ATTACHMENT J

Questions from the Middle School Principals' Meeting
Course-Related Fees
February 24, 2009

1. Can students be requested to provide flash drives or CDR-Ws for storing their own presentations, projects, etc.?

   Response: If a student uses a flash drive or a CDR-W to store his/her own materials and to transport material from school to home and back, the storage item may be considered an individual organizational tool or personal property which may be recommended but not required. If the teacher uses the flash drive to store materials during the instructional period to redistribute for the next instructional period, then the storage item is considered a material of instruction and must be provided by the school.

2. Who is responsible for replacing batteries for calculators on loan?

   Response: The calculator should be in working order when originally loaned. The student borrowing the calculator may be asked to provide batteries needed throughout the year.

3. Why are the new guidelines being implemented?

   Response: Montgomery County Public Schools determined to review course-related fees because of concerns related to financial demands on families, especially in light of the economic downturn, which mirror similar concerns expressed across the region and nationally. In addition, the Board of Education asked for a review of current practices and fees charged, consistency of practices among schools, and existing strategies to ensure that all students are able to engage in courses regardless of ability to pay course-related fees.

4. Can an activity fee be charged for incentives or school activities?

   Response: Each principal may determine, in collaboration with the school and parent leadership committees, if non-course-related fees for items such as incentives and school activities will be charged to students. The principal will communicate information about such fees and their purpose to all parents.

5. Will there be additional funds to purchase calculators?

   Response: No additional funds will be allocated for purchasing calculators other than the allocation from central office distributed to individual schools in a total sum based on a fixed amount multiplied by the number of students per school. It is the responsibility of the building principal and the leadership team to allocate resources to each department based on the instructional needs and priorities of the individual school.

6. Will there be additional textbook money allocated for workbooks?

   Response: No additional funds will be allocated for purchasing workbooks other than the allocation from central office distributed to individual schools in a total sum based on a fixed amount multiplied by the number of students per school. It is the responsibility of the building principal and the leadership team to allocate resources to each department based on the instructional needs and priorities of the individual school.

7. What is the waiver process? Does it apply to field trips?

   Response: There will be a waiver record form to allow each school to monitor the funds it provides from its own resources. This form will be provided and explained in future communications.

   Students may be charged transportation and associated fees for a field trip but not in advance as a course fee. A waiver record form would not be required since a field trip fee is not considered a course-related fee, although each school may wish to keep the record for future financial planning and to document costs associated with waivers. This information may be helpful for justifying future requests from central office.

8. Can schools charge for agenda books?

   Response: Yes, as long as the agenda book is not part of a student's grade, and it is not used as a hall pass. Fees may be charged if the item is not required. For example, all Grade 9 students are encouraged to obtain agenda books as an organizational tool, but are not required to obtain the agenda book. Please note that the basis for not charging a fee for a required agenda book has nothing to do with course-related fee guidelines.

9. What is a "reasonable selection" of musical instruments to have "on hand?"

   Response: The instrumental music teacher should have a reasonable selection of instruments on hand for students to use at no charge. If a student's preferred instrument is unavailable, a student has the option of renting the preferred instrument from a music store. Greater detail will be provided by the Department of Curriculum and Instruction.

10. May students rent equipment such as calculators or musical instruments?

    Response: Students will pay a 50 percent returnable deposit on a graphing calculator should they not wish to purchase their own. Students may rent musical instruments from a music store should they not wish to purchase their own or play available school instruments.

11. Can we rent graphing calculators, rather than ask students for a deposit?

    Response: No. Graphing calculators are considered necessary for the student to demonstrate mastery of the curriculum. Students should be encouraged to purchase their own graphing calculator for their academic career. If a student cannot purchase a graphing calculator, one will be loaned to the student for the duration of the course. Students may be required to make a 50 percent deposit fee on a graphing calculator for use during the course. The deposit will be returned to the student at the end of the course as long as the calculator is returned in proper working condition. As an alternative, schools may loan the calculator without charge, but assess an obligation (for the cost of the calculator only) if the calculator is lost or damaged.

12. If a calculator is stolen, will the fee be refunded to the student?

    Response: No. A refund of a student's deposit is dependent upon the return of an undamaged calculator. If the calculator is lost or stolen, the student is responsible for the replacement cost.

13. Will funding losses from waivers or nonpayment of financial obligations be reimbursed to individual schools?

    Response: No.

14. When will the funding allocation per school be decided? If there is an increase in enrollment, will the allocation be adjusted?

    Response: Allocations are based on the projected enrollment numbers. A recalculation will be made after the September 30 official enrollment data is recorded and an additional allocation will be made if there is a higher enrollment. Money will not be deducted if the enrollment is lower.

15. Does the elimination of towel fees undermine the expectations of good hygiene after exercise?

    Response: A survey of middle and high schools indicated a majority of the schools asked students to bring towels from home rather than charge a towel fee or schools supplied towels free of charge. Students are encouraged to practice proper hygiene.