Merchantville Board of Education 130 South Centre Street Merchantville, NJ 08109	File Code : 9250 Adopted : 09/27/88 Revised : 08/14/07 Revised : 03/13/2017 Reviewed: : **02/05/2024**

Expenses and Reimbursements

Board members receive no payment for their services. With board approval, they may be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses incurred on board business.

Travel and Related Expenses

Travel reimbursement will be paid only upon compliance with the board's policy provisions and approval requirements. Board members and employees shall only be reimbursed for work-related travel that is directly related to and within the scope of the board member's and employee's current work responsibilities. Board members and employees shall only be reimbursed for travel that:

A. Promotes the delivery of instruction and is critical to the instructional needs of the school district or furthers the efficient operation of the school district,

B. Is educationally necessary and fiscally prudent, and

C. Is directly related to and within the scope of the board member's current responsibilities, and for school district employees, the school district's professional development plan.

As described in this policy, school district travel expenditures include, but are not limited to, all costs for transportation, meals, lodging, and registration or conference fees to and for the travel event. School district travel expenditures include costs for all required training and all travel authorized in existing school district employee contracts and school board policies. This includes, but is not limited to, required professional development and other staff training, required training for new school board members, and attendance at specific conferences authorized in existing employee contracts.

Travel Payments

Travel payments will be paid only upon compliance with the school board's policy provisions and approval requirements. The school board will not ratify or approve payments or reimbursements for travel after completion of the travel event. All board members and employees shall adhere to the following specifications to be considered for reimbursement:

A. Reimbursement may not exceed State travel reimbursement guidelines as established by the NJ Department of Treasury in NJOMB circular letters, including but not limited to the types of travel, methods of transportation, mileage allowance, meal allowance, overnight travel and supporting documentation.

B. Reimbursement must also be in compliance with OMB Circular 6-11-OMB (found at http://www.state.nj.us/infobank/circular/cirindx/htm No reimbursement will be issued without submission of written documentation such as receipts, checks and vouchers detailing the amount of each expenditure. Such documentation must be submitted within a timeframe to be established by the board.

C. Travel expenditures must be in compliance with state travel payment guidelines as established by the Department of the Treasury and with guidelines established by the federal Office of Management and Budget; except that those guidelines that conflict with the provisions of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes shall not be applicable, including, but not limited to, the authority to issue travel charge cards.

The board of education shall comply with the applicable restrictions and requirements set forth in the State and federal guidelines including, but not limited to, types of travel, methods of transportation, mileage allowance, subsistence allowance, and submission of supporting documentation including receipts, checks or vouchers.

D. Board members and employees shall provide within one week, a brief report that includes, as appropriate, but may not be limited to, a description of the primary purpose for the travel, and a summary of the goals and key issues that were addressed at the event and their relevance to improving instruction or the operation of the school district. This report will be submitted to the board secretary or other appropriate party designated by the board.

E. Pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-5.8 concerning out-of state and high-cost travel events, out-of-state travel shall be limited to the fewest number of board members or employees needed to present the content at the conclusion of the event. Lodging may only be provided if the event occurs on two or more consecutive days and where home-to-event commute exceeds 50 miles. Prior written approval of the executive county superintendent may be required when the travel event has a total cost that exceeds $5000.

In addition to the requirements above, employee travel, to be reimbursable, must be directly related to the employee's professional development. No district employee shall be reimbursed for travel and related expenses without prior written approval of the chief school administrator and prior approval by a majority of the full voting membership of the board (as set forth below).

Prior Approval is Required

Board members shall only be reimbursed for travel and related expenses that have received prior approval by a majority of the full voting membership of the board, and are in compliance with N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24 and 24.1 of the School Ethics Act.

A. Specifically, a board member must recuse himself from voting on travel if the board member, a member of his immediate family, or a business organization in which he has an interest, has a direct or indirect financial involvement that may reasonably be expected to impair his objectivity or independence of judgment.

B. Also, a board member shall not: act in his official capacity in any matter in which he or a member of his immediate family has a personal involvement that is or creates some benefit to the school official or member of his immediate family; or undertake any employment or service, whether compensated or not, which may reasonably be expected to prejudice his independence of judgment in the execution of his official duties.

C. For employees, the board requires that travel occur only upon prior written approval of the chief school administrator and prior approval by a majority of the full voting membership of the board.

