

# Introduction

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## Background

High-quality education is essential for any country that wishes to be competitive in the global economy. Almost three decades ago, a report titled “A Nation at Risk” warned Americans that their National security and global economic competitiveness was at risk and would be lost if education was not swiftly reformed. And although America has gone through a series of educational reforms since, the quality of education in America has continued to plummet.

In 2008, when President Barack Obama stepped into office amidst an impending financial crisis, he acknowledged that poor education was a threat to national security. Moreover, he drove the point home by saying, “Countries that out-educate us today are going to out-compete us tomorrow,” (Obama, 2009). In 2009 “Race to the Top,” a \$4.35 billion dollar program, endorsed by the U.S. Department of Education, was issued to spur reform in the education sector. This program promises a portion of its funds to any State that is willing to adopt its guidelines. One such funding recipient that captured our attention was our Nation’s capital. We were particularly interested in the District of Columbia for two reasons. One, the District of Columbia has a long history of accepting some of the highest levels of government aid, while continuing to produce some of the lowest performance results in the country. According to Christina Settimi, writer from *Forbes Magazine*, in 2007 before the financial crisis Washington D.C. was ranked 95th out of 97 for overall performance amongst some of the highest per pupil spending districts in the nation (Settimi, 2007). Moreover, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data of 2006-2007, compared to all other States, the District of Columbia ranked last in

reading and mathematics for its fourth and eighth graders (Rhee, 2007). Hence, as Settimi points out, “More spending doesn’t necessarily buy you better schools.” (Settimi, 2007)

The second reason we were interested in D.C. was due to the aggressive reform initiatives put into place by ex-chancellor Michelle Rhee. The reform movements in D.C. gave the country hope that the D.C. school district would soon become a high performing district, while the critics dismissed D.C.’s initiatives as rash and immature. When Michelle Rhee was forced out of office after the exit of Mayor Adrian Fenty in 2010, the excitement surrounding D.C. reform faded. From the time that Michelle Rhee took office in 2007 till her resignation before 2011, the DC CAS, a standardized testing measurement in D.C., showed “strong” growth<sup>1</sup>. In July of 2011, The District was proud to proclaim that the CAS results moved from 37.5% to 43.0 % proficiency in reading and 29.3% to 43.3% proficiency in math. Unfortunately, none of the reform measures encouraged or supported field trips.

### **Why Field Trips and Middle Schoolers?**

Although improving test scores is a reasonable objective, recent discoveries of widespread cheating by teachers in historically underperforming schools highlight the danger of focusing narrowly on standardized tests. Instead of evaluating the quality and efficacy of schools simply on the basis of test scores, schools should also be evaluated on the basis of how well their curriculum educates students in the fullest sense of the word. One of the most effective

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<sup>1</sup> The Comprehensive Assessment System (CAS) is the standardized testing measurement used by the District of Columbia Public School System (D.C.P.S). This test assesses students on reading and math in grades 3-8 and 10, science in grades 5 and 8, biology in high school, and composition in grades 4, 7, and 10. (<http://dcps.dc.gov/DCPS/dccas>)

educational activities that often gets overshadowed and underutilized as a result of an excessive focus on test scores is the school field trip. A field trip, serves as a beneficial tool that supplements the curriculum by providing students with an opportunity to garner a deeper understanding of the content.

Prompted by this hypothesis, our study focuses primarily on the impact that field trips have on middle schoolers. Given the history of poor quality education in the D.C. school system coupled with the fact that D.C. is an area filled with field trip opportunities, we decided to examine the realities and possibilities of field trips in relation to the educational experiences of D.C. middle schoolers.

## **Structure**

Our study begins with a review of pertinent literature pertaining to the nature and function of field trips that helps frame all of the import issues that we later examine in the context of D.C. middle schoolers. Next, our study focuses on the insights and observations of educators and parents. Lastly, our study highlights key findings and offers a set of basic recommendations that reflect an informed understanding of the relevance and importance of field trips.

# Literature Review

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During the early stages of our research we viewed a wide range of material on the topic of field trips. Three of our main focal points were: the **importance** of fieldtrips, **best practices**, and **problems**.

## Importance

Field trips are important for two reasons:

**One**, Field trips enhance learning by helping students **better conceptualize** material and **supplementing to the curriculum**.

## Conceptualization

Throughout the literature the consensus is that field trips are better at helping students conceptualize than a traditional classroom. Field trips are so effective because they constitute a very powerful form of experiential learning. Each of the articles recognizes experiential learning as a tool for garnering a deeper understanding of a concept. Gillian Isoardri, Faculty of Science and Technology at Queensland University of Technology, explains the relation between experiential learning and field trips. (Isoadri, 2010) Isoardi expounds on this relationship by connecting field trips to a model known as Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), a model developed by the educational theorist David Kolb. The ELT model outlines four steps of learning: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active

experimentation. A successful progression through this cycle will enhance a student's understanding of any particular concept. According to Isoardi, "The value of field trips and their contribution to student engagement and learning can be viewed from an experiential learning framework," (p. 37); the framework that he is referring to is the Experiential Learning Theory. Thus, field trips are a tool for garnering a deeper understanding of a concept.

### **Supplement to the Curriculum**

Field trips are not excursions that are independent from the classroom, but instead field trips are excursions that bring along the classroom. The most beneficial field trips solidify and expand a student's understanding of an abstract classroom concept. According to Ali Balci, the author of *The impact of Geological Field Trips on Geography Teaching*, experiential learning is able to turn "Abstract concepts to concrete knowledge." (Balchi, 2008) He claims that this process makes knowledge permanent. Patricia K. Coughlin's article *Making Field Trips Count*, gives an account of how field trips make abstract concepts concrete (Coughlin, 2010). Within the article, a group of elementary history students in Pennsylvania were documented going on a field trip to a one-room-schoolhouse decorated to emulate a particular time period. The schoolhouse is used to help educators teach in a cost effective manner. In the case of the children in the article, the room was made to resemble a traditional classroom in the early 1900's. The students took the abstract concepts that they had previously learned and explored what those concepts really meant during their day at the one-room schoolhouse. The students spent a day performing the same tasks that students of the early 1900's performed. One difference which was of interest to many of the students was the lack of running water. According to Coughlin, the class is shocked

when the docent tells them that their twentieth century counterparts had to carry fresh water from the creek on a daily basis and had to share that water. These types of experiences are virtually unforgettable because the children have internalized the events rather than simply memorizing them from a textbook. Often, students are given materials to memorize and forget in a matter of months. However, field trips can be used as a tool to help students actively engage in and solidify their understanding of key curriculum elements rather than simply memorizing.

