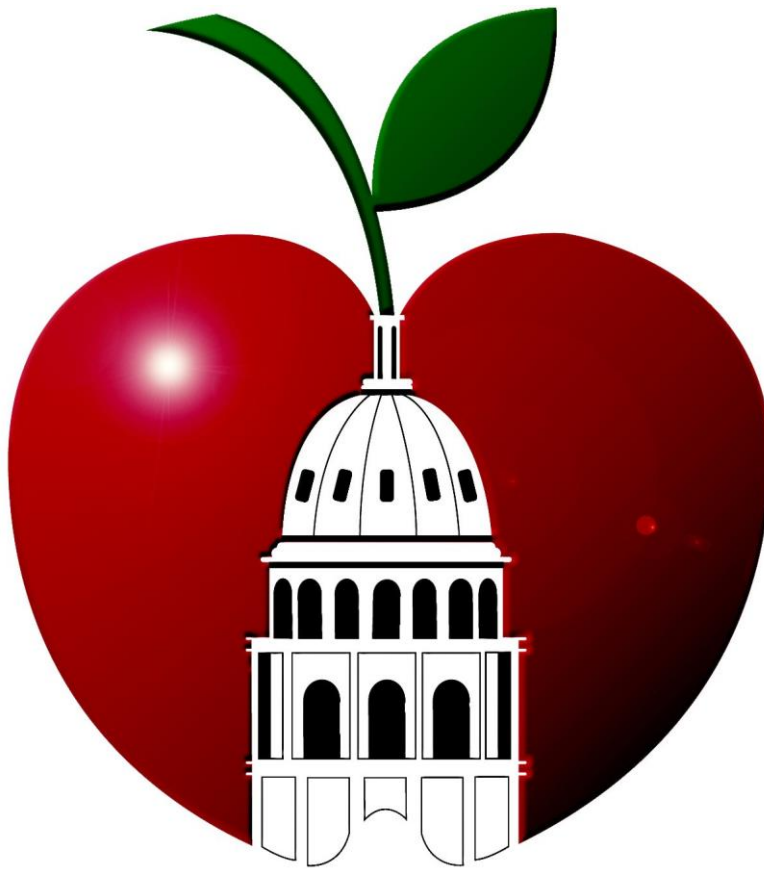


Austin Independent School District  
Finance Department

# Travel Procedures Manual

Revised and effective June 3, 2016



## Acknowledgements

The following Austin Independent School District Finance Department staff members, listed in alphabetical order, were involved in the development of this publication.

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This manual is intended to provide readers with a general overview of the policies and procedures associated with traveling while on official district business and the acceptable use of the district's travel card.

This manual will be revised and updated in future editions to include additional information and to reflect changes that may occur in statute or in district policy. We welcome your comments and suggestions.

Austin Independent School District  
Finance Department

Travel Procedures Manual  
Contents

- GENERAL INFORMATION.....1**
  - Board of Trustees Travel
  - Foreign Travel
  - In-district Travel
  - Non-employee Travel
  - Pre-Travel Approval
  - Travel Advance Checks
  
- PAYING FOR TRAVEL.....3**
  - Travel Card – Overview
  - Travel Card – Acceptable Use
  - Travel Card Suspension/Revocation
  - Out of Pocket
  
- AIR TRAVEL.....5**
  - Booking Airfare
  - Cancellations
  - Indemnification
  - Upgrades
  
- GROUND TRANSPORTATION.....7**
  - Shuttles and Taxis
  - Rental Vehicles
  - Personal Vehicles
  - Tolls and Parking
  
- LODGING .....9**
  - Employee Lodging
  - Student Lodging
  
- MEALS..... 11**
  - Employee Meals
  - Student Meals

OTHER EXPENSES .....	13
Tips, Gratuities and Service Charges	
Event Registration	
Baggage Handling	
Communications	
Postage and Supplies	
FINAL EXPENSE REPORTING .....	14
Acceptable Documentation	
Timeline for Filing Report	
Monies Owed	
Delinquent Reporting	
Where Can I Find More Information?.....	16



## General Information

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All out-of-district travel is governed by Austin ISD's Board policies DEE Local and DEE Legal. Whenever this document conflicts with Board policy, Board policy prevails. Austin ISD Board policies can be found at the following website:

<http://pol.tasb.org/Home/Index/1146>

Prior to making travel arrangements employees must complete a Pre-Travel Approval Form and have it approved by the appropriate individual(s). This form is available on the district's internal website at the Financial Services On-line Library:

<https://sites.google.com/a/austinisd.org/aisdweb/finances/financial-services/travel/online-library>

When traveling with students, the projected list of students must accompany the Pre-Travel Approval Form. When the employee returns and fills out a Final Travel Expense Report, a final list of students must be attached.

