

# **Morris Area Elementary School**

## **Volunteer Handbook**

## **Volunteer Guidelines and Procedures**

Welcome to Morris Area Elementary School! If you are new to the district, we invite you to become a volunteer in our schools. If you are a returning volunteer, we would like to thank you for your past commitment, and we look forward to working with you again this year. Volunteering is an excellent way to meet other parents and staff as well as a good way to be a part of your child's education.

Please take a look at this handbook and see how you can become an effective volunteer in your school. If you would like more information on the volunteer opportunities available, please contact your child's teacher or call 320/589-1250.

Thank you for your gift of time!

## **The Volunteer Program**

It is the intent of Morris Area Elementary School to utilize volunteers to enhance our educational programs.

As a volunteer, you are assisting the staff in their day-to-day endeavor to provide the best possible educational experiences for each child in the school. So that you can be more effective, you may want to better understand your role and how your volunteer tasks relate to Morris Area Elementary School. Volunteers work under the direction and guidance of school personnel. They will not replace salaried staff, nor will their presence mean that fewer staff members will be needed.

A volunteer is many things: an extra pair of hands, an extra measure of personal warmth, a valuable special resource for classroom enrichment, and a bridge between the instructional program and the community. We cannot buy what volunteers give our schools!

### **Why Volunteer?**

There are as many different reasons for volunteering as there are volunteers. Understanding your goals for volunteering will allow you to use your talents most effectively. Some of these reasons are to:

- Experience the satisfaction of helping someone
- Have an opportunity for personal growth
- Develop new skills
- Document experience for future jobs or academic references
- Meet new people and make new friends
- Learn about your community
- Explore career options
- Use time in a meaningful way
- Remain active and productive in the community
- Pursue a personal interest or hobby in retirement
- Create a closer tie with your child's classroom

### **Working With Students**

1. Be warm and friendly — learn the childrens' names and show interest in what they are doing and telling — you are very important as a listener.
2. When working with children, encourage them to do their own thinking — give them plenty of time to answer; silence often means they are thinking and organizing what they want to say or write.
3. If you don't know an answer or are unsure of what to do, admit it to the children and work it out together — feel free to ask the student's teacher for help when you need it.

4. Use tact and positive comments — encourage children — give compliments, especially when children are having difficulties.

5. Accept each child as he/she is — you do not need to feel responsible for judging a child's abilities, progress or behavior unless you suspect abuse or neglect. Then you need to report it to Stevens County Human Services.
6. Respect a child's privacy — if a child or teacher reveals personal information, regard it as a confidence unless you suspect abuse or neglect, then you must report it to Stevens County Human Services.
7. Maintaining a sense of humor is very important.
8. Be consistent with the teacher's rules for classroom behavior, schedule and atmosphere.
9. Wear comfortable clothes and get down to a child's level.
10. Keep your commitment; the children will expect you and look forward to you coming. If you know you will be gone, tell them in advance. Keep all promises and make none that you cannot keep — children never forget.

**For safety reasons, please observe the following when working with students:**

- Avoid being totally isolated with a child such as a room with a closed door. Work only in areas of the school building, which are in continual, direct supervision by district professional staff.
- Use the staff/adult restroom facilities rather than student facilities.
- Do not give students gifts, rewards, or food items of any kind without the teacher's permission.
- All interactions between you and the students must take place only at scheduled times and on school property.

**Staff Responsibilities**

Volunteers are an important part of the educational team. The suggestions and opinions of volunteers are always welcome. It is the professional staff, however, that is held responsible by law for the decisions that are made regarding the instruction of students and school management. For this reason, volunteers always work under the supervision of the professional staff.

**Is there anything volunteers shouldn't do?** YES! The professional staff at your school is responsible for everything that goes on in your building including student instruction, safety and discipline. A volunteer is never considered a substitute for a member of the school staff. Volunteers supplement and support the program, but may not:

- Discipline students
- Have access to materials in students' permanent record files

- Diagnose student needs
- Evaluate achievement
- Counsel students
- Discuss student progress with parents

## Data Privacy

Most of the data school employees know or create about students is private data and includes academic, personal, attendance, medical, disability, special education, and disciplinary information. Logically, it is in these areas where breaches of data privacy occur. A good rule of thumb is to remember that almost all information on a student kept by school employees in any form is subject to federal and state data privacy laws. School district employees are bound by data privacy laws regarding student records at all times including at the employee's work site, other district sites, and in the community.

To avoid data privacy violations, it is important to remember that private educational data can only be shared with staff members who have a "professional need to know." Good practice would be to refuse to discuss a particular student with any other student or with parents/ guardians other than his/her own. Violations of data privacy laws may result in criminal penalties, civil penalties, and/or disciplinary action related to employment.

## Sign-In Procedure

Volunteers are asked to sign in and out in the front office and put on a name badge (see Volunteer Name Badges below), each time they work at the school. For security reasons, and in case of an emergency, it is important for staff to know who is in the school and why.

In addition, a record of each volunteer's hours enables the school to evaluate its volunteer program and recognize volunteers for their contribution of time. The hours spent volunteering is an example of the commitment to quality education in our school district.

