

WCS Volunteer Network

Bill Kovach
Warsaw Community Schools

Niccole Pierre
Grace College

Lisa Harman
Biomet

John Armacost
DePuy

April 24, 2007



Abstract

Warsaw Community Schools covers a district with seven elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. Historically, volunteers have always been a key element of the total solution WCS provides for the education of its students. While that is not likely to change, in recent years other changes have occurred that may influence the growing importance of volunteers and the way in which volunteering may be managed in the future. Some of these recent changes forecast an increase in the importance and influence of educational mandates, with a corresponding lack of complete funding and support for those mandates. While there are many cited advantages to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, a consistent criticism of the federal law is the lack of complete funding to support the requirements on educational institutions¹.

Another example is Indiana Senate Bill 567, which in its current form would require school corporations and charter schools that offer kindergarten programs to offer full-day kindergarten programs for all students by the 2009-2010 school year. While, currently, this bill has support in the Legislature, one point of contention is the lack of clarity on the funding to support the initiative². Additionally, House Enrolled Act 1001, commonly referred to as the “2 Percent Circuit Breaker”, may further exacerbate the resource and financial support shortfall³.

At the same time schools wrestle with these resource and funding challenges, businesses are placing increased emphasis on skill sets relevant in today’s job market. Such skill sets include *collaboration & teamwork, project-based work experience, and communication & presentation skills*. While strong cases can be made supporting the value of this *marketable and job relevant* education, it places an emphasis on skills that go beyond current educational testing standards and would require more reliance on the *expertise centers* for such skill sets, primarily the very *businesses* that demand them.



WCS Volunteer Network

In this paper, an argument will be presented that these trends only increase the importance of the volunteer; that the value of this resource is sufficient to make a substantial difference in the school corporation's ability to meet the upcoming demands; and that proper management and the broadest possible access to this key resource is essential for future success. In essence, we will present a means to achieve these ends, more effectively than in the past, by leveraging technology. The goal: for Warsaw Community Schools to gain broader access to and more effective management of that potentially vast resource pool, volunteers.



Why Volunteer?

As the heading suggests, volunteers must have some motivation to go through the effort. Many take time out of work or family schedules and give freely to a variety of causes. While the opportunities are as varied as an individual's specific reasons for donating their time, there are some common themes. In research conducted, by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, some of the most common reasons for volunteering include the following⁴:

- It's a cause I care about
- It fits my schedule
- I can make a difference
- I understand the expectations

While it may be obvious that *passion for a particular cause* is a key motivator for volunteers, it is also evident from the study that other personal considerations are important. As we will address later, access to comprehensive information about the volunteering opportunity; such as time/schedule requirements, impact, and expectations; can be an important factor in an individual's commitment and overall satisfaction.

Understandably, there are also compelling reasons organizations use volunteers. Additionally, in the Hart Research Associates study, organizations that make use of volunteers were asked their top reasons for doing so. They include the following:

- To provide services that otherwise would not be provided
- To increase quality of service programs
- As a cost savings to the organization
- To improved personal attention to those served
- To increase public support for programs
- To improve management/operation of organization



WCS Volunteer Network

While these benefits are compelling, it is also important to consider the requirements to make most effective use of volunteers to obtain these benefits. Once identified, it is possible to consider the impact to organizations, in using enabling technologies that target these key requirements.

Current Volunteering Landscape

Today's volunteering landscape is notably different from that of just a decade or two ago. The incorporation of technology into our everyday life has expanded the sphere of expertise that defines a student's opportunity for learning. In contrast, there is still the same number of available teaching hours per year at a time when we have seen an increase in educational mandates. This has the net effect of reducing the remaining time for actual instruction of our students. With these pressures, today's teachers have little time to devote to large volunteer coordination efforts, yet an even greater need for this supplemental support. Key contributions currently met by volunteers include (but are not limited to) introducing business and industry expertise into the classroom, coaching teams for academic and athletics, providing mentoring on technical skills, homework assistance and tutoring, serving as chaperones, providing staffing and support of various educational events, and raising funds to augment budgets for educational activities and enrichment.

