

District Highlights

Newtown Public Schools

Our schools are enriched when parents and members of the community volunteer. Whether for 20 minute every few months or more continuously throughout the school year, volunteers play a huge part within the Newtown Public Schools, although very often it is not obvious just how much they really do. From volunteering for school events like Field Days and Book Fairs, to helping support after-school activities, to working in concert with staff and administration to improve student experiences, volunteers can be found working hard across the district.

In this newsletter, we get a chance to look at a cross section of the ways that volunteers make their mark on our school district. We talked with a couple of Parent Teacher Association presidents, touched base with a couple members of the Parent Educators Advisory Council, spoke with several volunteers helping with school-day and after-school activities, and took “A Closer Look” at a parent who has been heavily involved for years in multiple schools. We hope that you will enjoy hearing about all of the opportunities for parents and members of the community to make a difference in the schools and maybe even be inspired to jump in and bring new ideas into the district’s schools’.

Daniel Cruson Jr. and Deborra Zukowski
BoE Communications Subcommittee

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Board of Education Communications Sub-Committee

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At Our Core

Parent Teacher Associations

By Daniel Cruson

Starting 50 years ago when the National Congress of Parents and Teachers and the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers integrated to become the National PTA, Parent Teacher Associations became a big part of schools across the country. The Newtown PTAs do a lot for their schools, not just for the students but also for the staff and the buildings themselves. Katie Burke, the PTA president at Head O’ Meadow Elementary School shared that her PTA works with the school to finance and organize a variety of Cultural Arts programs each year including Christine’s Critters, science enrichment programs and a bilingual singing group. All of these are organized to reinforce what teachers are teaching the kids while supporting a fun learning environment. In addition to these programs, she also shared that the PTA helps to keep morale up with events and social opportunities such as Teacher Appreciation luncheons, family fun nights, Picnic at the Park, and Virtual Bingo Night.

Karyn Holden, the president of the Reed Intermediate School PTA, shared that her PTA also organizes events to bring families together. However there is a larger focus on organizing events, such as movie nights, that allow the kids to be a bit more independent than at the Elementary schools. The PTA also brings in speakers that can give kids an opportunity to explore careers, such as artists and scientists. She

shared that beyond programs, the PTA works with the principal on filling needs for the school that are not covered in the budget. For instance, the Reed PTA recently purchased an additional water bottle filling station for the school which was especially needed for the 20-21 school year. Finally, she mentioned ways that the PTA has shown appreciation for the staff on a monthly basis, including treats and assorted events.

The only way that these types of activities can happen is with volunteers. While many parents may be reluctant to step forward to help, thinking that it is a huge time commitment, Ms. Burke mentioned that there are many ways to help the PTA that fits into any schedule. Something as simple as attending a meeting and sharing a suggestion can make a huge difference in the success of the activity.

That is just one way that parents might get involved with the PTA at their school though. Ms. Holden shared her own journey to becoming involved in the PTA, which began at Sandy Hook shortly after the tragedy because she wanted a way to be more involved. She started by making time to go to Board of Education meetings and providing updates to fellow parents to keep them engaged. While her original intent did not include becoming as involved as she now is, the ability to have a personal relationship with staff while bringing smiles to the faces of the students resulted in her taking on larger and larger roles until reaching the position of president. Ms. Burke on the other hand had always had a desire to be involved with the school her children attended and felt joining the PTA was a good way to accomplish this. At first, she was a bit reluctant to join because of the stigma that has developed through the modern media's portrayal of PTAs, but after talking to current PTA members and understanding exactly what the PTA does for the school she was fully on board.