## Board of Trustees Travel

School Board Member travel on behalf of the district is governed by policies BBG (Legal) and BBG (Local). Board members shall be reimbursed for reasonable expenses incurred in carrying out Board business at the Board's request and for reasonable expenses incurred while attending meetings and conventions as official representatives of the Board. Alcohol is not a reimbursable expense.

Reimbursement shall be made by one of the following methods, as determined by the Board:

1. Reimbursement for use of personal car at the mileage rate currently approved by the Board, or the actual cost of commercial transportation, plus parking and taxi fares and expenses for lodging, meals and other incidental expenses. Board members shall file a statement and, to the extent feasible, attach receipts documenting actual expenses for which reimbursement is requested.
2. A set amount approved in advance for reasonable expenditures to be incurred on a particular trip. This amount shall include travel, lodging, meals and any other reasonably predictable expenditure. Board members shall file a statement, with receipts, accounting for amounts actually expended. Any excess shall be refunded to the District. Travel expenses not submitted within the fiscal year in which the travel occurred may not be reimbursed by the district and could become the responsibility of the Board member.

## Foreign Travel

**All travel outside of the country requires the Superintendent's prior written approval.** In addition, employees traveling abroad with students must also complete the EFD (Exhibit) form found on the district's internal website at the Financial Services On-line Library:

<https://sites.google.com/a/austinisd.org/aisdweb/finances/financial-services/travel/online-library>

## In-district Travel

Employees who receive a regular travel stipend are not eligible for mileage reimbursement of in-district travel. In addition, employees are not entitled to mileage reimbursement for travel between their place of residence and their official headquarters. Requests for in-district mileage reimbursements will be checked against the current list of employees receiving regular travel stipends to determine eligibility. The Travel Desk does not process reimbursements for in-district mileage. Instead those requests are processed by a separate accountant in Finance.

## Non-employee Travel

Austin ISD does not reimburse travel expenses incurred by an employee's spouse or an individual accompanying an employee on business unless the spouse/companion is a district employee and is required to be in attendance. When traveling with non-employees, district employees shall disclose the names of the individuals and the purpose for their attendance on the trip on the Pre-Travel-Approval Form. Travel reimbursements by Austin ISD to contractors/consultants are governed by the terms of the associated contracts/agreements.

## Pre-Travel Approval

A Pre-Travel Approval form is required for all out of district travel. The form can be found on the district's internal website at the Financial Services On-line Library:

<https://sites.google.com/a/austinisd.org/aisdweb/finances/financial-services/travel/online-library>

Employees should submit this form 30 days prior to the date of the trip. In cases where the forms are received within two weeks of the trip, it may not be possible for Finance staff to secure a travel card in time for the trip. Employees must attach a copy of any event brochure that lists what items (meals / lodging) are included. Depending on the circumstance, the number of signatures required on a Pre-Travel Approval will vary between one and four (depending on whether the trip is grant or locally funded).

## Travel Advance Checks

The district no longer issues travel advance checks for district employees.

# Paying for Travel

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## Travel Card – Overview

At the beginning of each school year, principals and department managers submit a list of new employees expected to travel that year. Once the Finance department receives this list of employees, they are then issued American Express travel cards in order to expedite future travel requests. This is because it typically takes 10 business days to receive a new card. A travel card can also be issued on an as-needed basis to new employees during the Pre-Travel Approval process.

A travel card is issued in the employee's name, but is paid for by the district. Accordingly, district employees shall not use the card for personal expenses. The district travel card shall be kept in a secure location when not in use. It is the cardholder's responsibility to safeguard the travel card. In addition, it is against district policy to loan the travel card to others, including other district employees. If the card is ever lost or stolen, employees should immediately notify American Express at (800) 492-4920 and the district Finance department at (512) 414-2362.

In order for employees to receive a pre-authorization on their district travel card, the trip estimate on the Pre-Travel Approval Form must exceed \$130. Otherwise the employee will be "out of pocket". This means that the district will reimburse the employee for pre-approved expenses after the trip. For more information, see the "Out of Pocket" section below.

