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Overview

This guidance article has recommendations regarding overnight field trips. These recommendations are not exhaustive but are intended as starting points for exploring each overnight trip's unique needs and circumstances.

Educational Benefit vs. Risk

Overnight trips provide unique opportunities for learning but can also expose students to additional risks and potential harm. In the past, WSRMP has seen claims of harassment, intimidation, bullying, and student-to-student sexual abuse for incidents that occurred on overnight field trips. Additionally, an overnight component to a field trip brings increased potential for student injury and property theft.

One of the most vital factors to consider prior to moving forward with an overnight trip is the educational benefit and the value added to the students' educational experience. In the case of an accident or incident, the school district must be able to explain why the trip was school-sponsored and why the district owned the risk. Could a similar educational benefit be achieved in a day trip to a local destination?

Before moving forward with an overnight trip, document the educational benefit and how it aligns with the curriculum. Follow your school district's policy and procedure for overnight field trips and obtain pre-approval for the trip from the designated administrator. In some cases, the school board may need to approve the trip at a board meeting well in advance of the proposed travel date.

Overnight Field Trip Planning and Approval Checklist

Below is a sample basic planning checklist for overnight trips. Your district's policy, procedure and practice may have additional requirements and considerations.

Planning and Approval:

- Review district policy and procedure regarding overnight field trips
- Obtain pre-approval for field trip from the designated administrator
- Establish primary point of contact for third-party host/venue
- Identify risks
 - Identify inherent risks associated with the location, venue, and activity
 - Consult with third-party host/venue as needed
 - Consult with risk management as needed
 - Input inherent risk language into parent permission form
- Consider insurance needs
- Distribute parent permission form
- Solicit funds (if applicable)
- Solicit volunteers (including appropriate screening/background checks and obtaining approval of any non-staff volunteers)
- Put in a transportation request (review district policy and procedure regarding student transportation)
- Put in a lodging request
- Add provisions for non-participating students
- Identify and create a plan students with medical conditions
- Identify and create a plan for food allergies

Pre-Departure:

- Collect parent permission forms
- Collect funds (if applicable)
- Notify volunteers of special risks/supervision considerations for field trip
- Notify volunteers of student medical conditions and food allergies
- Finalize and distribute the itinerary
- Finalize the list of participants
- Finalize the list of chaperones
- Finalize approval for the field trip

Guardian Consent Forms

Creating parent/guardian consent forms for overnight trips is a thoughtful process, with special attention paid to providing parents with a clear understanding of the trip's itinerary and specific risks.

Include with the form a detailed daily itinerary. Include specifics related to travel, transportation, lodging, chaperones, daily schedules, and menus in the itinerary. Clearly outline the risks involved with each activity. Below is sample inherent risk language specific to the overnight nature of the trip:

"This field trip involves overnight activities that have certain inherent risks including but not limited to risks associated with travel, third-party lodging or accommodation, and risks associated with periods of independent unsupervised activity".

Reviewing this itinerary and potential risks allows guardians to make an informed decision about whether the trip is a good fit for their student. Require parents/guardians to initial statements of acknowledgment and assumption of risk and authorization to participate.

Include another section on the form dedicated to health concerns, medication and allergy information. Request that parents contact the designated administration if there is additional information chaperones should know about their student. Require parents/guardians to initial a medical authorization statement attesting that their student has no medical or physical condition that could interfere with his or her safety, that they authorize emergency medical care if required and that they understand that the school district assumes no financial liability for such care.

A copy of this form should be in possession of the facility advisor while on the trip. Another copy should be left at the school or administration office per district protocol.

Additional information on parent/guardian consent forms and sample overnight field trip form language can be found in WSRMP's *Obtaining Guardian Consent* article and *Sample Field Trip Form* on the [WSRMP member website](#).

Pre-Trip Communication

Require that students and their parents/guardians read and acknowledge a code of conduct outlining written behavior and conduct expectations. Outline that this trip is an extension of the school day and school rules must be observed. Providing these expectations in a clear format ahead of time gives the parents/guardians an opportunity to have conversations with their students regarding their behavior expectations. This preemptive measure will help chaperones enforce rules and handle behavioral issues while on the trip.

Identify a contingency plan for handling a situation where a student no longer wishes to spend the night or needs to be sent home for behavioral reasons. Parents/guardians should be notified of this plan ahead of time, including any responsibilities they need to fulfill if a student is sent home.

Give parents/guardians necessary planning information with a trip-specific student packing list. It should include all applicable supplies as well as expectations regarding appropriate clothing choices for the travel destination. Include the expected weather conditions, so that students pack proper clothing and relevant items (sunscreen, umbrellas), as well as extra items in the event of a change in weather. guardians prepare proper clothing to prevent overheating or excessive exposure to cold temperatures. Outline in this document any rules specific to electronics, spending money, snacks etc.

Additional information on pre-trip planning can be found in WSRMP's *Extended and Foreign Field Trips Guidance* article on the [WSRMP member website](#).