**DON'T FORGET!!** Sign in and out each time you volunteer. We know it takes a few extra minutes to follow this procedure, but it is very important!

### **If you must cancel:**

If illness or any emergency arises, please call the office of the school where you volunteer. Ask the secretary to inform the teacher you will not be there or leave it on the teacher's voice mail. The plans of at least one teacher and learning of several children may be interrupted if you are not where you're expected at the scheduled time.

## Volunteer Name Badges

By wearing a name badge designated for volunteers, you will be immediately recognized as a person whose specific purpose is helping staff and students. Your name badge will enable staff to recognize you as a registered volunteer and an important part of the school's educational team.

## Tips for Volunteers

**Assignment:** If the assignment does not prove to be what you expected or you feel you cannot handle it, please contact your volunteer coordinator or teacher who assigned you.

**Cell Phones:** In order to provide an optimum environment for learning, cell phones must be turned off while in or near classrooms or the media center.

**Confidentiality:** Respect the confidential nature of anything you see or hear. Share any concerns you may have only with those in authority at the school. If parents and friends ask about your work, tell them you enjoy working with the children and discuss the activities you do rather than specific information about the child, the teacher or the school. You must sign the Volunteer Confidentiality Statement which can be found online at [www.morris.k12.mn.us](http://www.morris.k12.mn.us).

**Harassment and Violence Policy:** The purpose of this policy is to maintain a learning and working environment that is free from harassment and violence on the basis of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, familiar status, status with regard to public assistance, sexual orientation or disability. The school district prohibits any form of harassment and violence and asks that you report such behavior to building administration immediately.

**Suspected Child Abuse:** As you build trust with students, you may become aware of abuse in their lives. State law requires that education professionals and volunteers report any suspected abuse or neglect. If a student gives you information that you suspect may be considered abuse or neglect report it immediately to Stevens County Human Services, 320/208-6600 and notify the child's teacher or school principal.

**Your comments:** There is always room for improvement. If you have a creative solution or constructive criticism...tell us! We welcome your comments and encourage your ideas.

**Enjoy yourself:** Your enthusiasm will be conveyed to the students who are eager to learn about new topics and ideas.

**Must follow all District policies** which can be viewed online at [www.morris.k12.mn.us](http://www.morris.k12.mn.us).

### Chaperone Responsibilities

- Chaperones must ride the bus or walk with students to and from the field trip destination and pay bus and admittance fees that are required. Only designated chaperones who accompany the class to and from school will be allowed with the group on the field trip.
- Chaperones helping with a class field trip or outing must read and follow all directions pertinent to the particular site you are visiting as well as follow teacher instructions.
- Take responsibility for your entire group of assigned students for the duration of the field trip and always know where the children in your group are. Keep your group together and do not let them run ahead of you. Take a head count occasionally to be sure you have everyone with you who was assigned.
- Children need to behave in a respectful way at all times. Any students who have difficulty following your directives should be taken to a teacher.
- Remember that field trips are meant to be fun, but their primary purpose is to provide educational experiences that we cannot provide at school. Chaperones are brought along so that the class can be broken up into smaller groups thus allowing students to gain the most from the

experience.

- Follow the schedule and rules given to you and meet the teacher at designated spots on time.

- Field trips provide an opportunity for you to see other parents, but please keep in mind your responsibility is to the children in your group. Please do not neglect them for the sake of conversing with other chaperones. **Always set a good example.**
- Cell phones should only be used for emergencies. Your focus needs to be the students you are assigned.
- Do not purchase food or gift shop items for your child and/or the members of your group unless approved by the teacher for all students. Generally students and chaperones have a packed a lunch eliminating the need for purchasing food.
- Siblings are not able to attend field trips. Be sure to find alternate care.

### **Criminal Background Process**

Morris Area Elementary School is required to conduct a criminal history background check on all individuals who are offered employment in the district, any type III bus drivers, and on all individuals, except District 2769 student volunteers, who provide athletic coaching or other extracurricular services (i.e. such as volunteers), regardless of whether they receive compensation from the school district.

Recognizing our responsibility to ensure the safety and security of our students and everyone connected with the Morris Area Elementary School, we require a criminal history background check for school volunteers and chaperones. Any volunteer or chaperone supervising students or responsible for them will be required to have a background check. The cost of this background check is \$20 and is paid by the person requesting to volunteer in the District.

Potential volunteers/chaperones need to fill out a *VOLUNTEER* - COMBINED DISCLOSURE NOTICE AND AUTHORIZATION REGARDING BACKGROUND CONSUMER REPORTS.

This can be done one of two ways:

1. Complete the form online [www.morris.k12.mn.us](http://www.morris.k12.mn.us). Once your form is submitted, you will receive an email to log on and complete your background check. A credit card will be needed for payment.

If you do not have access to a computer, or credit card, you can complete the form at your child's school and attach a check made payable to ISD 2769.

2. The background check will include a county, state and national search. If you have been charged or convicted of anything, please answer yes to this question on the consent form and give specifics. If something shows up on the Criminal Background Check and you did not answer yes, even if it was dismissed, it may prevent you from volunteering. Final approval will be up to the building principal. Questions can be directed to Morris Area Schools Human Resources at 320/585-2221.