From bringing joy to the students at Newtown Schools, to showing support and appreciation for the staff that make the schools run, to fundraising to make all these objectives possible, the PTAs play a huge role in the schools. However, this requires parents with all sorts of views and experiences to work together and become a community. One of the final thoughts that Ms. Holden shared was that by becoming involved in the PTA you are getting involved in the school and meeting wonderful families and staff that you would not have necessarily met otherwise. Ms. Burke also shared a similar sentiment, as well as the fact that the PTA is happy to have people step forward and suggest new ideas. She added that there are many things that the PTA does for their school that would not happen otherwise because it is simply not in the school district budget. This makes parents' PTA contributions an important and ever-present part of the schools throughout Newtown.

I would like to thank Karyn Holden and Katie Burke for taking the time to talk to me for this article.



School Day Volunteers

By Deborra Zukowski

Three long-time volunteers shared their personal experiences as parent volunteers for their children's schools. Christi Carlson has lived in Newtown for about fourteen years, volunteering at Hawley School for the last ten. Amy Habboush has lived in Sandy Hook for ten years and has been volunteering for the last six at Middle Gate School. Kathleen Shope moved to Newtown in 2014, and has been volunteering every year since, first at Middle Gate School and now at both Reed and Middle Gate. While the rest of this article highlights only some of their volunteer experiences, it shows the wide range of volunteer opportunities available within the K-6 schools.

Christi Carlson first started volunteering when her oldest began kindergarten. She is an active PTA member as well as a general school volunteer. As the Hawley library volunteer coordinator, she sets up a schedule at the beginning of the year. Each class has 2-4 library volunteers, rotating months. When the class goes to the library, the day's volunteers join to help with checking books in and out, putting them away, and otherwise assisting the librarian during the day's lesson as needed. This year, she is also co-chair of the 4th Grade Celebration. She has ordered the 4th grade T-shirts, formed a committee responsible for gathering well-wishes and pictures for the yearbook, helped recruit sponsors, booked activities and more. She enjoys being a part of the effort because "it is nice to send the 4th graders off to Reed with a big celebration of their Hawley years!"

Like Christi, Amy started volunteering when her oldest entered kindergarten. She started as a PTA member, helping with Staff Appreciation Week, Breakfast Cart Monday, and Luncheon Friday. She served as PTA president for three years, though now continues as an active member at large. One of Amy's favorite activities is kindergarten registration. "It is fun to welcome new families to Middle Gate! As a volunteer we usually collect some information and medical forms from families and get to give parents and their incoming kinder a tour of the school. ... I like to be a friendly face for them to feel free to ask their questions." This year, she helped out during SBAC testing by coordinating snacks for all third grade classes, adding a preprinted note of encouragement with each one. Amy also helps make the school more inviting by decorating four of the bulletin boards at the school including the main one that greets the students as they enter.

Kathleen Shope began volunteering in 2014 when her oldest was in kindergarten, admitting that she was "a bit selfish" when she started. She wanted to make sure that her son "looked his very best" for picture day. She found, though, that she quite enjoyed helping all of the students during the day. So, every year she would volunteer and help them all look their best. In 2018, she was asked to chair the event and started getting even more involved. She then decided to sign up for "pretty much anything that I was able to do." One of her other favorite activities is Diversity Day that helps students better understand the challenges that face those with physical disabilities. During the day, students participate in activities like writing their names while masked and navigating a wheel chair around cones.

All three have been Room Parents. At the beginning of the school year, parents are asked if they might be available to help with classroom activities. Teachers may directly send a notice to parents, or the school's PTA may have a check box on their membership form. Room parents help plan classroom celebrations and assist with class enrichment activities. They also act as a liaison between the teacher and the PTA/parents for non-curricular needs. Doing so helps the teacher stay more focused on the students. All three have also volunteered at their schools' Holiday Boutique, another of their favorite activities! Every year, the boutiques provide students with the opportunity to select gifts for family and friends. Excited students arrive, peruse the gifts, count out money, and leave with the pride of finding the "perfect" gift.

