



6 Ways Teachers Can Improve Field Trip Planning

Field trips are some of the most exciting and memorable occasions for students. In fact, well into adulthood, most people remember school field trips more than any other school experience.

You can probably even remember a school field trip or two from your own youth!

Field trips are unique in the sense that they allow students to engage in hands-on, immersive, real world learning in a way that simply isn't possible in a classroom setting. When you take away the books, computers, whiteboards and pencils, students must employ a whole new set of skills and challenges to broaden their horizons.

For some students, field trips may be their first "real world" experiences without their family. Similarly, field trips give other students a chance to go on excursions, as they might otherwise not be afforded such outings.

With excellent planning, organization and curriculum for the field trip, teachers can create the best possible experience for themselves and their students!

What to do *Before* the Field Trip

When it comes to field trips, you can never plan *too* much. In fact, field trips take more planning and organization than your average day in the classroom. Aside from just the logistics of the trip, teachers need to have a "why" for the trip. Let's discuss how to find your "why" in more detail...

Tie it into a specific learning objective.

Every field trip should be tied into a specific learning objective. What are your students going to gain from this excursion?

Take a lesson from the classroom and explore how an in-person experience can relate to and enhance it. For example, if your students are exploring a unit on botany and photosynthesis, you might visit an arboretum where students can interact with the plants they are studying and learn about their life cycles.

Conduct a site visit.

The more you know about the site, the better. Spend some time on their website or leafing through reading materials before your site visit so you know exactly what you're getting yourself into.

During the site visit, ask a lot of questions! What are the busy days to visit? What time of day is most crowded? How many restrooms are on site? Is there a place where the children can have their lunch? Where can you park the buses? The list goes on and on!

You know your students best, so put yourself in their shoes and try to imagine the experience through their perspectives.

Carefully select your chaperones.

Needing help on a field trip is inevitable -- you can't be everywhere at all times! At least 2-3 weeks prior to the field trip, start scouting out eligible chaperones by sending a note home to parents or guardians.

It's important that all interested parents or guardians fully understand what is expected of them on the field trip. As teachers, you may assume some things are "obvious," but it never hurts to be specific and get verbal confirmation.

Consider creating a list of duties and responsibilities and getting all chaperones to sign and agree to them. Organize a list of everyone's contact details including your own, and create name tags for the chaperones.

It's also a good idea to have a handful of "back-ups" on call, in case a last minute emergency comes up.

Lay some ground rules.

Consider creating a list of field trips rules for your students. Go over the rules well in advance of the trip and ask all your students to either commit verbally or in written form.

Now is also a good time to assign small groups or pairs. Consider students who may be a distraction to one another or cause disturbances and place them in separate groups. If you have a particularly challenging student, it's best to place them in your own group.

Prep your students.

In the days and weeks leading up to the trip, delve into related materials that will excite and motivate your students. Perhaps you can show a video of the site or ask them to do some research on a specific exhibit or subject matter relevant to the site.

Keeping students focused on the lesson of the field trip can be difficult. Field trips are exciting! And with all that energy, they're bound to get distracted by chatting, fooling around and probably not listening all too intently.

For that reason, give your students a specific objective to focus on during the course of the trip. For example, if you're visiting a museum, ask your students to imagine they're creating their

own exhibit. What would be in it? How would they lead their tour? What topics would they cover?

Before the start of the field trip, give your students a handout that details their assignment, so they know what to focus on during the visit.

Logistics wise, remind your students of how to dress appropriate, or to bring sunblock, sunglasses, etc. Encourage your students to get a good night's rest before the trip, fill up on a healthy breakfast and to leave all their toys, electronics and non-essentials at home!

Plan for ANYTHING!

On the morning of the field trip, give yourself plenty of time to prepare by arriving earlier than normal. Double check your itinerary, contact lists, name tags and make extra copies, where necessary.

Also, don't forget to take care of yourself -- get a full night's rest, eat a hearty breakfast and be sure to have some snacks on hand, so you don't hit a mid-day crash.

Remember, while you might have every detail planned to a T, things are bound to come up and it pays to be flexible. If your students are super enthusiastic about a particular exhibit, give them an extra couple of minutes before moving on. If the buses arrive late, take it in stride so as not to panic the rest of the group.

How you react, both good and bad, will influence the rest of the group. So keep calm!

Above all, have fun! Be patient, enthusiastic and ready to explore as much as your students.

