

Students for Ed Reform



Mobilizing a new
generation of leaders

School Visit Toolkit

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NARRATIVE PROFILE

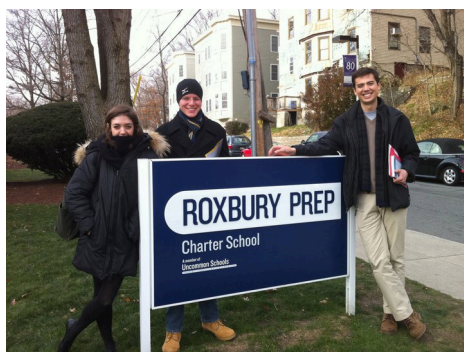
The school visits can easily be one of your chapter's most successful program, one from which your chapter will learn a lot about how to effectively plan events and create real learning opportunities for members. School Visits are also a very powerful way to connect college students directly with the schools and population we are all trying to help.

Creating a successful School Visit requires choosing the right schools for the right reasons, building strong relationships with their school contacts, finding outside resources to supplement the visit, and, motivating other college students to wake up early or take time out of their busy days. It may seem difficult, but there have been many successful school visits done by chapters across the country, including SFER Harvard, Princeton, and Minnesota.

SFER Harvard was fortunate to have easy access to many proof point schools throughout the Boston area, so during the Fall 2010 semester they successfully completed three School Visits. By the end of the 2010-11 school year, the chapter had completed nine different School Visits to seven charter schools (Roxbury Prep, Excel Academy, Academy of the Pacific Rim, Boston Prep, Community Charter School of Cambridge, and MATCH), one Boston Public pilot school (Fenway School), and two visits to the same independent school (The Epiphany School). Visit sizes were around 5 people, with the smallest groups having three people and the largest group having seven people.

Their best school visit that semester was to Excel Academy in East Boston, a 5th through 8th grade charter school with plans to open another school under the new Massachusetts charter law. The group of five was given school tour and observed a 5th grade morning routine and a 8th grade math classroom, then had the opportunity as a group of 5 to sit down with Dai Ellis, CEO of Excel, for 40 minutes and ask an array of questions. Afterwards the group of SFER Harvard members all had lunch back on campus together after the visit to further discuss what they saw in the school.

SFER Princeton also had tremendous success in their School Visits. One member returned to campus determined to change her summer plans and intern in education reform. Other members' comments included, "I LOVED IT," "I want to die and be buried in this school," and "Oh my God. So amazing. I love Uncommon Schools," and are proof that actually *visiting* a school and getting the flavor of the inspiring, successful models can truly have a positive impact on members. These experiences only strengthen SFER chapters and our cause as a whole!



SFER Harvard at a School Visit to Roxbury Prep Charter School.

PROJECT PROPOSAL AND EXECUTION FORM EXAMPLE

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| Date: 3/1/11 Name: Delia Younge Position: Vice President (SFER Harvard) Project Title: School Visit to Academy of the Pacific Rim Date(s) of Project: 5/1/11 Circle one: (Awareness/Public Opinion) Talent Development/Human Capital Advocacy |
| Proposal |
| Generally describe the proposed project: SFER Members and newly accepted TFA 2011 Corps Members will visit the Academy of the Pacific Rim in Boston on April 1 st . APR is a 5-12 charter school, founded by teaching guru Doug Lemov. The school integrates Eastern and Western education techniques. Trip participants will observe classrooms and meet with APR Executive Director Sue Thompson. |
| Project Timeline |
| What will be the major milestones of the completion of this project, and how will you know you've reached them? We will reach out to APR at the beginning of the Spring 2011 semester and work on coordinating a school visit date for late March or Early April (before the last day of classes). One week before our visit we will send out an email blast to our mailing list announcing the trip and explaining why APR. We will also invite 2011 TFA Corps Members. |
| Team |
| What kind of team will this project require? This visit will require coordination between our School Visits Coordinators to reach out to the school and our VP to reach out newly accepted TFA Corps Members. |
| Partnerships & Support |
| What other groups/organizations/administrators/resources will SFER require to execute this project? TFA Recruitment Director |
| Goals |
| Which principle(s) does this project address? (Circle one, and then describe below): <u>1</u> <u>2</u> <u>3</u> <u>4</u> <u>5</u> <u>6</u> <u>7</u> As a long-standing, high performing charter school in Boston, a visit to APR supports the first six SFER principles. Trip participants will be able to see in person what it takes to close the achievement gap by demonstrating how great teachers and school leaders can work with disadvantaged students and create outstanding results. |

