

ABSTRACT

This study surveyed public school personnel in the western United States concerning the perceived importance of selected components of volunteer management, and the characteristics of school districts responding to the survey. Statistically significant differences were found on six components of volunteer management between districts with coordinators and those without. Since sound management is important in volunteer programming, this study bore out the need for comprehensive volunteer management policies at all district school levels.

How Public Schools View Selected Components of Volunteer Management

James B. Harshfield, Ed.D., Gary L. Peltier, Ph.D.,
George C. Hill, Ph.D., Richard F. Daugherty, Ed.D.

INTRODUCTION

Volunteers in public education are valuable resources in improving the quality of children's education and helping children learn (State Resource Guide for School Volunteer Coordinators, 1987). In these times when most public schools (K-12) need and wish to offer additional educational services to special needs students (DeRidder, 1988; Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollock, and Rock, 1986; Morris, Perney, and Shaw, 1990), but are frustrated by limited revenues, volunteers' talents and enthusiasm can be used in diverse ways. Morris, Perney, and Shaw (1990) stated that there are hundreds of thousands of people who have the time and knowledge to help students be successful in school.

Volunteers are involved at all levels in school districts. Most volunteers provide instructional support to students. They also provide support at the school district administrative office level through committee work, professional advisement, special projects, and program development (Michael, 1990).

The recruitment and involvement of volunteers requires proper management to gain the greatest benefit for students. Management is the process of organizing and

directing the efforts of others under a coordinated plan for achievement of program objectives (Hamburger, 1967). Freireich (1984) contended that the management of volunteers is the single most important aspect of a volunteer program.

The purpose of this study was to determine the degree of perceived importance placed on the selected components of volunteer management by public school educators.

POPULATION OF THE STUDY

This study was limited to the following states: Arizona, California, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. The data search was limited to school districts with a Partners in Education Program and/or an active volunteer program. The Partners in Education Program is a nationwide project of the National Association of Partners in Education (NAPE) which connects children and classroom teachers with corporate, education, volunteer, government, and civic leaders. It represents more than 2.6 million volunteers involved in 200,000 partnerships nationwide. This study focused on volunteers who work in various

James B. Harshfield, Ed.D., is superintendent of the Dietrich, Idaho, school district. Gary L. Peltier, Ph.D., is professor of educational foundations in the College of Education at the University of Nevada, Reno. George C. Hill, Ph.D., is professor of educational leadership in the College of Education at the University of Nevada, Reno. Richard F. Daugherty, Ed.D., is professor of educational law in the College of Education at the University of Nevada, Reno.

capacities in public schools, but whose main contribution is tutoring students.

METHODOLOGY

The subjects for this study were identified from a database compiled in 1991 from a survey conducted by NAPE. Two criteria were used to select the sample from the NAPE database: (a) the location of the school district; and, (b) the school district's exposure to volunteer management.

The database search identified 255 school districts from a field of 506. Fifteen school districts were eliminated due to inadequate student information. The remaining 240 school districts were divided into three groups according to the number of students in each. The number of schools in each population group was as follows: (a) 0–500 = 79 students; (b) 501–3,500 = 81 students; and, (c) 3,501+ = 80 students. Forty school districts were randomly selected by a computer-generated random number program for each category to be studied, for a total of 120 school districts. Out of the 120 school districts surveyed, 74 returned valid questionnaires, a response rate of 61%. The survey instrument asked the respondents to provide demographic information, and rate the importance of 34 components of volunteer management. The components were derived from a survey of the literature on volunteer management.

RESULTS

Results of the study:

- About half of the school districts (49.3%) had policies to manage volunteers. Of the "yes" respondents, 36% clarified their answers by stating that volunteer management policies were developed at the site.

- It was also reported that 30% of the school districts had coordinators to manage volunteers' activities in their school districts. Of the "yes" respondents, 58% clarified their answers by stating that their school district coordinated volunteers at the site with the assistance of Parent Teacher Association members, teachers, or principals.

- The central question of the study was: What level of importance did the 74 school districts place on each of the selected components of volunteer management? The top three components, rated in order of importance were (see Table I):

1. Maintain communication with volunteers;
2. Strive to motivate and retain volunteers; and
3. Match volunteers with appropriate job task.

- Another question asked in the study was: Were there differences between the perceived importance of the selected components of volunteer management and the size of school districts? Significant differences were identified for five components. An examination of mean rank scores in Table II indicates that respondents from large school districts place highest importance on:

1. Recruitment of volunteers;
2. Enacting recognition programs for volunteers;
3. Considering the legal aspects of volunteer involvement;
4. Maintaining confidentiality of personal volunteer information; and,
5. Designating a district-wide coordinator for volunteer programs.

