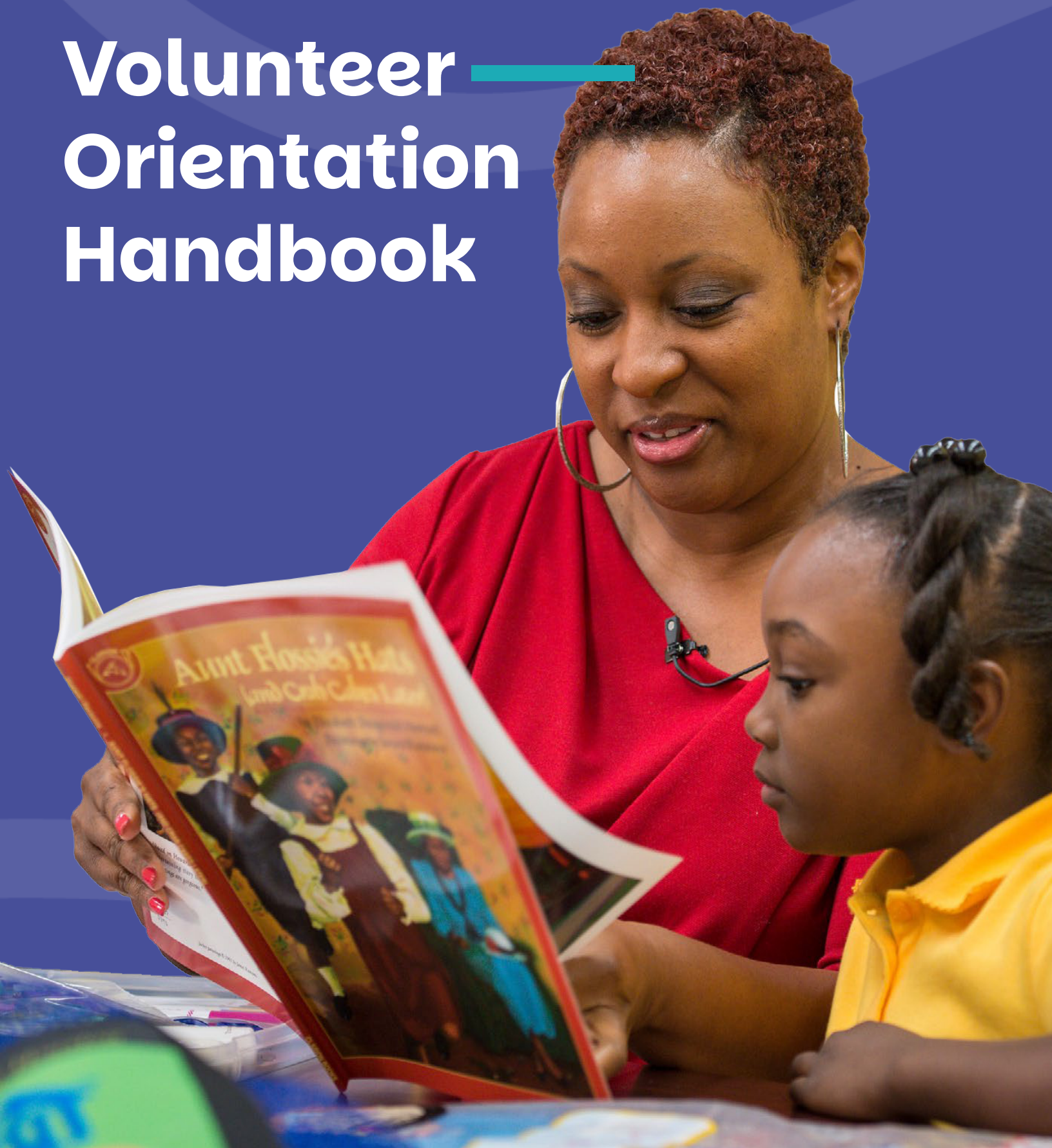
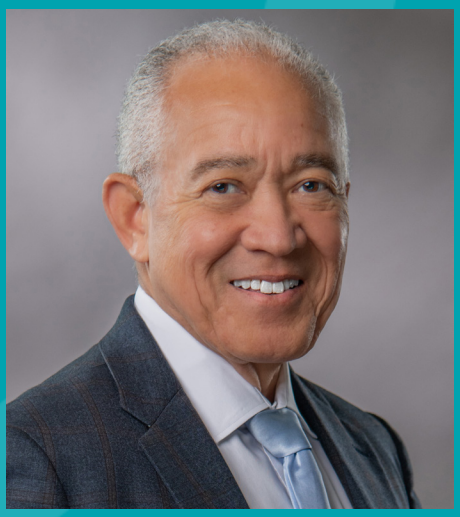
HISD

