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Involving Older Volunteers, in Public Schools

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guided reflection on the human dilemma might provide.

Civic education can be effectively accomplished only through a marriage of these two disparate traditions. Not only must academic learning be complemented by action, but active learning within the public sphere must be connected to exploration of the concepts and traditions

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that underlie democracy. Classical texts and their concepts of freedom, rights, justice, and community are illuminated for students by the vividness of concrete experiences. Experience grounded in tradition and enriched by its wisdom can have a more significant impact.

The first step toward the renewal of our commitment to civic education is the renewal of civic community within the academy. Those of us who work in educational institutions are subject to the same forces that have withered civic community in the larger society, and we will have to exert a concentrated effort to overcome these barriers. These efforts must take place across three areas in which our educational institutions are presently divided.

First, civic community must be nurtured across the disciplines. An overly narrow disciplinary focus pre-

vents us from having a coherent sense of the big picture. Effective civic learning will require creative integration of the disciplines beyond interdisciplinary courses in which subject areas are taught alongside one another toward courses which seek to present public life in all of its complexity.

Second, civic community must be nurtured between educators who pursue the classical and those who follow the experiential model. Forming such a community may be one of the most difficult challenges. Our differing philosophies and styles have kept us in separate worlds, and we must begin to learn the language of the others, as well as to seek out our common goals.

Third, civic community must be nurtured between these two groups of educators and resource people in the larger community who can contribute to students' learning. We need to use the knowledge of community members who care about civic education and who can help students understand the practicalities of public life.

Such changes will require a movement on the part of all involved—faculty, campus community service staff, and people in the community—toward cooperation with those groups with whom they have not ordinarily joined forces. This means a willingness to recognize our mutual dependence in order to achieve the shared goal of helping students become caring and reflective participants in public life. In strengthening these relationships, our institutions might in a small way provide a model for what we hope to encourage in our students. □

Some Guidelines for Building a Program

Involving Older Volunteers in Public Schools

By Kristen J. Amundson

From *Bridging the Gap: Involving Older Volunteers in the Public Schools*

EACH day, 5,000 Americans celebrate their sixty-fifth birthday. As this age group becomes larger, it will also become more powerful. As voters, seniors make up the most conscientious of the voting groups in our society.

In many school districts, nonparents make up as many as 70 percent of the voters. And, as the National School Boards Association Position Statement on Citizen Involvement notes, "Given that many of the elderly live on fixed incomes and have little positive personal experiences with schools, the potential for conflict between the elderly and the public schools is apparent." In fact, older voters in many districts have consistently voted against tax increases to support the schools.

One way to increase support for your school system among older voters is by developing volunteer programs targeted to involve the elderly. Across the country, increasing numbers of school districts have reached out to tap the potential of older volunteers. They have found that these intergenerational programs offer significant benefits for school districts, for students, and for the older volunteers.

How can schools involve older volunteers? Those experienced in establishing volunteer programs to involve the elderly note that there is no magic formula for success. Each school district and community is different. Nonetheless, there are some general guidelines that can lead to successful programs.

The key to a successful volunteer program is *planning*. Before the first volunteer walks into the first classroom, a number of logistical and policy issues need to be considered. By careful planning, most potential problems can be anticipated and eliminated.

Planning the program. Before launching any volunteer program, draw up a list of unfilled needs. Be sure to involve teachers in this assessment. Their early involvement is essential for long-term success. It is also important to determine whether the needs identified can be met through a

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volunteer program. Volunteers should *not* be used to replace paid staff. They *should* be used to increase the services available to students.

Involving seniors in planning your volunteer program is an important step to future success. "You really have to get everybody in on the ground floor. The joint planning, shared responsibility, and shared credit lead to shared ownership," says Mary Stamstad, director of the Re-

Involving seniors in planning the program is important to success.

tired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) in Madison, Wisconsin, which places older volunteers in 46 schools.

