



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## Principals/Administrators

### PAPERWORK: THE VOLUNTEER PACKET

#### 1. What are the new requirements for individuals who want to volunteer in my school?

Starting in the 2017-2018 school year, all adults aged 18 and over who want to volunteer in a school will need to turn in a “Volunteer Packet” (see question #2). The Volunteer Packet must include the three volunteer clearances as well as two new elements:

1. Volunteer Orientation Certificate of Completion
2. Signed Volunteer Code of Conduct

Like previous years, all volunteers will need to submit a Child Abuse History Clearance, PA State Criminal Record Check, and either a Volunteer Affirmation sheet (for individuals who have lived in Pennsylvania for the past 10 years) OR an FBI Background Check with fingerprinting (for individuals who have NOT lived in Pennsylvania for the past 10 years).

In addition to these clearances, volunteers are now required to attend a Volunteer Orientation (either in-person or virtually via an online webinar), which will provide mandated training regarding child abuse recognition and reporting.

Lastly, all volunteers will need to sign a Volunteer Code of Conduct.

#### 2. What is the “Volunteer Packet?”

The Volunteer Packet is a new requirement for the 2017-2018 school year. All volunteers will be expected to turn in a Volunteer Packet to the main office of the school in which they would like to volunteer.

The Volunteer Packet will include the following components:

- Signed Volunteer Code of Conduct (free; [www.philasd.org/face/volunteer](http://www.philasd.org/face/volunteer))
- Child Abuse History Clearance (free; <https://www.compass.state.pa.us/CWIS/Public/Home>)
- PA State Criminal Record Check (free; <https://epatch.state.pa.us/Home.jsp>)
- ONE of the following:
  - ◇ If the individual HAS lived in Pennsylvania for the past 10 years: Signed Volunteer Affirmation sheet (free; [www.philasd.org/face/volunteer](http://www.philasd.org/face/volunteer))
  - ◇ If the individual has NOT lived in Pennsylvania for the past 10 years: FBI Background Check with Fingerprinting (\$25.25; [https://www.pa.cogentid.com/index\\_pdeNew.htm](https://www.pa.cogentid.com/index_pdeNew.htm))
- Certificate of Volunteer Orientation Completion

The Volunteer Packet is meant to assist principals by streamlining the process of reviewing, storing, and managing the required paperwork that individuals need in order to volunteer.



### 3. Do volunteers need to turn in a Volunteer Packet at the start of every school year?

No. Volunteer Packets will be valid for 5 years (60 months), meaning that individuals will only need to turn in a new packet after 5 years (60 months). If individuals plan on volunteering at the same school over the next 5 years, their Volunteer Packet can remain on file for all 5 years; they will not have to re-submit the packet every school year.

If individuals have children in multiple schools and/or would like to volunteer in multiple schools, they can simply make a copy of the Volunteer Packet and turn it in at each school.

Similarly, if a volunteer's child changes schools, they can simply turn in a copy of their original Volunteer Packet to the new school (as long as it is fewer than 5 years old).

The FACE Office strongly recommends that all volunteers keep an original version of their Volunteer Packet on file at their home so that they can make copies should they need to in the future.

### 4. Is there a specific “due date” for individuals to submit their Volunteer Packets?

No. The only requirement is that individuals turn in the Volunteer Packet before they begin volunteering—with the exception of the Volunteer Orientation Certificate of Completion, volunteers will need to have all components of the Volunteer Packet on file in order for the principal to sign off on their paperwork and allow them to begin volunteering in the school.

Individuals can choose to volunteer at any point throughout the school year. There is no “deadline” for turning in Volunteer Packets.

### 5. Where do I store the Volunteer Packets?

Volunteer Packets must be stored in a secure location in the school building, such as a filing cabinet in the main office or principal's office. Volunteer Packets will have individuals' personal information in them—their phone number, email address, home address, and potentially their Social Security Number—so securing this paperwork must be taken seriously.

