

GATEWAY REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Superintendent's Corner

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I am grateful that we still support field trips as a means to have students experience other arenas, activities, and opportunities while also giving them the chance to practice many non-academic skills such as scheduling, collaborating with others, problem solving and learning to navigate in new surroundings. Gateway has a naturally leveled progression of field trips, starting with very controlled trips in elementary school to slightly more student-driven trips in the middle school to high school trips where students are expected to take much more responsibility for their experience. I'm also pleased that our school committee has given the administration authority to approve field trips within 150 miles that do not include overnight stays (except for certain exemptions for sports tournaments). School committee policy also allows home-schooled students to participate in field trips.

This means that the school committee must approve certain field trips and they were recently presented with requests for a middle school trip to Washington, D.C. and a high school field trip to Costa Rica. As one might expect, longer trips require more planning to ensure that the trip is organized to maximize educational opportunities, is safe for all participants, and is set up in such a way as to be cost efficient. Each of the field trips organized and managed by our school staff is yet another testament to the fact that our staff go above and beyond normal expectations to provide students with unique learning opportunities. The reality is that the time and effort that must be expended in planning any field trip, especially in making sure that all of the local, state and federal requirements are met, is significant and an additional burden. Overnight trips, especially those that include multiple nights or international travel, require that staff are essentially 'on-duty' every hour for the duration of the trip. While some trips allow for the organizer to participate for free or at a reduced rate, other trips require all chaperones to pay the full cost of the trip (this often depends on the travel company used in planning and/or operating the trip). In some cases, staff not only have to spend their own time planning and organizing the trip, take responsibility for students for the entire trip, and take time out of their own lives to be chaperones, but they also get the privilege of paying full price to participate.

Given the additional work and the need to meet so many specific requirements, many schools have essentially abandoned most 'live' field trips and have moved to 'virtual reality' trips. Unfortunately, the work required to meet all of the mandates around field trips are almost the same for traveling across town as they are for traveling out of country, similar in many respects to the government using a one size fits all approach on mandates without differentiating between a town of 500 people and a city of several million. One would hope that as their technological abilities grow, governments will begin to practice what they preach. Schools are required to differentiate instruction, meet individual student needs, provide resources based on various circumstances and to be evaluated on the ability to treat each child differently throughout the day. Yet legislatures pass laws, government agencies create regulations and officials implement rules with no differentiation for varying circumstances. Unfortunately, there is little oversight and accountability in many elected positions other than at the ballot box that often allows years between the 'evaluation' cycle. I would venture that many appointed officials, workers in private industry, and school staff might appreciate being evaluated every few years rather than in an ongoing process. However, without an ongoing process you lose the valuable feedback that allows for consistent improvement and the opportunity to develop a positive work environment focused on being effective and productive, something we may wish to see more of at the federal level.

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