

Planning College Trips

Parents

Parent Approval – start with parent approval for your trip. Parents will want specifics such as how much the trip costs, how many adults will be traveling with students, how long they will be gone, arrangements to and from airport etc.

Parent Committee – if you have involved parents at your site, it is helpful to recruit them for the trip. They can arrange transport to and from airport, check into health insurance, create registration and consent forms for each student etc.

Principal/School Board Approval

It is helpful to have a group of students and parents present the trip to the school board at a formal meeting. This is a wonderful experience for the students, and if the board knows that students have parental support they are much more likely to approve the trip.

Type a proposal – this can be brief, but include an overview of AVID including an objective to visit colleges as part of the program. Clearly show the educational value and purpose of the trip. Include the itinerary of what students will be doing while they are gone. This will include any cultural visits such as museums, plays etc.

Payment

A primary concern for parents and students is always where the money will come from to pay for the trip. There are many options. First, you can have students and their families pay for the cost of the whole trip. Second, you can fundraise part of the money for the trip for each student. Third, you can raise all the money for the trip for each student attending. Obviously your choice will be dependent upon how much time you have before you leave, how hard students are willing to work to earn the money and how much time you or your colleagues have to oversee fundraising events.

Fundraising Events

Be very specific about exactly where the money will go and who will be receiving money. For example, if ten students who are going on a college trip attend a car wash on a Saturday and raise \$500, will that money go into a pot to be divided for all students attending the trip, or will you divide it only among students who worked that day to earn the money? Is it fair to divide the money if a few students going on the trip never showed up to help with a fundraiser? Students are more likely to follow through and work the whole time if they know the money earned for their efforts will be deposited directly into their own “bank account” at the school.

The School Bank

It is always a good idea to work closely with your school banker. He or she has a great deal of responsibility and surprises are not welcome. Let the banker know if you are planning a trip and ask if it is possible to have each student keep a running total of deposits and fundraising money. After a fundraiser, divide the money accordingly and give a clear list to the banker of exactly how much should be credited to each student. Keep accurate, up-to-date records yourself and check that there are no discrepancies

between your lists and those in the bank. Encourage students to keep track of their own accounts with copies of receipts for each deposit made to the school bank.

Payment Plans

If students and their families are funding the trip themselves, it is helpful to have a payment plan so that all the money is not due at once. Find out the deadlines for the airlines, hotels, etc. Build in extra time for paperwork, weekends, etc. Set a schedule when payments are due and have a very clear policy for what happens if payment is NOT received on time. If you lose the money to the hotels or airlines, then let students and parents know that their deposits are non-refundable. If a student misses an early payment, perhaps you will return the initial deposit and then remove him or her from the trip. Whatever you decide, these policies have to be crystal clear, approved by your administration and given in writing to parents. It is a good idea to have parents read and sign the payment agreement so that there will be no confusion later. A parent/student meeting early in the process is a good time to give out all of the information and explain your itinerary and payment plan.

Health Insurance

Some professional tour companies offer health insurance for students at an extra cost. You can present students and parents with this option, have them cover medical costs themselves or purchase a travel plan from an independent company for the duration of the trip. Have parents include health insurance information on the registration form for the trip and include any pertinent information such as allergies/medical conditions/medication that you might need to know while you are away. It is a good idea to find the location of the closest hospitals while you are traveling – the hotels should be able to provide this information. Also have each adult on the trip carry a first aid kit (you can put together your own in a Ziploc bag at a low cost).

Itinerary

Develop a specific schedule for the entire trip. Allow extra time for travel to and from airports and for check-in /check-out procedures. It is not fun to be running from the airport already late for your first appointment. Professional travel companies are experienced at pacing the day for high school students. If you are planning the itinerary, make sure you do not plan so much that students are exhausted the whole time or so little that they have too much leisure time and are bored or constantly on buses. Check with teachers who have traveled extensively with students and get student feedback about expectations for waking up in the morning, how much they can handle in one day etc. Students themselves, however, may be inexperienced travelers and what sounds great on paper may actually be too much once they step off an airplane or sleep in a strange bed.

Room Sharing

A significant portion of the cost of the trip will be dependent upon room sharing. Do students want to sleep four in a room – sharing double beds and perhaps adding a fifth cot? Or is double occupancy more comfortable (and therefore more expensive). Parents may want to weigh in on this decision as well. From your own perspective, how old are

your students? Is having four or five freshmen or sophomores alone in a hotel room for several nights a good idea? You may also want to think about how to combine students. Will you allow them to choose their roommates or will you assign rooms?

