

2008-2009

Volunteers in Polk Schools
Polk County Public Schools



Volunteer **Handbook**

Connecting Community & Classrooms



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School Board of Polk County

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Superintendent of Schools

I am pleased to welcome you as a Volunteer in Polk Schools. Your commitment to education offers students an opportunity to have the individual attention so vital to their education and personal development.

The School Board of Polk County is proud of the community involvement in our schools. Last year, more than 29,000 volunteers shared more than 1,122,000 hours of service to our schools, representing a donation of more than \$17 million.

In Polk County, volunteer approval is a privilege. As an approved volunteer, you are a role model for students. You are expected to operate within the boundaries of school board policy and serve at the discretion of the local school.

As a volunteer, you will be assisting school staff to provide an enhanced educational experience for students. You are an important part of the total instructional effort. Teachers and students will be counting on you. Be sure that you take seriously your responsibilities as a member of the educational team.

I hope that you will find your volunteer experience rewarding. Our district depends on you to become a strong advocate by sharing your positive experiences and encouraging others to become involved.

Sincerely,

Gail F. McKinzie, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Volunteers In Polk Schools



Welcome!

Volunteers are a vital part of Polk County Schools. School volunteers enhance the quality of our children's education by:

- Reinforcing skills taught by the teachers;
- Giving students individual attention;
- Helping students develop confidence and competence;
- Preparing students to be engaged citizens and lifelong learners.

Each school individualizes its volunteer program to meet the needs of the students and teachers. Under the leadership of the Principal, the Volunteer Coordinator provides training and direction that will help you feel secure as you help students.

This handbook contains information about what is required of you as a volunteer. It is an overview of the various opportunities offered as well as policies and procedures volunteers must follow. Additional information can be found on the Volunteer website at <http://www.polk-fl.net/community/volunteers/default.htm>.

Thank you for giving your time to our students!

Sincerely,

Margaret Anne Wheeler
Coordinator
Community Involvement

Volunteers In Polk Schools



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Volunteers In Polk Schools



Procedures

Approval

Prior to volunteer service, individuals apply online at <https://volunteer.polk-fl.net> and undergo a Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) criminal background check at no cost to the volunteer. Criminal history information allows the Polk County School District to effectively screen out those volunteers who are not suitable for contact with children. When the FDLE cannot obtain an accurate background check, it is necessary for the volunteer applicant to undergo a fingerprint screening at their own expense, under the direction of the Community Involvement Office.

The School Board of Polk County reserves the right to deny volunteer privileges to individuals and to recheck criminal history as necessary.

Absolutely no one may volunteer unless approved.

The school volunteer coordinator contacts volunteers when approval is received. If you have questions about your approval status, call your local school.

Updating Your Information

When your name, address, phone number, or schools change, inform your volunteer coordinator.

Orientation

Volunteers are required to attend a school volunteer orientation before the first volunteer assignment. If you have not been invited to an orientation, notify your school's volunteer coordinator.

Identification

Always wear the school's identification badge. This identifies you as someone who belongs on campus. See your school volunteer coordinator if you have not been given the proper form of identification.

Volunteers In Polk Schools



Sign In Procedure

It is critical for school safety that schools have a record of your presence on campus. Your cooperation enables us to locate you in case of an emergency, provide Workers' Compensation coverage if you are injured, and verify volunteer service as work experience or for court documentation.

The school volunteer coordinator will show you where the VIPS volunteer log-in computer is located. Logging in is required. **All volunteers must log in and out each time they volunteer**, unless other instructions are given by the volunteer coordinator.

Volunteer Hours

Keep track of your volunteer hours! Schools are eligible for Florida Department of Education awards based on their total number of volunteer hours.

Volunteers who perform work off site, including at home, report hours to the volunteer coordinator who will add the hours to your record.

Conduct

Students look to you as a role model. Your appearance in dress and grooming must be appropriate and comfortable. Your manner must be respectful, civil and cooperative. Volunteer privileges will be suspended or revoked for failure to abide by Polk County School policies.

Cell Phones

Volunteers follow school board policy for cell phone usage on school grounds.

Discipline

Discipline is to be left to the school staff. Any problems should be reported to those in authority.

Volunteers In Polk Schools



Classroom Responsibility

As a volunteer, you are never to be left alone with a student or group of students. If you are asked to do so, please remind the staff member of the policy and report the request to the school volunteer coordinator.

Children Not Registered at the School

Volunteers may not bring preschool children with them on volunteer assignments. The school cannot assure their safety while the volunteer is giving undivided attention to their volunteer tasks with students.

