



## Trip Planner: Tips from Fellow Teachers



*“Teachers need to know that it’s wonderful fun, and probably the best experience they’ll have in school.”*

Judy Johnson  
North Shore Elementary School Teacher

This handbook is designed for coordinators of schools planning their first visit to Wolf Ridge. It asks “What do teachers need to know when planning their Wolf Ridge trip?” It is answered here, with perspective and humor, by teachers who have survived weeks (and years) of living with their students in a residential outdoor school setting, and still insist upon returning year after year.

*The teachers who wrote these suggestions bring students not because they (the teachers) would rather be sleeping in bunkbeds away from their families, eating pizza in a cafeteria, and slogging through the mud on a cold rainy day with 20 wet children, but because they believe in the positive changes in academic achievement and self esteem that they see in their students. These changes, though not easily measured, remain as a reminder of one of the most memorable educational experiences of students' lives. We are grateful to those teachers and all the others who make these experiences possible.*

### Planning Ahead

#### The Planning Team

Forming a planning team will be the first step on your road to Wolf Ridge. Start now. You can add to the team later.

### In the handbook. . .

#### Planning Ahead

The Planning Team, Timeline, Mission Statement, Budget, Parent Information, Chaperones, Fund Raising, Community Partners, Transportation, Student Forms, Student Preparation, Non-attending Students Supplies, Scheduling, School Led Activities, Student Handbook and Journal, Packing Demonstration, The Bus Ride

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Usually a team comprises those faculty who will attend, community members attending (parent chaperones), and those who will help plan, but cannot attend (principals, fundraisers, teachers expecting babies during their Wolf Ridge week...). Sometimes a Wolf Ridge trip is planned by one person, often the “champion” of the trip, the one person who believed it was worth the effort. Team members are welcome and encouraged to visit Wolf Ridge in advance. Please call to schedule a visit.

The number of teachers attending Wolf Ridge must be determined far in advance of the trip. Besides grade level teachers and related unit teachers, attending members may include the principal, school board members, specialists, DARE officer, school nurse, etc. It's important for the team to develop team skills and rapport. Meanwhile, if substitute teachers will be needed, the administration can make arrangements well in advance.

### Timeline

Create and distribute specific timeline to all involved staff. This will also serve as a checklist. Wolf Ridge provides a timeline/checklist on the back of their School Program Planner, but we've included here extra ideas from teachers who know it takes more to plan a trip than Wolf Ridge thinks. (*Future link to forms.*)

### Mission Statement

A mission statement will provide common vision and guidance for students, staff, administrators, parents and the community in support of the Wolf Ridge experience. (Faculty can refer to it daily or in moments of stress to maintain their mental health!)

As Michele Egan from St. Mark's School, St. Paul, MN, says, “I never believed we could capture this experience in words, but we did. This statement is awesome. We were forced to put our passion into words, which gives us strength to pursue our dreams for future St. Mark's students.” Their mission statement follows.

#### ***St. Mark's School Mission Statement***

*St. Mark's mission at Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center is to educate; to foster personal, social, emotional and spiritual growth; to build a sense of class spirit; and to leave a lifelong memory of crossing the threshold into middle school and adolescence. The five day, accredited, all-encompassing curriculum and experience for St. Mark's 6th graders at Wolf Ridge advances our mission by affording:*

*...the privilege to stand as a community in prayer in Nature's Cathedral,*

*...immersion in a “no walls” school wrapped around the message of environmental responsibility and respect,*

*...a remote setting, free from everyday distractions, which breaks down personal barriers and expands friendships,*

*...an opportunity to enhance self-esteem, personal confidence and pride through physical challenges and team building activities,*

*...timeless memories of a life-changing experience.*

*The commitment, faith and support from staff, students and parents is the model of the cooperative partnership that is the hallmark of St. Mark's and the Wolf Ridge experience.*

***Belle Plaine Elementary's mission statement is shorter:***

*“Students plus Nature = Educational Excellence.”*

Earl Gransee, Belle Plaine's principal, explained that “developing a mission statement declaring all our beliefs, philosophies and goals soon became 'mission impossible.' We believe that the short statement satisfies all our interests through a simplicity of style that is easily replicated, symbolic yet strong wording that represents individual thoughts and dreams. It sets the tone of achievement of excellence, is easily learned by children, and most accurately reflects the core of our program.”

