

Section II

THE ROLE OF THE VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

Volunteer Coordinating is a Varied Role

Volunteer programs vary widely from school to school. Some schools focus on tutoring programs, while others concentrate on parent leadership and classroom assistance. Some schools are rich with individuals and groups from the community, while others have a smaller number of dedicated individuals. All of our schools use volunteers in a variety of ways.

As family and community participation in schools increases for the benefit of our students, schools are recognizing that volunteer efforts need structure and support to make that participation effective. Volunteers need to be recruited, screened, scheduled and trained. We also need to match their interest and abilities to actual needs of students and staff. Ongoing communication with volunteers is essential as well as efforts to recognize and show appreciation for the services and support our volunteers provide.

The real and potential benefit of volunteer programs to students is clear to most schools. However, our experience shows that teachers and administrators are not able to provide the necessary level of oversight and coordination for more than a few volunteers given their other responsibilities.

A number of schools continue with varying success to spread volunteer coordination among different staff members including teachers, instructional, support and administrative staff. Many schools have relied on parent organizations for volunteer help. In year's past, small amounts of central funding was available to schools for volunteer coordination. Those schools that have paid someone to coordinate volunteers have largely done so through site-based funding sources.

In 2002-2003, approximately one half of our 100 schools identified an individual as their Volunteer Coordinator. Some schools are lucky enough to have a volunteer, including AmeriCorps volunteers, in that role. Many have paid someone very part-time or increased pay and responsibilities for a staff member with other roles. A few schools have a full-time staff person whose primary focus is coordinating volunteers.

Volunteer Coordinating is a Professional Role

While the role of Volunteer Coordinator varies from school to school, it is generally not an easy job. The needs in our schools are great and you are responsible for finding and coordinating people to work with our students in effective ways. You are likely acting as a recruiter, a screener, a trainer, a supervisor and an advocate. We expect volunteer coordinators to act in a professional manner and be adequately qualified for their job. The school will have expectations for your work, and hopefully those expectations will be clear and reasonable. Because of those expectations and responsibilities, you should expect to be considered a member of the staff, and treated accordingly.

Don't be a Martyr!

Some schools are lucky enough to have a volunteer doing the volunteer coordinating. Other schools pay someone for a certain amount of hours hoping and sometimes expecting that the person will put in more hours. Some schools hire and compensate the person coordinating volunteers in a more structured way that is similar to the majority of our paid staff positions. Traditionally, volunteer programs have been understaffed in our schools. Whatever your pay classification, you have the responsibility for making your needs and expectations known to those that you work with. The students and volunteers need supportive adults who enjoy working at the school. If you find yourself feeling overworked and not supported or appreciated, find a way to address this with those that you work with, preferably with your supervisor. Brainstorm ways to create a positive dynamic.

Understand the School Culture and System

If you are unfamiliar with being a staff member in a school, take some time and make some effort to understand how things work, how staff members do their jobs and interact, and what other staff members expect of you. Often we can have expectations for others that do not match their expectations. In addition, the environment at school is different than at home or in other organizations and businesses.

Clearly Define Your Role

The role of the volunteer coordinator should be clearly defined based on the needs of the individual school. Please see the next page for a sample job description that can be used as a model. School leadership should work to establish reasonable expectations for their volunteer programs, including adequate staffing. The volunteer coordinator, paid or unpaid, should be considered a member of the professional staff.

Volunteer Coordinator Job Description

(Sample)

Reports to: School Principal

Position Located: At school site assigned

Number of hours Worked: *Determined by funding allocation*

Primary Duties/ Responsibilities:

Responsible for oversight of school-based Volunteer/ Community Involvement Program. Duties include:

- Volunteer Recruitment
- Volunteer Screening
- Volunteer Orientation
- Volunteer Training
- Volunteer Placement/ Matching
- Volunteer Recognition
- Liaison between school staff/ volunteers/ community partners
- Program evaluation (qualitative and quantitative)

Desired Qualities/ Skills:

- Computer literate (or willing to learn)
- Able to work flexible hours (some evening and weekend work required)
- Ability to work on multiple tasks
- Ability to communicate effectively with a diverse student/ parent/community population
- Ability to communicate effectively on the phone and in writing
- Professional presence

Position Requirements:

- Identify program priorities and expectations to establish a realistic work plan.
- Clarify work schedule, methods for communication with staff and supervisory relationship.
- Attend appropriate trainings and meetings at school, within the school district and in the community.
- Keep appropriate volunteer records and track volunteer activity.
- Identify resources that increase effective volunteer programs.

Volunteer Coordinating on the side...

You know...I'm just a parent here.

Many school-based Volunteer Coordinators are parents of the students in our schools. You might have volunteered for this role at a PTA meeting, or perhaps the Principal decided that you'd be a good person to pay for a few hours a week. However you found yourself in this role, please keep in mind that most things that apply to the "professionals" in your position at other schools, should apply to your work as well. Your role is every bit as important and in need of structure. The suggestions below are applicable to all Volunteer Coordinators, but may be particularly helpful for parents in that role.

- ❖ **Meet with the Principal and/or PTA President.** Decide together what is reasonable and prioritize your efforts.
- ❖ **Set goals for the program.** These goals will guide the work that you do and are invaluable for identifying what is appropriate for your limited time.
- ❖ **Communicate regularly.** The Principal and the PTA will generally be glad to get an update and they will be more informed as they make decisions in the future affecting volunteer programs. This might be a monthly memo or simply part of your newsletter updates.
- ❖ **Keep track of your hours.** It will be helpful for the school to know how much time you are working, even if some of it is paid and some is volunteer time. If possible, keep track of how many hours you are dedicating to any particular projects like recruiting tutors, or coordinating the auction volunteers.
- ❖ **Communicate with your volunteers.** All of our volunteers need to feel supported and that they are a part of the school community. Most likely this is your job, if it is anyone's. Ongoing support is a hallmark for effective volunteer programs. Make this a priority.
- ❖ **Delegate when you can.** You might be able to identify some other people who can take on some of your tasks. Make it a team effort if possible.
- ❖ **Have good boundaries.** Remember that your role as volunteer coordinator is different than your role as a parent at the school. As a leader at the school, and perhaps as a staff person, you will likely have different roles with the staff, students and their families than other parents. Try to keep those roles distinct and help others understand when you are functioning as the Volunteer Coordinator and when you are functioning as your child's parent. Your role at school should make a positive impact on your child's education.