Please see the Administrative Procedures (section B) for complete directions on filing and storing Volunteer Packets.

## CLEARANCES

### 6. I have volunteers who obtained their volunteer clearances last school year. Do they have to get clearances all over again this year because of the new policy?

No. As long as the clearances are fewer than 5 years (60 months) old, volunteers can submit these clearances in their Volunteer Packet. This means that clearances obtained last school year will be valid for the next 4 years.

If you or a volunteer have questions about whether old clearances are still valid, you can email [volunteer@philasd.org](mailto:volunteer@philasd.org) for clarity.



## 7. What if my families/community members do not have access to computers/WiFi/printers or are not computer literate?

There are a few different options for working around this barrier. Individuals can reach out to their Family Engagement Liaison/Coordinator, who can provide on-site assistance with completing clearances online, or individuals can go to the Parent and Family Resource Center (440 N. Broad, Portal A), where Customer Support Liaisons can help with clearance completion. Liaisons/Coordinators and Customer Support Liaisons can also help print clearances if this is a barrier.

During in-person Volunteer Orientation sessions at the Central Office, participants will also have the option of staying after the session to complete clearances with the help of FACE staff.

If an individual does not have an email address, they can choose to download and print paper versions of the clearances (for the Child Abuse History Clearance and the PA State Criminal Record Check) and send these to the appropriate recipients (as designated on the paper clearances).

## 8. What if something comes up on a clearance and I am unsure whether to allow that individual to volunteer in the school?

The School District of Philadelphia recognizes that a background check alone is not an indication of the value volunteers offer to our students. When reviewing background clearances, the School District of Philadelphia also considers:

- The safety of our students and staff.
- The nature and gravity of the offense(s).
- The time that has passed since the conviction and/or sentence.
- The nature of the volunteer work for which the applicant is requesting to volunteer.
- The positive impact the individual has had within the community since the offense.

Principals will review all background clearances and determine if information is disclosed that should bar the individual from volunteering in the school. If principals have questions about information disclosed on background clearances, they should email the Deputy, Employee and Labor Relations.

Any volunteer who is barred from volunteering in a school as a result of a clearance may appeal the school-based decision by emailing [parentappeals@philasd.org](mailto:parentappeals@philasd.org).

## 9. Are there any options for individuals do not have Social Security Numbers? Can these individuals volunteer in any capacity in our schools?

Social Security Numbers are only required on the FBI Background Check. The Child Abuse History Clearance and Pennsylvania State Criminal Record Check do not require Social Security Numbers, nor does the Volunteer Affirmation sheet. This means that individuals who do not have Social Security Numbers, such as undocumented individuals, can fill out the Child Abuse and Criminal Record Check clearances, along with the Volunteer Affirmation sheet if they have lived in the state of Pennsylvania for the past ten years.

If the individual does not have a Social Security Number AND has not lived in the state of Pennsylvania for the past ten years, it is still possible to volunteer. The School District of Philadelphia aims to include as many families as possible in its volunteer program, and as such, the District is flexible with individuals who simply do not have Social Security Numbers. The District allows individuals to volunteer without the FBI Background Check on file as long as the following conditions are met:

- The individual has their Child Abuse History Clearance on file.
- The individual has their Pennsylvania State Criminal Record Check on file.
- The individual has a School District employee with them as a supervisor at all times.



## THE VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION

### 10. What is the Volunteer Orientation?

All individuals wishing to volunteer in the School District of Philadelphia are required to complete the District's Volunteer Orientation, starting in school year 2017-2018. The Volunteer Orientation will include information about what to expect when volunteering in the District, what standards of behavior volunteers are expected to adhere to, and how to recognize and report potential child abuse.

Policy 907 on Child Abuse states that volunteers are mandated reporters of child abuse, meaning that all volunteers need to know the signs of child abuse and the steps to take for reporting child abuse.

