

Policy – Parent Payment Policy

Policy Information

Policy Name:	Parent Payment Policy
Policy Number:	HAL-BUS-02
Current Version:	1.2
Sub-Program/Area:	(BUS) Business
Scope:	School Programs

Revision History & Ratification

This policy needs to be reviewed by College Council **annually or as required and** ratified at the College Council meetings when **changes are necessary**. This policy will be published for distribution to staff on Compass and to College Councilors each February.

Revision Date:	Council Ratification Date:	Summary of Changes	Prepared/Approved By:
12/08/2020	19/10/2020	Policy Creation	Gregory McMahan
20/01/2021 V1.1	Approved by College Council 16/02/21	Update and checked against the Policy and Advisory Library (PAL)	Jason Patten
10/10/2021 V1.2	Approved by College Council Dec 2021	Update and checked against the Policy and Advisory Library (PAL)	Jason Patten

Purpose

Hallam Senior College is committed to ensuring all staff are provided with sufficient information on the departments policies and procedures.

The purpose of this policy and procedure is to outline Hallam Senior College's approach to ensuring staff have access to adequate information about all the departments policies and procedures.

Along with other policies and procedures, this contributes to ensuring compliance with relevant legislation including but not limited to Training Reform Act 2006 VIC, Financial Management Act 1994 VIC and Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017.

PARENT PAYMENT POLICY

1. PURPOSE

To ensure that parent payment practices are consistent, transparent and ensure that all children have access to the standard curriculum.

2. RATIONALE

The Victorian community shares a vision to build an education system that champions excellence and ensures that every child and young person has access to the opportunities to succeed in life, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Colleges are best placed to make local decisions which ensure that all students can access a broad range of learning opportunities that support their expectations and promote their aspirations as they move through the education system. Parent contribution, in all forms, assists colleges to provide an enriched learning and teaching program for every student and is highly valued by college communities.

Learning and teaching programs vary across colleges based on local needs and circumstances and reflect each college's priorities, decisions and resources. This, in turn, informs the parent payment charges approved by college councils that may vary from one college to the next.

3. WHAT CAN COLLEGES CHARGE FOR?

The Education and Training Reform Act 2006 provides for instruction in the standard curriculum program to be free to all students in government colleges. College councils are responsible for developing and approving college-level parent payment charges and can request payments from parents¹ under three categories only- Essential Student Learning Items, Optional Items and Voluntary Financial Contributions.

Essential Student Learning Items are those items, activities or services that are essential to support student learning of the standard curriculum. These are items that the college considers essential for all students and which students take possession of. Parents may choose to provide the items themselves or buy the items from the college where practical and appropriate.

Optional Items are those items, activities or services that are offered in addition to or support instruction in the standard curriculum program. These are provided on a user-pays basis so that if parents choose to access them for students, they are required to pay for them.

Voluntary Financial Contributions

Parents can be invited to make a donation to the college for a general or specific purpose, e.g. college grounds projects, library fund or for new equipment. Only some Voluntary Financial Contributions are tax-deductible.

The diagram below "Understanding Parent Payment Categories" provides examples of items and materials under each category.

¹ Parent' in the policy has the same meaning as in the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*, which is: 'parent', in relation to a child, includes a guardian and every person who has parental responsibility for the child including parental responsibility under the *Family Law Act 1975* of the Commonwealth and any person with whom a child normally or regularly resides.

In implementing this policy, colleges must adhere to the following principles:

- **Educational value:** Student learning, aspirations and wellbeing are paramount when colleges determine their parent payments practices
- **Access, equity and inclusion:** All students have access to the standard curriculum program and participation of all students to the full college program is facilitated
- **Affordability:** Cost to parents is kept to a minimum and is affordable for most families at the college
- **Engagement and Support:** Early identification and engagement strategies by the college ensure parents are well informed of the payment options and supports available for those experiencing hardship
- **Respect and Confidentiality:** Parents and students experiencing hardship are treated with respect, dignity, sensitivity and without judgement and the identity and personal information of all parents and students are kept confidential in respect to parent payments
- **Transparency and Accountability:** College parent payment practices are well communicated, clear and transparent and their impact on student programs and families are reviewed by college councils

4. COST AND SUPPORT TO PARENTS

When college councils consider the proposed requests for parent payments the cost is kept to a minimum and is affordable to most parents at the college.

