Role of Virginia Preschool Initiative Program Volunteers

A VPI volunteer is any individual who shares his or her time and talents to make a positive difference in the lives of the students of the VPI Program. Our focus is to match the volunteer resources, abilities, and interests with the needs of the students, teachers, and administrators of VPI.

As a volunteer, you will work under the direction of the VPI classroom teacher or instructional assistant**, other VPI or school staff, and/or the building administrator. You may relieve teachers of many non-teaching duties and tasks; assist them in providing more individual help and instruction to students; and strengthen relationships and understanding between VPI and parents.

- Volunteering means you want to be involved in your child’s VPI experience.
- Volunteering does not mean you have to stay at school all day long or come every day.
- Volunteering means you are committed to doing your part to make VPI a better place for our preschoolers to learn, develop, and grow.
- Volunteering does not mean you have to volunteer all year.
- Volunteering means you care.

** Hereafter, the words "teachers" or "classroom staff" will mean teachers and instructional assistants.
The VPI Program has high standards for its students, staff, and parents. Therefore, because volunteers are such an integral part of the program, it is important for you to remember the following:

- Always put the students first.
- Strive to give each student the best you can.
- Respect each student as an individual.
- Learn student names as quickly as you can.
- Be professional at all times.
- Respect all VPI staff, other school staff, and other volunteers.
- Act as a good role model for the students.
- Do not distract teachers while they are teaching. If you have questions, wait until there is an appropriate moment.
- Be responsible and dependable.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Communicate with teachers or the appropriate staff person(s).
- Ask for assistance when needed.
- Be on time.
- Let the staff person know if you cannot fulfill your commitment.
- Find ways to be positive; point out things that are working well.
- Make any feedback or suggestions constructive.
- Feel free to share your ideas or insights.
- Try to find a replacement for yourself when you move to a new school.

Volunteer Time Commitments Vary

Short-Time Commitments: special one-time events, ex. field trip.

Regular/Ongoing Commitments: weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly sessions, ex. serving as a lunch buddy, or word processing the classroom newsletter.

Longer Time Commitments: may span several weeks or months, ex. plan a student-parent-teacher fashion, or planning a career day or fair.

We encourage you to choose the way you want to volunteer.
The Virginia Preschool Initiative Volunteer Program Guidelines

The VPI Volunteer Program’s guidelines are aimed at assisting our volunteers in becoming effective, content, and successful volunteers. Although the job is voluntary, your commitment is expected to be professional. Besides being responsible for maintaining an attitude of mutual respect and confidence, volunteers should also become familiar with school and classroom practices and rules. Working with the teaching and other school staff requires flexibility and a willingness to follow directions.

To capably assist VPI with volunteer services, all volunteers are to participate in the Volunteer Program orientation and to observe in the classroom where they will be assigned at least once before beginning to volunteer.

Please check-in to the office and sign in and out of the building each time you volunteer. Safety is at the heart of our care for our students and it is very important that we know exactly who is on the school premises and where they are.

In an effort to increase safety and security, wear your identification tag or badge provided by the school while you participate in volunteer activities. On leaving the building, return the tag/badge.

Work under the direction and supervision of the VPI teachers, recognizing that instructing, supervising, disciplining, and assessing students are their responsibilities.

Always remain within sight or sound of the VPI teachers while working with students. For your own protection and safety, we ask that you not enter a classroom unless one of the teachers is present.

Disciplining of students is solely the responsibility of the teachers in charge. Volunteers should in no way discipline students. Should students misbehave
in your presence, you need to report this immediately to the classroom staff. The teacher will then determine the necessary course of action. Volunteers should intervene directly only if the safety or security of a student is at risk.

**Maintaining impartiality** is the responsibility of all volunteers. You should favor no one side or party more than another in classroom or school situations regardless of the student/family background, culture/ethnicity, family’s financial situation, and student’s intelligence, physical or emotional maturity.

**Effective communication** with teachers or designated staff members ensures clear expectations, task assignments, and feedback on volunteer activities. Ask for clarification on any questions you have about your responsibilities, special needs of students you are working with, and school safety procedures. Please share your contact information (phone numbers and e-mail addresses) with teachers and other parents with whom you are working.

A volunteer’s **appearance** needs to be appropriate (neat, clean, and comfortable), always remembering that s/he is setting an example for the students.

