

RIVER VALLEY CHARTER SCHOOL FIELD TRIP POLICY

River Valley Charter School complies with all applicable Commonwealth and federal laws having to do with non-discrimination on the basis of age, ancestry, athletic performance, color, creed, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, gender expression, genetic information, homelessness, mental or physical disability, national origin, proficiency in the English language or a foreign language, prior academic achievement, race, religion, sexual orientation, and special need in its educational programs and activities.

A. General

River Valley Charter School affirms that firsthand experiences provided by field trips, goings out, and school-sponsored trips are an invaluable means of advancing student learning. Therefore, River Valley Charter School encourages the use of field trips, goings out, and school sponsored trips (field trips) to supplement the classroom learning curricula.

Additionally, due to the inherent educational value of field trips, River Valley Charter School shall conduct trips, to every extent practicable, that allow all students to participate equally. No student shall be denied participation in a field trip as a consequence or disciplinary response for previous behavior for which they already have been disciplined. If a student is prohibited from participating in a field trip, the Assistant Director or appropriate teacher shall notify the student's caregiver of such a decision and advise the caregiver that they may appeal this decision to the School Director.

Circumstances under which a student may be excluded from a field trip, going out, or school sponsored trip include the following:

- If the date or dates of a suspension from school for a violation of school-based rules or the codes of conduct coincides with the scheduled date or dates of the field trip, going out, or school-sponsored trip;
- If the field trip occurs immediately following a scheduled state-mandated standardized test which the student has missed and will make up;
- If the field trip is directly related to class work that has not been completed;
- Or if, in the judgment of the School Director, a student's current behavior poses a substantial risk to the health, safety and welfare of the student, other students and/or staff participating in the field trip, going out, and/or school-sponsored event.

The School Director shall establish guidelines for field trips and shall address the process for screening, evaluating and approving them in order to ensure that all reasonable steps are taken for the health, safety, and welfare of the participants, to ensure that no substantial disruption to the educational process occurs, and that there is inherent educational value of the field trip, going out, or school-sponsored trip.

This policy does not apply to walking field trips that originate at the school. Walking field trips to local areas are considered extensions of the daily general education experience. Nothing in this policy should be construed to prohibit walking field trips where students leave the school campus on foot.

B. General Guidelines for Field Trips, Goings Out, and School-sponsored Trips (excluding walking field trips initiated from the school site)

With respect to all (non-walking) field trips, goings out, or school-sponsored trips, including overnight trips, the following shall apply:

PLANNING/SCHEDULING

- The School Director shall approve all field trips prior to any scheduling and/or reserving or purchasing tickets and/or facilities for the event, as well as fundraising activities.

- A determination will be made that each trip substantially contributes to the educational program.
- If students are charged individual fees for participation, River Valley Charter School shall make every effort to provide financial assistance as needed. No student shall be prohibited from participating in any trip due to lack of sufficient funds.
- All participating students must submit, prior to the commencement of the trip, a signed permission form from their caregiver. Such form shall include appropriate authorization for emergency medical care and administration of medication.
- The student records of all students participating in the trip will be reviewed to determine if any medications, accommodations, or modifications are required for a student to participate in and have equal access to such a trip.
- Trip scheduling shall account for the likelihood of delays due to weather, traffic, stragglers, and other unanticipated factors.
- If substantially all members of a class are participating in a trip, the school shall provide appropriate substitute activities for any students not participating
- Non-academic field trips will be considered “optional school programs” and do not count toward meeting structured learning time requirements under 603 CMR 27.00. Academic field trips may be considered structured learning time (see the Department’s Student Learning Time Regulations Guide).
- Teachers and other school staff are prohibited from soliciting privately run trips through the school. The trip approval process applies only to school-sanctioned trips.

