

Good Afternoon, Everyone!

With the Labor Day weekend finally here and summer winding to a close, the Fort Belvoir Garrison and many of our tenant organizations are looking forward to participation in the Army's Partners in Education (PIE) program. PIE is an Army-authorized program that encourages Soldiers and federal employees to work with local schools to foster community relations and act as mentors for students. Our partner schools are reaping a great benefit from the wealth of experiences our Soldiers and employees bring to their students. As the PIE program expands and participation grows, we (as managers of civilian employees) need to remember that certain rules on work attendance, use of government resources, and liability do not change, even though the employee is a PIE volunteer.

Partners in Education originated from a 1996 Presidential memorandum that encouraged the federal work force to make their communities stronger by volunteering. On President Clinton's direction, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) created guidelines for federal agencies to follow in implementing volunteer programs.

One issue that my staff has been asked to provide guidance on concerns employees' work schedules and time off to participate in the PIE program. OPM has provided very straightforward guidelines, and it gives the supervisor three options:

- Create Alternative Work Schedules to allow participation. That is, you may require your employee to work his or her 80-hour-per-pay-period work schedule, but you may do so creatively to allow PIE participation.
- Allow for the liberal use of regular leave and leave without pay to allow participation.
- Provide the employee with an Excused Absence (administrative leave), so long as the absence is directly related to the PIE. However, the absence must be brief and infrequent. Moreover, the excused absence option should not be allowed if it is detrimental to accomplishment of your mission.

I strongly recommend that if your employees are participating in PIE, you choose one criteria for the leave status and apply that status evenly to your entire staff to avoid any unneeded confusion.

Other issues that have arisen deal with the use of government equipment for PIE program purposes. Government equipment may not be used in the PIE program. It is really that simple.

You also may not raise funds at work for the partner school or program. Fundraising activities are prohibited from occurring in government offices (remember you can't sell Girl Scout cookies

or dinging coupon books in your office, break room, or via government email). However, if you want to put a box in the front office for people to donate items for use by the students, that is acceptable. Don't forget, though, that there can be no coercion or perception of coercion by management to contribute. This would be an unlawful personnel practice in violation of 5 U.S.C. § 2302.

Finally, and with the hope that it will never actually happen, two other issues must be addressed. First, programs under PIE cannot involve political activity. So, if the Young Democratic Club or Young Republican Club wants your employee's help in promoting their candidate as a part of school activities, then you must decline. To participate in such activity would violate the Hatch Act. Second, in the unfortunate event that your employee is injured while participating in PIE, the employee will most likely be eligible for Worker's Compensation.

The PIE is a wonderfully successful program. However, let us not lose sight of the fact that this is a *volunteer* program that is not without its limitations. Please contact your Labor Counselor with any specific questions.