

Sioux Falls School District



VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

www.sf.k12.sd.us/page/volunteering-mentoring

Frequently Asked Questions

Who are the students?

Sioux Falls has a very diverse student body – over 24,000 student's grades pre-K to 12. Twenty-four percent (30.4%) of our students are from ethnic groups other than Caucasian. Among our English Language Learners, more than 57 different languages are spoken. Nearly 3,300 of our students receive special services based on identified needs. All of our students benefit from the presence of volunteers in our schools.

Do I need to commit to certain hours every week?

Most classrooms prefer a consistent schedule. If you feel that your schedule will be too busy to commit to volunteering on a weekly basis, please consider working as a Special Events Helper.

Is a volunteer entitled to know if a child has a learning disability or is on medication?

Volunteers are entitled to sound guidance and direction in working with students. A description of a student's learning style and instructional strategies that work well are appropriate. Only information that is relevant to the student's educational growth, safety, or well-being may be shared and will not include specific identification of disabilities or medical issues.

Are there immunization requirement for students?

The School District requires proof of physical examination completed within a year prior to entering any school program. A Certificate of Immunization must be presented prior to admission to school. A Chickenpox vaccination is required for students entering kindergarten.

How can a volunteer protect him/herself from being falsely accused of inappropriate behavior with a student?

Do not take children outside or away from the school. Do not touch children in an inappropriate manner. Sometimes a teacher will direct you to an empty classroom. Be sure to leave the door open at all times. Sit in two desks, which are easily seen by those passing by. Always work in a public area, on site.

With permission of teacher, school and/or parent, can volunteers take students to off-campus activities such as ballgames, concerts, or other events?

No. Your volunteer experience is limited to the school setting. As a volunteer, you may have an opportunity to assist the classroom teacher with student supervision on field trips, but will remain under the direction of the classroom teacher.

Can a volunteer touch a student, such as pats on the head or shoulder, to show approval or encouragement?

Appropriate touch -such as a pat on the head, arm, shoulder, or upper back -is acceptable... as long as the student is receptive. If the student resists being touched, respect his/her wishes.

Is it permissible to work with students one-on-one after school to increase the student's skills?

A volunteer may work after school with a student if the principal, classroom teacher, and parent/guardian agree. As during the school day, always work in a public area of the school, in view of other adults.

What are the appropriate ways for Instructional Helpers to get the most from their session with the students?

You can be most effective by helping the student think about his/her own learning and gain the necessary skills to work independently. Model such skills as appropriate strategies for different tasks, identifying areas of difficulty and how to overcome them, checking work to make sure the students understand not only what he/she has down but how it was accomplished. Provide praise that is specific and reinforces accomplishments and new skills.

What are the appropriate ways for volunteers to discourage unruly behavior?

All employees and students in our School District are expected to conduct themselves in a way that promotes respect for self and others. Become familiar with school behavior expectations, rules, and routines. Volunteers may correct or redirect student behavior, but all discipline is left to the discretion of school staff.

How can an Instructional Helper judge if the message is getting through to the student?

In some cases, students will verbalize frustration to a volunteer "I just don't get it." Other times, body language, restlessness, inattention is a signal that the student is frustrated. Sometime, students think they don't understand because they feel overwhelmed and anxious. Asking a student to read the problem or assignment aloud may help clarify expectations and put the student at ease. Ask questions in a nonjudgmental way: Where are you stuck? Which part don't you understand? Encourage the student to be as specific as possible about areas of difficulty so you can help accordingly.

How can humor be used when communicating with students?

Helping to develop humor as a social skill is an important part of communicating with students. In fact, research shows that humor can help to create a relaxed and effective learning environment. The key is to role model positive humor that is neither destructive nor hurtful. Some possibilities: jokes, funny stories, puns, cartoon, funny pictures related to the subject.

Do volunteers really make a difference?

More than you will ever know!! Supportive relationships with caring adults often result in increased self-esteem and sense of self-competence for students. Caring adults who provide the qualities listed below definitely make a difference in the lives of your people:

- Listen
- Cultivate trust
- Help students feel comfortable
- Recognize the individual skills and interests of each student
- Understand that each student has a range of abilities
- Encourage a student's initiative
- Ask the right questions to provoke thought
- Encourage learning

Volunteers are welcome and encouraged to ask for feedback from school staff on what the difference that their contribution is making.

Tips *for* Volunteers *from* Volunteers

Let the school know if you cannot make it on a scheduled day.

Ask: for a copy of the School District's annual Ignite Magazine
to receive the school's newsletter
for a copy of the student handbook
to exchange e-mail addresses with classroom teachers, school counselor, etc.
for a list of names of students with whom you will work; keep it with you
teachers to notify you if there is a change in schedule or any time the volunteer is not needed on a certain day

Learn the names of your students. Keep a notebook to record the student(s) helped, how they were helped, successes/problems encountered. Ask the teacher if he/she would like written feedback.

Get to know the students. If you hear anything that makes you uncomfortable, notify a school employee ASAP. Students may open up and share with volunteers and tell them things they have not shared with others.

Let the teacher know how you want students to address you (Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms., etc.) so that the teacher can introduce you correctly.

Carry your own pencils, sharpener, paper, tissues.