SUPERVISION/VOLUNTEERS/CHAPERONES

- All trips shall have the appropriate number of authorized volunteers/chaperones which will be determined individually for each trip based on the size of the class, age of the students, the destination, and other logistics.
- All trips shall be properly supervised by teachers, staff, and/or volunteers who have undergone and received appropriate background checks and clearance, including a CORI check in accordance with M.G.L. c 71 s.38R, and in most instances a SAFIS/fingerprint check.
- Volunteer chaperones shall execute a waiver of liability form as appropriate.
- Students and volunteers shall be advised of appropriate safety precautions to be observed.
- Student use of technological devices such as cell phones, tablets, or computers are not permitted except with the explicit permission of the teacher/chaperone supervising the field trip. In some instances, cell phone usage may be allowed for students to take relevant and appropriate photographs.
- Chaperones are not permitted to provide, supply, or offer food items to students without the express permission of the School Health Office to ensure there is no accidental ingestion or exposure to allergens.
- Students and their caregiver(s) will be responsible for any damage done to any personal or real property that they are found to have caused during the course of a field trip, going out, or school-sponsored trip. Caregivers are expected to pay for any damages that may be done by their child and/or aid school officials in collecting money necessary to do so.

TRANSPORTATION

- Appropriate transportation will be considered for each trip and River Valley Charter School shall comply with applicable laws, regulations, and school policies related to the transportation of students when providing field trip transportation. Under some circumstances, a caregiver may provide transportation to their child, at the discretion of the School Director, and subject to the caregiver executing a school-provided release and/or waiver.
- Planned trips shall involve pre-trip checks of companies, drivers, and vehicles. This applies to the use of River Valley Charter School vans, private automobiles, and commercial transportation vendors. Pre-trip checks include confirmation of licensure, insurance, registration, and inspection appropriate to the state in which the vehicle is registered.
- Whenever vans and/or private automobiles are used for trips, the school will check the driver's SAFIS/fingerprints and updated CORI.
- It shall be confirmed by the School that bus drivers who do not work for River Valley Charter School have undergone a CORI check prior to being hired for transportation services.
- Any commercial transportation carrier selected for transportation services must be licensed by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to provide charter services and licensed for passenger transport by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.
 - All vendors that provide transportation for field trips or school sponsored trips must provide evidence that their driver(s) are licensed in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to drive the vehicles being used to provide the transportation for the field trips and/or the charter services for the field trips.
 - All transportation vendors also must maintain liability insurance with a minimum of \$500,000 (five hundred thousand dollars) per occurrence for bodily injury.
 - No transportation vendor shall be used to provide transportation and/or charter services for field trips, goings out, or school-sponsored trips if it has a rating of "conditional" or "unsatisfactory" issued by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.
 - The contract with the commercial carrier shall prohibit the use of a subcontractor unless sufficient notice is given to River Valley Charter School to allow verification of the subcontractor's qualifications.

C. Additional Requirements for Overnight Trips

In addition to the policy requirements identified above, and pursuant to G.L. c. 71, § 37N, the Board of Trustees has adopted the following guidelines concerning students' overnight trips specifically.

APPROVAL

- Overnight trips shall offer significant educational benefits to students that clearly justify the time and expense of the trip. Such trips shall be appropriate for the grade level.

SCHEDULING

- Overnight accommodations shall be made in advance with student safety, security, physical, social and emotional needs, and gender identity in mind. Whenever possible, the trip schedulers shall avoid planning student travel between the hours of midnight and 6 a.m., due to the increased risk of vehicular accidents during this time period.
- Trip itineraries shall leave enough time for drivers to rest in conformity with federal hour-of-service requirements and common sense.

TRANSPORTATION

- The use of River Valley Charter School vans and/or private automobiles for trips planned to include late night or overnight student travel is permitted, although the use of commercial transportation vendors is preferred.

LODGING

- All lodging and accommodations for overnight trips must comply with all federal and state laws and regulations concerning public accommodations.
- A student or caregiver's request for specific roommates and/or special accommodations for a student shall be considered by the School Director on a case-by-case basis including for the purpose of honoring students' special circumstances, needs, gender identity, etc.