Volunteering at the schools benefits the students by enabling more opportunities for enriching activities and events and by having familiar and comforting faces nearby. It helps volunteers get to know others who they might not have met otherwise. It creates communities between parents, teachers, staff, and students. And finally, it creates memories. Amy recalls being asked if she was the “boss of the school” as the students got to know her but couldn’t quite figure out why she was there. Christi remembers the parent/student tug of wars during field days and the look on the students’ faces when they see their parent in the library. Kathleen remembers the day she helped a girl free her brooch from her necklace prior to the class picture and then hearing a boy ask if his collar was proper.

When asked if there were something that could be improved, all three agreed that they would love to see more parents involved. Special events need people to plan them, money to pay for added expenses, and hands to ensure that participants have the opportunity to enjoy and learn. Right now, it’s basically the same group of parents, and that group tends to get smaller as their children progress from one school to the next. Having a small group means that the volunteers have more to do, sometimes more than they really have time for. Increasing the number of volunteers would help even out the workload and it would increase the opportunities for volunteers to meet new people

DID YOU KNOW?

There are numerous activities needing many different talents and contributions so there is likely a place for everyone. Whether for an occasional hour or continuously during the year, if you have the time and flexibility to join, please keep an eye out for flyers in backpacks or on social media. These flyers often request help for activities like field days, the holiday boutique, and grade-level celebration events. You can also ask your child’s teacher or other parents and neighbors about opportunities. And, you can join the school’s PTA to participate in their school activities and fund raisers. Also, district administration and the Parent Educator Advisory Council are reaching out to members of the broader Newtown community in part by partnering with the senior center.

Extracurricular Volunteers

By Deborra Zukowski

As alluded to above, volunteering while students are in school is very important for the younger elementary grades but such opportunities decrease in later grades. While there are opportunities to volunteer for extracurricular activities at all grade levels, the need for help and the breadth of what volunteers can bring to such activities expands as students grow older. This article highlights a few of the many extracurricular volunteering opportunities that are available across our schools.

Hawley Fathers’ Club

Aaron Cox has been a school volunteer and an active Hawley PTA member ever since his oldest, now in 8th grade, started at Hawley School. His middle child will be heading to Reed next year and his youngest will be starting first grade. All told, he expects to be a Hawley volunteer for about 15 years.

One evening after a meeting about four years ago, he and Principal Moretti were chatting about how there were very few fathers in the PTA. Mr. Moretti then spoke about his experience at a prior school. The school had a Father’s Club that organized annual pancake breakfasts for Mother’s Day. Soon thereafter,

Aaron began thinking about starting a Father's Club for Hawley. He put together a one-page flyer asking for volunteers to help plan a bird house construction event. He personally reached out to other PTA members to see if more fathers were available to help. That year, 4-5 fathers worked together to plan and gather the materials needed to build bird houses. On the day of the event 40-50 families joined, each constructing their own bird house. Participants enjoyed the hands-on activity and took pride in what they had built together. Since then, the club has continued to offer events including more "build it nights," pumpkin carving, trips to sports games like Sound Tigers hockey matches, car washes, and school-wide BBQs. During the pandemic, when group-oriented activities were prohibited, the club still hosted the pumpkin carving event delivering 75 pumpkins directly to family homes.

The club uses its events to help raise money for other PTA and school needs. For example, some funds have been used to purchase items for the Maker Space in the Hawley library and often there is money available to help fund Staff Appreciation Week. When asked what he had hoped the club would accomplish when he first designed that one-page flyer, Aaron replied that he hoped that it encouraged more fathers to become active in the school community and, more generally, that parents – both moms and dads – would see how the club (and the PTA) bring joyful evenings to Hawley students and staff.

Hawley Fathers' Club meets monthly during the school year at Hawley Elementary School, with seven to ten fathers joining. Meetings are typically short – no more than 45 minutes.

Newtown Middle and High School Theater Productions

Marie Armstrong has been volunteering with musicals and plays for about seven years, ever since her oldest first participated in musical theater. She currently works with Mrs. Matson, the Newtown High School Choral Director who directs and choreographs musicals, though has also helped out with middle school plays when her children were younger. Volunteering gives her an opportunity to take a break from the detail-oriented mindset needed as a project manager and lets her enjoy the creativity that comes with theater. It also introduces her to many other like-minded parents and volunteers.