D. For board members, travel may occur only upon prior approval by a majority of the full voting membership of the board and that the travel be in compliance with section 4 of P.L.1991, c.393 (C.18A:12-24) and section 5 of P.L.2001, c.178 (C.18A:12-24.1).

Regular Business Travel Authorization and Approval

Regular business travel, such as NJDOE meetings and association events, is authorized by the board not to exceed $1,500 per employee, pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-7.3(b). Approval by the superintendent or designee is required, including justification for the travel. Regular business travel is authorized for regularly scheduled in-state professional development activities for which the registration fee does not exceed $150 per employee or board member.

School District Travel Advances are Banned

An employee of the school board, a school board member, or organization, shall not receive an amount for travel and travel-related expenses in advance of the travel, pursuant to N.J.S.A.18A:19-1 et seq.

Annual Maximum Travel Expenditure Amount

The board shall:

A. Allot in its annual budget a maximum travel expenditure amount and annually review its policy to assure that it properly reflects the amount budgeted.

B. Vote to authorize each reimbursement; specifying the way in which it promotes the delivery of instruction or furthers the efficient operation of the school district, within the maximum annual amount.

C. Annually in the pre-budget year, establish by school board resolution, a maximum travel expenditure amount for the budget year, which the school district shall not exceed in that budget year. The school board resolution shall also include the maximum amount established for the pre-budget year and the amount spent to date.

D. Provide that the maximum school district travel expenditure amount shall include all travel in accordance with this policy supported by local and State funds.

Additional Detailed Accounting Requirements which Demonstrate Compliance

In order to demonstrate compliance with this policy, documentation of all reimbursed travel expenses shall be maintained on file. This record may include receipts, checks and vouchers submitted in connection with any reimbursement. The district shall maintain separate accounting for school district travel expenditures as necessary, to ensure compliance with the school district's maximum travel expenditure amount. This may include, but need not be limited to, a separate or offline accounting of such expenditures or expanding the school district's accounting system. The tracking system shall be sufficient to demonstrate compliance with the board's policy and this section, and shall provide auditable information.

To minimize travel expenditures, school boards and staff will take the following steps:

A. "Retreats" will be held at school district facilities, if available. A retreat is a meeting of school district employees and school board members, held away from the normal work environment, at which organizational goals and objectives are discussed.

B. A school district shall not bare costs for car rentals, limousine services, and chauffeuring costs to or during the event, as well as costs for employee attendance for coordinating other attendee accommodations at the travel event.

C. One-day trips that do not involve overnight lodging are not eligible for a subsistence payment or reimbursement except in limited circumstances authorized in Department of the Treasury guidelines.

D. Overnight travel is eligible for a subsistence payment or reimbursement as authorized in Department of the Treasury guidelines, except as otherwise superseded by the following:

1. Per diem payment or reimbursement for lodging and meals will be actual reasonable costs, not to exceed the federal per diem rates as established in the federal register for the current year;

2. Lodging expenses may exceed the federal per diem rates if the hotel is the site of the convention, conference, seminar or meeting and the going rate of the hotel is in excess of the federal per diem rates. If the hotel at the site of the convention, conference, seminar, or meeting is no longer available, lodging may be paid for similar accommodations at a rate not to exceed the hotel rate for the event;

3. Receipts are required for hotel expenses. Meal expenses under the federal per diem allowance limits do not require receipts;

4. In any case in which the total per diem reimbursement is greater than the federal per diem rate, except when the going rate for lodging at the site of the convention or meeting exceeds federal per diem rates, the costs will be considered to be excessive and shall not be paid by school district funds;

5. School districts shall patronize hotels and motels that offer special rates to government employees unless alternative lodging offers greater cost benefits; and

6. Payment or reimbursement is approved for the full cost of an official convention meal that the employee or school board member attends, when the meal is scheduled as an integral part of the convention or conference proceedings. If a meal is included in the registration fee, the allowance for the meal is not eligible for reimbursement.

7. Air and rail tickets shall be purchased via the internet, if possible, using online travel services such as Travelocity, Expedia, Hotwire or Priceline.

Blanket or general pre-approval for travel is not authorized and will not be permitted by the board. Specifically, approval shall be itemized by event, event total cost, a number of employees and school board members attending the event. However a school board may also approve, at any time prior to the event, travel for multiple months as long as the school board approval, as detailed in school board minutes, itemizes the approval by event, total cost, number of employees and school board members attending the event.

