

Cape Schools Open Minds and Open Doors

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Cape Elizabeth Schools Volunteer Policy and Practice Review

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INTRODUCTION:

This review of school volunteer policy and practices was initiated in the fall of 2016 by John Holdridge, district volunteer coordinator, in order to ensure that current school board volunteer policy is reflected in matching practices within our three schools. The review has consisted of conversations with parents, a parent association president, teachers, building administrators, the interim superintendent, the school board chair, volunteers, and volunteer coordinators in neighboring school districts as well as internet research.

The following report, including recommendations, is the result of the review and was submitted to interim superintendent Howard Colter and school board members Elizabeth Scifres and Barbara Powers on January 4, 2017.

SECTIONS:

1. Cape Elizabeth School Board Volunteer Policy (Revised September 10, 2013)
2. Philosophy Agreement Statement for Volunteers
3. School Volunteer Registration Procedures
4. School Volunteer Orientation Sessions
5. Maine DOE Guidelines Regarding Volunteers and Fingerprinting
6. Volunteer Registration Practices in Other Districts
7. Recommendations

SECTION 1: CAPE ELIZABETH SCHOOL BOARD VOLUNTEER POLICY

School Board Policy HOC (REVISED-September 10, 2013):

The Board supports the use of community resources, including volunteers, to complement and support instructional programs and extracurricular activities in the schools. Volunteers work in partnership with, under the supervision of, and at the request of school administrators and staff. The purposes of the volunteer program are to:

1. Assist teachers in providing more individualized instruction and enrichment opportunities for students; assist staff with school projects; supervise or chaperone student activities; and perform clerical work;
2. Build an understanding of and support for school programs among interested citizens; and
3. Strengthen school/community relations.

Prospective volunteers must complete an application form and confidentiality agreement. Reference and background checks will be performed for all prospective volunteers. Applications will be screened and approved by the district's volunteer coordinator. The Superintendent and school principal are authorized to use their discretion to decline an application or terminate the services of a volunteer if they determine it is in the best interests of the school department. The school principal must approve all volunteer assignments before volunteers begin work. The supervising staff member is responsible for giving volunteers a clear understanding of the duties, procedures and expectations necessary to perform their assignments.

All volunteers who are approved to work with students and/or in support of school programs are expected to comply with the following requirements.

1. Volunteers shall attend any required volunteer orientation/training sessions provided by the school department.
2. Volunteers will work with students under the immediate supervision and direction of authorized school staff.
3. Volunteers shall perform only such duties and tasks specifically approved and assigned by an administrator or supervising staff member.
4. Volunteers must keep all student and staff information strictly confidential. Volunteers may not access, review, disclose or use confidential student or staff information without specific authorization from a school administrator. This requirement applies even after a volunteer stops performing services for the schools.
5. Volunteers will conduct themselves in a professional manner and comply with all Board policies, school rules and directions from school personnel.
6. In accordance with Maine law, a member of the Board or a member's spouse may not serve as a volunteer when he/she has primary responsibility for a curricular or extracurricular program or activity and reports directly to the Superintendent or a school administrator.

SECTION 2: PHILOSOPHY AGREEMENT STATEMENT FOR VOLUNTEERS

The Cape Elizabeth school volunteer enhances the educational opportunities and experiences of the students within the school system. The volunteer needs to be aware that the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act requires CONFIDENTIALITY in regard to any student-related information. Further, the volunteer is expected to recognize that school activities will always be under the direction of a staff member. These activities are organized in accordance with the school's educational policies and objectives. Volunteers are an integral part of the Cape Elizabeth school community requiring dependability and cooperation on the part of the volunteer.

SECTION 3: SCHOOL VOLUNTEER REGISTRATION PROCEDURES

For registration purposes, Cape Elizabeth School Volunteers are categorized as:

1. Parent/guardian volunteers (those with 1 or more children in the school system who have access to PowerSchool).
2. Community volunteers (those with no children currently in the school system and no access to PowerSchool).

Registration procedures are similar for all volunteers with two exceptions:

1. Parent/guardian volunteers complete forms through Powerschool and community volunteers complete forms through hard copy and/or google forms administered by the volunteer coordinator.
2. Community volunteers provide contact information for 2 references that are checked by the volunteer coordinator.

Volunteer Registration Procedures are clearly articulated on [the registration procedures page](#) of the Cape Elizabeth School [Volunteer Website](#).

All volunteers must complete 4 requirements in order to be registered to volunteer. These steps are:

Once in a lifetime:

1. Attend a volunteer orientation session led by the district volunteer coordinator
2. Provide information and permission that allows the district to run a State Police Criminal Record Check (CRC Check)

Community volunteers also provide 2 references that are checked by the volunteer coordinator

Annually:

3. Agree to the Philosophy Agreement Statement for Volunteers (see section 2 above). This statement constitutes the confidentiality agreement mentioned in board policy IJOC.
4. Answer questions related to past criminal activity and agree to possible sharing of information related to criminal activity/disclosures with appropriate school personnel.

SECTION 4: SCHOOL VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION SESSIONS

The volunteer orientation sessions are led by the district volunteer coordinator and cover the material outlined in the 4th edition of the Volunteer Guidelines (revised January 2, 2014).