While the skill demands have evolved over time with the changes in current technology, the methods for recruiting and coordinating volunteers at WCS has typically continued as refinements of more traditional methods. Even the most organized volunteer coordination efforts will rely on the following means:

- Face-to-face networking
- Telephone contact
- Email communication
- Promotional mailings and fliers



WCS Volunteer Network

What appears to be uniform across all volunteer coordination efforts is the significant time and labor necessary to retain and effectively organize large numbers of volunteers. Often Parent-Teacher organizations serve in a focal roll for this activity, also using volunteers to perform these coordination functions. It is also typical to find teachers, coaches and other interested people coordinating volunteers, specifically for their unique tasks or events. It is considerably rarer for paid staff to have a *primary role* in this coordination activity.

There are several typical outcomes resulting from today's most common volunteer coordination practices. First, these efforts tend to occur autonomously and independent from other similar efforts in other locations or from other dissimilar efforts in the same location. This means that each coordinator will tend to have a separate "cache" of volunteer resources and information (such as skills data) that is generally not shared or combined with other such "caches." In this mode, duplication of similar efforts, which might benefit from shared resources or coordination, is not only common – it is the norm. Second, the efforts tend to be run by a *key individual* who knows where everyone is, who is needed for what task, and other historical data. When that individual *moves on* to do other things elsewhere, invariably the effort suffers from the vacuum created by that departure. There is a general lack of "institutional memory" to prevent this occurrence, since concepts like *succession planning* are generally not embraced heavily in light of the lack of resources and available personnel. Often enough, this key individual may be the one who *holds "all of the pieces" and how they connect together*. This person may serve, not only as the key coordinator, but often as the key technical resource as well. In such situations, the vacuum can lead to a complete collapse of the activity after the key individual's departure, leaving those left behind with the daunting task of rebuilding it all from scratch.



Current Trends

Despite these considerable challenges, volunteering is still the best game in town. There is an enormous reservoir of skills, passion, and dedication within people. Many of them will want to make a positive impact for your cause. Aside from the expertise and labor to be gained from volunteers, the economic advantages of this workforce are obvious.

There are efforts underway in Warsaw Community Schools and the surrounding community which have the potential to influence the future shape of volunteering in the school corporation and beyond.

Area businesses are taking a serious look at community engagement programs and reevaluating their strategic direction and management. One example of this is EMBARQ's Core Curriculum Content program (CCC for short) for delivery of video-on-demand to classrooms in support of curriculum⁵. While the provisions in the contract allowing for EMBARQ's access to advertising space may not qualify this as purely an act of altruism, it represents an important development in the relationship between the *business community* and the *local public school system*.

Other companies are also evaluating their community engagement programs. For example, DePuy is currently updating its community engagement strategy. This new strategy will encompass the three focus areas of *Philanthropy*, *Employee Programs*, and *Volunteering*. One primary motivator to making this a key strategy is employee satisfaction and retention. Companies that enact policies that are not only accommodating to employees involvement in the community, but facilitate or bolster this activity, stand to benefit the most – as do the organizations that are recipients of their efforts. In this respect, DePuy is not alone among the orthopedic companies in our community. Biomet has also been working on coordination of their volunteering effort.

There are also programs within WCS, which have begun to influence the shape of volunteering in public education. The first of these is EdCom, an annual event that is the culmination of months of project work



WCS Volunteer Network

for hundreds of student teams and individual students. In this forum, students present the results of months of research and deep learning on a specific topic. As academic events go, this is the pinnacle within the Warsaw community. An effort of this magnitude does not happen without an extreme volunteer commitment, both in mentoring individual students and project teams, and in providing the staffing to conduct the event each March. This opportunity to explore topics in depth, then practice and develop presentation skills to deliver the topic content on the day of the event are invaluable to the students.

While the benefits of EdCom-style projects for students may seem obvious, it does represent an increasing challenge for the higher grade levels, i.e. past the elementary level. First, as students progress academically, the topics they can pursue continue to expand and diversify. It represents a significant challenge to provide adequate guidance and mentorship to students on their chosen subject area. It is also a fact that students in Middle School and High School are less “contained”, i.e. they have many teachers for many subjects and have more autonomy, and correspondingly less directed guidance. It is, perhaps, not surprising that the Middle School participation in EdCom is far less than in the Elementary Schools, and that the trend continues further in the High School. Where an elementary school teacher can commit an entire class to EdCom project efforts and guide them over the course of months to ensure they meet their goals, producing the same outcome in the High School would require considerably more collaboration between teachers (and perhaps students, as well). Plans to engage High School students in this type of project-oriented learning are currently under development in the form of Senior Projects.