Ground Transportation

As with all field trips, transportation is a crucial aspect of planning. WSRMP recommends using a school bus or district vehicle/van in most circumstances. When possible, avoid the use of ride-share services or taxis for student transportation unless the district has a specific contract with the vendor regarding transporting students. Preferably, the district selects contract-based transportation such as shuttles and charter buses. When arranging travel, please keep in mind that any vehicle in which a student is traveling

must have a school district staff member or chaperone who has completed the district's approval process to work with students unsupervised. Travel arrangements should be set in place well before the trip and communicated to parents/guardians as part of the parent/guardian consent form and planning process.

To avoid theft and loss of property, belongings and equipment should not be left in vehicles overnight. They should be properly stored, secured, and accounted for at every point in the trip.

If you have questions about student transportation in vehicles, please reach out to your WSRMP risk consultant and see the WSRMP article "*District Transportation Guidelines*" on the [WSRMP member website](#).

Air Transportation

Airplane travel requires extensive planning. Anticipate needing additional supervision and chaperones as there are additional risk exposures involved in airports and airplanes. As much as possible, request that your school group be seated together on the airplane and in the airport waiting areas. Work with chaperones ahead of time to determine how student supervision at the airport will be handled. Consider potential delays, layovers, late students, student requests to browse airport shops, and access to restrooms. Confirm that all students are on the airplane before the final chaperone boards. Plan how inflight food/beverage services and optional purchases will be handled, keeping in mind known student food allergies.

If checking luggage, encourage students and chaperones to keep valuable items on them as carry-on, as luggage may be lost or delayed by airlines. Student medications and paperwork should be kept in the designated staff member's carry-on luggage.

Hotel Lodging

The safety of students and chaperones is of the utmost importance when choosing hotel lodging. WSRMP recommends the use of established hotels that employ 24-hour staff and have experience accommodating minors on school-sponsored trips. When possible, select hotel rooms that are not accessible from an outdoor entrance, are on the second floor or higher, and do not have access to outdoor areas or balconies. Depending on the trip destination, the district can consider consulting crime maps when searching for hotel lodging. Areas with higher incidence rates of property or violent crime should be avoided altogether, if possible.

Request that rooms be grouped close together to improve the supervision of students. Consider grouping room layouts by gender so that gender-specific chaperones are closest to and have immediate access to the students assigned to them. Restrict student access to pools or fitness centers. If the hotel uses a keycard system, the hotel may be able to turn off room key access to areas that are off-limits to students. Work with the hotel ahead of time to make decisions regarding student access points.

Confirm with the hotel ahead of time that student access to pay-per-view movies or minibars is restricted. Students should not be able to make purchases to the room or order any deliveries to the hotel or their room.

Home Rental Vendors

WSRMP recommends against using personal homes or home rental programs like Airbnb for overnight student accommodations. Personal homes rented through home rental vendors are not held to the same

safety, hygiene, and maintenance standards as hotels and do not provide the same level of emergency response of a hotel with first aid equipment and 24-hour support staff.

Supervision can also be more difficult in-home rentals as student rooms may not be off a central hallway, and there are often multiple points of entry and exit. The house may also have additional "hangout spaces" such as living and dining rooms that would require additional supervision.

Home rentals may also make maintaining clear boundaries between chaperones and students more challenging. The home environment may encourage less professional behavior and create an environment that discourages students from observing school rules. There is a higher likelihood that an adult would need to share a lounge space or bathroom with students in a home. This could lead to the perception of boundary invasions.

The contents of homes also pose a greater liability risk. Homes typically include rooms and items you would not usually find in a hotel room, such as a kitchen that may be stocked with foods and drinks that should not be accessible to students. Home rental programs are increasingly requiring guests to perform cleaning duties that may involve hazardous chemicals or handling laundry. These cleaning duties would be unadvisable for both students and chaperones. It is also less clearly defined in the event of an accident who is liable for the damage or injury, as forms home rental vendors ask guests to sign may include a release of the property owner's liability.

Room Assignments

In the process of planning an overnight trip, the district should determine what rooming arrangement options will be made available to students and chaperones. Being thoughtful in rooming choices is crucial to mitigating risks of harm to chaperones and students. The district should determine prior to obtaining parent/guardian consent whether the school will provide students with separate beds or ask students to share. Keep in mind that if the school offers separate beds to the boys' teams, the same opportunity should also be provided to the girls' teams.

The school has a duty to ensure that every effort is made to assign students to rooms that allow for a safe and secure environment, including creating rooming arrangements that support students in their ability to follow school rules. Prioritize the bunking of established friends to mitigate risks of harassment or bullying. There should not be pairings of students with known histories of harassment, intimidation, bullying, or known romantic/sexual relationships. Consider ahead of time a process for students to request changes or accommodations.

Remind students that the field trip is an extension of the school day and that school rules, particularly those regarding appropriate behavior and intimacy, apply for the entire duration of the trip, including in the hotel rooms.

Gender Inclusivity

When planning overnight accommodations, WSRMP recommends reviewing your district's policy and procedure complying with [RCW 28A.642.080](#) regarding gender inclusivity in schools. This policy should include your district's process for handling situations that require student separation by gender.