Stamstad adds that most school boards do not need to develop new policies before beginning an older volunteer program. Policies on community involvement in the schools and on school volunteers usually have been written. One policy that should be addressed, however, is who will be responsible for coordinating the volunteer program. "For a program to have lasting impact on a school district, it has to be included in someone's job description," Stamstad says. Many school volunteer programs create an advisory board or council that includes representatives from a cross-section of the senior population. Other issues that should be addressed during the planning stage include:

Screening—Volunteers, like employees, have different strengths. Some type of screening program—ranging from a formal application to an informal interview—is helpful in placing volunteers where they can make the most significant contribution. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) recommends that all volunteer programs include a formal written application.

Scheduling—If there are not enough volunteers to fill all requests, how will decisions about placement be made? A volunteer coordinator in each school is a requirement; the job may be rotated among volunteers.

Support—Who will provide support for the volunteers? Who will stay in touch with volunteers? Ideally, volunteers themselves will manage the program—but they must have access to school district staff.

Recruiting volunteers. Where can older volunteers be found? Here are some suggestions:

- Senior centers.
 - Religious groups and institutions.
 - Retired government employees.
- In New York City, a notice about opportunities for volunteering in schools is mailed with each retiree's check.
- Corporations interested in keeping their retirees involved with the community. In Houston, for example, retirees from Shell Oil serve as tutors and conduct kindergarten screening in a local school.
 - Area agencies on aging.
 - Senior housing developments.
 - AARP.
 - Political groups, such as the Gray

Panthers, that are active on behalf of senior issues.

- **ACTION—RSVP.**
- Local clubs or organizations that involve large numbers of the elderly.
- A districtwide newsletter. If your district provides a "Gold Card" to the elderly, offering free admission to all school district events, consider a special mailing to this group.
- Free opportunities for publicity—bus signs, billboards, subway ads, etc. In Boston, nearly half of all school volunteers first heard about the program from signs in subway cars.

Training. Both volunteers and staff members will require some training if the program is to be successful. Volunteers need specific training in the jobs they will perform. If they are to serve as math tutors, for example, they may

the orientation, volunteers also meet the principal and the school's volunteer coordinator or a member of the volunteer staff.

Given society's pervasive prejudice against the elderly, staff members should be given some training in what they can expect from older volunteers and how they can work with them. The National Association of Partners in Education (NAPE), in its "Guidelines for Involving Older School Volunteers," notes: "Teachers must also 'volunteer'—to accept help in the classroom. Teachers, often younger than the older volunteers, must receive inservice training to know how to use volunteers effectively."

Training should extend to support staff as well—office personnel, for example, are often the people volunteers meet first. Their attitudes can be critical to the program's success.

Liability. Although volunteers are not entitled to the same legal protection as employees, volunteers do have legal rights, notes AARP. Among them are "the right to work in a reasonably safe environment and within the limits of a volunteer job description."

Your attorney and insurance carrier should review your district's insurance policy carefully to make sure liability coverage extends to volunteers. Such liability coverage is essential to protect both the school district and the volunteers. AARP recommends that the comprehensive liability policy protect employees and volunteers for both negligence and legal defense costs. NAPE offers no-cost liability insurance for school volun-

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need a session explaining the specific objectives they will be asked to teach. Older volunteers who are working with youth at risk of school failure may also need a session to develop strategies to teach these students. A Houston program has developed a handbook that is given to each senior volunteer as part of a regularly scheduled orientation program. During

teers as part of the cost of membership.

Transportation. For some older volunteers who are unable or unwilling to drive, transportation is the most serious obstacle to volunteering. Districts use a variety of methods to offer transportation to and from school.

