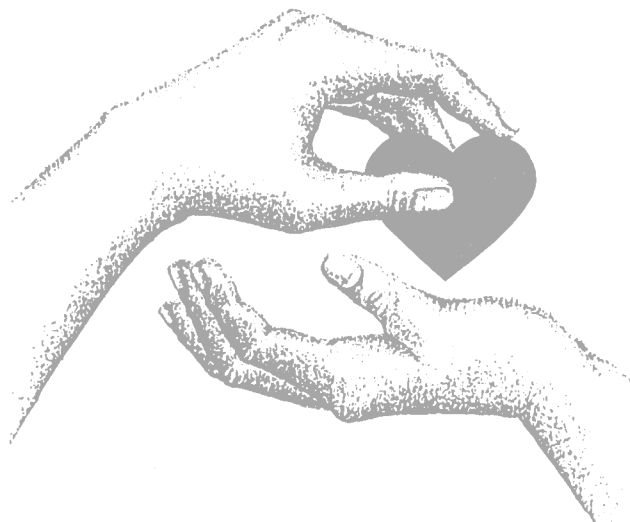




VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK



Volunteering in Tacoma Public Schools

The Tacoma School District is committed to the mission of providing excellent instruction that results in increased student achievement and creating a dynamic partnership with parents and our community.

Volunteer programs will:

- ❖ Enrich the curriculum.
- ❖ Enhance children's learning opportunities.
- ❖ Provide help for individual children.
- ❖ Increase students' self-esteem and motivation to learn.
- ❖ Provide satisfying opportunities for adults to make lasting contributions to children and schools.
- ❖ Assist teachers and other staff.
- ❖ Establish and strengthen community partnerships for quality education.
- ❖ Support efforts to achieve district academic standards.

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Being a Volunteer

Volunteering in a school is a unique and exciting experience and a benefit to students, their schools and the volunteer. It is designed to promote and maintain a supportive relationship between students, their schools and their community.

Volunteers should be:

- ❖ Friendly and caring.
- ❖ Reliable and flexible.
- ❖ Understanding and appreciative of the work of the school staff and the volunteer program.

Volunteers should have:

- ❖ A professional attitude and an ability to work cooperatively with school staff.
- ❖ Interest in working with young people.
- ❖ Good moral character.
- ❖ Time and willingness to service.
- ❖ An understanding of the important role that education plays in the lives of children and our communities.

Please keep in mind that volunteering will involve learning new skills and learning about students. The school's role, and therefore the role of the school volunteer, is always to improve the academic achievement of our students. We do this in a variety of ways including academic instruction and personal support.

Becoming a Volunteer

To begin volunteering with the school district, you must:

- ❖ Register with the school you want to work with and complete a volunteer application. All schools have these applications.
- ❖ Update your contact information as it changes.

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- ❖ Complete and sign a Disclosure Form authorizing the school to complete a Washington State Criminal History Background Check. Starting in School year 2009-10, background checks will be done yearly.
- ❖ **ALWAYS** sign ***in*** and ***out*** through the school office whenever you come to the school. (This is an important procedure for your safety, and for the safety of our children.)
- ❖ Wear a name badge at all times (provided by school).

Responsibilities of Volunteers

- ❖ Understand and accept the students in terms of their own background and values.
- ❖ Support and supplement the instructional program of the classroom teacher. ***The volunteer's role is assistance, not replacement.***
- ❖ Communicate regularly with the teacher, librarians, or school volunteer coordinator via meetings, notes, logbook, telephone or email.
- ❖ Be prompt, dependable, and regular in attendance.
- ❖ Know and observe all regulations and procedures in the assigned school (i.e. fire drills, accident reporting, lunch and coffee privileges, pupil restroom and drink privileges, inclement weather procedures).
- ❖ Discuss problems that arise with the teacher or school volunteer coordinator.
- ❖ Notify the principal, counselor, teacher, or school volunteer coordinator if a student confides in you about a situation of abuse or neglect. Staff will assist and support you with the reporting and follow-up protocols.
- ❖ Leave personal concerns and pressures at home. Leave school problems at school.
- ❖ Respect confidentiality with relationship to the school. Ensure that a child's work and behavior in school are held in confidence.
- ❖ Remember that you are acting as a role model for children, not only in how you interact with others at school, but who you are as a person.

