VOLunteer COmmunity Network

Bringing The University of Tennessee volunteers to the Community Schools

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Executive Summary

VOLCON

VOLCON is a new online resource that will act as an information conduit and volunteer matching service between University of Tennessee volunteers and Knox County Community Schools, eliminating administrative roadblocks that prevent many students from volunteering at the Community Schools while maintaining security and organizational standards.

The Problem

There is a significant barrier preventing the integration of volunteers into the local Community Schools, which is caused by the lack of a ready, secure, pathway between volunteer organizations and the school personnel.

~The Community:~ Community Schools are located in high-risk, low-income areas where students, families, and community members live and attend a community school. The community needs to have a stronger, more reliable relationship with the Community Schools to provide a better, more confident educational experience with their children, improving the community overall.

~The Great School Partnership (GSP)¹:~ GSP provides a connection between the local community and the school. GSP uses informal communication and Volunteer Knoxville (VK) to provide service to the school and the community but VK is strictly a hosting site and does not actively coordinate and advocate with stakeholders.

~University of Tennessee University-Assisted Community School Initiative (UTK-UACS)²:~ UTK provides educational services to two local Community Schools, Pond Gap and Inskip, through funding provided by a robust philanthropic network, which includes supporters like Randy Boyd. UTK-UACS has difficulty engaging the local community because there is no formal mechanism.

The Solution

VOLCON will connect UTK volunteers with the local Community Schools based on the schools’ specific needs. The partnership between UTK, GSP, and the Community Schools will benefit the educational experience of the Community School students but also better inform, educate, and influence the local community.

¹ http://www.greatschoolspartnership.com/community-schools/
² http://uacs.utk.edu/
Chapter 2: Problem Statement

Key Partners:

-The Community: The high-risk low-income areas where students, families, and community members live and attend community school.

-The Great School Partnership (GSP): A local Knoxville non-profit organization that provides a full service program to 10 local Community Schools, by providing a connection between the local community and the school.

-University of Tennessee University-Assisted Community School Initiative (UTK-UACS): UTK assists two local Community Schools, Pond Gap and Inskip. UTK provides a full service program utilizing UT students, staff, and resources.

Community Disconnect:
A recent poll from Education Week showed that 83 percent of African-American respondents and 61 percent of Latino respondents believed their school receives less funding, lower-quality teachers, and less attention than those in white communities. Other studies have shown that some parents have a negative opinion toward public school education, due to their own experiences. These influence and affect the student’s overall educational experience. The UACS network is designed to engage the community and provide a safer, more reliable relationship between the Community Schools and the community, while using university resources. UTK utilizes a robust source of UT students and staff to provide academic support to the two schools they assist. However, UTK lacks the ability to communicate and determine what the needs are, not only of the students, but the families and the community as a whole. One example is that Pond Gap serves families from 12 non-English speaking countries making communication between the parent and the school difficult. The GSP has made significant strides in reducing truancy and increasing overall student education by making the schools the center of the community overall, thereby vastly increasing the support for both the students and their families. However, the GSP program

Figure 1: The current state of communication between the Community Schools and UTK, it is clearly inhibited.

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3 http://www.greatschoolspartnership.com/community-schools/
4 http://uacs.utk.edu/
7 https://www.nettercenter.upenn.edu/programs/university-assisted-community-schools
has difficulty identifying and obtaining more permanent resources to provide to their designated Community Schools while maintaining the safety and security of the students and staff.

**Volunteer Knoxville:**

Volunteer Knoxville (VK)⁸ is a local non-profit organization that connects volunteers with volunteer opportunities. VK serves any and all volunteer opportunities while providing security by requiring a background check of each volunteer through Verified Volunteer. VK provides GSP with these services, and GSP has acquired more than 11,000 volunteer hours through VK. One inefficiency with the matching process is that, in order to maintain privacy of the volunteer, the programs posting the opportunity cannot see the volunteer. This does not serve programs that need experience-specific or permanent volunteers. We believe that there is an opportunity for GSP to directly advocate for specific volunteers or volunteer groups, that will serve their community school needs, which VK does not explicitly provide.

