

Teacher's Choice Program: Guidelines and Procedures

The Teacher's Choice Program is an annual benefit program that provides eligible New York City Department of Education (DOE) educators with funds to purchase supplemental instructional supplies and materials to enhance the learning experiences of their students. This program, funded by the New York City Council, was established in 1986 by the DOE and the United Federation of Teachers (UFT). The greatest benefit of the program is that it provides educators with the opportunity to exercise their professional judgment in selecting materials that will improve the education of their particular set of students. The DOE's Division of Financial Operations (DFO) administers this program.

This document contains the following sections to help guide program participants in using their Teacher's Choice funds:

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Eligibility

Only DOE employees who are actively staffed as of November 1st and who provide services to children at a NYC DOE site, are eligible to receive funding. Unless otherwise noted, the following is a list of educators at elementary, intermediate, junior high, high, and citywide special education schools who are eligible:

- General education teachers
- Special education teachers
- Permanent substitute teachers/ROTC instructors with a '5BA', '5BP' or 'TBR' status
- Adult education teachers
- Attendance teachers
- Speech teachers
- Guidance counselors
- School psychologists
- Social workers

- Universal Literacy Reading Coaches
- Single Shepherds
- Occupational Therapists
- Physical Therapists
- School Nurses
- High School Assistant Principals who teach at least one class
- Laboratory Specialists
- School Secretaries

Note: Absent Teacher Reserve (ATR) staff in eligible titles who meet eligibility requirements will also receive funding.

All eligible employees including those in the ATR pool – with the exception of high school assistant principals and permanent substitute teachers/ROTC instructors with a 5BA, 5BP or TBR status – will automatically receive annual Teacher’s Choice funds; no application is necessary to participate.

High school assistant principals and permanent substitute teachers/ROTC instructors with a 5BA, 5BP or TBR status: In order to receive funding, these employees must have their principal or supervisor complete a certification form – either the [High School Assistant Principal Certification Form](#) or the [Substitute/ROTC Certification Form](#), as applicable – and submit it to the Teacher’s Choice Unit by the deadline. Forms can be submitted via fax or email to:

- Fax: (718) 935-2171
- E-mail: teacherschoice@schools.nyc.gov

To identify eligible employees, DOE payroll data is used. To ensure inclusion in the program, it is imperative that employee payroll data be up-to-date and accurate. Any individual who is reassigned, not providing services to students is not eligible to receive funding.

Right to Opt Out

All eligible employees will receive Teacher’s Choice Program funding unless they opt out. Employees who do not wish to participate in the program during a particular school year must complete and submit a [Teacher’s Choice Request for Non-Participation \(Opt-Out Form\)](#) prior to the deadline. If a request for non-participation is not received by the deadline, the funds for that year will be distributed to the employee. Once funds are received, the employee must either use the money, following the process described in this document, or reimburse the DOE for funds not appropriately accounted for.

Funding Source

Funding for Teacher’s Choice is dependent upon funds from the New York City Council. If available for a particular school year, the DOE and UFT determine the funding levels by title.

Distribution of Funds to Program Participants

Distribution of funds to employees typically occurs in the late fall, and will continue to be distributed in the employees' regular paycheck on the designated distribution date. Everyone will receive their funding at the same time provided that the employee's payroll data is up-to-date and accurate as of November 1st.

Funds Not Received:

Any eligible employees who are missed during the initial distribution will be included in a subsequent distribution provided that the employee's principal or supervisor notifies the Teacher's Choice Unit via email (teacherschoice@schools.nyc.gov) by the deadline.

Program Requirements

In return for Teacher's Choice funds, all program participants must do the following:

- Purchase Desired Items:

Program participants are to purchase instructional materials in accordance with Teacher's Choice purchasing guidelines explained herein. All purchases must be made no later than the deadline. Even though funding will not be distributed to participants until the late fall, purchases made as early as August 1st qualify as program purchases provided the employee possesses the receipts.

As purchases are made, program participants must save all original receipts and invoices. If the receipts and/or invoices do not itemize each item purchased or if they do not provide a clear description of what the items are, the participant should hand-write details of the purchase directly onto the original receipt/invoice.

