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# VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>I</i>	<i>Introduction</i>
<i>II</i>	<i>What do Volunteers do?</i>
<i>III</i>	<i>What should a School Volunteer expect?</i>
<i>IV</i>	<i>What is expected of a School Volunteer?</i>
<i>V</i>	<i>Guidelines for Volunteers</i>
<i>VI</i>	<i>Disclosure of Possible Abuse</i>
<i>VII</i>	<i>Confidentiality</i>
<i>VIII</i>	<i>Liability Insurance</i>
<i>IX</i>	<i>Protection of Students</i>

## I. INTRODUCTION

**T**hank you for your interest in volunteering in our schools. The Halifax Regional School Board (HRSB) values the many roles that volunteers play in schools. Students and staff benefit from the contributions made by parents and community members.

The Halifax Regional School Board is a large employer with four union groups:

- **Nova Scotia Teachers Union (NSTU)**
- **Nova Scotia Government Employees Union (NSGEU)**
- **Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)**
- **Nova Scotia Union of Public and Private Employees (NSUPE)**

Each of these employee groups recognizes the importance of community involvement and volunteerism and many employees contribute endless hours of volunteer time. The purpose of volunteers is not to replace the work of the employee, but rather to assist the administration and staff in improving the quality of the school environment and student achievement.

Volunteers make a difference! Volunteer participation will be an opportunity for you to share with others in the enrichment of the education of our students. As a volunteer you will discover the rewards of helping students achieve their personal best and at the same time experience personal satisfaction and gain useful experience yourself.

## II. WHAT DO VOLUNTEERS DO?

A volunteer is an individual who interacts with students in an environment that is not supervised at all times by HRSB teachers or administrators. A volunteer includes, but is not limited to, a coach, a driver, a regular classroom helper and a trip chaperone.

A visitor is an individual who enters the school who is not an employee or volunteer. A visitor includes, but is not limited to, a one-time speaker, an individual making a delivery, a community member working at annual school events, a School Advisory Council or Parent-Teacher Association member and anyone attending a meeting with a teacher or an administrator.

Volunteers perform many different tasks in the Halifax Regional School Board. The tasks may include but not be limited to the following:

- Field trips
- Fundraising
- Special events
- Classroom support
- Resource room support
- Site plan committees
- Choir
- Library support
- Hot lunch program and canteens
- Safe arrival program
- Drivers for school trips
- Reading programs
- Assisting with playground supervision
- Assisting teachers with teaching materials
- Classroom cleanup
- Coaching
- Project work for staff
- School beautification
- Tutoring
- Communications (telephone committees/ newsletters/flyers)
- Health programs
- Chaperones

Volunteers who coach are expected to read and comply with the Board's Guidelines for Coach Volunteers, a copy of which is available through the school administration.

## III. WHAT SHOULD A SCHOOL VOLUNTEER EXPECT?

A school volunteer should:

- Believe that the assistance given is worthwhile and contributes to the overall value of the program in which they are participating;
- Be treated with respect and consideration by all students and staff;
- Be given clear instructions and any training necessary for particular volunteer assignments;
- Be given proper orientation to the school with introductions to key personnel and information provided as to parking, storage of personal items, washroom and coffee/lunch facilities;
- Be part of two-way communication with staff (i.e. discussion time or email exchange for ongoing direction and feedback);
- Be provided with direct support from staff if difficulties arise.



## IV. WHAT IS EXPECTED OF A SCHOOL VOLUNTEER?

A school volunteer has the following responsibilities to:

- Remember that the Principal has ultimate responsibility for all personnel, policies and programs in his/her school, including volunteers;
- Follow the policies of your assigned school (i.e. signing-in/out procedures school code of conduct, scent awareness);
- Be reliable. Accepting a school volunteer assignment means a commitment to be there - promptly and on schedule. Also, notifying the school in advance if you do have to be absent;
- Assist under the direction of qualified staff following their instruction closely. Work only with those staff members in your assigned school who request your help and work only with students referred to by those staff members;
- Remember that volunteers are in the school to assist and supplement - not replace the role of paid staff;
- To be receptive to, and participate in, orientation, training and meetings with staff, as offered;
- Remember you are a role model for students and the school community;
- Maintain the highest standards of confidentiality and ethics;
- Support schools and students in a way that values diversity and fosters respect among all members of the school community.

