

SCHOOL HOST SITE INFORMATION

FEBRUARY 11, 2009

A. ORGANIZATIONAL INFORMATION

The Wisconsin DPI Family-School-Community Partnerships AmeriCorps*VISTA Project began in 1998 and is funded by a grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service. The grant allows for 19 AmeriCorps*VISTA members to serve as family-school-community partnership coordinators in low-income Wisconsin schools and a VISTA Leader located at the DPI in Madison. The project goals for the sites are to:

- Develop and expand ongoing collaborative partnerships between schools and their respective families and communities;
- Involve parents of students in learning at home, volunteering, communicating with teachers and administrators, and participating in school decision making and community collaboration,
- Create and train an Action Team for Partnerships to design, implement, and sustain partnership practices for the purpose of improving student achievement.

The project design is based on the research of Joyce Epstein, Director of the National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION & COMMUNITY LEARNING AND PARTNERSHIPS TEAM (DPI – CLP)

The Community Learning and Partnerships Team of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction administers this grant, which provides for AmeriCorps*VISTAs to work in schools serving a high proportion of low-income students. Under the leadership of the elected state superintendent, the DPI advances the cause of public education and public libraries and provides technical assistance to the public schools so that all school age children have access to quality educational programs that meet high standards of excellence and all citizens have access to comprehensive public library resources and services.

The mission of the CLP Team is to work with communities to ensure learner success and stronger communities through family - school - community partnerships. The CLP Team brings together staff and programs that focus on helping to build strong communities. The core team includes staff in

community education, early childhood education, nutrition education, service-learning, and family-school-community partnerships. The team works with other

teams and programs in the agency to promote the work of the VISTA grant, including reading, Title I, Family Literacy/Even Start, student services, SAGE (Student Achievement Guarantee in Education), school and public libraries, and special needs. The resources of the DPI are available to the VISTA sites.

The CLP team is part of the Division for Libraries, Technology, and Community Learning (DLTCL) at the DPI. Find the DLTCL website at <http://www.dpi.wi.gov/dltcl/index.html> and the CLP team website at

<http://www.dpi.wi.gov/fscp/index.html>. The Program Director, VISTA Leader, and Program Assistant are located here to help you with technical assistance with your site responsibilities and work plan related concerns, payroll questions, conference registration, and reimbursement for on-site training related expenses.

PARENTS PLUS, INC.

The mission of Parents Plus is to educate, train, and support parents, educators, service providers and community members throughout Wisconsin to strengthen families, promote student success, and achieve optimal childhood outcomes.

The vision of Parents Plus is strong and healthy children, families, schools, and communities in Wisconsin. The goals of Parents Plus are to:

- Coordinate and expand program collaboration with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (Including Title I and other No Child Left Behind Initiatives) and other key public and non-profit organizations that promote improved student learning and parental/family involvement in urban and rural areas throughout Wisconsin.
- Assist schools in developing effective parental involvement policies, programs, and activities that will improve student's academic achievement. (Develop and strengthen the relationship between parents and their child's school.

- Assist schools to design and implement effective parental involvement policies, programs, and activities that improve children's academic achievement
- Further the developmental progress of Wisconsin's children by establishing, expanding or operating the Parents as Teachers (PAT) program services.

VOLUNTEERS IN SERVICE TO AMERICA (VISTA)

AmeriCorps*VISTA is a national service program in which full time volunteers build infrastructure and design sustainable programs while living in the communities they serve. Started in 1965, VISTA was created to meet the needs of underserved communities and to address and combat poverty. VISTA is now a program under the umbrella of AmeriCorps, a national service initiative started in 1993. The Corporation for National and Community Service (www.cns.gov), also created in 1993, oversees all AmeriCorps*VISTA programs.

CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE (CNCS)

The Corporation for National and Community Service provides opportunities for Americans of all ages and backgrounds to serve their communities and country through three programs: Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America. Members and volunteers serve with national and community nonprofit organizations, faith-based groups, schools, and local agencies to help meet community needs in education, the environment, public safety, homeland security, and other critical areas.