## Travel Card – Acceptable Use

The district travel card may be used for any allowable travel expense referenced in this manual, such as air travel, ground transportation, lodging and meals, etc. Unacceptable charges include but are not limited to alcohol, tobacco, cash advances, laundry, souvenirs, theatre or other entertainment, tips, valet services, or any personal charges, etc. Original itemized receipts are required for all charges to the American Express travel card, including meal expenses. Credit card receipts showing only the total charge amount are not acceptable documentation. **Receipts containing alcohol or any other inappropriate charges will result in the employee assuming personal responsibility for the entire amount of the receipt and the entire amount will be owed back to the district.**

## Travel Card Suspension/Revocation

Employees should remember that use of the district's travel card is a privilege not an entitlement. Accordingly, the district reserves the right to temporarily suspend or permanently revoke travel card privileges for employees who demonstrate a blatant or repeated disregard for district policies and procedures and/or abuse and misuse of the district travel card. If a card is suspended, the default suspension period is 200 days. Longer suspensions and outright revocations may occur, however.



## Out of Pocket

If an employee is ineligible or unable to use the district travel card, the district shall reimburse the employee for all pre-approved and eligible travel expenses incurred on the employee's personal credit or debit card. The Finance department cannot guarantee that reimbursement will occur prior to an employee's personal credit card statement coming due. In addition, the district does not reimburse travelers for interest charges on personal credit cards.

The district shall abide by the same policies that govern determining eligible expenses when reimbursing an employee for business expenses charged on a personal card. The employee is expected to maintain the same level of documentation in the form of original itemized receipts for each transaction. Receipts must be legible in order to be accepted. **In addition, receipts containing alcohol or any other inappropriate charges will result in the employee assuming personal responsibility for the entire amount of the receipt and the entire amount will be ineligible for reimbursement by the district.**

In addition, the employee is expected to provide further supporting documentation in the form of a credit card or bank statement (with personal expenses and account numbers marked out) supporting the charges for which the employee is seeking reimbursement. This also applies if the employee is eligible to sign the *Lost Receipt Affidavit* for expenses where original receipts cannot be provided. Employees should contact the Travel desk to find out if they are eligible to sign the *affidavit*.

Employees shall also be required to affirm that they did not receive reimbursement from other sources when submitting their final expense reports. The use of cash, while not prohibited, is discouraged, as it makes it difficult for an employee to provide documentation that the expense was personally incurred. If cash is used, the employee must get a "cash receipt" with the vendor's pre-printed or stamped name.

## Air Travel

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The Pre-Travel Approval Form must be completed and approved prior to making any reservations, including airfare. The airfare amount is solely entered on the Pre-Travel Approval Form to arrive at the entire cost of the trip. Finance will not include airfare in the amount authorized on the travel card. Also, travel packages that combine airfare, hotel and rental car are not allowed because these packages often cannot provide an itemized breakdown for each cost.

### Booking Airfare

The preferred method of making airplane reservations is via the district's travel agent: National Travel Systems (NTS), which can be reached at 1-877-717-7768. However, individually obtained airfare tickets (via internet, etc.) are allowed. Such "non-district travel agent assisted" reservations require documentation such as a credit card statement with the employee's name preprinted on it and the account number "marked out" or the front and back of a cancelled check in order for reimbursement to occur. Please note that the district is unable to reimburse employees prior to the travel occurring; therefore, employees that choose to obtain airfare on their own will remain "out of pocket" until the final expense report has been processed.

Employees must provide the 20-digit budget account number to the district's travel agent in order for airfare reservation to be processed. When NTS e-mails an itinerary back to the employee, the employee shall review the information carefully and email the agent back verifying the itinerary is correct because subsequent changes will require additional fees. In order to have an e-ticket issued, travelers MUST send the NTS agent back a confirmation email. Employees should verify procurement of the airfare prior to arrival at the airport.

Employees traveling by airplane must do so in the most cost-effective manner, utilizing the lowest possible coach fares. Employees traveling by airplane will not be reimbursed for the amount of which a first-class or business-class fare exceeds the cost of flying coach.

