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# Becoming an Effective Volunteer

## Introduction

Congratulations on the decision to become a school volunteer. Research and educators' experiences confirm that parental involvement in their student(s) education pays dividends. The purpose of this short, on-line module is to introduce and develop the skills of an effective volunteer--an asset to the school and learning experience for students. Following procedures and keeping safety in mind will help make the volunteer time with the school district as rewarding as possible.

The term "volunteer" in this brief course refers to people who work without pay under the direction of a credentialed person/supervisor in support of educational objectives. Volunteer opportunities may be available in the regular school classroom, playground supervision, office assistance, or other assignments where extra hands and energy can enrich the school's effectiveness. The process of becoming an effective volunteer may include an interview with the principal or other supervisor in addition to the supervising classroom teacher. Becoming acquainted with campus personnel is valuable and can enhance the effectiveness of volunteer services.



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# Becoming an Effective Volunteer

## Steps to Becoming an Effective Volunteer

### Procedures:

- Be sure to wear clothing appropriate for a school campus assignment. Check to see what the teachers and other staff members are wearing. There may be an official dress code for adults on campus.
- As always, be certain to report to the school office each time volunteer services are performed. If an identification badge is issued, wear it in a location easily visible to students as well as staff.
- At mutual convenience before the first actual day of service, meet with the potential supervisor (teacher or other staff member) to discuss the duties that will be assigned and any specific instruction on how to accomplish those duties most effectively.



The following topics should be discussed in that meeting or answers obtained from appropriate personnel:

1. What are the site's and district's policies regarding volunteers?
2. Is it necessary to be fingerprinted (Megan's Law check)? Have TB clearance?
3. Is approval of the principal, central office, or school board needed?
4. What are the procedures for fire drills, lock downs, and other safety provisions?
5. What are the steps in the student discipline policy which might be encountered by the volunteer when working with students?
6. What are the proper procedures for reporting hazards or observed unsafe practices or conditions?



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# Becoming an Effective Volunteer

## Understanding the Assignment

Some instruction and training of volunteers is typical on most campuses. The contribution of the volunteer such as a guest lecturer may be for a short period of time—a single presentation or brief series of visits; or the contribution may be scheduled for an extended period—specific days, weeks, months, or on an as-needed basis. The longer volunteer commitments should be preceded by a period of observation in the environment where the volunteer activities will take place—classroom or playground. A clear understanding of the assignment will enhance the value of the volunteer activity. (It is not infrequent for a teacher to assume the volunteer knows classroom routines [we all went to school] and can see what needs to be accomplished.) Inquire as to how to prepare for the assignment such as reading the student handbook, playground rules, office policies, etc.



Effective student management enhances the learning environment. The teacher's experience will be very helpful in this regard. Ask the teacher/supervisor for direction when working with uncooperative students. Avoid any inclination to touch students. Primary grade students may demonstrate their exuberance by a hug, pat, or other type of physical contact. The appropriate response should be a friendly verbal affirmation of the child. If any touching occurs that could be misinterpreted, inform the teacher/supervisor immediately.

If discrimination has been demonstrated against a volunteer for any reason, notify the teacher/supervisor of the situation. If the discrimination source is the teacher/supervisor, notify the principal.

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# Becoming an Effective Volunteer

## Volunteer Safe Practices

While on campus, to the greatest degree possible, keep safety in mind. This includes the safety of students and staff as well as volunteers. Utilizing common sense will assist in avoiding most school-related accidents. Should an accident involving a volunteer occur, be sure to discuss it with the teacher/supervisor and complete an accident report form. Workers Comp does not cover accidents in all circumstances so it is important to have the proper information in writing.

The most frequent accidents on school campuses occur under the trip/fall category. Be aware when walking on campus of items left on the ground/floor by students, tree roots, raised sidewalks, and other hazards which may occur on any campus. Model safe practices for students and alert them, where appropriate, to possible safety risks that student behaviors might engender.

A classroom volunteer should always be working with students under the direct supervision of a credentialed teacher and not alone in an isolated location. The best policy when working with any student(s) is to perform those duties within visual and hearing range of the teacher. Asking volunteers to transport students in private vehicles is risky business. Most districts prohibit volunteers from driving district vehicles, but if asked to provide transportation for students, volunteers must be sure to understand district policy before departure. Under most circumstances personal insurance would be considered primary.



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# Becoming an Effective Volunteer

## Conclusion

Volunteers are vital to an effective educational program. Many tasks on the campus can be accomplished by willing volunteers. The reduced adult/student ratio in the classroom has been proven to enhance the learning experience for students. The time spent will undoubtedly bring rewards to the volunteer, the students, and the educational community.



▶ Finish