### Budget

The first question asked by parents, or the school board, will probably be, “How much does it cost?” The cost is based on Wolf Ridge tuition plus transportation, supplies, and sometimes the cost of substitute teachers or chaperones. A scholarship fund is usually set up for students unable to afford the trip on their own. (Wolf Ridge tuition is reduced for students who qualify for free or reduced lunches, if a list of names is provided. Wolf Ridge can supply written permission from MN Child Nutrition Section to release these names.)

### Parent Information

A parental meeting should be held six months prior to the trip, if possible. All parents of participating students are urged to attend this meeting. Its purpose is to provide an overview of the Wolf Ridge learning experience, including goals, dates, approximate cost, probable curriculum, and student expectations. This gives ample time for parents (and students) to save the funds required. Parents can also be asked to think about being a chaperone/instructor. A second meeting, now or

later, can address chaperone requirements, procedures and issues. (*Future link to forms.*)

## Chaperones

Adult chaperones provide a vital link of information for the community, and support from it. Parent chaperones have an opportunity to see the growth of their children into responsible community members. Some return again and again, even after their children are grown. You'll want to consider a policy of whether parents are scheduled to be in the same activities as their children. (Of course they want to be with them, but do the children want it? Many schools schedule a compromise.)

Other chaperones might include administrators, school board members, school nurse, special education staff, bus drivers, retired teachers, grandparents, and police or D.A.R.E. officer. Some schools bring high school students who have been to Wolf Ridge before as chaperones. These students need clear guidelines as to their adult roles and responsibilities while on duty.

Chaperones help with supervision during classtime, free times after meals (providing indoor and outdoor activities), and nighttimes in the dorm. They may also supervise KP, store, recycling, and snacks in the evening. Before leaving for Wolf Ridge, chaperones should be briefed on exactly what is expected of them. A handbook outlining their responsibilities and duties, including schedules of what they are expected to attend, is helpful.

Often, the availability of dorm space at Wolf Ridge will determine the number of chaperones that can attend. Other considerations include whether you want a chaperone to sleep in each dorm room, or whether adults will sleep in separate "adult rooms." Information regarding the role of chaperones, responsibilities and classes will be shared at chaperone meetings. Chaperone application and/or selection will then take place. Based upon the number interested and how many you can take, you may have to prioritize adults based upon criteria such as..... parents of students with special needs (need written confirmation from medical provider)... those who have not attended before (last or only child in family)... people with special skills (teaching, driving, medical, etc.)...and then have a lottery for the rest.

It's also possible, considering human nature, that some chaperones may create a greater challenge than the students. For this reason, it's worth your while to pick chaperones carefully, and to clearly outline their responsibilities. Think in advance of how you will handle chaperones that are poor role models, or expect special treatment for themselves or their children. Some may come late to activities, distract students, not support school discipline policies, take their personal vehicle into town at night, or bring prohibited items (usually hair dryers or liquor) with them. Adults are human, too, just like kids. (*Future link to forms.*)

## Fund Raising

Most schools require students to cover the entire cost of their trip, however this can put a burden on some families. Fund raising helps to defray the costs to students, however don't plan to cover the entire cost through fundraisers. Students who work to pay for part or all of their trip will enjoy, appreciate and learn more from the trip than those who expect the entire cost of the trip to be paid for them by parents or the school.

Wolf Ridge calendars have proven to be excellent fundraisers. Schools can also coordinate fundraisers like selling candy, flowers, magazines, food and Christmas gifts, or by scheduling events such as car washes, bake sales, raffles, talent shows and carnivals. Often half of student earnings go toward their individual costs and half go into a pool for scholarships and other group costs. (*Future link to forms.*)

## Community Partners

Community partners not only provide funds, but also build support and a sense of ownership in community members. Here are some guidelines for developing community partners.

### 1. Finding community partners

Contact your local Chamber of Commerce for a list of employers, agencies, services and retailers. Possible partners include corporations and industries (employers of your students' parents), service organizations (Rotary, American Legion, VFW, Lions, Eagles, Kiwanis), Fire Departments, Education Associations, churches, utilities (electrical, phone, water, etc.), small businesses (grocery, hardware, drugstore, videos, fast food, car dealers), and local foundations.

