

Important SPS Building Use Information for PTAs and PTSAs

This summer, SPS and SCPTSA have been working together to revise SPS facility-use policies and procedures to ensure that activities supporting youth education are not charged rent by SPS. Here is information for PTA and PTSAs leaders to navigate these changes.

1. Latest Information on Policies and Procedures

In the summer of 2012, Seattle Public Schools implemented a new building reservation system to more efficiently bill outside groups rent for using SPS buildings. As a result, PTAs, PTSAs, and their activity vendors faced unexpected rental fees and restrictions for after-school programs and other activities.

SCPTSA leaders facilitated numerous meetings between district staff and PTA representatives, which culminated in a promise not to charge PTAs and their activity vendors rent for the 2012-2013 school year. SCPTSA and other community groups continued to engage with staff and school board members in the subsequent months on policy and procedure questions related to facility use. By June 2013, an updated Use of School Facilities (4260) policy and procedure were drafted.

The revised policy draft is headed toward committee and school board approval this fall. **A draft procedure reflecting that policy is being implemented for the start of the 2013-2014 school year**, along with procedural changes and clarifications. For PTAs, the updates and clarifications affect a range of uses, from evening PTA meetings or family events, to before- and after-school programs, chess tournaments, and weekend events, to using another school's auditorium or other special facility. Posted August 29:

[DRAFT Board Policy 4260: Use of School Facilities](#)

[DRAFT Superintendent Procedure 4260SP: Use of School Facilities](#)

[Request for Rental Fee Waiver](#)

Most important: PTAs should not be charged rent by the district for

use of schools facilities, provided that certain requirements are met and that the use is in "support of youth education," as defined in the proposed policy revision. In some cases, other fees may apply in order for the district to recoup the direct costs, such as heating or custodial services for holiday and weekend events.

Also important: A new rent-waiver request form must be submitted in addition to online reservation requests.

Other Highlights:

- PTAs can make all the reservations for their enrichment program space needs, instead of having activity vendors make the reservations. Reservations don't need to specify up front which vendors will use those spaces. This allows PTAs to secure space early and assign it later, as class registrations firm up.
- PTAs can complete a single rent-waiver form for a larger set of reservations without specifying exactly which vendor is using which room at what time (though they must also submit a list of vendors and activities for review and approval by the principal). Again, this allows the PTA to complete the rent-waiver request form early but maintain the flexibility to assign space later according to program, school, and registration needs.
- Building Schedulers (the designated administrative staff in your school) can make reservations on behalf of the PTAs, under the PTA account name. Building Schedulers can also make alterations to those reservations, including adding the name of the activity vendor using a space, once assigned.
- Reservations can be made and approved now for upcoming PTA events and other school-affiliated uses, per the "Priority Among Users" section of the procedure.

The new draft procedure has been reorganized and includes a helpful new overview of the permitting process. We strongly recommend that PTA event and activity planners read the procedure, since it's new to everyone-including school and facilities staff.

2. Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What are the policy requirements for rent-free use of facilities by PTAs?

A: In summary, the activity must be open to all students, first-come, first-served, but the policy allows for ability-based grouping and for limiting of

participation in tutoring, based on need. Also, there is an expectation that scholarships be offered to allow access to students with low income.

Q: What are the procedural requirements for rent-free use of facilities?

A: Key among them are:

- An online reservation under the PTA's legal name
- A completed rent-waiver request form submitted and approved by the school principal
- Current certificate of PTA insurance reflected in the PTA's account in the online reservation system (following verification by the Building Rentals office)

Q: Is there a specific scholarship requirement by the district, in exchange for free rent for enrichment programs?

A: No. In order to allow flexibility for varying school circumstances and program arrangements, a set scholarship policy was not put into place. However, rent-waivers are offered with the expectation that the facility use is for the benefit of students and that low income should not be a barrier to enrichment opportunities. A target guideline might be the equivalent of one full scholarship per 10 paying students. Other programs might offer reduced rate classes for all students to increase access. Some schools with high need and limited spots may also find other creative means to provide access to the most students possible throughout the year.

Q: Is it only PTAs that are receiving free rent?

A: No, the policy draft on Use of School Facilities opens the door for free rent for all uses that are in "support of youth education," provided the use meets certain requirements. Instead of focusing on types of *organizations*, the new policy focuses on categories of "*use*."

Q: Who should reserve rooms for PTA-coordinated before- and after-school activities when the program includes outside vendors?

A: Online reservations for all use within a PTA-coordinated program can be made by the PTA or by a school's "Building Scheduler" on behalf of the PTA. This approach allows the PTA to secure the space needed for the whole program-which may include activities led by parent volunteers, outside vendors, and teachers from within the school-and then to assign the space as appropriate. However, it is also possible for an outside activity vendor to request their own reservation, in which case they must submit a completed rent-waiver request form directly to the principal.

Q: Who needs to complete the rent-waiver form?

A: The PTA (or other organization making a reservation) needs to complete the form for every reservation or related set of reservations. For example, a PTA may submit a single form covering all related reservations for its fall enrichment program, provided that all outside vendors are listed *and* that those outside vendors are registered in the online reservation system with current insurance policy information.

