

Texas School Makes Community Service a Priority



With x2VOL, Students Give 35,000 Hours

Seven Lakes High School in Katy, Texas has over 3,400 students and nearly 1,500 of them participate in Spartans Out Serving or “SOS,” a voluntary community service club. Community service is deeply ingrained into the school’s culture. Over half of the student body participates in SOS and this year, almost 800 students met their service goals. For seniors, that means 60 hours of effort is rewarded with coveted white cords at graduation.

The school opened in 2006 and up until the 2010/11 school year, SOS members tracked their hours on paper and stored reams of it in ubiquitous three-ring binders. Student are mentored by teachers—their sponsors—who are responsible for reviewing and approving thousands of student hours each year. In fact for 2010/11, community service topped a whopping 35,000 hours. In previous years, such largesse required dozens of end-of-semester hours for parent volunteers to hand approve their students’ efforts, but not this year. This year, Seven Lakes High School has x2VOL from intelliVOL.

About x2VOL

x2VOL from intelliVOL is a patent-pending, web-based community service management application used by schools to track student hours given to non-profit organizations. Schools throughout the country use x2VOL to ease the paperwork burden for tracking student volunteer hours and community service.

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Efficiency in the Cloud

Before x2VOL, students were handing in their hours all at one time.

The shift from using paper and binders to x2VOL resulted in dramatic improvement. Because x2VOL is web-based, everything from signing up for volunteer work to garnering approvals is completed online. Reams of paper and binders no longer clog the library tables. The approval process is speedier and the end-of-semester rush disappeared. “Before x2VOL, students were handing in their hours all at one time, which put a time restraint on the sponsors to thoroughly review the hours,” said Tracey Grimme, the library media specialist who oversees SOS.

Taylor Acosta gave 105 service hours during her senior year. “I’m a pretty organized person anyway but before, I kept a folder and filed the paperwork chronologically. I had to write everything down and wait until the end of the semester to get approvals. With x2VOL, I can see the status [of approvals] and don’t have to wait until the end of the year to suddenly find that I might be short on hours or find that something isn’t getting approved.” The quick turn-around ensures none of Taylor’s effort gets forgotten and her records will be available to her any time she needs a report for college applications, scholarships or future jobs.

Easier Connections

Signing up for service opportunities used to be time intensive. “Students would sign up by email or call the group they wanted to help. We would put notices up about the opportunities and send out emails but x2VOL made this much easier,” says Ms. Grimme. Now, students can register with one click and the service organization immediately knows their slot is filled. A private calendar helps students keep track of their schedules and allows them to write in work they find on their own. When they finish their work, students record their hours and notes. Their sponsors can review and approve hours without fuss. “There’s no back-and-forth, no having to go back to the service group to confirm hours,” adds Ms. Grimme.

Even for highly motivated students like Colleen Wagner, a senior on her way to Texas A&M, finding the right person at any service organization can be difficult. “If I didn’t know the service group, x2VOL was helpful. I could see who was in charge and who to talk to if I had questions,” said Miss Wagner. Other students appreciate that they can find opportunities, schedule and track all of their efforts at a single site. “x2VOL made my volunteering convenient,” said Kevin Zhang a senior going to Johns Hopkins University this fall. “Volunteering is important at Johns Hopkins and it was important for my application to show the work I’ve put in. I could go home right after volunteering and then log my hours right then.”

Empowering Responsibility

Ms. Grimme and the school principal, Christie Whitbeck, feel that this sense of immediacy helps make x2VOL successful. Both agree that x2VOL helps students to be responsible and evens out the load for sponsors during the year. “We used to have parent volunteers spend two or three weeks at the end of the year going through all the student reports to approve hours. Now, at the end of the year, we are already done.”

“Kids are digital natives,” said Ms. Whitbeck. “To log in on a piece of paper is not their way. We are tapping into their world with x2VOL; this is how they think and operate. By making [the tracking of hours] convenient, they are more apt to do it. x2VOL increases their accountability.”

Greater Accuracy

There are no errors and no lost papers to stymie students when it is time to tally up hours. “With the old system, it was easy to forget to write down your hours or what you did and then you would forget stuff at the end of the year,” said Alejandro Yanes who frequently tutored at local elementary schools. Kevin Zhang added, “x2VOL reduces stress. I didn’t have to go track down phone numbers at the center or drive over there to get signatures.”

Principal Whitbeck pointed to the “more realistic picture” generated by x2VOL’s database. “It is easier to understand the depth of what we are doing with a real-time system,” she said. “Since we can now approve hours throughout the school year, the students think twice about what really is community service thus maintaining and improving the integrity of our program,” adds Ms. Grimme.

It’s all about convenience. When a school’s culture so strongly encourages students to give back, the next step to reaching the impressive numbers like Seven Lake’s is to use a management system like x2VOL that saves time, facilitates connections and helps kids do the right thing.