### 2. Making Contact

A. Who will make the contact? The teacher, PTA, students? Make a list of potential contacts and divide up the work. Students can contact every store in town. Parents can contact their employers.

B. Write a few sentences about your upcoming trip; explain that the school is seeking donations to make the trip possible.

This article can be submitted to newspapers and newsletters of local organizations and businesses. Posters of the same can be placed in public places.

C. Large corporations often have a “Community Affairs” or “Human Resources” office. Ask if they have a “corporate giving” program, or about their grant application process. They may also have a corporate matching program, to match donations by their employees.

Foundations often have an RFP (Request for Proposals) form.

Call owners of small businesses to request a meeting or submit a letter.

Offer to present a program to service organizations about your trip (before or after).

D. Be prepared with a specific suggestion (see below).

### 3. Preparing the Request

A. Know the total cost of your trip, and state how they can help. Try to match the donation to the company/organization’s goals, services, products.

Monetary: general contributions are less rewarding than a specific component that they can claim, such as money for: scholarships for specific students, transportation, substitute teachers, food, gas, etc.

In kind contributions:

Employers: company donation of parent chaperone’s time.

Newspapers: free ad to thank contributors (including themselves), or a reporter to accompany the group.

Food businesses: bag lunches for the bus ride.

Bus company: Donation of a bus or driver.

Gas station: gas to fill buses upon leaving.

Local stores: journal notebooks for each student, or boots, coats, mittens at end of year.

B. State the benefits to the contributor.

Community public relations, advertising, education of future employees, etc.

C. Close with the “good cause.”

The goals of the Wolf Ridge trip are to develop the qualities in students that employers have asked for: good citizens and community leaders. Their contribution will make a difference.

### 4. Follow Up

A. Have students write letters to each contributor.

B. Write an article in the newspaper about your trip, including thanks to each contributor.

## Transportation

Schools must determine the form of transportation used (i.e. coach buses, school buses, vans, personal vehicles, etc.) based upon availability, cost and policy. Since buses usually do not remain at Wolf Ridge, it’s a good idea to have one personal vehicle along for emergencies. Publish an itinerary of the trip that lists departure, travel route, rest or meal stops, and arrival time at Wolf Ridge, and includes emergency phone numbers or contact information. If possible, make a list of which students and adults will ride each bus in advance. While Wolf Ridge does not recommend a particular bus company, a list of options is available.

Each bus company has its own policies regarding food and beverages, bathrooms, videos, games, etc., and prices vary widely. (*Future link to forms.*)

## Student Forms

### Health Forms and Permission Slips

Health forms are needed to address medical conditions, medications, and medical emergencies. They must also include permission for treatment and insurance/billing information. Permission slips are for liability and transfer of responsibility. Samples of both are in the Wolf Ridge Planner. They should also include information/agreement regarding behavior guidelines and consequences. Some schools provide phone trees for communication of changes, etc.

Information on students with medical conditions, food allergies or IEPs should be forwarded to chaperones responsible for those students, and to Wolf Ridge, before your arrival.

### Application Form

For some schools, not all students from a grade or team can attend Wolf Ridge, because of budget, staffing or reservation limitations. An application is one way to determine which students can attend. Possible selection criteria can be based on order of sign-up, application responses, teacher recommendation, student behavior, etc. (*Future link to forms.*)

## Student Preparation

Plan and implement a very specific student expectation policy with a clear set of consequences, including the possibility of sending a student home for gross infringement of rules. This should be discussed (and discussed and discussed). A copy should be put in the students' journals, and signed by each student and parent in advance. (*Future link to forms.*)

Some schools arrange "big brother/big sister" groups to plan and discuss expectations, class offerings, class sign-ups, packing lists, schedules, phone trees, and whatever else comes up. A "question box" will provide anonymity to students with embarrassing questions. A "maturation program" should also be conducted for girls before the trip, to avoid any midweek surprises.

Schools that have been coming to Wolf Ridge often build much of their curriculum around what happens there. Science, environmental education, social studies, art, physical education, and social skills can all be woven into and around the trip. Wolf Ridge has aligned their lesson plans with Minnesota Graduation Standards, and with planning, those standards can be met.