WCS Volunteer Network

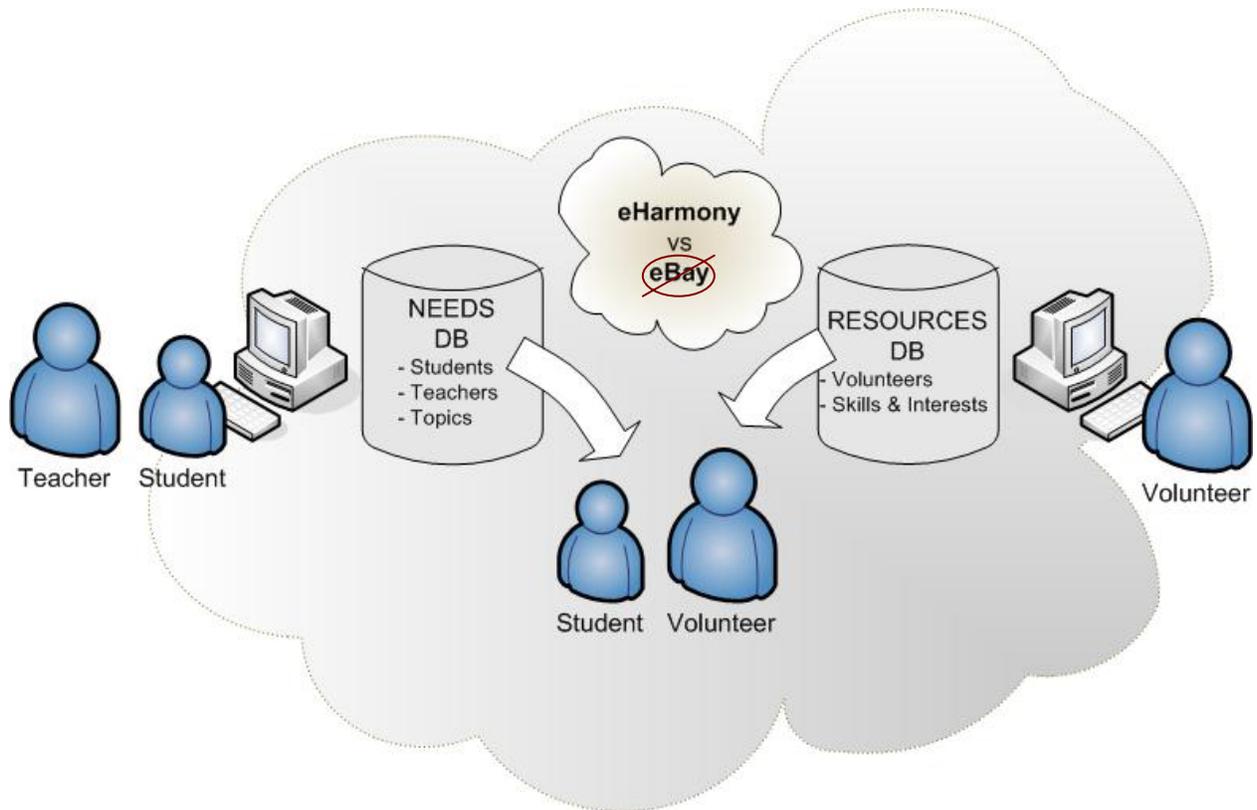
Solution Design

In order to best identify what the proposed solution would look like, it is important to identify its key characteristics. At a high level, it needs to address the gaps in current volunteer coordination efforts and better enable both the benefiting organizations and the volunteers. Below is an outline of this team's proposed solution based on our research:

WCS Volunteer Network

- ❖ Volunteer Features:
 - Visibility and management of volunteering opportunities
 - expertise requirements
 - time & effort
 - schedule
- ❖ Organization Features:
 - Provide visibility and management of volunteering resources
 - expertise
 - availability
 - preferences
 - Facilitate event coordination
 - sign on volunteers
 - advertise the event
 - access volunteer pools
 - Use of Best Practices
 - Autonomy and control of efforts
 - Reuse of information
 - Facilitate qualification of Volunteers
 - Background checks and screening
- ❖ Both
 - Facilitate matching opportunities with volunteers
 - Improve communication between coordinators and volunteers
 - Make use of existing technology trends

It is also possible to provide a graphical (and architectural) representation of the solution, as is depicted in the figure that follows.