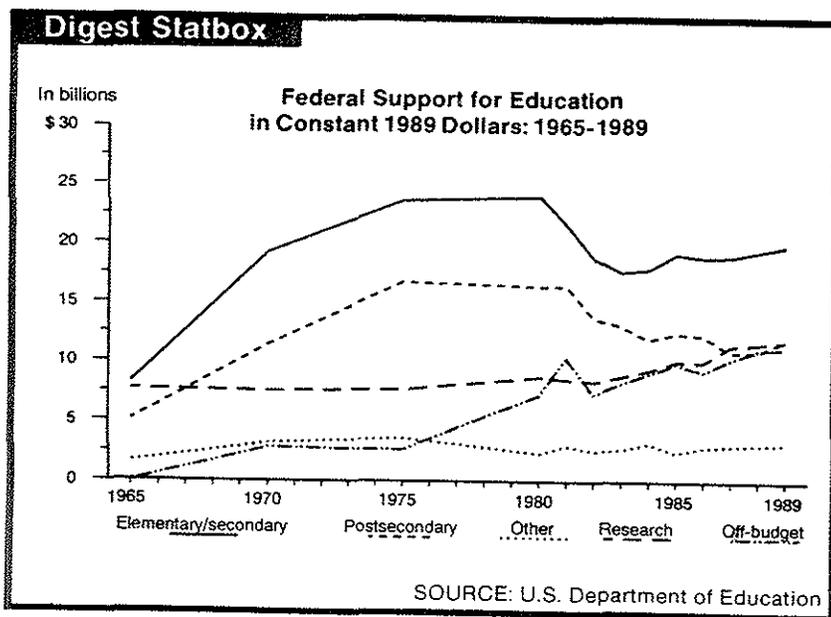
In Seattle, the RSVP offers to reimburse senior volunteers for bus fare. Approximately 10 percent of the volunteers ask for reimbursement. In West Chester, Pennsylvania, district policy provides that volunteers in need of regular transportation may ride school buses to and from school. Volunteers who request and are authorized this transportation are considered bus chaperones.

Recognition. Although volunteers

do not receive a paycheck, they do require compensation for their work. Certificates, pins, thank-you letters from staff and students are all important ways of showing appreciation. A formal thank-you luncheon, attended by school administrators and volunteers, is used in many school districts.

In Houston, a member of the volunteer staff regularly calls volunteers. In addition to providing information on volunteer activities, these calls also serve as a form of recognition, letting volunteers know that their efforts are known and appreciated.

But for most older volunteers, says Jane Angelis, project director of the Illinois Intergenerational Initiative, the real reward comes from the work itself. "They usually say they get more out of it than the kids do." □



Reading for Pleasure in the Social Studies

By Joseph Sanacore
From *Journal of Reading*

STUDENTS commenting on their long-term love of historical books are a rarity. Social studies teachers must share the blame for this because many still believe that using class time to encourage reading for pleasure is not their responsibility. To the contrary, social studies teachers must share a role in promoting long-term literacy. Many language activities occur during social studies lessons, including reading textbooks, discussing ideas, making speeches, writing essays, and studying notes. These activities represent a natural literacy context for supporting pleasurable reading.

What can social studies teachers do to promote lifetime reading habits? The following suggestions are not comprehensive, but they do provide instructional direction.

Include literature as part of the instructional program. Historical fiction, biographies, autobiographies, and diaries help readers personalize history. This process supports students' appreciation for an author's historical perspective and imaginary power.

Literary works selected for social studies classrooms should be interesting, and factual content should blend smoothly with narration. After selecting resources, teachers may approach

literature by covering recurring themes in history and motivating students to read related titles.

This is especially useful to young readers because it provides insight for problems of the past as well as those of today. In addition to themes or topics, teachers may decide to cover certain historical periods or events and to include appropriate literature.

Regardless of the approach taken, using literature in social studies classes increases the potential for enjoying reading and for considering it as a lifetime activity. Students also gain important values from literary activities, and teachers should encourage them as a major complement to the instructional program.

Use a wide variety of materials. In addition to historical literary works, potential lifetime readers need exposure to a variety of resources. Textbooks, anthologies, paperbacks, magazines, and newspapers provide suf-

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