

# Birmingham City Schools

## Travel Policy

Educational and professional developmental benefits accrue to the Birmingham City Schools by having administrative and other employees attend state, local, regional, and national professional meetings. Accordingly, the Board authorizes the Superintendent or his/her designee to approve attendance based on program needs and the availability of funds.

All travel must relate to an employee's duties and responsibilities for the Birmingham City Schools. A conference agenda must be included with the travel request and it shall reasonably align with the employee's related duties/responsibilities. Said duties shall be adequately specified on the travel request form. With the approval of such travel, the Board shall reimburse these employees for their actual, reasonable and necessary incurred expenses for such items as transportation, lodging, per diems for meals, registration and other allowable costs while attending such meetings. Documentation of such claims, excluding per diem and mileage, are required for reimbursement by the submission of paid receipts. For any travel funded by a federal or state grant, the custodian of that grant must approve that the use of the grant funds is reasonable, allowable, and funds are available in the budget.

Prepayment of registration, lodging accommodations, and travel expenses for airlines, trains, buses, etc. is allowable. Prior to any prepayment being made on behalf of the employee, all approved travel documentation must be received. Prepayment for usage of personal vehicle and per diem is not allowable.

Request for approval to travel and claims for reimbursements of travel expenses must be on forms or electronic software as supplied by the Finance Department. They must have attached all required documentation that might be relevant to the travel (see details below). The request for approval to travel and the reimbursement request must be approved by all required approvers.

**Approvals:** All travel at the school level must be approved by the Principal and the appropriate Instructional Superintendent. If it is out-of-state travel, the request must also be approved by the Superintendent or his/her designee. If the travel is being funded by a grant (in-state or out-of-state), it must be approved by the custodian of that grant. If it is a Title grant other than Title II, it must be approved as an allowable expense by the Director of Federal Programs.

All travel at the department level must be approved by the employee's direct supervisor and the individual responsible for the budget funding the travel (if not the same individual). If it is

out-of-state travel, the request must also be approved by the appropriate Cabinet level officer to whom the employee reports. If the travel is being funded by a grant (in-state or out-of-state), it must be approved by the custodian of that grant. If it is a Title grant other than Title II, it must be approved by the Director of Federal Programs.

**Air Fare:** **Pre-approved** travel air fare may be booked through the Board's travel agent by one of the designated staff allowed to make reservations for the District or may be reimbursed if the employee chooses to book their own flight. If a non-refundable ticket is booked by the employee and the employee does not make the trip as planned, funds may or may not be reimbursed depending on the provided justification for the cancellation. This decision will be made by the appropriate reporting Officer.

If an employee prefers to drive his/her personal vehicle instead of flying, the employee will be reimbursed the lower of the cost of air fare on the date of travel or the mileage reimbursement rate.

**Registration:** **Pre-approved** travel request for payment/reimbursement for registration must have an agenda, if available, which includes the meeting place and dates. A copy of the approved travel request form must accompany the registration request. Forms must be submitted in time to utilize any Early Bird registration rate if applicable. It is the responsibility of the employee to request a refund if the trip is cancelled. Failure to do so could lead to employee being required to pay for the registration. If registration is made online, print out the completed registration form to submit with the packet for payment.

**Hotels:** Prior approval for travel is required before any hotel reservations are booked with the District travel agent through the appropriate District representative or under limited circumstances, by the individual employee without utilizing the agency. Cost of hotels must be reasonable and hotels should generally be booked at the hotel rates set by the United States General Services Administration (GSA). These rates are updated annually and sometimes vary depending on the time of year. If the conference is held at a host hotel/motel with a higher rate than the GSA rate, the Board will pay the host hotel/motel rate per day. Occasionally, an employee is asked to attend a workshop after the host hotel is booked and the group rate cannot be obtained elsewhere. If a hotel cannot be found within a reasonable travel distance to the conference at the GSA rate, written justification explaining the details of why a higher rate is the only option and, with the appropriate Officer's approval, a higher but reasonable rate may be allowed. The Board will only pay for the rate for a single occupancy. If other individuals accompany an employee, the employee must pay for any additional rate above the standard single rate or if multiple rooms are included in the booking, the rate must be prorated and the district will only pay the rate of one room. Movie rentals, alcoholic beverages and other personal expenses will not be reimbursed. The original receipt must be

submitted. It is the responsibility of the employee to request a refund if the trip is cancelled. Failure to do so could lead to employee being required to pay for the hotel.

Generally, an overnight hotel stay for a trip less than 100 miles from the employee's base and for only one day is not allowable. Only on a limited basis and with written justification and prior approval by the appropriate Board Cabinet Officer will overnight stay be reimbursed by the District.

**Per Diem for Food/Meal Allowance:** The Board will reimburse the employee for meals based on the Meal and Incidental Expense per diem rates set by the United State General Services Administration (GSA). These rates are updated annually and will be effective each fiscal year. No receipts are required to receive the per diem reimbursement for meals. Per Diem will be allowed for each day when the meeting is in session. If it is not reasonable to expect the employee to travel on the first and/or last day of the meeting, per diem may be granted for the day prior to the start of the meeting and/or the day immediately following the end of the meeting. These date(s) must be included in and approved with the initial travel request forms.

No meal reimbursement will be allowed for in-county or out-of-county same day travel.

**Other/Miscellaneous:** Other necessary travel expenses such as cabs, subways, parking, toll charges, etc., are allowable if necessary, reasonable and documented with receipts. *However, employees may be responsible for any unreasonable costs that are not pre-approved.*

**Cancellations:** Employees may also be responsible for any costs, penalties, fines, fees or forfeitures that the Board incurs resulting from unreasonable cancellation. An employee's future travel requests may be denied for multiple, unjustifiable travel cancellations.

**Mileage:** Mileage for travel reimbursement must be for official business of the Birmingham City Schools and not for any personal use. Commuting miles from home to base of employment is not an allowable mileage claim. When calculating mileage driven to a meeting or conference, an employee must claim the shortest distance either from employee's base of employment to the meeting place or from the employee's home to the meeting place (if the employee is starting travel from home instead of his/her office). Mileage reimbursement is only for the driver. If a group carools, only the driver may claim mileage reimbursement.

If an employee receives a monthly stipend amount for travel, he/she may not claim travel within Birmingham City for any events.

**Car or Bus Rentals:** There may be occasions when it is less costly to rent a vehicle for travel instead of paying for air fare or use of a personal vehicle. In these instances, the written

justification for vehicle rental must be submitted to and approved by the Superintendent or his/her designee in advance of the rental.

If the district determines for cost reasons it is more economical to rent a bus for a group of employees traveling to a conference/meeting and an employee wants to drive separately, the employee will only be reimbursed the cost of the bus rental divided by the total number of employees expected to use the bus for transportation. He/she will not receive the full amount of personal vehicle mileage reimbursement if it is greater than the aforementioned rate.

**Reimbursements:** Requests for reimbursement for any travel related expenses shall be submitted for approval as soon as practicable, but shall not exceed thirty (30) calendar days from the employee's date of return from travel.