Volunteer Orientation Handbook





F. Mike. Miles.
HISD Superintendent of Schools

Introduction

Welcome to your volunteer experience with HISD schools and programs! We appreciate your interest in supporting our students and thank you for your investment of time and care.

As a new or continuing volunteer, you will have the support of a campus VIPS Coordinator and other staff as you carry out your volunteer assignment.

When you volunteer, you support the district's main goal: to positively impact student achievement. By serving as a mentor, tutor, chaperon, and role model you are supporting HISD students, parents and the future generations of the Houston community. Your work has special significance for our school communities and can be life changing for our students.

Even though volunteers are not part of the staff, you do share the same responsibilities of keeping students safe. School volunteers may be parents or community members. Volunteers can be utilized in a variety of situations in schools, ranging from one-time only events to monthly, weekly or daily commitments. They provide tutorial help, chaperon field trips, mentor, monitor lunchrooms, assist in the libraries, classrooms or playgrounds.

This guide and the accompanying online volunteer orientation are designed to ensure that volunteers are aware of their role, and specifically how they should work with HISD students and staff to maintain safety and confidentiality. In addition, volunteers will learn what to expect from their campus VIPS coordinators so that they are prepared to do their best for students.

Thank you for all you are doing to support HoustonISD and our students!

F. Mike. Miles.
HISD Superintendent of Schools

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About HISD

Mission

HISD strives to provide every student with a high-quality education that meets their needs and prepares them for life beyond the classroom. We do this by investing in strong instruction, supporting great teachers, developing school leaders, and creating a culture of high expectations and accountability.

Vision

The Houston Independent School District (HISD) empowers students to become critical thinkers, visionary leaders, and active contributors in their community, fostering a pathway to success for limitless opportunities in a competitive global landscape.

By the year 2030, HISD will implement wholescale systemic reform to significantly narrow achievement gaps and prepare all students for a Year 2035 workplace and world.

Core Beliefs

- We **Believe** all students can learn and reach their potential.
- We **Believe** effective teachers make the most difference in student academic performance.
- We **Believe** high expectations are held for students, educators, staff, and leadership.
- We **Believe** parent engagement and community support is essential.
- We **Believe** everyone in the system is accountable for clearly defined outcomes.
- We **Believe** reducing inequities inherent in the education system is imperative.

Overview of HISD Board Policy GKG1

(The Community Relations School Volunteer Program)

The Community Relations School Volunteer Program Policy GKG1 regulation outlines the requirements for the District's Volunteer In Public Schools Program.

For more information and to read the policy, go online to: **HoustonISD.org/VIPS**

Becoming an HISD Volunteer

How to become an HISD Volunteer

1. Register online and complete the volunteer application
   - English Application: **Click Here**
   - Spanish Application: **Click Here**
2. Agree to the annual background check and become APPROVED to volunteer
3. Complete the online volunteer orientation and the required documents
4. Sign up for volunteer opportunities at the District, campus or program site
5. Complete any role specific training
6. Sign in and out using the RAPTOR volunteer management system
7. Log your own volunteer hours in **V-Soft system**

Volunteers will complete these steps each school year to become an APPROVED VIPS volunteer.

