

2017-2018
Polk County Public Schools



Volunteer Handbook

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The School Board of Polk County, Florida, prohibits any and all forms of discrimination and harassment based on race, color, sex, religion, national origin, marital status, age, genetic information, homelessness, pregnancy or disability or other basis prohibited by law in any of its programs, services, activities or employment. To file concerns, you may contact the Office of Equity & Compliance in the Human Resource Services Division at (863) 534-0513 or P.O. Box 391 Bartow, Florida 33831.

Welcome!

As a volunteer in Polk County Public Schools, your commitment to education offers students an opportunity to have the individual attention critical to their success in school.

Volunteers are a vital part of Polk County Public Schools. School volunteers enhance the quality of our children's education by:

- Reinforcing skills taught by teachers
- Giving students individual attention
- Helping students develop confidence and competence
- Preparing students to be engaged citizens

The School Board of Polk County is proud of the community involvement in our schools. Last year, volunteers donated thousands of service hours to our schools, representing a generous investment to our District.

Each school individualizes its volunteer program to meet the needs of the students and teachers. Under the leadership of the principal, the volunteer coordinator provides training and direction that will enable you to support the academic needs of our students.

As an approved volunteer, you are a role model for students. You serve at the discretion of the local school and are expected to operate within the boundaries of school board policy.

You will find your volunteer experience rewarding. We are counting on you to become an advocate for schools by sharing your positive experiences and encouraging others to become involved.

Our Mission: To provide a high quality education for all students

Procedures

Qualifications

All volunteer applicants will be required to undergo a level 1 background screening through the Florida Department of Law Enforcement.



CLEARANCE

In meeting the criteria of Section 943.04351, Florida Statutes, for the "search of registration information regarding sexual predators and sexual offenders required before appointment," a background check is performed. Any applicant who has been convicted or had adjudication withheld in any misdemeanor within the past three (3) years or any felony offense, or if any criminal charges are pending of a crime that would disqualify him/her for employment in PCPS, shall not be accepted as a volunteer. Because PCPS values student safety, prior conduct may disqualify a volunteer applicant.

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Procedures

Approval

Prior to volunteer service, volunteer applicants can obtain an application by:

- requesting an application at any school site
- visiting www.polk-fl.net, keyword: Volunteer

A personal check or money order made payable to the Polk County School Board in the amount of \$25 to cover the Florida Department of Law Enforcement background check, is required for all applicants.

Please review the qualifications, sign the application, and return the \$25 non-refundable payment and application to the school site. Please allow 2 to 3 weeks to complete the application process.

Volunteer applicants will receive a notification letter with the final status of the application. If you have questions about your approval status, contact your local school.

The School Board of Polk County reserves the right to deny volunteer privileges to individuals and to re-check criminal history as necessary.

Identification

Volunteers are provided a District issued yellow badge which will identify you as an approved volunteer. The badge must be worn at all times when volunteering. See your school's volunteer coordinator if you have not been given the proper form of identification.

A \$10 replacement fee will be charged for lost badges.

Orientation

Volunteers are required to attend a school volunteer orientation before the first volunteer assignment. If you have not attended orientation, notify your school's volunteer coordinator.

Procedures

Sign In

All school visitors and volunteers ***must sign in and out*** through the **Visitor Tracking System** at the school. A government issued ID, such as a driver's license, passport, military ID or alien registration card is required. Your cooperation enables us to locate you in case of an emergency and provides Workers' Compensation coverage if you are injured.

Additionally, approved volunteers ***must also log on and log out*** using the **Volunteer Tracking System** each time they volunteer. The school volunteer coordinator will provide you with an 11-digit logon number and will lead you to the location of the computer terminal.

Absences

Schools rely on you to be prompt and dependable. Please call the school office if you will be absent or late.

If your assigned teacher is absent, check with the substitute. If the substitute is not prepared for you, report to your volunteer coordinator who will reassign you.

Cell Phones

Volunteers will follow school board policy on personal communication devices. Additional information can be found on the Polk County School Board website under District Info/Board Policy.

Children Not Registered at the School

Volunteers may not bring non-registered nor non-school aged children with them on volunteer assignments. The school cannot assure their safety while the volunteer is giving undivided attention to their assigned tasks.

