

GUEST OPINION

Retirees still gain much from classrooms

Volunteers add passion, experience to schools

By Jen Wimmer

Renee Wilberg, a Fair Park Elementary kindergarten teacher, recently shared the story of four retirees with backgrounds in education who volunteer in her classroom. According to Mrs. Wilberg, their positive impact on her students is a difference maker.

As a school district, we recognize how important it is to have volunteers provide their gift of time, enthusiasm, or skills. We also welcome local businesses or nonprofit organizations for partnerships to provide their unique knowledge, skills, and expertise to our students in a way that may help the students find a career path and/or gain a greater appreciation for and knowledge of their community.

Ruth Ruh retired as an administrative assistant at West Bend East High School in 2016 where she loved the fast pace and working with the students and staff. Once retired, she missed that. So volunteering at Fair Park Elementary School was an easy choice. Ruh told Mrs. Wilberg, "Kindergarten was the right fit for me; the kids are adorable. I receive so much more than I give. Volunteering has been a game changer for me." Penny Moniz also volunteers at Fair Park. She shared that she taught for more than 33 years, most of the time in middle school language arts in Brandon. In addition, another of Mrs. Wilberg's volunteers, Gloria Patoka, was an accounts payable assistant at the



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School District of Whitefish Bay, where her office was in the high school and she interacted with students every day.

Joyce Diels also volunteers for Mrs. Wilberg. She is a retired mathematics teacher at the

elementary, secondary, and collegiate levels. She even taught future elementary and secondary teachers at Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota. What we find in volunteers in the West Bend Schools is an enthusiasm that is contagious and an example of selflessness that all children can learn from. Joyce Diels told Mrs. Wilberg, "I love to see students make connections between what they know and what they have recently experienced. The joy they express when they can assist a fellow student with a new concept and the enthusiasm they display as they develop a love for learning is amazing."

Says Mrs. Wilberg, "I am so grateful and fortunate to have four amazing women that come in every week to read and work with students. These women are patient, loyal, kind, trustworthy, and skilled. With their education backgrounds, they have found that volunteering helps them stay connected to the needs of our children."

Volunteers can come from those who are retired, like these four ladies, or people with flexible work

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schedules. Parent teacher organizations meet in the evenings to make attendance easier and some even offer free child care during the meeting. How about seeing a new place like a farm, rock quarry, or petting zoo through the eyes of a child? Volunteer for a field trip and you can. The rewards are worth it.

From Mrs. Wilberg, "I have always had an open-door policy in my classroom. Because of this, I recruit, encourage, and welcome volunteers to help join us in creating a warm learning community with and for all ages."

Whether it is parent teacher organizations, booster clubs, event staff, field trips, or in the classrooms, volunteers are invaluable to our students and staff. If you would like to learn more about volunteering in a West Bend School District school or setting up a partnership, please review our website at west-bend.k12.wi.us or contact Cindy Gallun at cgallun@wbsd-schools.org or 262-306-4800.

(Jen Wimmer is superintendent of the West Bend School District.)