Q: Why is a rent-waiver form needed when the updated policy already specifies which uses qualify as rent-free?

A: Accountability. Principals must approve all facility use in their school and are accountable to sign the rent-waiver forms confirming that the requested use meets the policy requirements for rent-free use of facilities. Also, when a PTA requests space that is used by an outside vendor within an enrichment program, the waiver form allows for identification of all such vendors, so that district staff can then verify that the vendor has updated insurance policy information for their organization in the online system.

Q: Why is the district using a paper form when reservations are done online?

A: Lacking an immediate online solution, the district intends the rent-waiver request form to provide a paper trail the next time auditors ask for justification that a particular use qualified as rent-free.

Q: Which PTA events and activities need reservations?

A. *All use of school facilities outside of normal school hours* requires a reservation. If an event is truly a school event (like an open house or school concert), or if someone is volunteering for the school directly, then it's not a PTA event, even if PTA members help. But if it's a harvest night party or other event organized by the PTA, then it's a PTA event (even though it's really for the school).

Q: Why don't I see any changes in the official school board policy or superintendent procedure online?

A: Policy 4260 (Use of School Facilities) and its accompanying procedure have recently been revised (links above). The policy is headed for formal board approval in fall 2013 and the draft procedure is being implemented as of August 2013. Also, procedure 4265SP (School and Community Partnerships) ends with a now-outdated section on before and after school activities at school, which needs to be updated as well. The outdated

versions are still online until the new policy is officially adopted.

Q: Our PTA (or our activity provider) has recently gotten an invoice for facility use for last year. Why? What should we do?

A: The SPS accounting department is catching up on a backlog of invoices from Building Rentals, but it may not be clear now which reservations qualified for rent waivers. Besides unnerving PTAs, receiving such invoices may unnerve some activity providers causing them to raise prices due to uncertainty about what future fees may surface.

What to do? Straight from Bruce Skowyra, Director of Facilities: "Have the principal sign the invoice confirming use was for approved youth enrichment and the rental fees will be waived. Send the signed invoice to accounting and they will void the invoice."

Also, remember to distinguish between charges for rent versus other charges, such as fees for heat and custodial services. It's possible that charges for certain services are legitimate, if an event was on weekend or extra services were requested, for example.

Q: How can we ensure our events and clubs are covered by insurance?

A: PTAs should ensure that their own insurance is in effect for all PTA-sponsored events and activities. AIM insurance has several requirements for PTA-sponsored events, including: the event must be voted on by the PTA Board, it must be approved by the PTA Board, and a PTA member must be present at the event. For more information, go to [AIM's Knowledge Center](#), and its [FAQs](#). An overview, including Q&As with an AIM representative, was prepared in spring 2013, with a focus on after-school programs. Find it on the [Seattle Council PTSA website](#). The [Washington State PTA](#) is also a resource for questions about the liability of PTAs for various programs and events.

Official school and district-sponsored events are covered by district insurance. In addition, instructors paid via the school to teach in after-school programs are covered by district insurance.

Any outside vendors providing services for a PTA-sponsored or coordinated event must have their own insurance, as required by the school district. The vendor should submit a certificate of insurance coverage and any renewals to SPS Building Rentals. The district is

responsible for verifying that facility users maintain current insurance coverage; verified insurance coverage will be reflected in the organization's account in the online reservation system.

Q: If we make all of our after-school class and club room reservations through the PTA account, how will the district know which vendors we're using so that district staff can verify the vendors' insurance?

A: PTAs must submit rent-waiver request forms, including a list of all activities and their providers/sponsors (e.g. outside vendor or PTA club). The district will use this list to verify that a record of current insurance coverage is reflected in the vendor's online account.

Q: Who on our PTA should have an account in the system?

A: It's up to your PTA to decide. More than one person can create an account and be associated with your PTA in the system, so you might have one person making after-school activity reservations and another making event and meeting reservations. Whoever's account is associated with a reservation is also the person who will receive email confirmations, updates, and correspondence regarding the reservation. That user/requester also needs to submit a rent-waiver request form to the school that corresponds directly to a specific online reservation or set of reservations.

Q: Are there cases when a school can charge its own PTA, another school's PTA, or an outside group rent for use of facilities?

A: SCPTSA's understanding is that all facilities are owned by the district for the benefit of students and youth education. They are not intended to be moneymakers for the district or individual schools. The only legitimate site-based charges are reasonable fees for use or operation of special equipment owned by a school-related organization or possibly those that the school is responsible for maintaining. But if the equipment is owned by the district, or was granted by the district, then it's questionable whether (or how much) schools or school-related organizations should charge for its use. There is gray area here and a lack of clear guidelines.

Q: Tracking requirements for the different types of instructors in our program is confusing. How can I get a grip on this!?

A: Start with the [Activity Provider Matrix](#) posted on the SCPTSA website.