Absences

Students depend on you. Do your best to be prompt and dependable. If illness or an emergency arises, please call the school office and ask that the teacher be notified that you are unable to volunteer on that day.

If your assigned teacher is absent, check with the substitute. If the substitute is not prepared for you, report to your volunteer coordinator who will reassign you.

Student Emergencies

It is the responsibility of staff to care for sick or injured children. Volunteers do not provide medication for students. Contact school staff who will initiate proper procedures.

Ask for Help

If you need more instruction in order to perform a task, just ask. Establish a method of communication with the teacher, either written or verbal. If you need to change your assignment, contact the school-level or district volunteer coordinator.

Volunteers In Polk Schools



Protecting Our Students

When child abuse and/or neglect is suspected, you are required to provide information to the Florida Hotline 1-800-962-2873. School staff will help you follow proper procedures established by state law and school board policies.

If a student talks about harming themselves or others, report the conversation **immediately** to school staff.

Respect the confidential nature of anything that you see or hear at school. Any information about a student's academic progress, behavior or a school-related incident is strictly confidential and protected by Florida law. Share any concerns that you may have with school authorities.

School volunteers who witness bullying (teasing; social exclusion; threats; stalking; physical violence; theft; sexual, religious, or racial harassment; public humiliation; destruction of property) must report the incident to a staff member immediately. (Florida Statute 1006.147)

Jessica Lunsford Act

Only individuals who conduct business with Polk County Schools must comply with the Jessica Lunsford Act. For more information, call **Greg Bondurant at Support Services, 863-534-9251**.

Protecting Our Volunteers

Stay in sight of school staff when working with students. Make sure you are working in an open, visible area and do not allow yourself to be in a situation where your actions might be misconstrued.

Appropriate physical contact includes handshakes and hands on shoulders.

Volunteers do not have individual contact with students outside of school hours.

The State of Florida has a good faith clause which states that volunteers acting in "good faith" cannot be sued.

Volunteers In Polk Schools



Workers' Compensation Protection

Approved school volunteers who suffer job related injuries may opt for medical attention using the same procedures as Polk County School District employees. The volunteer should obtain the workers' compensation paperwork from the school secretary who will direct the volunteer in following proper procedures.

Booster & PTO/PTA organizations must carry liability insurance for volunteers who serve them. When volunteering for their activities, Worker's Compensation does not apply.

Teen Volunteers

Students can receive community service hours by volunteering at Polk County Schools. Students 12 and older submit the online volunteer application at <https://volunteer.polk-fl.net>.

Retired Senior Volunteer Program

Volunteers who are 55 or older may register for the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP). Upon completion of the proper forms, they have the option of receiving mileage reimbursement. Your volunteer coordinator has the paperwork.

We Are Online!

For more information about volunteering, visit the Volunteer homepage at <http://www.polk-fl.net/community/volunteers/default.htm>.

To start the process to become an approved volunteer, complete an on-line application at <https://volunteer.polk-fl.net/>.

Volunteers In Polk Schools



Field Trips

Field trip chaperones must be approved volunteers by February 1, 2009.

Field trip sites become an extension of the school site. All policies and procedures governing volunteers at the school site extend to field trips.

The choice of how many chaperones needed for a trip is the decision of the teacher and the school administrator. The school administrator may limit the number of adults accompanying students on any given field trip.

Chaperones are responsible for the children the teacher has placed in their care. If chaperones must leave their group of children for some reason, they should make arrangements with the teacher. Chaperones do not neglect their obligation to students to visit with other adults.

All chaperones must be at least 18 years of age.

- **Unapproved family members who accompany their own child report to school staff.**
- **Do not use profane or inappropriate language. Tobacco, alcohol, and illegal drug use is prohibited in cars, on buses, and at field trip locations.**
- **Adults should wear appropriate clothing. The school may designate specific attire.**
- **Do not use cell phones except for emergency purposes. Your attention must be on the students at all times.**
- **Chaperones will assume duties at the school site prior to the trip and complete duties at the school upon return. Any other arrangements must be cleared prior to the trip with administration.**
- **Chaperones transporting students in private vehicles approved by the Polk County School Board are liable for those students in the event of an accident. A current insurance card and driver's license are required.**
- **Preschoolers or children not registered in the school may not attend field trips.**
- **Failure to comply with field trip guidelines results in a denial of volunteer privileges.**



School Board Policy

Background Screening (6Gx53.3003 VI.D.1)

Volunteer applicants provide necessary information to undergo an FDLE background screening before being approved.

