Legal Services of Eastern Missouri
Action.Justice.Hope.

Education Justice Program
Advancing education equity and racial justice for all children.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: SCHOOL FINES AND FEES

Did you know? The Missouri Constitution guarantees "**free public schools**" for all people under age 21. Courts have determined that school districts cannot charge registration fees or fees for classes where academic credit is given—even small fees. While fines for extreme damage to less important materials may be allowed, no fine or fee should create a **barrier** to actual learning or graduation. For students with disabilities and students experiencing homelessness, districts may have even more specific requirements to waive fines and fees. If a fine or fee is preventing your child from accessing some part of their public education, consider seeking legal advice about your situation.

What Are School Fines and Fees?

Fine: monetary charge imposed on families in K-12 public schools as a penalty, such as a charge for a lost or damaged Chromebook

Fee: monetary charge imposed on families in K-12 public schools in exchange for receiving something, such as a charge that must be paid to get school lunch

Examples of School Fines and Fees

- Charges for school registration or enrollment (*always unlawful*!)
- Charges for technology (i.e., laptops, chargers, etc.)
- Charges for library books or textbooks
- Charges for school uniforms
- Charges for replacement student IDs or hall passes
- Charges for late caregiver pick-up
- Charges for extracurricular activities
- Charges for graduation events or materials
- Charges for damaged school property

Red Flags: What to Watch Out For

- Delays in being able to register for school due to outstanding fines/fees
- Not being able to get a new technology device—especially if it is used throughout the school day and necessary for education
- Being forced to sign an agreement binding you to fines/fees with no opt-out
- Not being able to graduate, receive a diploma, or move on to the next grade level due to outstanding fines/fees
- Fines/fees that treat students differently based on race, gender, or disability status

Education Justice Program
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