

Business volunteers go

# Back to School

By Linda Gebroe

**F**rom where Paul Hampton sits on Tuesdays, things look mighty low to the ground. That's when the Pacific Bell staff manager helps tutor fifth graders at George Washington Carver Elementary School in Hunters Point. There the chairs are mostly kid-sized. Hampton is one of 2,200 volunteers a year placed by San Francisco School Volunteers (SFSV) in the city's public schools. Established in 1963 with eight volunteers in two schools, the organization now draws on the diverse resources of the city—including businesses, senior citizens, university students and community organizations—to improve the quality of public education.

Volunteers teach math, reading, writing, career education and

English as a Second Language to some 33,000 public school students in the city. They also work directly with educators to help design programs in the area most essential for student learning.

“Education is perhaps the most personal of all

endeavors,” says Sandra Treacy, SFSV executive director. “Drawing out the human mind takes human effort. What San Francisco School Volunteers does is carefully match expertise with need.”

In San Francisco, the business community has served as a national role model in successful

partnerships between business and education. From entrepreneurs to multi-national corporations, more than 100 local businesses have responded to the call for help in the public schools.

San Francisco School Volunteers' Corporate Action in

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Public Schools (CAPS) program recruits, trains and places business people in the classroom with individual students. Now in its fourteenth year, CAPS has bolstered the school-business partnership movement with the involvement of such corporation as Pacific Bell, AT&T, IBM,

PG&E, The Bank of California, Wells Fargo Bank, Shaklee Corp., the Internal Revenue Service and Levi Strauss. Volunteers play an increasingly vital role in the classroom, helping students achieve academic goals and providing valuable insights into the world of work.

Paul Hampton is a CAPS volunteer.

“I requested this

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**— Paul Hampton, school volunteer**

school because it’s in Hunters Point. My background is similar to that of the children who go to school here,” says Hampton, who was raised in Pittsburgh. “It can be real rough for a kid to come to school and learn. But there were people who helped me when I was in school. I knew I wanted to do the same when I could.”

Hampton adds that he asked to be placed where he was most needed, and where he could see the results of his efforts.

“Volunteering here is like watching blossoms come up. These children begin to trust you, to share with you, to vie for your attention,” he says. “Recently, I was working

with a girl who was convinced she didn’t want to do her reading assignment. But I encouraged her to do it. The next week, she came up to me and said not only did she do it, she liked it.”

The genuine partnerships that are created between business and education are what make the programs so successful, Treacy observes.

“Both sides are professionals,” she says. “Each has respect for the other.”

Why should business, which seems to be a generation apart from schools, be involved at all?

“I think the American business system is understanding that it’s time to invest in the most important product this country has—its people. There is simply no better investment than education.

“Businesses spend about \$25 billion a year on employee remediation,” says Treacy. “The investment needs to be made at the front end, in the public schools. That’s how we

groom a qualified work force for the future. More important, it guarantees our young people their constitutional right to equal opportunity.”

With San Francisco School Volunteers coordinating business involvement in public schools, the San Francisco student-teacher ration has been lessened. Positive role models are provided to one of the most diverse student populations in the country. Students are not the only ones to benefit. Allowing employees to step outside their business roles and contribute to a child’s education boosts employee morale. Employees often learn by teaching, too.

“I think I’m getting more out of this than the students,” Hampton says.

Making volunteer involvement in the educational system even more meaningful is the challenge facing San Francisco School Volunteers, says Treacy.

“The momentum is there,” she says. “There’s a much greater openness to taking the first step. Now businesses are seriously considering what it means to be involved and saying, ‘Yes. We want to help.’”

For more information, call (415) 864-4223.