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Field Activities

Introduction

Outdoor field trips and activities should be an integral part of studying living things. But safety concerns become paramount in the "less-confined" classroom. When the activity is carefully planned, the possibility of accidents is greatly reduced. Thorough preparation can ensure safety for all participants.

Field Study Guidelines

1. Knowing the school/district policies and procedures for out-of-class activities is vital. Following the policies and exceeding the district safety guidelines will help avoid potential conflicts if any problems arise on the trip. Locate and study all district policies, forms, and guidelines. If the district does not have policies, forms, or guidelines, discuss with district administrator the need for guidance.
2. Keep student safety in mind as you plan the field activity. Create a written plan for the activity that includes goals, objectives, student rules and responsibilities, and permission forms. Determine the appropriateness of the activity for all students. Determine if any physical disabilities, allergies, or other conditions will impair or prevent some students from participating. A detailed written plan allows for review and approval by administrators. Document all safety suggestions/ rules for the out-of-class trip.
3. Obtain appropriate school/district approvals in writing and inform colleagues of the date and destination of the trip.
4. Check with the site administrators or owners to obtain permission to be on the site, especially if it is private property. Parks and public places often require prior permission for large group visits. Depending upon the nature of the activity, permission to collect specimens or conduct experiments may also be required.
5. A personal visit to the site prior to the student trip is essential. Include parents or other adults who will assist with supervision the day of the trip. All supervisors should be briefed on the nature, goals and expectations of the trip. At the site, all adults should be involved in identifying any possible safety concerns. Conditions to check for include: conditions that could cause student falls, unstable overhead objects, bridges or crossings, deep water, animals, insects, poisonous plants, vehicle traffic, seasonal hunting possibilities, electrical hazards, sensitive areas with exotic species, areas sprayed with herbicides or pesticides, and any other unique feature of the terrain.
6. As a result of the site visit, further specific plans should be formulated and any previous plans revised as appropriate. Special precautions about movement of students and equipment through the site might be required. Identification and location of poisonous plants/animals should be charted. Clothing requirements should be reviewed. Review all necessary safety equipment (goggles, gloves, etc.) and incorporate them into the plan.
7. Final emergency plans should be formulated with as many backups as possible for the area. Determine a method(s) for contacting the school in case of emergency. Maintain up-to-date medical information and emergency telephone numbers for each participant. Be sure first-aid kits are available and recently checked for all key components. Be sure procedures are in place for as many anticipated potential emergencies as possible. Be sure a plan is in place for transporting an injured student from the site if such a need should arise.
8. Make arrangements for transportation, if needed. Be sure to use transportation that is approved and insured by your school district. Personal transportation modes generally should be avoided.
9. Obtain appropriate parental permission as prescribed for your district. Permission forms should be accompanied by a written description of the trip, its purposes, and student responsibilities. Include any vital information about clothing or other safety precautions that need to be taken. Also ask for allergy information or other information that may affect student participation.
10. On the day of the field activity, remind building personnel of the trip and leave appropriate contact information with key building personnel. Be sure to leave a list of all students participating in the activity with the school office.

11. Make any arrangements that are necessary with any special personnel that will be required for the trip (special ed staff, nurse, parents, administrators, etc.).

12. The day of the trip remind all adult supervisors of the goals for the trip and their safety responsibilities with students. Monitor students to be sure they are adhering to all precautions and rules developed for the trip. Use an equipment checklist to assure that all equipment (especially safety equipment such as goggles) is packed and on site.

Put together a binder with all approvals, emergency information, safety procedures, etc. to help you and other supervisors handle any situations that may arise. Advanced planning and documentation are the keys to successful out-of-class trips. Enjoy the out-of-doors with your students—the educational outcomes will far outweigh the increased risks and extra work.

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