

**Maria Hastings
Elementary School
Volunteer Handbook**

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Welcome from the Principal

Dear Parents,

You, our parent volunteers are an integral part of our school. You add so much to the educational and enrichment experiences that our children have at Hastings and we appreciate you so much.

Our parents and staff on School Improvement Council have created this handbook to give you some guidelines about your participation.

We hope that these guidelines build your confidence and give you some direction so that you feel as if your time spent here has been worthwhile. Remember that there are countless ways of contributing to our children's education, whether it be making phone calls, attending meetings or coming into the school.

Whatever you do, please know how much you are appreciated.

Steve Adler, Principal

Introduction

- This handbook has been put together by both the Hastings School Council and PTA. We want to welcome you and help you make the most of your volunteer experience. There are so many different ways to participate at Hastings, we hope this handbook will help guide you.
- As a parent and a volunteer, you are an important part of the Hastings community. When you become a volunteer, your work takes on special significance -- though you are not part of the staff, you share their responsibilities while working with students.
- When you volunteer at Hastings, you help . . .
 - ✓ your child
 - ✓ other children
 - ✓ teachers
 - ✓ administrators
 - ✓ the community.
- We also encourage you to take advantage of our volunteer training. It is a great way to meet people and get started on the right foot.

Building a Strong Volunteer Community

Hastings has a strong tradition of parent involvement. Because volunteers are such an integral part of Hastings, it is important to keep our standards high. Hastings is a very busy place, with over 70 staff members and over 500 students. It is important for all volunteers to remember the following:

- Be responsible and safe -- always put children first.
- Respect confidentiality. Students and staff have a right to privacy.
- Be professional.
- Communicate.
- When things come up and you can't fulfill a promise, let someone know.
- Ask for help -- don't suffer in silence!
- Share your experience with others and encourage new volunteers.
- Try to replace yourself when you move on and help train the new person.

Commitment - *Once you become a volunteer others depend on you.*

- Try to pick what is manageable and interesting to you.
- Attend training sessions. They can really help you find your feet.
- Be prepared. Communicate with teachers and coordinators ahead of time.
- Be on time. If you can't make it, let someone know. If necessary (e.g. in the Library), try to find a substitute.

Getting Started

Before starting your first volunteer task, we ask all volunteers to be aware of the following points.

Safety - *Act as a good role model for the children.*

- Always sign in and out at the school office.
 - It is important for staff to know that you are in the building and it makes it easier to locate you in an emergency.
- Always wear a “Visitor” badge.
- As a courtesy to others, please turn off cell phones while in the school building.
- Complete your CORI* form and bring to the office.
- Always follow the correct fire safety procedures:
 - there is no talking during fire drills;
 - when in a classroom, follow the teacher out of the building and stay with the class;
 - when not in a classroom, quietly exit the building and remain at a safe distance until notified that it is safe to return.
- If you are taking food into school, please check with the class teacher or school nurse because some food may be inappropriate for children with food allergies.

** What is a CORI form and where can I get one? CORI stands for Criminal Offense Records Investigation. The Town of Lexington requires all adults who work with children to submit a completed form. The form is very simple to fill out and the information received is kept private. Forms are available from the school office and completed forms should be returned to the office. As of September 2004, a new form only needs to be submitted once every three years.*

Confidentiality

To make sure that students, staff and families feel comfortable, we all need to respect each other’s privacy. Volunteers must be especially careful to honor confidentiality. Breaching confidentiality can be hurtful to children, their families and the staff. It can also harm the good reputation our Hastings volunteer parents have earned over the years.

To help, here are some sample issues that can arise.

“Wasn’t it cute when John . . .” No matter how innocent, cute, funny or charming a classroom event may be, it is not okay to repeat stories about students. What happens in the classroom stays in the classroom.

When parents ask you questions . . . Many parents are tempted to ask you about how their children behave at school. This is especially likely if you are friends outside school. It is not okay to put volunteers in this awkward position. Don’t ask! Don’t tell!

If parents do have concerns, encourage them to talk to the class teacher.

When you see or overhear something . . . As a volunteer, you might see or hear things from staff or students which they would not want to have repeated outside the school. What happens in the classroom (or the hall, or the gym) stays at school.

If you have concerns about something you see or hear, please talk to the class teacher or Principal if appropriate.

When students tell you about their family, pet, vacation, etc. . . .

As students become comfortable working with you, they might decide to share something personal. You need to keep this information private, even if you know the child and their family outside of school.

When you have a concern . . . If a student tells you something that causes you concern, tell the classroom teacher. If you observe something that troubles you, tell the classroom teacher. The teacher is in the best position to deal with the issue appropriately.

Approach - Be professional and be positive!