Types of Expenditures Not Eligible for Reimbursement

Unnecessary and excessive travel expenditures as listed in N.J.A.C. 6A:23A:7.8 are prohibited. Prohibited types of expenditures include: travel by spouses and other relatives; costs for unnecessary employee attendance (for example employees who merely coordinate other attendees' accommodations at the travel event); charges for laundry, valet service and entertainment; district payment for alcoholic beverages; excessive tipping and gratuities; airfare without documentation of at least three (3) price quotes; and souvenirs. Travel expenses, subsistence expenses and incidental travel expenses shall only be allowable when consistent with N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-7.

Penalties

The board by this policy informs its members and staff that the penalties for violating this policy based on state law includes:

A. By law, any district board of education that violates its established maximum travel expenditure, or that otherwise is not in compliance with the travel limitations set forth in this section may be subject to sanctions by the commissioner as authorized pursuant to N.J.S.A.18A:4-23 and N.J.S.A.18A:4-24, including reduction of State aid in an amount equal to any excess expenditure.

B. A person who approves any travel in violation of the school district's policy or this section shall be required to reimburse the school district in an amount equal to three times the cost associated with attending the event.

C. An employee or member of the board of education who travels in violation of the school district's policy or this section shall be required to reimburse the school district in an amount equal to three times the cost associated with attending the event.

The chief school administrator may develop regulations to implement this policy.

Mandated:

Travel and Related Expenses

Assembly bill A5 was signed into law as P.L. 2007, c. 53, on March 15, 2007, effective immediately. Section 15 of A5 concerns travel expenditures for "training and seminars," for "conventions and conferences," for "regular school district business," and for "retreats." It does not refer to student field trips.

The intent of this legislation is to strictly prohibit extravagant travel expenditures and to make boards "fiscally prudent" in their policies and reimbursements for expenditures. All boards must have travel policies that conform to the legislation, to monitor and restrict reimbursement of travel and related expenses. For example, travel advances are banned. P.L. 2007, c. 53 applies to both Abbott districts and other districts, including charter schools. Since P.L. 2007, c. 53 applies to all districts; NJSBA has a single unified travel policy.

The policy allows board members and employees to be reimbursed for travel and related expenses that are directly related to the school district professional plan; that are limited in scope, educationally necessary, and fiscally prudent. Travel shall be critical to the instructional needs of the district or further the efficient operation of the district. Reimbursement is limited to the guidelines established by the Department of Treasury in the NJOMB circular 16-11-OMB (found at http://www.state.nj.us/infobank/circular/circindx.htm). Any violation of these established maximum travel expenditures as set forth in the above policy may be subject to reduction of state aid in an amount equal to the excess expenditure. There are additional personal "treble damages" penalties for unauthorized travel.

Key Words

Reimbursement of Board Members, Board Member Reimbursement, Board Member Expenses, Employee Reimbursement, Employee Expenses

Legal References:		
N.J.S.A.	18A:2-1	Power to effectuate action
N.J.S.A.	18A:4-23 and 24	Supervision of schools; enforcement of rules Determining efficiency of schools; report to state board
N.J.S.A.	18A:11-1	General mandatory powers and duties
N.J.S.A.	18A:12-4	Compensation of members
N.J.S.A.	18A:12-24 and 24.1	School Ethics Act Code of Ethics
N.J.S.A.	18A:54-20	Powers of board (county vocational schools)

N.J.S.A. 18A:55-3 School districts, conditions for receipt of State aid; efficiency standards

N.J.S.A.	6A:23A-5.9	Out of state and high cost travel
N.J.S.A.	6A:23A-7.1 et. seq	Travel Reimbursement
P.L.	2005, c.132	Appropriations Act
P.L.	2007, c. 52	A5, provides for various school district accountability measures

See also: In the Matter of Anthony Esgro, Luis Perez, Clifford Meeks and Frank

Speziali, Glassboro Board of Education, CO7-97, March 30, 1998

Possible Cross References:

3571	Financial reports
*9200	Orientation and training of board members
*9270	Conflict of interest

*Indicates policy is included in the Critical Policy Reference Manual.

NJSBA Date: 01/09