



Water-based field trips to natural environments carry risk management concerns over and above land-based trips. Many children do not know how to swim and there are many different levels of proficiency for those who can. Prior to students participating in any water-based activity, schools must have clear policies in place. Learning to swim takes much longer than one or two lessons, meaning that for some children, water-based field trips may not be an appropriate activity.

In cases where school boards choose to organize swimming field trips, the Physical Education Safety Guidelines should be used to minimize risk to participants. The educational benefits of a water-based field trip should be measured carefully against the risk to the participants. High-risk activity requires a certain skill level to ensure safety and diligent supervision is always required.

In planning the field trip, all guidelines established by the local school board's Field Trip Policies and Procedures must be followed. The safety, security, supervision and well-being of students must be the prime consideration. Trips must be planned well in advance to ensure educational purposes, parental support and safety issues are addressed. The following guidelines will assist:

1. Whenever possible, do a site visit prior to the field trip to familiarize yourself with the layout, determine hazard areas and identify safety equipment availability.
 - Check on the safety equipment available at the site or provided.
 - The swim area should be defined by a float line.
2. Use board approved Informed Parent Consent Forms.
 - Informed Parent Consent forms for each student must be completed for every field trip to ensure that parents are aware of the activity (including thorough descriptions of the trip, any inherent risks, any unusual or potential hazards and the possible consequences) and are supportive of the student's participation.
3. For all student field trips an appropriate emergency response plan must be in place.
 - The teacher must carry or have access to a first aid kit during the field trip and ensure that first aid certified personnel are available to respond in case of an emergency.
 - A copy of each student's medical form must be available to staff on overnight or multiple-day field excursions in case of medical emergencies or incidental delays.
 - Mandatory group medical/hospital insurance coverage, Informed Parent Consent form for treatment by a doctor.
4. The school office, teacher or supervisor traveling with the students must have a student roster including home and emergency contact telephone numbers.

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School Safety for Water-based Activities in Natural Environments

5. Ensure suitably qualified employees and approved volunteers are selected for supervisory responsibilities.
 - Swimming should take place within designated swim areas at local beaches in the presence of qualified lifeguards
 - Learn to Sail and other similar sailing lessons at approved facilities with certified instructors;
 - Introduction to canoeing and kayaking with a qualified instructor on local lakes;
 - Dragon boating with an approved trainer on local lakes.
6. Request evidence of insurance for instructors, facility operators, and for operators of any boat or tour boats.
7. The school's Code of Conduct must always apply during field trips.
 - Appropriate preparatory and follow-up instruction related to the field-trip should take place in advance.

Confirm the following:

1. Know the skill level for all students for any swimming or small craft activity
 - Check on skill level of all participants
 - Using the Swim to Survive standard as a minimum requirement for deep water
 - Check on skill level of all teachers and parent volunteers accompanying the group
2. Ensure that students are taught proper safety and Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs) are in use for small craft and readily accessible for larger craft.
3. For waterfronts, a current National Lifeguard Waterfront Option is recommended.
4. Ensure there is trained emergency back-up assistance onsite with minimum of Emergency First Aid.
5. Ensure a safe & reasonable ratio of lifeguards to swimmers such as the industry standard of is a minimum 1:40.
 - **Additional consideration for waterfront lifeguarding and day camps (1:25) and enhanced ratios for (1:4) of staff for non-swimmers, children under 8yrs of age and those with special needs.**
 - Adults supervision in the water and within arm's reach at the ratio of 1:4 for non-swimmer and those under 8yrs of age
 - That lifejackets are always worn by non-swimmer and those under 8yrs of age
 - Ensure that all participants who are non-swimmer and those under 8yrs of age remain in shallow water.
 - Check on skill level of all teachers and parent volunteers accompanying the group
6. Before the swim session starts, clearly outline safety rules to all participants, including emphasis to adults that children are within arm's reach.

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