Volunteers are an Important Part of a System of Student and Learning Supports*

> 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.
>
> – Center at UCLA

> When students see adult volunteers in their schools, they see firsthand how members of their community value education and support their local school. When a community is very involved in their school volunteering, more people have a better sense of the total education picture, and see how dedicated so many people are to educating the community's youth. More involvement results in better understanding, more trust building, and a commitment to even more support. School begins to feel like family!
>
> – Jonathan Green

> I am a college student who works part time as a math tutor [along with other tutors] at a middle school. I follow the progress of 3 students all year round but I also help out the other students in class if need be. Working as a tutor at a middle school I noticed that it took a while for the students to trust me. At first most students were even shy to ask for my help or be wrong. As the students got more used to me, they started asking more questions and wanting my help. As this trend progressed, the students and I became "friends" and I saw a change in them, even if it was just a little. The kids looked more at ease and they were having fun. As far as grades, I noticed a change as well. Slowly but surely they started getting better grades. Some took longer than others and some of the grades did not change drastically, but they changed. Especially as the semester came to a close, we (the tutors) were able to aid the 8th graders to transition to high school (some were on the verge of dropping out).
>
> – Azzurra Campioni

Volunteers can have a very powerful impact on the students and schools. What follows briefly highlights some research on the benefits and ways to use volunteers and ways for schools to move forward in implementing volunteer programs.

What Research Says

Henderson and Mapp (2002) report evidence that volunteers can be significant resources in helping create a supportive and welcoming environment at schools and facilitating students' behavior and performance. As positive role models and student motivators, volunteers are viewed as contributing to better school attendance, improved grades and test scores, matriculation, less misbehavior, better social skills, staying in school, graduating, and going on to college.

Available evidence suggests that when adult volunteers are present, students see that adults take school and education seriously and respect learning. This promotes positive attitudes toward school.

Extrapolating from a wide range of research, it seems safe to conclude that volunteers can be a valuable asset in enhancing a school's efforts to support learning and teaching. And over time, a variety of roles and functions have been identified (see Exhibits A and B).

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 as a
    Whole – including helping develop and staff additional

    A. Recreational activity

    B. Enrichment activity

    C. Tutoring

    D. Mentoring

IV. Helping Enhance the 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

One School's Parent Volunteer Program (http://www.palihigh.org/volunteeropps.aspx)

Parent Outreach/Office Assistance

Attendance Office, Health Office, Library,
College Center, Study Center,
School Tours, Tutoring,
Language Translation.
Test Prep SAT/ACT Boot Camps

Fundraising

Educational Foundation,
Booster Club -
Fall Phon-A-Thon, Holiday Boutique,
Casino Night, Silent Auction, Grant Writing,
Grant Writing (Community Based)

Parent Organizations

Booster Club, Education Foundation,
PTSA/PAC

On Campus

Fuerza Unida (Latino Student Union),
Village Nation (Black Student Union),
Music, Drama

School Governance

Board of Trustees Committees:
Communications, Educational Programs,
Finance & Budget, Operations & Facilities &
Technology, Policy, Strategic Planning (Academic,
Budget, Culture & Community, Facilities, Technology)

Hospitality

Baking/Cooking/Shopping, Graduation Reception,
Senior Activities (Picnic, Breakfast, Awards),
Student Events & Assemblies,
Teacher & Staff Lunch/Dinners

Communication / Technology

Website Maintenance/Design,
Email Communications: Writing or Editing
Social Media Networking/Tech Support

Other Volunteer Opportunities

Campus Beautification/Recycling/Gardening,
Health and Safety/Emergency Preparedness,
Field Trip Chaperone/Transportation, Athletic Events,
Educational Programs/Presentations

Research also indicates that the inequality that characterizes so many facets of schools exists with respect to volunteer availability. The paradox of financially distressed schools is that they need low-cost ways to provide supports for the school and for students, but the sparse resources associated with such schools often are a barrier to recruiting volunteers (and providing many other student and learning supports). Even parents at these schools often are not a ready source of volunteers.

> Note: Mentors are a special and often popular type of volunteer. Studies suggest that when a mentor is able to develop a *close relationship* with a student, the student has better academic outcomes.

> Note: As contrasted with volunteer tutors, mentors are meant to help the student have a one-to-one friendship with an older role model in hopes of "changing their lives for the better." Interestingly, studies suggest that relationship-only mentor programs produced as good academic outcomes as those with an academic focus.

> Note: Studies emphasize that volunteering also has many benefits for the volunteers – including being a pathway to employment.

Establishing a Leader for Volunteer Development

In our experience, any school that is serious about developing a strong volunteer force will need to start by identifying a lead staff person for volunteer development (e.g., a student/learning support staff member). This lead person is not expected to devote full time to the effort. Rather, s/he begins by recruiting the involvement of one or more other staff and a few non-staff volunteers to form a work group. The group both steers and carries out the various activities necessary for

- establishing policies and procedures for recruiting, training, supervising, and maintaining an effective pool of volunteers

- developing a variety of volunteer opportunities (see Exhibits A and B).