**Chapter 3: Alternative Solutions**

**Community School Programs**

Throughout the United States school systems have been faced with deteriorating educational outcomes as budgets are tightened and educational requirements continue to expand. Realizing the problem, many states have started community schools in one form or another to develop existing schools within low income communities to act as agents of change within the community (shown in Figure 2⁹). One of the leaders in this effort is the Urban Community School Program located in Cleveland, Ohio, which acts as a model for other community school programs. One barrier to schools’ utilization of community resources and support is that there is no specific mechanism, such as VOLCON, for supplying expert volunteers to classrooms. Within Tennessee, this is also the case. VK is the only organization that formally supports volunteers and volunteer opportunities, but these are not exclusive to the Community Schools. VK serves any program that purchases their services. If schools do not use VK, then educators are left to their own devices to find and vet volunteers, should they wish to involve them in the classroom. VOLCON will provide a centralized utility and a uniform process to facilitate these connections for teachers and schools without access to VK, and our organization will provide a more efficient matching service by providing volunteers based on school-specific needs. This is a utility for which the Great Schools Partnership, representing a dozen K-12 schools in Knox County, has already expressed a need.

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⁸ http://www.volunteerknoxville.org/
Chapter 4: Solution

What is VOLCON?

The primary structure of VOLCON is an online website that will act as the coordination and placement service between University of Tennessee volunteers and the Community Schools faculty (Figure 3). VOLCON will allow people wanting to volunteer at the community schools to generate a profile and propose potential volunteer opportunities for school officials to evaluate and determine if they are appropriate for their needs. An example of the use of this program would be at Pond Gap in providing volunteers for after-school English as a Second Language courses and tutoring to students and parents in helping to facilitate these relationships. The Great School Partnerships Resource Coordinators (RC) located at the schools will select proposed volunteer opportunities to be used at the schools.

- The rationale behind having the RC take this action is to both act as another safeguard in the dissemination of Personally Identifiable Information and to ensure robust participation on the behalf of the community school personnel. The RCs are tasked with, amongst other things, maximizing the number of beneficial interactions between the surrounding community and the school and therefore they are in the best position to perform this task.
- VOLCON will provide them with an additional tool. The RC will perform a quarterly needs survey (found in Appendix B) of the teachers at their schools; the results will then be posted to the site to provide additional information for volunteers. VOLCON will bypass the current barriers by bringing together the stakeholders and addressing security and organizational concerns. Communication between the University of Tennessee and the Community Schools will be facilitated by VOLCON via the website developed and maintained by Volunteer Knoxville, an organization that acts as a large-scale volunteer coordination service.
- Volunteer Knoxville offers an annual service, which maintains a restricted access volunteer portal for specific interests. This will be utilized because of both their specialized experience and their established reputation. Verify Volunteers background check service will be employed to ensure the safety of both the facility and students at the Community Schools. Maintaining safety standards is an area of significant concern and large amount of effort was expended to ensure stakeholder acceptance and agreement. Finally the Great Schools Partnerships will be used for general coordination and advocacy as VOLCON expands and adapts.
Who Benefits?

**The Community:** The community overall will benefit significantly from the development of VOLCON because not only will this program generally strengthen the Community Schools (which will have a cascading improvement on the surrounding community) it will also improve the town-gown relationship in our community. These connections may be further developed providing increased access to the community support mechanisms that the University of Tennessee offers such as the Tennessee Partnership for Ongoing Parental Support, the Smart Communities Initiative, the Tennessee Water Resources Research Center, and the UT Chapter of Nourish International.

