

Funmathschool Criticized as Taking Too Many Field Trips

by Robert Lebowitz

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The students of the Urban Assembly School for Applied Math and Science--a.k.a. the funmathschool--are apparently spending so much time taking field trips that perhaps the school should be renamed the Urban Assembly School for Applied Tourism.

According to their school's Web site, students at Riverdale's newest and most controversial school will be going on an astounding 16 field trips this year, all in keeping with the school's philosophy of keeping learning "fun."

"In addition to visiting the Hall of Science and the Bronx Zoo 8 times each during the first year, our initial list of supporting partners plan to help develop curriculum, provide guest speakers, and provide professional development," the school states on a page detailing the "rationale" for the school.

The statement fails to explain precisely what students will be learning at each location or even why eight trips to each is necessary to absorb those lessons.

The funmathschool presently has only a sixth grade class.

While the Department of Education states that there is no official limit to the number of field trips a school can arrange for its students, several education professionals of other area schools were stunned to learn of the frequency of these excursions, which amount to eight times more than their own students take over the course of a year.

"That is outrageous," said Randi Martos, president of the Parent Association of the Riverdale-Kingsbridge Academy. "We only take two trips a year! School time is so important these days we don't want to take time away from the classroom."

"I'd love to know who is paying for these trips," she added.

Daniella Phillips, principal of the Riverdale-Kingsbridge Academy, further explained that it is critical that such trips be an extension of learning in the classroom rather than unrelated instruction.

"There needs to be some curriculum link," she said. "For example, this semester our sixth grade went on one field trip to perform some short stories they had been studying in their literature class. In the spring, they will go the Bronx Zoo in conjunction with a unit in biology."

M.S. 101/The Maritime Academy in Throggs Neck, generally regarded as one of the best schools in the City, averages three to four field trips per year for it's sixth grade class.

Kenneth Baum, principal of the funmathschool, has consistently refused to discuss any issues related to the school with this newspaper, and has said that all queries should be directed to Department of Education.

The school's unique field trip policy is not the only anomalous feature of the funmathschool, which opened its doors this school year at the Whitehall annex on Independence Avenue as one of dozens of new, small schools recently created throughout the City.

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In September, this paper reported that the school, which bills itself as a school devoted primarily to demonstrating the relevance of math and science in an engaging way, lacked any math teachers for its first incoming sixth grade class. Several months into the semester, it was reported that science teachers were still doing "double duty," substituting for the missing staff.

The establishment of the funmathschool itself angered residents and local officials when it first announced the school would be housed in the annex despite the complete lack of consultation with anyone from the Riverdale community. Most likely as a response to the community's opposition, the school's current Web site emphasizes that its current Riverdale location is temporary, although it is still unclear how long it will be housed here before it takes a permanent field trip to its final location.