**Two**, field trips expose the students to experiences and opportunities that lie beyond the scope of the curriculum by providing **alternative learning methods** and **exposing kids to different career opportunities**.

### **Alternative learning method**

Teachers know that different students learn best in different ways, but when our schools are responsible for millions of students a year, it becomes difficult to tailor lesson plans for every student. Field trips are a way of enhancing the curriculum to better service the students who do not learn well within the classroom. According to Jennifer Taffy, "Often times, it is the experiences we have during our elementary years that we take with us throughout life." Taffy argues that students are not learning effectively in the classroom and her theoretical rationale relies on the basis of the Student Engagement Theory. According to this Theory, students need to be engaged in learning in different ways as well as experiences outside the classroom. The problem is, our schools are not operating this way and thus cannot reach our kids effectively.

### **Field trips widen an individual's career opportunities**

Students often limit themselves to a narrow set of job choices: Doctor, Lawyer, Businessman, Teacher etc. They seldom explore or even know about the broad set of career choices that they have at their disposal. The youth should pick careers based on what they enjoy in areas they excel, not simply for the salary. Field trips broaden one's understanding of the world and where they fit within it. McLaughlin Barry published an overview of the PRIME program that reveals insight into how children's view of their place in the work force can be shaped and refined through field trips. (Barry, 1981) The Philadelphia Minorities in Engineering Consortium (PRIME) is an organization that molds minorities into talented and sought after candidates in the field of engineering. According to Barry, "PRIME graduates are much sought after candidates and are known to be talented, highly motivated students," (p. 2). Each summer, the students spend a month at a university participating in hands-on engineering training. Students can start the program in the seventh grade and continue until they graduate college. The training that these students receive helps them better understand the engineering field and this knowledge helps them make more informed career decisions. Also, these students meet professional engineers and are taught what it takes to be competitive in the engineering field. Networking with professionals also means potential job opportunities in the future.

Minorities are underrepresented in the engineering field and, "PRIME is first of all an organization of people with strong commitments for social justice," (p. 3). The Prime program offers minority students an opportunity to discover for themselves if they are fit to be engineers. The experiential learning that the program offers is highly marketable and results in the PRIME organization placing many sought after minorities in the field of engineering.

Aside from the reasons why field trips are important for all students, there is quite a bit of material that argues that field trips are more beneficial to minority students.

### **Field trips are important to minorities**

According to Principal Terri Tomlinson at George Hall Elementary, minorities in low income communities benefit greatly from field trips because they often are not granted the luxury of participating in many educational excursions outside of the classroom.<sup>2</sup> She recognized her student's lack of mobility to participate in outside educational excursions within her own school, which has a large percentage of minority students and linked this to the issue of poor quality of education. In response, she and her team implemented a program called the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learners Project. The project primarily focuses on the implementation of technology but couples it with field trips to provide a richer experience for the students<sup>3</sup>. In the process, her school went from an at risk school, to a school whose test scores are competitive with some of the best wealthy suburban schools across the state. According to Tomlinson, field trips "open up the world," and "made [learning] real for [the students]". Her jump to a nearly 100% proficiency rate in both English and mathematics, proves that her project worked and reveals how field

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2 Principal Tomlinson quoted this observation within the article entitled "Conversation with Educators from Extraordinary Public School in Alabama."

3 One such example of the implementation of technology within field trips by George Hall Elementary is their vocabulary building field trips. During these trips students would have digital cameras and recorders and record what they did on the trip, and upon getting back they are required to produce a product.



trips can play a pivotal role in improving the education of low income minority students. All students need field trips as a co-curricular activity in order to be well rounded. But low income minority students need it especially because a good percentage does not have the resources to partake in any.

## Best Practices

Field trips are beneficial, but only if they are done correctly. Proper planning and assessment will ensure that every trip offers an educational experience that is also safe. There are many efficient models available for planning great field trips, but the *Curriculum Module* for the Lutz-Franklin Schoolhouse is the best model that we've found to ensure a high quality educational experience.<sup>4</sup> As for safety, Margaret Wilson's article "Field Trips Fundamentals," provides a nice overview of what one must keep in mind in order to keep students safe during a field trip.

### Curriculum Module:

This Curriculum Module outlines a way of achieving an optimal educational experience and basically consists of three separate parts: pre-visit lessons, the actual field trip, and the post-visit assessment.

#### *Pre-Visit*

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<sup>4</sup> Patricia K. Coughlin, "Making Field Trips Count: Collaborating for Meaningful Experiences." (2010): [200-210].

The Curriculum Module states that the teacher should present at least two lessons before the field trip to teach the students what they will learn during the trip. A field trip is usually one day and students get more out of the experience if they know what to expect. The model argues that the lesson must be directly related to the trip and details how to engage the students appropriately.

### *During*

The Curriculum Module states that the students should be engaged in the material by having a variety of different kinds of tasks and should always be actively participating. The Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) describes the learning process students must go through in order to learn during a trip. The process is, concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active participation. Teachers should strive to take their students through each one of these steps during a field trip.

### *Post-Visit Assessment*

The Curriculum Module stresses assessment of the teachers and the students after each trip. The Module states that it is essential for the success of future trips to examine how each participant felt about the previous trip. A survey should be taken by each teacher and student involved as a means to understand what they liked or disliked about the trip. The model also argues that the teacher should gauge the knowledge of the students through a benchmark test, paper, or activity. The benchmark serves to provide the teacher with a better understanding of what the students grasp during the field trip so that they can build upon their teaching strategy for the next trip.

## Safety

Ensuring a safe trip is an important aspect of any field trip and Margret Wilson explains how to achieve this feat from personal experiences. Wilson thought she knew how to keep her children safe until one of her field trips took a turn for the worst. She lost a student who slipped into a closet with a locking door (Wilson, 2010). In her own words she says, "I'll never forget the gut-wrenching sensation and desperation I felt when he went missing," (p. 1). After this experience she wrote an article detailing all of the things to consider when taking a trip. I will list a few: "Make sure you know what you are getting into"; "Prepare for a successful bus ride"; "Before getting on the bus tell the kids exactly, where you are going, who you will get there, who else may be there" ... etc; "Think about restroom needs"; "Use parents appropriately". (p. 1 - 2)

She wrote this article in hopes that others will heed her warning and avoid a terrible mishap.

## Problems Surrounding Field trips

Common problems that are seen in relation to field trips are testing constraints and budgeting. Both of these problems arise because of the lack of importance that is placed on field trips. Our school systems seem to be too focused on test scores and many administrators fail to see that field trips truly enrich the lives of their students. Alternatively, there are educators who believe field trips can be used as a tool to improve test scores. When Principal Tomlinson, from George Hall Elementary, was questioned about the dilemma of testing and field trips she responded by rhetorically asking, "But what could we do that would be both a richer experience for the kids, and also one that would help with student achievement?" (Claus, 2010) (p.1) Principal Tomlinson then goes on to described what she did at her school. She mandated all teachers

incorporate vocabulary into every trip. This program was highly successful, taking her school from at risk to one of the best in the state. Yes, there are other factors that affected the increase in scores, but according to Tomlinson, these field trips played a large role in the school's success.

