







Volunteering in Today's Schools

A Tool for Senior Corps Volunteers

As a Senior Corps volunteer preparing to serve in a school, you have much to look forward to. As part of your service, you will receive initial and ongoing training and support, but you may still encounter things that you don't expect. If you haven't visited a school since your own school days, you might be in for a surprise! School buildings, schedules, classrooms — and especially students — look very different these days. The following chart can help you anticipate some of the changes you will see. For a more indepth discussion of strategies for entering school cultures, visit: www.nwrel.org/learns/tutor/fall2004/fall2004.html.

<i>That was then ...</i>		<i>This is now ...</i>
Students sat in neat, orderly rows.		Students often sit in circles or other formations that are more conducive to interaction and collaborative learning.
Students called teachers Mr. _____ and Mrs. _____.		It's not unusual for students to call teachers by their first names, or sometimes to use a hybrid form, such as Miss Susan or Mr. Tom.
Students dressed modestly.		Many youngsters come to school to make a fashion statement. Depending on the school's policy, this may include short skirts, t-shirts emblazoned with ambiguous statements or logos, and ripped jeans, among other things. Conversely, many public schools, particularly those in areas with high levels of gang activity, are requiring students to wear uniforms. If you're working with older youth, you'll likely see some piercings and tattoos, as well.
Gum-chewing was strictly prohibited.		Many teachers allow gum in class, and some allow other refreshments and snacks.
Students spoke only when called upon — not out of turn.		Teachers encourage authentic, student-led discussion. While there are still ground rules requiring students to respect their peers and teachers, raising your hand and waiting to be called on may not be one of them.
Students were viewed as receptacles of knowledge imparted by teachers and textbooks.		Hands-on work is more common. Teaching and learning are increasingly based on experience, discovery, and discussion.

That was then ...

Talking to the child next to you was considered disruptive or even a form of cheating.



In contemporary cooperative learning environments, talking to and working with peers is encouraged.

Children learned to read with *Dick and Jane* books, or other primers that encouraged and reflected mainstream values and dominant cultures.



Students read books that more accurately reflect their cultural diversity and life experiences.

Students wrote papers and homework assignments by hand.



Students type their work on computers.

Students who acted up sometimes received a paddling.



Physical punishment for misbehavior is no longer acceptable. Most schools and education programs have a disciplinary system in place that may involve time-outs, written warnings, or other ways to manage student behavior.

Students filed in and out of classes in an orderly fashion — no running around.



Hallways are boisterous settings, filled with all kinds of student activity.



That was then ...

This is now ...

Bells controlled the schedule.



Many schools have eliminated bells and encourage students to manage their time through other means.

Students kept their belongings in lockers.



Due to safety issues, many schools no longer have lockers and students are required to carry all their books and gear in large backpacks.

Schools sometimes had televisions for viewing educational programs. Phones were to be used only in an emergency.



Schools have computer labs and a range of technology options available for students. Many students also have cell phones and schools have policies regulating their use.

Kids brought lunch from home or ate cafeteria food.



Don't be surprised to see fast food and soda chains with a presence on campus. Many big chains are contracting to be the exclusive providers of sustenance for students in exchange for a financial boost to the school.

Adults came and went from school buildings freely.



Any adult entering a school — staff and volunteers included — is required to sign-in and/or wear a badge or other form of ID. Some schools even keep doors locked for safety.

Moms were present in the school as “class mothers” and PTA participants.



Both moms and dads serve on the PTA, but as more and more families have two working parents, fewer parents volunteer during the school day.

