

GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEERING IN PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Volunteers in the schools provide additional help and assistance to the school staff in providing services to the students. Each building principal should publish written rules for volunteers to use, and provide appropriate orientation and training.

If the volunteers will serve in the schools on a regular basis (i.e., more than 15 hours per week), they must complete a temporary employment application form and be processed through the Department of Human Resources.

Volunteers who do not serve on a regular basis must always work in the presence of a certified staff member and/or a regular volunteer.

Volunteers will act within the rules, regulations, and policies of the School Division, which includes refraining from promoting commercial products, religious beliefs, or a political agenda. Additionally, abortion counseling, birthright counseling, distributing contraceptives and distributing pregnancy tests are prohibited. Volunteers should model the kind of speech and dress and overall behavior which students would be expected to emulate. Volunteers will follow the following guidelines:

Confidentiality

Volunteers must understand that information based on contact with students, staff, or others at school is considered confidential and may not be used in conversation at school or outside school. Students and their parents have the right to expect that the student's conduct, classroom performance and achievement, and other characteristics of the student will not be the subject of rumor or gossip. Respect for the confidentiality rights of students and others within the school is essential. Volunteers must also be informed of the limits of confidentiality as described in Regulation 651-2. Volunteers should be cautioned when entering into relationships in which students may disclose sensitive or confidential information. Volunteers may not engage in counseling or other health-related services; such services may only be provided by authorized personnel in accordance with relevant policies and regulations. It should be noted that policy only permits paid employees access to students' grades, test scores, and other information which is considered confidential student information unless the parent/guardian or adult student authorizes the release of such information.

Reporting Requirements

Volunteers must be informed of the legal requirement to report cases of suspected child abuse or neglect to school officials. In addition, they must be informed of the responsibility to report illegal or improper behavior on the part of the student as well as any information that might indicate that a student or others may be at risk of harm, as described in Regulation 651-2.

Volunteers must also report to school officials any incidents involving property damage or bodily injury as required under Regulation 390-1.

Risk Avoidance

As volunteers work in the schools, they must keep in mind that their intentions may not be perceived accurately by students or others. What children go home and report to parents may not always be an accurate portrayal of events. What is perceived, factual or not, has the potential of causing problems for all involved. A heightened level of awareness can help to avoid potential pitfalls. Awareness can be increased by paying close attention to verbal and nonverbal signals, and by taking a moment to consider the possible unintended consequences of specific actions. Additionally, volunteers must AVOID:

- **Suspicion** – Behavior which may arouse suspicion in others can be minimized by increased awareness, considering consequences, and by attention to the remainder of this list.

- **Privacy** – Volunteers should not normally meet with individual students or small groups in an empty room with the door closed. Meetings should occur in open areas that are visible to others, especially other adults.
- **Secrecy** – Volunteers should not share (give or receive) secrets with students. No school staff members have an unlimited right to confidentiality even though some personnel have specific training which allows them a greater right than others. Volunteers have no such right, and they place themselves in a particularly vulnerable position by engaging in confidential communication.
- **Touching** – Physical contact with students is discouraged. The line between appropriate and inappropriate contact is often unclear and may be subjective, based on the perception of others. While unusual circumstances may require physical contact for self-protection or to carry out a specific request of the administrator/designee, it is otherwise prohibited.
- **Favoritism** – All students should be valued and respected equally. The appearance of favoritism undermines the ability of staff to work effectively with all students and may lead to suspicion of the individual's motives.
- **Outside Contact** – Volunteers may not arrange to meet with students outside school without parental permission. This does not apply to a chance meeting in some public place. In such a situation, a friendly greeting and brief conversation may be appropriate, especially if the parent is present. The school is not responsible for any problems which may arise from outside contact.

These guidelines are designed to protect the volunteers as well as the students, staff, and parents with whom they may work. Volunteers should be assured that their efforts are appreciated and that guidelines are intended to ensure the continued success of volunteer services within the schools. Volunteers should be given a copy of the guidelines, reviewed during the orientation process, to be used for later reference. **All volunteers must sign the attached form to acknowledge receipt.**