### Cancellations

In order to get the lowest fare, tickets purchased through NTS are non-refundable. Most of these tickets are also non-transferable (the ticketed name cannot be changed) and it is possible there will be a difference in the fare due to any changes made later. If a trip is cancelled the fare is still paid; however, an employee should notify NTS and the ticket cost may be applied to the purchase of a new ticket for that same individual on the same airline within one year of the original purchase date. If a trip is cancelled and the ticket payment was from a grant, the grant has to be refunded from the employee's department's local budget account.

## Indemnification

Occasions may arise when airlines overbook, change, delay, or cancel flights, thereby imposing travel inconveniences on their passengers. In these instances, airlines often offer the impacted passengers indemnification for these inconveniences. Examples of indemnification include vouchers for meals or lodging, upgrades to non-coach travel and credit towards future flight costs. Austin ISD employees are authorized to accept such indemnification if the travel inconvenience was imposed by the airline and there is no additional cost to Austin ISD.

## Upgrades

Officials or employees may, at any time, use personal frequent flyer miles or similar programs to upgrade to non-coach travel. In addition, nothing in this policy shall preclude an Austin ISD official or employee from personally paying for an upgrade to non-coach travel. Upgrades charged to a district appointed travel card will become the responsibility of the employee and will be owed back to the district.

# Ground Transportation

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## Shuttles and Taxis

When on travel assignment in a city that requires airfare, the preferred means of ground transportation in the destination city is an airport shuttle. Taxis should only be used when airport shuttle service is unavailable. Tips are not reimbursable expenses and should not be charged to your district travel card.

## Rental Vehicles

Rental vehicles may be needed if the hotel is a long distance from the conference site, shuttles are not provided from the hotel, or taxi fare would be prohibitively expensive. The Texas Comptroller has contracted with Enterprise Rent-A-Car and Avis Rent-A-Car System, Inc. Under the State contract, the rental rate includes insurance for LDW (Loss/Damage Waiver or comprehensive) and Liability for in-state travel. For out-of-state rentals, employees should purchase insurance coverage at the rental counter (or the traveler will assume coverage responsibility). Rental vehicles can be booked through NTS, but unlike airfare, the traveler is expected to pay for the rental vehicle upon pickup.

In cases when the traveler arranges to have the rental car agency direct bill the district, the traveler would still be responsible for including the rental fee in the pre-travel authorization form. In these instances, even though the rental fee is included in the total cost of the trip, the Finance department does not include the amount in the travel card authorization. All car rentals require pre-approval by the employee's principal or supervisor, budget center manager and/or director/executive director.

## Personal Vehicles

Employees who travel more than 50 miles from their work headquarters may be reimbursed for mileage expenses associated with pre-approved travel. Reimbursement for use of a personal car is based on the Privately Owned Vehicle (POV) Mileage Reimbursement Rates found on the GSA website. Employees can estimate the mileage cost from their work headquarters by using the driving directions provided on any electronic mapping source as long as the total miles is pre-printed. This printout must be attached to both the Pre-Travel Approval Form and the Final Travel Expense Report Form. Personal mileage incurred while on travel status is not eligible for district reimbursement.

If an auto gas expense appears on the district travel card while driving a personal vehicle, the employee forfeits mileage reimbursement for the trip. This is because the mileage rate already incorporates auto gas expense. If this occurs, the employee will be required to retain the original receipts for all actual auto gas expenses and turn them in with their final expense report. Additionally, in order for gasoline to be reimbursed, the receipts must be dated within the date range for the trip.

Employees who travel by personal vehicle when air travel is more cost effective shall only be reimbursed up to the lesser of actual mileage or the lowest airfare to the destination. It is the employee's responsibility to get a quote from NTS to verify cost of the airfare for comparison.

## Tolls and Parking

Austin ISD will reimburse travelers for reasonable parking and toll expenses while on official travel status. Employees are expected to obtain receipts for these expenses whenever possible.

# Lodging

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## Employee Lodging

Employees who travel more than 50 miles from their work headquarters may be reimbursed for lodging expenses associated with pre-approved overnight travel. If the lodging costs are chargeable to local funds only, then reasonable actual costs are allowed. Employees should avoid the "deluxe" hotels and motels, unless at a "conference hotel". Employees should also obtain conference, corporate or government rates, whenever possible. Original itemized receipts in the traveler's name are required for reimbursement. Movie and long distance phone charges will not be reimbursed. Expenses for "home rentals" such as HomeAway, airbnb, etc. are not allowable and will not be reimbursed.

