

VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

"As a mother of four, volunteering became an important way for me to have a role in my children's school. I quickly learned that pitching in carried with it the satisfaction that comes from filling a need and helping kids. That was it, I was hooked."

— Jennifer Thompson



Human Resource Services

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**Halifax Regional
School Board**

XI. Recognition

Volunteering is the giving of time, energy, and concern. 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 of the Halifax Regional School Board.

Together we can make each child's years in the Halifax Regional School Board a solid foundation upon which to build a lifetime of successful achievement.

XII. Protection of Students

A Student Protection Policy was approved by the Halifax Regional School Board on February 10, 2004. Prior to volunteering or commencing any other activity in the Halifax Regional School Board's schools, any volunteer with regular and direct contact with students under the supervision of HRSB staff at all times is required to only complete an Offence Declaration. (This form can be obtained from the School Principal and must be completed on an annual basis).

- Any volunteer involved in overnight trips, coaching or who may have regular and direct contact or responsibility for students with limited supervision by HRSB staff must provide annually:
- A completed Department of Community Services Form XIII – Child Abuse Register – Request for Search
 - A certified and true copy of a current (completed in the 3 months before volunteer activities begin) Police Reference/ Records Check.

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I. Introduction

Welcome to the growing ranks of school volunteers. Through our school leaders, we hope to encourage increased participation and partnership in our local school community. For the children of the Halifax Regional School Board to reach their full educational, physical, emotional and social potential requires the commitment and involvement of all the members of the community: students, teachers, parents, guardians, community organizations and school administrators.

The Halifax Regional School Board is a largely unionized employer with four union memberships:

- Nova Scotia Teachers Union (NSTU)
- Nova Scotia Government Employees Union (NSGEU)
- Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)
- Nova Scotia Union of Public and Private Employees(NSUPPE)

Each of these employee groups recognizes the importance of community involvement and volunteerism and many employees contribute endless hours of volunteer time. The purpose of volunteers is not to replace the work of the employee, but rather to assist the administration and staff in improving the quality of the school environment.

Volunteers do make a difference! Volunteer participation will be an opportunity for you to share with others in the enrichment of education for our students. You will discover the rewards of helping students achieve their personal best and at the same time gain useful experience yourself. We hope as well that the experience of volunteering in our schools will offer you a greater awareness of the variety of challenges and opportunities confronting our education system.

X. Liability Insurance

Volunteers, when acting in a Board approved activity, are insured under the School Insurance Program in the same way as the Board, Teachers and all other staff with respect to actual or alleged negligence. 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 School 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.

IX. 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 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/her participation will be treated with the same confidentiality and respect.

II. What do Volunteers do?

Volunteers perform many different tasks in the Halifax Regional School Board. The tasks may include but not be limited to the following:

- Computer support
- Resource room support
- Site plan committees
- Classroom parents
- Field trips
- Fundraising
- Special events
- Choir
- Library support
- Hot lunch program and canteens
- Photocopying and stapling
- Safe arrival program
- Drivers for school trips
- Reading programs
- Assisting with playground supervision
- Assisting Teachers with teaching materials
- Classroom cleanup
- Coaching
- Guest speakers
- Advisory committees
- Project work for staff
- School beautification
- Tutoring
- Communications (telephone committees/newsletters/flyers)
- Parent-Teacher Associations
- Health programs
- Chaperones

III. 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 line with their areas of interest, skills, and, if possible, convenience of location;
- Be given clear instructions and any training necessary for particular volunteer assignments;
- Be given proper orientation to the school with introductions to key personnel and information provided as to parking, storage of personal items, washroom and coffee/lunch facilities;
- Have a two-week trial period in each new volunteer position realizing that changes may be asked for by either 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.

VIII. Disclosure of Possible Abuse

In Nova Scotia, it is a legal obligation to report any suspected case of child abuse. If a child indicates to a volunteer that he/she has been or is the victim of abuse, or if a volunteer has strong suspicions that a student may be an abuse victim, the volunteer must inform either the supervising Teacher or the Principal.

One of the most difficult things to handle may be when the student asks the person in whom they have confided to “promise not to tell”. A volunteer cannot make such a promise and should be clear about that to the child. Don’t try to “counsel” the child. Remain merely a sympathetic “listening ear” without being judgmental or trying to offer solutions. Assistance and counselling should come from those professionals with the responsibility and experience to provide it.

VII. 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.

IV. What is Expected of a School Volunteer?

A school volunteer has the following responsibilities:

- To remember that the Principal has ultimate responsibility for all personnel, policies and programs in his/her school, including volunteers;
- To follow the policies of your assigned school (i.e. signing-in procedures where requested, local school behaviour codes);
- To be reliable. Accepting a school volunteer assignment means a regular commitment to be there - promptly and on schedule. Also, notifying the school in advance if you do have to be absent;
- To assist under the direction of qualified staff 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 these Teachers;
- To remember that volunteers are in the school to assist and supplement - not replace the role of paid staff;
- 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.

V. Guidelines for Volunteers

- A school volunteer is not a Teacher or an educational 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 member'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 area 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.

VI. Student Behaviour and Discipline

The Halifax Regional School Board has a clearly defined policy on student behaviour and discipline. 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 region wide approach to student discipline and to specify the procedure 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 that 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.