Our Literature Review was an attempt to organize what scholars and educators around America are saying about field trips. The information that we found proved quite beneficial because it helped us develop a preliminary understanding of the nature and importance of field trips that helped frame the interviews which were central to our study.

# Interviews

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One of the first steps in constructing our study was to determine exactly what type of data we would use. Given that the stated goal of our research was to determine “The Impact of Co-Curricular Field Trips on Middle Schoolers in the District of Columbia,” we thought about using quantitative data that could be easily analyzed and displayed. For a quantitative scheme to be successful, however, we would need to find a direct correlation between the number of field trips and a measure of a child’s success. Currently standardized testing is the accepted measure, thus we would need to find a correlation between one of the many standardized tests and field trips. Aside from being difficult to document, we did not believe that such a correlation and such a project would comprehensively represent the benefits of a field trip. As a result we moved on to a qualitative approach that had its own set of challenges. In general, a qualitative approach allowed us to draw conclusions from the testimony of the professionals that create field trips as well as the parents of the students. As a result, we were able to develop a broadly informed conception of the benefits and challenges of field trips more generally, as well as in direct relation to D.C. area middle schoolers.

## Interview Structure

### Opening

The interviews were conducted by both Wlajimir Alexis and Rodric Waugh. We began by introducing ourselves to the subject. Each of our introductions was structured around two questions that we found almost everyone asked. “Where are you from and why did you choose

this project?” We would then detail our experiences in the field of education both as students and as educators. We then moved onto why we decided to take part in this study. The next step was to explain the focus of the project and what we had achieved up to that point. Once the subject had been briefed on our intent we would field any questions that they had and begin the interview. We used a discussion based interview method instead of the classic question and answer style. We did so because it would not only allow us to understand what the subject felt was most important but it would also ensure we were able to garner peripheral information that we would have missed had we used the classic style. This was not an unguided discussion however; we utilized a set of objectives for each type of subject that we encountered. These objectives helped us ensure that we garnered all of the information necessary to make a comprehensive comparison.

## Objectives

We began constructing our objectives by determining exactly which groups we felt it was important to contact. We did this by choosing those who have the largest impact on a child's life. These were parents, administrators, and teachers. The next step was to create a set of objectives for each group which acted as the guiding principles of the discussions.

### Universal

The universal objectives were issues that all of our subject groups could address. These were the purpose of field trips and the methods used to create them. For teachers and administrators we were attempting to understand what they believed the purpose of field trips to be and what

methods they used to design them. For parents we were attempting to determine the importance that they placed on field trips and the impact of these trips on their children.

## Principals

We targeted principals because they control the administrative aspects of field trips. We created three objectives to guide our conversation. We wanted to discuss budget and time issues because field trips are a time intensive activity and the financial constraints on today's schools force them to carefully ration their resources. We also sought information on the assessment of field trips. This is important because our previous research showed that both pre- and post-assessments are key in the construction of a good field trip. Our final objective was to get a sense of a principal's conception of the ideal field trip.

## PTA

We wanted to determine two things during our interviews with PTA members. First we wanted to discover where field trips stood on the PTA agenda. We wanted to discover this because the D.C. school system had to function with fewer funds, as a result of the economy, and because of this they need extra resources to maintain the status quo. One source of extra funds for some schools would be PTAs. As a result a program's standing on the PTA agenda would determine the likelihood that it would receive supplementary funding from the PTA. The second thing we wanted to gauge was parent involvement with field trips. Parent involvement is important during field trips because of safety concerns. When a single class of thirty or more students goes on a field trip with their teacher they need more than a single chaperone to ensure their safety. It is because of this lack of man power that parent involvement is key.

## World Strides

We used World Strides as an example of the best practices for field trips. In doing so we wanted to determine what those practices were and how they could be adapted to Washington D.C. schools. Our first objective was to gain industry perspective on the importance of field trips and what field trip professionals considered crucial for a good field trip. Once we had an understanding of what a good field trip entailed, we wanted to understand how financially burdened school districts could use this model and if World Strides had created packages for these districts that incorporated all of the key elements for an affordable price.

## Teachers

We created two main objectives for teachers; the first was to determine what they saw as the value of field trips and the second was to minimize the amount of time that we took up. We wanted to minimize time because teachers are busy near the end of the year and the less time we took the more likely the teachers we interviewed would refer us to others. In general, our questions focused on the relationship between field trips and the curriculum and teacher's conceptions of the keys to an effective field trip. After our first interview we began integrating the objectives of the principal in an effort to obtain the educators stance on the same issues. This allowed us to create a more comprehensive view of the spectrum of teacher and administrator opinions.

## Preparation

We followed a template when preparing for interviews; we would first look over our objectives to determine exactly what we would be asking and would then adapt those objectives to what



we had seen in other interviews which meant adding nuances that applied to each school's situation. This allowed us to gain a comprehensive understanding of our plan before we began the interview.

## Findings and Interpretations

### Importance

We utilized a conversational approach to the interviews so that the interviewees could guide the conversations to areas that they felt were important and we could easily guide the conversations to any other areas of interest. During every interview we sought responses to the question, **“What do you feel is the importance of a field trip?”** Each interviewee had their own way of answering this question, but the same key points kept popping up. The three points that we heard in increasing order of frequency were: 3) Field trips provide opportunities for students to access their community’s resources. 2) Field trips promote a deeper understanding of concepts. 1) Field trips have broad and significant impact on the lives of children in minority communities.

#### **3) Field trips provide opportunities for students to access their community’s resources.**

Keenan Keller<sup>5</sup>, PTA president and Senior Council for the House Judiciary Committee says that his PTA ensures that field trips are at the top of their agenda because, “the local kids need to know what they have access to.” Our Nation’s Capital has a plethora of attractions that people

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<sup>5</sup> Keenan Keller is a PTA President of Hardy Middle School. He is a Member of the Local School Restructuring Team at Hardy Middle School and Bancroft Elementary School. He is a Senior Council for the Democratic Staff of the house Judiciary Committee. His focus is on the Civil Rights and Liberties Agenda for the house Democrats. He is a lawyer and practiced in Washington as well as in New York. He graduated from Yale Law School and Brown University.

from all around the world come to visit; But Mr. Keller is disheartened because many students and their families in the D.C. area lack the means to visit many of these attractions. Juliette Armerding<sup>6</sup> an English teacher argues that these children and their families do not even know of the many facilities they have access to. Reflecting on a past experience in New York City, Amerding remembers chaperoning students from the Bronx who had never traveled to Manhattan, “It was like a whole other world for them,” she said. Field trips open up this world for students and provide a connection to the community that is invaluable.

