funded through the government grants. This may include additional computers or student-related services) - General voluntary financial contributions or donations to the school.