

Denice Buchanan
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Volunteers, who developed and staffed the public libraries of the past, continue to be major components of successful libraries (Reed, 1994, pg. 1). In today's financially burdened society, libraries turn to volunteers in order to maintain a high level of service for its patrons.

The Sunny Valley Elementary School Library Media Center¹ is devoted to providing the student body with the best possible educational experience. Volunteers can free the library media specialist from daily routine activities so they can spend more time providing quality instruction to the students they serve ("1105 School Volunteer Policy," 2006).

Volunteers are invaluable advocates of the library and the services it provides its students. They understand the effectiveness a well-supported librarian impacts the student's education because of their insider perspective on the daily ins and outs of the LMC. Volunteers are not classically trained in traditional library practices, allowing them to offer insightful ideas that may be overlooked (Reed, 1994, pg. 15).

The success of a volunteer program hinges on the ability to find an appropriate number of willing participants. The needs of the library need to be carefully determined in order for the LMC to be run at maximum efficiency. Too many volunteers pose as many problems as too few. Recruiting parents,

¹ Referred to as LMC

grandparents, and members of the community that represent different backgrounds bring a fresh perspective to the LMC (Reed, 1994, pg. 28).

Volunteers of all skill levels are welcome as there are a variety of tasks they can assist with, but they do need to be reliable and willing to learn a new set of skills.

The following is a list of potential recruitment methods:

- Present volunteer program to PTA and school board
- Send flyers home with all students at beginning of the school year
- Run “Help Wanted” advertisements on district, school and LMC websites, in school newspaper and school newsletter
- Set up a display in the library and speak with parents at open house
- Ask teachers for recommendations of parents to personally reach out to
- Hang flyers at local coffeehouses and bookstores
- Network! Talk with parents you know and ask them to spread the word

An important aspect of the program is to show gratitude and appreciation to those who have volunteered their time. Volunteers should be recognized and thanked for their commitment to the LMC throughout the year to remind them how much their efforts mean to the library and librarian. Public recognition is also a means of recruiting potential new volunteers. Volunteer recognition can be done in the school newsletter, local paper, bulletin board displays featuring a “volunteer of the month”, and certificates for a job well done given at a group breakfast or luncheon.

Volunteer Policy

Volunteers play an integral role in students learning, and are an asset to the librarian, teachers, administration and students of Sunny Valley. Their volunteering efforts show their children and the student body that they place a value on their education and reading interests (Snively, n.d.). The volunteers main responsibilities are to aid in the daily activities of the LMC so the librarian can be more effective at teaching the student body 21st Century Learning Skills. Their presence and assistance allows students to a high quality level of service that would not be possible with an over-worked librarian (Driggers & Dumas, 2002, pg. 5).

Becoming a Volunteer

Once volunteers have expressed interest in the program, they are required to fill out a "Volunteer Form." The form includes contact information, their children's name and teacher (if applicable), the days and times they are available to work, and what tasks they are most interested in. If there are enough volunteers, the librarian creates a schedule involving two volunteers covering each shift. Parents of school children are scheduled when their children are at the library. Before a volunteer can begin at Sunny Valley, the district completes a background check and requires each volunteer to read and sign the district student confidentiality agreement.

To orient volunteers to the sections and materials in the library, each new volunteer is required to watch the library orientation Voicethread presentation.

This presentation discusses the library's mission and goals, describes the tasks the volunteers will participate in, and provides a walking tour through the library. More in depth information, including library procedures, common jargon and abbreviations, is located in a volunteer handbook.

Volunteer Activities

Volunteer opportunities are available for all skill sets and varying time commitments. The librarian will attempt to match volunteers with tasks each individual will find rewarding and matches their work style, which is essential to keep volunteers happy and willing to continue their efforts. Volunteers are encouraged to take initiative by being creative with bulletin board or book displays when other tasks have been completed.

Coverage of the circulation desk during periods of regularly scheduled classes is the first priority for volunteers. Tasks include check-in and check-out of materials, sorting checked-in materials on shelving carts, running and reporting overdue statistics to the librarian, stamping date due cards, and preparing for the next incoming class. Volunteers should be knowledgeable of the circulation system and its prompts and understand the importance of its accuracy.

The shelving of materials (those which have been checked in and those which have been left on shelving carts throughout the library) is the next priority. The accuracy, appearance and organization is an essential component of the library, and volunteers must understand that students will not find the library an

enjoyable or useful place if they cannot find what they need. After shelving is completed, volunteers can begin the process of shelf reading. Shelf reading includes not only making sure all items are in correct order and facing out, as well as keeping an eye out for books in need of repair and maintaining a general tidiness of the shelves.

Volunteers can also check the volunteer binder for an ongoing to-do list that is maintained and added to by the librarian on a regular basis. The tasks may include:

- new book processing
- setting up for book fair
- general cleanup of the library
- sharpening pencils and refilling scrap paper at all computer stations
- light cleaning (dusting shelves, wiping down keyboards and work surfaces)
- displaying books in shelf “holes” or on top of shelves (choose themed/seasonal books)
- prep lesson materials (set up laptops for incoming class, cut out items from worksheets, laminate past projects)

General Guidelines & Procedures

- Upon arrival in the building, volunteers must sign in at the main office and obtain a volunteer badge that must be worn for their duration of the time in the building.

- If volunteers are unable to make their scheduled shift, they need to let the librarian know as soon as possible so that other arrangements can be made. Volunteers should make their best effort to find another volunteer to cover their shift and should let the librarian know who will be coming in their place.
- Volunteer time is not for extensive socializing with other volunteers, and cell phones and pagers should be left with other personal items in break room.
- Parents of students should not use scheduled shifts to speak with teachers about their children.
- Volunteers may not enter teacher classroom unless otherwise instructed.
- Volunteers need to be positive and supportive to all students, not just their own children.
- Each volunteer must follow the code of dress, language and overall behavior mandated by the Sunny Valley School District (policies can be found in main office).
- It is understood that student confidentiality is of utmost importance. Volunteers are instructed not to repeat items overheard by teachers, staff and students. The general rule to follow is “what is heard in the library stays in the library”.

Works Cited

- 1105 School Volunteer Policy - Washington County School District*. (2006, April 18). Retrieved September 24, 2010, from http://www2.washk12.org/policy/1000/1105_school_volunteer.html
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