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Rights of Volunteers

Volunteers have the right to:

- ❖ Know as much about the school as possible, including its policies, its staff, and its programs.
- ❖ Sound guidance and direction by someone who is experienced, informed, patient, thoughtful and has the time to invest in giving guidance.
- ❖ A suitable assignment with consideration for personal preference, temperament, life experience, education and employment background.
- ❖ A variety of experiences, through transfer of one activity to another, and through special project assignments.
- ❖ Be heard, have a part in planning, feel free to make suggestions, and have respect shown for an honest opinion or different perspective.
- ❖ The right to recognition through day-by-day expression of appreciation, or some tangible evidence by being treated as a co-worker.

Tips for Volunteers

- ❖ Be patient when working with students. Give yourself time to find your niche.
- ❖ Names are important. Make sure you say the student's name the way the student wants it to be said. Learn to spell it correctly. Make sure the student knows your name and can pronounce it correctly.
- ❖ Treat individuals with respect and courtesy and expect the same in return.
- ❖ Show that you are interested in the student as a person by listening carefully to what is said and showing you care by words and action.
- ❖ Encourage and support student successes. Build self-confidence by praising them honestly and frequently. Accentuate the positive and minimize the negative.
- ❖ Avoid making comparisons between students, between teachers and between schools.

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- ❖ Always remember to be fair and consistent.
- ❖ Students make mistakes. Let them know that making mistakes is part of living. Don't be afraid of making mistakes yourself.
- ❖ Be trustworthy and honest in your approach and attitude. Students will trust and respect you when you are "real."
- ❖ If you will be absent, call the school. Students will be disappointed but will be reassured that you cared enough to call.

Safety and Liability Issues

Where should I work with a student?

Locations will vary, depending upon availability and the preference of the student's teacher. Many schools are crowded, so you may end up working with the student in the hallway. Try to find a quiet space with as few distractions as possible.

Sometimes a teacher will direct you to an empty classroom. Always work in an area assigned by the teacher or the school volunteer coordinator and keep the door open.

If you are working with a student in an after-school program, it may be tempting to offer the student a ride home. **Never go off site with a student and never give them a ride in your car.** Your volunteer experience is limited to the public school setting.

What are my confidentiality rights?

As the relationship with a student progresses, he/she will begin to trust you and may start to confide in you. Take time to listen and show that you care. However, do not make a promise you cannot keep. If a student reveals information relating to possible abuse or neglect, let the student know that you care and are there to listen. Be sure to follow school guidelines and let the building administrator, teacher, or counselor know of the situation. There is always a chance that someone may already have insight into the situation, which could help you to understand and work better with that student.

Personal information about yourself should be shared only as it is relevant to the work you are doing with the student. Do not give out personal contact information such as your address, phone, email and personal website addresses.

Can I hug a student?

Some students, especially at the elementary level, will naturally become very attached and affectionate toward you. Many students are craving affection and attention, so it is important that you handle the situation with sensitivity. Unfortunately, **front hugs should be avoided.** Instead, carefully put your arm around a child's shoulder and turn

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it into a side hug. Use other signs of affection, such as “high fives.” In addition, regardless of age, students should never sit on your lap.

What are some safer touch areas?*

Areas that are safest to touch are:

- Shoulders
- Upper Back
- Arms
- Hands

Remember to keep in mind the cultural perspective and personal context of touch from the student’s perspective. Cultural influences, beliefs and personal history affect a student’s comfort level regarding personal boundaries. **Some children are not comfortable with touch and may want more personal space.** Respect their wishes. Recognize their signals that they do not want to be touched, such as avoiding you or drawing back or away from you when you touch. In general, touch all students in a consistent manner.

*Special circumstances will arise where touch that exceeds these guidelines will be necessary. Special physical education needs, nursing and coaching may require additional student contact for the health and hygiene needs of the student. Be clear (to yourself and the student) about when, where, why and how you are touching the student.

What are some signs of possible child abuse and neglect?