Dr. Barnett<sup>7</sup>, a band teacher, also claimed that students need to be more connected to their communities and argued that beyond giving students a chance to be exposed to the larger community, they also create opportunities for the community to be exposed to the children. Many of her students are of Hispanic decent and she has witnessed firsthand the misunderstandings which results from a lack of familiarity and mutual understanding. Moreover, she told us that when her students perform at community events, she considers it a very important opportunity for the community to see her children in a different light and embrace them in terms of their individuality.” Barnett’s outlook fully accords with her experience, for before she was an inner city teacher she lived in a small town that was predominately white and confesses that all she knew about race relations was from history class. However, as a result of

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6 Ms. Amerding is an English teacher at Columbia Heights Educational Campus.

7 Ms. Barnett is a high school Band Teacher at Columbia Heights Educational Campus.

her experiences in D.C. she developed a new and deeper understanding of race relations and the positive role that field trips can play.

## **2) Field trips promote a deeper understanding of concepts**

At a young age, many children are asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Often, they confidently answer with things like, pilot, astronaut, or for the more imaginative, superhero! These children know the most basic description of many of these jobs, but they lack true understanding of all of the responsibilities. As a child, it’s okay to only understand things on the surface, but during one’s adolescence it is important to begin to critically think and develop a deeper understanding of things. D.C.’s current test prep culture, does not teach students how to think critically. Mr. Wilson<sup>8</sup>, a PTA president, believes that, “We are teaching our children as if they are robots,” and that as a result they’ll find it hard to function in life. A robot can be programmed to do physics, but it will never understand the significance of physics principles in relation to daily life.

All interviewees agree that field trips are a different and powerful way of engaging students and challenging them to think critically. One example is Mrs. Shaw, an art teacher,<sup>9</sup> who believes that field trips can be used as a tool to engage the students with relevant material that ultimately requires students to think critically. For instance, instead of always taking trips to museums, she

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<sup>8</sup> Mr. Wilson is a co PTA president of Bancroft Elementary School.

<sup>9</sup> Ms. Shaw is a high school art teacher at Columbia Heights Educational Campus.

takes the kids on trips to local colleges so that they can “see what people in their twenties are doing.” As a result, she has noticed improvements in the vocabulary, attitude toward learning, and increases in critical reasoning abilities of her students. Given her experience, she believes that students need to be put in an environment where they are interested in the material and are praised for exhibiting intelligence.

**1) Field trips have broad and significant impact on the lives of children in minority communities.**

On August 23, 1963 Martin Luther King Junior led the biggest march in Washington D.C.’s history. On this day, roughly a quarter million people joined Dr. King and voiced their disapproval of the current racial and discriminatory climate in America. However, two short decades later the once strong minority community of Washington D.C. was torn from its roots by the epidemic of crack cocaine. According to the D.C. Metropolitan police Department, during the high point of the epidemic murders spiked so high that the city became known as the, “murder capital,” of the United States (Urbina, 2006). Mr. Wilson, a PTA President, told us about his memories of the minority community before and after the crack epidemic in D.C. According to Mr. Wilson, “Crack completely devastated the minority community and no one is acknowledging the effects of this [dark] time in D.C.’s history.” He went on to explain how many families are still broken and as a result, many children are arriving at school without being “School Ready,” or without knowing the basic concepts needed for the most basic levels of education. Being a middle class male, Mr. Wilson has enough time and money to educationally

engage his daughter on a daily basis; He goes out on field trips with her and reviews her homework daily. He recognizes that these opportunities are a privilege and he contributes a lot of his daughter's success to them. In contrast, Wilson said that, "Many low-income minority students are not able to get this kind of treatment at home because of the, large chasm between the haves and the have nots," brought on by historical injustices." Mr. Keller agreed with Mr. Wilson by saying that, "One of the things that is not well appreciated in the current educational dialogue is the at home preparation that is required for children to excel within the classroom." Every child needs educational experiences outside of the classroom, because these experiences provide excellent opportunities for them to develop their critical skills<sup>10</sup>.

## Best Practices

The phrase *Best Practices* is used to refer to the activities, procedures, and goals of a good fieldtrip. Our final conception of best practices was shaped by our review of the literature pertaining field trips and our interview of professionals who construct and market educational field trips packages. The main objective of any business is to generate profits and the easiest way to do so is to provide the best product for the lowest cost. For companies that create and manage field trips for students this means that they are attempting to create the most enriching

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<sup>10</sup> Field trips build critical thinking skills. e.g. When middle school students visit civil war memories, they can more easily **internalize** the events of that bloody time in American history. From there the students will feel inclined to **formulate their own questions**. Field trips set the stage for this critical thinking process to take place better than the classroom.

educational experience while maintaining low costs. This is important for middle schools in the D.C. area because school districts are attempting to provide their students with the best experience possible with only limited resources. In an effort to determine a general set of *Best Practices*, we visited one of the leaders in private sector educational field trip, a company called World Strides.<sup>11</sup> This company has been creating and running educational tours for decades and has been managing recreational tours since 1964. Given their wealth of experience and their status as a for-profit leader in their field, they were perfect choice as a resource for building our broader vision of *Best Practices*. In general, we found that the practices came in three categories; preparation, curricular connection, and assessment.

Preparation was one of the cornerstones of the World Strides' program but its style of implementation in the public school system varied. The planning of a field trip begins when the teacher contacts World Strides. The company has a suite of preplanned trips for which both transportation and a trained tour guide are provided. In the public sector the safety of the students and transportation is solely the responsibility of the teacher. Because the metro and bus systems provide unlimited rides for a discounted monthly rate to D.C. students, finding transportation is not difficult. However, problems arise because of a lack of parent volunteers to ensure the children's safety when they have to travel long distances using public transportation.

World Strides states that preparing both the teacher and the students is an important aspect of a successful fieldtrip because it ensures that they enjoy an optimal educational experience. The

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<sup>11</sup> World Strides is one of the leaders in the creation and marketing of field trips for school throughout the nation.

teachers are provided with “Teacher Tool Boxes” to help with preparation. These tool boxes contain literature concerning the destination as well as a suggested lesson plan that is personalized for the teacher and the focus of the lesson upon request. In the public sector some schools also prepare by utilizing lesson plans provided by institutions with which they have partnerships. One such institution which provides lesson plans is the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. These lesson plans help to inform the students about the art they’ll see once they visit the gallery. For those schools without a partnership with an institution or company that provides lesson plans a teacher’s preparation will vary because each field trip is so different. Nevertheless, the importance of preparation in general was summarized nicely by Mr. McCoy, a D.C. area middle school vice-principal, who claimed that one of the fundamental tasks of the teacher is to be able to “remind them of [what they are there to learn] all through the experience, before during and after.”<sup>12</sup> However, for the preparation to translate into an experience that will have long term impact, the trip itself must be connected to the curriculum.