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| Action Steps |
| <p>What tasks will need to be completed to execute these goals and to complete the project successfully?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Collect contact information for APR -Reach out to APR -Schedule a visit -Reach out to TFA 2011 Corps Members -Send out email to SFER Members -Create a 'Day of Plan' (what time to meet, public transit directions, walking directions) -Send a thank you note post trip |
| Evaluation |
| <p>What metrics will be used to determine the impact of the project, and its ability to execute on these principles?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The number of trip attendees -The number of trip attendees who become more involved with SFER in the future |
| Targets |
| <p>What does success look like? Explain in terms of the aforementioned metrics.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -7 to 10 trip attendees -1 to 2 trip attendees who want to become more substantively involved with SFER Harvard |
| Other |
| <p>Anything else that is important to note.</p> |

EXAMPLE WORKPLAN

Below is SFER Harvard's description of their two School Visits Managers board positions. They coordinate all school visits, discussion series, and other understanding events with several project managers doing the actual outreach to schools.

| POSITION | SPECIFICS | |
|---|--|-----------|
| 2 SCHOOL VISITS MANAGERS Goal: Complete 8 school visits | MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES Create semester schedule of school visits and collect school contact information Reach out to schools by explaining SFER and our School Visits and coordinate visits Recruit SFER members/other students to go on trips Prepare pre-trip articles of interest Lead school visits on designated days (including logistics, like walking directions) Follow up with handwritten thank you notes | YEAR LONG |

Example semester goals of school visits include rationale for the goal:

| GOAL CATEGORIES | SUB-GOALS | LEADERSHIP |
|--|---|-------------------------|
| SCHOOL VISITS Goal: Complete 8 school visits <i>Vision: Create understanding amongst SFER members and non SFER members of the best proof point schools in Boston, including charters, pilots, traditional schools, and parochial schools.</i> | Visit KIPP, MATCH, Cristo Rey, Epiphany School, Excel, Roxbury Prep At least 2 visits include targeted to non-SFER members | 2 School Visits Leaders |



SFER Harvard visiting Excel Academy, East Boston, October 2010

TIPS

Have a very specific ‘why’ for each visit. The best learning experiences will not always come from “the best” schools in your area, i.e. the highest performing or most publicized schools. For example, there is a lot of value in seeing how a traditional Public School tries reform from within the system or how a religious-based school uses a “no excuses” charter model. It is also important that “Why this school?” is clearly communicated to your trip participants so they know what things to look for and how this individual school fits into a larger picture of education reform.

Emphasize quality over quantity. Think about the purpose of each school visit. Instead of a visit being an isolated event, have each become cumulative events where members can see concepts and policies they have been discussing, in action.

Have School Visits make people want to get more involved with SFER. Think about a school visit from the perspective of someone who does not know anything about SFER. At the end of the visit, will they know “What is SFER?”, “What else does SFER do on campus?”, or “How can I be more involved with SFER?”. Also, never underestimate the importance of friendliness, punctuality, and enthusiasm, three qualities that most students respect in a student group.

Build lasting relationships with schools. Strong connections within local reform leadership circles will create other connections and open doors. For example, after a great visit to Excel Academy in Massachusetts, SFER Harvard kept up a relationship with the CEO, Dai Ellis, who later sat on a successful panel even on the Achievement Gap and provided SFER Harvard with the opportunity to attend two student recruitment events door knocking for the new Excel Academy school in Chelsea, MA.

Seek out a diversity of schools. Charter, independent, traditional public, and pilot schools are all great opportunities for School Visits.

Have a pre or post trip reflection/discussion. A struggle with school visits is that trip participants feel the need to get back to campus by a certain time and lack the opportunity to discuss what was seen after a school visit. Having a post-trip lunch or pre-trip breakfast be a required component of a visit is an easy way to immediately continue the discussion outside of the school in a structured manner.