Conduct

You are a role model for students. Your appearance and manner must be appropriate. Be respectful, positive and cooperative. Volunteer privileges will be suspended or revoked for failure to abide by Polk County School Board policies.

Procedures

Discipline

Any discipline of students is the responsibility of school staff. Any problems should be reported to those in authority at the school site.

Faith-Based Beliefs

Volunteers may not engage in any communication or teaching of students that would influence religious beliefs.

Protecting Our Students

If child abuse and/or neglect is suspected, report your concerns to school staff. If a student talks about harming themselves or others, report the conversation **immediately** to school staff. You may be required to provide information to the Florida Abuse Hotline (1-800-962-2873). School staff will help you follow proper procedures established by state law and school board policies.

School volunteers who witness bullying (teasing, social exclusion, threats, stalking, physical violence, theft, sexual, religious, or racial harassment, public humiliation, destruction of property) must report the incident to a staff member **immediately** (Florida Statute 1006.147). Access the Bullying and/or Harassment Form online at www.polk-fl.net Keyword: bullying. School sites have copies of this form available.

Volunteers may not have individual contact with students outside of school hours.

Volunteers do not take pictures or videos of students without the appropriate staff permission.

Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse

Section 39.201 (1)(a), Florida Statutes, states: "Any person who knows, or has reasonable cause to suspect, that a child is abused, abandoned, or neglected by a parent, legal custodian, caregiver, or other person responsible for the child's welfare, as defined in this chapter, shall report such knowledge or suspicion to the department in the manner prescribed in subsection (2). How do you make a report? Call the Florida Abuse Hotline (1-800-96ABUSE or 1-800-962-2873) of the Department of Children and Families. A volunteer should also report to their school supervisor that they have made such report. Additional information can be obtained at the Department of Children and Families website: www.dcf.state.fl.us/abuse.

Procedures

Protecting Our Volunteers

Please stay in sight of school staff when working with students. Make sure you are working in an open, visible area and do not allow yourself to be in a situation where your actions might be misconstrued. Avoid physical contact beyond handshakes and hands on shoulders.

Florida law offers some protection for volunteers acting in good faith.

Student Confidentiality

Volunteers are expected to respect the confidential nature of anything seen or heard at school. Any information about a student's academic progress, behavior or a school-related incident is strictly confidential and protected by Florida law. Failure to respect the privacy rights of students has legal consequences.

Student Emergencies

It is the responsibility of school staff to care for sick or injured students. Volunteers must not administer medication to students. Volunteers do not move injured students. Contact school staff who will initiate proper procedures.

School Safety & Security

School safety is everyone's responsibility. In your role as a volunteer, we ask you to be vigilant and report anything you witness that could affect the safety of the school campus. In the unlikely event of a catastrophic incident, stay calm, and follow the directions of school staff.

Procedures

Tobacco, Alcohol & Illegal Drug Free Schools

Tobacco, alcohol, and illegal drug use is prohibited anywhere, anytime by anyone on campus during all school sponsored events, whether they occur before, after or during regular school hours.

Updating Your Information

When your name, address, phone number or schools where you are volunteering change, ask your school volunteer coordinator to update your records.

Volunteer Hours

All volunteer hours must be logged. Volunteers and schools are eligible for state awards given by the Florida Department of Education based on the total number of volunteer hours.

Volunteer hours performed off site are also important. Report hours upon completion of your service using the Volunteer Tracking System. Ask your school volunteer coordinator if you have any questions.

Procedures

Volunteer Tax Benefits

The background check fee of \$25 is tax deductible. Approved volunteers can deduct \$0.14 per mile for travel incurred as part of their volunteer service. Consult your tax advisor for specific information.

Workers' Compensation Protection

Approved school volunteers are eligible for workers' compensation benefits while serving as a volunteer on school grounds. Volunteers are to report injuries immediately to the work site supervisor or designated representative who will comply with procedures.

Booster and parent organizations must carry liability insurance for volunteers who serve. When volunteering for these activities, volunteers are not covered by the Workers' Compensation benefits of the District.