The material covered falls under the general categories of

1. Volunteer Registration Procedures
2. Volunteer Philosophy Agreement
3. Volunteer Recruitment and Placement
4. School Sign in Procedures
5. Confidentiality (FERPA)
6. Security/Physical Safety (protocols for evacuation, shelter in place, and lockdown, as well as general safety health precautions)
7. Volunteer Conduct and Professionalism

SECTION 5:

MAINE DOE GUIDELINES REGARDING VOLUNTEERS AND FINGERPRINTING

The Maine DOE has established guidelines regarding fingerprinting for anyone who works in a school setting. [The full text can be found here.](#) The DOE guidelines state in part:

Anyone who works with children in a school setting is required by law to be fingerprinted through a process approved by the Maine Department of Education.

*****The Maine DOE gives discretion to school districts regarding the use of fingerprinting with regards to volunteers.*****

The DOE guidelines go on to state:

This includes bus drivers, secretaries, cafeteria employees, custodians, and volunteers (at the school's discretion), among others.

SECTION 6: VOLUNTEER REGISTRATION PRACTICES IN OTHER DISTRICTS

Conversations with area volunteer coordinators and internet research concludes that each district determines their volunteer policies and practices in the context of their own community. Several local volunteer coordinators noted they have looked to Cape Elizabeth Schools' policies and practices as models for their own systems. With regards to CRC checks and/or fingerprinting for school volunteers in neighboring districts:

South Portland Schools only conduct CRC checks for volunteers who supervise field trips and do not conduct fingerprint checks

Yarmouth Schools do not conduct CRC checks or fingerprint checks for volunteers

Scarborough Schools do not conduct CRC checks or fingerprint checks for volunteers

Falmouth Schools conduct CRC checks for volunteers but do not conduct fingerprint checks

Portland Schools conduct CRC checks for volunteers but do not conduct fingerprint checks

SECTION 7: RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendations related to POLICY:

1. Regarding the policy phrase: “*Volunteers will work with students under the immediate supervision and direction of authorized school staff*”
 - a. Establish a clear definition of the term “*immediate supervision and direction*” for each school building with consideration taken for the age of students
 - b. Realign practices to match definitions in each building

Rationale: There is no clear and/or widely accepted definition for *immediate supervision and direction* and this results in inconsistent practices.

2. Regarding the policy phrase: “*The school principal must approve all volunteer assignments before volunteers begin work.*”
 - a. Replace the phrase “*principal must approve all volunteer assignments*” with the phrase “*principal must approve all regular volunteer assignments.*”
 - b. Establish a clear definition of “*regular volunteer assignments*”
 - c. Establish procedures for requests and approvals
 - d. Realign practice to match new working definitions and procedures

Rationale: With the number of volunteers entering our schools in any given day or week it would be an administrative burden for principals to approve of each volunteer. It would be more appropriate for principals to approve “regular volunteers” who, because of regular and repeated contact with students, may develop a larger sphere of influence within the school community.

3. Regarding the policy phrase: “*Reference and background checks will be performed for all prospective volunteers.*”
 - a. Change the phrase to: “*Background checks will be performed for all prospective volunteers and community volunteers will submit references to be checked by the volunteer coordinator.*”

Rationale: Reference checks are only completed for community volunteers.

4. Regarding photography in schools
 - a. In the policy section that lists requirements that volunteers are expected to comply with, add: “*7. Individuals will refrain from taking and/or posting photographs of students while serving in a volunteer capacity.*”

Rationale: Taking and posting of photographs of students has the potential to violate media permissions of some individuals. As only teachers/staff have access to media permissions for their students, only teachers/staff should be taking and/or posting photographs of students in accordance with school policy.

Recommendations related to DEFINITIONS/PROCEDURES/PRACTICES:

5. Regarding Criminal Background Checks (CRC) and/or fingerprinting for volunteers
 - a. Revise the current practice of “once in a lifetime” CRC checks for volunteers to a practice of CRC checks for volunteers every 5 years.

Rationale: Volunteers serve under the immediate supervision and direction of authorized school staff and are therefore not in a supervisory role with students in the course of a day. It is therefore not necessary for volunteers to submit to fingerprinting. By instituting volunteer CRC checks every five years our volunteer registration practice becomes consistent with 5 year school employee re-certification. This change was suggested by C.E. Police Chief Neil Williams as an acceptable alternative to fingerprinting.

6. Regarding school day vs. after school/extra curricular events and volunteers
 - a. Establish clear definitions for differences, if they exist, between school day and after school/extra curricular activities in each building and/or across the district
 - b. Establish procedures related to definitions
 - c. Realign practice to meet definitions and procedures

Rationale: The definitions, procedures, and practices of volunteers related to after school/extra curricular events are unclear.

7. Regarding Parent Association sponsored events
 - a. Establish clear definitions for differences, if they exist, between school sponsored and parent association sponsored events
 - b. Establish procedures related to definitions
 - c. Realign practice to match definitions and procedures

Rationale: The definitions, procedures, and practices of volunteers related to parent association events are unclear.

8. Regarding Field Trips
 - a. *Consider making a distinction between school volunteers and field trip chaperones*
 - b. *Consider creating alternate/additional registration procedures for field trip chaperones*
 - c. *Consider limiting field trip chaperones to school staff and/or approved substitutes*

Rationale: Depending on the established definition of *immediate supervision and direction* in each building, school field trips may be a time when volunteer activity falls outside of that definition.

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9. Regarding the School Volunteer Guidelines Handbook

- a. Revise the volunteer guidelines to reflect changes that result from this review
- b. Revise the volunteer guidelines to reflect other changes in practice such as the emergency procedures now referred to as evacuation, shelter in place, and lockdown

Rationale: The current (4th) edition of the volunteer guidelines was revised on January 2, 2014. Changes in practice have naturally evolved over the years and need to be updated in common print form available to the public.

Respectfully Submitted on January 4, 2017

-John Holdridge