

"I've been volunteering in my son's classroom this year, and it's been a great way to have a better understanding of the kind of education he is receiving."

Ways Teachers Can Get the Most from Volunteers

(From a Parent's Perspective)

Have an initial meeting with all volunteers to explain what you need and how a volunteer can help you the most. Answer questions. Note that all information about children is private and should not to be shared outside the classroom. [My son's teacher did this and it was helpful to all.]

Give parents a list of rules of the classroom.

Have alternate projects for parents who aren't good with kids (especially in large groups). Have other things for them to do outside of the classroom (cutting, cataloguing, laminating, etc.).

When asking for help with a project:

- Don't feel the need to apologize. We know you're overworked. We want to help.
- Explain goal and scope of the project (e.g., it might be an art project but your goal might have to do with language - so make it clear). Is the process the paramount part or is it the finished product?
- Give parameters (time frame, number of kids per group, etc.). Is this a one day project or will it culminate on another day?
- List project's steps and supplies needed and have the supplies near the activity.
- Let volunteers know what quality level you expect from the students.
- What are contingency plans? (e.g., What if kids need more time or don't understand what they're supposed to do?)
- Suggest ways to enhance the project (e.g., while waiting for the pizzas to cook, ask the kids to tell you their favorite 'M' word and explain why it's their favorite).
- Suggest ways to make the project more creative (and open ended).

Providing parents with resource information (articles, web addresses, excerpts from the Frameworks) helps us to better understand child development, teaching and learning.

When you can, incorporate parents' work and interests into classroom activities so they feel a part of the education process (I know this is hard with the huge amount of material to cover, but just a thought).

When possible, have the kids introduce themselves to the parents.

Introduce parents to other adults in the classroom (Title 1 teachers, etc.).

Long-term projects (like producing a play) during the school year can incorporate a number of parent volunteers. Using volunteers can help you to have kids create the play's dialogue, props, sets, costumes, etc. Performances, art shows or other events help families to see what the children have done, and how they did it. These events are valued and remembered.

Notes sent home in back-packs (or e-mail messages) are easiest to understand and respond to when you are concise and specific about what you need. Write at the top (to get our attention):

WHO	WHAT	WHEN	WHERE	WHY
	4 Sponges	3/15/03	K-1	Art Project
3 Volunteers		3/19/03	Cafeteria	Bake Cookies

At the beginning of the year, let parents know which contact method(s) you will be using (and when to expect it...if you know). Some people don't look at backpack stuff until it's too late.

