

Volunteers do make a difference! Volunteer participation is an opportunity for you to share with others in the enrichment of educational opportunities either through direct involvement with students or through other support services which make for better schools or work places. You will discover the rewards of helping others while at the same time gaining useful experience yourself. The experience of volunteering will offer you a greater awareness of the variety of challenges and opportunities confronting our education system.

What do Volunteers do?

Volunteers perform many different tasks. The following list is not a complete list of volunteer activities but an indication of some of the many ways volunteers assist in the Strait District schools:

- Resource room support
- Site/ School Planning Committees (SST)
- Field trips
- Special events
- Library support
- Safe arrival program
- Reading programs
- Assisting teachers with teaching materials
- Coaching
- Advisory committees (SAC)
- School beautification
- PTA
- Chaperones
- Bulletin board displays
- Communications (telephone committees/newsletters/flyers)
- Preparing props and costumes for school plays and variety shows
- Assisting with computer work (e.g. word processing, graphics, Internet)
- Supervising field trips
- Classroom parents
- Fund raising
- Choir/ Musical groups and productions
- Photocopying and stapling
- Drivers for school trips
- Assisting with playground supervision
- Classroom cleanup
- Guest speakers
- Project work for staff
- Tutoring
- Health programs
- Crafts
- Decorating for various occasions

What Should a School Volunteer Expect?

A school volunteer should:

- be made to feel that the assistance given is worthwhile and contributes to the overall value of the program in which they are participating;
- be treated with respect and consideration by all students and staff;
- be given a suitable assignment in which their areas of interest, skills, and talents can be best utilized, and where possible, in a convenient location;
- be given clear instructions and any training necessary for the particular volunteer assignment;
- be given proper orientation to the school with introductions to key personnel and information provided as to parking, storage of personal items, washroom and break and lunch facilities;
- have a two-week trial period in each new volunteer position realizing that changes may be asked for by either the volunteer or supervising staff;
- have an effective mechanism for two-way communication with staff (i.e. discussion time or regular memo exchange for ongoing direction and feedback);
- be provided with direct support from staff if difficulties arise.

What is Expected of a School Volunteer?

A school volunteer has the following responsibilities:

- to remember that the Principal or supervisor has ultimate responsibility for all personnel, policy and programs in his/her school or work site;
- to follow the policies of your assigned school or work site (i.e. signing-in procedures where requested, local school behavior expectations);
- to be reliable. Accepting a school volunteer assignment means a regular commitment to be prompt and on schedule. Also, notifying the school in advance if you do have to be absent;
- to assist under the direction of qualified staff and to following their instruction closely. Work only with those staff members in your assigned school who request your help and work only with students referred to by the teacher(s) in charge;
- to remember that volunteers are in the school to assist and supplement - not replace the role of the employee;
- to be receptive to, and participate in, orientation, training and meetings with staff, as offered. Try to "grow in the job";
- when asked, to offer constructive feedback to staff on your experience as a volunteer and make good use of their evaluation of your performance;
- to remember you are a role model for students and the school community.

Please maintain the highest standards of confidentiality and ethics.

Guidelines for Volunteers

- A school volunteer is not a teacher or student program assistant, not a therapist or a counsellor, but first of all a friend who accepts the students as they are. The volunteer can convey by his/her interest, attitude and sincerity that the student is a worthwhile person. Only when people feel good about themselves are they able to learn.
- Ask questions freely about programs, policies and equipment at a time appropriate both for the staff member and for yourself. Follow the staff person's established procedures. Talk to the teacher about any difficulties at appropriate times, not in front of students or parents.
- Share your experiences and talents. Let the teacher know in what you excel (telling stories, singing, playing instruments, handcrafts, computer use, photography, etc.)
- Try to learn the names of students.
- Help students to tackle their work but do not do their work for them. If they get off-track, help them get back on in a tactful manner.
- Work at the student's level; sit or stand with him/her. Show your interest and involvement.
- Speak in a positive way to students – point out the things they have done right, the things they do well. Rushing them or nagging causes more problems than it solves. Belittling a person or making comparisons is harmful.
- Remind students of appropriate behaviour if they are disruptive or break rules. Show by example a calm, responsible attitude for dealing with problems. Remember though that corrective discipline is the responsibility of the principal and the teaching staff.

