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I. INTRODUCTION

The Lincoln Public Schools (“LPS”) recognizes the importance of engaging families and the community in meaningful ways to support student success. Providing volunteer opportunities in schools is one strategy that can be used to build stronger connections between Parents/Guardians and teachers, the home and the school, and the school and the community. Parents/Guardians as well as members of the community-at-large may bring support and expertise that enrich the instructional program, assist teachers and staff, and connect students with their community.

II. POLICY

Volunteers must adhere to all LPS policies, including the Civility and Social Media Policies. Volunteers do not take the place of LPS employees. The responsibility for and supervision of all volunteers in school and on school grounds during the school day is the responsibility of LPS employees that request the assistance of the volunteer or permit volunteers to have access to the school during the school day. Schools should provide volunteers with the information they need to ensure that they understand the school’s expectations for all volunteers. Additionally, training may be required by the school for certain volunteers who assist in specific situations in the school or classroom.

Volunteers shall:

1. be a minimum of 18 years of age.
2. each school calendar year, have a background check pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 16-2-18.4 and 16-2-18.5 and consistent with this policy;
3. each school calendar year, be provided with an orientation to the program and the volunteer assignment;
4. always work under the supervision of LPS employees;
5. never engage in any disciplinary action with a child;
6. each school calendar year, adhere to all LPS policies;
7. maintain confidentiality and not discuss or reveal any LPS student/school related confidential issue or information with any third party;
8. not have access to confidential information, files, or records; and
9. each school calendar year, sign a statement attesting to their understanding of this policy.

Volunteer Liability and Indemnification:

All volunteers may be required to consent to and execute the following:

1. A release and indemnification.

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Each volunteer shall agree to indemnify and hold harmless LPS and its officers, agents and employees from any and all claims, damages, losses, liabilities, judgments, workers' compensation payments, litigation expenses and legal counsel fees arising out of or resulting from the volunteer's acts or omissions (including negligence), except to the extent such claims, damages or losses result from LPS's gross negligence and willful misconduct.

2. A confidentiality agreement.

All volunteers shall at all times be willing to be subject to the direction of LPS employees.

Volunteers are prohibited from engaging in unlawful behavior, personal attacks, harassment, intimidation or disparaging commentary directed at LPS employees, LPS students or other LPS volunteers or disclosing the private information of LPS employees, LPS students, or LPS volunteers while on LPS properties or at an LPS sponsored event. Harassment is defined as oral, written, graphic, electronic, or physical conduct that is sufficiently severe, pervasive or persistent so as to interfere with or limit that person's ability to participate in LPS's programs or activities by creating a hostile educational environment.

The Superintendent has the discretion to suspend a current volunteer from serving as a volunteer at LPS if (i) the volunteer fails to adhere to LPS policies, including but not limited to, this LPS School Volunteers Policy and the LPS Civility and LPS Social Media Policies, or (ii) the volunteer's conduct disrupts the educational process, negatively impacts school operations, or creates unnecessary distractions to, or adversely impacts, the interpersonal relationships between the students, faculty, and staff.

Any volunteer wishing to appeal the Superintendent's decision may do so by writing a letter to the chairperson of the LPS School Committee within ten (10) days of the Superintendent's decision. If the decision of the LPS School Committee does not resolve the matter, a written appeal may be filed with the Rhode Island Department of Education.

Statement of Nondiscrimination:

LPS does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, ancestral origin, sex, sex orientation, gender identity or expression, age disability, marital status, citizenship, genetic information, or any other characteristic protected by law. Individuals with disabilities may contact the Superintendent's office to request a reasonable accommodation to participate in a program or activity sponsored by LPS.

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III. VOLUNTEER BACKGROUND CHECKS

- A. LPS will obtain background checks from school volunteers consistent with RIGL 16-2-18.4 and RIGL 16-2-18.5 the RI Department of Education and Rhode Island

Attorney General's policy, procedures, and regulations. (See: <https://riag.ri.gov/i-want/get-background-check>)

1. All volunteers who may have direct and unmonitored contact with children and/or students on school premises shall undergo a BCI to be initiated prior to or within one week of beginning volunteer work. At the beginning of each new school year, LPS volunteers shall obtain a new BCI check.
2. Volunteers required to obtain a BCI may apply to the Department of Attorney General, state police or local police department where he or she resides, for a state criminal records check.
3. Results of BCI provided to LPS shall be maintained by Human Resources for the then current school year.
4. The Superintendent may require a volunteer to obtain an additional BCI check at any time he or she reasonably deems such a requirement appropriate.
5. Any prospective volunteer who refuses to comply with this Policy shall be ineligible to volunteer.

- B. Volunteers with prior criminal records checks.

If a current or prospective volunteer has undergone a BCI check within twelve (12) months prior to commencement of volunteering for LPS, LPS may request from the bureau of criminal identification or local police department a letter indicating the presence or absence of disqualifying information.¹ The letter may be maintained on file to satisfy the requirements of this policy.

- C. Non-Rhode Island-resident or new resident volunteers

A volunteer who is not a resident of Rhode Island or who has not lived in the state for the twelve (12) months prior to indicating their interest in volunteering at LPS and is thereby unable to complete the Rhode Island state BCI, may satisfy the requirement with one of the following:

¹ R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-2-18.5 provides that "[t]he bureau of criminal identification will respond without disclosing the nature of the disqualifying information."

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1. Completion of a National Background Check through the RI Attorney General's Office within the school calendar year that such volunteer wishes to volunteer. The cost of this process shall be paid by the volunteer.
2. Providing a copy of a state background check, other than Rhode Island, completed within the school calendar year that such volunteer wishes to volunteer.

D. Appeals

A person against whom disqualifying information has been found may request that a copy of the criminal background report be sent to LPS. The Superintendent shall have the responsibility to determine, in his sole discretion, whether the volunteer may still serve. The Superintendent's decision shall be final in all respects. Nothing in this policy shall be construed to grant any individual the right to be a volunteer generally, or in any specific situation.

LEGAL REFERENCES:

RIGL: 16-2-18.4 & 16-2-18.5.

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