

Volunteer Handbook



Preschool Program



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Volunteer Training Video

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Welcome

Dear Families,

We are glad to know that you are interested in volunteering in your child's classroom. Research shows that parent engagement in schools is closely linked to better student behavior, higher academic achievement, and enhanced social skills.

Your support and engagement also help provide funding for the preschool program. Prince William County Public Schools receives federal and state funds to provide a preschool program for families. Twenty-five percent (25%) of the money received from federal tax dollars must be matched by donations of services, facilities, and volunteer hours. **So, every hour you spend volunteering counts!**

This handbook has information on how to help in the classroom and reviews volunteer policies. Parent(s), guardian(s), or other trusted adults 18 years or older from the preschool child's emergency card may volunteer. Community members may also volunteer and should contact the preschool office for more information.

Those interested in volunteering should review the handbook and sign the Volunteer Responsibility form. Once completed, reach out to your child's teacher to discuss a plan for volunteering. Volunteering typically does not occur in the first month of school, to allow time for students to adjust to classroom routines.

We hope this information will help make your time in the classroom successful. Please speak with your child's teacher if you have any questions.

Thank you,

The Preschool Program

VOLUNTEER RESPONSIBILITY FORM

A classroom volunteer's role is to support school staff in providing a safe, nurturing, and educational environment for children. Volunteers are expected to abide by PWCS volunteer regulations and those outlined in the Volunteer Handbook. Volunteers should model professional communication, dress, and overall behavior and abide by the following regulations:

Volunteer Regulations:

- The preschool program is an inclusive environment. Volunteers are expected to be respectful of student and staff cultures, backgrounds, and individual needs.
- Volunteers must be 18yrs of age.
- Volunteers must be listed on a Preschool child's Emergency Contact list or have prior approval from the Preschool Office and school.
- Volunteers must provide a valid photo ID to the school office when volunteering.
- Volunteers are not permitted to bring other children to the classroom.
- Volunteers must be healthy and free from any communicable disease. Proof of a negative TB test/screening is requested prior to volunteering.
- Information about classroom staff or students is considered confidential and may not be shared.
- Pictures or videos of children other than the volunteers' children are prohibited.
- Volunteers should refrain from using cell phones in the classroom and while on field trips.
- All schools or school events are smoke, alcohol, drug, and firearm free zones.
- Volunteers are not to be alone with children and do not escort children to/from the bathroom.
- Classroom discipline is the responsibility of the teacher. Children are never to be pushed, hit, pinched, jerked, or yelled at. Volunteers should inform teaching staff if there are concerns with a child's behavior.
- Those who volunteer for 15 or more hours per week are required to complete the PWCS Human Resources process for volunteers.

Special Considerations:

- Volunteers are encouraged to talk with their child before volunteering to explain their role while in the classroom is to help the teacher with all children.
- During meals, students are encouraged to try foods but are not forced to eat. Food should never be denied as a form of discipline.
- Volunteers may eat meals with the class; however, they will need to purchase meals from the school cafeteria or bring a healthy meal from home. Food is not to be shared with children (including the volunteer's own child).

By signing below, you agree to abide by PWCS Volunteer Policies, regulations listed above, and the those outlined in the Volunteer Handbook.

You also agree to provide proof of a negative TB test/screening to the Preschool Office. Your Family Service Worker will provide referrals for assistance if needed.

Failure to abide by regulations will affect your ability to volunteer.

Name (print): _____

Child's School: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Volunteer Policies

Cell Phones

Volunteers should not use cell phones or other personal devices while volunteering. This includes mealtimes, recess, or field trips.

Child Abuse and Neglect

A classroom volunteer's role is to support school staff in providing a safe, nurturing, and educational environment for children. Volunteers are not left alone with children and classroom discipline is the responsibility of the teacher. Children are never to be pushed, hit, pinched, jerked, or yelled at. Volunteers should inform teaching staff if there are concerns with a child's behavior.

Volunteers are required to report cases of suspected child abuse or neglect to school officials. They should also report illegal or improper behavior of students or staff to school officials.

Volunteers may not be convicted of a felony or offense involving child abuse or child neglect.

Communication

All communication with students, staff, community members, or other parents is to remain professional. Volunteers should avoid abusive language or profanity in written, oral, and nonverbal communications. Volunteers are also expected to be respectful of student and staff cultures, backgrounds, and individual needs.