Student Behaviour and Discipline

The Strait Regional School Board has a clearly defined policy on student behaviour and discipline, Section IV-C-1 to IV-C-10. The Board strives to provide a supportive, caring and orderly school climate that will enable students to develop skills that can help them achieve their full potential intellectually, physically and socially, in accordance with the Public School Program and the School Board's mission statement. The purpose of the Student Behaviour and Discipline Policy is to describe a district wide approach to student discipline and to specify the procedures applicable to student suspensions.

Good school discipline means a sense of order prevailing in the classroom, throughout the building and on the school grounds. The sense of order offers security and comfort as well as a background for teaching and learning. Discipline should proactively encourage and acknowledge good behaviour and support actions, which promote the pursuit of the best possible learning climate.

School and classroom codes of behaviour will therefore incorporate strategies for fostering, recognizing and rewarding positive behaviour, in addition to outlining the potential consequences for inappropriate behaviour.

Finally, school discipline is a process involving several partners in education; namely, the School Board, the educators, the parents and guardians, the students and the community. By working together, these partners can create, in each school, a teaching and learning environment that allows every student to reach his/her potential.

Each school is required to develop their own "School Code" using the Board Policy as their guide. Volunteers should be made aware of the School Code in order to successfully support the efforts of the school administration and staff.

Volunteers as Mentors/Helpers: A Position of Trust

Volunteers who work in a one-to-one relationship with students have a unique opportunity to help these students build feelings of competence and self-esteem, thus creating an environment for enhanced achievement. But with opportunity comes responsibility. As a student begins to realize that there is someone who does care, who takes a personal interest in the individual, that student may show increasing trust in the volunteer. It is essential that nothing happen to damage that trust. This means that the volunteer must:

- be a genuine friend and role model for the student,
- accept the student as an individual,
- follow through on all promised commitments.

Speaking About Confidentiality

Perhaps one of the greatest obstacles in the path of effective use of volunteers, especially parent volunteers, is the worry on the part of teachers and principals regarding the possible misuse of privileged information. Once anyone begins to work in a school setting, he/she becomes privy to knowledge about children's behaviour patterns, academic ability, emotional maturity, relationships with others, etc. In some cases, information of this nature is imparted in order that the volunteer might work more effectively with the child. In other cases, it is simply acquired in the course of frequent contact in the school. In addition, volunteers are in a position to learn more about staff members than would normally be learned from their "public image". One also forms personal opinions about the professional competency of the individual teachers and principals. There is nothing wrong with the volunteer possessing such knowledge and arriving at personal conclusions. This knowledge or these opinions, however, should never be shared in the community or with anyone who has no legitimate need to know. Similarly, care must be taken not to make comments harmful to the reputation of any pupil, professional or other volunteer.

If problems develop, the line of communication regarding a situation in the school is always first with the staff member concerned and then, if necessary, with the principal. A volunteer has every right to expect that his or her participation will be treated with the same confidentiality and respect.

Liability Insurance

Volunteers, when acting in a Board-approved activity, are insured under the Self-Insurance Program in the same way as the Board, teachers and all other staff with respect to their actual or alleged negligence or error or omission. However, it is the duty of any person who witnesses any incident which, in today's litigious society, could become a claim, or receives any word that a claim may be made, to notify the superior in charge without delay. It must then be relayed to the Board so that the Self-Insurance Program will have the opportunity to investigate while it is fresh in everyone's mind. Any person, who voluntarily transports students in his/her own vehicle, shall follow procedures as provided through school administration, based on Board policy regarding "private use of vehicles" and volunteers should be made aware of these procedures prior to transporting students.

Recognition

Volunteering is the giving of time, energy, and concern to others. It is an honourable and cherished responsibility of our society. The Board wishes to thank each and every volunteer for their participation and dedication to the students and staff. Together we can make education and the functions which support it a solid foundation upon which to build a lifetime of successful achievement for students and those who work in the system.

How to Become A Volunteer

- Complete Child Abuse Registry Form
- Stop by the school to pick up a Volunteer letter to waive the fee to get a Criminal Records Check