## Non-attending Students

Substitutes must be provided and curriculum/lesson plans designed for those students who stay behind in the classroom. Consider how to make them feel included in the experience. For example, if students at Wolf Ridge will be studying Ojibwe Heritage, classroom students can report on Ojibwe history as well, so they can contribute to a presentation or project afterwards.

## Supplies

Establish a list of supplies to purchase and pack prior to departure. They might include: journals, pencils, first aid kit, feminine products, cards and games, balls, snacks, and coffee maker. Evening snacks are available in quantity from Wolf Ridge food service. Snacks can be brought by schools, but please remember no food is allowed in bedrooms. Teacher lounges are provided in dormitories, and pop machines are available in locked closets. Teachers will be given a key to pop closets for their own and student use. (*Future link to forms.*)

## Scheduling

Complete the Wolf Ridge confirmation form 8 weeks prior to your trip. This will list numbers of participants, activities requested, food service plans, any special needs for students (IEPs, medical conditions, food allergies, birthdays, etc.). If this is your first trip to Wolf Ridge, our School Program Coordinator would be happy to suggest a schedule for your group. Once this is completed, you can make the following schedules for your trip, including...

- ... Bus lists (including adults)
- ... Dorm rooms (make sure students know their dorm room number before arrival)
- ... Student activity group lists
- ... Staff/chaperone assignments to groups
- ... Wolf Ridge activity teaching schedule
- ... KP assignments
- ... Recycling assignments
- ... Store visit groups
- ... Birthday celebrations
- ... Free and Reduced student lists

It's helpful to have wall-sized copies of schedules hung with masking tape in the dorm, or copies to be placed in each student/chaperone folder or journal. (*Future link to forms.*)

## School Led Activities

School staff and/or parent chaperones will be responsible for leading evening activities (listed in the planner, and for which lesson plans are available) and sometimes crafts, campfires, and other special events. Leaders need to be designated and given lesson plans prior to the trip, and times arranged for training before their stay. They usually can be scheduled to watch a program before teaching it. In some cases equipment and supplies must be arranged and packed as well. (*Future link to forms.*)

## Student Handbook and Journal

Student and chaperone handbooks showing dorm room and roommates, schedule during the week, behavior expectations, emergency information, etc. can be very helpful. A handbook could be combined with a student journal. Many schools give each student a journal, which can be prepared before the trip. This can serve as a memento of their experience, a

portfolio to show parents and community members, and an assessment tool of their learning. Sample journals are available from Wolf Ridge. (*Future link to forms.*)

### **Packing Demonstration**

A packing demonstration held at school prior to the trip can help students decide how to organize their own materials. Include a demonstration of everything each person should bring (lots of socks!), and how to pack a sleeping bag, etc. Some schools have students bring their packed gear in a day in advance of the trip. It's a good idea to put each student's name and dorm room number on their suitcase or pack with masking tape. A packing list is found in the planner. (*Future link to forms.*)

### **The Bus Ride**

The bus ride can be an additional learning experience for students. Some schools plan activities along the way, researching the trip beforehand, creating maps, and recording times, mileage, phenology events or other items in their journals. The Thompson Hill Rest Area, near Spirit Mountain just south of Duluth, is a popular rest stop.

## **Upon Arrival at Wolf Ridge**

### **Wolf Ridge Liaison**

Wolf Ridge liaisons are prepared for each school's arrival, and are waiting in front of their dorm an hour in advance of their school's scheduled arrival time. They will step up to the bus upon arrival and ask for the lead teacher. Unless requested otherwise, the first step is usually unloading students from buses into their dorm rooms. It saves crowding and confusion if each student knows their dorm room number before they get to the dorm. While students move in, the liaison will ask the lead teacher to confirm numbers of students and adults for our meal count.

Depending upon the time of arrival, the next agenda item may be unpacking or going directly to a meal. KP students and adults should know who they are for the first meal, check with the liaison, and be prepared to leave immediately for the dining hall. The rest of the group can be escorted to their meal by the liaison when the group is ready.

Before the first class, the liaison will present an oral "Welcome" to the entire group in their homeroom. This will take 15-20 minutes, and adults may be asked to stay for an additional five minutes of adult orientation.

### **Communication**

It is critical that daily discussions regarding student behavior and successes be shared among staff so that all are informed. An adult contact person should be available at all times, and daily staff and student meetings planned. Any changes to the schedule or other plans can be made or announced at these times. Schedules are reviewed, expectations reinforced, mail distributed, and feedback given during these meetings.

