



Room Parent Handbook



WELCOME

Thank you so much for agreeing to be the room parent for your student’s class! Strong schools thrive on a positive collaboration between families and the school staff. By being a room parent you are helping to make ECS a great school! You are the parent’s main touch point to the school. Their involvement, in large extent, relies on their room parent keeping them informed and involved.

As a room parent you will be a tremendous asset to your teacher. By handling the volunteer coordination, planning parties and helping out “behind the scenes” you free up your teacher’s time so they are able to focus their time and energy on what is most important- teaching our kids!

So many of the fun things that the kids look forward to are made possible by the room parents and other class volunteers. Thank you for helping to make this year fun for the students!

Being a room parent has benefits to you as well! One big benefit is getting to know the teacher, the families and the kids well. It is also a great way to feel more connected to the school. Hopefully you will have a positive experience as well!

At times being a room parent may feel like a thankless job but please know that your time and effort are valued throughout the entire ECS community! Thank you!

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PCO Room Parent Coordinators

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ROOM PARENT RESPONSIBILITIES

The main role of an ECS room parent is to act as a liaison between the teacher and your class. Your job is that of a volunteer coordinator rather than to be the main volunteer for your class. Get the families in your class involved, ask for help and delegate! These are some specific things you will also be responsible for:

1. **Meet with your teacher as soon as possible to determine their specific needs and expectations.**

Our teachers all have individual preferences when it comes to their room parents. It is important to remember that your job is to follow their lead and execute their vision rather than imposing your own viewpoint. Room parents are there to make their teacher's life easier. Some teachers will be open to giving you a lot of leeway while others know exactly what they want. Things you may want to discuss at your first meeting:

- General volunteer needs and preferences
- Proposed classroom celebrations and dates
- Preferred method of communication
- Creating a classroom directory
- Food allergies or restrictions in the classroom so you can safely plan party food.

Remember, don't take it personally if your teacher does not want or need a lot of help! Everyone has different ways of doing things.

2. **Send an introduction letter home to your class.**

Please have this done within 2 weeks of becoming the classroom parent. There is a firm deadline of the first Monday of October to complete. See samples on Page 18.

3. **Create a simple class directory.**

Obtain the approval of your families to include their contact information in a classroom only directory. The contact information is for communication within this classroom only. It is to be used for things like homework help, arranging "play dates" and sending birthday party invitations. The directory is not for public knowledge and should be used responsibly.

4. **Communicate with your teacher regularly.**

A quick email once a week is a great way to check that things are going well or if they have an immediate or upcoming volunteer need.

5. **Communicate regularly with the families in your class via email and/or letters.**

Ideally at ECS we will conserve paper and email but not all families have email. Identify which families prefer a hard copy of volunteer needs and announcements and try and get a paper copy out to them. At times this may not be possible (if something comes up at the last minute). Let your families know that some messages will only get communicated via email. A few times of the year it is nice to send something home on paper as emails can get overlooked easily. The best times to do this are at the beginning of the year, prior to the holidays and before Teacher Appreciation week. It is also very nice to do things like share pictures and a summary of what the kids have been up to. It is a great way to help the families that can not be in the classroom feel connected. (more information on photo sharing below)

You may also ask your teacher to include room parent updates and news in their weekly newsletter. Consider sending out event invitations (like curriculum nights, PCO meetings...) or Boxtop for Education deadlines, a reminder to come in sometime and sharpen pencils, volunteer to cover your teachers' lunch duty, little things to keep families in the loop and keep communication open.

6. **Volunteer management.**

This is your main job and thus deserves it's own section! See page 5.

7. **Plan class celebrations, maintain party kits, manage PCO-provided party funds.**

The other biggie! This also has it's own section. (Page 8)

8. **Attend 1-2 room parent meetings per school year.**

All dates are tentative but there will be an orientation meeting in October and maybe a teacher appreciation planning meeting in April. Other meetings as needed though most communication will take place via email.

9. **Stay informed about ECS.**

While you do not need to be the representative to the PCO for your class, it is very helpful to stay informed about what is going on with ECS and the PCO. Some of your families will assume that you are "in the know" and ask you questions. Read your Wednesday Word, check your email, read the PCO Facebook page, attend meetings and events. By being well informed you will be a big help to the families in your class.

And while you don't need to be a representative to the PCO, we would like you to be! If your class has any news or notable event to share with they school community, bring it to the PCO meetings in person or share it with the room parent coordinators.

10. **Be accessible to your families.**

Reply to emails and phone calls in a timely fashion.

11. **Recruit volunteers for school wide and PCO events.**

Direct requests from a room parent often increase participation and involvement better than other modes of recruitment. Please pass on these requests to your family when and if you receive them.

12. **Help to plan teacher and staff appreciation events throughout the year.**

Help plan class specific gestures of appreciation. Typically we plan events during the first week of May, Teacher Appreciation Week.

13. **Work with your families and students to arrange gifts for the teacher(s) during holidays, Teacher Appreciation Week and/or the end of the year.**

It is up to the room parent to make sure that something happens for the teacher(s) at least once/ year. It is very possible that other families in your class have ideas so open up a discussion in person and/ or via email several weeks ahead of time. See Page 10 for ideas.