The following factors may be present when abuse has occurred, but do not guarantee an abusive situation. If any of the following signs are present in your child, **you are required to alert the teacher, principal, or counselor so that they can further investigate the situation:**

The following signs may signal the presence of child abuse or neglect.

Signs of Abuse:

- Shows sudden changes in behavior or school performance.
- Has not received help for physical or medical problems.
- Has learning problems (or difficulty concentrating) that cannot be attributed to specific physical or psychological causes.
- Is always watchful, as though preparing for something bad to happen.
- Lacks adult supervision.
- Is overly compliant, passive, or withdrawn.
- Comes to school or other activities early, stays late, and does not want to go home.
- Signs of injury, such as welts, bruising, cuts, burns, fractures, or swellings.
- A history of repeated, untreated, or unexplained physical injury.

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- A contradiction between the story, “I fell off my bed” and physical evidence that has included repeated bruising.
- The child appears to be uncomfortable or fearful when talking about the injury.
- Child alludes to or seems preoccupied with sexual matters.

Signs of Neglect:

- Is frequently absent from school.
- Begs or steals food or money.
- Lacks needed medical or dental care, immunizations, or glasses.
- Is consistently dirty and has severe body odor.
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather.
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs.
- States that there is no one at home to provide care.

What is the purpose of these rules?

The Tacoma School District wants you, as volunteers, to carry out your responsibilities in a caring and appropriate manner. We want you to feel comfortable about hugging and touching kids. We want everyone to feel safe. Having guidelines will assist you in creating and maintaining a safe environment for you and the students with whom you work.

Boundary Invasion

When volunteering it is important to remember your own personal boundaries and the boundaries of the children and youth you are working with. Here are some boundaries to keep in mind when volunteering with children in the Tacoma Public Schools. By keeping these boundaries in mind you are protecting yourself and the child from boundary invasion and violations. Do not allow yourself to:

- Favor certain students by giving them special privileges of treatment.
- Be alone with the student behind closed doors.
- Initiate or extend contact beyond the school day.
 - Such as taking the student on outings, away from protective adults.
- Engage in inappropriate communications
 - Such as talking to the child about the child’s personal problems or allow yourself to become a confidant of the child - it is not your job.
- Use phones, e-mail, text-messaging, instant messaging or personal web pages/social networking sights to discuss personal topics of interests with students.

Keep our students safe.

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Working with Students from Diverse Cultural Backgrounds

Students in Tacoma Public Schools come from many different families, cultures, and communities--each with its own set of values and beliefs. Our individual culture, beliefs, values and behaviors seem natural as a part of who we are such that sometimes it is often challenging to understand others with unique traditions.

Because of the many unique ethnic groups represented in Tacoma Schools, children speak many different languages and have many varied beliefs and customs. Children from diverse cultures are acclimating—that is, living in both cultures. Each individual must honor the beliefs and habits of their culture of origin, while learning to respond to the beliefs and habits of the school culture. Volunteers should be aware of the delicate balancing act students live every day.

Cultural differences may affect a student's background knowledge, learning style, behavior, and social skills. Specifically, you may experience cultural differences with regard to:

- Varying learning styles
- Eye contact
- Sense of time
- Effective discipline
- Student motivation
- Personal space and appropriate touch

Understanding the students' cultures and helping them to understand the school culture will increase your ability to help them learn.

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Volunteer Information/Procedure Checklist

When you first meet with your teacher/supervisor, plan to discuss the following:

- Days and times to work in classroom/school.
- Procedures for volunteer and teacher/supervisor to keep in touch (regular conferences, telephone conversations, notes, informal meetings.)
- Alternate plans for days when the teacher/supervisor is absent.
- How the teacher/supervisor will tell you as a volunteer of your day's assignment (folder, note, or other means.)
- How the students will address the volunteer (school or volunteer's preference of having students use first name or Mr./Ms./Mrs.)
- Materials, strategies or games to be used.
- Teacher's/supervisor's classroom/school policies, procedures and rules (such as management system, reinforcement techniques, organizational plans, emergency procedures, where volunteer leaves personal belongings, and whether volunteer is welcome in teachers' lounge and lunchroom.)
- Dates of required and suggested trainings.
- Protocol for informing school/teacher/student about volunteer absence.