Austin ISD is exempt from the Texas Hotel Occupancy Tax. Employees can obtain a blank exemption form on the Financial Services online library. It is the employee's responsibility to complete the form and submit it to the hotel upon check-in. Employees should review hotel receipts to ensure (local) taxes have been applied correctly to their lodging expenses in accordance with the state tax laws and regulations. Employees should attempt to resolve any problems with the billing prior to checkout. State taxes that remain on the hotel bill will become the responsibility of the employee. This form is available on the district's internal website at the Financial Services On-line Library:

<https://sites.google.com/a/austinisd.org/aisdweb/finances/financial-services/travel/online-library>

If lodging costs are chargeable to state or federal grant funds employees must follow the Federal Domestic Maximum Per Diem Rates schedule for in-state and out-of-state, supported by original itemized receipts. For cities not listed (in-state or out-of-state), the rate of the county should be used. When neither the city nor county are listed, the lodging rate is the actual cost up to the maximum approved rate per night plus city and local taxes. Travel reimbursement rates can be found here:

<https://fm.xcpa.state.tx.us/fm/travel/travelrates.php>

If a trip is cancelled past the hotel's cancellation policy deadline due to the employee's request, the employee will be responsible for repayment of the deposit to the district. If a trip is cancelled due to district actions, the employee will not be held responsible. A written explanation by the employee's direct supervisor will be required in such instances. In addition, employees who extend their hotel stay beyond what is reasonably required to carry out the purpose of the trip, or who take leave during the trip, will not be reimbursed for lodging expenses incurred during that period.

## Student Lodging

Lodging for students will only be provided for competitions and other approved trips that warrant overnight stays. Special consideration by the Athletic Office for lodging reimbursement will be given to schools with extenuating circumstances, which must be submitted in writing, before the competition occurs. Original itemized receipts are required. Movie and long distance phone charges will not be reimbursed. Equipment budgets may not be used for lodging in any sport.

When traveling with students, the projected list of students must accompany the Pre-Travel Approval Form. When the employee returns and fills out a Final Travel Expense Report, a final list of students must be attached.

# Meals

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## Employee Meals

Employees are allowed reimbursement for actual meal expenses up to the approved per diem rates for the destination. Original itemized receipts for all meals are required. For questions on tips, please see the section in this manual labeled *Tips, Gratuities and Service Charges*.

Employees should refer to the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) – Per Diem Rates which can be found at this URL: <http://www.gsa.gov/perdiem> to determine the rates for the travel destination. The first and last calendar days of travel are calculated at 75 percent of the per diem rate for the destination. In Texas, for destinations that are not listed employees should use the standard GSA per diem rate of \$51. For convenience the per diem amounts for the first and last day of travel have been calculated below:

GSA Per Diem Rate	\$51	\$54	\$59	\$64	\$69	\$74
First & Last Day of Travel (75%)	\$38.25	\$40.50	\$44.25	\$48	\$51.75	\$55.50

Employees will not be reimbursed for meals within the Austin city limits or any areas not within scope of the travel destination. In addition, employees who extend their trip beyond what is reasonably required to carry out the purpose of the trip, or who take leave during the trip, will not be reimbursed for meals incurred during that period.

## Student Meals

The per diem meal allowance for students is 70 percent of the GSA per diem rate for employees for the destination city. The first and last calendar days of travel are calculated at 75 percent of the student rate. For convenience the student per diem rates as well as the rates for the first and last days of travel have been calculated below:

GSA Per Diem Rate	\$51	\$54	\$59	\$64	\$69	\$74
Student Per Diem Rate (70%)	\$35.70	\$37.80	\$41.30	\$44.80	\$48.30	\$51.80
First & Last Day of Travel (75%)	\$26.78	\$28.35	\$30.98	\$33.60	\$36.23	\$38.85

**Original itemized receipts for all meals are required and must be attached to the sponsoring district employee's final travel expense report.** Instances where student per diem meal allowance is exceeded will result in monies owed to the district. In these instances, these monies will become the responsibility of the district employee accompanying the student(s). Reimbursements for eating utensils used to consume food are allowed when travelling with students. For questions on tips, please see the section in this manual labeled *Tips, Gratuities and Service Charges*.



When traveling with students, the projected list of students must accompany the Pre-Travel Approval Form. When the employee returns and fills out a Final Travel Expense Report, a final list of students must be attached.