**The Great Schools Partnership (GSP):** VOLCON benefits GSP by providing them with UTK volunteer groups and individual students who fit the missions of UTK-UACS, GSP, and the community they both serve while meeting their requirements for security. For example, VOLCON could connect the GSP with the UTK Graduate Association of Mechanical Engineers (GAME), (See Appendix A) who are attempting to work in schools with in-class and after-school science and engineering demonstrations. They have directly and measurably impacted the student’s education. VOLCON would provide GSP with these opportunities more directly, efficiently, and permanently.

**UTK:** VOLCON will provide the following critical support\(^\text{10}\) to the VOLCON – UTK partnership:

- “When partnerships are formed with elementary, middle, and secondary schools, they benefit the society as a whole, the economy, and also the university (because students are more qualified for university entry and advanced work).
- Partnerships also facilitate the recruitment and retention of talented faculty, staff, and academic leaders.
- Partnerships enable a broader, superior approach to knowledge generation through community-based, participatory research and the multiple, emergent methodologies it promotes.
- Partnerships provide unique, superior opportunities for learning and professional development for students, faculty, and partners in external settings.
- Partnerships provide unique, superior opportunities to integrate, in community settings, teaching and learning, research and scholarship, and service.
- When partnerships are strategic, they build the university’s capacities for innovation and its infrastructure supports for work with external constituencies.”

Chapter 5: Our Strategy

VOLCON: Pilot Design

The online portal will be managed by Volunteer Knoxville and will be secured by requiring that a University of Tennessee or Resource Coordinator specific password be initially entered to login to the site. This is designed to limit site access to only appropriate personnel, and if they do not have the password they will be prompted to visit the University Of Tennessee Office Of Leadership and Service to receive it via phone or in person.

- The volunteers will initially develop a profile, which provides the necessary information for a Verified Volunteers Background check (through VK). Volunteers will then have direct access through the VOLCON website to develop and manage their Volunteer Proposals. The website will allow them to describe their proposal along with categorical information. In addition they will be able to view requested and existing volunteer bookings and, if necessary, cancel upcoming events. Furthermore the volunteers will be able to see the results of a survey of needs provided by teachers at each community school.
• The Resource Coordinators at each school will also produce a VOLCON profile where they will be able to review proposals categorized for their school. They will be responsible for scheduling Volunteers Proposals in classes in their schools. In addition to this they will be responsible for administering the needs survey to the teachers at their schools and uploading the results to the VOLCON site.

Logic Model for Success

The number one goal of VOLCON is to create a means of communication and coordination between teachers and Resource Coordinators (RC) at the Knox County Community Schools and volunteers at the University of Tennessee. This program will first be implemented in Pond Gap Community School, and if this program excels at Pond Gap, the success will lead to implementation of VOLCON in all twelve GSP Community Schools, See Table 2.

The short-term success of this program can be measured in two ways:

1. The number of volunteers from UTK in the Pond Gap Community School
2. The Great Schools Partnership Community Schools Outcomes Indicators specific to Pond Gap

With an increase in the number of volunteers, it is expected that indicators such as attendance and TCAP math and reading would greatly improve. In the 2014-2015 academic years alone, those students who participated in after school programming at GSP Community Schools out-performed their peers in the same school:

• Nearly 5 fewer days of absence
• 7.6 scale score points higher on TCAP math
• 6.1 scale score points higher on TCAP reading

A baseline will be established for Pond Gap and then at the end of the next school year in which VOLCON is implemented, these indicators will be evaluated against the entire GSP system and Knox County Schools as a whole. VOLCON aims to have launched its platform for Pond Gap no later than January 1, 2017 with an expected success evaluation in May of 2019 giving an entire year and a half for implementation, troubleshooting, and outreach/advocacy.