14. **Share photos with your families.** Create a website for your class using a source like Shutterfly (password protected, accessible only to those invited) or Facebook. Obtain a photo release from your families for this purpose. A class photo album is a great way for every family to feel included if they aren't able to come to parties, field trips or just day to day functions.

15. **Coordinate school wide PCO collections.** The PCO often collects for group gifts at the holidays and/ or Teacher Appreciation Week. There may be other requests, such as raffle baskets for Fall Festival. You may be given a letter to distribute then you will need to collect money or items and make arrangements to get them to the event organizer.

VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

TYPES OF VOLUNTEERING

As the room parent, your primary job is to recruit and organize volunteers. Be in touch with your teacher to determine what help they need. Encourage your families to find their niche in your class. These are some of the ways that families can help:

- **Regular in-class volunteering.** Help may be needed for things like reading and math centers. These will be recurring needs and it is best to find volunteers that commit to come every week.
- **Occasional in-class volunteering.** Reading to the class, helping with a special project, hanging artwork, sharpening pencils, filing, etc.. Often if a loved one is in the building and they have 15 minutes they can find a task that will really be helpful.
- **Out of class volunteering.** These are wonderful ways that working parents or those with small children at home can help. Teachers can send home small projects that can be worked on from home. They include tasks like stapling, cutting, sorting, and other tasks that are behind the scenes. One way that you, as a room parent, can facilitate this is by providing a **take home tote** that will allow materials to be transported with the kids home to their families.
- **Chaperones** for hikes, field trips and other outdoor excursions.
- Planning and attending parties and celebrations.

HOW TO RECRUIT VOLUNTEERS

- Let your families know of all the different ways they can get involved with the class by sharing the in and out of class opportunities. Encourage them to help in any way they can- all help counts!
- Distribute a calendar of planned needs as soon as possible so families can arrange to be there. 2-3 weeks ahead of events, start emailing and getting in touch with the families. Advanced notice is a good way to arrange volunteers. Remember that a last minute plea may be necessary- and is often successful! So, don't rule out contacting your families even if it seems too late. People may not know how needed they really are. A website like Sign Up Genius, Doodle, Evite, or Google Documents is very useful as volunteers can see exactly when they are needed and what items might be needed.
- Social networking like Facebook is a nice way to get the word out about volunteer needs. Use the ECS PCO Facebook group.
- Personally ask the families to help. If you see them in the halls or at drop off/ pick up, take a moment to chat with them and encourage them to get involved. If you are really struggling for help, ask your key volunteers to also personally recruit someone to come. They may have personal connections with other families in the class and can provide successful outreach.
- Any adult who has clearances can help. If you need to pull more people, ask your families if they have grandparents or other extended family members that may be willing and able to volunteer.
- Remember to thank your volunteers! We all like to have our work acknowledged and appreciated. This will foster a good will that will encourage repeat volunteerism.
- If you are short on volunteers, please reach out to your fellow room parents! Your 3rd grade class may not have enough chaperons but there could be a 1st grade parent willing and able to go! Work together as a community. If you find yourself in a volunteer shortage the day of an event (like a classroom party), contact your room parent coordinators to see if they can help.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION TO SHARE WITH YOUR VOLUNTEERS

1) How to be a good volunteer

All in class volunteers need to know that volunteering in the classroom is a privilege. Volunteers are there to work, not socialize, not observe the class, not have a private conference about their child. Volunteers that are a distraction or abuse their time in the class may be asked to leave. Let your families know how important it is to be responsible and courteous when they are in the classroom. Our volunteers can be great role models for the students.

Secrets of a good volunteer

- Sign in at the office and wear your name tag at all times.
- Be on time.
- Be reliable.
- Be unobtrusive.
- Ask questions at the beginning of the shift (know where materials you might need are located and any other issues that might come up) so that you will not have to distract the teacher with these questions later.
- Find a substitute if you are unable to make your shift.
- Do not commit to something like chaperoning if you are not sure you can do it. The teachers count on every chaperon and they can be left in a very awkward situation if a volunteer cancels at the last minute or does not show.
- Know that by not showing as planned you may upset your child. They worry when they expect you to be there.
- Follow your teacher's lead on how they like their class to be run.
- Read the ECS handbook, especially with regards to discipline and bullying.

2) Clearances

Visit the ECS website <http://environmentalcharterschool.org/index.cfm/volunteering/> for information on clearances and filing instructions.

- Clearances are necessary for in-class volunteering. However, they are not necessary to attend parties or participate in school-sponsored events like Fun Day and Fall Festival.
- Volunteers that will be responsible for small groups or individual students must have clearances. This includes volunteers for things like reading groups, chaperons on field trips, chaperons during student only events, driving a team or group of students to an event, and assisting in the classroom. A description that may help- if you are acting as an extension of the teacher, you need clearances.
- If there are no breaks in enrollment status, clearances on file will not need to be updated. This may change and you will be informed of changes.
- Volunteers submitting clearances for the first time can only submit clearances that are less than 1 year old.
- There is a fee for clearances. If cost is an issue for an individual wishing to volunteer, the office may be able to provide assistance.
- Mandated Reporting. Volunteers with clearances are obligated, per their clearance forms, to report any

suspected abuse. Please review the information at the Department of Health and Human Services for more information: http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/mandata.cfm

3) Confidentiality

ECS takes student confidentiality very seriously and expects all volunteers to sign the confidentiality form. (See pages 16-17.)

