

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

IMPLEMENTING A VOLUNTEER PROGRAM FOCUSED ON LITERACY

The Issue: When used wisely, volunteers can make an impact on children's literacy skills (Memo 12). However, many educational settings lack attention to recruiting, managing and monitoring volunteers in a way that would create sustained and effective volunteer programs.

What Are Some Common Pitfalls That Impede Impact?

Common Pitfalls	What We're Learning
1. Drawing on the same small group of school community members as volunteers.	1. Effective volunteer programs recruit widely from all members of the school community (Memo 11).
2. When volunteers arrive, busy practitioners decide on the spot how to use them.	2. Effective volunteer programs waste no one's time; a person (or team) delegates volunteers' responsibilities in advance.
3. Program impact – if monitored – is gauged solely by counting the number of volunteers and their hours at the site.	3. Effective volunteer programs are regularly monitored using indicators of program quality and children's achievement (Memos 1 & 5-7).

For More on This...

Much of the guidance provided in this memo is drawn from *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action* (3rd edition) by Joyce L. Epstein and Associates (2009).

You can also find guidance from Epstein and her group at the [National Network of Partnership Schools](http://www.nationalnetworkofpartnershipschools.org) website.

What Are Key Decisions and Strategies for Impact?

The person (or team) delegated to lead and sustain the effort should take responsibility for:

1. Wide Recruitment

Bolstering School-Community Partnerships

- Invite all families to partner with the site through volunteering
- Create flexible schedules for volunteers
- Value a wide range of contributions (Memo 11)

2. Ongoing Support

Ensuring the Program Is Carried out as Planned

- Train volunteers
- Hold regular meetings
- Check in with staff and volunteers on an ongoing basis regarding participation and commitment
- Keep volunteers invested by showing them how they help advance children's learning

3. Strategic Monitoring

Using Multiple Indicators of Effectiveness

Gather and analyze information that reflects:

- Child learning
- Patterns of volunteer involvement (e.g., who participates and what are their roles)
- Feedback from program participants (e.g., staff, volunteers) (Memos 1 & 5-7)

Self-study for Impact: Lead the Conversation!

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

- *Are we communicating with all members of the school community, inviting them into our volunteer program?*
- *Is a diverse group of families involved?*
- *Is the program being carried out as planned?*
- *Are we using multiple indicators of program effectiveness?*

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