Utilization of the VIPS/RAPTOR Volunteer Management System

As per **HISD GKG1** policy, all HISD schools are required to use the VIPS/RAPTOR Volunteer Management system to track volunteers who are regularly providing services for, or on behalf of, the Houston Independent School District (HISD). Being a volunteer may require you to volunteer for a single trip or event, on the premises of District property or at a schoolsponsored or school-related activity on or off school property.

You will be required to register online each school year in VIPS/RAPTOR Volunteer Management System. All volunteers must pass an annual criminal background check before volunteering at any HISD school. HISD reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to refuse and/or restrict an individual's access as an HISD volunteer based on an individual's criminal history, in accordance with applicable law and HISD policy, including HISD Policy GKG.

VIPS Appeals

Any parent, grandparent or legal guardian who is a prospective volunteer who has been deemed ineligible (Denied) to participate in VIPS after the background check may request an appeal. The process involves submitting the **VIPS Appeals form** and completing an interview with an HISD VIPS Appeals Committee.

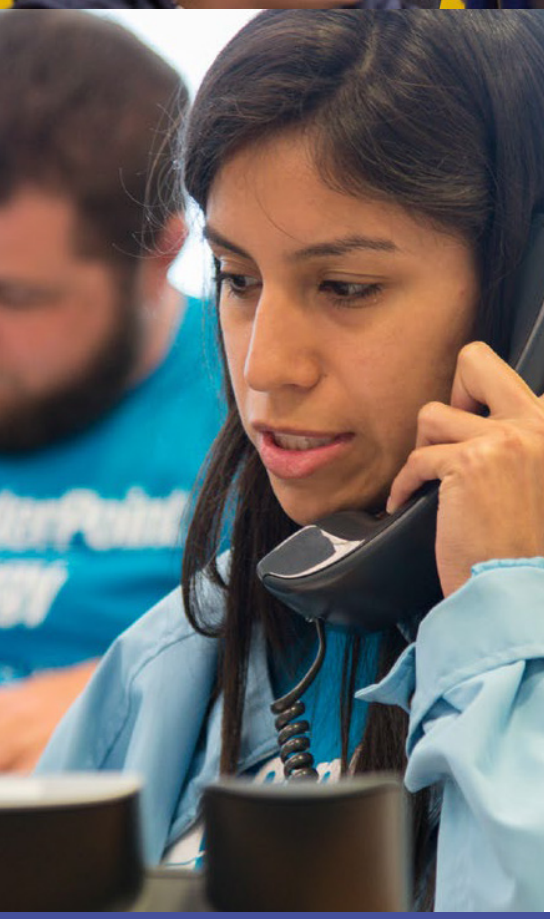
Though no special preparation is needed for this interview, prospective volunteers are welcome to bring any documentation or information that they believe might be helpful for the committee to consider, such as resumes, letters of recommendation, or previous volunteer experience.

Volunteer Guidelines & Expectations

The following guidelines have been developed by the HISD VIPS Program. They are designed to protect both students and volunteers from harm and to prevent even the appearance of impropriety on the part of the individual mentors, volunteers, students and schools participating in volunteer programs.

Acceptance of and adherence to these guidelines is mandatory to participate as a volunteer in Houston ISD. Please know that we appreciate your participation and that we appreciate your adhering to these guidelines. If you have additional questions, ask your school principal or campus VIPS coordinator. In addition to this assistance, following these guidelines and expectations will help you to have a successful volunteer experience:

- **Complete the required application, volunteer orientation and any other required training sessions.**
- **Be prompt and dependable.** Please notify the school VIPS coordinator if you cannot come at your scheduled time. Communication by e-mail is preferred.
- **Sign in and out upon arrival and departure according to school procedures**. Wear your issued RAPTOR printed badge.
- **Communicate.** Ask questions, share ideas, get to know the staff and other volunteers. The VIPS Coordinator is there to help — don't hesitate to call, leave a note, or ask for a meeting to discuss any problems or concerns that may arise. Every problem is solvable with respectful, honest communication.
- **Support the work of the classroom teacher and school staff.** The volunteer's role is one of assistance.
- **Be a positive role model for children and youth in attitude, behavior and language.** Let your conversations demonstrate respect for others, and avoid language that may be perceived as discriminatory, sexist, or offensive.
- **Dress appropriately and follow school policies.**
- **Be respectful of children's diversity of culture, language, religion, and background.** Don't assume that all students celebrate the same holidays (Christmas, Easter, Halloween, or even birthdays). Don't assume the make-up of a student's "family" (size, race, gender or financial resources). Practice correct pronunciation and spelling of students' names if they are unfamiliar. Show interest in students' cultures and learn more about those cultures.
- **Maintain confidentiality.** Respect the confidential nature of the knowledge you gain concerning the academic performance, behavior and personal information of the students with whom you work Discuss concerns with the teacher or tutor coordinator, not with other volunteers, parents/family members or acquaintances.
- **Maintain appropriate contact only in school setting. DO NOT** initiate contact with the students with whom you work with or their families outside of the school or program setting.



- **Protect privacy. DO NOT** ask for students' addresses or phone numbers, and do not share yours with the students.
- **Refrain from gift-giving. Don't bring gifts or food treats for individual students.** With teacher or program coordinator approval, volunteers may bring snacks for the entire class or group, or they may make a donation of books or supplies for the class or group.
- **Follow "safe touch" suggestions.** Volunteers **DO NOT** initiate touching a student (pats on arm or back, or for younger children, hand-holding, hugs, or lap-sitting), but may respond to student's initiation of appropriate touch.
- **Notify the teacher, principal, or social worker if a student tells you something or you notice something that may indicate his/her safety is at risk or he/she is in emotional distress.**
- **Know and adhere to school district regulations regarding Internet use and social media.** Silence cell phones during volunteer assignments.
- **Never arrive to your volunteer assignment while under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or use alcohol, drugs, or tobacco during your assignment.** Never carry a weapon on school premises or other program sites.
- **Fundraising, solicitation of donations, and using a volunteer placement for personal gain are prohibited.** Some program fundraising and solicitation of donations may be appropriate in collaboration with designated school and program staff. Only they are authorized to publicly represent the program and/or serve as spokespersons.
- **Promotion and/or solicitation on behalf of your own personal interests or those of your organization or business is not allowed.**
- **Follow non-harassment and safe workplace rules and regulations.**
- **Ensure positive closure.** If you plan on ending your volunteer involvement before the end of the school year, please notify your teacher and the VIPS coordinator. It is especially important that the student is aware of your final tutoring session. The student needs to be left with the clear message that you have enjoyed working with him/her.
- **Adhere to all HISD policies and procedures.**
- **Enjoy knowing your investment of time and interest is making a difference for students!**

Keeping Student Information Safe

All student information should be treated confidentially. Both state and federal law protect the privacy of student information, including the **Family Educational Rights & Privacy Act ("FERPA"). FERPA is a federal law that governs the disclosure of school and personal records for students.** As a volunteer you may find yourself having access to protected student information during the course of your service. We must keep all student data and information confidential pursuant to FERPA. Sharing student information with others may be a violation of the law. Confidential information includes any personally identifiable information regarding a student, including, but not limited to:

- Student's name
- Parent name(s)
- Name of another family member
- Parent address
- A personal identifier (like Social Security number), or
- A list of characteristics that would make it possible to identify the student with reasonable certainty
- Academic and health records
- Test scores and grades
- Family information
- Discipline or behavioral incident information
- Status or accommodations given an academic or developmental special need

Volunteers must respect the confidential nature of the knowledge you gain concerning the academic performance, behavior and personal information of the students with whom you work. Discuss concerns with the teacher or VIPS coordinator, not with other volunteers, parents/family members or acquaintances.

