

Providing guidance for leaders dedicated to children's literacy development, birth to age 9

DESIGNING A VOLUNTEER PROGRAM FOCUSED ON LITERACY

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?

Common Pitfalls	What We're Learning
1. Having minimally trained volunteers work with the children who have the greatest needs.	1. Children who require individualized support need highly-skilled adults who work with them regularly.
2. Using a spur-of-the-moment approach for assigning tasks to volunteers.	2. Volunteer initiatives work best when volunteers' roles are clearly defined and match their interests, skills, and schedules.
3. Delegating tasks that are not linked in some way to children's literacy learning.	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).

For More on This...

School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action, 3rd edition by J.L. Epstein & colleagues

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](#)

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?

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