

School trips are an educationally sound and vital component in the instructional and/or athletic programs of PACE members. Each trip should be well planned beforehand and thoroughly evaluated after completion. Remember, if you fail to plan your students' trip carefully, then they will plan it for you. The trip leader(s) should be held responsible for the activity, just as if it were being conducted on campus. All students within the class or school group must be given an equal opportunity to participate in these trips. In addition, all PACE member policies and protocols pertinent to school-sponsored travel, including those governing the use of in-house transportation services, should be consulted and strictly adhered to.

Unfortunately, school trips can create serious problems for PACE members if supervision procedures and student expectations are ill-defined. Therefore, trip guidelines should be thoughtfully crafted in advance and made publicly available. It is also important that all participating students, and their parent(s)/guardian(s), understand the PACE member's rules and regulations governing discipline for any students who fail to abide by these guidelines.

Board Policy and Administrative Regulation (AR)

For members that allow school trips, a board policy and associated AR should be in place. If you use OSBA's model policies, you should reference policies IICA and IICA-AR. It is important to remember that school trips are an extension of the classroom and as such, all school board policies, and school rules and expectations are applicable just as if you were still in the classroom.

Approval Process

As a best practice, PACE recommends that all members have a documented approval process for school trips. It would also be good practice to have guidance on what type of trips are encouraged and types that are most likely not going to get approval. This process should include gathering information for administration to decide whether to approve the



trip. You may also want to develop time frames on how many days prior to the trip a request must be submitted to prevent last-minute scrambling. The information gathered may include details like:

- The school(s), staff member(s) and/or club(s) organizing the trip.
- The date, duration, and location of the trip.
- Expected number of students, staff, and chaperones.
- Description of the trip and all associated activities, including the educational purpose of the trip.
- For overnight trips, what sleeping accommodations/arrangements look like.
- Mode(s) of transportation of students on the trip.
- Anticipated costs and funding sources for the trip.

When looking at this approval process, there should be multiple levels of approval. For example, simple, low risk trips like going to a local museum may only require building administration approval. For higher risk trips such as overnight trips, out of state travel or trips that include activities that have inherent risks should have an approval process that includes the building administrator, a district level administrator and possibly even the school board.

PACE members can always gauge their appetite for risk versus a trip's potential educational value by asking themselves the following question, "If this trip were to result in a significant injury or other liability, would we ever support it again in the future?" If the answer is no, then the question becomes, "Why are we endorsing the activity in the first place?" We should not be waiting for something bad to happen before making changes.

Supervision

Oftentimes, the safety and litigation-related issues which arise from school trips stem from inadequate supervision. PACE recommends sufficient supervisory staff and/or volunteer chaperones on hand to ensure all students are supervised for the trip. This should mean that students are within sight and sound of a supervisor.

Any volunteer chaperones should be thoroughly background checked in advance, as per Oregon law and board policy. The volunteers are agents of your school and, therefore, you may be liable for their actions or inactions. We can probably all share stories of parent chaperones that added to our student count rather than assisting us with supervising the students. As such, it is imperative that you provide them with guidance on your expectations of them prior to allowing them to be a chaperone on the trip.

There is no magic number when it comes to staff-to-student supervision ratios for school trips. That number will largely depend on a variety of critical factors, including:

- The nature and location of the activities involved
- The age, behaviors, and ability of the students
- Students with special educational and/or medical needs
- The experience, competence, and background of supervisory staff
- The requirements of the organization/ location(s) to be visited
- The mode(s) of travel to and from the venue(s)

In the event of a student or trip leader needing to vacate the trip early, an adequate level of supervision will still need to be maintained. For example, a trip leader may need to accompany a sick or injured student to the hospital or attend to a personal emergency. This possibility should be considered when planning your excursion.

