

6th Grade Field Trip – CHICAGO

Wednesday, April 15 – Thursday, April 16, 2026



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Why are we taking our 6th Graders to Chicago?

In accordance with our District Strategic Plan (DSP), it is a goal to return to pre-pandemic norms, expanding learning opportunities for students, and fostering off-campus education. While our middle school used to take one off-campus class trip pre-pandemic – the 8th Grade to Chicago – we have established four Pirates on the Move trips... 4th / 5th Grades go to Mackinaw Island every other year, 6th Grade goes to Chicago, our 7th Grade goes to Adventure Point for a Day Camp, and our 8th Grade heads to Gettysburg and Washington DC.

Why target Wednesday, April 15 and Thursday, April 16?

The reason we target these dates in April each year is due to hosting SAT and PSAT testing for the majority of our building. Our 6th Graders will get far more out of an off-campus learning opportunity like this than altering their in-building schedule and tip-toeing around the building for two days while the majority of our other students complete their respective standardized test.

What is the agenda for the trip? Could you explain the rationale for the transportation plan?

The agenda for the trip is attached (or passed out at the meeting). While we initially explored the option of taking a charter bus down to Chicago, the costs of contracting a charter have more than tripled over the past years. As it is a priority to ensure that all students can attend this class trip, we have done everything in our power to keep costs as low as possible for attendees. Therefore, we take a school bus to Indiana – with Mr Dygert driving, chaperoning, and acting as our trip's safety officer – and then board the South Shore train to take toward Millennium Station. This not only drastically reduces cost and keeps things simple (as far as pick up, travel, and parking goes in the city), but it gives attendees the opportunity to learn about and navigate public transportation in a big city – an education in its own right.

Who will chaperone the trip? Are parents allowed to attend as chaperones?

The primary three chaperones attending are Mrs Brown (School Employee / 6th Grade Teacher), Ms Bauer (School Employee / 6th Grade Teacher), Mr Dygert (School Employee / Health & Safety Officer), and Mr Portenga (School Employee / Middle-High School Principal). While there are many objectives to the trip, the idea is to maintain a 1:4 ratio of chaperones to students – with a group lead – so as not to suffocate the

idea of team building and class bonding. Therefore, we will be opening up **8** additional spots (1:3 ratio in 2026) up to parents who wish to chaperone.

Chaperones must pay their own way – according to the “financial breakdown” attached (or passed out at the meeting). Preference will be given to a parent who has a medical background or who is CPR / First Aid / AED certified. **If there are more than 8 parents who wish to chaperone, we will conduct a lottery drawing.** All chaperones must be fingerprinted by law enforcement for a background check to attend. Furthermore, if a chaperone isn’t picked for the 6th Grade trip, then they are guaranteed first dibs for a spot on the 8th Grade trip to Washington DC.

Can chaperones drive their own vehicle to and from Chicago?

No. All chaperones must accompany students at all times – riding the bus and train to and from Chicago.

What will the small groups look like?

The class will be broken up into 8 small groups – each accompanied by a chaperone. These groups will partner as small groups throughout the entire trip – accountable to each other while traveling and eating together. Obviously, the class will move through museums together as a unit, but breaking down into smaller groups (strengthened by the buddy system) with a chaperone overseeing each small group will help logistics, organization, and accountability.

Where will the students be traveling to? Where will they stay?

The majority of time will be spent in and around the museum complex at the south end of Grant / Millennium Park. Our group traverses the (safe) parks that are downtown Chicago – staying at the Congress Hotel overlooking Grant Park and Lake Michigan. We do not stray much from Michigan Avenue. Simple, safe, affordable, and educational... that is the key to what we’re doing.

At the Congress Hotel, the boys and male chaperones will be sleeping on one floor while the girls and the female chaperones will be sleeping on a different floor. There will not just be a curfew, but a ‘lights off’ time as well. Additionally, Mr Portenga and the chaperone team will act as ‘hallway patrol’ once ‘lights off’ has been enacted to ensure safety and security.

Regarding matters of individual / group safety or in the event of an emergency...

Mr Dygert is not just our school district’s Director of Operations and School Safety, but he has been a member of the Pewamo Fire Department for 14 years - the last 5 years as a Captain. Additionally, Dygert holds a Medical First Response License through the State of Michigan and is on the Ionia County Emergency Response Team. All matters pertaining to medical emergencies and individual / group safety will be run through Mr Dygert... and we are so blessed to have him helping in such a capacity!

What is the plan for meals and snacks?

As you can see in the trip itinerary and financial breakdown, all meals and snacks are accounted for and factor into the overall trip cost.

What is the cost of the trip for attendees?

Attached (or passed out at the meeting) is a financial breakdown of the class trip to Chicago for attendees. As part of our *Pirates on the Move* campaign – the official name given to our platform that gets K-12 field trips going again – our building budget helps subsidize the cost of the trip to keep the cost per student affordable.

Do I have to fundraise or can I just cut a check for the cost of the trip?

Fundraising is available. Parents are welcome to write a check for the cost of the trip as well.

Can I help sponsor another student?

You can donate to help cover another student's cost in two ways. First, on our attached (or passed out at the meeting) financial survey, you can identify that you wish to contribute toward the cost of another student in various increments. Second, if you have a business that wishes to sponsor our *Pirates on the Move* group shirts by advertising on the back of the shirt via a company logo, spaces go for \$250. The same shirt will be worn for the various class trips taken this school year.

When are payments due?

Fundraising monies must be turned in by Monday, December 1. The first half payment is due Friday, December 12 and the other half is due Friday, February 27. If your family is in need of financial assistance, we have donors and funds to cover half the trip's expense, but the student's side of the payment is the "first" payment.

What if my student takes medication? Who will administer?

We will follow the same protocol as we do in our Front Office. On the waiver, there will be a section that allows family to list medical needs, etc. Upon submission of the waiver, there will be an opportunity to submit medical documentation and provide details regarding medication guidelines. Just as we do in our Front Office, we will have a certified and trained chaperone in charge of holding / dispensing medication.

What will the cell phone policy be for the trip? What about headphones, Chromebooks, etc?

For emergency purposes, we will be allowing students to bring their cell phones. Headphones will also be allowed. However, Chromebooks will not be needed. When it comes to cell phone use, there will be designated periods of time where a student may use their cell phone, but we will otherwise follow school rules as far as use goes during educational, group, and entertainment activities. While on the bus, there will be plenty of individual / group activities to keep our students busy!

What if I do not want my student to attend?

Students who do not attend the class trip will still be expected to attend school on April 15 and 16. They will work through many of the same worksheets and projects affiliated with the trip, but from either our 6th Grade classroom with a substitute teacher or in our Library-Media Center.

If you have questions, comments, or concerns, please reach out to Principal Ryan Portenga – ryan.portenga@pwschools.org / (989) 587-5100 x 5103