

### **Field Trips - What do you NEED to know!**

A “field trip” occurs when students leave school grounds for an educational purpose. There are many types of field trips including day trips that occur one time, those that are recurring (same activity on a regular basis, such as a choir or sports games), and those that extend over night or to foreign locals.

While most field trips are not high-risk, there are some activities that require extra care due to special hazards. These can include anything occurring near water or involving swimming or boating, occurring in remote locations, involving animals (farms, zoos, riding animals, etc.) or involve outdoor risks such as hiking.

A field trip is school-sponsored if school or ASB funds pay for the activity, it is part of the educational process, or it is supervised or staffed by paid school employees and approved by the district. A field trip is privately sponsored if no school funds are used, the school/district is not named in promotional materials, meetings are not held at school<sup>1</sup>, and the field trip does not occur during school hours and paid school staff are not supervising.

There are some issues that must be addressed before approval of any day fieldtrip, to insure the activity is appropriate and does not violate district policies or incur risks that are not appropriate for schools to sponsor.

- District field trips must be directly supervised by paid School District Staff acting within the scope of their job duties.
- *All* applicable District policies/procedures must be followed. This includes the handling of all monies, signing of contracts, transportation requirements, and proper background checks for volunteers, to name a few.
- You must verify with your District Office that the activities are covered for liability / property coverage by the Washington Schools Risk Management Pool. Some activities are excluded.
- Determine the educational objective clearly outweighs the risks. The courts have repeatedly stated there has to be an *educational benefit* that could not have been achieved by another activity that was less dangerous. While the YMCA and local Park Departments do not have to meet this bar, the school district must.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Some district facility use policies permit groups to meet in schools to discuss activities that are not school-sponsored.*

Require staff to provide a preliminary list of information about the proposed trip. This should include:

- ⌘ Listing specific activities that students will be participating in. Compare with District Activity Matrix or list of activities to avoid, or are high risk.
- ⌘ Number chaperones, adults supervising and any specific special training required (First aid, Red Cross water safety training, etc.)
- ⌘ Number students participating, age/grade level, and if they have any special needs, or medical conditions
- ⌘ Means of transportation
- ⌘ Costs and fund sources

Over-night, out of area and foreign field trips have additional risks that require more extensive planning. This includes outlining additional insurance needs such as medical /accidental coverage for students, chaperone needs, travel and housing requirements. After the building principal has approved preliminary information, it should be reviewed by district administration and school board as required by policy. The principal and advisor must also agree on a process for determining the level of support by parents of students in the group.

While district sponsored out-of-country field trips can be handled with or without outside organizations providing travel, housing and curriculum plans and insurance protection, WSRMP strongly recommends transferring liability. When the district makes the choice to include an outside sponsoring organization (I.E. Foreign Exchange Programs), many of the risks and liabilities are automatically transferred to that organization. As the sponsoring organization has a vast amount of experience in the preparation, planning and participation in out-of-country activities, they are well versed in the potential “pit-falls” that can result in potential injuries, accidents, travel delays and discomforts. Such organizations have already secured protection from such risks by means of purchasing insurance to provide protection for the activity and students. They have developed screening programs for host families, housing, travel and for agencies that they contract with for other services. They have made connections that provide valuable assistance in making the foreign trip an enjoyable experience. If the district chooses to make the plans without the use of an outside agency, it is important that they carefully plan ahead.

**Consult the school board policy to assure compliance.**

ESD 112 has developed a School Field Trip Procedures manual that is available on WSRMP website for download.

If you have questions, or are unsure how to proceed, contact your District Risk Management person, and relay the facts to them. They will work with WSRMP to put in place guidelines that will help keep students protected and your district defensible in case of a loss.