As a volunteer, you must not disclose such confidential information except as may be allowed and/or required by law or HISD policy. You further must exercise due diligence to safeguard against the negligent disclosure of confidential information by ensuring confidential information is not left unattended or unsecured in paper or digital format. If you have any questions about whether certain information is confidential or the disclosure of student information, ask campus administration for clarification.

For additional information about FERPA and to read the FERPA regulation visit: https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/faq/what-ferpa

Student Disclosures

As a consistent volunteer, you will potentially build trusting relationships with students. These relationships may lead to students sharing thoughts, experiences and feelings with you. Resist the urge to promise a student that you will not reveal confidential information to a parent or school officials. It may be necessary to reveal information to protect the welfare of the student and to protect you from violating the law. Although the student is free to share confidential information with you, there are certain things that you are required by law to tell the campus administrator. Any personal information learned from a student or student's files, should be held in strictest confidence except:

1. If a student confides that he or she is the victim of sexual, emotional, chemical, or physical abuse;
2. If a student confides that he or she is involved in any illegal activity;
3. If a student confides that he or she is considering homicide or suicide.

Should one of these exceptions arise, **you are required to immediately notify the student's principal AND appropriate agencies. In case of suspected child abuse or neglect, contact the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (TDFPS) at 1-800-252-5400 within 24 to 48 hours.**

Note on your calendar when this information was reported and to whom it was given. Remember, this information is extremely personal and capable of damaging lives, so do not share it with anyone except the appropriate authorities. If you have questions, please ask a campus administrator.

"Texas law requires that any person suspecting that a child has been abused or neglected must immediately make a report. If there is an emergency, call 911 and then call the DFPS Texas Abuse Hotline at 1-800-252-5400. You can also make a report online.

Professionals must make a report no later than the 48th hour after first suspecting a child has been abused or neglected or is a victim of an offense under Section 21.11, Penal Code. A professional may not delegate to or rely on another person to make the report (Texas Family Code, Section 261.101)."

Important Information for volunteers

Appropriate Interactions with Students

As a volunteer, you will be interacting with HISD students in a variety of settings over varied periods of time. Appropriate interactions as per HISD policies are outlined below:

Physical Contact

- Volunteers should practice appropriate touch: side hugs and high fives are appropriate if students initiate them.
- Restrict other physical contact.
- Use common sense.
- Remember that what you see as simple, friendly affection between you and the student may be viewed as something entirely different by someone else.

Pictures and Recordings

- Volunteers should not photograph or record any students who are not their own; without prior permission from the teacher and/or the campus principal.
- Volunteers should never post photos of students on social media. Both state and federal law protect the privacy of student information, including pictures and recordings of students.
- Volunteers should not photograph or record any students' work without prior permission from the teacher and/or campus principal.
- Volunteers should never post, distribute, or publish any photograph or recording of any student not their own, even if the teacher or campus principal consents, on any social media site.

Transportation

- Transporting a student in your personal car as part of your volunteer activities is prohibited. Do not put yourself in the position of being alone with any student in any vehicle.
- Students must be transported in a school district vehicle for field trips or in the vehicle of a parent or legal guardian.
- Sometimes a parent may provide written consent for you to transport the parent's child. That may not protect you from liability because you would not be acting within the scope of your duties as a volunteer.

Positive, Respectful Role Modeling

- Do not criticize parents, teachers, school personnel or guidelines publicly or with your student. If a problem arises, consult with your VIPS coordinator or the campus principal.
- Do not discuss your students and their problems publicly or with others. If you need help with a student, discuss the matter professionally and confidentially with the teacher, counselor, assistant principal, or principal.
- Address the student directly and with sensitivity, be honest and model an appropriate manner.