College principals must ensure that:

- items students consume or take possession of are accurately costed
- payment requests are broadly itemised within the appropriate category
- parents are advised that they have the option of purchasing equivalent Essential Student Learning Items themselves, in consultation with the college
- information on payment options is available, accessible and easily understood to all parents so that they know what to expect and what supports they can access
- parents are provided with early notice of annual payment requests for college fees (i.e. a minimum of six weeks' notice prior to the end of the previous college year). This enables parents to save and budget accordingly.
- parents are provided with reasonable notice of any other payment requests that arise during the college year- ensuring parents have a clear understanding of the full financial contribution being sought
- the status and details of any financial arrangements are kept confidential and only shared with relevant college personnel
- parents experiencing hardship are not pursued for outstanding college fees from one year to the next
- use of debt collectors to obtain outstanding college funds owed to the college from parents is not permitted
- there will be only one reminder notice to parents for voluntary financial contributions per year
- Invoices/statements for unpaid essential or optional items accepted by parents are not generated more than monthly or according to the parent payment arrangement with the college.

5. SUPPORT TO PARENTS

Families may experience financial difficulties and may be unable to meet the full or part payments requested. Principals and college councils exercise sensitivity to the differing financial circumstances of students and their families when considering parent payment fees. There are a range of support options available to support and assist parents. These can be accessed through [“Cost support for families.”](#)

Consideration to hardship arrangements in respect to payment requests is provided to families experiencing long term hardship or short term crisis on a confidential, case by case basis. All colleges have written hardship arrangements that include a proactive approach to providing support for parents experiencing financial difficulty.

All parents are provided the name and contact details of a nominated parent payment contact person at the college who they can discuss payment arrangements with.

6. ENGAGING WITH PARENTS

In respect to each college’s development of its parent payments, college councils will engage in effective communication with the college community and have strategies in place to ensure they are aware of and understand the needs and views of parents.

7. REVIEW OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Colleges will monitor the effectiveness and impact of the implementation of this policy at least annually as part of its ongoing improvement and report back to the college community.

The full Parent Payment Policy is available from the Department’s [College Policy and Advisory Guide](#).

Answers to the most commonly asked questions about college costs for parents see:

[Frequently Asked Questions – For Parents](#)

Understanding Parent Payment Categories

Schools

What does the legislation say?

The Education and Training Reform Act (2006) provides for free instruction in the standard curriculum program to all students in government schools. The Act also empowers school councils to charge fees to parents for goods and services provided by the school to a child.

In the Act, a 'Parent' includes a guardian and every person who has parental responsibility for a child including parental responsibility under the Commonwealth Family Law Act 1975 and any person with whom a child normally or regularly resides.

What do schools pay for as part of 'free instruction'?



Free instruction is the teaching staff, administration and the provision of facilities in connection with the instruction of the standard curriculum program, including reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities.

The standard curriculum for Years F-10 means implementation of the Victorian Curriculum F-10.

The standard curriculum for senior secondary schools means a program that enables a student to be awarded a VCE or VCAL qualification.

What principles govern parent payment practice?

Educational Value | Access, Equity & Inclusion | Affordability

Engagement & Support | Respect & Confidentiality | Transparency & Accountability

Parents

What may parents be asked to pay for?

Schools can request payment for Essential Student Learning Items



These are items, activities or services that the school deems **essential** to student learning of the standard curriculum.

Where practical and appropriate, parents may choose to purchase items through the school or provide their own.

These may also be either:

Items the student takes temporary or permanent possession of

- e.g.
- textbooks, activity books, exercise books
 - stationery, book bags
 - student ID cards, locks
 - cooking ingredients students will consume
 - materials for final products that students take home (technology projects, build-your-own kits, dioramas)
 - Picture Exchange Communication Systems

Activities associated with instruction that all students are expected to attend

i.e. travel, entry fees or accommodation

- e.g.
- excursions
 - incursions
 - school sports
 - work placements



Parents can be asked to pay for items, activities and services in the three Parent Payment Categories:

Essential Student Learning Items, Optional Items and Voluntary Financial Contributions.

Schools determine how items, activities and services are classified within these categories based on the learning and teaching program of their school.

Schools can request payment for Optional Items

These are items, activities or services that are **optional** and are offered in addition to the standard curriculum.

Students may access these on a user-pays basis.

These may be either:

Items the student purchases or hires

- e.g.
- school magazines, class photos
 - functions, formals, graduation dinners
 - materials for extra curricular programs
 - student accident insurance

Activities the student purchases

- e.g.
- fees for extra curricular programs or activities, such as instrumental music tuition
 - fees for guest speakers
 - camps, excursions, incursions, sports
 - entry fees for school run performances

Items and/or materials that are more expensive than required to meet the standard curriculum

- e.g.
- use of silver in metal work instead of copper
 - supplementary exam revision guides

Support for families experiencing hardship is available at every school and each school has a parent payment contact person. See your school's policy for more information.