Volunteer Opportunities

Adult Education

Volunteers are assigned to adult centers where students are preparing for their GED exams or learning basic skills.

Chaperones

Approved volunteers may be asked by classroom teachers to accompany students on school field trips. **Prior** volunteering at the school site is strongly suggested. Additional information regarding field trips can be found on page 11.

Classroom Assistant

Volunteers work with classroom teachers to assist students with instructional centers, tutoring in academic subjects, and various projects. Volunteers assist teachers with clerical work and are engaged in classroom activities.

ESOL – English For Speakers of Other Languages

Volunteers can help non-English speaking students increase their skills in understanding, speaking, reading and writing English. Volunteers do not need to speak the student's native language.

Volunteer Opportunities

Mentors

Mentors are caring adults and older youth who are willing to provide the necessary ongoing support, guidance and friendship to our youth facing challenges in school. Mentors must undergo additional training in order to provide these services and must remain in a supervised area when mentoring students. All mentoring takes place on school campuses.

Parent Organizations **(PTO/PTA, Athletics, Boosters)**

Parent organizations exist at the discretion of the Principal. They are responsible for complying with District policies and procedures. They support the school through various activities that raise funds and community involvement.

Tutors

Tutors work one-on-one or with small groups who need help in academic subjects (Reading, Math, English, Science, Social Studies) to reinforce basic skills with students. Tutors are always supervised and are never left alone with students.

Field Trips

Field trip sites become an extension of the school site. All policies and procedures governing volunteers at the school site extend to field trips.

Chaperones are approved volunteers and are expected to have volunteered at the school site **before** serving on field trips.

The choice of how many chaperones needed for a trip is the decision of the teacher and the school administrator. The school administrator may limit the number of adults accompanying students on any given field trip.

Chaperones are responsible for the students the teacher has placed in their care. If chaperones must leave their group of students for any reason, they should make arrangements with the teacher. Chaperones must not neglect their obligation to students to visit with other adults.

- All chaperones must be at least 21 years of age.
- Family members who must accompany their own child for medical purposes do not have to be approved volunteers. They may not supervise other children, nor ride in a district vehicle where other students are present. Unapproved family members always report to school staff.
- Do not use profane or inappropriate language.
- Tobacco, alcohol, and illegal drug use is prohibited in cars, on buses and at field trip locations for all volunteer chaperones.
- Wear appropriate clothing. The school may designate specific attire.
- Do not use cell phones except for emergency purposes. Your attention must be on the students at all times.
- Chaperones assume duties at the school site prior to the trip and complete duties at the school upon return. Any other arrangements must be cleared prior to the trip with school administration.
- Preschoolers or children not registered in the school may not attend field trips.
- Failure to comply with field trip guidelines will result in revocation of volunteer privileges.
- Chaperones may transport students only after completion of the required approval process provided by the District's Support Services Department. Please call (863) 534-7335 for more details.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Do I have to pay for a background check if I already had one completed through my employer?

Yes. Polk County Public Schools does not have access to background check information from other employers.

I am an approved volunteer with another county. Do I pay for another background check?

Yes. Polk County Public Schools does not have access to background check information from other counties.

Who is EXEMPT from paying for a background check?

Active and sworn law enforcement officers with arresting power, current / retiring PCPS employees, registered PCPS students and college students majoring in Education are EXEMPT.

Do I have to pay for a background check if I am an approved vendor?

Yes. A level 1 background check will be required. You may refer to the **Qualifications section** located on page 2.

I want to volunteer at my child's school during their school carnival/festival. Do I have to be an approved volunteer?

Yes. School carnivals and/or festivals held on school grounds will require volunteers to undergo a level 1 background check and be approved.

I am a parent of a special needs child who will be attending a field trip. May I ride the bus to accompany my child?

No. Unapproved volunteers may not ride the bus. Polk County Public Schools is committed to providing safety and security for all students; therefore, only staff members and approved volunteers are able to ride a school bus on field trips.

My volunteer privileges were revoked. May I volunteer at another school?

No. If a volunteer's privileges are revoked, it applies district-wide.

**Thank You For Making A
Positive Difference!**



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**Love us enough to
Volunteer in our schools!**