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E-G's Volunteers in Education program thrives with volunteers helping students

By Ann Voss
 HTF Contributor



Volunteer Robert Finc tutors an Eveleth Gilbert student. Submitted photo.

EVELETH/GILBERT – The Eveleth-Gilbert Volunteers in Education (VinE) program, a part of Volunteers in Education's Tutor Program which offers tutorial assistance in eight local schools, is growing with volunteers interested in supporting students at various sites in the district.

VinE, which is in its fourth year at Eveleth- Gilbert Public Schools, has provided tutoring assistance within the school's K-8 classrooms, as well as with the junior high after-school Homework Help Program, from individuals of all ages in the community. Parents and grandparents, high school students, former teachers and students, and many other community minded citizens have stepped forward over the past few years to offer support for students to help them succeed.

The Eveleth-Gilbert VinE program has steadily grown each year and currently has about 35 active volunteer. People are becoming more aware of this valuable way of serving in our communities, and the program's success is due, in large part, to the many willing, devoted, caring individuals who want to help students develop their skills and confidence in learning. VinE utilizes volunteers at Franklin Elementary in Eveleth, and at Nelle Shean Elementary and the junior high school in Gilbert. The teachers have welcomed and truly appreciate the support volunteers provide for students in their classrooms. Volunteers assist by providing individual or small group tutoring assistance with reading, math, learning stations, the SMART Program, technology, and in other content areas where teachers feel students need additional help.

Some VinE volunteers have been with the program since it started almost four years ago. Roberta Klink assists at Franklin Elementary.

"Now that I'm retired, I've been doing quite a bit of volunteering and loving it, especially with the kindergarten and first grade children at Franklin Elementary," she said. "It is so gratifying to be of any little help that I can, and it's also wonderful to see the students making progress throughout the year! Having worked with the public for over 40 years, I've gotten to know so many people, and it's great when I get to work with the children and grandchildren of those friends."

Another volunteer, Robert Finc, who has participated in the program for the past two years at Nelle Shean Elementary and Eveleth- Gilbert Junior High School, reflected on his involvement in the program.

"It is rewarding, enjoyable and worthwhile," Robert said. "To encourage and assist students solving a math problem, and then have them realize their accomplishments gives me a good feeling. It is also great to participate and be fully utilized and directed by such wonderful, dedicated teachers."

An exciting addition to the numerous dedicated, caring volunteers already in place is the participation of a group of employee volunteers from Miners National Bank in Eveleth. Several volunteers from the bank visit Franklin Elementary each week at various times during the school day, providing assistance in reading, math and other areas in which teachers ask for support for their students.

Bank employee Linda Kohlhase, who volunteers in Ms. Lautigar's fourth-grade classroom during reading time stated, "I have truly enjoyed working with and getting to know the students in Ms. Lautigar's fourth-grade class. Now that the students are feeling more comfortable with me, I can see them responding when we have discussions about their reading material. It's truly amazing what insight some of the children have, their thought processes, and how they can attach real-life situations to the books and articles that they are reading."



Jonathan Hoel is shown working with students in technology. Submitted photo.

In addition to the many interested, enthusiastic and devoted adult volunteers, a large number of Eveleth-Gilbert High School students have stepped forward over the past few years to offer their assistance. Interested juniors and seniors have provided tutoring and classroom support throughout the week at Franklin Elementary and the junior high school during their study period times or after school. This is a great way to give young people an opportunity to participate in community service and, at the same time, benefit by feeling good about helping out.

Senior Sara Coldagelli commented, "I really enjoy being able to go to the elementary and work with the kids. It's exciting seeing them start to understand a concept that they have been struggling with. It's also a very rewarding feeling when kids look forward to working with you."

Maddie Sumner, an Eveleth-Gilbert senior, has been a part of the junior high after-school Homework Help Program since its beginning three years ago. "I have been in VinE since I was in the 10th grade. Now that I am a senior, I am able to look back at the great times I have spent with the kids and see them finally understand what they are learning."

Another senior, Kaiti Rigstad, who has been both a classroom volunteer and Homework Help Program volunteer, commented, "VinE has helped me realize that I would really like to go into education in college next year. I really enjoy helping the students and watching their 'AHA!' moments."

VinE's start in the Eveleth-Gilbert School District began in 2013 after the school board adopted the program following a presentation by Volunteers in Education program founder and director Art Dale, who has since retired. The volunteer program (and the support it provides to teachers and students) offers one more tool in the efforts to improve student success. In addition, our community members benefit with the opportunity to see HOW students learn and HOW MUCH learning is happening in our schools. It's a win-win for all-our students and our communities.

Melissa Lautigar, a Franklin Elementary teacher, had this to say about VinE: "VinE is a wonderful program that brings together community specialists with eager learners."

Currently Lautigar is utilizing both adult volunteers (Linda Kohlhase and Donna Babich from Miners National Bank) and a student (Cassie Ward) in her classroom. Lautigar stated, "VinE has brought in wonderful help throughout the years, which I am happy to be able to participate in."

Franklin Elementary first-grade teacher Becki Carey also had high praise for the volunteer program. "It has been a privilege to have a VinE volunteer helping in my classroom over the past few years," she said.

Becki has previously utilized high school students and felt her students looked up to the "big kids" as role models. More recently she has benefited from having retired Eveleth- Gilbert teacher Sharon Sandon assisting in her classroom.

"The students are so excited to practice reading with another adult and truly look forward to the days when Mrs. Sandon visits," Becki said. "The VinE program is so beneficial to our students because it provides the opportunity for extra support for all of the kids. We couldn't do what we do without all of our wonderful volunteers."

And Nelle Shean fifth-grade teacher Laurie Oates, who has participated in the program since its first year stated, "I love having VinE volunteers come in and work with individual students on specific math and reading skills. Even more important, the students look forward to seeing them and even ask when they are coming."

Eveleth-Gilbert Schools continues to seek additional volunteers to provide the needed support teachers have requested. If anyone would like to be a part of the Eveleth-Gilbert VinE program, they can contact me at avoss@egschools.org. Anyone wanting information about the VinE program in other Range schools, contact VinE's Program Director Cassandra Hailey at cassandra.hailey@vine-mn.org.

Robert Finc summed up his feeling about his volunteering when he stated, "Being a 'homer,' I want to see Range students exceed and succeed. It's Rangers helping Rangers. I highly recommend it to anyone interested in helping students and wanting to 'give back' to the community."

Volunteers in Education engages the community in the education of its students, supporting their growth and preparing them for productive citizenship. *Ann Voss is the VinE Eveleth-Gilbert site coordinator. She lives in Mt Iron, MN.*

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