It is a good idea to design room assignments at the hotel so that one adult advisor is close by student rooms on every floor. The hotel cannot always book floors together and this may not be the best idea anyway. Instead, splitting up students on different floors with an advisor close by may work better. That advisor can conduct room checks every night to make sure students are where they are supposed to be and that they are quiet and respectful to other guests.

Rules

Students and parents need to know that you have very strict rules for travel and that they will be adhered to with no exceptions. Get approval from your principal for all travel rules and design clear repercussions if rules should be broken. For example, if a student or students fail to show up at a designated meeting place at the agreed upon time, tell them you will call the police to begin a search, and when they are found, they will be sent to the airport in a cab to board the next plane home completely at the parents' expense. Missing students is no joking matter, nor is unacceptable behavior of any kind. Remind students that they will be ambassadors for their school and more importantly for AVID. How strict you are about rules and how willing you are to enforce them will make your trip more enjoyable and set a precedent for all future trips as well. Students know when they can and cannot get away with negligent behavior.

Choosing A Professional Tour Company

If you select a tour company from the Internet or from a brochure you received, ask for teacher references. Not simply a written testimony, but ask to talk to someone who has traveled with this particular company before so that you can receive honest feedback about the company and its policies. Sometimes companies have tours just for educators in the summer or on spring break so that you can preview the tour and stay at the same hotels, get to know your way around, find out how much meals cost etc. Make sure you know the name of the airline with which you will be traveling and the names of the hotels as well as the ratings of those hotels before you book. Watch out for companies that give significant discounts for booking early and giving hefty deposits, but have no cancellation policy. Find out exactly what would happen if there is a terrorist attack or a war breaks out. Get all cancellation policies/agreements from the tour company in writing and read their policies very carefully. Many tour companies have representatives who will visit your school and give presentations to students and parents and explain their policies as well as show videos/give computer presentations of the sites students will be visiting. Some companies arrange for students to communicate with their parents via email every day.

Calling Home

It is wise to investigate phone charges from your destination to student homes. Parents will be concerned and want to hear from their kids. Prepaid phone cards are a good idea.

Inform students that hotels often impose significant surcharges for long distance calls. It is best not to call home through the hotel systems. Set realistic expectations for calls home. Parents have a copy of the itinerary and can expect calls during down time, perhaps in the evening once students return from the activities of the day. Keep in mind any differences in time zones and propose convenient times to call home before you leave on the trip.

Identification/Information/Getting Lost

If students need to apply for a passport for the trip, the turnover time is significant, often four to six weeks if the passport is processed on time. Have students collect all required identification well ahead of time. It is also a good idea to make a photocopy of the passport. You can decide if you would like to collect passports and keep them yourself, or if you would like students to carry them.

Students should carry something that identifies them, contains the name and address of the hotel as well as any medical or pertinent emergency information. If you are taking local transit such as the subway, have students record the numbers of the trains that will get them to and from their destination in case they get separated in a busy subway station or get left on a train. Make a policy that you will wait for them at the next agreed upon stop. Students will feel more comfortable if they know what to do in case they do get separated. Be sure to explain how the subway system works. If students are alone and don't feel comfortable using the subway, they can always move to street level and hail a cab to meet you at the next agreed upon destination. It is a good idea for students to carry some pocket money for this reason. At least one of the advisors should have an emergency cell phone on at all times. All students on the trip should carry this number at all times. Cell phones don't work in the subways, but obviously the advisor will await a call from a missing student once they arrive at the next agreed upon destination.

Spending Money

Obviously it is not a good idea for any student to be carrying large amounts of money. Nor should they wear expensive jewelry or carry anything else of great value that could be lost or stolen. Decide upon a reasonable amount of spending money for each day, including money that will cover meals if they are not included in the price of the trip. Do not engage in any spontaneous trips to expensive restaurants or last minute attractions. Students who did not take extra money or who cannot afford such luxuries will feel left out. Stick to your itinerary. Agree ahead of time whether there will be time for shopping and ask parents for a realistic amount they have set for their student to spend at such times. Remember to calculate any currency exchanges if you are traveling to a foreign country. Decide whether you will have students convert their money before they leave or once they arrive. Airport currency exchange often comes with a significant surcharge. Local banks usually offer reasonable exchange rates. Find out the location and operating hours before you arrive.