- Strive to give each child the best you can and know that other Hastings volunteers do the same when working with your child.
- Respect each child as an individual.
- Respect your co-workers and all school employees.
- If working in your child's classroom, try not to single them out for attention as this may make them uncomfortable.
- Don't distract teachers while they are teaching. If you have questions wait until there is an appropriate moment.
- Honor your commitments and be on time.
- Find ways to be positive and notice things that are working well
- Try to make any criticism constructive.

Remember your time and energy is helping to make Hastings a great place to learn

Opportunities

Volunteer skills, interests and time commitments vary we hope you will be able to find something that you will enjoy doing.

Classroom opportunities: Some teachers may like to have volunteers help in their classroom or on field trips. If a teacher has volunteer opportunities they are often introduced at the beginning of the year usually on or around Curriculum Night, but new projects can arise throughout the year. If you are interested in getting involved, a great idea is to send your teacher a note.

School-wide opportunities: Hastings has many programs geared at enriching student experience outside the classroom. Volunteers might help at recess, in after-school programs, or in the library. Be sure to check out the range of opportunities, so you can find the perfect match for you!

One shots - *short time commitments; special one time events*

Examples: help at a booth on the day of Walk for the Arts or at the Spring Fair. Help out at Recess one time. Put up a display of student art or a display for the library.

Weekly/Ongoing - *some programs rely on regular time commitments*

Examples: help at the library, volunteer for the Big Back Yard program and lead 3-4 seasonal walks throughout the year.

Projects - larger commitments that may span several days or weeks.

Examples: Coordinate an anthology of school writing, help organize the potluck supper or plan a talent show.

ACT (Arts Created Together)

Projects

Help ACT bring musicians, storytellers, actors, children's authors, artists and other enrichment programs to the school.

Art Room

Ongoing

Help our art teacher on one or more projects throughout the year

Beautification

Projects/One shot

Help improve and maintain the grounds around the school building. Volunteers help with weeding, pruning, raking, and spreading fertilizer and mulch.

Big Backyard

Ongoing

Volunteers lead small groups of children on nature walks that are tied to their grade-level curriculum. All training and materials are provided.

Computer Lab

Ongoing/Bi-weekly

Assist teachers by working with students in computer lab for one hour every other week. Training is offered.

Educational Garden

One shot

Volunteers plant and tend the school garden throughout the year. The garden is used in grade specific projects/

Family Friends

Ongoing/monthly

Volunteers host a child from Boston once a month on a Thursday afternoon.

Family Math Night

Projects/ One shot

Volunteers lead fun math activities where a student and an adult partner participate in individual and group math activities. Each grade level meets on one night.

Field Day

One shot

Volunteers lead games at an all-school field day held in the late spring.

Fifth Grade Activities

Projects Volunteers help with fifth grade fundraising and celebratory activities (e.g. Halloween Party, Pool Party, Moving On Ceremony, Class Picture, Class Gift and Yearbook).

Gift Wrap Sale

Projects

Fall fundraiser Process orders and arrange for the distribution of the gift wrap.

Hospitality

One shot Help provide refreshments for school events or help clean up after.

Library

Ongoing Volunteers are trained assist the librarian by shelving, repairing, cataloguing, checking in books or assisting students. Choose a regular weekly or biweekly slot. Volunteers also assist during the book fair.

Math Club

Ongoing

Volunteers lead early morning math activities.

Recess Helpers

Ongoing/One shot

Volunteers help with fun recess activities (e.g. obstacle course, limbo).

Room Parent

Ongoing

Support classroom activities and teachers. A full year commitment. Responsibilities can include organizing class breakfasts, field trip volunteers and holiday events.

School Committee Liaison

Ongoing

Attend regular Lexington School Committee meetings, take notes for web site.

School Council Teams***Ongoing***

Attend monthly meetings and work on school initiatives.

Anti-Bias Team - Explores and supports ongoing projects relating to community building and respecting differences

- Other teams are formed as needed to implement annual school improvement goals.

School Directory***Project***

Volunteers create the annual school directory made available each September.

School Pictures***Project/One Shot***

Coordinate a photographer and date, or volunteer for Fall's Picture Day.

Spring Fair***Ongoing/One Shot***

Help coordinate and publicize the spring fair, or volunteer on the day of the fair. Fun booths offer a range of activities: hook-a-duck, Candyland, face painting. Held every other year.

Talent Show***Project/One Shot***

Coordinate students for the spring talent show or help as a One Shot volunteer for the rehearsal or the night of the show (set-up, clean up, backstage, bake sale).

Walk for the Arts***One Shot***

Help with our annual fundraiser for ACT. Help organize the walk, provide refreshments or entertainment for the walkers.