Curricular connections are required for a World Strides’ field trip to be successful. One of the hallmarks of their advertising is the claim that they provide credit for students who take part in their field trips. In order to provide such credit, World Strides has become accredited as a high school. To ensure that the students retain knowledge from their field trips the company creates rich connections between aspects of the field trip and the personalized curriculum they give the teachers. They do so by giving students “Discovery Journals” which require them to engage with their surroundings in order to answer various questions. In addition, there is the certified tour

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12 Mr. McCoy is the Vice Principle of Bancroft Elementary in Washington D.C.



guided who constantly encourages the students to make connections between what they are seeing or experiencing and the educational objectives of the curriculum. In the public sphere, curricular connections are also required for a field trip to be optimally educational. In cases such as those where a partner provided a curriculum, the curriculum was created for a specific field trip and thus the two are closely aligned. One way in which these connections are made is by taking what the students have seen in the curriculum and showing them how these items work in the real world. In the case of art, it's a matter of allowing the student to see the artwork in person or allowing them to listen to the music in a concert hall as it was meant to be played as opposed to seeing the art on a computer screen or listening to the music on a stereo. These types of opportunities generally help cement the lessons taught in the classroom. Nevertheless, it is important to assess what the students have retained to determine to what degree a field trip was successful.

Assessment of the students and the field trip itself is an integral part of the World Strides procedure, but such is not always the case for public schools. The assessment done by World Strides determines how much students retained and the impact it had on their lives. These factors define the value of the trip. The data regarding these two objects comes from two sources; the first is a survey given to parents and the second is a class taught by a teacher that revolves around the field trip experience. The survey helps the company gather information about the experience that the students had on the trip and any interactions the parents had with the company staff. Such information is important because it allows the staff to not only improve the field trips; it also helps them improve their customer service. The class taught after the trip is used to assess the students' knowledge of what they learned on the field trip and to

teach them supplementary information that helps make the field trips more meaningful.

Unfortunately, in the case of public schools, assessments are often encouraged but rarely required.

## **Problems Surrounding Field trips**

### **Economic Constraints**

In today's struggling economy revenues are dropping and it is becoming difficult for many institutions, including school systems, to pay their bills. As government revenues have fallen school districts have had to make some difficult decisions concerning funding. It is the necessity of these difficult decisions that drove us to identify economic constraints as an issue pertaining to field trips. Although we believed economic constraints were a major issue regarding field trips all of our interviewees said otherwise. Principal McCoy said, "We never had to say no because of money." This was a special case because the school received a lot of financial backing from its PTA and it allocated ten to twelve thousand dollars a year for field trips. Schools that lacked this type of financial PTA support from PTA support used partnerships and free resources to take their students on field trips and many forged partnerships with institutions in the community.

For those schools that lack such partnerships, creating field trips can be challenging. However, one of the interesting things about Washington D.C. is that the pitfalls are rarely financial. As previously mentioned, the D.C. transit system provides discounts that allow children from within the D.C. metropolitan area to travel on both the metro and bus systems for a discounted monthly fare. This means that there is an easily accessible and dependable form of

transportation for the students to take. Although traveling with a large class on the public transit system can be as one teacher described it, “a logistical nightmare,” this type of option makes taking field trips in D.C. really viable. In addition to free transportation, Washington D.C. also affords its schools free access to a host of different federally funded museums and attractions. This being the case, there are lots of different free and educational field trips that can be integrated into most D.C. curriculums.

### **Time Constraints**

Although money doesn’t pose a serious constraint on the ability of D.C. schools to take field trips, time does. In today’s society our students are competing on a global scale, gone are the days when classmates were only competing with each other. Today students are competing with children around the country and around the world. Currently, the most prevalent manner in which students’ level of education is measured is through the use of standardized tests. We did not think that standardized testing would have been a dominant factor in planning and taking field trips, but surprisingly, it was. Every educator with whom we spoke said that during the middle of the year they did not take field trips. The time period that was quoted by both Mrs. Armerding, an English teacher, and Mrs. Johnston, an art teacher, was from January to April. Although the educators were never told that field trips were not allowed during this time period, they were, as Mr. McCoy puts it, “discouraged” from taking trips. Because of this, teachers do not take field trips during this time and hence the actual opportunities to take field trips are severely limited. Testing also affected the number of field trips taken in a secondary manner. In classes that do not teach subjects being tested in DCCAS or District of Columbia Comprehensive Assessment System and other standardized tests the teachers are required to

spend time teaching English, math, and science in their classes. Additionally, students are also at times pulled out of these non-test oriented classes to attend supplementary English, math, and science classes. Although this may not immediately seem problematic, it does mean that these teachers must eliminate some activities from their lesson plan in order to make up the time. Moreover, this means that activities that are not considered priorities get eliminated from the lesson plan. Although these situations can be difficult, many teachers will go along with the program because, as we were told by a middle school music teacher, if the students fail to meet the standards set by the government the teachers will lose their jobs.

## Recommendations

As we conducted our interviews and research we found that educators, administrators, and parents deviated from the *Best Practices* stemming from the literature considered in the course of our study. This being the case, our recommendations are an attempt to provide each of these constituencies with a little advice concerning how they can help children reap the benefits of field trips.

### Administrators

Administrators have the final word in decisions concerning their schools and as a result control the allocation of resources. It is because of these factors that administrators are the first group we will address. As we stated in the findings section, we found that from the months of January to April field trips were never taken. Although it is not expressly forbidden it is expected that teachers will not schedule field trips during this time. As a result students do not have opportunities to enjoy the benefits of field trips corresponding to significant portions of their curriculum. Because of this we recommend that administrators make curricular value as opposed to scheduling convenience the driving factor when planning field trips. Ultimately, this type of shift in policy should lead to an increase in the number of field trips and this increase should allow students to develop a deeper understanding of various aspects of the curriculum.

A second recommendation is that administrators make the assessment of field trips a top priority. To ensure that field trips are being implemented effectively an administrator needs to assess teacher performance. World Strides and the Lutz-Franklin Schoolhouse *Curriculum*

*Module* both push for assessment of those facilitating field trips to ensure their effectiveness (Patricia K. Coughlin 2010). World Strides actively follows its own advice by monitoring the performance of its tour guides who perform the same facilitation functions as teachers in order to ensure that they are using the best practices as defined by the company. Administrators should assess teachers to guarantee that the best possible practices are being implemented and that students' time is being used effectively. If these recommendations are followed they will help to improve the educational experience for students.