Project professionalism. In emails to the school, in participants’ dress on the visit, and in follow-up thank you letters, always remember that you are representing both your campus and SFER National.

SCHOOL VISIT REACH-OUT EMAILS

TO SCHOOLS

Below are two emails that were used to reach out to schools to coordinate a School Visit. Feel free to edit to your dates, schools, and intent, but make sure that a uniform language is used to describe SFER and the purpose and intention of your School Visit.

Example 1

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Ben Likis and I am a sophomore at Harvard University, and a member of Students for Education Reform (SFER). SFER is a national student organization designed to raise awareness of the national achievement gap, achieve greater understanding of issues pertaining to public education, and engage with local communities and educators. Every week, as a part of our Charter Friday series, we hope to visit a different high performing charter school nearby. I am writing to inquire whether it would be possible for a small group of SFER members to come visit Roxbury Prep Charter School on Friday, November 5. We would greatly appreciate the opportunity to visit your classrooms, talk with any teachers or administrators who may be available, and learn as much as possible from your school.

We are extremely excited by this potential opportunity, and hope you consider extending us an invitation for Friday, November 5. If that date does not work for any reason, but there are other possible dates available for visitation in the future, we would gladly make time to come at your nearest convenience.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best,

Signature

Example 2

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is _____, and I am a junior at Harvard University and a member of a student group called Students for Education Reform (SFER). SFER is a national 501c3 dedicated to raising awareness of the achievement gap and mobilizing a new generation of education reform leaders. Every week, as part of our Charter Friday series, we visit a different high performing public charter school in the Boston area. I am writing to inquire whether it would be possible for a small group of SFER members to come visit CCSC this Friday, November 5th. I understand

that this is a quick turnaround, and if this date doesn't work, we would also be interested in visiting on Friday, December 3rd.

We would greatly appreciate the opportunity to observe classroom instruction, talk with any teachers or administrators who may be available, and learn more about the experience of running a high performing charter school.

I look forward to hearing back,

Signature

TO MEMBERS

Below are three examples of emails used to send out to a SFER chapter's mailing list inviting members to come on a school visit. Edit to fit your own visits, but keep a good tone in all communication. Notice in the first example the explicit answer to "Why this school?". Also, try to include links (e.g. to the school's website, Youtube videos, articles about the school) within the email in order to pique the interest of your members.

Example 1

Subject: SFER School Visit – Academy of the Pacific Rim

Dear SFER,

Our fourth School Visit of the semester is to Academy of the Pacific Rim, this Friday from 8am-11am.

Why this school?

Write a paragraph explaining why you are visiting this particular school: have they achieved something extraordinary, overcome a particular obstacle for the community they are in? You can include a brief history of the school, its mission. Explain what you will be doing at the school (ex: a student led tour, meeting with the director, classroom observation, etc)

If you're interested in coming along on our visit, please reply individually to this email by 10pm tonight so we can make all necessary travel arrangements.

Thanks!

SFER Harvard

Example 2

Subject: SFER School Visit – Epiphany School, Dorchester

Hey SFER!

For those interested in visiting the Epiphany School, a high performing Episcopal middle school in Dorchester, we will be meeting **this Friday** at the **Harvard Square T-Station** at **12pm** (leaving around 12:15pm). We will be staying there for the all-school meeting at 12:45pm, a tour of the school, and hopefully some “Fun Friday” activities, which start at 1:30pm. Time is flexible, but I would expect us to return around 2:30 or 3:00pm (it is really up to us when we want to leave).

If you are unfamiliar with the Epiphany School, please do consider coming, and check out the link above! It should be a fantastic experience!

If you are interested in attending our School Visit, please reply individually to this email. If you have any questions, you can email me at _____, or call at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Best,

Signature

Example 3

Subject: SFER Weekly Update and School Visit – MATCH Public Charter School

Dear SFER,

Our third School Visit of the semester is this Friday to MATCH a college-prep, charter school in Boston that was named the 51st best public high school in the country by Newsweek in 2010. **If you have yet to get involved with SFER Harvard or have yet to come on an SFER School Visit, our visit to MATCH on Friday at 8:30am is a great chance to start!** If you want to come along, please reply individually to this email and we’ll get in contact with you.

Have a great week!

SFER Harvard