A vendor's business name and address must be printed on the cash register receipt in order for it to qualify as proof of purchase. Therefore, it is imperative that program participants verify that a vendor can comply with this requirement prior to making a purchase.

- Submit Supporting Documentation to the Principal:

After eligible purchases are made, program participants must complete the [Teacher's Choice Accountability Form](#) and submit it, along with all original receipts and invoices, to their principal or designee. This documentation may be submitted at any time after the initial fall distribution but no later than the deadline. To avoid loss of receipts or late submission which can result in a salary deduction, it is strongly suggested that participants submit documentation as soon as they have completed their purchases. Participants should keep copies of all receipts for their own files. Note that ATR participants cannot submit their completed Accountability Form in advance of the deadline; ATR participants must submit their documentation to the principal at the school to which s/he is assigned during the week containing the actual deadline.

Using Teacher's Choice Funds

- Purchasing Guidelines:

Teacher's Choice funding is primarily intended for the purchase of school supplies and instructional materials for use in full-time classrooms or office assignments. All items purchased must be of benefit to students and appropriate for use in these settings. For a

general guide of the type of items appropriate for purchase, please refer to [Appendix A](#). For a listing of materials and services that cannot be purchased with these funds, please refer to [Appendix B](#). Note: Nurses should refer to [Appendix C](#) for a listing of materials appropriate for purchase as well as what cannot be purchased.

Please be mindful when purchasing materials that they do not pose a threat to the health or safety of students and meet the acceptable levels of quality and safety in accordance with DOE standards.

- Purchasing Computer-Related Materials for Use on a Personally Owned Computer:

Given that home computers are frequently used to prepare materials for classroom use, Teacher's Choice funds may be used to purchase software and computer-related supplies for use on personally owned computers, provided that the materials involved will be of benefit to students. However, Teacher's Choice funds may not be used to purchase or repair scanners, printers, or other computer accessories for personally owned computers.

- Pooling of Funds:

If two or more program participants wish to pool all or any portion of their funds to purchase an item for a shared class or assignment, each must complete his or her own Teacher's Choice Accountability Form as instructed in the [Program Requirements](#) section above. All participants should indicate each other's names on their respective form and include the dollar amount contributed toward the joint purchase. One participant will attach the original receipt(s) or invoice(s) to his or her completed form and the other(s) will attach photocopies of receipts or invoices.

- Making Purchases:

All purchases must be made during non-classroom time and no additional time or compensation will be provided for this purpose. Materials may be purchased in person at a store, or ordered via the internet, mail, telephone, or fax. Supplies may be purchased from any legitimate business provided it is capable of providing appropriate documentation for record-keeping purposes. In general, payment is required when the order is placed.

- Delivery of Goods and Shipping Charges:

Delivery of ordered materials can be made either to a program participant's school or home. Deliveries should be accompanied by an invoice and/or packing slip that provides details of each item purchased, including the price, and also indicates that the order is paid. Any shipping charges paid by the participant that is reflected on an invoice and/or packing slip and included an Accountability Form will count toward the participant's accounted for allocation.

- Sales Tax:

All purchases made with Teacher's Choice funds qualify for tax exemption given that they are made on behalf of the DOE. To prove a purchase's tax-exempt status, program participants should present the vendor with a copy of the [Sales Tax Exemption Certificate](#). Please note that this letter may not be used for any personal purchases and that the New York State Form ST-119.1 is out-of-date.

When a program participant is unable to satisfy a vendor's request for appropriate documentation concerning the purchase's tax- exempt status, s/he must pay the tax. In

these cases, any tax paid by the participant that is reflected on receipts and included on an Accountability Form will count toward that participant's accounted for allocation. Additional information regarding the DOE's tax-exempt status may be found in the "Other Than Personal Services chapter of the Standard Operating Procedures" (see section entitled "Sales Tax").

