

FEATURE

Dear Teacher, We're Taking Our Child Out of School for Vacation

By Matt Beardmore



Photo courtesy Matt Beardmore

The memories and experiences gained through travel can sometimes be more valuable than the lessons learned inside a classroom.

It used to be a painful exercise when I had to write a note to our son's teachers to let them know we would be taking our son out of school for a family vacation. The guilt would sink in and I would start to think we were bad parents for not putting enough focus on his education. I would write and re-write these emails and would get a knot in my stomach after hitting send as I wondered what his teachers must be thinking of us for prioritizing a trip over the classroom.

But as we've traveled more and I've gotten more practice writing these types of emails, I've come to a few basic conclusions:

- **Travel is education.** The memories and experiences gained through travel can sometimes be more valuable than the lessons learned inside a classroom.
- **Our son is still very young** and him being absent for a handful of days each school year is not going to have an impact on him learning the class material.
- **The time we enjoy together on vacation is crucial for our family.** The reliance on technology, work stresses, and constant running around the city for errands, after school activities and birthday parties takes a toll. It is a huge release to be able to leave all this behind and just focus on each other.

Some will argue that vacations are no reason to take a child out of school, and I am also very aware that just being able to take a vacation is a privilege. But if you are able to take a trip and decide to do so during your child's schooldays, here are a few tips on how to write that note to your child's teacher:

- **Before you send that email, review the school's policies.** What is considered an excused absence vs. an unexcused absence? What, if any consequences, will there be if your child accumulates too many unexcused absences?

- **Communicate well in advance of your trip.** Telling your child's teacher a day or two before you plan on taking your child out of school for a trip is not best practice, and it's not respecting the teacher's time. We like to give our son's teachers at least a month's heads-up when we need to take him out of school so they can modify their lesson plans for him, if necessary.
- **Focus on academics.** Your child's teacher is concerned about your child's academics, not your family spending a week at Disney World or Spring Training in Arizona during the middle of March when school is in session. So, let your child's teachers know that your child will be making up any assignments they'll miss. If assignments are posted online in Google Classroom or another platform, even better. Your child can still complete/submit work on time when they're gone.
- **Be honest.** There's no reason to make up a story about why your child is going to be absent. You're taking a trip. At the same time, as mentioned above, you don't need to share your vacation itinerary with your child's teachers.

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Matt Beardmore, owner of MB Writing and Editorial Services (www.mbwritingandeditorial.com), and is a professional writer and editor. His work has appeared in the New York Times, Fodor's Chicago Travel Guide, Chicago Tribune, Chicago Sun-Times, ESPN the Magazine, and numerous other national and local publications. Matt lives in Chicago with his wife and their young son.