## Teachers

Teachers are one of the most important parts of the educational experience because they impart knowledge to the students and in doing so influence their overall growth. It is because of this power that our first recommendation concerns the nature of the field trips teachers choose to take. All of our interviewees said that field trips are an integral part of education. Even with all of the local resources mentioned it will be difficult for some teachers to create optimal field trips. These teachers need to consider the partnerships that are present in the D.C. area, especially those for the arts. A partnership that we previously mentioned was the Corcoran Gallery of Art. This program not only provides teachers with graduate students who serve as guides but also provides their classes with transportation as stated by Mrs. Johnston. However, this is not the only program of its kind. The Kennedy center also presents a host of programs. These programs include free concerts for students, artist visits to classrooms, professional development for teachers and administrators, and in the case of the *Get on the Bus* program, money for transportation to Kennedy Center events (Kennedy Center 2011).

For these field trips to be of value even with the assistance these organizations basic *Best Practices* must be a part of program. One of the tenants of *Best Practice* was the fact that a valuable field trip must have a strong connection to the curriculum. World Strides utilizes curricular connections to ensure that students receive the optimum benefit from the trip itself and that they are prepared for the post trip assessments. This idea of curricular connections is echoed throughout our previous research in articles including Ali Balci's, *The impact of Geological Field Trips on Geography Teaching*, Patricia K. Coughlin's article *Making Field Trips Count*, and Nabors, Edwards, and Murray's article *Making the Case for Field Trips* (Patricia K. Coughlin 2010 & Nabors, Martha L., Linda Carol Edwards, and R.K. Murray 2009). These articles were also supported by the statements of many of our interviewees who likewise stressed the fact that curricular connections are essential if a field trip is going to be academically valuable. In order to determine if there are enough connections to the curriculum one must have an understanding of a student's knowledge of a subject before and after the field trip. This is why assessments are an important part of the *Best Practices*. Few of the teachers that we interviewed implemented pre- or post-assessments. Adding both pre- and post-assessments would ensure that the resources that the school devotes to a field trip, be they class time or funding, are being used effectively. For teachers it would ensure that the field trips that they created provide beneficial experiences for their students while simultaneously ensuring that their students draw critical connections between those experiences and their classroom curriculum.

## Parents

Parents are integral to the success of our students. Unfortunately, many parents in the D.C. area are stressed under the weight of a financial crisis and all of the other problems that life in an impoverished inner city presents. Nevertheless, parents can advocate for their children and support the efforts of teachers and administrators to provide their children with quality field trips.

Most immediately, however, parents should strive to ensure that the field trip experience is maximally beneficial by playing an active role in chaperoning field trips when they can and reinforcing the lessons of field trips by engaging their children in thoughtful conversations about what they enjoyed about their field trip and what they learned. Moreover, it's as simple as parents asking their children questions like, "What did you learn during the field trip?", "Did you like the field trip?", "What was your favorite part of the field trip?"... etc. By asking such questions, parents give their children a valuable opportunity to reflect once more on the things they learned during the day.

**Lastly, parents themselves need to take their children on field trips.** Some of the best field trips are simply thoughtful little excursions that provide children with an interesting educational experience. In fact, one of the best ways of making a field trip interesting and rewarding is to have you child or children help you research and plan it. Doing so, not only creates an opportunity for children to see and experience something educational and interesting, it also helps them develop the language arts skills and critical thinking skills that will be foundational to their academic development and success.



# Contextualization

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WLAJIMIR ALEXIS

This was my first research project and every step of the way was a new and exciting experience.

From start to finish the project changed quite a bit, but I am happy with the finished product.

Initially this project was going to be about the trends in budgeting between low and high performing schools. But we later realized that this would be too broad. After narrowing our focus to field trips, we were surprised to find a wealth of material that provided us with a strong foundation for framing interviews focusing on the nature of field trips and various issues surrounding them in relation to D.C. students. However, ironing out the dates for the interviews was not as easy as I expected. In the beginning stages we spent much of our time simply trying to pin down meeting times and somehow we always managed to get the runaround. We entered D.C. with a few confirmations, but after talking with a couple people we were able to network and connect with enough people to make the trip worthwhile.

Our interviewees were welcoming and eager to talk to us about the importance of field trips. Every person had their own unique perspectives, but the general consensus was that field trips are important and need to be more effectively utilized. I am happy that we decided to use a conversational based style of interview because every interviewee was able to reflect on things that they felt had the most importance and these self-expressed views brought various aspects of the project to life. The write up itself was an experience in itself. We spent weeks reviewing recordings, and writing up synopses of our findings. The nerve-racking part of this experience

was giving our advisor updates of our progress. He was looking for polished and refined work and we never wanted to disappoint.

**While in D.C. it was not all business though, and we managed to also have a great time! We visited monuments and museums and polishing our knowledge of historical events and artifacts. Our most memorable day consisted of a visit to the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum to ride their flight simulator. I always wanted to be a pilot and having the opportunity to sit in the cockpit and have full control of the plane was an unforgettable experience. Also, since we were lodging with my cousin, who is an officer in the Army, we were afforded an opportunity to roam the base at Fort Myer<sup>13</sup>, eat in their dining halls, and even watch their famous presentation, Twilight tattoo. All of these events served as our mini field trips. In fact, I like to think of the whole experience as a field trip, because before the project I had only a faint understanding of what a field trips entailed, but needed this experience to truly understand all went into this process!**

## **RODRIC WAUGH**

This was my first attempt at designing a study on this scale and as such it was an amazing experience. During the design stage I looked at a wide range of different studies that presented many different methods for framing our project. I also thought about numerous possible focal

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13 Fort Myer is the U.S. Army Military Base adjacent to the Arlington Cemetery.

points. However, after numerous discussions with Wlajimir, we decided to focus on Washington D.C. because of the volatile landscape of education in that area. As we looked closer and closer at the state of public education in Washington D.C. we found that there were large populations of both minority school children and children eligible for free lunch programs. During Spring Break I delved into the financial statements of both the district as well as individual schools within the district in an attempt to find connections between funding allocations and test scores. Although there were some interesting findings Wlajimir and I, with the help of our advisor Professor Franklin, found that our scope was far too large for the time and resources that we had at our disposal. This being the case, we decided to focused on one of the more interesting and underappreciated aspects of education--field trips.