The long-term success of this program can be measured in the following ways:

1. 100% of Community School classrooms will use VOLCON at least once throughout the school year,
2. 100% of Community School students will have the opportunity to participate in the relationship created between UTK and GSP by VOLCON, and
3. Volunteer involvement at UTK will increase as a direct result of the collaboration with GSP
Table 1: Logic Model for Success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Result</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resource Coordinators</td>
<td>Phase 1: Develop a platform where RC connect teachers from Pond Gap with UTK volunteers</td>
<td>Increased supply of well qualified volunteers</td>
<td><strong>Short Term</strong> 6 months to 2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer Knoxville</td>
<td>Stage 1: Create a platform for RC and volunteers to connect</td>
<td>Support mission of Broadened Outreach</td>
<td>Improved communication between UTK volunteers and KCCS RC/teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pond Gap Elementary School</td>
<td>Stage 2: Assess usage of the site and GSP student indicators</td>
<td>Better Student and Community Outcome</td>
<td>Increased student test scores and attendance rates at Pond Gap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howard Baker Public Policy Group</td>
<td>Stage 3: Analysis and improvement of VOLCON</td>
<td>Positively impact the overall community</td>
<td><strong>Long Term</strong> 2 to 3+ years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Schools Partnership</td>
<td>Phase 2: Develop advanced system connecting volunteers and RC in all 12 GSP Community Schools</td>
<td>Better meet needs of the Community Schools</td>
<td>Increased student test scores and attendance rates at GSP Community Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UT Outreach Offices</td>
<td>Stage 4: Expand VOLCON to the remaining Community Schools</td>
<td>Develop well rounded, quality students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stage 5: Further expansion to other volunteer bases</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stage 6: Incorporate other Knox County schools into VOLCON</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Budget

VOLCON Proposed Startup Budget

Without the help of VK, the initial setup for VOLCON would have been $99k/year; factoring for the cost of website creation, first year portal labor, and administrative personnel to engage the community and raise awareness at both the University and within the Community Schools themselves (Figure 6) the partnership with VK becomes even more crucial. VK provides website design, maintenance, development, data services, and Verify Volunteer which are all mandatory components of launching VOLCON for the flat price of $300 per month. Since GSP is already a premier member of at VK, VOLCON will hopefully be able to reap the benefits that the company offers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Startup</th>
<th>Volunteer Knox Startup</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Website Creation</td>
<td>Website Creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain</td>
<td>$15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosting</td>
<td>$300.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Year Portal Labor</td>
<td>First Year Portal Labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Personnel</td>
<td>Administrative Personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$19,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$75,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$98,315.00</td>
<td>$(94,715.00)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6: Budget Comparison

VOLCON Advocacy and Sustainability

The VOLCON team is working diligently to reach out to various programs for initial advocacy and future funding avenues. Thus far, we have reached out to The University of Tennessee's Center for Leadership and Service, UTK's Experience Learning Director, Beyond A Brick LLC, and The University of Tennessee's Graduate Association of Mechanical Engineers (GAME)\(^{11}\), all with positive feedback about our hopes for this project. We also hope to reach out to The University of Tennessee’s Departments of Education, Agriculture, Art, Science, and Engineering in the near future, to advocate for VOLCON. The future of VOLCON would be to expand it to the remaining 11 Community Schools and to local businesses. This would also increase advocacy on both sides, but for now we will work on VOLCON-Pilot at Pond Gap.

The success of VOLCON is also dependent on its future sustainability. Without a plan in place to promote, encourage, and facilitate this program, the prospect of furthering volunteer impact on these schools is grim. With that being said, before any of us graduate in the next year, we hope to kindle interest in this program from our fellow peers and students in other departments so that the program can be maintained even after the four of us graduate. The continual interests in UACS from UTK, specifically the UT-UACS and Center for Leadership and Service demonstrates that either group would be a great successor.

