

Charleston, W.Va. – West Virginia Board of Education President Delores Cook and state Superintendent of Schools Dr. Steven Paine today provided guidance to county school systems related to school supply lists. In alignment with a state Supreme Court opinion, it is acceptable for teachers to provide parents with lists of items that they may wish to purchase for the benefit of their child or their child’s classroom. However, no child shall be denied participation in the public school system if his or her parents choose not to purchase the items on these lists.

Though no state statute or West Virginia Board of Education policy specifically addresses school supplies, a 1995 state Supreme Court of Appeals opinion in the case of Randolph County Board of Education v. Adams, 196 W.Va. 9, 467 S.E. 2d 150, clearly states that only items that are an “integral and fundamental part of the elementary and secondary education must be provided free of charge to all students.”

“We believe that this opinion provides important guidance related to school supplies,” Paine said. “Aside from textbooks, those items ‘integral and fundamental’ to public education include basic paper, writing utensils and other basic items that a student must have in order to participate in the curriculum.”

Items such as backpacks, tissues, baggies, hand sanitizer, specialized binders and folders are not considered “integral and fundamental.”

“Considering the limited financial resources available for classroom teachers to use in purchasing supplies, donations from parents will enhance the classroom environment and allows school money to be used for other educational purposes,” Paine said.

It also is acceptable for schools and teachers to request that students purchase their own equipment for performance-based classes such as band, orchestra, dance, theater and choir. However, if a child cannot afford to buy items like instruments and costumes, the county school system must have in place a contingency plan to allow the student to fully participate in the class. No child shall be denied participation in any curricular offering or otherwise penalized because his or her parents or guardians are poor.

For additional information related to school supply lists, please contact the West Virginia Department of Education Communications Office at (304) 558-2699.