

## **Volunteers as an Invaluable Resource**

(<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/voluntresource.pdf>)

### **The Many Roles for Volunteers in the Classroom and Throughout the School**

#### **I. Welcoming and Social Support**

##### **A. In the Front Office**

1. Greeting and welcoming
2. Providing information to those who come to the front desk
3. Escorting guests, new students/families to destinations on the campus
4. Orienting newcomers

##### **B. Staffing a Welcoming Club**

1. Connecting newly arrived parents with peer buddies
2. Helping develop orientation and other information resources for newcomers
3. Helping establish newcomer support groups

#### **II. Working with Designated Students in the Classroom**

##### **A. Helping to orient new students**

##### **B. Engaging disinterested, distracted, and distracting students**

##### **C. Providing personal guidance and support for specific students in class to help them stay focused and engaged**

#### **III. Providing Additional Opportunities and Support in Class and on the Campus**

##### **A. Recreation**

##### **B. Enrichment**

##### **C. Tutoring**

##### **D. Mentoring**

#### **IV. Helping Enhance Positive Climate Throughout the School – including Assisting with "Chores"**

##### **A. Assisting with Supervision in Class and Throughout the Campus**

##### **B. Contributing to Campus "Beautification"**

##### **C. Helping to Get Materials Ready**

Volunteers can be a multifaceted resource in a classroom and throughout a school. For this to be the case, however, the school staff must value volunteers and learn how to recruit, train, nurture, and use them effectively. When implemented properly, school volunteer programs can enable teachers to personalize instruction, free teachers and other school personnel to meet students' needs more effectively, broaden students' experiences, strengthen school-community understanding and relations, enhance home involvement, and enrich the lives of volunteers. In the classroom, volunteers can provide just the type of extra support needed to enable staff to conference and work with students who require special assistance.

Volunteers may help students on a one-to-one basis or in small groups. Group interactions are especially important in enhancing a student's cooperative interactions with peers. One-to-one work is often needed to develop a positive relationship with a particularly aggressive or withdrawn student, in re-engaging a student who has disengaged from classroom learning, and in fostering successful task completion with a student easily distracted by peers. Volunteers can help enhance a student's motivation and skills and, at the very least, can help counter negative effects that arise when a student has difficulty adjusting to school. Working under the direction of the teacher and student support staff, they can be especially helpful in establishing a supportive relationship with students who are having trouble adjusting to school.

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Volunteers can be recruited from a variety of sources: parents and other family members; others in the community such as senior citizens and workers in local businesses; college students; and peers and older students at the school. There also are organized programs that can provide volunteers, such as local service clubs. And, increasingly, institutions of higher education are requiring students to participate in learning through service. Schools committed to enhancing home and community involvement in schooling can pursue volunteer programs as a productive element in their efforts to do so.

Few teachers have the time to recruit and train a cadre of volunteers. Teachers can work with student support staff and the school administration to set up a volunteer program for the school. Initially, a small group of volunteers can be recruited and taught how to implement and maintain the volunteer program (e.g., how to recruit a large pool of volunteers, help train them, nurture them, work with them to recruit replacements).

*The cost of volunteer programs is relatively small compared to the impact they can have on school climate and the quality of life for students and school staff.*

See: *Volunteers to help Teachers and Schools Address Barriers to Learning.* (Technical Aid Packet)  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/volunteer/volunt.pdf>

### Using Aides and Volunteers in Targeted Ways

Every teacher has had the experience of planning a wonderful lesson and having the class disrupted by one or two unengaged students (who often are more interested in interacting with a classmate than pursuing the lesson). The first tendency usually is to use some simple form of social control to stop the disruptive behavior (e.g., using proximity and/or a mild verbal intervention). Because so many students today are not easily intimidated, teachers often find such strategies don't work. So, the control efforts are escalated. The teacher reprimands, warns, and finally sends the student to "time-out" or to the front office for discipline. In the process, the other students start to titter about what is happening and learning is disrupted.

In contrast to this scenario, teachers can train qualified volunteers to work in ways that help all concerned by minimizing disruptions and re-engaging an errant student. The objective is to train volunteers to watch for and move quickly at the first indication that a student needs special guidance and support. For instance, a volunteer is taught to go and sit next to the student and quietly try to re-engage the youngster in the lesson. If this proves undoable, the volunteer takes the student to a quiet area in the classroom and initiates another type of activity or, if necessary and feasible, goes out for a brief walk. It is true that this means the student won't get the benefit of instruction during that period, but s/he wouldn't anyway.

None of this is a matter of rewarding the student for bad behavior. Rather, it is a strategy for avoiding the tragedy of disrupting the whole class while the teacher reprimands the culprit and in the process increases that student's negative attitudes toward teaching and school. This use of a volunteer allows teaching to continue, and as soon as time permits, it makes it possible for staff to explore with the student ways to make the classroom a mutually satisfying place to be. Moreover, by handling the matter in this way, the teacher is likely to find the student more receptive to discussing things than if the usual "logical consequences" have been administered (e.g., loss of privileges, sending the student to time-out or to the assistant principal).

Using this approach and not having to shift into a discipline mode has multiple benefits. For one, the teacher is able to carry out the day's lesson plan. For another, the other students do not have the experience of seeing the teacher having a control contest with a student. (Even if the teacher wins such contests, it may have a negative effect on how students perceive them; and if the teacher somehow "loses it," that definitely conveys a wrong message. Either outcome can be counterproductive with respect to a caring climate and a sense of community.) Finally, the teacher has not had a negative encounter with the targeted student. Such encounters build up negative attitudes on both sides which can be counterproductive with respect to future teaching, learning, and behavior. Because there has been no negative encounter, the teacher can reach out to the student after the lesson is over and start to think about how to use an aide or volunteers to work with the student to prevent future problems.