\(^{11}\) See appendix A for an example of the GAME model
Appendix

A. UTK GAME Example

**UTK- GAME outreach modules.**
Module structure (lessons will be conformed to fit school schedule if necessary):
20 minutes: introduction to topic (whole class)
50 minutes: rotation through several hands-on demonstrations (small groups)
20 minutes: conclusions and emphasis on knowledge retention (class-led discussion)

Brief descriptions of our modules are included below:

**Non-Newtonian fluids:**
Oobleck, a shear thickening non-Newtonian fluid, is used to demonstrate that not all materials are easily classified into one of the states of matter. Small group activities teach the concept of viscosity and shear thickening with hands-on participation. Discussion of where non-Newtonian fluids may be useful is also encouraged. This module consists of 4 stations each meant to show a different property of Non-Newtonian fluids. *(NOTE check to make sure no cornstarch allergies exist)*

- 1.) oobleck on speaker: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zoTKXXNQIU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zoTKXXNQIU)
- 2.) small bins - hands on trying to remove objects stuck in oobleck
- 3.) large bucket - hands on show the difference between slow or quick impacts
- 4.) group discussion - explain concept of polymers, uses for non newtonian fluids, and other simple science concepts

**Polymers:**
Properties of polymers including viscoelasticity, interaction and absorption of water and oil, and glassification will be shown with hands-on demonstrations. Students will make bouncy balls from common household items. Sodium polyacrylate, an absorbent polymer, will be used to show the ability to absorb and desorb up to 400x its weight in water. Polymer glassification will be shown with a racquetball.

- 1.) Students will create bouncy balls from polymers: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPSevryilG1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPSevryilG1)
- 2.) Students will view glassification of elastic polymers: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P7H7RZvijig](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P7H7RZvijig)
- 3.) Absorbent polymers ability to absorb and unabsorb significant quantities of water: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-gg_0wvHV9E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-gg_0wvHV9E)
- 4.) Ability to slice polymers after absorbed water: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPK2m0qRZx4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPK2m0qRZx4)

**Plasma:**
A plasma globe will be used to allow students to visualize and interact with the fourth state of matter, plasma. In small group settings students will work together to investigate the many properties of plasmas including temperature, molecular composition, and structure through spectroscopy and visual observation. Additionally, students will be able to probe the external electric field around the plasma globe by wirelessly powering neon tubes, fluorescent lights, and speakers by simply bringing them close to the globes surface. In conjunction with the hands-on activities, students will learn where plasmas exist in nature (e.g. lightning and space) as well as some of the many manmade uses of plasmas (e.g. lighting, welding, and spacecraft propulsion).

- 1.) Plasma globe demo show heating of internal air and concept of grounding
- 2.) Plasma globe demo creates electric field can light fluorescent bulbs or led's without contact
- 3.) Neon tubes and neodymium magnets show magnetic deflection of plasma
- 4.) Spectroscope visualization of individual wavelengths
- 5.) Show interaction with speakers or headphones
- Video of several demos: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZB6zjOObAU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZB6zjOObAU)
Electricity and magnetism:
Magnetic field lines will be visualized using ferrofluids and iron filings in separate demonstrations. Magnet polarity will be discussed. Faraday's law of induction will be demonstrated with a magnet and coil used as a generator or motor. Ohm's law and Kirchhoff's laws will be discussed with lightbulbs in parallel and series. Faraday cages and Gauss’ law will also be shown.

- 1.) Difference between circuits in series and parallel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BDzvgrp8N4
- 2.) Faraday cage's ability to insulate electrical signals and van der graaf generator: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wqv1mbn9GG4
- 3.) Basic principles of Ohm's Law and Kirchhoff's voltage rules
- 4.) Visualization of magnetic fields using iron filings and ferrofluids: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNG481SY1w
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sFOv6_L5C-k
- 5.) Introduction to motors and generators and their differences and similarities

Working on adding robotics lessons to this module. Currently underdevelopment:

- Quadcopters
- Basic programming
- Various control methodology

States of Matter:
Combines demonstrations from polymers, non-Newtonian fluids, and plasma modules to present the four classic states of matter. Students will be shown various methods to induce phase changes including: chemical reactions and temperature changes. Students will be shown sublimation and evaporation at room temperature. Students will learn what causes phase changes and how they can be useful in the world of engineering.