After completing the Volunteer Orientation (whether in-person or online), participants will receive a Volunteer Orientation Certificate of Completion, which they will need to submit in their Volunteer Packet or within 45 days of their volunteer start date at the school.

### 11. Do volunteers need to take the Volunteer Orientation every year?

No. Like clearances, the Volunteer Orientation Certificate of Completion will be valid for 5 years (60 months).

### 12. If an individual has been volunteering in my school for several years, do they need to take the Volunteer Orientation training?

Yes. The School District of Philadelphia is now required to train all volunteers on how to recognize the signs of child abuse and report potential cases of child abuse. The Volunteer Orientation may cover some information that longtime volunteers already know by virtue of having been in the school, but the information on child abuse recognition and reporting will be new and is a required training topic for all School District of Philadelphia volunteers starting in school year 2017-2018.

### 13. How do individuals take the Volunteer Orientation?

The Volunteer Orientation will be available through several avenues to accommodate families' and community members' busy schedules. There are three ways to take the Volunteer Orientation:

- **In-person, at the Central Office (440 N. Broad St.):** Sessions will be offered on the third Thursday of each month at 10:00am and 5:00pm. See [www.philasd.org/face/volunteer](http://www.philasd.org/face/volunteer) for a complete schedule.
- **In-person, at the school:** Liaisons/Coordinators/SISLs will be required to host a Volunteer Orientation once per month at each school.
- **Online, via a webinar:** The Volunteer Orientation Webinar is available on [www.philasd.org/face/volunteer](http://www.philasd.org/face/volunteer). It is pre-recorded and can be viewed at any time.

### 14. Will the Volunteer Orientation be offered in multiple languages?

Yes. The PowerPoint presentation will be translated into the nine major languages of the District (Albanian, Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Khmer, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese) and interpreters will be available (if appropriate notice is given) for in-person trainings. The webinar will be translated into the nine major languages of the District, and interpreters will voice the webinar in the nine major languages as well.

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

### 15. If a family member or community member is interested in volunteering, how should they get started with the volunteer process?

Any interested individuals should begin by filling out a Volunteer Application on [www.philasd.org/face/volunteer](http://www.philasd.org/face/volunteer).

The Volunteer Application will ask about what times individuals would like to volunteer, the capacity in which individuals would like to volunteer (as instructional, administrative, special events, or organization volunteers), and will give individuals an opportunity to share any special skills or experiences they may have that would be especially beneficial to the school.

### 16. Who counts as a “volunteer” (i.e., who needs to turn in paperwork)?

The School District of Philadelphia distinguishes between "volunteers" and "visitors." Visitors are viewed as individuals who are attending and/or observing an event or activity without providing a service to the students, staff, or school/district operations and who would not be responsible for the care, supervision, guidance, or control of children.

The table below clearly distinguishes between the roles that require the submission of a Volunteer Packet (“Volunteers”) and the roles that do not (“Visitors”). If you have questions about who requires the submission of a Volunteer Packet, please reach out to [volunteer@philasd.org](mailto:volunteer@philasd.org) or call 215-400-4180, Option #6.

<b>VOLUNTEERS</b> <i>Required to submit a Volunteer Packet</i>	<b>VISITORS</b> <i>Do not need to submit a Volunteer Packet</i>
Classroom tutors	Families who attend Back-to-School Night
Student mentors	Families who attend Parent-Teacher Conferences
Classroom helpers	School concert attendees
Field trip chaperones*	School assembly attendees
SAC members	Presenters at Career Days
Home & School Association members	Assembly speakers
Friends Of members (if meeting in the school)	Attendees at Parent Workshops
Office helpers	Guests (non-members) at SAC meetings
Front desk helpers	Attendees at holiday parties/school events
Library assistants	
Bake sale workers	
Book sale workers	
Helpers at end-of-year fun days	

\*See question 17. Field trip chaperones do NOT need clearances for the first TWO field trips they chaperone.



