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# ONcall

ready-to-use NEWS

## Engaging retired staff in schools

Schools lose a valuable resource when staff members retire, but retirement doesn't have to mean goodbye.

Many retired teachers and administrators return to schools in a different role — as volunteers. It can be a great fit for those who miss interacting with students and who want to give back in a meaningful way.

There are a variety of ways retired staff can volunteer in schools. Some former teachers enjoy helping with instruction in the area where they taught. Others are happy just to lend a hand wherever they are needed — in the office, a classroom or after school.

Some help at specific times, such as supervising recess or chaperoning a field trip. An option for others is to serve on a school advisory committee or on the school board.

The payoff comes from working with young people again and doing work that they enjoy and feel makes a difference. The bonus is being able to do it on their schedule, choosing the days and times they want to volunteer and then leaving at the end of their designated time without a stack of papers to grade.

While some retirees immediately jump into the volunteer pool, others need some time to travel and otherwise relax before they make any new commitments. Smart districts stay in contact with retirees, sending a yearly letter or other communication informing them about the district — and also offering up volunteer opportunities. That helps keep a connection between the retiree and their former district, so that when they are ready to spend time volunteering, their first thought is the schools.

That's an important point because there is lots of competition for retirees. Baby boomers are retiring in record numbers, and non-profit organizations recognize their value. Often it's the "early bird who gets the worm" — or in this case, the volunteer.

Better yet, connect with your potential volunteers before they ever leave their jobs. Prepare a flyer with volunteer information, and give to those who are retiring. Follow up with them in the fall, after they have had a few months to enjoy their new freedom.

There are a number of ways schools can reach out to former school employees.

1. **Work with your Human Resources department to develop a list of former employees.** Send them a personal letter inviting them to volunteer in the district. For best results, offer a list of possible volunteer jobs, such as tutoring students after school, working with an elementary reading group, or filing books in the library. It's easier for people to say "yes" when they know exactly what they are signing up for.

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2. **Work with your union representatives (both classified and licensed)**, and ask them to include information about volunteering in any newsletters that go to former members.
3. **Post a list of volunteer positions on your school and district websites.** Be specific about what's involved — days of the week, hours, description of the position and whether any specific skills are needed. People feel more inclined to volunteer if they are confident they have the skills and time to do the job well.
4. **Post volunteer positions on websites like Volunteer Match** ([www.volunteermatch.org](http://www.volunteermatch.org)). This free site connects you to potential volunteers not only in your immediate neighborhood but casts a net as wide as you want. For some volunteer opportunities — such as recruiting guest speakers from specific fields — you may need to look beyond your own community to neighboring cities.
5. **Invite former staff back for special events.** As part of extending a public welcome, invite them to consider volunteering. Have your volunteer coordinator or other designee ready to hand out a flyer with more information or to talk personally with someone who might be interested.
6. **Encourage current staff to reach out to colleagues who have retired** and invite them to volunteer. Design a postcard that staff can send out, listing volunteer opportunities and why volunteering is good for both the person doing the volunteering as well as the children they would be helping.

Recruiting retirees to volunteer is often the easy part. Keeping them can be harder. It can be difficult for former staff who once were giving orders to be taking directions on how to work with students. They may be uncomfortable — or maybe even offended — if staff have moved to new tools or different ways of doing things. That's why it's important to take time to talk with your retirees before placing them in a particular position or at a particular school to learn their background and their strengths and interests. If they were a dynamic reading teacher, it would be a waste to have them supervising recess when they could be leading reading groups or coordinating your Read Across America event.

Retired school staff have so much to offer as volunteers. They know the school culture, and they love working with young people. They understand the importance of education and the impact they can have. The key is to place them in positions where they can use their skills, feel respected and believe they can make a difference.

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*Contributed by Connie Potter, communications consultant*