Prior to volunteering with middle and high school theater productions, Marie volunteered in community theater helping actors with their costumes. She now uses her organizational skills and costuming talents to help Newtown students and to offload costuming work from Mrs. Matson. She guides the other costuming volunteers, helps plan the look of the outfits with the director and students, coordinates the costume/prop sewing efforts, and assists the actors with their costumes during the show.

Usually, most costumes are rented though some have been custom made. The volunteers may also make drapes, wall-hangings, and other fabric-related items. During the months prior to the show, Marie gathers with others who volunteer their sewing talents or are willing to learn how to sew to help out. The preceding weeks can be very busy as the volunteers meet to sew and craft – and have tea together. Their efforts are more than rewarded during the show as they help with broken zippers, relish the faces of the actors when they don the outfits, and interact with such talented, kind, and courteous students.

While students – especially in high school – take the lead both onstage and off, theater offers lots of opportunities for volunteers to assist. They can help students create props, build sets, apply make-up, and take photographs during the show as well as behind the scenes. In addition, they can help with advertising, ticket sales, lobby decorations, and audience management. Marie encourages others to get involved. "Find out what your sweet spot is and share." Like her, you may be well rewarded.

Newtown High School Sports Programs

Newtown High School offers 32 sports programs with a total of 56 freshman, junior varsity, and varsity teams according to Matt Memoli, the school's Athletic Director. There were 22 volunteer coaches for the fall-winter and spring seasons this year, including Newtown Boys Volleyball Varsity Team Assistant Coach Tony Nocera and Newtown Girls Softball Varsity Team Assistant Coach Lindell (Lin) Hertberg.

Tony Nocera lives in New Milford and is the head coach for the New Milford Girls Volleyball varsity team, having started the position about nine years ago. One day while he was officiating a girls volleyball game, Newtown Coach Sandy Doski approached and asked if he would help out with the Newtown Boys Volleyball varsity team. Though he had been cutting back on other coaching activities at the time, he respected both the coach and the program and so accepted the offer. That happened five years ago and he has been an assistant coach ever since.

As assistant coach, Tony does whatever needs to be done to help the team play well. For example, he oversees drills and gives the players feedback. He also gathers game statistics and publishes them online. And, he films every match for the players to use when college recruitment time comes around. What he likes best is that he simply gets to coach. As a head coach for New Milford, he knows how much non-sport "stuff" head coaches must do. They reserve space, handle emails and phone calls, address scheduling conflicts, and monitor the academic success of their student athletes. As a Newtown volunteer, he just gets to enjoy the players, the other staff, and the sport. So every year, he always looks forward to the spring volleyball season.

Tony volunteers with the goal of helping every player improve. In addition, with each passing year he feels he becomes a better coach. Both the year's experience and the camaraderie of other coaches who are very knowledgeable about the sport – and who are always at the ready to bounce ideas off one another – help him continue to grow as a coach.

Lin Hertberg and his wife moved to Newtown with their three daughters in 1971. In 1975, he started coaching for the Parks and Rec girls' softball team when his daughters began playing and continued coaching the team for ten years. In 1980, he became a coach for the Parks and Rec girls basketball team, continuing for 21 years. In recognition of his dedication and positive impact on the players, he was inducted into the Newtown Bee's Sports Hall of Fame in 2000. So, by the time he was approached by Newtown Girls Softball Coach Paul LaFrancesca in 2000 to join the coaching staff, he was an experienced and well-established figure in girls' sports.

From mid March to early June, Lin joins the team every day but Sunday (when they don't play). He helps the coach and players during practice and tracks game statistics, but mostly he's there to support the players both on and off the field. He often writes letters to the players cheering their accomplishments and cherishes the hundreds of notes he has received in return. Over the years, he has forged many long-lasting relationships. Even as we were sitting down for our interview a woman passing by, who had played on his softball team in the mid-1970s, enthusiastically said "hi" to her coach.