Accountability

If a program participant fails to comply with any of the guidelines established herein by the deadline, s/he will be required to reimburse the DOE for all or part of the Teacher's Choice funding received earlier in the year. This may occur for any of the following reasons:

- A participant received funds yet did not submit a completed [Teacher's Choice Accountability Form](#) along with appropriate receipts and/or invoices;
- A participant failed to bring the materials purchased into the school;
- A participant made purchases that were not in compliance with the guidelines established herein.

In these instances, the program participant must repay the DOE by check or money order made payable to the *New York City Department of Education*. This is to be submitted directly to the program participant's principal or supervisor, who will then forward all payments to the Teacher's Choice Unit. If the participant fails to repay the DOE by check or money order, an automatic payroll deduction will be scheduled to repay the DOE for the money owed.

Property Rights

Although the items purchased with Teacher's Choice Program funds were selected by the program participant, they are:

- The property of the DOE
- Intended solely for use in the participant's classroom or office assignment
- To be in compliance with the DOE's Standard Operating Procedures for Other Than Personal Services if/when applicable.

With the exception of computer-related supplies intended for use on personally owned computers, all purchases must be brought into school for use in the program participant's classroom or office assignment. These materials may only be removed from the school in accordance with the procedures outlined in the "Inventory" chapter of the DOE's Standard Operating Procedures.

Items purchased by school-based support team members (SBST) or Absent Teacher Reserve (ATR) staffs who provide services at more than one location may be moved to any site in which they are providing services to students.

Returning Unspent Balances

Should a program participant fail to spend all or part of the Teacher's Choice funding received, the unspent balance must be returned to the DOE as described herein.

- Remaining Balances of \$4.99 or less:

Program participants with a remaining balance of \$4.99 or less can write a check to the school to repay these funds. The school may deposit these checks into the student activity fund in the General School Funds. These residual balances may be spent by the school for student purposes in accordance with standard procedures. If a participant's principal cannot authorize the deposit into this fund or if the school does not have an established account, then the program participant must follow the procedures outlined below for unspent balances in excess of \$4.99.

- Remaining Balances of \$5.00 or more:

Any unspent portion totaling \$5.00 or more should be submitted to the participant's principal or supervisor in the form of a check or money order made payable to *New York City Department of Education*, who will then forward all payments received to the Teacher's Choice Unit. This includes situations where a program participant did not spend any of the funds.

Misuse of Teacher's Choice Funds

All school-based employees have an obligation to report information regarding the possible misuse of Teacher's Choice funds to the [Special Commissioner of Investigation](#) (SCI). SCI can be reached by calling (212) 510-1500.

Special Circumstances

- Procedures for Individuals on Sabbatical or Who Have Separated from Service:

If a program participant receives Teacher's Choice funding and subsequently either goes on sabbatical, separates from service, or is reassigned to a non-teaching position for any reason during the term, s/he is obligated to fulfill the program requirements as described above. The completed [Teacher's Choice Accountability Form](#) with original receipts must be submitted to the principal or designee by the employee's final day of service.

If Teacher's Choice funds were received yet some or all of the purchases were not made, the employee must pay the remaining balance back. Repayment can be accomplished via check or money order made payable to *New York City Department of Education* and must be submitted to the principal by the employee's final day of service. Payments must then be forwarded to the Teacher's Choice Unit (See page 8, 'Unspent Teacher's Choice Funds')

- Procedures for Transferred Staff Members:

Program participants who transfer from one site to another may utilize the funds to purchase materials for use in their new assignments.

All other program requirements remain unchanged.

Principal's/Supervisor's Responsibilities

A program participant's principal or supervisor also has a set of specific responsibilities pertaining to the general management of the Teacher's Choice Program at his or her school. These are as follows:

- For Employees Who Wish to Opt Out of the Teacher's Choice Program:

Should an eligible employee wish to opt out of the Teacher's Choice Program, s/he will complete a [Teacher's Choice Request for Non-Participation \(Opt-Out Form\)](#).

Principals/supervisors are to sign the form, once completed, and return it to the participant. The participant will forward the signed form to the Teacher's Choice Unit by the deadline.

