**Mercer Island School District (“MISD”)**

**Volunteer Handbook**

**Requirements**

All MISD volunteers must be checked annually through the Washington State Patrol, WATCH criminal history data base. *See* MISD Policy 5631P. After completing the WATCH procedure, volunteers are expected to update the school immediately if they are subsequently convicted of any crime, misdemeanor or otherwise. Volunteers must also complete the Volunteer/Visitor Confidentiality Agreement, Volunteer Release Form, as well as watch the Online Volunteer Training Material.

Volunteers in a school or a program serve at the sole discretion of the building principal, program manager, or teacher. Permission to volunteer may be revoked at any time by the building principal or program manager. If permission to volunteer is revoked, an appeal may be filed using the process indicated in Policy No. 4220.

**Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Rules**

The District is committed to providing students with a positive and safe learning environment, and we follow federal and state guidelines to ensure that we neither promote nor tolerate discriminatory or harassing behaviors in our schools. Harassment is defined as any act based on race, creed, religion, disability, national origin, gender or sex, age, or sexual orientation or any other protected status that substantially interferes with an individual’s educational or work performance. (*See* Board Policy 3210).

Harassment consists of unwanted or uninvited sexual comments, advances, cartoons, innuendoes, racial and gender slurs or jokes, intimidation, etc. It can occur between an adult and a child, between two adults, or between two children. When these incidents occur, MISD must make every effort to stop the behavior and see that it does not occur again.

If you become aware of a behavior that might constitute harassment, report it immediately to a teacher or the building administrator so that it will be investigated and addressed. Make sure to examine your own behaviors and word choices closely also. Example: Statements or phrases such as, “You throw like a girl,” are inappropriate and will not be tolerated. (*See* Board Policy 3207).

**Emergency Response**

Because you may be in the building during a crisis or fire drill, it’s important that, just like our students and staff, you know how to evacuate the building or respond to an emergency situation. You should familiarize yourself with the emergency exits in the building and be aware of evacuation procedures for the building in which you are volunteering. In every building, there are staff members trained in first aid and emergency assistance. As a volunteer, you are to call on these individuals to administer first aid. DO NOT attempt to do so yourself unless the situation is critical. The only persons authorized to administer medications are trained school nurses and office staff.

**Code of Ethics Attitude:**

Come to school with a positive attitude, one that will say to the students, “You are special. I’m glad that I have an opportunity to work with you.” Focus on the positive – look for the strengths of the students, staff, and school. Behavior: Volunteers are expected to show decorum in their actions, speech, and dress. Treat school staff and students with respect and courtesy, and expect the same in return.

**Confidentiality:**

By spending time in the schools as a volunteer, you may see and hear things about students’ work and behavior that need to remain confidential. Further, you may, under limited circumstances, have access to student education records and other student information.

MISD students have the right to expect that information about them will be kept confidential by all volunteers. Additionally, the U.S. congress has addressed the privacy-related concerns of educators, parents, and students by enacting the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (“FERPA”).

Volunteers must not repeat anything that happens to or about a student to anyone other than authorized school department employees, as designated by the administrators of the MISD school at which they are volunteering/visiting. Confidential information may not be discussed in any form, including any type of social media. Volunteers/visitors should not ask a student personal questions that will invade their right to privacy; however, volunteers/visitors should listen without judgment if students wish to share. Though volunteers/visitors should respect the confidentiality of any information a student may share, if a safety or at-risk issue is revealed a volunteer/visitor should share this information with the student’s teacher or an administrator.

**Communication:**

Your volunteer work should be a positive learning experience for both you and the students. When you have questions about policies and procedures, ask the appropriate person which will generally be the teacher, the building administrator, or the program leader.

**Dependability**:

Please come to and be timely for all scheduled volunteer opportunities. The teachers and staff have planned activities for you and the students. If something comes up, please be considerate of those depending on you, and notify the appropriate school office as early as possible.

**Discipline:**

Remember that the teacher is ultimately responsible for the behavior and discipline of students. Reinforce school rules, but please seek guidance from the teacher in addressing inappropriate behaviors.