Workers' Compensation (6Gx53.3003 VI.D.5)

Volunteers on the approved volunteer list are covered by Workers' Compensation when they are serving in a school-sponsored activity.

Booster club/PTA/PTO carry liability insurance to cover volunteers at their sponsored activities.

Student Confidentiality (6Gx53.3003 VI.D.8)

Florida Statute 1002.22 protects the rights of privacy with regard to student information and records, to include academic performance, grades, test scores, attendance and discipline records, health data, family background data, ratings and observations from teachers and guidance counselors. This information is confidential and is not to be discussed with anyone other than designated school staff. **Failure to respect privacy rights of students has legal consequences.**

Preschool children (6Gx53.3003 VI.D.13)

Volunteers may not bring preschoolers or children not registered in the school when they tutor, chaperone field trips, mentor, assist in the classroom, media center, office, cafeteria, or clinic.

Tobacco Products and Alcohol Use (6Gx53.3003 IX.C; IX.D)

Use of tobacco products and alcohol is prohibited on school campuses and during school sponsored events. Your vehicle becomes an extension of the school campus if you are using it to transport students, so your conduct is governed by school board policy during that time.

Discipline (6Gx53.3003 VI.D.8)

Disciplinary action is the legal responsibility of the teacher.

Staff Supervision (6Gx53.3003 VI.D.8)

Volunteers are never to be given charge of a class in the absence of a School Board employee.

Transporting Students (6Gx53.3003 VI.D.14, 6Gx53-7.001.III)

Volunteers must transport students for school sponsored activities in approved vehicles. Volunteers who transport students in their own vehicles for school-sponsored activities do so at their own risk since the Polk County School Board's liability coverage is only in force for vehicles owned, leased, or rented by the School Board.

Volunteer Travel (6Gx53.3003 VI.D.6; 6Gx53-5.011)

Volunteers may be approved to travel on behalf of the School Board of Polk County and be eligible for expense reimbursement with administrative approval.

For more information:

<http://www.polk-fl.net/districtinfo/boardmembers/boardpolicy.htm>

Volunteers In Polk Schools



Working with Individual Students

- Introduce yourself and tell the student why you are there and when you'll be volunteering. Learn the student's name and how to pronounce and spell it.
- Get acquainted. Find out what interests the student. Tell him some things about you. While you establish rapport, be patient. It may take time for you both to feel comfortable. Your words and actions let the student know you care.
- Be dependable. You are modeling responsible behavior for students.
- If you must be absent, call the school and ask that the student be told you cannot come that day. The student will be disappointed but reassured that you care enough to call.
- Build the student's self-confidence. Praise your student specifically and frequently. Accentuate the positive; minimize the negative.
- Let the student know that making mistakes is a normal part of learning. Don't be afraid of making mistakes yourself. We learn from mistakes!
- Listen attentively, but keep the student focused on task.
- Keep your explanations short and clear.
- Give students extra time to think so they can discover the answer to the question.

Do not get discouraged if you do not see immediate change in the students' attitude or academic achievement. Their present situation has been building over time, and it will take time to change it. You ARE making a difference, even though you may not even be around to see the positive results.

Volunteers In Polk Schools



Volunteer Opportunities

Tutors

Classroom

Tutors work one-on-one or with small groups of students who need remedial help in academic subjects (reading, math, English, science, social studies) to reinforce basic skills with students.

Time: One hour per week

ESOL – Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

Tutors in this program will help non-English speaking students increase their skills in understanding, speaking, reading and writing English. Volunteers do not need to speak the student's native language.

Time: One hour per week

Adult Literacy

Adult Literacy tutors work one-on-one with adults who are learning basic skills. Volunteers are assigned to adult centers where students are preparing for their GED exams or learning basic skills.

Time: 1 – 1½ hours each week

School Advisory Council

School Advisory Councils work as a team with school staff to develop the School Improvement Plan as defined by state statute. Parents and students are elected to the School Advisory Council. The principal appoints community members. The School Advisory Council reflects the racial-ethnic composition of the school's student population and meets at least 4 times each year.

Time: 1 hour per month

Parent Organizations (PTO/PTA, Athletics, Boosters)

Parent organizations exist at the discretion of the principal. They are responsible for complying with district policies and procedures. They support the school through various activities that raise funds and community involvement.

