

Getting Involved in Your Child's School

Whether your child is just starting kindergarten, entering the final year of high school, or is somewhere in between, there are many good reasons and opportunities for you to volunteer at school. It's a great way to show your child that you take an interest in his or her education, and it sends a positive message that you consider school a worthwhile cause.

Parent volunteers offer a huge resource and support base for the school community while showing their kids the importance of participating in the larger community.

The school isn't the only one to reap the benefits of your involvement. By offering some of your time to the school, and by interacting with teachers, administrators, and other parents on a regular basis, you can gain a first-hand understanding of your child's daily activities and some insight into the trends and fads of school life that will help you communicate with your child as he or she grows and changes (all without intruding on your child's privacy or personal space). Even if you haven't been involved in the past, it's never too late to start!

One of the best starting points for getting involved is a parent-teacher conference or open house - these are usually scheduled early in each school year, and they provide a great opportunity to approach your child's teacher or principal about volunteer involvement.

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Here are just some of the things your child's teacher and/or the PTA can help you to do as a school volunteer:

- act as a classroom helper
- mentor or tutor students
- help children with special needs
- volunteer in a school computer lab
- help organize, cater, or work at fundraising activities such as bake sales or car washes
- volunteer as a lunchroom or playground monitor
- help to plan and chaperone field trips, track meets, and other events that take place away from the school
- help to plan and chaperone in-school events (i.e., dances, proms, or graduation ceremonies)
- organize or assist with a specific club or interest group (if you have an interest in an activity that isn't currently available to students, offer to help get a group started)
- assist coaches and gym teachers with sports and fitness programs or work in the school concession stand at sporting events
- help the school administrators prepare grant proposals, letter-writing campaigns, or press releases or provide other administrative assistance
- attend school board meetings
- work as a library assistant or offer to help with story time or reading assistance in the school library
- work with the school band or orchestra or coach music students individually
- help out with visual arts, crafts, and design courses and projects
- hold a workshop for students in trade or technical programs
- volunteer to speak in the classroom or at a career day, if you have a field of expertise that you'd like to share
- volunteer to judge a speech tournament.

Remember that not everyone is suited for the same type of involvement - you may have to "try on" a number of different activities before you find something that feels right. If you're at a loss for how you can help, just ask your child's teacher, who will likely be glad to help you think of something!

Remember that the work you do not only benefits your child, but will enrich the classroom, the school and the entire community by providing students with positive interaction, support and encouragement.

