



The High School View

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Overseas field trips threatened, policy changes explored

By Sophie Lew and Eliza Gowell

For regional high school students, places like Stonehenge, the Louvre, the Parthenon, Shakespeare's birthplace, and the ancient ruins of Chichen Itza may soon become dreams instead of destinations.

Quite possibly, students will not be able to travel to those or other places on school trips due to policies that many teachers feel are unclear or too restrictive.

Teachers who once felt that the school would stand behind them should a problem occur, now believe that language in the current policy would place virtually all liability on them.

"The liability seems to be shifting to the teacher," said history teacher Ms. Kurtz. "And how that supports education and the teacher, I don't understand."

Currently, the school differentiates between school sanctioned and school sponsored trips.

School sponsored field trips are classified as sports and other academically approved trips. Other field trips, which may either be overnight or abroad, and are self-selected, are classified as school sanctioned.

This distinction shifts the liability from the school's insurance to the teacher's.

If teachers choose to take students on a school sanctioned field trip, it is necessary for the teachers to go to their own insurance provider and take out their own insurance policy for the trip.

Should something go wrong on such a field trip, the teacher could be held liable and without the support of the school.

"I don't even want to think about what could happen," said history teacher Corinne Kurtz. "Why would any teacher bother taking this on?"

"They would take your house, they would take your job," said English teacher Keith Dodge. "It has seemed to me that the administration has tried to distance itself from field trips."

Although this has been the policy since 2007, school officials are adopting new interpretations of some portions of the policy.

Many years ago, teachers could collect money for international trips and give it to the school for safe keeping. School personnel would write checks from the travel account as needed.

The current policy, in place for several years, requires that teachers set up an outside bank ac-

count to deposit the funds and that they write checks to cover expenses as needed.

"I find it odd that they dictate rules but bear no responsibility," said Ms. Kurtz.

Recently, the high school administration did agree to allow monies collected from students for in-country field trips, such as a visit to the Museum of Science in Boston, to be deposited in school accounts.

Principal Stephen Nixon responded quickly last week to help teachers planning a theater field trip find a way to salvage the event when confusion about the financial policy occurred. He created a place in each department where teachers can deposit monies for in-country trips only.

Many teachers are also concerned by the fact that school officials are requiring them to use their own personal days for a school sanctioned field trip if any school day is used as part of the trip.

"It's already a big personal commitment to do a field trip," said English teacher Bill McCarthy. "But then to kick in some of their personal salary? It just seems like it sort of lowers the morale for that kind of undertaking."

"All of a sudden you're almost

being punished," said Ms. Kurtz. "I'm going out on a humongous limb to take kids on field trips. It's too bad. The stuff that feeds the soul seems to be the stuff on the altar."

School administrators and Superintendent Jim Weiss are in the process of studying field trip policies and revising them as needed. The School Council is set to meet about it Thursday, February 5.

Some teachers believe that field trips will be heading towards the private sector, in which the experience of going on field trips would likely be shifted to chaperones who are professional strangers.

"There is something to be said about going on field trips with people you know and respect," said government teacher Olsen Houghton. "Traveling with strangers would detract from the overall learning experience."

However, the present atmosphere in the school is one of worry regarding the continuation of field trips, especially international ones. Several teachers who were considering trips, have decided not to plan any. Said one teacher who requested anonymity, "Why should I spend hundreds of extra hours planning and chaperoning a trip and wading through the maze of policies written in lawyer-speak."

The school does not seem to care or support us anymore. I'll never go again with kids. And that makes me sad. It's such an important part of their education. It's what they remember during their 25th reunions. Now its gone."

"I'm going on the England exchange trip this year but I'm not doing any international trips after this," said Mr. Dodge. "It's too risky."

"That's going to be the big question," said Ms. Kurtz. "Why would any teacher take on the responsibility of international travel?"

Despite the situation, many of the teachers still cling to field trips as a necessity in this day and age.

"I've been organizing international trips for many years," said World Language department chair Kerri O'Keefe. "My French and English students still keep in touch and say how much of a life-altering experience it was. It is vital to learning a language."

Said senior Ben Hopkins, "It's unfortunate if trips were to disappear because it unofficially broadens your scope of the world and allows you to experience other cultures. It lets you see what the rest of the world is like and not just the Island and the United States."

Ben David rocks the halls

By Kristen Parece

In the afternoon, with the building empty of students, unsung hero custodian Donald Ben David travels the halls escorted by the sound of country music.

Mr. Ben David, 76 years young, was born and raised on the Island. He has four children, nine grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren.

When he was a young man on the Vineyard, Mr. Ben David was given the nickname "Buck." The nickname stuck with him and to this day, it is still used. Students and faculty members at the high school will still refer to him as "Buck."

Mr. Ben David attended the Oak Bluffs High School. He graduated in the year 1950 with only 12 students in his class.

For over 50 years he worked at his family car dealership called Ben David Motors in Oak Bluffs.

Because Mr. Ben David has been on the Island for so long, he is familiar with many families. One of the reasons he loves his

job at the school is because he gets to see the Island children grow up, even his own relatives.

Mr. Ben David is known for the humor he brings to work. All his co-workers agree that his humor is one of his best qualities. Tom Church, Mr. Ben David's supervisor, said, "He is very dependable and always goes the extra mile."

"If you hear country music you know Buck is nearby," said Rob Oslyn, a co-worker.

"If you play country music backwards, you will get something back," said Mr. Ben David. "The songs are all about losing something."

Mr. Ben David loves riding motorcycles. While he was in the Air Force from 1952-1956 he toured Europe on a BSA motorcycle.

He is part of the Martha's Vineyard Harley Riders which is an organization that donates all of their funds to charities on the Island.

The Harley Riders are the biggest donor for the Red Stocking Fund, and in 2007, they donated over \$17,000 to the charity.

Mr. Ben David has been riding



PHOTO BY OLIVER FILLEY

Mr. Ben David with Marvin the skeleton.

the island roads with the Harley Riders for over 25 years.

He usually displays his well-known figures during the holidays and, whether they know him or not, Islanders look forward to driving by his house to see the changing displays.

For this past Thanksgiving, Mr. Ben David created and displayed a turkey figure outside of his home. For the winter holidays, he displayed well-known Christmas characters, such as Santa and his reindeer.

"The positive comments from the public saying they like my displays make me feel proud," said Mr. Ben David.

Guidance counselor and friend Mary MacDonald, said, "He is a good mechanic, a great addition to our school, and a great Patriots fan," said Mrs. MacDonald.

"I like living on the Island be-

cause I was born here and it's in my blood," said Mr. Ben David. "I have seen the Island change and grow. Once your feet get in the Island sands, you can't leave."

Harlem Rockets
Showtime Basketball
vs.
MV Dream Team

Friday, February 6
7 pm
MVRHS Gym

Tickets sold in advance
\$10 for Adults
\$8 for Students

Ticket Locations:
All MV Public Schools

Tickets sold at door:
\$12 for Adults
\$10 for Students