The figure above shows how this enabling technology might be laid out. Note the reference to eHarmony® vs. eBay®, which emphasizes the importance of providing a compatible match between the volunteer and the opportunity for a successful implementation.

Recommendation

Several events during the course of our research led us to explore solutions to match the Design we proposed in the previous section. One was a resource that DePuy’s parent company, Johnson & Johnson, has made extensive use of in the communities of some of its other operating companies, called VolunteerMatch.org. DePuy associates are currently discussing the opportunities in making use of this capability for their internal volunteer coordination efforts, so we thought it warranted further investigation.



WCS Volunteer Network

In our exploration, we not only were confident that this solution would meet the key requirements as described in the Solution Design, but that this represented a Best-In-Class solution to the challenge.

The first step in implementing VolunteerMatch.org as the WCS Volunteer Network would be for WCS to subscribe to the service. After visits to the site and discussions with VolunteerMatch staff, the Community Leader level, at a yearly cost of \$75.00 was determined to be the best approach. Joining at the Community Leader level would provide the school system with extra features that would allow for better coordination of volunteer efforts, including:

- ***Custom Questions:*** This feature will allow WCS to ask specific questions of their volunteers and learn more about them and their skills right from the beginning.
- ***Document Manager:*** WCS will be able to attach up to three documents, such as any required background check forms, to their referral confirmation e-mails saving volunteers and WCS staff time.
- ***Listing Duplication:*** With this feature, each opportunity can be customized without having to reenter common information.
- ***Exporting Tool:*** A simple spreadsheet can be created listing all posted opportunities and volunteers who responded to them, allowing for quick and easy tracking.
- ***Syndication Tools:*** These will allow Warsaw Community Schools to provide access to all of these resources directly from the WCS Web Site in much the same way a Google Search bar can be added within individual sites without leaving the site.

The next step to a successful implementation would be to market WCS Volunteer Network within the school system, to WCS faculty and staff. Information should be included in all employee communication – newsletters, e-mail blasts, flyers in pay stub envelopes, school meetings, etc. – making teachers aware of the opportunity to post their needs on the site. It would be important to emphasize that a short-term time investment, i.e. posting their opportunity to the site (or sending their needs to the WCS project coordinator for posting) would result in long-term benefits for them and their. It would also make good sense to facilitate the startup with demonstrations and training, as well as establishing some coordinating resources within the school system, to make it easy to find someone to help a first-time user to get the ball rolling.

Once volunteer needs have been established, the site would be marketed to all possible volunteer bases. Recommended starting points would be with those closest to the school, such as employees, current



WCS Volunteer Network

volunteers, and PTA/PTOs. Working outward from there, parents, local volunteer organizations, and area businesses would be included. Since the success of this effort would depend on achieving a certain “critical mass”, the more multifaceted and thorough the marketing effort is, the greater the likelihood of achieving measurable success soon. Media may include parent newsletters, radio spots, newspaper articles, presentations at PTA/PTO meetings, and representation at key school & community meetings.

Finally, it would be an advantage to obtain a sponsor for the effort – an organization that would underwrite the annual expenses, (although they may be relatively minor) but more importantly, to provide consistent exposure and focus on the effort. There are many possible sponsors, but some are much more synergistic than others. Since engagements for this purpose are already underway, exploration into this remaining facet will be considered beyond the scope of this paper.



WCS Volunteer Network

References

1. "No Child Left Behind Act," April 19 2007, Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, found at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No_Child_Left_Behind
2. Alspaugh, Chrissy and Johannesen, Kirk. April 1, 2007, "Full-day kindergarten: Is this the year?", Indiana Economic Digest @ <http://www.indianaeconomicdigest.net>.
3. "2 Percent Circuit Breaker Fact Sheet," *accessed on* April 22, 2007, Department of Local Government Finance @ <http://www.in.gov/dlgf/news/circuitFS.html>
4. O'Rourke, Molly (Peter D. Hart Research Associates) and Baldwin, Greg (VolunteerMatch), "How the Internet has Changed Volunteering: Findings from a VolunteerMatch User Study," The Journal of Volunteer Administration, Volume 22, Number 3, 2004.
5. "Video-On-Demand New Educational Tool In Warsaw Community School Classes," February 24, 2007, Warsaw Times-Union.