

## **Lufkin Independent School District Travel Guidelines**

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## **I. Travel Philosophy**

The Board of Trustees and the Administration believe attendance at appropriate professional meetings and membership in sponsoring organizations can enhance the value of the individual to the school system.

It is the desire and intent of the District to establish rules and procedures that will encourage and promote adequate travel of employees to maintain a position of leadership while recognizing the limitations of available financial resources.

Employees on trips for workshops/conferences for which the District pays expenses are expected to attend all sessions. Employees are encouraged to select hotel/motel accommodations recognizing the financial constraints on the District and, when appropriate, share room accommodations. The superintendent, principal, or department administrator will determine the appropriate meetings for budget expenditures. Signatures of approval from the appropriate supervisor shall be secured by employees for all trips on the appropriate District form(s).

## **II. General Guidelines**

The following general guidelines shall apply:

1. All professional travel shall be contingent on fund availability and District priorities. There may be years when travel funds are not budgeted and others where only partial funding is available.
2. All professional travel requires request for approval at least two weeks in advance of departure. Occasionally it will be impossible to provide two weeks advance notice. In these cases, no advances or prepayment will be made.
3. Every effort should be made to keep the number of days absent from the classroom or regular duty assignment due to travel by any one employee to a minimum.
4. When the source of the reimbursement is a federally funded program, reimbursement for lodging and meals is limited to the amount currently authorized by U.S. General Services Administration.
5. Travel expenses may not be paid from one source and that source be reimbursed from another. (Ex: paid from an activity fund and reimbursement requested directly from the District budget.)
6. All out of state travel must be pre-approved by both the immediate Supervisor/Director and the Superintendent.
7. Cost of travel by school board members will be reimbursed using the same criteria as District employees.
8. All personal expenses incurred while traveling (ex: personal telephone calls, movies, laundry services, shoe shines, newspapers, etc.) are the responsibility of the employee and are to be paid by the employee at the time of checkout from the hotel
9. If books or souvenirs are to be purchased while on the trip, the employee must verify the vendor will accept purchase orders and then they must ensure a PO is approved for the items ahead of time. You may not purchase books or souvenirs and claim them on your travel voucher. These expenses are not included on your travel request and are therefore not allowed.
10. The Superintendent must approve any exceptions to the above guidelines.

### **III. Travel Request Completion**

A travel request should be completed if you are attending a conference that requires a registration fee to be paid, or the trip is costing \$100 or more, or you are staying overnight. If the trip is less than \$100.00 then you do not need to submit a travel request unless you are driving your personal vehicle.

There has been a change in the travel request process starting with the 2014-2015 school year. If you **are not** requesting a registration fee to be paid ahead of time, you should submit two copies of your travel request, the original and a copy, to your supervisor for approval. When this approval is obtained, send to the business office, Attention: Heath Wethington. If you **are** requesting a registration fee to be paid ahead of time, you will submit one copy of the travel request and one copy of a completed registration form to your campus secretary for processing. You should also include a conference agenda unless it is a Region VII workshop. The secretary will enter this into the Skyward Finance system as a check request. The secretary should then scan the travel request, registration form and agenda and attach to the check request electronically. Your principal will approve electronically and it will then be forwarded to the Business Office for further approval and payment.

**The travel request will need to be turned in at least 14 days prior to the date of the meeting.**

If the employee is unable to attend the meeting requested, then attempts should be made to receive a refund for the registration fee paid if any. The Business Office should also be notified so that our paperwork can be cleared.

### **IV. Travel Voucher Completion**

When an employee has returned from a conference, then a travel voucher should be completed. This is an accounting of all the expenses that have been incurred to attend the workshop/convention. Travel vouchers must be completed within 30 days of the trip or it may be denied. Please complete the travel voucher as listed below.

This travel voucher form is online. This form is now in excel format and should total for you when it is completed. You will then print this form, attach all receipts, send to your supervisor for approval and then it should be forwarded to the business office. When everything is verified, it will be processed. We now have the ability deposit these checks electronically. Please inform Heath Wethington via email if you wish to receive your travel check deposited electronically.

Receipts are needed for everything listed on the travel voucher except for mileage. **We must now have all detailed meal receipts for trips taken starting with the 14-15 school year.**

When two or more employees from your campus have traveled to the same conference or workshop, please submit the travel vouchers for each person at the same time.

## V. Registration Fees

Please note that failure to register for a conference by the early registration deadline will result in the employee paying the difference between early registration and regular registration. This would not apply if there are extenuating circumstances (such as being asked to go by your supervisor at the last minute, etc.).

If circumstances arise where you have to pay for your registration yourself, you must submit your receipt along with your travel voucher after the trip. Reimbursements will not be issued until after the date of the trip in case there is a cancelation.

