



# Benefits of Volunteering

Finding ways for your family to get involved in your school community is easy! Family involvement in schools is especially important. Epstein (1995) describes six types of parental involvement in schools:

1. **Parenting:** The basic obligations of parents include housing, health, nutrition, and safety for their children. Parents also should provide home conditions for learning at all levels.
2. **Communicating:** The basic obligations of schools include school-to-home communication (such as memos, notices, newsletters, report cards, conferences, and phone calls) and information (on schools, courses, programs, and activities). Parents provide home-to-school communication, making a two-way channel for interaction and exchange.
3. **Volunteering:** Parents volunteer their time and talents at school activities and fundraising.
4. **Learning at Home:** Parents help their children with homework and with setting educational goals.
5. **Decision Making:** Parents participate in school councils and help guide school decisions on policy, leadership, and advocacy.
6. **Collaborating with the community:** Parents encourage partnerships with community resources and services.

Here is some of the research behind why it is so important for parents to volunteer in schools.

According to Epstein (1995), effective volunteering has the following impacts:

## Impact on Students:

- "Skill in communicating with adults.
- Increased learning of skills that receive tutoring or targeted attention from volunteers.
- Awareness of many skills, talents, occupations, and contributions of parents and other volunteers." (p. 706)

## Impact on Parents:

- "Understanding teacher's job, increased comfort in school, and carry-over of school activities at home.
- Self-confidence about ability to work in school and with children or to take steps to improve own education.
- Awareness that families are welcome and valued at school.
- Gains in specific skills of volunteer work." (p. 706)

## Impact on Teachers:

- "Readiness to involve families in new ways, including those who do not volunteer at school.
- Awareness of parents' talents and interests in school and children.
- Greater individual attention to students, with help from volunteers." (p. 706)
- "Development of a better understanding families' backgrounds, cultures, concerns, goals, needs, and views of their children.
- Respect for families' strengths and efforts." (p. 708)



## Ways to become involved in your child's school:

- Visit your child's classroom; a visit will give you an idea of what your child does at school and how he or she interacts with other children.
- Volunteer to help in the classroom as an assistant (listening to children read, for example, or serving as an aide during computer work).
- Support student events and performances by helping with them (such as sewing costumes or painting scenery for a school play) and by attending them.
- If your school has a Parents' Room/Lounge or Parent Center, drop in to meet other parents and teachers there, or to pick up information and materials.
- Participate in workshops that are offered, such as those on child development or concerns that parents have (or help plan such workshops).
- Take advantage of parent-teacher contracts (perhaps agreeing to read with your child for a certain amount of time each night).
- Ask your child's teacher if he or she has materials that you can use to help your child at home and to supplement homework.
- Be part of decision-making committees about school issues and problems, such as a Parent Advisory Committee.

The Center for School Change (n.d.) also lists the following ways that parents can become involved in schools:

### Come to school to assist.

- Share information with a student or class about a hobby.
- Share information with a student or a class about a career.
- Share information with students about a country you visited or lived in.
- Tutor one or a small group of students in reading, math, or other area.
- Help coach an athletic team.
- Help check a student's written work.
- Help put out a school or classroom newsletter (can also be done at home).
- Help sew or paint a display.
- Help build something (such as a loft in a classroom or new playground).
- Help students work on a final exhibition or project (can also be done at home or workplace).
- Help answer the schools' phone.
- Help plan a new playground for the school.
- Help plan a theme-based presentation for students.
- Help present a theme-based program for students.\*
- Demonstrate cooking from a particular country or culture to students.
- Share a particular expertise with faculty (such as use of computers, dealing with disruptive students).
- Help students plan and build an outdoor garden or other project to beautify the outside of the school.
- Help bring senior citizens to school to watch a student production.



### **Help arrange learning opportunities in the community.**

- Help set up an internship or apprenticeship for a student at your business, organization, or agency.
- Host a one-day 'shadow study' for one or a small group of students about your career in business or some other organization.
- Go on a local field trip with a teacher and a group of students.
- Go on an extended (3-5 day) cross-country field trip with a teacher & students.
- Contact a particular local business or organization regarding possible cooperation.
- Help to create a natural area outside the building where students can learn.

### **Serve on an advisory or decision-making committee.**

- Serve on the school-wide site council.
- Serve on a school committee that reports to the site council.
- Serve on a district committee representing the school.
- Serve as a member on the school's parent council
- Help organize a parent organization for the school.
- Help design a parent and or student survey for the school.
- Help conduct and or tabulate results of a parent survey regarding the school.

### **Share information or advocate for the school:**

- Serve as a member of a 'telephone tree' to distribute information quickly.
- Write a letter to legislators about the school.
- Write a letter to school board members about the school.
- Go to a school board meeting to advocate for the school.
- Go to another school to provide information about this school.
- Help design a brochure or booklet about the school.
- Help translate information from the school into a language other than English.
- Help translate at a parent-teacher conference for people who don't speak English well.
- Provide transportation to a parent-teacher conference for a parent who needs a ride.
- Write an article for publication in a magazine about the school's activities.
- Help arrange for a political leader (mayor, city council, Premier, or member of parliament) to visit the school.

### **Increase financial resources available to the school:**

- Help write a proposal that would bring new resources to the school.
- Donate materials to the school.
- Arrange for a business or other organization to donate materials to the school.
- Help with a fundraiser for the school.



### **Help other parents develop their parenting skills:**

- Help teach a class for parents on ways they can be stronger parents.
- Help produce a videotape for parents on ways they can be more effective parents.
- Help write, publish, and distribute a list of parenting tips.

### **Recognizing Volunteers**

*Handout 11 Retrieved from Alberta School Councils Association (n.d.) Revitalize your school council: Handouts.*

### **Recognize Volunteers**

- Every contribution is encouraged, acknowledged and celebrated
- School council has a culture of appreciation
- Volunteers' time is valued so meeting etiquette, protocol is respectful and comfortable
- Creating the atmosphere where volunteers' skills and talents are recognized by allowing them latitude in how they participate and complete tasks
- Provide food and snacks at meetings
- Handwrite notes of thanks or encourage students to write thank you notes
- Give pins, badges or special framed certificates
- Recognize school council volunteers in your school council column of school newsletter
- Have a luncheon or coffee party with a guest speaker
- Provide name tags for all volunteers
- Plan an annual celebration
- Present small gifts such as plants, bookmarks, pens
- Make school council part of photographer's shoot
- Post recognition lists on school website (may not have full name e.g. M.D. or Mandy D.)

### **Volunteering Creates a Positive Impact in the Home Environment**

Communication between families and teachers is imperative because parental feedback, participation, and support of the program not only reinforces the learnings of the child in the home environment, but allows the knowledge to permeate into other areas of the community as well.

Programs which promote interacting more positively as a family and in the community support a sense of belonging within those groups and that's what we hope to do as part of S4.

### **References:**

Alberta School Councils Association (n.d.) Revitalize your school council: Handouts. Retrieved February 10, 2012 from [http://www.cbe.ab.ca/parents/school\\_council/pdfs/2011oct5/CustomRevitalize.pdf](http://www.cbe.ab.ca/parents/school_council/pdfs/2011oct5/CustomRevitalize.pdf)

Center for School Change. (n.d.). *Parent/community involvement opportunities: A partial list* [Brochure]. Minneapolis, MN: Author.



Epstein, J. (1995, May). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76 (9), 701-12.