

Supporting student learning...

**Supporting student learning at history museums:
The practices and beliefs of secondary teachers and museum professionals**

(Executive Summary only)

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III. Executive Summary of Findings

This section provides an overview of key findings from the study as well as a summary of the implications. Each of these findings is examined in greater detail in the sections that follow with additional context and analysis.

Finding # 1 – The Value of Museums

Both secondary history teachers and history museum professionals in Connecticut place a significant value on museums as unique learning contexts and resources. Teachers noted that students learn history when they go on these visits and that museums are well positioned to develop a sophisticated level of historical understanding in students. Moreover, teachers reported very positive attitudes about the potential value of history museums to contribute to students' understanding of the past. Museum professionals also say museums are excellent resources for helping students develop a sophisticated level of historical understanding. They have tremendous faith in museums as places where the past comes alive for students, allowing them to learn specific content, connect the past and the present, develop historical empathy, interpret evidence, and see multiple perspectives.

Finding # 2 - Field Trips Taken by Teachers

Secondary history teachers strongly support the incorporation of field trips to history museums into their curriculum, but are often unable to overcome the hurdles necessary to actually take these trips and thus do not take as many trips as desired.

Supporting student learning...

Finding # 3 - Teachers' Views on the Barriers to Taking Students to History Museums

The overwhelming concerns raised by teachers in terms of barriers deterring visits to museums are money and logistics. Teachers agreed that it was difficult to take trips to history museums because of logistical issues and repeatedly cited financial constraints when asked about how they make decisions to attend field trips.

Finding # 4 - Museum Professionals' Views on the Barriers to Taking Students to History Museums

The most significant hurdle faced by museums in creating learning opportunities for students is getting the students to the museum. Museum staff is particularly disappointed by the number of high school visitors. They are aware of many of the barriers teachers face in bringing students to museums, particularly the financial and logistical issues. These museum professionals attribute the problem to time-on learning, standardized testing, budget cuts and transportation costs.

Finding # 5 - Views on Museum Resources

According to teachers, museum resources, particularly websites and lesson plans, are moderately helpful for those who use them or are familiar with them, but could better meet teachers' needs. Meanwhile, museum staff reported mixed results in how often and for what purposes the websites are being used.

Finding # 6 - Professional Development for Teachers at Museums

Forty-eight percent of teachers said they had participated in a museum initiated professional development program. The majority of these teachers attended a workshop offered by one of the larger and more well-known history museums in Connecticut. The teachers also noted that overall they were generally willing to attend professional development focused on museum education and were interested if such programs were offered.

Supporting student learning...

Finding # 7 - Teacher Practices With Students on Field Trips to Museums

The most common forms of pre- and post-trip activities used by teachers for a field trip to a history museum are to hold a class discussion followed by asking students to complete a reading or review primary sources. Teachers report rarely using museum created lessons plans as preparation and almost never had museum staff visit their classroom in preparation for a field trip or after a field trip.

Finding # 8 - Critically Examining Museums as “Sources”

Students are asked to participate in a variety of activities on field trips, some seemingly more effective than others, but rarely are they asked to challenge the trustworthiness of museums as a way of knowing about the past or at least to problematize museums as a source of information about the past just as they might be asked to evaluate primary sources.

Finding # 9 - Museum Staff Approach to Creating Programming

Museum professionals demonstrated a keen awareness of the need to meet the standards set by the state and district, the learning goals of the teacher, and the approach necessary to engage and often entertain students in a meaningful learning event.

Finding # 10 – Museum Staff Practices With Students on Field Trips to Museums

Museum staff often provide pre-visit materials to teachers and their students but rarely visit schools prior to or following a visit. The use of guided tours and interpreters for student visits is common and museum staff hold positive views about the programs they offer to student visitors.

Finding # 11 - Teachers’ Perspectives of Museum Programs and Staff

The teachers in our study slightly agreed that they are satisfied with museum staffs’ ability to plan effective activities for their students. However, in many cases

Supporting student learning...

teachers provided a fairly critical perspective of museums' programs for students, as well as museum staff's performance during field trips.

Finding # 12 - Teacher-Museum Staff Collaboration

Teachers report often collaborating with museum staff both to handle logistical issues and to plan specific activities. However, this collaboration appears to be mostly limited to field trip preparation. Within their own domains, teachers and museum staff limit collaboration. Museum staff reported mixed success in collaborating with teachers to plan and run field trips. They found high school teachers more difficult to contact, both in terms of establishing an initial relationship to plan and discuss field trips and for on-going collaboration. They also believe there is significant room for improvement of the quantity and quality of collaboration.

Summary of Implications

Below are a summary of implications based on the findings. The next section discusses these implications in more detail.

- Secondary teachers are not satisfied with the number of visits they actually take, while museum staff report the vast majority of their K-12 visitors were elementary students. Therefore, a key question is: what can we do to promote secondary history classroom visits to history museums and more specifically, what can we do to support history teachers in order for them to plan, run, and design follow-up visits to history museums?
- The findings suggest two strategies for supporting teachers to overcome obstacles to museum visits: arm teachers with a strong rationale for history museum visits, and, provide teachers with the skills to develop effective pre-

Supporting student learning...

visit, during-visit, and post-visit activities for history museum field trips that advance the goals of historical understanding.

- There needs to be better preparation for teachers during pre-service training, more and better collaboration and outreach between history teachers and museum staff, and expansion of formal professional development opportunities for teachers and museum staff.
- We must seek to cross the boundaries that exist between museum staff and classroom teachers from both sides. One promising area for enhancing teacher/museum collaboration is through the use of websites and the Internet.
- There is a need to expand research that examines student learning during pre-visit, visit, and post-visit activities. We might ask: which activities are most effective? And, do certain types of museums (e.g. living-history museum) better support certain historical thinking skills?