Lin has gone beyond the day-to-day duties of coaching. He has also worked to ensure the field that the girls play on is fit for a team of winners. He has donated dugouts to replace benches, a scoreboard, and team banners. When asked what he would like to see improved his answer was, simply, his age remarking "If you do something you really enjoy, time goes very very quickly."

DID YOU KNOW?

On June 5th Matt Memoli, the Newtown High School Athletic Director, presented Lin Hertbert with a plaque to honor his contributions to the Girls Softball Program while standing in the pitching circle of the newly named Lindell Hertberg Softball Field. "This really is the least we can do to honor and thank him for all he does," Matt said to us recently. Congratulations Lin!

*Newtown International Center for Education (NICE)*¹

Cathy Filiato has been an active volunteer for 16 years, helping out at Middle Gate School as both a class parent and reading literacy assistant. She was also active in the Middle Gate PTA and worked with another PTA volunteer to bring cultural arts activities and events into the school. When her children moved up to Reed, she helped out at the library. As her children moved on to high school and beyond, she shifted her volunteering focus to NICE.

NICE has been active in the Newtown High School for over a decade. Its mission statement, available at: <https://nicenewtown.wixsite.com/nice>, reads "The Newtown International Center for Education (NICE) is an educational organization that aims to prepare students and teachers to be culturally and globally literate citizens through academic learning opportunities and real-world experiences, cultural exposure, and discussion of global issues." It is led by teachers who cultivate relationships with international sister schools and plan cultural and educational trips for the students.

During the 2019-2020 school year, NICE planned to offer trips to sister school locations in Spain and China. During these types of trips, students stay with local families. It also planned a service-oriented trip to India, an ecological study trip to Panama, and a historic and cultural guided tour of England and France. Finally, it planned to host students from its Japanese sister school in March. Unfortunately, all planned trips except Spain and India were canceled due to the pandemic. The visit from the Japanese student delegation was also canceled.

Though the organization has not been able to sponsor any trips during the pandemic, the connections made earlier still live on. Recently, a fundraiser was launched to collect money for oxygen gas lines needed to retrofit a building that Newtown students had visited during the recent trip to India into a COVID treatment facility. While the event has passed, collections are still being accepted and future fundraisers may be organized. For more information, go to https://twitter.com/NHS_TWEETS/status/1397249862895382533/photo/1.

NICE relies on community support and volunteers. There is a complementary organization, the NICE Parent & Community Organization (PCO) that assists the teachers by canvassing for host families, fundraising to offset the costs of student trips, chaperoning, interviewing students who wish to participate in trips, and more. Cathy is the current president. She stepped up to help the organization in part because it provides students with the opportunity to personally connect with people from other cultures. She has also hosted families, finding it very fun showing the students around her town and state. After a earlier experience, she posted "Our family has hosted a student from Spain and two students from China. It has been an amazing experience for us. Through the exchanges we learned so much about other cultures and about our own. I recommend hosting a NICE exchange student, you will make a lifelong friend and have an experience you will never forget!"

Unfortunately volunteer support is waning, and the NICE PCO is at risk of being dissolved. Initially, there were eight volunteers (both parents and teachers) on the PCO Board though that number is now

three, including Cathy who will unfortunately have had to step back. Time commitments are flexible and meetings are held during the evenings. Most events occur in the evenings or on weekends. The NICE PCO is open to anyone who values the importance of preparing Newtown students for a multicultural future.

¹ The Newtown International Center for Education was previously highlighted in the “Past Efforts” article from the BOE Newsletter for Equity and Diversity, available at:

https://newtown.campuscontact.com/_theme/files/Board%20of%20Education/BOE%20Newsletters/2020-2021/District%20Highlights%2011_2020.pdf

Parent Educator Advisory Council (PEAC)

By Daniel Cruson Jr.