Schools should also maintain daily contact with their Wolf Ridge liaison to address scheduling changes, compliments and concerns. This can usually be done at meal times.

### **Supervision**

Adults need to know that they are in charge of supervising students while moving into their dorm, as well as during classes, evening activities, meals, store, on free time, and during quiet time at night. Wolf Ridge expects all guests to be respectful of selves, others, property and the environment.

### **Equipment**

After arrival, group equipment such as supply boxes, coffee pots and snacks, computers, cameras, balls, games, first aid kit, etc. must be arranged for use. Wall schedules should be posted in dorm lobbies or homerooms.

### **Medications/First Aid**

Designate an adult to administer daily medications. Refrigerators in dorms can be used to store medications. First aid kit and personal emergency vehicle should be accessible. Wolf Ridge has volunteer emergency responders and community 911 system response, but no nurse or doctor on site.

### **Laundry**

In case of wet weather, wet sheets, spills in the lake, etc, designate someone to be in charge of laundering bedding and clothing. They will need quarters and liquid detergent (both available at Wolf Ridge store and office).

### Conservation Challenge

Wolf Ridge encourages responsible environmental behavior through this contest to conserve energy and resources. To ensure success, adults or students should be assigned to monitor and encourage conservation of resources, and check bathrooms, lights, windows, wastebaskets, etc.

### Free Time

School staff must provide supervision and monitoring of students during free times (usually 30 minutes between activities). Organized activities (board and card games, playground balls, etc.) will provide options for students during these times. Journal times are also appropriate.

### News to Home

News and anecdotes of each day can be provided to the home community by phone, radio, and news media. Calls can be made to the school secretary for daily announcements of highlights.

### Recording the Experience

Each school records their experience in a different way. Possibilities include video taping, cameras (digital, slide or photo), art projects or journals. Plan for a display or program back at school to include/inform the community and promote next year's trip.

## Upon Departure

Make sure any buses are plugged in the day before departure during cold weather. Check with Wolf Ridge regarding reservations for next year (which are booked one year in advance). Plan to complete evaluations the evening before if necessary for early departures.

Pack up supplies, empty and check rooms, and empty recycling. Arrange to collect bag lunches from the kitchen if requested. The liaison will deliver your invoice, conservation awards and student certificates. Liaisons will also present a short "Closing" to the entire group at your final meeting. This should take about 15 minutes and can be done before or after luggage is loaded on buses.

Monitor loading of luggage and students on buses. Wave good-bye. Look forward to returning, after a well deserved rest.

## Back at School

### Debriefing

Staff will check student journals. Evaluations, which might be included in journals, are filled out by attending students and adults.. Also, don't forget to distribute lost and found items. (*Future link to forms.*)

### Documentation and Assessment

Students can preserve the memory of their experience through activities that they and staff develop together. These might include a school display window, posters, murals, newspaper articles, art projects, models of sites, essays or poetry, etc. Slides, tapes, pictures and digital programs must be edited for presentation. Staff can add the items to the school's collection showing their history at Wolf Ridge. Students can also recreate Wolf Ridge lessons as a group, and present them to other students who didn't attend from different grades, etc. They can also apply Wolf Ridge activities and lessons to their own school site. Examples of this are making keys to their schoolyard trees, or role-playing the history of their own community. (*Future link to forms.*)

The above products can be used to document assessment of graduation standards and tasks addressed at Wolf Ridge or back at school.

### Public Relations

Organize thank you activities for people and organizations which supported the trip. Also plan and execute media coverage via district newsletter, local cable or newspaper, etc. (*Future link to forms.*)

### Staff Debriefing

Within two weeks following the trip, gather the participating staff to evaluate and examine the experience while it's still fresh in their minds. Changes for the following year are discussed at this time. It's recommended that the meeting is held

off campus and pizza and refreshments be served.

**Wolf Ridge mentor teachers**, like those who wrote this handbook, are available at no cost to your school, to advise new schools by phone or in person, and help them plan their stay at Wolf Ridge. Contact Wolf Ridge for details.

Special thanks to the many veteran visiting teachers who contributed to this handbook, especially those listed below.

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