Everything that you see and hear in the classroom is confidential. This really means everything, from “M. is an amazing reader!” to, “J. had to go to the principal’s office today!” and anything in between. These things, especially the more positive ones, may seem like they shouldn’t be a problem but they really can be and you never know. Do not discuss observations and interactions that you witness or are part of at school; that is not your responsibility. The teachers and staff will share academic, social, behavioral and emotional with the families impacted as needed. Room parents set the tone among the other parents in the class, so your help is appreciated.

PARTIES AND CLASSROOM CELEBRATIONS

The second biggest room parent responsibility is coordinating party planning. There is no rule that says you need to be the person in charge of all of these. It is very reasonable to ask for volunteers to be in charge of specific events. These details are at the discretion of the room parent. Just be sure and spread the volunteering opportunities around since we do not want anyone to feel left out (and don't just choose your friends to help!). Even if you have a brain filled with fantastic ideas, it is nice to solicit more ideas. You never know what other families may come up with!

Your teacher may have very specific ideas about how they want parties to be run so always be in touch with them before making any plans or arrangements. Please do not plan the party without running it by your teacher. It's even a good idea to mention things like proposed materials...some teachers really dislike when things like glitter are used in their classroom for example!

THE CLASSROOM PARTY KIT

The ECS PCO has provided a kit of reusable party ware for each homeroom. The maintenance of the kit is the responsibility of the room parent- this job can be delegated! Each homeroom has 24 cups and 24 plates in a storage bin. Please keep track of the quantity and alert the Room Parent Coordinator if you need replacements. If you have ideas about items you would like to see included, please also pass those ideas along! We will stock extras in the PCO cabinets as well.

Whenever possible, use your party kit. It is very much in keeping with our school's mission and a great, free alternative to disposable items.

THE PARTY AND CLASSROOM NEEDS' FUND

The ECS PCO has established a fund to be used for classroom parties and celebrations. The funds are to be used for things such as craft materials, decorations, food and other activities. It is perfectly reasonable and acceptable to ask your families for donations rather than dip into the fund. You may find that your families are more than happy to contribute the items you need. But, know that the money is there and that with wise budgeting you should be able to cover party expenses with the PCO funds. Also, remember that the craft materials in the PCO cabinet are available for your use. Try to incorporate these, free, recycled materials into your party and craft plans!

This fund can also be used for supplies that directly benefit the class or teacher. Some past examples include the purchase of cardstock so the kids could write a "thank you" to their teacher as a gift; the purchase of blank CDs so all families could have pictures from the school year's activities; and purchasing a class photo book through a website like Shutterfly for the teacher.

PARTY PLANNING

- The key to successful party planning is giving yourself enough time.
- At the beginning of the school year, learn the dates for parties and get those dates out to your families.
- Be in touch with your teacher a few weeks before the party and get in touch with your families about 2-3 weeks before the event.
- It may be helpful to discuss plans with the other grade level room parents because some parties are done jointly.
- You may be responsible for coming up with ideas for crafts and activities. Refer to Pages 12-14 for suggestions.
- It is very helpful to share the party plans with your volunteers ahead of time so they know what to expect- email them a day or 2 ahead of time. It can also be very helpful to write out an exact plan for

the day including set up and clean up needs as well as exactly what the games, crafts, snacks and activities entail. Sometimes parties can be a flurry of activity and volunteers feel like they don't know how they are supposed to help. A to-do list allows the party planner to be sure the needs are clearly conveyed without distraction. Refer to Appendix E

PARTY FOOD

ECS is committed to avoiding foods that offer “minimal nutritional value” per the USDA. When planning food for a party, please do your very best that the food that is brought in is nutritious. These are things to avoid:

- soda
- water ices
- certain candies like hard candy, gummies and jellies, marshmallow, fondant, licorice, spun candies, candy coated popcorn

See <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/menu/fmnv.htm> for information.

CLASS GIFTS

There is currently no ECS gift policy or limit. It is a nice idea to keep with the school's mission when thinking about gifts. It is also very helpful to consult the teacher surveys. The surveys include lists of favorite stores, restaurants, favorite foods, classroom wish lists and lots of other helpful ideas.

Inform your families about the holiday gift plan by Thanksgiving so that they can plan accordingly. Each class is going to vary tremendously with regards to level of participation. By the time December rolls around you should have a good idea what your class is like and you can use that to determine what would work best for a class gift. For example, if participation and communication has been wonderful then you may be able to pull off a gift where everyone chips in for one large item. But, you may also find that participation is so spotty that it would be better to allow families to do independent gifts.