- Another issue in this study was the relationship between the perceived importance of the selected components of volunteer management and whether school districts had a comprehensive volunteer management policy or not (See Table III). Statistically significant differences were found in six components. Respondents from school districts with volunteer management policies chose the following components in order of importance:

1. Enacting recognition program for volunteers;
2. Designating on-site volunteer coordinator;
3. Establishing rationale, mission, goals, and objectives;

TABLE I
Number of Responses, Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranking for the
34 Components of Volunteer Management by the 74 Respondents

Components of Volunteer Management	N	Mean	SD	Rank
1. Maintain Communication with Volunteers	74	4.50	.65	1
2. Motivate and Retain Volunteers	72	4.46	.67	2
3. Match Volunteer and Job	74	4.45	.72	3
4. Maintain Confidentiality	71	4.35	1.04	4
5. Enact Volunteer Recognition Program	74	4.34	.88	5
6. Develop Staff Commitment	73	4.33	.67	6
7. Evaluate Volunteer Program	73	4.26	.85	7
8. Develop Appropriate Volunteer Assignment	74	4.26	.88	7
9. Educate Staff—Benefits and Operation	71	4.18	.99	9
10. Educate Staff on Volunteer Supervision	73	4.16	.96	10
11. Consider Legal Aspects	74	4.15	1.12	11
12. Provide Job Training for Volunteers	74	4.14	.98	12
13. Develop Policies and Procedures	73	4.07	1.05	13
14. Recruit Volunteers	74	4.07	1.09	13
15. Promote Volunteer Reliability	73	4.07	.98	13
16. Provide Management and Leadership	74	4.01	.94	16
17. Keep Accurate Records	73	3.89	1.07	17
18. Plan Volunteer Program	73	3.89	1.07	17
19. Check References of Volunteers	74	3.88	1.45	19
20. Establish Goals and Objectives	73	3.86	1.12	20
21. Assess the Need for Using Volunteers	71	3.86	1.11	20
22. Evaluate Volunteer Performance	74	3.84	1.06	22
23. Designate Local (On-Site) School Coordinator	74	3.82	1.26	23
24. Develop Job Description	74	3.80	1.22	24
25. Provide Liability Insurance	73	3.78	1.43	25
26. Require Health Screen	73	3.62	1.50	26
27. Interview Volunteer	74	3.60	1.37	27
28. Provide Adequate Budget	72	3.57	1.48	28
29. Require Completed Application Form	74	3.53	1.31	29
30. Provide Tuberculosis Test	74	3.43	1.75	30
31. Designate District-Wide Volunteer Coordinator	74	3.31	1.54	31
32. Provide Workers Compensation Coverage	71	3.31	1.78	31
33. Provide Fingerprint Screen	73	3.16	1.79	33
34. Offer Contract to Volunteer	74	2.18	1.42	34

TABLE II
Differences Between the Size of the School District and Perceived Importance of the
Top Five Components of Volunteer Management

Variables	χ^2	Mean Rank Score		
		Sm. N=15	Med. N=25	Lg. N=34
Recruit Volunteers	13.07**	38.6	26.2	45.3
Enact Volunteer Recognition Program	12.33**	33.1	27.9	45.3
Consider Legal Aspects	9.28*	31.1	29.2	43.9
Maintain Confidentiality	8.47*	32.3	27.7	41.5
Designate District-Wide Volunteer Coordinator	7.63*	24.3	32.8	40.7

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Note: Caution must be taken when interpreting data in Table II because of the small number of responses from small school districts.

p value is an indication of the probability that this result could have occurred by chance is less than the value shown. For example, a $p < .05$ indicates that if this survey was conducted 100 times, we would find statistical significance 95 times. A $p < .01$ indicates that we would find statistical significance 99 times out of 100.

The Kruskal-Wallis test of significance is the nonparametric equivalent of the one way analysis of variance. It is used because the data and methodology in this study could not meet criteria for the analysis of variance. The Kruskal-Wallis statistic is typically reported as a chi-square distribution (χ^2).

TABLE III
Differences Between the Perceived Importance of the 34 Components of
Volunteer Management and School Districts With and Those Without Policies

