

Students ‘go out in the field’ to enhance curriculum learning

A yellow school bus packed with singing students en route to a field trip is a good indication of a cheerful bunch. And why not? Out from behind their desks and away from the stringent routine of school ought to cajole good moods as students revel in a day of fun and alternate learning.

“They love going on the buses,” said Pamela Walters, interim principal of Sacred Heart School, Baltimore. “The older they are, the more they enjoy it. They sing songs the entire trip. They think it’s the greatest thing ever.”

No matter where the bus is headed, students are delighted to take field trips, reported several principals. A day out of the school building offers a chance for students to view their teachers in a different light and to explore outside their communities.

“They like going because many of the experiences they have are new to them,” said Sister Eileen Clinton, I.H.M., principal of Mother Seton Academy. “They really enjoy all of it.”

Whether visiting a pumpkin farm or Washington, D.C. monuments, trekking through Gettysburg’s national park, or frolicking through the countryside at the popular Genesee Valley Outdoor Learning Center in Parkton, these and other venues lure teachers to plan enlightening experiences.

“We try to make each of them educational,” said Sister Eileen. Her students attend Genesee Valley annually with their sister school, School of the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen, Homeland, for a team building day.

Each of the three grades (6-8) has the opportunity to watch local stage productions, said the principal, and is offered spiritual retreats each year. The sixth grade visits a farm in Frederick since one of the sisters on staff has a family farm.

“They pick apples, make apple sauce, feed cows, ride horses ... they certainly do

enjoy that," said Sister Eileen.

Eighth-grade Mary Our Queen parents signed their names on eight permission slips this past year. Teachers decide trip locations as a team, although "they are fairly constant year to year," said secretary Susan Gray, "with some changes here and there, maybe from a new teacher's suggestion."

The principal of Cardinal Shehan School, Baltimore, is a huge believer in experiential learning. "The more we get them out of here, the better they are," said Paula Redman. Her faculty looks at the curriculum to decide what trips will integrate best with approaching units.

When students return to the classroom after field trips, they can incorporate their learnings into literature, science and other subjects, said Ms. Redman. "If field trips are planned well they get so much out of them."