

Hampton Council of PTA/PTSAs SPOTLIGHT AWARD

Jones Magnet Middle School PTA has one of the highest levels of parent volunteerism among all Hampton City schools. Part of our success this year has been the *active* use of our Volunteer Database, managed by our Volunteer Chair, Laurie Grant. Laurie has made it her mission to involve as many volunteers as possible in the activities at Jones, to give each volunteer a sense of purpose and belonging in their child's school. Our volunteers have been called upon to do several things to address school needs, improve communications, and improve parent-teacher relationship to enhance student success.

Why is volunteering so important? From the National PTA website lists these benefits:

- **Students** have higher grades, test scores, and graduation rates; better school attendance; increased motivation and self-esteem; lower rates of suspension; and decreased use of drugs and alcohol
- **Teachers** have greater morale (and self-esteem); teaching effectiveness (proficiency) increases; job satisfaction goes up; and community support of schools increases
- **Parent** communication/relations with children and teachers improves; self-esteem goes up; education level/skills increase; and attitude toward school and school personnel improves.

Many PTAs currently use a volunteer database, and many call on their volunteers occasionally to help with special programs. But at Jones, our volunteers have been called upon frequently – at least once a month, and sometimes several times - regardless of their personal relationships with those who are requesting help. We don't discriminate or allow ourselves to be a "cliquey" PTA.

When I first began working with the Jones PTA, I realized that many times when a job needed to be done by a large group of people, the person heading the task first called upon friends and family to help. This is understandable to a certain point; it is human nature to call on those you know you can count on when you need something done. However, this attitude doesn't always breed a widely diverse volunteer force, nor does it allow for new members to become acquainted with their school and PTA. To ensure inclusion, at the beginning of the year we collected volunteer sign-up forms from as many of our parents as we could reach. We made our volunteer forms available during all three orientation nights in August, put copies in the student's first day information packets, put the form on the school website, and we listed it in our PTA newsletters. Our goal was to give every parent an opportunity to help. We had volunteer activities for working parents as well as stay at home parents.

Our student population is just over 900, and we have 415 parent volunteers. That's an incredible response rate for a middle school! At the first board meeting after our Open House Night, Laurie gave each committee chair and officer a list of the people who signed up to help with that committee. Some lists had a dozen names, some had hundreds of names. Each committee chair and officer was told to be sure to contact each volunteer on that list *at least once* before year's end. Periodically, we remind our board to be sure to tap into their lists. We have made it our goal to not allow a single parent say at the end of the year, "You know, I signed up to help this year, but no one called me."

Here are some of the things our wonderful volunteers have done or will soon do at Jones:

- Worked on a bulletin board displaying the Core Ten words to help students perform well on SOLs
- Stuffed information packets for the entire student body for the first day of school
- Attached laptop bag tags to the 7th and 8th graders laptops for easy identification
- Sold tickets and chaperoned the SCA school dance
- Supplied donations to help us with our first ever successful Silent Auction
- Brought food in for the teachers' holiday luncheon
- Supplied desserts for the Occasion for the Arts evening event
- Planted pansies, watered, and weeded in our front flower beds
- Helped sell books at both the spring and Fall book fairs
- Sent in hats, scarves, and mittens to be distributed to children through the HELP HOUSE
- Have pledged to help at our Field Day, or Super Sports Day in June with the activities

From the list above, it is evident that Jones families care about their children and community. These volunteers are not just parents but also grandparents, siblings, friends and even Jones graduates. We can count on them for anything, and they deliver with a generosity and enthusiasm unparalleled in Hampton City Schools.