

8 lessons I learned while volunteering at field day

As a failure at my own elementary school field days, I had never looked forward to attending one before I signed up to volunteer at Leo's. But it turned out to be a fantastic day.



Here are just a few of the things I learned:

1. Field Day is a real workout. No, not for the students; for the volunteers. I didn't think I'd break a sweat. Instead, my fellow volunteer and I spent the morning jogging behind the students, rearranging hula hoops, dodging jump ropes, and chasing tennis balls across the gym. Picture me grabbing a spinning hula hoop with one hand while lunging for a tennis ball with the other and yelling, "Only one person can be on the trampoline at a time!" with a badminton racket held in my teeth, and you won't even need to look at the YouTube clip. (I pray no such footage exists.)

2. Obstacle courses are arbitrarily designed. Early on, purely for safety reasons, we had to ask the students not to shoot the basketball at the end of the course. Then we eliminated the tennis ball portion. Finally, as the classes coming to the course were getting younger and younger, we pulled the badminton rackets. Don't worry. It was still physically demanding for the students, but it was also more fun because no one was chasing tennis balls. And, as the saying goes, when the moms volunteering at Field Day are happy, everyone is happy.



3. I don't know how to slice oranges. For years my husband has been (kindly) telling me that there is a way to cut oranges so that they are easier to eat. When presented with a knife and oranges in the school kitchen, I realized that John is absolutely right. There is a better way. But Field Day offered no time for on-the-job training, and I just need to be grateful that my friendship with the mom I was helping survived my pathetic orange slicing.

4. Even when I'm not a competitor, I'm not cut out for Field Day. Three or four groups had come through our obstacle course before a smiling mom with a clipboard approached me.

"What are the scores?" she asked.

"Oh, we're not keeping score!" I said. "They just race through the course and head on to the next activity. We're having a wonderful time."

"But...they're split into blue and gold teams," she said. "Aren't you keeping track of which team is winning?"

"Teams? Oh. Well, they didn't seem to have teams, so we have just been counting off."

She was pleasant about it, but as she walked away I knew the truth: I had failed as a Field Day volunteer.



5. I love our Catholic school. *I knew they started each day with prayer, but there's something so wonderful about seeing the entire school standing together to say the Our Father and the pledge. When the principal referenced the Gospel reading they had all heard earlier, I was reminded yet again why we have chosen to send Leo to Catholic school.*

6. I'm going to cry more on the last day of kindergarten than I did on the first. *When the younger students formed a tunnel for the eighth graders to run through, I was so moved—and I only know one eighth grader. But what struck me the most was watching our not-so-little boy looking so confident and happy, traveling from activity to activity with his friends and classmates. Where has this year gone? And how can I be so sentimental and still so grumpy about homework assignments?*

7. Leo is still my little boy. *Every single time he saw me, he waved or, if we were close enough, ran to give me a hug. I don't know when he'll outgrow that, but I love these sweet moments with him. And when I wasn't even with him and children I didn't know called me "Leo's mom," I felt like a celebrity.*



8. It was the best Field Day ever.

"Tell your brother about Field Day," I said to Leo as we were driving home.

"Oh! Yes! Field Day was fun," Leo said to Daniel. "I got to do a race! And Mama was there!"

I may not have been on the blue or the gold team. And they may never invite me back for another Field Day. But I couldn't be prouder if I defeated the entire eighth grade in tug of war.

I can't wait for next year.