Respecting Boundaries

- Volunteers should never give the student personal contact information (email, phone numbers, etc.) or take student information.
- Volunteers and students should never meet outside of the program.
- Volunteers should never give students gifts, candy or any other item. Opportunities may exist for student recognition, but must be approved by the campus principal and designated staff.

Important Information for volunteers (continued)

In Case of Emergency

In case of an emergency on the campus, volunteers must follow the campus plans, policies, and procedures. Campus VIPS coordinators should include these procedures in the on-campus training. If there are safety drills, volunteers are expected to participate if they are on campus.

What Volunteers should expect from the VIPS program

The **VIPS Coordinator** on your campus has been designated by the campus principal to lead volunteer efforts. They are actively coordinating with campus leadership, teachers and the central VIPS office to provide volunteers with the support they need to impact student achievement. As a volunteer you can expect that the VIPS Coordinator will:

1. Be able to assist volunteers with online registration and check to ensure that volunteers are cleared through the background check process.
2. Provide training to share campus norms, policies and procedures. This should include emergency plans, drills, and procedures.
3. Assist with job specific training or connect volunteers to appropriate training depending on the program/duty.
4. Answer any questions or concerns a volunteer has about their assignment and provide guidance on next steps where necessary.
5. Provide an opportunity for regular feedback, assess the volunteer assignment and make any required adjustments.
6. Support volunteer service, including transitions and exits.
7. Be knowledgeable about how to get additional help.Volunteers and students should never meet outside of the program. Volunteers should never give students gifts, candy or any other item. Opportunities may exist for student recognition, but must be approved by the campus principal and designated staff.

Volunteer Opportunities

There are numerous opportunities at HISD schools to volunteer. Every HISD school has a designated VIPS Coordinator and a campus Contact Team that will share with you the ways family and community can support their school. Whether you would like to volunteer as a classroom/ office assistant, coach, tutor, field trip chaperon or at a one-time event, you are encouraged to contact your school directly to learn about current opportunities. Sample activities:

Office/Classroom Assistant

Assist the teacher with assigned duties and tasks in the classroom. Assist with assigned duties and tasks in the office.

Field Trip Chaperone

Serves as a chaperone during HISD-sponsored field trips to ensure students are properly supervised when traveling away from the campus.

Guidelines for working with Students in Tutoring or Mentoring programs

1. **All meetings and/or activities with students must take place on the school campus, or as part of a school-sponsored or school related activity such as a field trip, concert, or athletic game.**
2. **All activities with a student or students must take place in a room with open visibility to the public or on the school grounds in sight of school staff representatives.**
3. **Off campus meetings between the volunteer and a student are strictly prohibited unless under the direct supervision of a school official or parent/guardian.**
4. **Communication with the student through the use of electronic media is prohibited. The term "electronic media" includes all forms of social media, such as text messaging, instant messaging, electronic mail (email), web logs (blogs), electronic forums (chat rooms), video sharing web sites (for example, YouTube), editorial comments posted on the Internet, and social network sites (for example, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, SnapChat). Electronic media also includes all forms of telecommunication such as land lines, cell phones, and web-based applications. A volunteer may communicate with the parent of a student about volunteer activities by telephone, cellular phone or email. The volunteer will provide a copy of any email communication to a parent regarding volunteer activities to district staff upon request. If requested by the parent or district administrator, the volunteer will cease calls and/or emails to the parent.**
5. **The volunteer is prohibited from knowingly communicating with students through a personal social network page.**

Code of Ethics and Code of Civility

As a volunteer, you are also expected to adhere to both the Code of Ethics and Code of Civility.

Volunteer Code of Ethics

As a volunteer, I realize I am subject to the same high code of ethics as that of the paid professional. I expect to be held accountable for fulfilling my responsibilities. I promise to serve with an attitude of open-mindedness, a willingness to be trained, and a respect for confidential matters. My goal is dedicated service to the students of the Houston Independent School District (HISD).