Volunteer opportunities aren't just available at the individual school level, but also at the district level. At the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year, Dr. Rodrigue convened the Parent Educator Advisory Council (PEAC). The goal of PEAC is “To promote a partnership between educators and parents that will embrace core values, further a common language for all stakeholders, and support District priorities in the best interest of students”. The council is divided into four sub-committees: Partnerships, Communications & Branding, Budget/Operational Plan and Diversity & Equity. All these groups count parents who bring a variety of experiences and expertise as an important part of their membership. Dr. Christianne Golesky, a member of the Budget/Operational Plan sub-committee, said that she joined right at the start when Dr. Rodrigue called for volunteers. As an administrator in another district, she saw it as a good opportunity to contribute to her community in a meaningful way. Dr. Monica Kwarcinski, a member of the Communications sub-committee, was another parent who also said she joined right at the beginning. She was previously involved in PTAs and saw PEAC as a great way to get to know the district and community members better.

Both Dr. Golesky and Dr. Kwarcinski were very excited to talk about the work that they have done on their respective sub-committees. Dr. Kwarcinski talked about her sub-committee’s research into communication apps and the pending release the Blackboard app for Newtown Public Schools. This new app, which is scheduled for release in time for the 2021-2022 school year, was the result of careful research and review to find a way to enhance communication between the school district and parents.

Blackboard will bring together all of the different systems that are

currently used within the district so that parents have one location to go for information on their students and the schools.

Dr. Golesky shared that the Budget sub-committee had been hard at work helping the community understand what goes into the budget and the impact it has in the school. To this end, they created instructional spotlight videos and she said that it was fantastic to present them to the community. She also told me about the work to create elections at each school, to get the students excited to vote for something that would have an impact on the schools. This created an opportunity for civic education and simultaneously got families talking about the importance of voting. By timing the activities around the Budget Referendum in April it created a school to home connection, getting the children excited and hopefully the parents would then be excited to participate in the referendum.



When Dr. Kwarcinski and Dr. Golesky joined, right at the inception of PEAC, neither was sure what to expect. However, both agreed that looking back they had no regrets and would jump in again. Dr. Golesky shared that it has been a great opportunity to see what makes Newtown unique and special as well as getting a behind the scenes look at how things are done in the school district. Dr. Kwarcinski felt it was a great way to be more involved in the district but cautioned that it requires all members to roll up their sleeves and be an active participant. Both made it clear that they were looking forward to continuing their work in their respective sub-committees and seeing what new ideas come to fruition through the collaboration between the staff and the parents.

I would like to thank Dr. Monica Kwarcinski and Dr. Christianne Golesky for taking the time to discuss their work on PEAC.

A Closer Look

with Laura Taylor, President of the NHS Marching Band and Guard Parent Corporation
By Deborra Zukowski

How long have you been a Newtown school volunteer?

15 years, since 2006.

Please share a brief history of your volunteer activities.

Sandy Hook School – As a parent volunteer in and out of the class room for six years and in a variety of other activities wherever I was needed with the time I had to help out including Family Fun Fair, guest storytelling, room mom, arts and crafts, school newspaper support, chaperoning, teacher appreciation, an active role on the PTA Board and more.

Newtown Middle School – PTA Board two years and an active volunteer with the NMS Jazz band chaperoning trips to the University of New Hampshire Clark Terry Jazz Festival and the CT State Fantastic Festivals. I loved hosting the teachers’ luncheon at NMS. It was a great opportunity to see the staff and to give them a little treat and a break in their day. My husband also chaperoned the DC trip with my son’s 8th grade class.