- For Employees With 5BA, 5BP or TBR Status Who Wish to Opt In to the Teacher's Choice Program:

A request to participate in the Teacher's Choice Program is not required for almost all eligible employees; inclusion in the program is automatic. There are three exceptions, however: assistant principals who teach at least one high school class, and permanent substitute teachers or ROTC staff with a 5BA, 5BP or TBR status. These individuals must opt in to the Teacher's Choice Program. Should these individuals choose to participate, principals/supervisors must complete either the [High School Assistant Principal Certification Form](#) or the [Substitute/ROTC Certification Form](#), as applicable, and submit it to the Teacher's Choice Unit by the deadline. Forms can be submitted via fax or email to:

- Fax: (718) 935-2171
- E-mail: teacherschoice@schools.nyc.gov

- Determining Eligibility:

In order to determine who at a school is eligible to receive Teacher's Choice funds, principals/supervisors are urged to generate a myGalaxy TO Report in the Galaxy system (review the [instructions for obtaining a school roster](#) to learn how to generate this report). This report will provide the principal/supervisor with a roster of all staff members identified as eligible to receive Teacher's Choice funds. If an employee is not on the roster but the principal/supervisor believes the employee is eligible, s/he should alert the Teacher's Choice Unit immediately. Please forward the name(s) and file number(s) of these individuals via email: teacherschoice@schools.nyc.gov.

Similarly, if an employee appears to be eligible to receive funding, given his/her status on the myGalaxy TO Report, yet actually is not, principals/supervisors should alert the Teacher's Choice Unit immediately via the email address listed above.

- Upon the Purchasing Deadline:

After purchases have been made, participants – including those in the ATR pool – are to itemize their purchases on the Teacher's Choice Accountability Form and submit it to their principal or designee by the deadline (those in the ATR pool will submit it to the principal at the school to which s/he is assigned during the week containing the deadline). Once the completed form is received, the principal or designee is to review it, alongside the receipts and/or invoices of items purchased to ensure that purchases were made in accordance to program guidelines and that all Teacher's Choice funds provided are properly accounted for. If all appears to be in order, the principal or designee must maintain these documents in a file that shall remain at the school. These documents are subject to audit.

- Unspent Teacher's Choice Funds:

- Remaining Balances of \$4.99 or Less:

If a program participant has a remaining balance of \$4.99 or less, s/he should write a check to the school and provide it to the school principal or his/her supervisor. These funds can be deposited into the student activity fund at the school and must be spent on student activities in accordance with regulations governing general school fund accounts (see the General School Funds & Cash Transactions chapter of DFO's Standard Operating Procedures for details). If a participant's principal chooses not to authorize deposit of the unspent balance into this fund, or if the school does not have an established account, then the program participant must follow the procedures outlined below for unspent balances in excess of \$4.99.

- Remaining Balances of \$5.00 or More:

Program participants who have a remaining balance of \$5.00 or more should provide their principal/supervisor with a check or money order in the amount of the remaining balance. The check or money order should be made payable to *New York City Department of Education*. This includes situations where a program participant did not spend any of his/her Teacher's Choice funds.

Once all checks and/or money orders have been collected from program participants as necessary, the principal/supervisor must submit them, by mail, to the Teacher's Choice Unit at the following address:

Teacher's Choice Unit
New York City Department of Education
65 Court Street, Rm 1402
Brooklyn, NY 11201

- Participant Non-Compliance:

Should one or more program participants fail to submit a completed Teacher's Choice Accountability form and all receipts and/or invoices by the deadline, principals/supervisors must complete a [Teacher's Choice Outstanding Accountability Report](#). (Note that only one form is needed per school even if there are multiple participants who did not comply with the Teacher's Choice requirements.) Once completed, the form must be submitted to the Teacher's Choice Unit prior to the deadline via fax or email:

- Fax: (718) 935-2171
 - E-mail: teacherschoice@schools.nyc.gov

Additional Information

For additional information or assistance with the Teacher's Choice Program, please contact the Teacher's Choice Unit:

