

How to Help your Students Have a Successful Visit to the Michigan Supreme Court Learning Center

by Karen Burgess, 4th Grade Teacher

Background—A tour of the Learning Center is different from some other field trips. The purpose is to interact with exhibits to gain knowledge, as opposed to visiting historic locations such as a courtroom or seeing famous people. There is a lot of reading involved at many of the exhibits.

Suggestions for Success

- Set an expectation with your class that each student will be asked to share one new piece of information learned.
- Field trip contracts signed by each student are also helpful.
- You will have the opportunity to focus the information that docents highlight on your tour.
 - A check-off sheet offered upon arrival gives choices, such as “structure of the Michigan courts,” “roles in the courtroom,” or “constitutional rights.”
 - Specialized Core Democratic Values tours, which must be requested when reserving a tour, are very popular.
 - With sufficient notice (six weeks or more), other specific topics/needs can sometimes be accommodated. Ask when you reserve your tour.
- Your field trip starts with an introduction followed by a video that appeals to 4th/5th grade students. It explains the court system.
- Because the Learning Center can be divided into three areas, it works well to divide your class into three groups, and then assign partners. (It is effective to pair a good reader with a struggler to help with the information.)
 - Exhibits opposite the theater area discuss Lady Justice, traffic law, significant cases in Michigan, and student rights.
 - The middle area is set up like a courtroom. Assign students to start as the judge, witness, attorneys, and jurors. Rotate the students through as time allows. Students may not get through all the information in each area but will gain more knowledge than if they wandered.
 - The last area has exhibits on types of law, including consumer law, environmental law, and tribal law. Students can spread out more here, and they find many of the exhibits to be very interesting.
- Encourage chaperones to remain engaged with the students and the exhibits. Adults often learn as much as the students during the experience. (Please note that the Learning Center requires at least one chaperone for every five students.)
- Finally, you may feel like your students did not get to do everything in one visit. Students and chaperones are encouraged to visit again on their own, even in the summer. (For groups of 10 or fewer, reservations are not required, and it’s still free!)

Michigan Supreme Court Learning Center

925 W. Ottawa St. ♦ PO Box 30205 ♦ Lansing, MI 48909

<http://courts.mi.gov/plc/> ♦ Tour reservations: 517-373-7171

Field Trip Contract

1. I will stay with my group leader.
2. I will listen attentively, quietly, and respectfully.
3. I will be positive and polite.
4. I will stay in my own personal space, and I will keep my hands and feet to myself.
5. I will use “I statements.”
6. I will follow directions the first time.
7. I will wait patiently without bothering others.

If I choose to break this contract, I understand that I will have consequences. I may not be able to attend our next field trip, and/or my parents may be informed of my behavior.

Signature _____

Date _____