Volunteers in Williamson County Schools
Questions and Answers

Why do our volunteers need background checks?

One of our main priorities is to keep children safe. Before these guidelines and procedures were implemented in March 2010, anyone could walk into any of our buildings, offer to volunteer, and could be left alone with a child. We surveyed other Tennessee districts similar to Williamson County and discovered that all of them, except for WCS and one other, required background checks of their volunteers. Since there are three tiers of volunteers, there are many opportunities for volunteers to work in our schools even if they do not want to go through the fingerprinting background check process. The background check is only for volunteers who will be working with children in an unsupervised setting.

Who made this decision?

Superintendent Dr. Mike Looney and staff made the decision. The Volunteer Guidelines and Procedures document is an administrative procedure. It is not a School Board policy.

How do I get the volunteer approval process started?

We have created a three-tiered guideline to protect children and to continue to maintain the high levels of volunteerism that we enjoy in our district. The new guidelines will not affect all volunteers. Samples of the three tiers include:

Tier 1-Someone who volunteers occasionally and in a highly public setting with little or no contact with students and who are under constant supervision by personnel of Williamson County Schools will not be required to complete a volunteer application or a criminal background check. A volunteer fitting this example might be someone working at a school field day or fundraising event or someone working in the concession stand or making an occasional classroom visit. If you plan to volunteer at the Tier 1 level, you don’t need to complete any paperwork.

Tier 2-Regular volunteers with student contact under constant supervision of Williamson County personnel must complete a volunteer application and a confidentiality agreement acknowledging FERPA (student confidentiality) requirements. A volunteer fitting this example might include a room parent, class readers, front door reception, front office volunteers, and single day field trip chaperones at the middle and high school level where it is assured that students will always be supervised by a Williamson County school employee. However, at the principal’s discretion at middle and high schools they can request that their Tier II volunteers be fingerprinted for duties that they are fulfilling at the schools or at school events.

Tier 3-Volunteers who have unsupervised contact with students on or off campus will be required to:

1. Complete a volunteer application and confidentiality agreement, which is to be returned to the school, and
2. Have a criminal background fingerprint check (Volunteer Fingerprint Process).

A volunteer fitting this example would be someone providing one-on-one tutoring, an overnight field trip chaperone, or a single day field trip chaperone where there is no direct supervision by a
Williamson County school employee. All elementary field trips are considered Tier 3. For the most current locations you can log onto, http://www.identogo.com. A report will be returned to Williamson County Schools Human Resources Department. The fingerprint check is a one-time check even if your child transitions to a new school, unless there is just cause.

What type of background check is the district conducting?

TBI/FBI nationwide criminal background check through the National Crime Information Center, NCIC.

When does this take effect?

Dr. Looney has asked school principals to implement the procedure in the current year, based on the schedule of that school’s activities.

Could the district use a background check that was done by my church, another agency, or employer?

Possibly, if the fingerprint checks was through the FBI’s database within the past six months. You should contact the government agency or employer to obtain a copy of the fingerprint background check (NCIC rap sheet; results page) and bring the copy to the Human Resources Department at the Central Office, 1320 West Main Street, Suite 202, Franklin. They will determine if your fingerprint background check is appropriate.

How much does it cost?

Effective September 29, 2016, the cost for fingerprints will be $30.15, payable by money order. You may pay by credit or debit card by registering online before going to a fingerprint location. (Volunteer Fingerprint Process)

Where do you go to get your fingerprints completed?

There are a number of locations in Middle Tennessee, including one in Franklin. For the most current locations you can log onto, http://www.identogo.com/locations. Simply follow the Volunteer Fingerprint Process directions found on this page.

Who determines if someone is “cleared” to volunteer and how will the schools know?

The WCS Human Resources Department will receive the reports from the background checks and forward them to Dr. Looney if a report reveals any criminal history. Dr. Looney will evaluate the report based on the standards in paragraph B of the procedure https://www.wcs.edu/wp-content/pdf/BoardPolicies/4501p.pdf. The Human Resources Department will be compiling a list of Tier 3 volunteers that will be shared with the schools. Individual schools will keep a separate list of Tier 2 volunteers at the school site.

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Do I have to get a fingerprint check every year?

We have structured the Tier 3 check as a one-time check that will clear the volunteer from that point forward, with the caveat that each volunteer is responsible for reporting any subsequent events. The fingerprint check is a one-time check even if your child transitions to a new school, unless there is just cause.

Is fingerprinting truly necessary or would a background check be a sufficient place to start?

A fingerprinting background check will reveal any criminal history that is in the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database that is maintained by the FBI. This is the same check that is required of employees and contractors, and this is the information that has been established through appropriate legal due process and can be reasonably relied on for accuracy. Also, this is the information that is relevant to us for volunteer work where the volunteer might be one-on-one with children. We have not found a more reliable criminal background check.

Who is maintaining the records?

The WCS Human Resources Department.

What privacy safeguards are in place? Who will be privy to the information?

WCS will maintain these reports. Social security numbers will be safeguarded and will not be included on information that is shared with the schools. However, the information obtained from these searches includes public records from across the nation. Because of this, WCS cannot guarantee that the information is confidential. If an individual is concerned that a criminal background check will reveal something that they do not want disclosed, they should not volunteer for the Tier 3 work described in the procedure. WCS will not disclose this to any member of the public unless required by law to do so, but Tennessee law does require disclosure of most government records to members of the public upon written request. You can further safeguard your personal identifying information by registering with Identogo Systems yourself and paying online.

Can one who is denied appeal a decision?

There will be no appeal procedure since there is no legal right to volunteer; the schools can always refuse volunteer work absent discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, age, sex, or disability. However, the prospective volunteer can certainly talk with the Principal or Superintendent if the prospective volunteer has any questions.

Must a parent driving students to an event, where bus transportation is not provided, be fingerprinted?

Under Williamson County Government’s standards, if the schools are not transporting students to an event, parents must arrange for their child’s transportation. Those arrangements are made entirely outside the fingerprinting procedure since the schools do not make these arrangements.