## 17. Will families still be able to volunteer as chaperones on field trips without having to obtain clearances/turn in the Volunteer Packet?

Families can go on up to TWO field trips per school year without any clearances or volunteer paperwork on file.

However, the FACE Office recommends that any parent/family member who plans on volunteering—including chaperoning trips—turn in a Volunteer Packet just in case they choose to volunteer multiple times at the school or chaperone more than two trips during the school year.

## 18. What if I have an emergency event and need volunteers right away?

Individuals can volunteer ONE time per school year without a Volunteer Packet on file. Policy 916 on Volunteers states that a volunteer is someone who has direct volunteer contact with children, which is defined as “the care, supervision, guidance, or control of children and *routine interaction* with children” (page 2, Policy 916).

“Routine interaction” is defined as repeated and regular activity. In the case of volunteers, “routine interaction” means volunteering more than one time at the school.

## 19. Can parents/family members who have their Volunteer Packets on file and have been cleared to volunteer in the school come into the school whenever they please?

Section 1116(d) of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) states that parents and families should have “reasonable access to staff, opportunities to volunteer and participate in their child's class, and observation of classroom activities.” Per School District of Philadelphia Policy 907 (“School Visitors”), visits to classrooms must be scheduled in advance unless authorized by the Principal/designee and all visitors must report immediately to the school front office upon entering the school and identify themselves as well as their purposes for visiting.

Classroom volunteering and/or observations should be scheduled with the consent of the classroom teacher or appropriate administrator. At some grade levels and for some students, the presence of parents in the classroom causes a disruption and is a hindrance to student learning. Therefore, it will be up to the discretion of the classroom teacher and/or appropriate administrator as to when and how to allow parents/family members in the classroom. The teacher, appropriate administrator, and parent/family member should have a discussion to find the best time, place, and scenario for the parent/family member to help improve their child's academic achievement.

If parents/family members disagree with the determination the school has made, they have the right to submit a complaint to the District.

In order to avoid confusion and miscommunication around this issue, schools are encouraged to include language about classroom the visitation/volunteering policy in their School-Parent Compact. Schools are also encouraged to develop a volunteer program at their school with structured volunteer roles and volunteer time slots, so as to avoid potential conflict with volunteers who want to roam the halls or observe classrooms without approval.



## 20. Should volunteers have access to confidential information and/or be working with confidential information?

Both staff and volunteers have a legal obligation to protect the privacy of students and staff. Schools are required by the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) to keep student information confidential. Confidentiality means protecting all school records and personally identifiable information about a student.

### What are school records?

- Student grades
- Health information
- Attendance reports
- Conduct reports
- Court records
- Test scores and results
- Applications and status for state and federal assistance

### What is personally identifiable information?

- Student and family names and address
- Student social security or school identification number
- Descriptions about the student or situations in which the student has been involved
- Any information, including behavior, which is shared with others which makes it possible to identify a student

### How do I keep from violating the requirements of FERPA?

Do not provide verbal, audio, video, or written information about students to other individuals unless they work directly with the student and have a legitimate educational interest.

### What can happen if confidential student information is shared?

A parent may file a formal complaint with the Office of Civil Rights (OCR). The OCR will investigate the matter and make a ruling that could include federal funds being withheld from the district. Also, parents may take legal action against the district, individual district employees, or volunteers.

## 21. Can volunteers who have special skills take on quasi-staff roles at the school?

Volunteers who have special skills—such as having a nursing degree, being bilingual, or having their teaching certification—should not be treated in any way as “staff members.” For example:

- A parent who has his nursing degree should not be called upon to administer medical services to students.
- A parent who speaks Arabic should not be called upon to interpret at an IEP meeting, interpret at general parent meetings, or translate documents.
- A community member who happens to have her teaching certification should not be called upon to substitute or teach in a classroom.