- **The Group Gift.** It is reasonable to ask families to chip in for a gift so long as you ask in a way that lets people know it is optional. Also be sure and express that while \$___ is the recommended donation, any amount is acceptable because budgets may vary. The easiest way to organize the collection of money is to send home information on paper about the gift and put it in a manila envelope for each child. The students can return the \$ (plus a drawing or other handmade craft, if desired) in the envelope and it can be sent home with your child. Your families may also mail you their contribution if that sounds better. Come up with a system that works great for you (and share your success story with the Room Parent Coordinator so it can be included as an example for future room parents!).
- **Gift Cards.** Many teachers don't need or want more "stuff" no matter how well meaning it is. Gift cards allow them to pick out exactly what they want or need. Collecting from the whole class to purchase a gift card can be very successful plus it gives the teacher a larger gift card. Giant Eagle gift cards are a twist on gift cards because the teachers can buy from Giant Eagle food and gas as well as purchase gift cards for other stores and restaurants. (Double check that that policy is still valid if interested.)
- **Homemade Gifts.** Homemade treats are usually appreciated, but instead of sending in 2 dozen cookies, for example, 1-2 sugar or gingerbread cookies decorated by your student can be even better. Tell your families that less is usually more on the treat front!
- **Donations to Charity.** There are many wonderful charities around the world that help children, families, schools and society as a whole. You can gauge whether your teacher would appreciate a gift like that versus a tangible gift or gift card.
- **A Wishlist Item.** Collecting for a physical class gift can be great for your class. Perhaps the teacher really wants a fan...maybe your class could chip in to purchase one. Take a look at your teacher's wishlist and see if your class could work to fulfill some of the list.
- **Say Thank You.** Encourage your families to write to the administration to compliment your teachers' strengths. This is free, simple and fast! Most importantly, it is probably the most appreciated gift you can give.

The PCO has had great success collecting money from all ECS families and pooling it together to get gifts for all of the ECS Specialists. In the past 2 years, we have collected almost \$100 per specialist. Room parents are going to be asked to collect for their class and arrange to get it to the PCO representatives. We have also collected for every employee during Staff Appreciation Week; this too

has been successful.

Just be mindful with your plans if you are concerned about being stuck footing the bill. Every family might not chip in what you hope for a class gift. Have low expectations and hope for the best!

Remember that participation in gifts is totally optional! Please respect families' decisions about participating. It is OK to remind families of deadlines but never to call out individual families.

FUN IDEAS FOR CELEBRATIONS AND EVENTS

When planning any class party, try to make the room look festive and fun! Ask your volunteers to come in 15-30 minutes before the party will start and decorate the class. Use twinkle lights, themed tablecloths and any appropriate decorations. The kids love coming back and seeing their room transformed! Some music is always fun as well!

If you are ever stuck for a filler activity, simply blowing up a few balloons, turning on some music and letting the kids bounce the balloon around is almost always a hit!

The website Pinterest is a great resource for party ideas. The PCO has created a Pinterest account for all committee members, including room parents. Feel free to add great ideas you may stumble across if you use Pinterest. Contact the room parent coordinators for the login information.

HALLOWEEN

ECS usually caps off the celebration for Halloween with the costume Pumpkin Parade. All families are invited to come and watch the parade and it is often great fun! The exact schedule of the rest of the day will vary by teacher. The more Fall themed the party is, the better but some Halloween is ok!

Crafts (From Family Fun <http://familyfun.go.com/crafts/>)

- Paper Bag Gargoyles
- Acorn Necklaces
- Jack O Lantern made from bottle caps
- Paint a pumpkin (stickers don't stick well- FYI)
- Make bats out of hand prints
- Trace the kid's forearm and outstretched hand on a piece of paper- those will become a tree trunk and branches. The kids can then dip their fingers in paints to make the leaves.
- Make slime (search online for recipes)
- Make lollipop ghosts out of rubber bands, lollipops, markers and tissue

Games

- Guess the quantity of X (candy corn...) in a jar- this is a great way to fill in a little window of time! Great game for any party.
- Halloween Bingo (search online)
- Mummy Wrap- teams race to either create most covered mummy or mummy done the fastest (you decide) by wrapping a team mate up in toilet paper
- Scarecrow relay- kids are on teams lined up on one side of the room. Across the room put a pile of adult sized jeans, flannel shirt and hat. Each kid takes a turn running down to the end, getting dressed up, running back, stripping it off, tagging the next person then the next kid gets dressed up...
- Mini pumpkin on a spoon relay
- Skeleton scavenger hunt. Get a jointed paper or plastic skeleton from the store, separate, hide the body parts around. Kids find the pieces then assemble the skeleton (with or without the help of a template).
- Pumpkin Guts' game- hollow out a few pumpkins (I did 4 but 2-3 would be fine), mix together all the guts so you can evenly distribute guts and seeds. Bag up the guts and seeds into 4 bags. During the party have the kids separate the seeds from the guts. Neatness counts (-2 seeds for any mess!) and the team with the most seeds wins! Mini pumpkins make great prizes. (The church on the corner of Fifth Ave. and Negley in Shadyside has a charity pumpkin patch and it's a good place to buy from.)
- Outdoor scavenger hunt.

Snacks

- Mini pumpkin muffins (minis are less waste when they don't like them!)
- Cider

Books

- For the younger grades: The Little Old Lady Who Wasn't Afraid of Anything by Linda Williams
- Ask the school literacy coach for other recommended, age appropriate titles.

THANKSGIVING

ECS celebrates Thanksgiving different ways each year but most years it involves some sort of potluck. I had great success with Evite this year. I created a list of how many of what type of food I needed. Guests could leave a comment about what they planned to bring. All invited guests could see exactly what was coming and if there were gaps to fill. Limit desserts otherwise the spread will be very skewed!