## V. GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEERS

- Share your experiences and talents. Let the teacher know in which area you excel (telling stories, singing, playing instruments, handcrafts, computer use, photography, etc.);
- Ask questions freely about programs, policies and equipment at a time appropriate both for the staff member and for yourself. Follow the staff member's established procedures. Talk to the teacher about any difficulties at appropriate times, not in front of students or parents;
- Learn the names of students you are working with;
- Speak in a positive way to students - point out the things they have done right, the things they do well;
- Report inappropriate student behaviour to an administrator.

## VI. DISCLOSURE OF POSSIBLE CHILD ABUSE

In Nova Scotia, it is a legal obligation to report any suspected case of child abuse. If a child indicates to a volunteer that he/she has been or is the victim of abuse, or if a volunteer has strong suspicions that a student may be an abuse victim, the volunteer must inform either the supervising Teacher or the Principal.

One of the most difficult things to handle may be when the student asks the person in whom they have confided to "promise not to tell". A volunteer cannot make such a promise and should be clear about that to the child. Don't try to "counsel" the child. Remain merely a sympathetic "listening ear" without being judgmental or trying to offer solutions. Assistance and counselling should come from those professionals with the responsibility and experience to provide it.

## VII. CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality is of utmost importance in your role as a valued school volunteer. Once a volunteer begins to work in a school setting, he/she becomes privy to knowledge about children's behaviour patterns, academic ability, emotional maturity, relationships with others, etc. In some cases, information of this nature is imparted in order that the volunteer might work more effectively with the child. In other cases, it is simply acquired in the course of frequent contact in the school.

This knowledge should never be shared in the community or with anyone who has no legitimate need to know. Similarly, care must be taken not to make comments harmful to the reputation of any student staff member or other volunteer.

If problems develop, the line of communication regarding a situation in the school is always first with the staff member concerned and then, if necessary, with the Principal.

A volunteer has every right to expect that his/her participation will be treated with the same confidentiality and respect.



## VIII. LIABILITY INSURANCE

Volunteers, when acting in a Board approved activity, are insured under the School Insurance Program in the same way as staff with respect to actual or alleged negligence. However, it is the duty of any person who witnesses any incident which could become a claim, or receives any word that a claim may be made, to notify the staff member in charge without delay. The incident must then be relayed to the Board so that the School Insurance Program will have the opportunity to investigate while it is fresh in everyone's mind.

Any person who voluntarily transports students in his/her own vehicle shall follow procedures as provided through school administration, in accordance with the Board's Student Transportation Policy, including completion of the necessary form. Volunteers should be made aware of these procedures prior to transporting students.



## IX. PROTECTION OF STUDENTS

The Board recognizes its responsibility for ensuring that all students attending our schools are protected by taking reasonable precautions to screen volunteers who may be working with students without direct supervision of staff.

In accordance with HRSB's Student Protection Policy, prior to volunteering with the Halifax Regional School Board, all volunteers will provide:

- A completed Child Abuse Register Search or completed Child Abuse Register Request for Search (Form A) which can be found at:
  - <http://www.gov.ns.ca/coms/families/abuse/ChildAbuseRegister.html>
- A certified and true copy of a Criminal Records Check available from your local Police or RCMP detachment or through online organizations endorsed by Nova Scotia law enforcement agencies, including a Vulnerable Sector Search.

The Child Abuse Register Search and Criminal Records Check must be issued in the three months preceding volunteering and updated every three years.

It is the responsibility of any volunteer, after having completed the screening process, to contact the school principal should they be subject to an investigation or conviction under the Criminal Code of Canada.

All volunteers are to sign in at the school office upon arrival and wear an access badge while at the school. This badge must be returned to the issuing office at the end of each visit.

Thank you for your interest in volunteering in our schools!