- Be sure to sign in and out of the school and wear the required VIPS photo ID badge.
- Be a positive role model by acting professionally and dressing appropriately.
- Be familiar with all school policies, such as use of office machines, parking regulations, and emergency procedures.
- Remember that all school, staff, and student information is confidential per FERPA.
- Remember that it is the principal's decision when to allow volunteers into the building and what tasks the volunteers are allowed to do. This is determined based on the needs of the school and may differ from campus to campus.
- Never verbally or physically discipline or touch a student.
- Never allow a child to leave your care.
- Discussions with students should remain on-topic, school and age appropriate, and within the context of the nature of the assignment.
- Treat fellow volunteers, teachers, students, parents, and administrators with respect and kindness.
- Please remember the parent role is separate from the volunteer role. Please refrain from visiting your child's classroom or teacher during instruction hours.
- Notify, as soon as possible, the school's Family Liaison or Volunteer Coordinator if you must be absent.
- Discuss any concerns with the campus volunteer coordinator, principal, or the central VIPS office at **713-556-4877**.
- All volunteers will follow the Houston Independent School District Code of Civility.

Failure to follow the Volunteer Code of Ethics and the responsibilities thereof will result in the termination of my volunteer services.

Code of Civility

Civility is the affirmation of what is best about each of us individually and collectively, not just an absence of harm. Therefore, as we uphold a level of safety and civility, Houston Independent School District (HISD) requires that when we communicate, we (students, HISD faculty and staff, parents, guardians, and all other members of the community) will:

1. Treat each other with courtesy, honesty, and respect at all times
    - Listen willingly to each other, even when opinions differ
    - Share opinions and concerns with professional discourse; calm body language and mindful tone of voice
2. Take responsibility for your actions
    - Share accurate information
    - Manage negative responses (ex: anger) appropriately
    - Observe operational schedule
3. Cooperate with one another
    - Notify each other when we have information that affects student safety and/or success
    - Respect each other's time
    - Respond when asked for assistance
    - Resolve disagreements respectfully with relevant people present
    - Honor the school

As a Houston Independent School District (HISD) volunteer who values a safe, civil, and productive environment, I pledge to:

- ▷ **Treat HISD faculty and staff, colleagues, students, parents, and community members with courtesy, honesty, and respect at all times.**
- ▷ **Take responsibility for my verbal, written, and physical actions.**
- ▷ **Cooperate with everyone to ensure student success.**

CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENTS

Please acknowledge the following statements by initialing each sentence, signing and dating this form. Print and submit this signed form to your VIPS coordinator or submit it online by accessing the VIPS website at: HoustonISD.org/VIPS

Consent to Share Confidential Information

_____ I understand that the volunteer screening process includes both criminal background checks and reference checks.

_____ I give permission to have the results of these checks shared with placement sites considering my involvement as a volunteer.

Confidentiality Agreement

_____ I understand that in providing my services as a volunteer with HISD, I will respect the confidential nature of the knowledge I will gain concerning the academic performance, behavior and personal information of the students with whom I work (according to FERPA).

_____ If a student tells me something or I notice something that may indicate that he/she is in emotional distress, I will report that information to the principal.

_____ If a student tells me something or I notice something that may indicate his/her safety is at risk or they are in imminent danger, I will immediately notify the student's principal AND adhere to state law, by contacting Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (TDFPS) within 24 to 48 hours at 1-800-252-5400. For additional information **Click Here.**

_____ I also agree to not initiate contact with the students with whom I work or their families outside of the school or program setting to which I have been assigned.

Receipt of Volunteer Orientation Handbook

_____ I have received and reviewed the Volunteer Orientation Handbook and the policies therein and I agree to apply them to my volunteer service. I acknowledge that failure to follow these policies could result in my dismissal from the VIPS program.

_____ _____

Name **Signature**

_____

Date

HISD

HOUSTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
Hattie Mae White Educational Support Center
4400 West 18th Street • Houston, TX 77092