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**MEMORANDUM**

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**TO:** JOHN PHELAN, SUPERINTENDENT  
**FROM:** MICHAEL E. MCALLISTER, PRINCIPAL  
**SUBJECT:** OUT OF STATE FIELD TRIP: ENVIRONMENTAL CAMP (GRADE 5)  
**DATE:** 1/30/2017  
**CC:** J. DARIAS, J. HARTUNIAN, E. BAKER

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I write formally request your permission to allow our Grade 5 students to travel to Colebrook, CT on their annual environmental school field trip.

Background: The Grade 5 sleepaway trip has been a tradition at Chenery for many years. It was a trip that closely aligned with our science curriculum and served as the culminating experience of Grade 5; an opportunity to spend a few days away from Belmont in a community of learners -- teachers and students together -- discovering, connecting, and “doing” science. Originally it was a full week trip at “Nature’s Classroom” on the Cape Cod National Seashore, but several years ago a new venue was chosen due to safety concerns with Nature’s Classroom site. A new company, “The Ecology School,” located at Ferry Beach in Saco, Maine, was selected and the trip became a 2 ½ day overnight trip (one half of Grade 5 students attended Monday through Wednesday, and the other half attended Wednesday through Friday). Last year, in rather dramatic fashion, Grade 5 students traveled to Ferry Beach on Monday and, due to a disagreement between the Ecology School and the Ferry Beach landlord, were subsequently sent home. The trip was cancelled without much warning. Chenery students and teachers became collateral damage in a business disagreement that our school was not a part of. Understandably, there were many hard feelings. Starting on my second day as Principal I started to work with Ms. Elizabeth Baker, our Director of Science, to investigate alternatives. Throughout the summer and fall we met with Grade 5 Science teachers and investigated alternative sites for a Grade 5 overnight ecology trip.

Dates: Wednesday, May 24 to Friday, May 26, 2017. This is the week before the long Memorial Day weekend.

Organization: YMCA Camp Jewell in Colebrook, CT will provide the appropriate level of trip support for Chenery. This is a new company for us this year. Last year after an unsuccessful trip to The Ecology School at Ferry Beach we set about finding a new location. To do so we set a rather rigorous criteria:

1. Trustworthiness: The organization must have a track record of above-the-board business dealings. We were determined to vet all options via reference calls, site visits, and online reviews.
2. Safety: The organization’s site must be able to safely house all 348 Grade 5 students. This was a primary reason we moved away from Nature’s Classroom, and a major contributing factor why last year’s dispute occurred with The Ecology School.
3. Sustainability: Although this year’s class size is 348, subsequent years show us growing -- 351 currently in Grade 4, 369 currently in Grade 3, 392 currently in Grade 2, etc. We are looking to engage in a longer-term partnership with whatever organization we select so they must be able to have the space to grow as we do.
4. Cost: The cost must be reasonable. After all, we are running a public school, not a luxury travel agency.

5. Schedule: The schedule must not interfere with our school calendar, especially MCAS testing which lasts from April 3 to May 31.
6. Curriculum: The program must connect clearly to our curriculum. In the end it is a learning trip, not a vacation. This is especially important this year as we transition to the new “Next Generation Science Standards.”
7. The ultimate litmus test we make all school decisions based on: *Is it good for children?*

Of 13 total sites that were evaluated, YMCA Camp Jewell is the only organization that fulfilled our entire criteria. We are confident that they will be able to provide our students with tremendous logistical support as well as on-site and on-call safety support.

Cost per student: \$240-270 per student. This is a decrease from last year’s rate of \$300 per student. This price includes transportation, lodging, and YMCA Camp Jewell course leaders.

Travel: Students will travel to and from CMS and Colebrook, CT on coach buses hired through Yankee Transportation.

Participation rate: Estimated 345 / 100%. In 2016 we were unable to attend due to a dispute with The Ecology School. As such, we do not have a comparable data point.

Resources for students who need financial assistance: Grants and donations. We receive a grant from the Chenery Middle School PTO (\$4,000) and family donations (variable year to year). No students who present financial need have been denied this opportunity.

Please let me know if you have any other questions or concerns. Thank you for your careful consideration.

Respectfully,

Michael E. McAllister

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