NATIONAL NETWORK OF PARTNERSHIP SCHOOLS (NNPS)

Established by researchers at Johns Hopkins University, The National Network of Partnership

Schools brings together schools, districts, and states that are committed to developing and maintaining comprehensive programs of school-family-community partnerships. "Based on more than a decade of research and the work of many educators, parents, students, and others, we know that it is possible for all elementary, middle, and high schools to develop and maintain strong programs of partnership," explains Joyce L. Epstein, Director, Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships. Dr. Epstein and all of the staff will work with members of the Network to encourage, inform, recognize, and support efforts to improve and maintain school, family, and community connections that produce positive results for students. The Center and NNPS are located at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. Visit www.partnershipschools.org for more information on NNPS, conferences, promising partnership practices, a bulletin board, meeting NCLB requirements, and current research. **All schools interested in hosting a VISTA member MUST join NNPS.** The one time fee is waived if schools fill out and submit yearly update forms.

AMERICORPS*VISTA APPLICATION AND ENROLLMENT PROCESS OVERVIEW

The DPI and Parents Plus work together to recruit and approve VISTA members. Once a candidate is selected, Parents Plus Staff will complete the enrollment paperwork with the candidate and return it to the DPI before the deadline. The AmeriCorps*VISTA members' term of service is for one calendar year, and begins immediately following the mandatory Pre-Service Orientation (PSO) required by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), which will take place in Chicago.

B. AMERICORPS*VISTA POSITION DESCRIPTION

The overall goal of the DPI AmeriCorps*VISTA Project is to improve student achievement in low-income and underserved schools, thereby helping to close the achievement gap between low-income and minority students and their peers. The project utilizes AmeriCorps*VISTA members in the following capacities:

- To develop and expand ongoing collaborative partnerships between schools and their respective families and communities
- To involve families in learning at home, volunteering, communication with teachers and administrators, and decision making processes that affect students' education
- To facilitate an Action Team for Partnerships that designs, implements, and sustains partnership practices

RESPONSIBILITIES

Each individual project site should adapt the position description and work plan to the needs of the school and local community (these modifications need to be approved by the Program Director). For example, DPI VISTAs may be expected to:

- Participate in an assets mapping project in collaboration with school staff and community members.
- Help develop staff development and parent education workshops.
- Enhance relationships with staff, volunteers, parents, and others that will help sustain programs beyond the VISTA's term of service.
- Help establish an effective and comprehensive communication system for the school community.
- Help families understand school structure and to feel welcome in the school.
- Coordinate the recruitment and training of tutors and/or mentors.
- Communicate regularly with volunteers to discuss their work and address any concerns.
- Help in offering learning activities and events for the whole family.
- Include parents and other community members in facilitating children's learning outside of school.
- Recruit families and other community members to volunteer in school community events.
- Encourage parents to participate in school activities, including attending school board and site council meetings.
- Involve local service groups in the school.
- Recognize and celebrate community involvement in schools.
- Work with local AmeriCorps members to design and implement projects on national days of service (i.e. MLK Day, Make a Difference Day).
- Promote school partnership efforts through various media, such as local newspapers, radio stations, or community bulletin boards.
- Write grant proposals to support partnership activities.

C. STAKEHOLDER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

*The following information outlines the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders in the Wisconsin DPI Family-School-Community Partnerships AmeriCorps*VISTA Project.*

DPI – CLP TEAM

- The DPI allocates a monthly living allowance of \$865/month. Checks are deposited directly into

QUALIFICATIONS

VISTA candidates must have

- A bachelor's degree.
- Excellent oral and written communication skills.
- Computer and e-mail proficiency.
- Excellent organizational skills.
- Patience and flexibility.
- Entrepreneurial skills (to seek funding).
- Relationship-building skills.
- Team and leadership skills.
- Research skills.
- A willingness to take initiative to promote partnerships.
- Commitment to the mission of the project and its impact on schools and communities.

The VISTA reports directly to his or her Site Supervisor but will also be responsible for communicating regularly with the DPI and VISTA Leader through bi-weekly and quarterly reporting and other progress assessments. Additionally, VISTAs are encouraged to network and share resources with fellow DPI VISTA members through e-mail, occasional regional and statewide meetings, and by phone.