3. What should PTAs do now? Recommendations:

- **Make sure your PTA has one or more members with accounts in the reservation system** (aka FS Direct, the Community Use site, or SchoolDude). You can start at the [SPS Building Rentals webpage](#) and click the link to the "SPS Community Use site." It can take time for accounts to get approved, so create any new accounts needed before you need to make reservations. Online accounts are created by individuals, in their name, and then associated with one or more "organizations." (Your PTA is the organization.)
- **Make sure your PTA has the organization type "Group 1a - Community, Rent Waived."** There can be more than one version of any given organization within the system, so create another version of your organization in the system if your PTA is somehow registered under the wrong type. Then always use the "rent waived" version when requesting facility use. Otherwise your PTA might be charged rent.
- **Make sure your PTA has the most updated insurance information in the reservation system.** Send updated certificates of insurance to Building Rentals.
- **Read the updated (draft) policy and procedure on Use of School Facilities, and review the new Request for Rent Waiver form.** They are new for everyone, including staff, so PTAs should be informed. If you have questions or find problems, let the facility staff and the Director of Facilities know.
- **If you decide to make all enrichment program reservations through the PTA (recommended), then tell your providers that they don't need to make their own reservations.**
- **Tell any activity providers that their organization must be registered in the reservation system-with current insurance information- regardless of whether they will be making their own reservations or not.** To be clear: Outside vendors need to be in the reservation system, but PTA volunteers covered by PTA insurance do not, and instructors paid and insured through the school do not. From the district's perspective, outside vendors being registered allows for tracking of facility users and verification of insurance. For PTAs, having vendors register in the district's reservation system also helps limit PTA liability and increases vendor accountability.
- **Make a good faith effort to work with the reservation system and rent-waiver process.** Communicate constructively and proactively with the facility staff and management about any issues, and loop in SCPTSA representatives as needed. Participation in the system

helps:

- ○ Ensure safety for staff, students, and the community.
- ○ Promote fiscal responsibility and efficient cost management by the district.
- ○ Minimize PTA liability by knowing and following district requirements and by ensuring that the district has a direct relationship with any outside vendors, including the responsibility to verify their insurance.
- **Before an event, communicate with school office and custodial staff and respect their need to work in certain areas and not supervise stray children or worry for their own safety.** For evening or weekend events, reserve all the space you need and keep participants to those boundaries. For example, if your event for parents is in the library and you are offering childcare in the gym, you will need to reserve both locations.

4. Open Issue: Paying a school's teachers to lead before- and after-school programs

Background: At many schools, a PE, choir, art, or other teacher leads before- and after-school clubs or classes. Often these are rich programs that help the students feel more connected to their school and teachers. They tend to be lower cost, allowing more students to have access to enrichment opportunities-which is especially important in schools with higher FRL numbers that don't receive Title I funding or Levy funding. It may also be easier for schools with newer or smaller PTAs to coordinate clubs with teachers than with outside vendors.

Variations on teacher pay and insurance: Some teachers lead clubs on a volunteer basis. Others are paid, which is a more sustainable model. In practice, the means of payment has been varied, ranging from parents paying teachers directly, to PTAs paying teachers, to schools paying teachers directly using fees collected from parents or transferred from the PTA budget. Some teachers have gone to the trouble of getting business licenses and insurance (because in some recent years, teachers were told this was required). Some may think that PTA or district insurance covers them in cases when it doesn't.

Understandings about paying teachers vary from school to school.

Uncertainty about teacher contracts, ethics, and pay is sometimes an obstacle preventing cautious principals from allowing teachers to lead clubs.

Based on discussions between SCPTSA volunteers district staff over the last year, it seems the only acceptable method for teachers to be paid for leading enrichment clubs or classes is to be paid via the school (with funds potentially being transferred from PTAs).

We understand that district staff are preparing clarifications related to the following questions:

- Does the district encourage or discourage schoolteachers leading before- and after-school programs?
- Are there contract obstacles that would affect the teacher's availability?
- Can you explain the process in a way a new PTA enrichment coordinator and new PTA treasurer can understand? How might seniority and pay rate affect the cost, so that we can estimate costs for pricing tuition?
- Since instructors paid by the district are covered by district insurance, does that then make the event a district event for reservations and insurance purposes? Or, in the case of a PTA program, is the activity still considered a non-district event?

5. Where Can I Get More Information and Updates?

Contact:

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[SPS Building Rentals webpage](#)

[DRAFT Board Policy 4260: Use of School Facilities](#)

[DRAFT Superintendent Procedure 4260SP: Use of School Facilities](#)

[Request for Rental Fee Waiver](#)

SCPTSA webpage on Building Use for Events and Enrichment Programs. Resources include a [PTA Insurance Overview](#) and a [Matrix on Activity Instructors](#).

The Enrichment Coordinator Google Group (a forum for PTA/PTO coordinators and interested PTA/PTO leaders on managing after-school programs and related issues). To join, contact Betsy Hudson, SCPTSA Enrichment and Building Use Committee Chair.

The [SPS webpage on Volunteering](#) (with links to background check info for volunteers that also applies to activity instructors)

AIM Insurance (most common PTA insurance): AIM Knowledge Center, and [AIM FAQs](#)

Thanks to the many district leaders-both staff and school board-who have engaged on these important issues affecting student access to out-of-school-time enrichment opportunities, student safety, and the ability of PTA volunteers to understand and follow district processes.