

PTA Room Parent Welcome Letter
Takoma Park Elementary School
2015-2016

Thank you for volunteering to be a Room Parent in your child's classroom this year! Room Parents play a vital role in making each classroom the best it can be. While the role each Room Parent will play in the classroom will differ somewhat depending on the needs and interests of each teacher, the PTA offers this Welcome Letter to provide some basic information about being a Room Parent that we hope you will find helpful.

I. Getting to Know The Teacher and Identifying Needs and Interests

At the beginning of the school year, it is helpful to set a time to meet with the teacher to identify the teacher's expectations for the Room Parent (or Room Parents if there is more than one in your child's classroom), to get to know the teacher's needs and interests, and to establish a means for regular communication.

If there is more than one Room Parent in your child's classroom, this may also be a good time to divide up responsibilities between the Room Parents, both to lighten the load for each Room Parent and to make it clear to the teacher which Room Parent will be in charge of what responsibility.

While such a meeting will likely range over a wide variety of topics, there are several common topics that it is a good idea to cover. These include:

- The Shutterfly site: Most teachers at TPES use a Shutterfly site for classroom communication (see below for more details about setting up such a site). If that's the case in your classroom, it makes sense to discuss with the teacher whether the teacher expects the Room Parent to manage the site and keep it updated or to play any other role related to the site.

- Classroom needs: Another good topic to cover is whether the teacher has any specific classroom needs and whether the teacher would like the Room Parent to assist in soliciting donations from parents to meet these needs. Most teachers will, throughout the year, have occasional immediate needs for supplies, like Kleenex and snack donations. In addition, many teachers have longer-term plans for their classroom, such as purchasing yoga balls or indoor recess activities that a Room Parent may be able to help the teacher accomplish over the course of the school year.

- Teacher gifts: At this meeting, it is also helpful to identify possible future gifts for the teacher. This may seem a little awkward, but at TPES it is traditional for parents to purchase small gifts for the teacher in December before the holidays and at the end of the school year (see below for more details on teacher gifts), so it is very helpful to have the teacher provide you with some ideas for possible gifts at the beginning of the school year.

II. Communicating with other parents

Facilitating communication between parents is a key role of the Room Parent. As described above, most teachers use a Shutterfly site as an easy forum for classroom communication. Information on site setup can be found on Shutterfly or you can email diana.mccown@gmail.com Parents sign up for the site individually, but the Room Parent can facilitate this process by encouraging parents to sign up so that there is a single central means for parents to communicate with one another and the teacher.

Typically, the Room Parent works with the teacher to keep the site updated. Key aspects of updating the site include:

- Updating the classroom calendar regularly: Ideally, the classroom calendar should include information about all-school events (early dismissal days, assemblies) as well as classroom specific events (field trips, other classroom events). The PTA regularly hears from parents who want to volunteer or attend school events but learn of opportunities too late to adjust their work or childcare schedules. Room Parents can help with these challenges by providing parents with regular reminders about upcoming classroom events. Although much of this same information will also be sent to parents through other means – such as through

flyers sent home in Dolphin folders or school newsletters – Room Parents play an important role in communicating directly with a smaller group of parents about these topics and aggregating this information in one easily-accessible location.

- Posting messages on general classroom topics: Typical topics include: alerts when classroom donations are needed (such as snacks, tissues, or hand sanitizer); calls for volunteers (such as to volunteer as a field trip chaperone); and reminders for parents to return completed field trip permission slips.

Because Room Parents are regularly communicating with other parents about classroom topics, it is not unusual for Room Parents to receive a variety of questions from parents about classroom topics. Often the questions are straightforward and the Room Parent can answer them easily. However, if the Room Parent doesn't know the answer to a question or is uncomfortable answering a particular question, the Room Parent should reach out to a PTA officer to provide an answer or guidance.

III. Teacher Gifts

At TPES, it is traditional for parents to provide the teacher with a small gift in December and again at the end of the school year. The Room Parent coordinates the purchase and delivery of these gifts. As has already been mentioned, it is helpful to ask the teacher at the beginning of the school year for suggestions about possible gifts.

Most Room Parents follow the following process for teacher gifts:

- Two to three weeks before you want to present the gift, send an email to all parents in the classroom (parent emails will be available when the school directory is distributed in October or November) announcing that you as a Room Parent are coordinating the purchase of a gift for the teacher and requesting that parents who wish to contribute towards the purchase of the gift should do so.
- The note typically requests that parents send their contributions in an envelope in their child's Dolphin folder addressed to the Room Parent by a date that is several days before the Room Parent plans to purchase and present the gift. Other parents will

almost always ask for a suggested contribution amount. It is up to you whether to provide such a suggestion, however, many Room Parents find it helpful to provide a clear suggestion (typically ranging between \$10 and \$20 per family) while stating clearly at the same time that contributions of any amount are welcome.

- The Room Parent then purchases the gift. The gift can be whatever the teacher has requested. However, in the absence of a specific request, Room Parents often purchase a gift card for the teacher so the teacher can decide what to do with the gift. The gift is often presented by the Room Parent to the teacher at a classroom event – such as a holiday party or end-of-the-year celebration. However, in other cases the Room Parent simply presents the gift to the teacher directly. In either case, it is a good idea to send an email to other parents telling them how much was collected for the teacher gift and that the gift was purchased and presented to the teacher.

V. What if I have other questions?

In addition to reading the information contained in this letter, every room parent should sign up for the TPES Room Parent Listserv, which serves as a valuable ongoing resource for Room Parents. After you are selected as a Room Parent, you will receive an invitation to join this listserv. If you do not receive such an invitation, contact the PTA, who can assist you in signing up.

More generally, when questions arise that you do not know the answer to, you should reach out to a PTA officer for assistance in seeking an answer.

Again, *thank you* for volunteering to be a Room Parent. You are providing a huge and much appreciated service to your child's classroom.

From the TPES PTA, we hope you have a great year