Liability Waivers/Informed Consent

The utilization of waivers and informed consent forms for field trips is essential for off-campus activities. These documents serve as legal safeguards, outlining the potential risks associated with the trip and obtaining permission from parents or guardians for their child's participation. Waivers acknowledge that certain hazards may be present during the excursion, such as transportation-related risks or activities that involve physical exertion. Informed consent forms provide detailed information about the trip itinerary, emergency procedures, and any special requirements or accommodations needed for students. By obtaining signed waivers and informed consent forms, administrators demonstrate their commitment to transparency and risk management, while also ensuring that students are adequately prepared for the educational experience outside the classroom. [PACE Legal Services](#) has sample forms and can also assist in reviewing forms.

Student Code of Conduct

Student codes of conduct for trips are a great tool to set expectations and hold students accountable. It can be used with your waivers and informed consent to ensure that parents and guardians are on the same page and should be signed by both the students and the parents/guardians. Consideration should be given to include what it would look like if a student was to be sent home early from a trip for violation of school rules or the codes of conduct.



Transportation

When planning school trips the modes of transportation should be in line with school board policy. PACE strongly discourages [transportation of students in personal vehicles](#). Regardless, if you're going to use district transportation, charter a bus, fly on a plane or utilize a train, you should have good procedures in place to account for and supervise all students during transportation.

Roll call should be taken as often as needed to ensure that all students are accounted for. At a minimum, it should occur prior to departures, ensuring no students are left behind.

PACE has dealt with numerous issues of bullying, hazing and even student-on-student abuse that has occurred during the transportation of students. So, it is imperative that staff and chaperones position themselves to have good line-of-sight supervision as well as be within sound of all students. Supervisors should spread out on the bus, plane or train and not all be sitting together in the front, where they can't hear what's going on in the back. Also, students should not be allowed to create privacy by draping coats or blankets over seats.

Overnight Travel

Overnight travel adds another significant layer of risk to school trips. School trips with overnight travel are highly nuanced scenarios, the risks of which cannot be comprehensively addressed here. Therefore, it is highly recommended that schools consult [PACE Risk Management](#) when planning any overnight travel.

From a best practice perspective, PACE typically discourages use of private homes, vacation rentals or camping when planning these trips. Instead, PACE encourages the use of gymnasiums at a host school or hotels. Regardless of the accommodation, supervision of students has to be planned for and be constant in some form throughout the night.

Using hotel overnight accommodations as an example, here are some considerations that should be made:

- Ensure that all rooms are on the same floor and next to each other, but do not have adjoining doors. Avoid ground floor rooms as students could easily sneak out windows.
- Students of similar age should be roomed together and students with known behavioral issues should be separated. Staff and chaperones should never share a room with students. Also, only one student should be assigned to each bed and roll-away beds would be encouraged for additional sleeping space. If you have questions regarding specific overnight accommodations, please reach out to [PACE Legal Services](#).
- Staff and chaperones should take shifts having two people (preferably male and female) patrol the hallway(s) ensuring students are staying in their rooms and listening for anything out of the ordinary in the student rooms.

Planning for the Unexpected

School Administrators should be having conversations with staff to plan for the unexpected when on school trips. Although you might not be able to plan for everything that may go wrong, these conversations will help ensure more appropriate responses in the advent of less than desirable situations and help you set expectations with your staff. For example, notification to the administrator should occur as soon as possible when something goes wrong. Below are a few examples of helpful prompts to start these conversations. What would you do if:

- A student forgot their medication?
- Your chaperones were driving in a separate vehicle and did not show up?
- A student gets caught stealing and law enforcement is involved?
- Senior athletes are caught hazing freshman athletes?

Out-of-State and International

Educational entities are protected by the Oregon Tort Claims Act. It is a protection that limits the amount an educational entity can be liable for in the event of a loss. However, if you choose to travel outside Oregon, these protections do not follow you. If something were to happen during that trip, well, let's just say, "The Sky's the Limit".

If you decide to leave the state or country, you may want to check with your insurance agent to see if there are any insurance coverage implications or additional coverage you may need. You should consider the option of travel insurance as well.

This is not an all-inclusive list of every consideration that should be made related to school trips. Rather, this is meant to be a tool to start conversations within your educational entity to help improve and ensure the safety of your students and lower the liability risk for your school. Your [PACE Risk Management Team](#) is available and eager to consult with you on your school trips process.

PACE RISK MANAGEMENT

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