- Phone: (718) 935-3304
- E-mail: teacherschoice@schools.nyc.gov

APPENDIX A:
Acceptable Usage of Teacher's Choice Funds

Teacher's Choice funds may be used to purchase the following:

- General classroom supplies such as basic art and drawing materials, paper and stationery supplies.
- Library books, magazines and supplies including items such as magazine binders, bookends, visible record card materials, labels, tape writer kits/label makers, and display letters. Lamination for lessons materials.
- Fabrics, yarns and sewing notions as well as cooking, baking and general kitchen supplies required for Home Economics courses.
- Musical instruments and related accessories and supplies intended for classroom use.
- Materials specific to the study of earth science, botany and physics as well as other science topics taught at the elementary, intermediate and high school level.
- General science supplies such as microscopes, laboratory glassware, science kits, charts and posters.
- Lumber, hand tools, automotive supplies and graphic arts materials required for various industrial arts programs. Batteries for items used in the classroom.
- Basic athletic supplies for use in physical education programs such as baseballs, basketballs, volleyballs and soccer balls, badminton supplies, punching bags, table tennis games, whistles and stopwatches.
- Educational learning aids including bulletin board and flannel board materials, flashcards, instructional games and activity kits, building toys, dolls and accessories, manipulatives, reproducible, letters and numbers, puzzles, musical toys, pegboards, stamps and stickers.
- Textbooks, study guides, teacher's manuals and student workbooks, foreign language materials, dictionaries and classroom reading programs. Books purchased for professional development.
- Subscriptions to newspapers, magazines, journals and on-line software subscriptions if being purchased for students.
- Desk organizers, desk calendars, posters, tissues, etc. for professional assignments.
- Instructional computer software programs and audio visual software appropriate to the various subject areas taught at the elementary, intermediate and high school level.
- Flash drives, storage drives & external drives.
- Desktop Printers and scanners for classroom use only.
- Computer software and computer related supplies for use on personally owned computers if the purchase can be justified on the Accountability Form as described in the "Purchasing Computer-Related Materials for Use on a Personally Owned Computer" section (page 3-4).

**APPENDIX B:
Unacceptable Usage of Teacher's Choice Funds**

Teacher's Choice funds may not be used to purchase the following:

- Furniture
- Any equipment that requires special wiring or installation.
- Fees for postage, trips, seminars, courses, performances or any type of professional services.
- Gifts for students including candy or snack items and food for parties.
- Refrigerators and other appliances unless they are specifically related to the subject area/assignment the teacher is responsible for.
- Air conditioners, fans, humidifiers
- Paper shredders
- Power tools
- Cleaning supplies
- Personal items including, but not limited to, clothing, briefcases, backpacks, business cards, cellular phones, personal desk accessories and other than basic writing materials.
- Personal electronic devices (e.g., PDAs/electronic handheld information devices), Global Positioning Systems (GPSs) for navigating, iPods, Laptops, Notebooks/ Tablets and iPads.
- Printers, scanners and other computer accessories for personally-owned computers for home usage.
- Repair of personally owned computer hardware.
- Computer software and computer related supplies for use on personally owned computers unless the purchase can be justified on the Accountability Form as described in the "Purchasing Computer-Related Materials for Use on a Personally Owned Computer" section (page 3-4).

APPENDIX C: For Nurses
Acceptable Usage of Teacher's Choice Funds

Teacher's Choice funds may be used to purchase the following:

- Posters for medical room
- Adhesive notes/Post-its
- Page Protector
- Binders
- Desk calendar
- Paper Towels
- Tissues
- Sharpie highlighters
- Red and black pens
- Pocket folders
- Tape
- Reinforcement circles
- Borders for bulletin board
- Staples
- Rubber bands
- Legal pads
- Markers
- Baggies to put ice in
- Ice trays
- Calculator
- A to Z page dividers
- X-Large zip-lock bags
- Pencil boxes to put the epi pens

Unacceptable Usage of Teacher's Choice Funds

Teacher's Choice funds may not be used to purchase any of the items listed in Appendix B nor any of the following:

- Food of any kind
- Beverages
- Medical Supplies

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