If you are uncertain about which grade levels you prefer, ask to shadow seasoned volunteers at various levels. Finding the right fit will help to make your volunteer experience a happy one.

Ask the teacher how to handle unruly students. They may direct you to send students back to class if they don't cooperate.

Do not ask students if they understand something. They will almost always say "yes" to avoid embarrassment. Ask the student to show you.

Students learn faster when –

- food is involved. Some lack basic nutrition or sleep. Ask the teacher if you can use food as a treat or an incentive. *Be aware of food allergies!*
- if you make a game of the learning process. In this setting, games should not be timed or competitive.
- when the atmosphere is relaxed and humor is involved in some way.

Students who struggle in one area usually have another area where they excel. Talk to them about their successes as well as their struggles.

Students do not learn things in the same way or at the same pace. Some learn most quickly by hearing information presented. Others learn most quickly if they see a visual explanation. Others learn best by doing. Whatever the pace or learning style, all students want to be successful and need the patience and encouragement of caring adults.

A student may not always *act* happy to see you, but they usually are.

Relationship building and trust are critical. Attempt to get to know about the student and his/her background.

Reminders

Confidentiality

We love to have our volunteers talk about the joy and satisfaction of working in classrooms. It is essential, however, that our volunteers respect confidentiality. Information about individual students should not be shared outside of the classroom, including:

- Student's abilities
- Student's behavior and attitudes
- Student's home/family background

Concerns about a student should be discussed with the teacher or principal.

What to wear

Clothing should be neat, clean and appropriate for the grade level and classroom in which the volunteer works. If you have any questions about appropriate attire, visit with the classroom teacher.

In case of bad weather

When an emergency confronts the schools, notification of the closing of schools will be broadcast over all local radio and television stations no later than 7:00 a.m. Should the schools be dismissed early during the day because of a developing storm, that announcement will also be made over local radio and television stations.

Emergency weather announcements are also posted on the School District website, and broadcasted over KLRN, the School District's cable channel 20.

Ages and Stages

Five-Year-Olds

Five-year-olds are cheerful, energetic, and enthusiastic. They understand about 13,000 words and use five to eight words in a sentence. They know basic colors like red, yellow, blue, green, and orange. They enjoy creating and telling stories and like jokes and riddles. They understand comparative terms like big, bigger, biggest. They identify some letters of the alphabet and a few numbers. They can count up to 10 objects. Their attention span is about 10 minutes. They understand time concepts like yesterday, today and tomorrow. Five-year-olds thrive on praise.

Six through Eight-Year Olds

Six, seven, and eight-year-olds have settled into a steady pace of learning. Their attention spans grow longer, around 15 to 20 minutes, and they are more likely to stick with things until a project is finished or a problem solved. A six-year-old can normally follow a series of three commands in a row. Reading may become a major interest at this time. They begin to understand time and the days of the week. Using learning aids that children can touch and manipulate give them an active role in learning. Children at this stage will tell you exactly how they feel: sick, happy, miserable. They thrive on praise and acceptance.

Nine through Twelve-Year-Olds

Children of this age develop a sense of self and find it important to gain social acceptance and experience achievement. Their attention span has increased to 30 or 45 minutes and they like a mental challenge. They are interested in reading fictional stories, magazines, and how-to project books. A student at this stage may be very interested in discussing a future career. They are capable of understanding concepts without having direct hands-on experience. At this age they seek a sense of belonging and enjoy being members of a club. By age 10, most children can follow five commands in a row. Children who struggle academically at this age may try to cover it up with backtalk or clowning around and will rarely expose themselves to potential ridicule by asking for clarification. In working with children of this age, give them an opportunity to ask questions and to explain things back to you.

Adolescence, Ages 12 through 19

Adolescence marks the transition from childhood to adulthood. It is a time for formulating a personal identity. As students, they learn to approach a problem from all possible combinations. They develop advanced reasoning and abstract thinking skills. They have the ability to hypothesize about the logical consequences of events. They tend to become introspective. Early adolescence may be marked by moodiness. They want to stay up late at night as a sign of increasing maturity. Boys in early adolescence tend to "clam up." Girls are talkative but not necessarily communicative. They may be hesitant to talk to adults for fear of revealing their vulnerabilities and privacy is an important issue for them. **In** late adolescence, students begin to explore, "Where do I fit **in** to the world?" Work opportunities and career exploration reinforce the adolescent's self-concept and are important to identity formation. They crave respect for their opinions and for their maturity.

School District Policies/Regulations

Volunteers serving in the Sioux Falls School District are to review the following policies. All District policies are available at <https://quorum.sparqdata.com/Public/Organization/siouxfalls>

- **School Volunteers**
 - Policy IJOC
 - Regulation IJOC-R
- **Drug-Free Work Place**
 - Policy GBEC
 - Regulation GBEC-R
- **Alcohol-Free Work Place**
 - Policy GBECB
 - Regulation GBECB-R
- **Tobacco-Free Schools**
 - Policy GBED
- **Corporal Punishment**
 - Policy JKA
- **Harassment**
 - Policy GBAA
 - Regulation GBAA-R
- **Use of Technology Resources**
 - Policy IJNDC
 - Regulation IJNDC-R
- **Communicable/Infectious Diseases**
 - Policy JLCC
 - Regulation JLCC-R