Activities

- Ask the kids what they are thankful for and record their answers. Compile all the answers and leave off the kids' names. Send it home for the families to enjoy as there are almost always some silly answers on there.
- Have everyone bring in a vegetable to share in soup. Chop up the veggies and put in a Crockpot with broth. Serve the soup at the end of the day. Read Stone Soup.
- Make butter in baby food jars by shaking.
- Make a tree by tracing kid's arm and hand on paper. Use fingers dipped in paint to make the tree's leaves.
- Make turkeys out of pine cones.
- Make pine cone bird feeders so the birds can have a treat too!
- Make place cards for Thanksgiving dinner. Family Fun has some great ideas! One includes making turkeys out of fingerprints.
- Find some activity sheets (mazes, puzzles, word hunts) and distribute them for when the kids finish eating or get done with a craft. There are lots of free printables online.

More ideas and descriptions of some of the above can be found at <http://room-mom101.blogspot.com/search/label/Thanksgiving>

WINTER HOLIDAYS

Try to avoid holiday specific ideas and focus more on generic Winter as we don't know what all the families in the class celebrate.

Crafts

- Cut out the shape of a mitten and provide the kids with yarn, glitter glue, buttons, other notions, markers...to decorate them. The mittens can be strung together on yarn and used as a garland to decorate the classroom, with the teacher's permission.
- Collect old holiday cards and have the kids cut them out to make a collage. Take it a step further and laminate or use clear contact paper to create place mats.
- Have the kids create gifts. They can get tea towels and stamp them or draw on them with fabric paint. They can make their own wrapping paper from paper bags and decorative materials.

- Create kid snowmen. Take a picture of each child and have the pictures developed. Using paper plates of varying sizes, create the body of a snowman. Glue the student's picture on the top plate, the head. The plates work best hinged together with binder clips because they really hold.
- Make a treat like chocolate covered pretzel rods. Bring in some melted chocolate in a slow cooker and let the kids dip some of a pretzel rod in it. Then let the kids roll their pretzels in sanding sugars, sprinkles, mini M&Ms, crushed candy canes and other yummy treats.
- Decorate sugar cookies with frosting and sprinkles.

- **Good Websites For Games**

- http://misanthropically/htm/christmas_party.htm
- <http://holidays.kaboose.com/xmas-party.html>

VALENTINE'S DAY

Crafts

- Give each student a piece of poster board and let them decorate them with their name, stamps, stickers and other materials. Let the students mingle and sign the poster boards. This eliminates the need for students to bring valentines from home.
- Create secret message valentines for loved ones at home.
- Create kind notes for local nursing home residents.
- String healthy treats on a string to create “candy” necklaces. Cheerios and raspberries, for example. Alternatively, create necklaces from beads.
- Decorate shoe boxes for valentines.
- Decoupage a small bottle with tissue paper and create a bud vase.

Snacks

- Strawberry Kebabs
- Strawberry and vanilla yogurt parfaits

Good website for Games

- <http://sassysites.blogspot.com/2012/02/valentine-party-minute-to-win-it.html>

TEACHER APPRECIATION WEEK

Note: You do not need to do something special every day! Some classes will, some won't. You do need to do at least 1 thing, however. (It is a Room Parent Responsibility 😊). The PCO will be doing many things during Staff Appreciation Week so you really do not need to do much.

Past room parents have brought 2 fantastic ideas to the group regarding Staff Appreciation Week:

1. Put 1 person or a small group of people in charge of 1 day for the week. They can work together to plan and execute a thoughtful gesture.
2. Allow families to sign up to cook dinner for the teacher each night that week (or purchase a restaurant gift card). This requires a only a minimal number of volunteers so it is a good option for a class with spotty participation.

The blog, Room Mom 101, has a lot of great ideas for Teacher Appreciation Week.