If you work on academic areas with students, you should also discuss:

- Pertinent background information about the student(s) you will work with (within the appropriate standards of student information confidentiality).
- Strengths of the student(s).
- Needs of the student(s).
- Tips for working successfully with specific students (learning style and reinforcement techniques.)
- Procedures for taking student(s) out of classroom for individual work.
- Designation of work area location.
- Alternate plan if student is absent.

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Volunteer Agreement

Copy of FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act)

Copy of Student Records policy

Copy of Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting policy

Copy of Volunteer Policy

**Copy of Board Sexual Harassment Policy (both student and staff)
provided to all long-term volunteers and/or mentors who have
been screened and approved by the district as a volunteer;
signed receipt required and verification maintained with
volunteer/mentor application.**

***All students, employees and parents/guardians, substitutes,
volunteers must be notified of the names, office address, and
telephone number(s) of the designated coordinator(s) of Title IX.**

***All students and their parents, staff and volunteers, enrolling after
the 1st of the school year, are notified of the name and phone
number of the district Title IX compliance coordinator (or
building officer).**

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Safety and Liability Issues

_____ As the relationship with a student progresses, he/she will begin to trust you and may start to confide in you. You should take time to listen and show them that you care about them. However, do not make a promise you cannot keep. If a student reveals information relating to a possible abuse or neglect situation, let the student know that you care and are there to listen but that you are required to pass this information on to a teacher, counselor, or principal who can offer them help

_____ Personal information about yourself should be shared only as it is relevant to the work you are doing with the student. Do not give personal contact information such as your address, phone, personal website, and email.

_____ Some students, especially at the elementary level, will naturally become very attached and affectionate toward you. Many students are craving affection and attention, so it is important that you handle the situation with sensitivity. Unfortunately, front hugs should be avoided. Instead, carefully put your arm around a child's shoulder and turn it into a side hug. Use other signs of affection, such as "high fives." In addition, regardless of age, students should never sit on your lap.

Working with Children from Diverse Cultural Backgrounds

_____ Students in Tacoma Public Schools come from many different families, cultures, and communities--each with its own set of values and beliefs. Our individual culture, beliefs, values and behaviors seem so naturally a part of who we are that it is often challenging to understand others with unique traditions. Understanding the students' cultures and helping them to understand the school culture will increase your ability to help them learn.

Confidentiality

_____ Students in the Tacoma Public Schools have the right to expect that information about them will be kept confidential by all volunteers. Additionally, the U.S. congress has addressed the privacy-related concerns of educators, parents, and students by enacting the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (known more commonly as "FERPA" or the "Buckley Amendment").

- Each student with whom you work has the right to expect that nothing that happens to or about him or her will be repeated to anyone other than authorized school department employees, as designated by the administrators at your school.

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- You may not share information about a student even with others who are genuinely interested in the student's welfare, such as social workers, scout leaders, clergy, grandparents, or nurses/physicians. A grave medical emergency, in which confidential information may be necessary for a student's care, is an exception. Thus, you must refer all such questions to the school employees so authorized and indicated to you, typically the student's teacher or principal.

- Parents, friends, or community members may in good faith ask you questions about a student's problems or progress. Again, you must refer all such questions to the authorized school employees. You may not share information about a student even with members of your own family.

- Before you speak, always remember that violating a student's confidentiality isn't just impolite, it's against the law.

Agreement

I, (print name) _____, as a volunteer have read and agree to the above terms. In addition to the remaining guidelines in the Volunteer Handbook, I have been made aware of where to find the Volunteer Handbook and to whom I can speak to regarding any questions or concerns I may have.

Please print full name

Volunteer site

Please sign full name

Date

Volunteer Coordinators signature

Date

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STAFF DIRECTORY

Assigned School _____

School Telephone _____

School Address _____

Principal _____

School Secretary _____

Volunteer Coordinator _____

Teacher _____

Teacher _____

Teacher _____

Other Contact(s) _____

The volunteer coordinator, teacher or supervisor at the school can assist you with any questions, concerns, problems, etc., that you might have with your placement.

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Notes