Time: Varies

Volunteers In Polk Schools



Volunteer Opportunities

Mentors

Mentors encourage students to improve their attendance, behavior and academic performance by helping them maintain academic focus. 1½-hour training is required.

Time: One hour per week

Youth Motivator Program

Youth Motivators meet weekly with at-risk students in public elementary, middle and high schools across the county.

Contact: Margaret Anne Wheeler 534-0636

Take Stock In Children

Low-income high school students are helped to succeed by provision of college scholarships, mentors, tutoring, and long-term support.

Contact: Susan Fenich 519-8077

Big Brothers/Big Sisters

Some schools utilize the Big Brothers and Big Sisters program to provide a mentor for students once a week at elementary schools and/or through after school programs.

Contact: Carrie Varnadoe 682-5191

School based mentors may apply to Big Brothers/Big Sisters program(682-5191) as a community mentor to spend out of school time with students.

Chaperones

Volunteers, most often family members, accompany students on daytime and overnight field trips.

Time: ½ - full day

Guest Speakers

Guest speakers, share career, travel, hobbies and cultural experiences with students in a classroom setting at Polk County's Great American Teach-In in November or as needed.

Time: 30 minutes-1 hour

Volunteers In Polk Schools



Volunteer Opportunities

Assistants

Classroom

Volunteers work with classroom teachers to assist on various projects and student interaction. Elementary school volunteers tell stories, read to children, prepare bulletin boards, and chaperone. Secondary school volunteers work on music, drama performances, operate audio-visual equipment, or make instructional materials. Volunteers may sew costumes, repair uniforms or coach academic teams at all live events.

Clinic

Clinic volunteers receive special training to offer comfort measures to students with minor discomforts, administer basic first aid, maintain the clinic, and assist with clerical duties. Clinic aides notify the appropriate staff person when students appear acutely ill or seriously injured.

Computer Lab

There are opportunities for volunteers who have computer skills and knowledge of software.

Media Center

Volunteers work at the circulation desk, catalog and shelve books, mend books, operate audio-visual equipment, and fill teacher and student requests.

Office

Tasks may include typing, computer input, answering telephones, duplicating or other office work.

Great American Teach-In

Guest speakers talk about career, hobbies and travel on the third Wednesday in November.

Time: 20-30 minutes for elementary; 50 minutes for secondary

Volunteers In Polk Schools



Volunteer Training Checklist

I have:

- Completed an application form and been approved
- Met the volunteer coordinator
- Participated in an orientation session
- Been assigned to a teacher or a task
- A specific place to work as a volunteer

I know:

- How to sign-in on VIPS sign-in computer
- Where to get volunteer identification
- The location of parking and facilities
- School calendar, opening and closing times, school telephone number
- Discipline policy
- Fire drill procedures
- Important school phone numbers
- Who to call if I am absent
- What to do if the teacher is absent
- Where instructional materials are kept
- What to do if I suspect abuse or neglect of a child with whom I am working
- Where to eat while volunteering



School Calendar

Date	Event
Monday, August 18, 2008	First day of school for students
Monday, September 1, 2008	Holiday-Student/Teacher/Para
Wednesday, September 10, 2008	Staff Development Day Student/Para Holiday
Friday, October 17, 2008	Teacher Work Day Student/Para Holiday
Tuesday, November 4, 2008	Distribute Report Cards
Week of November 24-28, 2008	Holiday-Student/Teacher/Para
Friday, December 19, 2008	Last School Day before Winter Holidays
Mon., Dec 22 - Mon., Jan. 5	Winter Holidays
Tuesday, January 6, 2009	Students and Para educators return from Holidays
Monday, January 19, 2009	Holiday-Student/Teacher/Para
Tuesday, January 20, 2009	Teacher Work Day Student/Para Holiday
Friday, January 30, 2009	Distribute Report Cards
Tues., Feb. 10 – Fri., Feb. 13	FCAT Writing Assessments
Monday, February 16	Holiday-Student, Teacher, Para
Tues., March 10 - Mon., March 23	FCAT Testing
Mon., March 30 – Fri., April 3	Spring Holidays
Friday, April 10, 2009	Holiday – Student/Teacher/Para
Tuesday, April 14, 2009	Distribute Report Cards
Monday, May 25, 2009	Memorial Day/All Staff Holiday
Wed., June 3 & Thurs., June 4	Graduation/ Final Exams
Thursday, June 4, 2009	Last Day for Students



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Volunteer Coordinator

Phone

The Mission of Polk County Public Schools is to ensure rigorous, relevant learning experiences that result in high achievement for our students