

More About Volunteer Screening and Background Checks

*Seattle Public Schools has a practice of screening all volunteers who are working directly with our students. This is most often done through the **Washington Access to Criminal History (WATCH)** background check system through the Washington State Patrol, but may also include reference checks or other screening procedures adopted by individual schools and programs.*

Please Note: *“Fingerprinting” is a more comprehensive and costly background check that is required of all paid employees of Seattle Public Schools. With the exception of volunteer coaches for sports programs, Seattle Public Schools does not require the fingerprinting of volunteers. Fingerprinting is highly recommended for those schools and programs that can adopt this practice logically and financially, especially for those volunteers with significant unsupervised and unstructured access to children, like some mentors.*

WATCH is Standard Practice

Screening volunteers through WATCH is a standard practice with agencies and organizations that serve children, youth and vulnerable adult populations in the Washington State. Other states have similar systems. The WATCH is a minimal, online screening procedure that looks at crimes against persons within the State of Washington. For more information about WATCH, please visit the WATCH website at <https://watch.wsp.wa.gov/>

When is the Screening Done?

Screening most often takes place before the volunteer begins his or her work with our programs. However, with proper supervision, schools may allow the volunteer to begin their work while the screening process is taking place, with the understanding that the volunteer's continued involvement with the school or program depends upon the results of the check.

What is Required to do the Check?

In order to perform the WATCH check, prospective volunteers must fill out and sign the Seattle Public Schools Screening Form, authorizing Seattle Schools to do the check. The full name and date of birth of the prospective volunteer is usually all that is needed to do the check. Volunteers must provide a copy of their valid Washington State ID, or show their ID to the person at the school who is responsible for the WATCH procedures. In certain situations, a social security number may be requested to sort through multiple WATCH results with matching names. In rare cases when a person's name matches too many results in the WATCH system, the Washington State Patrol requires the school to acquire a thumbprint from the volunteer and send the request through U.S. Mail.

If No Criminal History is Found

If the WATCH system indicates no criminal history, a copy is made and placed in the confidential files with the Volunteer Application and other forms that may pertain the particular volunteer. The school will provide the prospective volunteer a copy of the results at the volunteer's request. These records are considered by the state to be public employee records and therefore are cared for with the same procedures as paid employee records.

If Results Indicate Criminal History

If the WATCH system returns information on a prospective volunteer that indicates criminal history, the school personnel will first work to verify that the results match the prospective volunteer. If the match is likely, the school has a number of options (see following pages), and it will be necessary for school personnel to inquire further about the nature of the criminal history. In their decision, schools will consider a number of factors, including, but not limited to, the following:

Considerations:

- ❖ **Prior Disclosure**—It is important that any criminal history be indicated upfront when completing the disclosure piece of the Seattle Public Schools Screening Form. Failure to disclose criminal history upfront may be considered negligent or an intentional effort to conceal information.
- ❖ **Type of offense**—The type of criminal offense matters with regard to the level of risk the person poses to the children at school. Some offenses automatically disqualify the person from volunteering with our schools (see next page), while other offenses may allow for limited and supervised volunteer roles.
- ❖ **Context of Offense**—Sometimes specific information about the criminal history, such as timing, cause and effect, multiple offenses, progress since the crime, etc. may affect the decision process.

The school principal has final responsibility regarding the involvement of a prospective volunteer who has a criminal history. This may be done in consultation with the Seattle Public Schools General Counsel or other qualified personnel.

Options for Volunteers with Criminal History

Option A—Full Access

If the school principal, in consultation with other appropriate school staff, determines that the prospective volunteer with criminal history poses no greater threat to our students than other volunteers, full access to volunteer opportunities may be given. Normal levels of supervision will be provided

Option B—Limited Access

If the risk level of a prospective volunteer with criminal history is low, but still questionable, the principal may approve a limited volunteer role for the individual. Involvement may be on a short-term or trial basis, with an appropriate and defined role, and should be limited to only those roles with significant levels of supervision.

Option C—Denial of Access

Some types of offenses will automatically disqualify a person from volunteering in our schools (see below above list of bolded offenses). In addition, others offenses may disqualify a person depending upon the judgment of the principal and the information school staff are able to gather from the prospective volunteer and the WATCH System.

The WATCH System checks for the following offenses:

Crime against children or other persons:

- ❖ **Aggravated murder**
- ❖ **First or second degree murder**
- ❖ **First or second degree kidnapping**
- ❖ **First, second, or third degree assault**
- ❖ **First, second, or third degree assault of a child**
- ❖ **First, second, or third degree rape**
- ❖ **First, second, or third degree rape of a child**
- ❖ First or second degree robbery
- ❖ First degree arson
- ❖ First degree burglary
- ❖ **First or second degree manslaughter**
- ❖ First, second or third degree extortion
- ❖ **Indecent liberties**
- ❖ **Incest**
- ❖ **Vehicular homicide**
- ❖ **First degree promoting prostitution**
- ❖ **Communication with a minor**
- ❖ **Unlawful imprisonment**
- ❖ Simple assault
- ❖ **Sexual exploitation of minors**
- ❖ **First or second degree criminal mistreatment**
- ❖ Endangerment with a controlled substance
- ❖ **Child abuse or neglect as defined in RCW 26.44.020**

- ❖ **First or second degree custodial interference**
- ❖ **First or second degree custodial sexual misconduct**
- ❖ Malicious harassment
- ❖ **First, second or third degree child molestation**
- ❖ **First or second degree sexual misconduct with a minor**
- ❖ **Patronizing a juvenile prostitute**
- ❖ **Child abandonment; promoting pornography**
- ❖ **Selling or distributing erotic material to a minor**
- ❖ **Custodial assault**
- ❖ **Violation of child abuse restraining order**
- ❖ **Child buying or selling; prostitution**
- ❖ **Felony indecent exposure**
- ❖ Criminal abandonment
- ❖ Manufacture, delivery, or possession with intent to manufacture or deliver a controlled substance
- ❖ First, second, or third degree theft
- ❖ Forgery
- ❖ Or any of these crimes as they may be renamed in the future

Based on practice, not policy, highlighted offenses suggest automatic disqualification of individuals from volunteering with our schools.

Qualifications

Currently (August 2003), Seattle Public Schools does not have a policy that specifically establishes the types of criminal history that will automatically disqualify a person from volunteering with our schools.

The offenses highlighted above are based on the judgment of Volunteer Services staff, in consultation with other qualified school staff and other youth serving agencies that use volunteers.

Those crimes that are not highlighted include types of offenses that may or may not disqualify a person from volunteering. In addition, there may be circumstances involved with highlighted crimes that would allow exceptions to be made for volunteer involvement.

These suggestions have been established as a guide at the request of school district personnel.

Seattle Public Schools recognizes the overall priority of providing a safe environment for all of our students, and seeks to involve those adults who can contribute positively to our schools.