**Dependability** is an important guideline. Check your volunteer schedule to ensure that you report to the VPI classroom at the correct times. Please notify the VPI teachers if you will be coming in late or will be absent. Your assistance in the classroom is valuable. The teacher may have been counting on you to help with an activity that cannot proceed without your help. Give the teachers a call or send them a message so that they can avoid disappointing the students.

**Maintaining objectivity** is required of volunteers. Do not let your personal feelings enter into your work as a volunteer.
Respect for the authority of the VPI teachers, school staff, building administrators, as well as other volunteers, and the students is to be maintained by volunteers at all times. Students are expected to treat volunteers with the same level of respect given to other school personnel. If you feel that students are not being respectful towards you, do not hesitate to discuss the matter with the teacher or other staff person.

All volunteers are expected to maintain confidentiality while working in VPI. Things that are seen and heard at school about children and their families should be considered privileged information and as such, should not be discussed outside the classroom with anyone but the designated school staff with whom you work. Volunteers must protect the teachers’ and students’ right to privacy. Communicate relevant information about students to the respective classroom teachers or administrator. Do not discuss student progress or behavior with a child’s parent. Direct inquiries about students to the teachers or administrator.

The facilities that volunteers may use in the school usually include the classroom, cafeteria, media center, playground, office, or wherever the volunteer is assigned to work. Ask the building administrator or classroom teacher whether it is permissible for you to use the teachers’ lounge. Volunteers may use the restroom that staff uses. Volunteers are not to ever use the children’s restrooms.

Volunteers should follow VPI teacher and school staff instructions during fire, tornado, hurricane, and earthquake drills, and assist in getting the students out of the building as quickly as possible.

If you have concerns, if a student tells you something that troubles you, or if you observe or hear something that causes you to worry, please talk with the VPI teachers. They are trained to deal with such issues appropriately.
Some Do’s and Don’ts of Volunteering in the VPI Program

Do:

Participate in orientation / training programs offered to volunteers.

Take a personal interest in helping and working with teachers, staff and students.

Be willing to learn more about fostering the process of growth and development in our students.

Be willing and able to follow directions from teachers and staff.

Be adaptable, patient, and flexible when working with students.

Maintain a cooperative attitude in working with VPI / school personnel.

As a courtesy to others, please turn your cell phone to vibrate or turn it off while you are in the school.

Be imaginative, creative and optimistic.

Be consistent and dependable.

Keep all student and staff information strictly confidential.

Accept each student for who s/he is.

Allow the teachers to be responsible for the educational leadership and discipline in the classroom.

Learn the names of all the students and use them often.

Listen carefully to the students, always maintaining patience and understanding.

Maintain a relaxed, friendly attitude; a sense of humor is helpful.

For liability reasons, volunteers must leave their other preschoolers who are not registered in the school, at home.

Remember to sign in and out of the office every time you volunteer.
DON'T do a student's work for her/him. Demonstrate how to do it correctly.

DON'T become annoyed when students don't understand something the first time. Repeat what you said or try to explain it by using different words.

DON'T fuss or raise your voice at a student when pointing out errors. That may distract the student and make it difficult for her/him to focus.

DON'T forget to contact the teacher or school if you cannot fulfill your commitment. When you commit to volunteer on a particular date, teachers rely on your being there.

DON'T allow your temper to get the best of you. Count to ten if that helps, or use other calming techniques that work for you. Keep in mind that little eyes watch adults and often follow our examples.

DON'T get into an argument with children or adults. Try to model ways to resolve the issue with a win-win result.

DON'T shout at a child unless you need to get her/his attention immediately in the event of a safety or security concern.

DON'T manhandle, hit, or threaten a student. Those actions are not permissible in Richmond Public Schools (and anyway they are totally counterproductive to the VPI approach).

DON'T discuss a student's performance with anyone but the teachers. Remember, we're counting on you to maintain student confidentiality.

DON'T ask teachers or others for personal information about students. Again, confidentiality is the issue here.

DON'T intervene or contradict a teacher while s/he is resolving a behavioral problem. Discipline should be handled by the teachers only.

DON'T be afraid to laugh at yourself. Often a little humor may help to diffuse an otherwise unpleasant situation.