

Hot Topic: Use of Volunteers in Schools

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Parents, alumni, and others who serve as volunteers in the classroom, academics, athletics, field trips, fundraising, and at other sponsored events play an important role in independent schools. Yet, in spite of their importance, few schools have a comprehensive policy regarding volunteers. In a United Educators study, accidental injuries attributed to a volunteer's physical impairments or unfamiliarity with the campus accounted for four out of 10 related claims. Of the remaining claims, volunteers caused harm to others as a result of vehicle collisions, sports participation, and other types of accidents. Physical and sexual abuse of children by volunteers was also reported.

School officers sometimes admit that implementing a volunteer management policy can be a herculean task. To manage volunteers effectively, it is recommended that schools identify all volunteers and categorize them by the amount of contact they have with students and other aspects of school life. For example, single-event, short-term, and long-term volunteers will all undergo basic levels of screening, supervision, and training, as appropriate, and additional steps such as criminal background checks will be reserved for those who present the greatest risk.

At the end of the day, volunteer participation is crucial to the overall success of every school program. It is important to remember, however, that the overriding consideration is student safety. Be sure to implement, manage and update your volunteer program as on a regular basis to fit the needs of your individual school.