- 1.) Plasma globe demo show heating of internal air and concept of grounding
- 2.) Neon tubes and neodymium magnets show magnetic deflection of plasma
- 3.) Students will create bouncy balls from polymers: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPSFvzpiG1
- 4.) Students will view glassification of elastomers: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P7H7RZyibig
- 5.) Absorbent polymers ability to absorb and unabsorb significant quantities of water: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-g_0whVY9E
- 6.) oobleck on speaker: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zoTKXNQIU
- 7.) large bucket - hands on show the difference between slow or quick impacts

Renewable energy: (under development)
A Horizon renewable energy kit will allow students to investigate how different forms of renewable energy, i.e. solar, wind, and fuel cells, can be coupled together and optimized to provide energy for a home and car. Kits will be purchased to allow students to work hands-on in small groups. Issues associated with intermittent renewable energy will be discussed by graduate students with an expertise in energy storage to show students how work at the University of Tennessee is relevant on a large scale.

- Kit used: http://www.amazon.com/Horizon-Technologies-Renewable-Science-Education/dp/B004CR37HK
- Show generation of electricity from wind turbine, PEM fuel cell, and solar panel
- Use created electricity to power motors, lights, or fans.
- Impact of alternative energy and complications associated with their implementation

States of Matter, polymers, non-Newtonian fluids, or electricity and magnetism are ready to go. We would be glad to do multiple modules for you all on different days. If you want to let me know if any of these appeal to you and some potential dates that might work best for you all.

We generally come present these topics ourselves, but we would be glad to share any of our lesson plans, presentations, or demos with you all if you would like to attempt them yourselves. If you are looking for other hands on demos that are easy to do let me know and I can try
to point you in the right direction. We perform all demos free to the schools however we do ask permission to take pictures to be used for departmental promotion and grant reports/applications for additional funding so this program can continue to be offered.

If you have any questions you can email me or call me at 865-643-4007.

**B: Teacher / Resource Coordinator Survey**

Community Schools Service Learning Needs

Thank you in advance for your time! We are a group of graduate students from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville working with the Howard Baker Center to develop an Community Service Learning Initiative (VOLCON) which would foster communication between Knox County Community Schools and the University of Tennessee. We are hoping to provide an increased presence of volunteers in your classrooms and schools through this policy proposal. Again, we appreciate the time you are taking to fill out this survey, and we look forward to hearing your thoughts on going forward with this program!

* Required

- How many volunteers have you used in the past? *
- Are you interested in maintaining more permanent volunteer relationships? *
  - Yes
  - No
- What does your ideal interactive/hands-on volunteer experience look like?
  - During school hours
  - After school hours
  - I don't see a need for volunteers in my school
- If you see the need for volunteers in your school, how many hours per week would you want them to interact with the students?
- What are the primary barriers/concerns for you in regards to volunteer introduction?
  - Certification
  - Reliability
  - Background Check
  - Consistency
  - Other:
    - If you chose "other" please provide a response below so that we may better evaluate your needs.
- What topics or subjects need to be taught in your school by interactive/hands-on volunteers?
- In the box below, please feel free to provide any suggestions for implementation of this program in your classroom/school.

**C: Great School Partnership Report**

Overall, students who participated in after school programming at community schools out-performed their peers in the same school:

- Nearly 5 fewer days of absence
- 7.6 scale score points higher on TCAP math
- 6.1 scale score points higher on TCAP reading

Although community schools as a whole perform lower on academic proficiency tests (they were selected to be community schools for this, among other, reasons):

- The RLA achievement gap between community schools and the rest of the district was closed by more than 3%.
- Proficiency levels on TCAP math at community schools have also been trending upward at faster rate than non-community schools, with a gap closure of more than 3%.
- Five of eight community schools experienced greater than expected gains in reading and language arts.
- Six of eight experienced greater than expected gains in math proficiency.

More community members and volunteers are engaged with community schools:

- Total number of new volunteers in 2015: 858 (nearly 11,000 volunteer hours)
- More than 200 community partners offer services ranging from art lessons for students to Zumba classes for parents, teachers and community members.