I wanted to focus on field trips because I felt they could play a major role in a student's life for a wealth of reasons. As we came to a consensus on our subject, Professor Franklin directed us to various resources that served to broaden our understanding of the subject. As I read more and created documents condensing my knowledge of the subject I began to realize that I was gaining a much better understanding of the specifics of the project and this allowed Wlajimir and me to refine the questions and foci of our interviews. The most difficult part of this entire process was procuring the interviews. Before we travelled to Washington D.C. we had a small number of interviews scheduled but once we hit the ground and began meeting people face to face we received many additional responses and referrals. The interview process itself was relatively simple because of our decision to take an open discussion approach. Although the process was simplistic the resulting answers were fascinating because even with the myriad of

differences between each educator, parent, and administrator they all wanted the best for the students and they all considered field trips highly valuable.

When creating the findings section I found that our results reaffirmed some of my beliefs about the funding and support of field trips but they surprised me as well when I discovered the relatively small role that funding played in the use of field trips in the D.C. school system. In essence we learned that a narrow focus on teaching to the test, which probably negatively impacts true educational achievement in numerous ways, also negatively impacts students by limiting their opportunities to have experiences like seeing the space shuttle that inspire them to study math and science or seeing a painting by Henry Tanner that awakens their love of the arts. Recognizing this to be the case, my ultimate hope is that our project will help call attention to the need to make field trips a priority so that future generations of children, regardless of their social situation, will have the opportunity to take field trips and experience the same type of excitement and awe that nurtured my curiosity and my desire to learn.

# Appendix

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## Interviewee's Job Description

### WORLDSTRIDES

#### **Jessalyn**

She is a former teacher, 2<sup>nd</sup> on educational issues for WorldStrides, and online course instructor.

#### **Andy**

He is a part of the Marketing department for WorldStrides.

#### **Sarah**

She is an Intern for WorldStrides and college student.

### PRINCIPAL

#### **Principal McCoy**

He is the Assistant principal at Bancroft Elementary School.

### TEACHERS

#### **Dr. Barnett**

She is the High School Band teacher at Columbia Heights Educational Campus.

#### **Mr. Francis**

He is a Middle School Band teacher at Columbia Heights Educational Campus.

**Ms. Armerding**

She is a Middle School English teacher at Columbia Heights Educational Campus.

**Ms. Johnston**

She is a Middle School Art teacher at Columbia Heights Education Campus.

**Ms. Shaw**

She is High school Art teacher at Columbia Heights Education Campus.

**PTA**

**Mr. Keller**

He is Senior Council to Democratic Staff House Judiciary Committee, Co-PTA President of Bancroft Elementary School and active parent.

**Mr. Wilson**

He is a Co-PTA President Bancroft Elementary School and active parent.

## **Interview Summaries**

**WORLDSTRIDES**

*WorldStrides* is a private for profit organization that facilitates field trips for different schools across the country. Though WorldStrides does not have any of its own students, it is accredited as a school. The three main elements of World Strides's mission are to provide a safe and secure fieldtrip, exhibit passionate professionalism, and provide a beyond the classroom experience. Since 1969, this institution has been in the business of field trips and its years of specialization offer a wise outlook on field trips.

### **How World Strides works**

The business model of World Strides relies on parents as the consumer and generally uses the school as the vehicle to advertise their fieldtrip packages. In other words, a teacher chooses a particular field trip package from World Strides, but the parents pay the fee that World Strides charges. Once a fieldtrip is chosen, World Strides begins working with the teacher to plan the logistics surrounding the fieldtrip in order to ensure the teacher gets the most out of the experience.

### **What World Strides defines as a good field trip and how they can help achieve one.**

World Strides provide many services for teachers that exemplify their understanding of what a good fieldtrip is. The World strides team believes a good field trip experience involves careful preparation, is safe and secure, gives the student a chance to engage, is co-curricular, and assesses the child's knowledge. In an effort to help the teachers prepare their students for the field trip World Strides offer, a suggested lesson plan book, readily available staff to answer questions, and other services. To ensure a trip is safe and secure they staff the fieldtrip chaperone positions with individuals who have been trained to protect the well being of the children.

To ensure that the students are engaging these same chaperones use tactics to engage the students that they have been trained to do. Lastly, in order to assess the child's knowledge and also to show the student that the trip is co-curricular; World Strides online classes after the trip that coincides with what they have learned and provide high school credit.

## **PRINCIPAL**

### **Principal McCoy**

McCoy plays an active role in the field trip process at his school and is very open to the concept of experiential learning. Mr. McCoy thinks that field trips are important because they complement the material and grab the child's attention.

As the vice principal, his role is to overview fieldtrips that teachers make. He has to ensure that each trip is safe and logistically sound. Mr. McCoy says it is exciting to overview fieldtrips because each trip is an opportunity for the students to learn something new and he enjoys seeing an active year.

But, although he likes to see an active year, the administration does not allow (never said it was outlawed just that it was not advised) the teachers to leave during the month of April because testing is important and doing poorly could mean losing funding. Currently funding for field trips is not a problem at Bancroft, but if the school loses funding because of poor testing it could really hurt the budget for fieldtrips. One alternative that we suggested that could help in time of a low budget is taking the students on virtual fieldtrip. Mr. McCoy acknowledges this as a good idea, but would much rather not have to go that route because Virtual fieldtrips take away from the



experiential learning of students he also said that if you could buy the equipment you could send them on a field trip.

## TEACHERS

### Dr. Barnett

Dr. Barnett is the band teacher at Bell high school located on the Columbia Heights Educational Campus. She is very out spoken about the value of field trips and what they can do for her students as well as society at large. The majority of trips which she takes are performance related including a yearly marathon and Kennedy center visits. She has a performing ensemble unlike many other schools in D.C. Because of this she takes her students to environments which they would rarely be in other wise such as the Kennedy Center. She says that when she takes her ensemble to play in public venues, they are showing the world students of color in a positive fashion which is not done frequently enough. It also benefits the students by helping to expose them to cultural sites which many of them have not been able to visit previously. While at these locations the students are taught important social skills which they have not had the chance to learn because they have not been in these types of situations. She confirmed that from January to May there were no field trips because of the testing schedule. But in the last five weeks her students have taken one field trip per week. This kind of schedule is demanding and takes up their time not only on trips but also at home where they practice. These field trips were all music related but not every field trip that Dr. Barnett

takes is directly related to class. She did take her students to six flag as a reward for their service. In the end she states that the purpose of field trips is to break students out of the insular environments which restrict their knowledge of their world and what it has to offer.

