The school field trip has a long history in American public education. For decades, students have piled into yellow buses to visit a variety of cultural institutions, including art, natural history, and science museums, as well as theaters, zoos, and historical sites. More-advantaged families may take their children to these cultural institutions outside of school hours, but less-advantaged students are less likely to have these experiences if schools do not provide them. With field trips, public schools viewed themselves as the great equalizer in terms of access to our cultural heritage. During the first two semesters of the school tour program, the museum received 525 applications from school groups representing 38,347 students in kindergarten through grade 12.

The purpose of the trip is usually observation for education, non-experimental research or to provide students with experiences outside their everyday activities. Such field trips are increasingly threatened by limited school funding, lack of time and crammed curricula, the pressures of standardized tests and
student assessments, and a need for teachers and principals to document whether and in what way individual field trips satisfy curricular demands (Anderson et al., 2006; Schatz, 2004). Evidence of even longer-term outcomes was found in a study of a class trip to a science center in Israel (Bamberger & Tal, 2008, in this issue). What factors impact the effectiveness of school field trips? In addition to attempts to measure outcomes, research also provides insight into the factors that can impact the effectiveness of school trips as learning experiences.