<http://roommom101.blogspot.com/search/label/Teacher%20Appreciation%20Week>

Thoughtful Gifts

- Candy treats in their mailboxes and on the counter near the sign in sheet each day
- Flowers brought in by the students- each student can bring in 1 (more to include specials and/ or aide) and create a bouquet
- Special messages from the students. The kids can write a special message to the teachers or staff on colorful paper and they can be hung up in the staff lounge.
- Hire a massage therapist to come in and give the staff each 10 minute massages in those massage chairs.
- Treats at lunchtime: chips & salsa and virgin margaritas day; make your-own-sundaes day, etc.; chocolate baked goods; breakfast foods...
- Drawings for gift cards, gift baskets, or even "free time" provided by the principal
- Artwork made by the kids, can be bound simply with yarn
- Thank you notes from the students
- Have the kids record a special message for the teacher and put on DVD
- Paperweight rocks made by the kids, kids can paint a message on it like "Ms. Karichko, you ROCK!" Ask Ms. Micco if perhaps there would be space in the new outdoor garden for a rock collection made by the kiddos as a colorful decoration.
- Thank you posters in the hall made by the kids to the whole staff
- Donate a book from your class to the classroom library have all the kids sign it. Same applies to a board game or other item the teacher might love to have for their classroom.
- Have the kids make a thank you poster for the class and take a picture of them with it
- Create a very personal Thank You. Print out outlines of letters and have each child decorate the letter with crayon, marker, craft supplies. The letters spelled out "Thank You [Teacher]!!!" and then take a picture of the class while they were holding their letters in order. Have the kids drop the "[teacher]" part and take a photo of the Thank You part for the aide, specials and office. Have the photo printed out and either buy cards that can hold photos or simple frames.
- Encourage families to write personal thank you notes
- Find out if the teachers would like to have a parent come in to read to class or do a craft during the week while they get caught up on some tasks. Last year I hosted a puzzle afternoon and had different puzzle at each table. It was a lot of fun! Volunteer must have clearances.
- See if the teacher would like a volunteer to cover recess duty one day
- Take their order and bring them lunch from somewhere like Panera.
- Go in and wipe down the desks
- Ask your teacher for their best wish for the class, something a volunteer can do like sorting craft materials, dusting bookcases, hanging things, redoing a bulletin board...and get it done
- Have the kids write why they love their school and/ or teacher on a heart shaped piece of paper. If we get enough maybe we can hang them around the teachers' lounge for Monday or in the gym for Friday. Or just around the auditorium for something nice to look at all week!
- Thank you notes for the specials into their mailboxes from the kids
- See if your class wants to buy a plant from the PCO plant sale to give to your teacher (and maybe aide!)- \$2 from each family
- Buy and decorate a pot and plant something nice in it. Maybe the kids can each paint a small pot and put a seedling in it? or, just one pot put with the phrase, "Thanks for helping us grow! Love, your class." or "Thank you for helping us bloom!"
- Have each child write a favorite memory of the year and create a book of that
- Finding a volunteer to come in and help on Friday would be great so your teacher won't be rushed to enjoy the luncheon!
- Some of the things may be able to get done over the weekend at school, like door or hall signs. If there is interest, ask the Room Parent Coordinator to obtain approval.

APPENDIX A. CONFIDENTIALITY LETTER



ENVIRONMENTAL CHARTER SCHOOL
829 Milton Street
Pittsburgh, Pa 15218

Dear Friend of ECS,

Confidentiality is an important legal and ethical practice in schools. While in our school one may witness a student entering the resource room or notice another student struggle while reading aloud in class. Confidentiality is the obligation not to willingly disclose this information.

Confidentiality is based on four basic principles:

1. Respect for an individual's right to privacy.
2. Respect for human relationships in which personal information is shared.
3. Appreciation of the importance of confidentiality to both individuals and society.
4. Expectations that those who pledge to safeguard confidential information will do so.

It is important that any individual, when entering our school, is aware of the rights of individuals to privacy and to respect the confidential nature of information concerning students.

There may be situations where an individual is obligated to share confidential information about a child. When one has the reason to believe that a child is or might be in need of protection or if a child threatens potential harm to him/herself or another person the sharing of this information is not a breach of confidentiality. If you are in our school and suspect either of these conditions, please inform Principal McCann immediately.

The Family Education Rights Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) Privacy Rule provide legal backing to the importance of confidentiality. Information on both pieces of legislation can be obtained at:

<http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/index.html>

<http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/privacy/>

Thank you for respecting the confidentiality of our students. We appreciate your commitment.

APPENDIX B. CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT



ENVIRONMENTAL CHARTER SCHOOL
829 Milton Street
Pittsburgh, Pa 15218

CONFIDENTIALITY FORM

I, _____ have been informed of, and understand, the importance of confidentiality of students in accordance with State Regulations, *Chapter 14-Special Education Services and Programs*; Federal Regulations, *Part 300.572 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*; and *FERPA, the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act*. After visiting classrooms in the Imagine Environmental Charter School, I will not at any time or place discuss or mention by any identifiable means, any students in the classroom.

I agree further that should I disclose confidential information obtained as a result of the classroom observation in violation of the above paragraph, and an action is brought against the Imagine Environmental Charter School in any administrative or legal proceeding as a result thereof, I would indemnify and hold harmless, Imagine Environmental Charter School, its agents, officers, officials, employees and assigns as a result of such breach of confidentiality.

Signature

Date

APPENDIX C. SAMPLE INTRODUCTION LETTERS

The website PTO Today, <http://www.ptotoday.com/> has a wonderful File Share section with many samples of room parent correspondence. If you are ever stuck for something and want to read other ideas, simply visit there!

SAMPLE A

NOTES ON THIS LETTER: This letter works best if it is 2 pages stapled together so families can keep party dates and other information. Even though I asked for and got volunteers for the parties and Mystery Readers, I found it necessary to open it up to everyone in the weeks leading up to the events. Some people indicated that they were willing to help but then were not able to as the date approached. It was nice to have a baseline interest for everything but don't assume that responses on here will reflect what will actually happen. I did not wind up creating a directory because while I was waiting for the families to turn in the sheets, ECS published the school directory. All of our families participated in there so a separate list seemed unnecessary.

The Do's and Don'ts have been very helpful though! Consider sending them home in your introduction letter.

