The Issue: Volunteers are a potentially powerful resource for supporting children’s literacy development, but in too many cases, they are underutilized and/or mismanaged. This missed opportunity for impact is especially unfortunate given current budgetary struggles across the nation.

What Are Some Common Pitfalls That Impede Impact?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Pitfalls</th>
<th>What We’re Learning</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Having minimally trained volunteers work with the children who have the greatest needs.</td>
<td>1. Children who require individualized support need highly-skilled adults who work with them regularly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Using a spur-of-the-moment approach for assigning tasks to volunteers.</td>
<td>2. Volunteer initiatives work best when volunteers’ roles are clearly defined and match their interests, skills, and schedules.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Delegating tasks that are not linked in some way to children’s literacy learning.</td>
<td>3. Volunteers’ time and efforts have an impact on children’s literacy development when the work is connected to the site’s literacy improvement plans (Memo 10).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What Are Key Decisions and Strategies for Impact?

1. Generate a plan that outlines the roles of volunteers within your site’s literacy improvement effort

2. Assign volunteers to responsibilities that:
   - free-up the time of experienced professionals
   - match volunteers’ interests, skills, and schedules (and, of course)
   - facilitate children’s literacy development!

   For example, volunteers might:
   - Perform ongoing tasks (e.g., organize or prepare lesson materials, log books taken/returned from a lending library, construct bulletin boards to celebrate literacy progress)
   - Provide literacy block assistance (e.g., supervise children at learning centers while trained staff work with struggling learners, read aloud to children as the teacher conducts assessments or provides small-group instruction)

3. Delegate a leader (e.g., teacher leader, parent liaison, literacy coach) or leadership team to provide ongoing support and supervision to volunteers

Self-study for Impact: Lead the Conversation!

These self-study questions will help steer your decisions and strategies for impact.

- Are volunteers’ roles explicitly linked in some way to children’s literacy learning?
- Are volunteers freeing up the time of highly skilled staff members, allowing learners to receive targeted support?
- Are volunteers’ interests and skills well-matched with their responsibilities?
- Are volunteers receiving ongoing support and supervision?

For More on This...


The Administrator’s Guide to School-Community Relations, 2nd edition by G.E. Pawlas

Find examples of successful volunteer programs at the John’s Hopkins University National Network of Partnership Schools

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