BENEFITS

To support them in their service, AmeriCorps*VISTAs receive:

- A living allowance of \$865/month.
- Health benefits.
- Child care, if eligible (max \$400/month).
- Option of an end-of-year cash stipend of \$1,200 or an Education Award of \$4,725.
- Ten personal leave days and ten sick days.
- An option to purchase life insurance.
- A relocation allowance (depending on the distance of the move).
- Training opportunities

the VISTAs' bank accounts bi-weekly. This money comes from the project's CNCS grant.

- The DPI screens all candidates and coordinates enrollment procedures for selected VISTA candidates by forwarding all enrollment paperwork to the CNCS.

- The DPI helps Parents Plus in recruiting candidates for available positions through the online AmeriCorps recruitment system and other venues.
- The DPI provides an orientation at the beginning of the year and various training opportunities throughout the year for VISTAs and their Site Supervisors.
- The DPI provides networking opportunities to members via e-mail, regional meetings, and various trainings.
- The DPI conducts regional and individual site visits.
- The DPI coordinates monthly communication with Parents Plus and School Site Supervisors.
- The DPI acts as a liaison between sites and the CNCS to provide information to all VISTAs and Supervisors.
- When VISTAs elect the end-of-year cash stipend of \$1,200, the DPI provides the stipends through the grant from CNCS.
- The DPI provides information on grant opportunities, workshops, and other topics.
- The Program Director and VISTA Leader provide technical support and guidance.
- The DPI develops a memorandum of understanding between all stakeholders.

PARENTS PLUS

- Recruit, interview, check references for, and select VISTA members and school host sites.
- Conduct an On-Site Orientation and Training (OSOT) to acquaint each VISTA with Parents Plus, staff members, schools, and position.
- Attend VISTA Supervisor Training (before the VISTA's service begins), as well as certain required trainings with their VISTAs during the year.
- Assist school in identifying a School Site Supervisor who will provide daily supervision. Provide regular guidance and training for VISTAs.
- Communicate with VISTAs and School Site Supervisors on a bi-weekly basis.
- Provide office space with access to a phone, voicemail, printer, fax machine, computer, and the Internet as well as an individual e-mail account/address to the VISTA.
- Allocate a budget to cover work-related transportation costs and other appropriate expenses for members and supervisors to participate in agreed-upon activities and training.

SCHOOL SITE

- School Site Supervisors must attend the DPI Orientation for VISTAs and supervisors at the beginning of the VISTA year, as well as certain required trainings with their VISTA during the year (see application for details). All costs incurred by Supervisors must be covered by the DPI.
- School Site Supervisors are strongly encouraged to attend VISTA Supervisor Training (before the VISTA's term of service begins). Costs incurred are covered by CNCS.
- School Site Supervisors must design an On-Site Orientation and Training (OSOT) to acquaint their VISTA with the school, staff, community, and position. Obtaining "buy-in" for the VISTA position prior to applying is necessary for the success of the program.
- School host sites must provide office space with access to a phone, voicemail, printer, fax machine, computer, and the Internet.
- School host sites have the option of contributing a set amount to the DPI for reimbursing the indicated expenses. Upon request of need from the site, the DPI will provide financial assistance within its budget capacity.
- School Site Supervisors have the option to modify the Work Plan for their VISTA *prior* to his/her arrival with approval from the DPI and Parents Plus and are required to ensure that it is followed throughout the year.
- Supervisors must be available to meet with their VISTA to discuss projects, goals, and actions, and communicate with Parents Plus on a bi-weekly basis.
- School host sites must not expect or ask VISTAs to perform direct service activities at their site (i.e. work that is normally done by a paid staff member, such as substitute teaching, answering phones, lunch/recess/bus duty, etc.; or by a volunteer, such as copying, filing, data entry, etc.).
- New school host sites must complete a Host Site Application when applying for a VISTA member through Parents Plus; returning school host sites must complete a Continuing Host Site Application for each year they apply for a VISTA.

NOTE: *School host sites may provide additional benefits, such as room and board, school lunches, tuition waiver, scholarship, subsidized housing, or utility assistance; however, sites may not supplement or increase the living allowance provided by the DPI CLP or provide any other monetary compensation (per federal law).*