

I'd like to have volunteers in the school but I'm worried about confidentiality. What can I do to feel more secure about this?

Volunteers can be a very valuable addition to school life. The good thing is that the principal makes the final decision about who volunteers and in what capacity they work. Consider the following suggestions related to PIM when bringing volunteers into the school:

- Make “privacy and confidentiality” part of your orientation in-services and any written material that you distribute to potential volunteers.
- Have volunteers sign a confidentiality agreement.
- Although volunteers are privy to information in all areas of the school, instruct them that classroom interactions are highly sensitive and privileged.
- Volunteers you assign as chairs, co-chairs, coordinators or other leaders can help you by occasionally stressing the importance of confidentiality to those they oversee.
- Be vigilant – do routine spot checks to monitor adherence to privacy and confidentiality i.e. go looking for signs of non-compliance. Have your staff monitor this as well and report to you i.e. the school secretary who oversees office volunteers should provide you with an update in this area.
- Have only school board employees handle volunteers' *Criminal Reference Checks*. This includes efforts to obtain, organize and seek updates. Provide suitable envelopes which are labelled “private and confidential”, and to the attention of the principal.
- Volunteers also need to steer clear of students' OSR's.
- Instruct and remind your staff to be careful about what they say i.e. always maintain a professional stance because volunteers may be present.
- Depending on your school culture, you may wish to have a volunteer “welcome” centre that is apart from the staffroom.
- Volunteers who answer the school telephone should always identify themselves as such.
- Volunteers may mark quizzes for the teacher but the circumstances should be considered i.e. there is only one right answer and there are no subjective questions/answers. Again, privacy and confidentiality prevail. Principals and teachers should ask, “Is this really necessary?” before proceeding. You must think about your community's perception.

Is it permissible to have volunteers work with students' personal information, say in the formulation of emergency closure lists?

Yes. However it would be advisable that lists or records of related personal information be kept securely by the volunteers. Some may wish to take home the information. Others will prefer to work at the school. The principal must make decisions in this regard within his or her own comfort level. In any event the volunteers need to respect and maintain confidentiality and security, both of which may be indicated on the volunteer confidentiality agreement they sign. Emergency closure systems or “trees” have the end result that selected parents have a call list with personal information. They, too, need to understand and comply with aspects of privacy, confidentiality and security.

Principal's Best Practice: The example set by yourself and your staff with regards to privacy and confidentiality will go a long way in determining your volunteer program's success in this area. Be consistent in monitoring compliance of volunteers. Carefully choose which volunteer works in each area. Follow your professional instincts. The decision is yours.