

# **An Open Letter to Parents and Community Members**

**(Prepared by Deborah E. Burns, University of Connecticut)**

Dear Interested Parents and Community Members:

This letter has been distributed to you as part of our efforts to locate adults within our community who might be willing to share their professional expertise, talents, and experiences with the students in our schools.

In designing programs to meet the needs of our children, it is important that we provide a wide variety of enrichment experiences. Classroom studies, independent research, and special classes already meet many of their learning needs. Yet the abilities of many of our students are often so unique that it becomes necessary to look beyond the boundaries of the traditional classroom in order to locate appropriate resources and role models.

It is our belief that advanced-level interests can best be encouraged by bringing children in touch with adult professionals who share their interests and ambitions. In this way, children will have an opportunity for intense exploration of individual interests and a wide exposure to adults of varying lifestyles and ideologies. We firmly believe that children who have this prolonged contact with adult role models will gain an appreciation for task commitment, creativity, and problem solving by observing the “practicing professional” in a realistic setting. Children who have this experience will be more likely to eventually develop positive attitudes toward independent learning, self-motivation, and in-depth investigation.

The community involvement we seek differs a great deal from traditional volunteer programs. We are not searching for chaperones, cookie bakers, or teachers’ aides. Instead, we are asking you to share your professional expertise, your experiences, talents, and hobbies. Depending on student needs, this sharing and exploration might involve service as a classroom speaker or as a mentor for an individual child involved in a long-term project.

The survey that follows is our attempt to locate those community members who are willing to share their talents with our students. It will provide us with helpful information regarding your areas of expertise and interest in volunteering your services. If the idea intrigues you, please complete the survey and return it to your local coordinator of enrichment programs. We will contact you regarding future involvement in the program as soon as we have located students who share your interests.

Please accept, in advance, our gratitude for your cooperation.

Return to:

Sincerely,