

# Saint Paul Public Schools Volunteer Guide

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Thank you for volunteering in the Saint Paul Public Schools. We appreciate the contribution of your time and talent to support our learners of all ages.

## **WHY VOLUNTEER?**

There are many reasons for volunteering. Understanding your own goals for volunteering can help you to use your talents most effectively. Common reasons include:

1. To experience the satisfaction of helping someone.
2. To have an opportunity for personal growth.
3. To develop new skills.
4. To document experience for future job or academic references.
5. To meet new people and make new friends.
6. To learn about your community.
7. To explore career options.
8. To use time in a meaningful way.
9. To remain active and productive in the community after retirement.
10. To pursue a personal interest or hobby.

Which of these reasons apply to you? Do you have other goals for your volunteer experience? Be sure to share these with your supervisor.

## **THE VOLUNTEER ROLE**

As a volunteer, you are assisting staff in their day-to-day endeavors to provide the best possible educational program for all students.

A volunteer can be many things: an extra pair of hands, an extra measure of personal warmth, a valuable special resource for classroom enrichment, and a bridge between the school and the community. We cannot buy what a volunteer can give to our schools and programs!

If your volunteer assignment does not prove to be what you expected, or feel you can handle, please discuss this with your supervisor. Not all volunteer assignments are right for all people. Your supervisor will try to find the right match for your interests and skills.

## **SUPERVISION**

Volunteers work under the direction of a staff person. You should be told exactly who will supervise you in your volunteer assignment, and how you can contact that person.

Ask questions of your supervisor whenever they arise. Your supervisor shares your desire for a successful and happy experience for both students and volunteers.

In most cases, school volunteers work with students only in settings where a staff person is able to see or hear their activities. This enables the supervisor to identify situations when the volunteer may need assistance. This also provides the volunteer with protection.

As a volunteer, you will be asked to sign in at the school office each time you report for your volunteer assignment, and to sign out when you leave. You will also be expected to wear a visitor badge. This helps everyone - students, staff and other visitors - to feel safe. The school may also ask you to record your volunteer time in some other way, in order to recognize your contribution to students' success. This kind of information sometimes is needed when schools apply for a grant or form a community partnership.

## **APPLICATION AND BACKGROUND CHECK FORMS**

All volunteers are asked to complete a volunteer application form as well as a form granting permission for the school district to conduct a background check. Typically, background checks are only conducted in cases where volunteers will work with students out of view or earshot of a supervising staff member. This is for the protection of both students and volunteers. Your forms will be kept in a secure location at the school.

## **SCHEDULE**

If you cannot keep your scheduled volunteer time due to illness or other emergency, call the school as far in advance as possible. If you cannot directly reach your supervisor, leave a message in the office, giving the name of the supervisor to be sure the message gets delivered to the right person.

If you need to cancel your time often, it may be best for you to reconsider your commitment. Perhaps another time or day would work better for you, or you could better fit volunteer activities into your schedule at some time in the future.

The school will make efforts to notify you in advance of changes in the schedule (such as field trips or testing days) that will affect your volunteer duties. Please check at the school for upcoming schedule changes each time you volunteer.

It is important for you to arrive on time for your volunteer work. After signing in at the office, report to the person who supervises your work. If at any time, this person is not available (and has not made other arrangements for your work that day), or the work you expected to do does not materialize, please notify the school office. Your services and time are too valuable to go to waste.

Check on radio, television or the Saint Paul Public Schools web site ([www.spps.org](http://www.spps.org)) for school closings due to inclement weather.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Volunteers are expected to respect the privacy and confidential nature of what they see and hear in a school setting. Share any concerns you may have only with your supervisor, or others in authority at the school or program. Issues concerning students or staff absolutely cannot be discussed outside of the school or in the neighborhood.

## **STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES**

Volunteers are an important part of the educational team. Your suggestions and opinions are welcome. However, in the end, it is professional staff who are held accountable for students' safety, well being and achievement. For this reason, volunteers always work under the supervision of a professional staff member. Your supervisor may provide feedback and suggestions to help you enhance your work as a volunteer. This is intended to help you to be more successful, and ultimately, to experience more satisfaction as a volunteer.

Is there anything volunteers should not do?

Yes. Volunteers supplement and support the program, but should not:

- Discipline students
- View materials in students' confidential records
- Diagnose student needs
- Evaluate achievement
- Counsel students
- Discuss student progress with parents

Exceptions should only occur with clear, written direction from your supervisor.

## **TAX DEDUCTUIONS**

Some out-of-pocket expenses connected with volunteering are deductible on your income tax. You can generally deduct mileage, auto expenses and parking fees, and direct gifts of money to the school or program. If you plan to claim these deductions be

sure to keep accurate records. Unfortunately you cannot deduct the value of your time, or expenses for childcare while you volunteer.

## **TIPS FOR WORKING WITH STUDENTS**

- ◆ Be warm and friendly. Learn the students' names and show an interest in what they are doing and saying. Being a good listener is one of the most important qualities in a volunteer.
- ◆ When working with students, encourage them to do their own thinking. Give them plenty of time to answer a question. Silence often means they are thinking and organizing what they want to write or say.
- ◆ If you don't know an answer or are unsure of what to do, admit that to the student. If possible, work it out together. Feel free to ask the students' teacher for help when you need it.
- ◆ Use tact and positive comments. Encourage students with compliments, especially when they are having difficulty.
- ◆ Respect privacy. If a student or staff person reveals personal information, regard it as a confidence.
- ◆ If parents ask about your work, you can discuss the activities and the group as a whole, but do not reveal information about individual students or staff members. If they seek more specific information, refer them to the teacher.
- ◆ Maintain a sense of humor.
- ◆ Be consistent with the teacher's rules for classroom behavior, schedule and atmosphere.
- ◆ Wear comfortable clothes, and don't hesitate to get down to the child's level.
- ◆ Honor your commitment. The students will expect you and look forward to your time with them. If you know you will be gone, tell them in advance. Don't make promises to students that you are not certain you can keep.
- ◆ Enjoy yourself. Students appreciate people who enjoy their company.