When talking with students, it is important to state things in a positive way. This helps the child know what you would like him or her to do rather than focusing on the negative. Here are some examples:

"Please use your walking feet" instead of "Don't run."

"Please use your inside voice" instead of "Don't yell."

Using a quiet and confident voice when speaking to children is important. Children will copy your behavior.

Confidentiality

Information based on contact with students, staff, or others at school is considered confidential and may not be used in conversations at school or outside of school. Students and families have the right to expect that their child's needs, conduct, classroom achievement, or other characteristics will not be the subject of rumor or gossip.

Conflict of Interest

Volunteers may not solicit, pressure, direct, or require PWCS students, staff, or parents to participate in any outside service or event.

Dress Code

Volunteers should dress comfortably and professionally, with closed-toe shoes. Ensure clothing is not too revealing, short, or tight, as volunteers and school staff are often dancing, sitting, running, jumping, and playing with students. During the day, volunteers may get water, paint, or dirt on their clothing. Clothing should not contain vulgar, suggestive, or hurtful photos or content.

Health and Safety

Volunteers are asked to provide proof of a negative TB test or screening (given within the last year) to the Preschool Office prior to volunteering.

Volunteers should familiarize themselves with the location of safety information and equipment. Medical Emergency Procedures are posted on the health bulletin board. The location of the classroom phone, emergency phone numbers, and Classroom Evacuation Route are posted by the exit door.

Classroom staff always maintain a count of students. The class “safe number” is written near the door or front of the class. Volunteers help with ensuring all students are accounted for while in the classroom, outside, or during transitions. Including children in the counting process is encouraged, as this occurs throughout the school day.

All schools or school events are smoke, alcohol, drug, and firearm free zones.

Hours

Volunteers should communicate with the teacher to determine what days and times are appropriate for volunteering in the classroom. Teachers may have specific days or times when volunteers are most needed or when volunteers are not permitted. Teachers will make every effort to accommodate the days or times when volunteers are available. Volunteers are welcome even if they can only commit to thirty minutes.

Volunteers who are assisting at school for 15 or more hours per week are required to complete the PWCS Human Resource process for volunteers and staff. This process includes completing an online application, submitting reference letters, completing an online orientation, and agreeing to a background check.

Meals

Volunteers may eat with the class during meals (breakfast or lunch). Meals need to be purchased from the school cafeteria or healthy meals may be brought from home. **No foods are allowed to be shared with the class, including one's own child.**

Other Children

Volunteers are not permitted to bring other children (younger or older). There may be occasions or events when families are invited to visit the classroom. Check with the teacher about these special events and if other children may accompany you. Examples of these events would be an open house, back-to-school night, or class performance.

Other Ways to Be Involved

We are aware many parents want to volunteer at school, but due to childcare, work, or other obligations may not be able to. Being involved in your child's education is not only volunteering at school! Involvement begins at home, with:

- the conversations you have with your child about their day
- supporting your child's learning at home
- reading to your child
- playing games with your child
- taking a walk or visiting the playground
- making sure children come to school every day unless they are sick
- making appointments for days school is closed
- ensuring vacations are scheduled when school is closed
- attending parent/teacher conferences

Those who want to volunteer but are unable to visit the classroom should talk with the teacher about other ways to volunteer. Volunteers may be able to assist at home with preparing materials like cutting out name tags or bulletin board materials. Other ways parents have volunteered from home include:

- Record a video of yourself reading a story for the class, to be shared during story time.
- Send a video of your child completing a specific skill the class is working on (like brushing teeth) for the teacher to share in class.
- Record a video of yourself playing an instrument, to be shared with the class during circle time or rest time.
- Donate supplies for a classroom activity

Photos or Videos

Pictures or videos of children other than the volunteer's own child on personal devices are prohibited. Teachers may ask volunteers to take photos of the classroom or activities, as part of their volunteer tasks. This would always occur with a classroom device.

Recording Volunteer Hours

After signing in at the front office and providing a valid photo ID, volunteers may go to the preschool classroom. In the classroom, volunteers sign in and out on the "Visitor Sign-In" sheet noting:

1. Date
2. Volunteer's name and name of their preschool child
3. Time spent volunteering (entry and exit time)

Each month teachers review the information and send it to the Preschool Office to be recorded. A printed copy of volunteer hours is available, upon request.

Transportation

Preschool parents who do not have transportation may ride the school bus to/from school with their child. This requires a bus pass, which should be requested from the Family Service Worker.