(PAGE 1)

Hi! My name is __, parent to __, and I will be the room parent for your class this year. I will be helping to organize volunteers for different class needs. I will be in touch when the class needs help and I welcome communication from you if I can be of any help. I hope we can have a great year and that we are able to help things run smoothly for [our teacher] so she can focus her time and energy on teaching our kids! Below are some ways you can get involved:

Mystery Reader

Be a class Mystery Reader! Every Friday around 1:30 I will arrange for one of you to come to the class and read from a favorite book or simply share one of the classroom books with the kids. The Mystery Reader can also be a grandparent, older sibling, or an extra special person to your child. Older ECS siblings are welcome and encouraged to participate with your permission! The Mystery Reader should keep their plan to come in a secret so the kids all have fun trying to guess who will come! See the sign up form if you would like to be included on the roster. Our teacher had great success with this in past years and I hope our class can carry on this fun tradition!

Class Parties

3rd grade has several parties planned for this year. I need your help! I need volunteers I can count on on party days.

I know that we all have schedule challenges though so even if you are unable to come in for a party there are a lot of ways that you can be involved! Maybe you know of a great craft we could do with the kids? Would you like to send in a refreshment with your student? Do you have a talent you could come and share with the kids? See the sign up form for ways you can help make the parties fun for the kids! The dates below are the tentative dates for the parties. Watch for communications in the weeks leading up to the parties for more specifics. [List dates.]

Regular In-Class Volunteering

Be on the lookout for communication about academic volunteer needs. Volunteers may be needed for small group instruction, PSSA preparation or other needs on a regular basis. This is a great task if you have consistent availability as reliability is key! Volunteer clearances are required. Please contact the office if you have questions about clearances.

At Home Support

There are ways that you can help even if you can not be present during the day at school. Help is sometimes needed for tasks that can be done at home! Materials that need to be prepped or pencils that need to be sharpened could be sent home with your child, for example.

Hikes, Special Projects, Chaperons, etc...

I will be in touch when volunteers are needed as things come up throughout the year. I will try to give as much notice as possible. Volunteer clearances may be required. [your contact info]

(PAGE 2)

This form is to be returned by [date] to your teacher!

Class Directory

A class directory will be kept for use within our classroom only. It will be helpful for planning parties and other social functions. I would like a personal copy for all families so I can be in touch about volunteer and classroom needs. Please complete the form below but make a note if you don't want your information shared with the class.

Student's name _____
Student's birthday _____
Parent/ guardian name(s) _____
Phone number(s) _____
Email(s) _____

Class Photos

The email address above will be added to a private website (like a password protected site like Picasa or Shutterfly) so that you may view pictures of the kids engaged during their time at ECS! If you do not want your email added nor your child's photographs to be included on this private website, please indicate that below:

- Yes, my child's pictures may be included on a private classroom website
- No, please do not include my child's pictures on a private classroom website

Class Parties

For each party, please indicate how you are willing to help. I will contact you in the weeks leading up to the party to confirm.

Pumpkin Parade [date]

Feast of Favorites [date]

Plan activities, crafts and games		Plan activities, crafts and games	
Provide materials		Provide materials	
Provide refreshments		Provide refreshments	
Volunteer day of		Volunteer day of	

Winter Party [date]

Valentine's Day Party [date]

Plan activities, crafts and games		Plan activities, crafts and games	
Provide materials		Provide materials	
Provide refreshments		Provide refreshments	
Volunteer day of		Volunteer day of	

Fun Day

Volunteer day of	
------------------	--

Mystery Reader- would you or a loved one like to be added to the roster? Please include contact info:

**Are you willing to provide at home support?
Questions, comments, volunteer interests?**

In class volunteering Do's and Don'ts

Don't – Share confidential information about students, parents, teachers or situations. This goes for “Johnny is a wonderful reader!” or “Suzy is having a really hard time with math.” These observations should not be shared with anyone else.

Do – Encourage students to do their best work

Don't – Expect to have a conference with the teacher about your child during volunteer time

Do – prepare your child prior to coming in and let him/her know you'll be working and he/she will need to continue to participate in class

Don't – Expect hand holding from the teacher, chances are the teacher will be busy with students while you are there.

Do – anticipate problems during the start of you time and ask questions then. For example, find out where materials are before you start a project in case you run out.

Don't – release any family contact information unless you've gotten permission

Do – take the time to get to know the children

Don't – expect that all tasks will be easy or fun.

Do – Offer to help with other tasks once you’ve finished the work you came to do. There is always copying and laminating to be done.

Don’t – Forget to consult the teacher before making decisions.

Do – Respect the wishes of the teacher.

Do – take photos (with the teacher’s permission)

Don’t – forget to share them with other parents

Do- follow the model of handling classroom behavior. Keep your responses in keeping with Miss Schwartz’s model.

SAMPLE B

NOTES ON THIS LETTER: Your teacher might already have the contact information. If so, there is no reason to ask for it again! Create a phone tree with your teachers' contact information. Verify that you have permission to include it first.

It does help if you have as many specifics as possible when you send out the letter. Know what day(s) your class needs help, know what help they may need from home and find out the dates of possible parties and what your teachers may want for them. You can ask them on a form like the one below and then you will have a go-to group when the time comes. But, you can choose whatever works best for you!

Dear Parents/Guardians of _____ Class,

My name is _____. I am parent to _____. I am looking forward to being _____’s room parent for the 2009/2010 school year.