More specifically, the first tasks for the workgroup are to

- elicit input from a critical mass of the school's leadership to guide initial planning and ensure their support

- clarify existing district and school policies and resources related to recruiting, training, and supervising volunteers

- inform all stakeholders (staff, parents, community leaders) about plans and invite any who are interested in joining the work group

- recruit one or more volunteers (e.g., parents, persons from the community, college students) who are willing to be co-leaders for initial implementation (e.g., helping to plan and then recruit, select, and train other volunteers)

- arrange for capacity building for the work (including staff development for all on the work group) and establish a strategic action plan for initial implementation

- begin volunteer recruitment (using all the ways the school communicates with parents and the community; eventually recruited volunteers also can become recruiters)

- select and train volunteers and also those who will be supervising them; eventually experienced volunteers can help induct and train newcomers)

(As a beginning set of resource aids for developing school volunteers, see the documents listed in the Center's Quick Find on *Volunteers in Schools* http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/volunteers.html.)

Concluding Comments

Everyone knows that schools have a big job to do and too few resources with which to accomplish the work. Volunteers are not the answer to this complex problem. But they can play a role in helping schools enhance equity of opportunity by adding their contribution to addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students.

From the front office to the classroom to the outside campus, before school, after school, and on weekends – volunteers can assist with a wide range of activities. And in doing so, they can improve the lot of students and their families, ease the burden on staff, and reap a host of benefits to themselves.

Here are some concluding comments the Center has gleaned from volunteers and teachers:

Every kid in every grade needs need to know that no matter what there will always be someone there for them. Volunteers can help fill this need. – Volunteer

The children were able to feel special and were able to work on a project or skill longer than normal. – Teacher

The general overall experience has been great! I had a lot of fun and I learned a lot about teaching and kids. – Volunteer

Children looked forward to them coming. (They) assisted with small groups and one-on-one tutoring . . . relieved some of the pressure from targeted students. – Teacher

I found out that I work well and enjoy working with children. – Volunteer

A real stress reducer knowing that the 'slow' learners got additional help. – Teacher

Three targeted children were each given individual attention. This allowed me to spend more time with the rest of the class. – Teacher

I really enjoyed volunteering. It was my first experience with non-English speaking children and I'm sure when I become a teacher I will encounter many more. – Volunteer

It helps to provide the individual help for the target children and makes it possible to do more effective activities because there is more help and supervision. – Teacher

As a result of the extra attention, several students improved and unmotivated students began to show interest. – Teacher

A Sample of Resources Used in Developing this Document

Bayer, A., Grossman, J.B. & DuBois, D.L. (2013). *School-based mentoring programs: Using volunteers to improve the academic outcomes of underserved students.* New York: MDRC Endowment. http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/School-Based%20Mentoring_Programs.pdf

Brinton, B. (1999). *Volunteering in the Classroom Benefits Parents and Children.* Douglassville, PA: Parents' Source. http://www.parentssource.com/volunteer.article.asp

Center for Mental Health in Schools (2013). *Volunteers as invaluable resources.* Los Angeles: Author at UCLA. http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/voluntresource.pdf

Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA. (2010). *Guiding and supporting volunteers.* Los Angeles: Author at UCLA. http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/guiding volunteers.pdf

Center for Mental Health in Schools. (2007). *Volunteers to help teachers and school address barriers to learning.* Los Angeles, CA: Author at UCLA. http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/volunteer/volunt.pdf

Child Trends (2013). *Parental involvement in schools. Indicators on children and youth.* Washington, DC: author. http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/39_Parent_Involvement_In_Schools.pdf

Cravens, J. (nd). *Essential/favorite resources regarding volunteer management and volunteerism .* http://coyotecommunications.com/volunteer/favresources.html

generationOn (2011). *Adult volunteers in schools: A guide for adults serving in schools.* New York: Author. http://learningtogive.org/resources/Adults-in-Schools-Guide.pdf

Hager, M.A. & Brudney, J.L. (2004). *Balancing act: The challenges and benefits of volunteers.* Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411125_balancing_act.pdf

Henderson, A. & Mapp, K. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement.* Austin, TX: National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, SEDL. http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf

Pawlas, G. (2005). *Administrator's guide to school-community relations.* New York: Routledge.

Spera, C., Ghertner, R., Nerino, A., & DiTommaso, A. (2013). *Volunteering as a pathway to employment: Does volunteering increase odds of finding a job for the out of work?* Washington, DC: Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Research and Evaluation. http://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/upload/employment_research_report.pdf

Note: Our Center's online clearinghouse Quick Find on *Volunteers in Schools* has links to resources developed by the Center (see examples listed below) and from other online resources. Access the Quick Find at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/volunteers.html.

Note: In 2012, *Education World* provided a two part discussion of (including resources for) working with school volunteers entitled: *Schools Recruit, Recognize Contributions of Volunteers*
>Part 1 – http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin420_a.shtml
>Part 2 – http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin420_b.shtml

Note: Federal policy supports the importance of volunteer opportunities – see the *Corporation for National and Community Service* – http://www.nationalservice.gov/

Note: For more on mentoring in schools, see:
>The National Mentoring Resource Center –
http://www.mentoring.org/program_resources/national_mentoring_resource_center
>Tutor/Mentor Institute, LLC (T/MI) – http://www.tutormentorexchange.net/