WSSDA Sample Policy 3211 affirms that the gender the student identifies as in the school environment should be equally observed and respected in the travel and lodging of an overnight trip. Work with the

student and their family to put them in a room with peers they feel comfortable with and make special accommodations for the student if necessary. Keep in mind that the school district must maintain the student's privacy and must not disclose their transgender status to other students or parents, even if they believe the other parents and students already know.

Accommodations

Students with disabilities should be given equal opportunities to participate in overnight trips. This applies to students with physical and mental disabilities alike. Maintain compliance with [Section 504](#) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the [Title II](#) of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 in planning and execution of overnight trips.

Lack of appropriate planning is a potential precursor to a district failing to meet the accommodation needs of its students. These accommodations might include pairing a child with a one-on-one paraprofessional, securing a sign language interpreter, or providing transportation accommodations. It is not advisable for a district to require a parent/guardian of a student with a disability to chaperone their child; the district should own the responsibility when the student is in its care.

If equal opportunity cannot be provided to all students eligible for the trip and its excursions, the district should reconsider the planning and implementation of the trip. This includes equal financial opportunity, as students who may not be able to afford trip fees should be accounted for prior to planning the trip. Any and all accommodations should be considered and mapped out in pre-planning of the overnight trip.

Emergency Plans

Develop emergency and medical plans as part of the trip planning process. List the contact information for medical and emergency resources specific to the location of the overnight trip. Advise chaperones and students on what they should do in the event of an emergency. At least one staff member on the trip should be certified in CPR and first aid.

Request hotel safety information and evacuation maps and develop hotel-specific emergency plans. Provide the hotel with the contact information and room numbers of supervising school district staff. This allows hotel staff to contact the appropriate chaperone in case of an emergency or with any concerns.

Medications

Work with your school nurse before the trip to ensure all laws and school policies/procedures for the storage, handling and dispensing of student medication are met. The nurse must train the person designated to administer medication on the overnight trip well ahead of its start. The chaperones should keep any medication in a locked, secured location during the entirety of the trip.

All students taking medication need a district medication form completed and signed by both the parent and the physician. Follow your school District's board policy, procedure and practice.

Chaperones

WSRMP does not provide a set chaperone-to-student ratio for any event or activity. What is an appropriate ratio can change depending on the situation. The number of adult supervisors depends on the age and gender of the students, the duration of the trip, the nature of the activities, and special safety or health considerations. Some school policies and procedures include minimum ratios. If the proposed trip includes male and female students, provide chaperones from both genders.

Remind chaperones that they are representing the district at all times during the trip. It is crucial that their behavior reflects school district policy and procedure, even when not actively supervising students. Chaperones are not allowed to consume alcohol or other prohibited substances while on the trip, even if students are asleep or engaged in an approved activity. Chaperones may not be permitted to bring along any individuals who are not part of the trip.

If the district chooses to use the supervision help of volunteers, each volunteer chaperone must complete the district's volunteer approval process. This should include a background check and trip-specific orientation. We recommend that all chaperones sign a *Volunteer Hold Harmless Agreement* and a *Volunteer Code of Conduct*. Find the *WSRMP School Volunteers* guidance article and sample *Volunteer Hold Harmless Agreement* and *Code of Conduct* on the [WSRMP member website](#).

Supervision

Supervision needs during an overnight trip are extensive and should be carefully planned out. The environment of an overnight trip is unusual and different from the standard school environment. However, they should be treated as an extension of the school day where the same rules apply. Train chaperones to supervise students at all times. Do not let students explore independently and take side trips without adult supervision. Remember, if you can't see them, you are not supervising them.

Plan ahead of time what areas students are permitted to visit when there are no planned activities. The district should decide what amenities and areas students are allowed to use in the hotel, keeping in mind that a chaperone needs to supervise any area with students. Plan in advance how common spaces such as hotel lobbies will be supervised.

WSRMP recommends against allowing students to use any pools or fitness rooms. These kinds of activities would require informed consent from the parents and extra planning. For example, a lifeguard must be present if students are using the pool, but hotels often do not provide one.

Overnight Supervision

Determine a supervision plan specific for nighttime that requires gender-specific chaperones for overnight supervision and bed checks. Consider the rules and practices needed to ensure students are in their assigned rooms. Determine ahead of time what time bed checks will be and how curfew will be enforced. Avoid creating situations where a staff member or chaperone is alone in a room with a student. Preferably, if a student's room needs to be entered, have two chaperones or staff members present. Whenever possible, have the chaperone conduct check-ins and bed checks from the doorway.

Tell students where chaperones will be, where to go, or what room number to call if they need adult help during the night or during time without scheduled activity. The students should keep this information with them and have it available in their rooms at all times.

Conclusion

Overnight trips create unusual opportunities for incidents, accidents, and district liability. Avoiding and mitigating these risks requires thoughtful planning and the thorough education of parents/guardians, chaperones, and students. If you would like further consultation on the specific needs of an overnight trip, please reach out to our Risk Services Department at 206.394.9737 or riskservices@wsrmp.com.