### **Mr. Francis**

Mr. Francis is originally from Boston Massachusetts but he now work as the middle school band teacher at Lincoln middle school located on the Columbia Heights Educational Campus. He believes that field trips are important but that they must be connected with the curriculum. Otherwise they are a waste of both the student and teacher's time. He mentions an example in which he was a chaperone on a field trip which was a reward for the students; as such this trip had no academic tie in. He also says that a good field trip must be well planned and executed. He points toward a leadership camp which held no value for anyone involved because a lack of logistical planning by the camp director. Mr. Francis does admit that logistics can be difficult to cope with. The school does not set aside funds for field trips so the students are forced to take the metro. This can be a harrowing experience when there is a class of thirty or more children. The logistical difficulties also continue into the realm of food. Because Lincoln is a school in which many children receive reduced priced lunch teachers have to provide lunch on all day field trips, the school does not always provide this however. Thus Mr. Francis had to bring lunches for his students. Scheduling field trips is also difficult because of the constraints testing places on teachers. During testing season field

trips are never taken and students are pulled out of Mr. Francis' class to attend extra English or math classes. There are some benefits to working in the D.C. area however. There is a wealth of destinations to visit a couple of subway stops away and many of these institutions make partnerships with schools. One such institution which Mr. Francis is allied with is Lincoln Center. He takes his student there to listen to and interact with the musicians. It is this interaction that is key to his students' growth as musicians.

**Ms. Armerding**

Armerding believes that field trips are important for its ability to provide cross curricular connections. As an English teacher, she believes it is beneficial for her students to partake in fieldtrips and does not like the rhetoric that establishes field trips as only beneficial to students in science or history classes.

Armerding goes on to acknowledge the pressure that the administration forces teachers to focus on test preparation. According to her, the months of January to April are completely closed to field trips. Field trips are blocked off more by the pressure to prepare for testing than the need for funds. She argues that the school has enough money and if not, there are many organizations that are willing to fund a field trip. In other words, money is a menial problem in comparison to test prep restrictions.

She believes that our students should start engaging in fieldtrips at a younger age than middle school. From her experience, students at the middle school age in urban communities are not very excited about visiting the museum. She argues if the field trip

agenda was started at a young age then the students would have more desire to partake in them.

Her closing arguments were students need field trips in order to cultivate their overall sense of importance for education.

### **Ms. Johnston**

Mrs. Johnson believes that the purpose of a field trip is to make abstract concepts more concrete. "Students need to visit a museum that exhibits the different hazy art concepts learned in class in order for them to become clearer and for the students to have a keener eye for true art."

Field trips also keep the student in line; many of the students are usually fidgety in class, but being in a new environment calms them. Better behaved students lead to a heightened understanding of the material.

She believes there must be pre and post assessment to a good fieldtrip. Before a field trip, teachers must engage the students in material that they will see on the trip. After the fieldtrip it is essential to cover material that allows the students to use the same material in a different way.

According to Ms. Johnson, standardized testing definitely interferes with the teacher's ability to take students on more fieldtrips. She also argues that testing is more of a restraint than budgeting needs. There are different programs available for funding. Mrs. Johnson is connected to the Corcoran Arts program. This is a program that allows her art

program to visit three times a year. Because of this partnership funding for field trips is not an issue for Mrs. Johnston.

### **Ms. Shaw**

Mrs. Shaw is a high school art teacher at Bell high school which is located on the Columbia Heights Educational Campus. She had recently been transferred to the Columbia Heights campus from, Wilson a school which she had been working at for almost a decade. We began by explaining our research and asking her about the importance of field trips. From there she took over the interview and provided us with a wealth of information. She began by saying that field trips are imperative to children's growth; so much so that she will take students to museums on her own time. She went on to expand and designate specific reasons why she feels that field trips are so important. In her opinion it was imperative that art students go on field trips because there is no other way to truly experience the art. Other forms, such as print outs, distorted the images and the colors. There is also a social reason for taking field trips; students were often more engaged by the museum than they would have been in class. This was a result of the new environment. This also helps teach students how to interact in public spaces. They observed the other patrons and picked up on the social queues concerning acceptable behavior. These excursions also brought museums to the attentions of students thus showing them an alternative to movies and other more conventional teenage pass times. She then goes on to discuss how she determines what a good field trips is. It should focus on instillations which are relevant to the student,

causes the students to think critically, and have a connection with the student's work in other classes. Shaw wants to ensure that the trips are relevant because they will open the world to the students while simultaneously instill confidence because of the subject matter. One example is of a painting of LL Cool J where he is represented as a powerful figure. Mrs. Shaw is a teacher who not only cares about her student's learning but also about their growth as people and this comes through in her analysis.

## PTA

### Mr. Keller

Keller believes that fieldtrips are important because they serve to complement the curriculum in a way that cannot be done from within the classroom. For example, he believes that all students should understand their government and argues that a trip to the nation's capital will give the students a greater connection to this material. Keller believes that a field trip is important, but highlights that the experiential learning component is what makes field trips truly special. Experiential learning is any experience that makes an abstract concept more concrete. He argues that a sufficient amount of experiential learning is essential to the development of anyone one who wishes to be a well rounded individual. Unfortunately, many students of a low socio-economic status lack the opportunity to receive even the simplest forms of experiential learning. He feels sympathy for the many children who do not have the opportunity to have these outside experiences and believes it is the schools role to provide such an opportunity through a field trip.

As the president of the PTA, Mr. Keller has recognized that schools need a great deal of help in order to finance and facilitate fieldtrips for students.

He has made funding and advocating for fieldtrips a leading role in his PTA's agenda.

During our visit to D.C. the Bancroft students went to the capital building and the PTA funded the bus expenses for the trip.

Aside from raising money for field trips he facilitates and helps plan fieldtrips. For example he is responsible for granting students access to some of the most restricted rooms in D.C.

Many of the students were from lower income families and are primarily of Hispanic decent. He believes that this field trip had a greater impact on these individuals because it may have provided them with an experience that they would otherwise never take during their childhood.

#### **Mr. Wilson**

Mr. Wilson is an inspiring and wise parent who we meet in the parking lot on the way to the car. He walked right up to us and began asking questions. His passion for education was evident from the first couple of minutes of speaking with him.

Mr. Wilson believes that field trips are important for the exposure that they offer children. It is a big world, but many children stay within their neighborhood. Mr. Wilson believes all students need to step outside of their box in order to develop the skills needed to succeed in a competitive job market. He also argues that students do not

learn the same, and field trips are a way to provide students with another avenue for which they can learn a given material. Also, he makes light of the fact that many minority students pursue a narrow set of professions that they see on T.V. “Doctor, Lawyer, Business man, etc. Why not make it our role as the school to open up these children’s world to other positions?”

A lot of his insights were drawn from his interactions with the parents of Bancroft Elementary School. Many of them are low income Hispanic families. As a parent himself he reflects on the disparity that some students may face because of their socio-economic status.

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