Prior to being issued a bus pass, parents need to visit the school office and submit a valid photo ID to be processed. Family Service Workers can assist with transportation to/from the school to complete this process and then will issue the parent a bus pass.

Bus passes are only given to parents or guardians, are not transferable, and are only valid while your child is in preschool.

How to Help in the Classroom

Volunteers are an important part of the classroom team who assist with lessons, activities, and supervision of students. Volunteers may work with an individual child or a group of students during the day. Volunteers join in with the class and follow the lead of the teacher or teacher assistant.

Review the following suggestions and think about ways you are comfortable assisting. Talk with the teacher about activities you most want to help with and inform them if there are activities you are not comfortable with. Not everyone wants to read with students, dance during music and movement, or help on the playground, and that is ok!

Arrival

Assist teachers with lining students up, counting them as they exit the bus, checking the bus attendance grid to ensure the correct number of students are present, or walking them to the class. Many schools also have car riders, and volunteers assist with collecting students from parents/guardians and helping them line up with the class. Then, assist students with hanging up their backpacks and collecting folders or notes.

Morning Greeting

Students choose a morning greeting. Each child has a choice of high five, handshake, hug, etc. Assist the greeter or allow them to show you the different greetings. Children enjoy greeting visitors and volunteers too!

Circle Time

Assist with children transitioning to circle time. Often classes use this time to give a morning message, lesson for the day, music and movement activity, or to help organize hand washing for breakfast.

Handwashing

Make sure a stool is located at the sink, paper towels are cut or within reach of children, monitor the line of students washing, or help children with turning the water on/off. Children wash their hands when they come in from outside, before meals, and after using the bathroom. Handwashing follows the process of:

1. Wet hands in warm water
2. Use soap
3. Lather and scrub (for the length of the Happy Birthday song)
4. Rinse well
5. Dry hands



Mealtime

Assist with getting the food cart from the cafeteria and taking the cart back when finished. In the classroom:

- Assist with cleaning tables before and after meals;
- Wear gloves and place food in serving bowls for each table;
- Assist the classroom helper (children put out napkins, plates, eating utensils and straws)
- While at the table, have conversations with children. Ask questions like, “What color are your carrots?” and “Is that crunchy or soft when you chew it?” or ask about where they played in the class.
- Guide children on opening milk or other food items, modeling how to do it and allowing them to try.
- Assist teachers with monitoring clean-up time

Children are encouraged but never forced to eat. Children are not denied food as a form of discipline.

Reading

Read aloud to a child or small group. Allow children to choose a book and ask questions about the story as you read. Go slow, show pictures, and point to words as you read. Don't be afraid to be silly! Children love it when you read in different voices or act out the story.

Ask about multi-lingual books and read to children in your language if available. If there are children in the class who speak the same language as you, ask them to choose a book and read the story to them in your language.



Brushing Teeth

Children brush their teeth every day in class. Assist by setting out toothbrushes or placing toothpaste out for the children. During tooth brushing, the teachers play a song and show children how to get all their teeth. Children may want to rinse their mouths when they are done. Assist with making sure the toothbrushes are put away.

Large Group Activities

During large group activities, children are dancing, moving, and stretching. Encourage children to participate and join in. Volunteers may lead a large group activity like yoga or other calm-down activities, acting out a story, or learning a new song.

Small Group Activities

During small groups, children sit in groups at the tables. They are working on a specific activity, led by the teaching team. Counting, sorting, practicing writing names, and playing a game or puzzle are all types of small group activities. Lead a table of children, asking questions as they work.

Learning Centers

A learning center is typically a designated area within the classroom that provides students with exciting and interesting experiences to practice, enrich, and enhance their learning.

The centers are filled with manipulatives, art materials, books, and other instructional tools. Try to spend some time in each area assisting children and having conversations to encourage their learning.

ART CENTER



Art can include painting, using crayons or watercolors, using playdough, gluing, cutting, or writing. To help a child begin a project, Say, “What would you like to do?”

Make sure the children’s names are on the projects.

Accept whatever a child does on his or her own. Remember everyone has a different idea about how things should “look.” You can say things like: “Tell me about your picture” or “You used lots of red in your painting.” “Do you like red?”

BLOCK CENTER

Block play encourages many skills. Children build towers, cities, houses, and many other things. Sit and play with the blocks and talk with the children about what they are building.

Through your questions they are learning problem solving, math skills, and language skills.