For more information on Parent Payments and Personal Devices, visit the DET website at: www.education.vic.gov.au

Schools can invite

Voluntary Financial Contributions for



- e.g.
- Building or Library fund (Tax deductible)
 - Voluntary contributions for a specific purpose, such as equipment, materials, services.
 - General voluntary contributions

8. PARENT PAYMENT CHARGES

The Education and Training Reform Act 2006 provides for instruction in the standard curriculum program to be free to all students in government colleges. College councils are responsible for developing and approving college-level parent payment charges and can request payments from parents under three categories only- Essential Student Learning Items, Optional Items and Voluntary Financial Contributions.

Essential Student Learning Items

- Materials for electives that involve making an item for consumption (such as food technology, ceramics, media, etc.)
- Excursions that all students are expected to attend (including transport and admission costs)
- Purchase of combination lock (secondary)
- Audio-visual resources
- Textbooks, stationery
- College diary

Schools can issue reminder notices to families for unpaid Essential Student Learning Items and Optional Items, but no more than once per term.

Optional Items:

- Participation in competitions
- Camps and Excursions

These are provided on a user-pays basis so that if parents choose to access them for students, they are required to pay for them.

Voluntary Financial Contributions

- Parents can be invited to make a donation to the college for a general or specific purpose, e.g. college building and library fund or for new equipment. Only some Voluntary Financial Contributions are tax-deductible.
- The attached diagram "**Understanding Parent Payment Categories**" provides examples of items and materials under each category.

Payment requests support/enrich the college's learning/teaching program by providing quality programs and a comfortable and efficient learning environment for our students. The College Charges are designed to supplement the Government's allocation to colleges to provide materials and services. These charges enable us to enrich and extend the learning experiences of our students.

9. PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND METHODS

Payments can be made in full or by instalments using the following methods:

- Cash/cheque/EFTPOS at college administration
- BPAY
- Monthly Credit Card Direct debits
- Centrepay

10. FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS

- CSEF
- State School Relief
- Smith Family Scholarships
- Various humanitarian organisations eg: AMES, Red Cross, DHHS

11. CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP

The college will provide support to parents experiencing hardship through the following avenues:

Assessment of Parental hardship

The College will consider hardship arrangements for families who are experiencing chronic, long-term financial hardship or short-term crises on a case-by-case basis for assistance with Essential Student Learning Items. Families experiencing hardship should contact a member of the Principal team or Business Manager to investigate what assistance the College may be able to provide. Please contact the College at 9703 126.

Long Term Hardship

Families in possession of a valid means-tested concession card and/or the receipt of Centrelink benefits or allowances will be deemed to be experiencing long-term hardship.

The college will identify families who may be experiencing hardship through liaison with:

- College Wellbeing Team,
- College Community Team,
- College staff
- Various Supporting Agencies

12. COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES

A letter from the Principal and the School Council President will be sent to all families in November/December, including the information about categories of parent payments.

Parents will receive advance notification of the parent payments sought in November or December (i.e. a minimum of six weeks' notice prior to the end of the previous school year). Whilst immediate payment is preferred, parents are not required to make payments until the following year.

Any parent having difficulty meeting payment is to be encouraged to contact a member of the Principal team or Business Manager to negotiate a lesser amount they can afford and/or a payment timeline that is suitable.

Families in difficulty should be referred to support services such as State Schools' Relief and Smith Family Invoices/statements for unpaid essential or optional items accepted by parents are not generated more than monthly or according to the parent payment arrangement with the school.

During the year only two requests will be sent to parents, the second being a reminder notice for voluntary contributions.

Parents can raise any issues and make general inquiries about charges with any member of the Principal team and/or the Business Manager at any time.

The policy will be placed on the COMPASS parent portal and the College website.

13. MONITORING AND REVIEW OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS POLICY

It is the College Council's responsibility to monitor the implementation of the policy. The College Council will monitor the implementation of the policy by ensuring the following:

- items students consume or take possession of are accurately costed;
- payment requests are broadly itemised within the appropriate category;
- information on payment options is available, accessible and easily understood to all parents so that they know what to expect and what supports they can access;
- parents are provided with early notice of annual payment requests for college fees (i.e. a minimum of six weeks' notice prior to the end of the previous college year). This enables parents to save and budget accordingly;
- parents are provided with reasonable notice of any other payment requests that arise during the college year- ensuring parents have a clear understanding of the full financial contribution being sought;
- the status and details of any financial arrangements are kept confidential and only shared with relevant college personnel;
- there will be only one reminder notice to parents for voluntary financial contributions per year; and Invoices/statements for unpaid essential or optional items accepted by parents are not generated more than monthly or according to the parent payment arrangement with the college
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The college leadership team will report on this to the College Council on a regular basis.