**Equality:**

Understand and accept students in terms of their backgrounds, values, and aspirations. These may be different from yours. Remain consistent by applying the same rules each time to every student.

**Support:**

As a school volunteer, you will be in a support position. Your role is to support the classroom teacher and the building administrator in fulfilling their responsibility to educate the students. Loyalty to the school and its staff is important for a good working relationship.

***Do Not:***

* Supervise a class without a teacher present
* Discipline students
* Establish instructional objectives
* Assume it is acceptable to bring younger children with you to your volunteer assignment.
* Share information about their personal life with staff or students. Please leave your own concerns and pressures at home.
* Laugh at the effort a student is making. It makes them reluctant to try again.
* Talk about a student within his/her hearing distance.
* Scold a student for an incorrect answer.
* Damage a student’s self-esteem by criticizing, using harsh words, or labeling with negative words such as “You lied,” “You cheated,” or “You should know that answer.”
* Judge a student. Each student is different and needs every chance to succeed.
* Pass on confidential information about a student or their family.
* Make comments regarding the relevancy of activities or procedures.
* Make comments regarding the appropriateness of teaching materials.
* Contact parents regarding the performance of students.
* Attempt to visit with the teacher or other volunteers during the school day. This is very disruptive to the students and the educational process.

***Tips and Hints***

* Demonstrate patience. Speak quietly, be calm and attentive, and use positive statements when working with students.
* Be a good listener rather than a good talker. Listening to a student is one of the most important things you can do for him/her. It helps to teach most of the basic skills students need.
* Try to be on the same level as the student so that you can look directly into his/her eyes. This way the student knows you are giving your undivided attention.
* Speak with the proper tone of voice. When speaking to students, use a tone of voice that will encourage and make them feel accepted. Consider the age of the child you are speaking to.
* State directions in a positive form. “Use the blocks for building” rather than “Don’t throw the blocks.”
* Avoid comparing students and their work. We are all individuals with unique talents. Children need every opportunity to feel successful and proud of their accomplishments.
* Don’t help too much. Students learn by doing, not through passive observation. Students learn by asking questions and by searching for answers to their questions. Ask students questions that may lead to the correct answer instead of telling them the answer directly.
* Avoid physical contact with students.
* SMILE. A smile to a child means warmth and acceptance.

**What to Expect From Staff and What They Expect From You**

In working with volunteers, District staff shall clearly explain the volunteer’s responsibility for supervising students in school, on the playground and on field trips. On field trips, both students and volunteers are to be informed of the rules of student behavior and the means by which they are to be held accountable to those rules.

* Clear Guidelines - Staff will give clear guidelines to volunteers as to what is expected of them.
* Opportunities - Staff will offer volunteers work opportunities appropriate to their skills, experience, and aspirations.
* Assistance - Staff will pass on a few techniques to help assist the volunteer in performing particular roles/tasks.
* Feedback - We are aware that volunteers may occasionally need time to give us feedback. There may also be times when it will be necessary to provide volunteers with feedback appropriate to their activities in the school.
* Punctuality and Preparedness - Our staff members are instructed to be prepared and on time. We ask the volunteer to be, so we need to do the same.
* Notice of Schedule Changes - Staff will give volunteers prior notice of changes to the school schedule or programs that will impact them.
* Supervision/Discipline – Volunteers are expected to report behavior problems to the teacher. Teachers are ultimately responsible for the behavior and discipline of students with a volunteer.
* Parent Requests - Teachers will check with the volunteer to determine whether or not they wish to work with their own child/children. Be aware, however, that most teachers would discourage this practice.
* Adherence to Guidelines – Staff members are expected to refer any problems (ex. Lack of confidentiality, lack of effectiveness, etc.) to the building administrator.
* Safety - It is understood that the teachers and the building administrator maintain ultimate responsibility for the welfare of students.
* Good Working Relationships - We ask all of our staff members to develop a good relationship with our volunteers so that any issues that arise can be discussed directly with the volunteer.