- Try asking “How big is your tower?” “Where is the long block?” or “How did you build that?”
- “Will it take five blocks or three blocks to fill up the truck?” or “Which tower has more blocks?”
- “Will this block balance on the smaller blocks?”

BOOK CENTER

Read aloud to a child or small group. Allow children to choose a book and ask questions about the story as you read.

Go slow, show pictures, and point to words as you read. Don’t be afraid to be silly! Children love it when they read in different voices or act out the story.

DRAMATIC PLAY CENTER

In dramatic play or “housekeeping”, children play pretend. They model being mom or dad, having a grocery store, restaurant, or hair salon.

Through their play and conversations, children are learning cooperation and many life skills (how to clean and answer the phone). This is a “busy” area. Children love to have you join in their play.



OUTSIDE TIME



During outside time, help children observe safety rules. Regulate the flow of tricycles and avoid bumping into each other. Help children share toys and take turns.

Closely supervise activities on the slide and climber. Join in organized games. Assist the teacher with lining up and counting children.

SAND/WATER TABLE

This area encourages children to experiment with pouring and measuring liquids and solids. The table may be filled with sand, water, fake snow, or other materials and often has shovels, buckets, and other measuring supplies.

Work with children to identify shapes and textures. Ask "How does that feel?"

Talk to the children about what they are doing. Ask "Will the water in the small bucket fill the larger bucket?"

Help the children interact and use language. Ask "I see you stirring. Tell me about what you're making?"



SCIENCE CENTER

Here, children learn how things work, move, feel, and stick together. They learn about different kinds of animals and how things grow. You might see leaves, books, sticks, animals, fish, magnets, scales, thermometers, binoculars, and musical instruments.

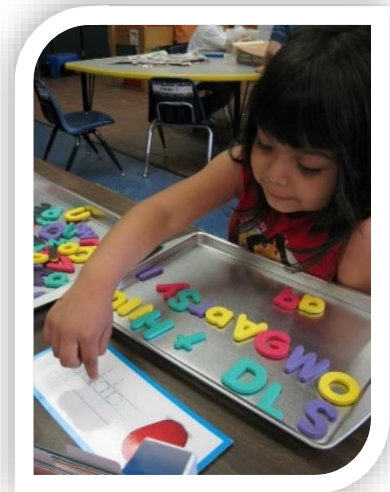
You may work with a group or with one child. Help children explore how things work, how much things weigh, and how long things are.

Individualized Learning

Children learn in different ways and at different paces. Teachers set individual goals for children, to help them master the skills needed for kindergarten.

Part of the assessment process is capturing what children are learning during the school day. Volunteers can help with this by taking photos of children completing specific tasks or class activities.

- Talk with the teacher about specific skills you should be looking for, like recognizing colors or letters.
- Using the classroom tablet or classroom camera, take photos of children when they are completing a task.
- Teachers may want help taking photos of a special activity like working with pumpkins, class field day, or planting seeds.
- Volunteers may use a notepad to write down notes, for example:
 - Photo of two children playing with blocks. Note: they shared blocks and took turns knocking down and building back up again. OR they counted to 8 as they built their towers
 - Photo of a child writing his name. Note: he was able to write the first letter by tracing.
 - Photo of a child trying new foods at mealtime. Note: she ate all of her fruit and tried one bite of her meat.



Special Considerations

- Talk with your child before coming to the classroom to prepare them that you will be in class to work with **all** the children. Sometimes, your child is excited because you are there but may misbehave or cry. Although it is difficult, you should ignore the behavior, not scold, and be calm. Allow the teacher to handle the situation. We promise the more you volunteer, your child will adjust. He or she will be more comfortable each time you visit.
- Teachers are working with the entire class and are not able to speak to volunteers about their individual child. Ask the teacher for a time to meet before or after class if you have questions about your child's learning.
- Discipline is the responsibility of the teacher unless you are asked to assist or there is an emergency. The teacher knows the children and the routine of the classroom. Children often misbehave simply to get attention, try to ignore minor situations, and make the teaching team aware of any concerns. Children should never be struck, shoved, yelled at, or jerked as a form of discipline.
- Remember our preschool programs include children with disabilities and you will not always know who they are.... Please respect each child's individuality.
- Volunteer experience can prepare you for related jobs in the community (such as childcare worker, teacher's aide, substitute teacher or cafeteria worker). Ask the Family Service Worker for a printout of your volunteer hours, if needed. Remember, the volunteer time in the system is one month behind, as teachers submit visitor sign-in sheets at the end of each month.

