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## Fees can be waived for needy students

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raised for."

Linda Rossi, a Newmarket mother of three and co-chairperson of the Newmarket High School parent council, has always been rubbed the wrong way by user fees.

High school has become much more expensive for families as less is covered by provincial funding, she said, referring to the York board's decision to no longer offer transportation to those who can take public transit to school.

"Fundraising and fees, to me, should be about paying for things over and above the classroom learning experience, like field trips," she said. "Asking for money in a core subject just seems wrong."

She questions who makes the decisions on what will be covered as essential learning tools and what is constituted as an extra, since her daughter was charged a fee for materials in her art class and her son for wood in shop class, yet students taking a computer course aren't asked to cover the cost of the pricey technology or Internet use.

When the first bell of the year rings Tuesday, she figures she will be handing over about \$100 right off the bat to pay for the courses her children have selected. That doesn't include back-to-school supplies or take into account the rest of the fees she will cover throughout the year.

"I don't know how parents in low-income families can afford it. Heck, I remember taking home economics in high school and it didn't cost me a dime to bake, cook or sew," she said. "And it seems wrong for schools to have to raise funds for library books when

these elements should be covered by the government as they are essential."

She questions the public board's policy that states funds raised may not be used to purchase core learning materials or items covered by the provincial funding formula.

But if a student must purchase materials to complete a course, is it not considered an essential learning material, she asks.

Under the policy, program participation fees cover the costs of such things as art and carpentry supplies.

It is standard practice to charge a fee for materials that are used up or expended during a course, public board spokesperson Ross Virgo said.

Fees are usually charged if the course uses materials to add to the classroom experience that isn't laid out in the Ontario curriculum such as non-textbooks, speakers, course packs and field trips. However, Mr. Virgo pointed out these fees cannot stand in the way of student success and, when the concern is raised, the school will figure out how to waive a fee for students and families who cannot afford it.

He admits \$34 million is a large figure, however included in that number are funds raised for charity through the schools, including Haitian relief efforts, Jump Rope for Heart, Terry Fox Run, the Stephen Lewis Foundation and others. Next year, the board will separate those figures, as dictated by the education ministry.

The ministry committed to developing a fundraising policy to guarantee school councils' control over funds raised and to limit fundraising by ensuring education essentials are provided by the system. But that policy is still at least two years away, the report states.

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