



CHARLES MENCHACA/WAUSAU DAILY HERALD

Volunteer Becky Jackson hands a bag of popcorn to second-grader Keeton Opper at Lincoln Elementary School in Wausau on Friday. Lincoln is one of four pilot schools in a revamped volunteer program.

Schools upgrade system to recruit, retain volunteers

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A revamped volunteer program this year in the Wausau School District has brought in some first-time helpers and others willing to increase their involvement, program organizers said.

The program, called Our Network for Education, has brought 100 volunteers to four schools since Sept. 1 and during the pilot phase of the program. It is unclear how many of that group are new volunteers, but program coordinator Roxane Hagedorn said she has spoken to applicants who have no direct connection to the district.

Volunteer Sarah Nilles on Wednesday helped students check out books at Franklin Elementary School. Nilles, 27, has twin boys at the school and plans to sign up for additional volunteer opportuni-

How to sign up

To become a volunteer in the Wausau School District, log on to www.wausau.k12.wi.us/departments/volnet/index.htm or call 261-0584.

ties. She is not a first-time volunteer, however.

In the past, the volunteer program was not centralized or available online, making it difficult for parents and others to know the needs across the district or whom to contact.

"It was just more convenient and allowed me to take a look at everything going on through the year," Nilles said of the new online volunteer system. "It helped me to be informed."

Nilles said the revamped application process might encourage more people to assist. Volunteers at Colonial Manor in Wausau, for

example, are more likely to help in the Wausau schools now that they know where they are needed, she said. Nilles is a social worker at Colonial Manor.

Lincoln Elementary School kindergarten teacher Ann Miller said she would not be able to build gingerbread houses with students every year without volunteers.

Students also can learn from the volunteers, Miller said. A woman once shared stories with Miller's students about life in Taiwan, and another woman talked about her visit to the ocean.

Students also get to spend more time with their families if their families volunteer at the school.

Children will be motivated by seeing their parents involved at their school, and the parents can build a rapport with their child's classmates, said Becky Jackson, 35, a Lincoln Elementary volunteer and parent.