Website***Ongoing/Project***

Help with the Hastings website. Create pages about school events, All School Meeting or class projects.

YES Science***Ongoing***

Volunteers help with after-school science program for Grade 4 students. The 1 hour sessions run for 8-10 weeks between December and April. Two coordinators organize and run the program. 8-10 volunteers help with the weekly 1 hour sessions.

Sharing Knowledge, Tips and Ideas

Although Hastings has many special traditions, new ideas arise each year. To make the best of both, we encourage volunteers to share their insights with one another, with staff, School Council and the PTA.

If you see a better way to do something, don't be shy to come forward. Names and contact details can be found in the School Directory. Similarly, if you have a great experience from another school, share with the PTA your ideas about a potentially great fundraiser or exciting school-wide project.

After you work as a volunteer, you might decide to take on the role of a project coordinator. As a coordinator, it is helpful to keep notes on your events and to pass these along to future project leaders. Space has been set aside in the school library and we ask coordinators to leave an annual update on file.

Ongoing School Improvement

The role of Hastings School Council is to help advise our Principal in the creation of an annual School Improvement Plan (SIP). The SIP is presented to the School Committee and Superintendent. Parents, teachers, other staff and a community representative work together to identify goals.

Volunteers can provide valuable feedback in this process.

All volunteers are welcome to attend School Council meetings and learn more about the process.

School Council Survey Hastings School Council has begun an annual school-wide survey. Please share your input -- your suggestions will help define our annual School Improvement Plan!

Miscellaneous

Clean up

After you have finished any activity within the school, it is important to tidy up afterwards. For obvious reasons scissors, glue guns etc should not be left lying around. Classrooms and other public areas should be left clean and tidy.

Parking

Unfortunately, the school does not have a huge amount of space for parking. If you park at the school, please park in a designated parking spot. Please do not park in the fire lane or in the semi-circle in front of the school as that is needed for school buses.

PTA Closet

The PTA has a closet in the teacher's workroom where basic supplies of cutlery and condiments are kept. These can be used if required but please do not rely on them for class breakfasts etc.

Funding

If you need PTA funds for an activity, please contact the PTA for approval before you go out and buy supplies. The PTA will be able to supply you with a reimbursement form for all approved pending.

Publicity

We are trying to reduce the number of flyers that are sent home in backpacks. New guidelines about publicity are planned for Fall 2004 so please check before sending anything home.

Space

Hastings has wonderful spaces for volunteers to share. These include the gym, the stage, the library, the backyard. If you want to use any of these spaces for events or meetings, please contact the School Secretary in advance to request your space.

School Calendar

As a school improvement goal for 2004, Hastings has started a school-wide calendar. The aim of this calendar is make sure that important school events and fundraisers are spaced evenly throughout the year. Please ensure that any new events that you plan are included on the calendar.

Available Resources

- PTA. The PTA helps provide funds for many of the activities listed in this book. Some programs do independent fundraising. If a program you are involved in would like to start a new fundraiser, please contact the PTA to find an appropriate place on the school calendar.
- Lexington Education Foundation (LEF). The LEF is a private foundation that raises money to enrich public schools in Lexington. If you are interested in supporting staff in a new initiative, keep in mind the possibility of applying for an LEF grant. Information is posted on the web <http://www.lexedfoundation.org>.

Volunteerism Task Force

This book is brought to you by the Volunteer Task Force – a joint effort of the School Council and the PTA.

For School Council (2003-2004)

Lynne Stinson, Principal
Susan Campbell, Teacher
Barbara Lockwood, Teacher
Bette Piece, Teacher
Jennifer Hertzell, Parent
Janet Lane, Parent
Tammy Mulligan, Parent
Jessie Steigerwald, Parent
Maria Moxon, Community Representative

For the PTA (2003-2004)

Liz Cooper, Co-PTA President
Jess Lindley, Co-PTA President
Sarah Flatley, Vice-President
Ellie Muter, Vice-President
Naomi Hitchcock, Treasurer
Chris Kuhlberg, Secretary
Connie Gregg, Membership

Committee Representatives:

Margaret Fleming, Parent Volunteer
Tina Jaillet - ACT
June Hsiao, Parent - BBY
Joan Rutila, Parent - BBY

Useful websites:

- Hastings School: <http://hastings.lexingtonma.org>
- LEF: <http://www.lexedfoundation.org>
- Lexington Public Schools: <http://lps.lexingtonma.org>
- Lexington Education Association: <http://www.lexed.org>

Maria Hastings Volunteer
Acknowledgement Form

I have read this handbook, and understand my responsibilities
as a school volunteer.

Signature

Date

Please return completed form to the front office.