For any travel with federal funds, any expenses incurred prior to the trip (registration, hotel deposit, etc.) must be coded to a prepaid expense account with the object code of 1410. Once the trip has taken place, the expense will be charged out to the appropriate account.

## VI. Transportation

The District reserves the right to select the appropriate mode of transportation and does not allow first class fares. All fares (bus, plane, cab, and shuttle) will be reimbursed for the actual amount paid. Receipts are required for documentation.

Car rentals are allowed and are sometimes the best value for the District. Each trip has to be taken into consideration to ascertain the need to rent or drive. The business office can help with this process. The District has an agreement with Enterprise car rental. To rent a car from Enterprise, first call the business office to obtain a purchase order number. Enterprise should then be called and the car requested should be the best value for the trip. Luxury vehicles are not permitted. Only a small or mid-sized car should be rented unless there is a need for a larger vehicle due to the number attending. Additional insurance purchased through Enterprise is not reimbursable.

Employees are encouraged to use school owned vehicles when they are available. Vehicles must be picked up at the Transportation Department where employee vehicles may be locked inside a secured area. **Reimbursement for actual cost of gasoline should be submitted for payment after travel concludes or a gas card can be obtained. Use of gas cards are only permitted when driving a school vehicle or when renting a vehicle. If you have rented a vehicle and are traveling with students, you will check your gas card out at transportation. For all other vehicle rentals for employee only travel you will check your gas card out at the Business Office.** In accordance with state law, smoking is prohibited on school property including a district vehicle. These vehicles are also expected to be returned free from litter and in clean condition. Damage to vehicles is to be reported to the District immediately.

When personal vehicles are used for trips, reimbursement shall be based on the shortest practical route between the District and the destination via intermediate points at which official business is conducted. The District has a predetermined mileage chart that is available on the school website. This mileage chart allows for mileage both ways using [www.google.com](http://www.google.com). If a city is not listed on the mileage chart, then the traveler is required to calculate mileage by [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) for the city not listed. The traveler must print out the driving directions to the site and attach them to the travel voucher. Reimbursement is 54.5 cents per mile according to local policy. When traveling in groups, only one vehicle is allowed mileage reimbursement for every three persons unless work schedules require different arrival and departure times. In this instance, the reason must be documented on the travel reimbursement form.

## VII. Lodging

### **State Regulations for Federal Funds and State Funds**

Costs of lodging will be reimbursed depending upon the approved rate for federal funds (Title 1 or IDEA B) or state funds (such as comp ed, special ed, vocational funds and bilingual). The approved rate for federal funds and state funds has been changed by the Texas State Comptroller and is subject to the domestic maximum rates established on the state website. These rates can be accessed by using the following instructions. Access the Texas State Comptroller's website at <http://window.state.tx.us>.

- Click the “Finances and Economy” tab at the top of the home page.
- Scroll down to the “Fiscal Management” section, and click “State of Texas Travel Information.”
- In the “Resources” section, click the “Textravel” logo.
- Click the Meals and Lodging tab.
- Then to the left you will see a Lodging subtitle. Click here and you will see a link for the lodging reimbursements. Click here.
- Then click the Domestic Maximum Per Diem Rates link. You will click Texas here or the state where the travel is planned.
- If the Texas city to which you are traveling is not listed, check the county list. If the county to which you are traveling is listed, use the rate given for that county.
- If the Texas county to which you are traveling is not listed, use the current maximum rate of \$85 (Fiscal 2015) for lodging.
- If the employee chooses to stay at a hotel whose GSA rate is more than the state allowed rate, then the difference must be paid from local funds which requires supervisor approval.

### **Local Policy for local funds (199)**

Local regulations permit lodging rate reimbursement above the Texas State Comptroller's rate; however, conference hotel rates should be utilized when applicable. If a conference hotel rate is used, then provide conference hotel rate documentation. Be aware however, that the

district will not pay above the conference rate if a motel is chosen that is not listed on the conference registration information. If an employee chooses to stay at a non-conference hotel and the rates are higher than conference rate, then the employee will have to pay the difference. If a motel is listed on the conference information but a registration deadline is missed that allowed for lower rates, the district will not pay above the conference rate even though you are staying at a conference hotel. Please check to make sure that you are meeting all deadlines.

An itemized paid bill or statement will be required as documentation. If a conference hotel is not provided, then every effort should be made to lodge at a moderately priced hotel at the government rate. The District is responsible for paying all local hotel occupancy taxes, but is exempt from state tax. Should state tax be charged to your hotel bill, you will not be reimbursed for this tax. Please check your bill upon check out to verify that state taxes have been removed.

Under no circumstances can you reserve your room with third party booking sites. These sites do not break down the taxes and we cannot distinguish between state and local taxes. Employees also may not book condos or bed and breakfast rooms due to the additional charges associated with these types of rental.

