

EDUCATION

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No Child Outside the Classroom

WHEN NO CHILD LEFT Behind became law in 2002, teachers suspected there'd be some casualties—they just didn't think field trips would be one of them. Since the federal government's landmark overhaul of U.S. schools, class trips have plummeted at some of the country's traditional hot spots for brown-bag learning. The new emphasis on standardized testing has resulted in "a reluctance to take

schools to get students up to state targets in reading and math by 2014 or face sanctions that could result in school takeovers or closings. "Curriculums are so much tighter than they used to be," says Susan Lewis, an elementary-school teacher in San Antonio, Texas. Add in rising transportation costs, and field trips are fast becoming history. Compton Avenue Elementary School in Los Angeles has halved its trips in the past three years. "They were all academically based," says principal Claudia Ross, but they no longer fit a budget focused on test scores, not general enrichment.

Museums are coming up with new strategies to lure



FAR AFIELD: Elementary-school kids in Louisiana enjoy a rare class trip

kids out of the classroom," says Natalie Bortoli, head of the visual-arts program at the Chicago Children's Museum, which has lost more than a tenth of its field-trip business since 2005. At Mystic Seaport, a maritime museum on the Connecticut coast, school traffic has slowed more than a quarter since 2005, while Boston's New England Aquarium has lost nearly the same amount since 2003. Even NASA's Johnson Space Center has started to see its figures stagnate, says marketing director Roger Bornstein, "and stability is not our goal."

Teachers blame the bear market in part on No Child Left Behind, which requires

schools back. The Chicago Children's Museum sends teachers a checklist that highlights how the museum can help them meet Illinois state standards, while representatives from the New England Aquarium visit schools in Massachusetts to explain how its programs can give kids a boost. Many museums have also started giving their young visitors clipboards, worksheets, science journals and the chance to quiz a resident historian or scientist. "We know it's directly linking into the standards," Bortoli says. "But I don't think the kids notice." They're happy as long as they don't get left behind.

—ROXANA POPESCU