# Other Expenses

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## Tips, Gratuities and Service Charges

Tips or gratuities are generally not reimbursable expenses, except when traveling with students. Employees traveling with students are allowed to add up to 18% gratuity. **No hand-written additional amounts are permitted for employees traveling without students.** However, mandatory service charges are allowed. This is typically the case for large parties. Due to IRS regulations, there is a distinction between line items labeled as gratuities or service charges. In order for the service charge to be eligible for reimbursement, the amount must be pre-printed on the original (not reprinted) meal receipt.

The total amount for meals including any allowable mandatory service charges or gratuities must still be within the per diem guidelines set forth earlier in this document. Room service convenience fees, delivery fees and mandatory gratuities associated with room service are reimbursable. If the trip is grant funded, then a local account will be needed in order to cover any allowable gratuity that was charged on the trip.

## Event Registration

**Registration fees shall not be paid using the American Express travel card.** Instead, these fees shall be paid via your campus/department's American Express purchasing card (p-card). In cases when an employee does not have access to a p-card or they get to the conference and registration was not pre-paid, they must have their supervisor send an email to the Travel desk approving the expense so the amount of the fee can be authorized on the travel card. Original itemized receipts are required.

Although registration fees should not be paid for using the travel card, the employee should include these fees in the Pre-Travel Approval form in order to properly account for the entire cost of the trip prior to booking.

## Baggage Handling

Employees may be reimbursed for baggage handling fees for up to one checked bag. If special circumstances necessitate checking a second bag, employees must provide a justification accompanying their Pre-Travel Approval Form.

## Communications

Employees may be reimbursed for work-related Internet usage charges. These charges should be itemized on the hotel bill, but should not be listed on the final expense report under the lodging category. Instead these charges should be listed in the "internet" section category of expenses.

## Postage and Supplies

Employees may be reimbursed for postage, supplies, or duplicating services, provided the expense is work-related and the cost is reasonable. These expenses must be documented in the final travel expense report accompanied by original itemized receipts as well as a written justification for the expenses. The employee should include these estimated fees in the Pre-Travel Approval form in order to properly account for the entire cost of the trip prior to booking.

# Final Expense Reporting

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## Acceptable Documentation

Original itemized receipts are required for all charges to the American Express travel card. Credit card receipts showing only the total charge amount are not acceptable documentation. Receipts must also be legible in order to be accepted. If original receipts are misplaced, the employee must obtain duplicate receipts. If duplicates cannot be obtained the charges may become the personal responsibility of the employee and would be due upon notice from the district. In certain cases, employees may instead sign a *Lost Receipt Affidavit* and should contact the Travel desk for details.

## Timeline for Filing Report

A Final Travel Expense Report with original itemized receipts must be received in the Finance department within 10 business days upon the employee's return. Because multiple approvals from principals, department heads and/or grant approvers are often required, employees must submit these reports immediately upon return. It is ultimately the employee's responsibility to ensure that their complete, signed reports (and all documentation) reach the Finance department on time.

Additionally, if the Final Travel Expense Report is not filed within those 10 business days, the employee's travel card will be suspended until the delinquent final travel report is received. Furthermore, travel expenditures not submitted in the fiscal year in which the expenditures were incurred may not be reimbursed by the district and could become the responsibility of the traveler.

## Monies Owed

Upon completion of the Final Expense Report reconciliation, there may be balances owed to either the employee or the district. Balances that are less than \$1.00 will not be processed in either direction. In cases where monies are owed to the employee, the Finance department will deposit the amount directly into the employee's bank account. If monies are owed to the district, the employee will be notified of the balance, and that amount will be payroll deducted. **The district no longer accepts payment via cash, check or money order.** Also, campuses shall not reimburse the employee for monies that are payroll deducted, even if using activity funds.

## Delinquent Reporting

Employees who fail to submit their completed final travel expense reports will have the cost of the entire trip deducted from their paycheck after being provided with reasonable notice by the Finance department and will be subject to automatic card suspension for 200 days or, in certain cases, card revocation.

**Subsequent trips occurring during the suspension period will not be cause for early reinstatement of the travel card.**

# Where Can I Find More Information?

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More information related to travel can be found at the following websites:

Austin ISD – travel related resources

<https://sites.google.com/a/austinisd.org/aisdweb/finances/financial-services/travel/online-library>

U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) – Per Diem Rates

<http://www.gsa.gov/perdiem>



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