When practical and conditions allow, employees should consolidate travel and lodging arrangements to reduce total cost.

Valet parking will be reimbursed only if it is required by the motel. Otherwise, the employee is expected to park their own vehicle. Phone calls and internet charges will not be reimbursed unless they are for school business. If this is the case, then notations should be made on the invoice; otherwise, they will not be reimbursed. Contact Technology for the availability of internet hot spots.

### **VIII. Meals**

The travel voucher must include departure and return time to calculate the partial day meal amounts. Gratuities are not allowable in the above amounts. Under no circumstances will alcoholic beverages be reimbursed.

If meals are provided when a workshop or conference is attended, there will not be a meal allowance for that meal unless there are extenuating circumstances (medical reasons) for not eating the meal provided. If so, then this must be documented.

Meals will not be reimbursed for day trips. If the trip is overnight, then meals will be reimbursed for actual costs or per diem whichever is less. Per Diem amounts are \$11 for breakfast, \$12 for lunch and \$18 for dinner. Please see below for cutoff times for claiming these meals. Itemized receipts are required to be turned in with the travel voucher. Receipts for snacks and or beverages only that are outside of normal meal hours may be disallowed.

The cutoff times for the meals are as follows:

7:00 A.M. - Breakfast

If the employee leaves at 7:00 a.m. or before, then breakfast can be claimed.

11:00 A.M. - Lunch

If the employee leaves at 11:00 a.m. or before, then lunch can be claimed.

7:00 P.M. - Dinner

If the employee returns at 7:00 p.m. or after then dinner can be claimed.

If an employee is traveling out of state, then the meal allowances are based on the comptroller's reimbursements for payment in each state. Your reimbursement amount would be the lesser of your actual costs or per diem for traveling out of state. Call Heath Wethington (936-630-4488) and he can give you the rates for the area where you are traveling.

## **IX. In District Mileage for Homebound Teachers, etc.**

Employees that are required to travel extensively will be reimbursed actual mileage traveled at the district approved mileage rate. Under no circumstances will commuting to and from work be reimbursed. The form that is required in order to be reimbursed can be found online ([www.lufkinisd.org](http://www.lufkinisd.org)) and is called the Monthly Mileage Report. When you are at the website, go to Financial Services/Forms/Monthly Mileage Report. Mileage reports must be submitted within 30 days of last day traveled or they may be denied. Due to new recommendations from the Districts insurance agents, all in district traveling employees must have a copy of their current vehicle insurance card and driver's license turned in with their reimbursement request.

## **X. Student Travel**

Activities /trips by a school club should be funded by the club or organization unless these plans have been approved in advance. Make sure that you have funds available to pay for this activity before making reservations, down payments, etc. Do not count on district funds at the last minute to cover travel expenses not agreed on in advance.

The district uses a meal allowance for students who are traveling on official school approved functions. The maximum reimbursable cost per student is listed below:

\$8 per person per meal - The total for one meal cannot exceed this amount.

\$10 per person per meal - Meal allowance for state competition. Above rule still applies.

The number of meals that a student group is qualified for will be based on the time that the group leaves and arrives back in the District.

7:00 A.M. – Breakfast

If the group leaves at 7:00 a.m. or before, then they are allowed \$8 for breakfast.

11:00A.M. – Lunch

If the group leaves at 11:00 a.m. or before, then they are allowed \$8 for lunch.

7:00 P.M. – Dinner

If the group returns at 7:00 p.m. or after, then they are allowed \$8 for dinner.

The district requires the sponsor/coach to list the number of people fed. The District will only be responsible for expenditures up to the meal allowance times the number of people fed. After that, the sponsor/students are responsible. The dollar limit does not distinguish between the sponsor/coach and student.

Two types of Meal Allowances exist: (1) sponsor/coach and students eat all meals together, or (2) individual members eat separately and at different times due to the time events are scheduled. Type 2 meal allowance may not be used during travel times. It is important for the sponsor/coach to realize the difference in reimbursement requirements for these two types of meal allowances.

- (1) Group meals – There are two methods to pay for the meals. The sponsor/coach uses a purchase order and charges the meals, or the sponsor/coach pays for the meals with travel advance money. For either method, a receipt is required.
- (2) Individual meals – The sponsor/coach gives each member of the group the meal allowance money to purchase their food. If this method is used, then the coach/teacher must write an explanation for this meal stating that this is what occurred. To provide a check and balance, the Business Office will be requesting from the sponsors a list of the students who attended the event. All students who received a meal allowance must sign this expense sheet to verify that they did receive the meal allowance.

All travel vouchers must include an agenda or a copy of the entry form to verify meals provided for the trip.

The remainder of travel advance money must be turned in with the travel voucher with students form and required receipts within 14 days of the trip or future travel advance may be withheld until outstanding advances are settled.