



Lessons Learned

Volunteers: A Multifaceted Resource

Everyone knows schools have a big job to do and too few resources to do it. Volunteers are not *the* answer, but they can play a role in helping schools do much more in addressing barriers to learning. From the front office to the classroom, before school, after school, and on weekends – volunteers can assist. And in doing so, they ease the burden on staff, improve the status of students and their families, and reap a host of benefits to themselves.

Schools have always used volunteer help. However, they do not always use such resources in a multifaceted way. This is unfortunate because, with relatively little expense, volunteers can (a) be the backbone of newcomer welcoming and social support programs, (b) assist with specific students in ways that minimize class disruptions and facilitate positive performance, enabling teachers to personalize instruction, (c) help with school recreational, enrichment, and tutorial programs, (d) provide general assistance to staff on countless everyday tasks that must be done, freeing other school personnel to meet students' needs more effectively, (e) broaden students' experiences through inter-action with volunteers, and (f) strengthen school-community understanding and relations.

With the renewed interest in "volunteerism" and "service learning," schools have a wonderful chance to capitalize on what will be an increasing pool of talent. The key to doing so effectively is making recruitment, training, and daily maintenance of a volunteer force part of a school's everyday agenda.

Using Volunteers in Many Roles

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 by Helping Develop and Staff

A. Recreational and enrichment activity

B. Tutoring

C. Mentoring

IV. Helping Enhance a 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 Get Materials Ready

Volunteers Helping with Targeted Students

Volunteers can be especially helpful working under the direction of the classroom teacher to establish a supportive relationship with students having trouble adjusting to school. Every teacher has had the experience of planning a wonderful lesson and having the class disrupted by one or two students. Properly trained volunteers can help minimize such disruptions by re-engaging an errant student. When a teacher has trained a volunteer to focus on designated students, the volunteer knows to watch for and move quickly at the first indication that a student needs special guidance and support. The strategy involves quickly sitting down next to and quietly engaging the youngster. If necessary, the volunteer takes the student to a quiet area in the classroom and initiates another activity or even goes out for a brief walk and talk if feasible. 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 enables the teacher to continue teaching, and as soon as time permits, it allows the teacher to explore with the student ways to make the classroom a mutually satisfying place. Moreover, by handling the matter in this way, the teacher is likely to find the student more receptive to discussing matters than often is the case when the usual "logical consequences" are administered (e.g., loss of privileges, sending the student to time-out or to the office).

*For more on this topic, see the Center's TA Packet on Volunteers and the guidebook: *What Schools Can Do to Welcome and Meet the Needs of All Students And Families.*