Newtown High School - For the last six years I have been involved with the Marching Band and Guard program at NHS and in the last three years have served as President of the band parent organization. The NHS Marching Band and Guard Parent Corporation supports year-round band and guard programs from Fall Marching Band and Guard, to Winter Percussion and Winter Guard. It takes the efforts of many parents to support the band and guard programs. We also have an active alumni group who return and support fundraisers year after year. Led by Director of Bands Kurt Eckhardt [now retired], there is a dedicated staff who generously give their time to the programs and our students. The band parent organization is there to provide support including chaperoning, pit crew which involves building props and moving equipment on and off the field each week, management of our annual home show which is the largest fundraiser and many other activities. This allowed Kurt and the staff to focus on the music, the performers, and the show.



In a much smaller capacity, I've also supported teacher appreciation events, SAT testing day, the Blue and Gold Jazz Bands and a spring musical.

How did you find out about volunteer opportunities and what did you do to let school staff know of your interest to help?

The PTA was a great place to start. They were very good about sharing information and encouraging people to help

Many teachers reach out to parents, especially in the younger grades, and I think it's important to ask teachers where they need help from parents. Sometimes it was as simple as sending in a few boxes of Kleenex and other times it was hosting an appreciation lunch or chaperoning a trip.

Get to know the Principal and ask what they need. I've been very fortunate to have known and worked with several outstanding Principals in Newtown.

Do you have a personal philosophy about volunteering?

I have a few thoughts here...

- Almost everyone can find the time to do something. Do what you can. Even a small contribution can make a big difference when it comes to helping a teacher, a program, etc.
- Get involved because it will help you stay more connected with your kids.
- Teachers, administration, support staff, and coaches give so much of themselves for our children, honor them by volunteering.

From your experience as a volunteer and working with others, what does it take to be a volunteer?

No experience necessary!

A willingness to help.

Find your niche, if you don't like to be out front, there are plenty of behind the scenes opportunities.

Use your talents. You'd be surprised what you have to bring to the table.

How have volunteers enriched classroom and extracurricular activities for students and staff?

I hope that by giving teachers a hand, it allows teachers more time to focus on the lesson and the students. Teachers give so much of themselves to their students, it's important to support them.

In terms of extracurricular activities, it's also been a great opportunity to get to know my children's friends, watch them grow into young adults. And, I cherish the relationships I've cultivated with parents and staff.

As a long-time volunteer, how have volunteer experiences/responsibilities changed as you moved from school to school? How have interactions with the students and staff changed?

In elementary school there are more opportunities to support in-classroom activities such as guest story time or arts and crafts projects. In the older grades there is more focus on out of classroom support and chaperoning.

At any grade level, there is always a need to volunteer with or take a leadership role with the PTA or other extracurricular activity organizations. Those organizations play a key role in fundraising, event planning, program advocacy, teacher support, and more.

Are there volunteers that stood out? What do you feel made them special?

I have had the honor to work alongside many volunteers and volunteer leaders in my 15 years as a NPS parent. Jen Taylor, Tracey Jaeger, Mara Street were three of the most committed volunteer leaders during my time at SHS. Each has a passion to help, talents to contribute (communication, organization, and leadership) and huge hearts – they care about others.

In my time volunteering with the NHS Marching Band and Guard, I’ve been blessed to volunteer with well over 300 families. The band parent leaders who came before me set a high bar and were very generous with their time as I adjusted to my role. The Board during my tenure has been a great support and we could not do what we do without the help of parents, grandparents, and sibling volunteers.

What advice would you give to current and future volunteers?

Get involved and if you are involved, look into stepping that up to a leadership role.

Get active in the PTA at your school or in the parent organization for your children’s activities! You will get to know other parents, be more aware of what is going on with your kids, and have fun.

Is there anything else that you feel should be included in this conversation?

Get involved!

Congratulations to Laura, a Newtown Public School 2021 Profiles in Professionalism honoree. And, thank you to those who nominated such a well-deserving person!



NEXT ISSUE

In our next issue we will be talking about the ways we help our students succeed after High School. We will take a look at scholarship opportunities, the Capstone projects, Portrait of a Graduate, and more!