Components of Volunteer Management	χ^2	Mean Rank Score	
		With Policies N=36	Without Policies N=37
1. Maintain Communication with Volunteers	.86		
2. Motivate and Retain Volunteers	1.11		
3. Match Volunteer and Job	.88		
4. Maintain Confidentiality	.78		
5. Enact Volunteer Recognition Program	7.72*	42.9	30.5
6. Develop Staff Commitment	.00		
7. Evaluate Volunteer Program	.04		
8. Develop Appropriate Volunteer Assignment	3.06		
9. Educate Staff — Benefits and Operation	.09		
10. Educate Staff on Volunteer Supervision	.45		
11. Consider Legal Aspects	3.65		
12. Provide Job Training for Volunteers	.51		
13. Develop Policies and Procedures	3.32		
14. Recruit Volunteers	1.99		
15. Promote Volunteer Reliability	.05		
16. Provide Management and Leadership	3.66		
17. Keep Accurate Records	5.60*	41.8	30.7
18. Plan Volunteer Program	.27		
19. Check References of Volunteers	4.42*	39.3	29.7
20. Establish Goals and Objectives	5.32*	41.9	31.1
21. Assess the Need for Using Volunteers	1.45		
22. Evaluate Volunteer Performance	.19		
23. Designate Local (On-Site) School Coordinator	5.96*	42.3	30.8
24. Develop Job Description	1.07		
25. Provide Liability Insurance	2.20		
26. Require Health Screen	2.40		
27. Interview Volunteer	.19		
28. Provide Adequate Budget	.36		
29. Require Completed Application Form	2.15		
30. Provide Tuberculosis Test	1.04		
31. Designate District-Wide Volunteer Coordinator	4.55*	38.7	28.9
32. Provide Workers Compensation Coverage	1.57		
33. Provide Fingerprint Screen	2.26		
34. Offer Contract to Volunteer	.76		

*p < .05 **p < .01

p value is an indication of the probability that this result could have occurred by chance is less than the value shown. For example, a p < .05 indicates that if this survey was conducted 100 times, we would find statistical significance 95 times. A p < .01 indicates that we would find statistical significance 99 times out of 100.

The Kruskal-Wallis test of significance is the nonparametric equivalent of the one way analysis of variance. It is used because the data and methodology in this study could not meet criteria for the analysis of variance. The Kruskal-Wallis statistic is typically reported as a chi-square distribution (χ^2).

4. Keeping accurate records of volunteer activities;
5. Checking references of volunteers; and,
6. Designating district-wide coordinator for volunteer program.

SUMMARY

What level of importance did school district personnel place on each selected component of volunteer management? The mean scores were ranked from #1 (high) to #34 (low) according to the respondents' perceived level of importance for each component. The 74 respondents placed the *highest* mean scores on the personnel functions of volunteer management as indicated by the following survey rankings: (#1) maintaining communications with volunteers; (#2) striving to motivate and retain volunteers; (#3) matching the volunteer with the job task; (#4) maintaining confidentiality of personal volunteer information; and, (#5) enacting recognition programs for volunteers.

The respondents placed *moderate* importance on the administrative functions of volunteer management. The following administrative components were ranked as indicated: (#7) evaluate the success of volunteer program; (#13) establish policies and procedures to regulate the use of volunteers; (#16) provide management and leadership for the volunteer program; (#18) plan for the implementation and modification of the volunteer program; and, (#20) establish rationale, mission, goals, and objectives for the volunteer management program.

Overall, the respondents placed the *lowest* importance on risk management functions of volunteer management. The following risk management functions were ranked as indicated: (#11) consider legal aspects; (#19) check references of volunteers; (#25) provide liability insurance for volunteer activities; (#26) require health screen for volunteers working directly with students; (#30) provide TB test; (#32) provide state workers compensation cov-

erage for volunteers; and, (#33) provide fingerprint screen.

The following components of volunteer management were found to have *low importance and high standard deviations*:

1. Provide TB testing;
2. Provide state workers compensation coverage for volunteers; and,
3. Provide fingerprint screens. As is shown in Table I, the respondents showed a wide range of responses.

IMPLICATIONS

This study found that:

1. Large school districts, guided by volunteer management policies and directed by on-site volunteer coordinators, placed high importance on volunteer recognition and designating on-site coordinators.
2. Large school districts with district volunteer coordinators placed high importance on considering the legal aspects of volunteer management.
3. School districts with volunteer management policies and district-wide volunteer coordinators placed high importance on establishing goals and objectives and designating district-wide volunteer coordinators.

The results of this research indicated that different aspects of risk management were rated with varying levels of importance. The observation can be made that the potential risk of tort claims and lawsuits should encourage school districts to carefully consider liability issues when involving volunteers. School districts must develop policies and training to keep risk to an acceptable minimum for the protection of all involved.

All school districts without volunteer management policies should consider appointment of a district-wide volunteer coordinator to oversee all aspects of volunteer administration since statistically significant differences were revealed on 6 components of volunteer management be-

tween districts with coordinators and those without (see Table III).

In closing, the authors recognize that an era of tight school budgets justifies the appropriate involvement of volunteers and the hiring of a volunteer coordinator. This article points out overlooked areas of volunteer management that warrant further study by school districts of all sizes if they wish to be successful in tapping this plentiful and willing resource. Implementing the effective management of volunteer programs should be every school district's goal.

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