I am setting up a Phone Tree for dissemination of information should there be an emergency or an unexpected event that requires that each parent be reached quickly. I will be at the top of the “tree” and will call three people with the message. Those three people will each call two and so on until all the parents/guardians have been reached. The information you provide at the bottom of this page will help me get that set up quickly and as soon as I have it completed, I will get the chart out to everyone. Should there be an emergency, we will be prepared!

There are a few more things I will need from you to help make this year successful and fun for our children.

- **Volunteers** – Volunteers are needed for a variety of things: field trip chaperons, math and reading center helpers, portfolio helpers, behind the scenes helpers (copying, cutting, etc.), filing helpers, hiking chaperoned, integrated science helpers, “Wednesday Folder” stuffers, helpers for tearing out workbook pages.
- **Ideas** - any ideas you have for activities at parties would be appreciated. I would love for the parties to be a group effort.
- **Contact Information** - please provide me with names and numbers and e-mail addresses so I can get in touch with you all as needed. Return the bottom portion of this to school in an envelope marked HILF and I will compile it all and send a copy out to each of you.

Name: _____

Student's Name: _____

Address: _____

Home Phone: _____ Work Phone: _____

Cell Phone: _____ e-mail Address: _____

I am interested in volunteering for: _____

SAMPLE C

NOTES ON THIS LETTER: Short and to the point. If nothing else, please at least send something like this home! I want to be sure that everyone in your class knows that you are their room parent before October!!!!

Hi! My name is _____ and I am _____'s parent/ guardian. I am the room parent for this class this year. I will be in touch with you about volunteer opportunities in and out of the classroom. You can reach me at _____. I look forward to working with you to make this a great year for our kids and [teacher] this year!!!

APPENDIX D. SAMPLE CLASS DIRECTORY PAGES

ITEMS TO INCLUDE IN DIRECTORY

- Name
- Child's Photo
- Birthday
- Parents
- Phone Number
- E-mail
- Home Address

EXAMPLES OF OPTIONAL ITEMS

- Siblings Names
- Family Pets
- Favorite Foods
- Favorite Games and/or Toys
- Favorite Books and/or Movies

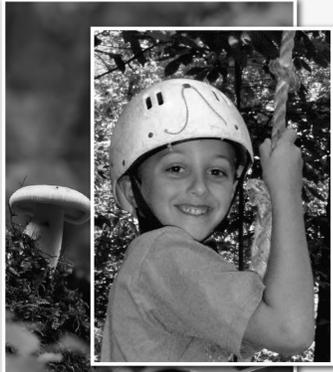


Peyton Lynae Pinkney
 Birthday: [REDACTED]
 Parents: [REDACTED]
 Phone Number: [REDACTED]
 E-mail: [REDACTED]
 Address: [REDACTED]
 Siblings: [REDACTED]
 Pets: [REDACTED]
 Favorite Food: Pizza and Baked Beans
 Favorite Book: Fancy Nancy anything
 Favorite Movie: Avatar

Example of a class directory with extra photos and optional information.



Grace Anderson
 Birthday: [REDACTED]
 Parents: [REDACTED]
 Phone Number: [REDACTED]
 E-mail: [REDACTED]
 Address: [REDACTED]
 Pittsburgh, PA 15233
 Siblings: [REDACTED]
 Pets: [REDACTED]
 Favorite Food: soup
 Favorite Game: Parcheesi
 Favorite Book: It's Raining Cupcakes



Julian Rubin
 Birthday: [REDACTED]
 Parents: [REDACTED]
 Phone Number: [REDACTED]
 E-mail: [REDACTED]
 Address: [REDACTED]
 Pittsburgh, PA 15221
 Siblings: [REDACTED]
 Pets: [REDACTED]
 Favorite Food: cheese
 Favorite Games: Herbie the Love Bug and hide and seek
 Favorite Books: Judy Blume books
 Favorite Movie: Wizard of Oz



Miles Bennett
 Birthday: [REDACTED]
 Parents: [REDACTED]
 Phone Number: [REDACTED]
 E-mail: [REDACTED]
 Address: [REDACTED]
 Pittsburgh, PA 15221
 Siblings: [REDACTED]
 Pets: [REDACTED]
 Favorite Food: french fries
 Favorite Toys and Games: Legos Harry Potter
 Favorite Book: Harry Potter
 Favorite Movie: Star Wars

APPENDIX E. SAMPLE PARTY “TO DO” LIST

TAKEN FROM 3RD GRADE PUMPKIN PARADE PARTY

- Take notes on current classroom layout so things can be put back as we found them.
- The kids will be working in teams for 2 games. Both can be done outdoors weather, time and space permitting. We will have to decide as a group what makes the most sense. I don't want to rush around transitioning but they may be more fun outside.
- If we stay inside, the tables need to be rearranged. We need 4 teams and each team needs a work area large enough to hold at least 2 big mixing bowls.
- Tablecloths go on all the kid tables, if possible. One more will go on the larger table near the windows.
- On each kid table, we need 1 container of Play-Doh per student. We can just pile them up on each table so the kids can choose their own colors.
- On the larger table, we will put the snacks, cups and napkins plus a few decorations.
- There is a Halloween banner to hang near the entrance to the class or near the Smart Board or on the bulletin board wall. Hang the animated spider near entrance. Hang lights if time.
- Gather craft and game supplies so they are ready to be doled out and used.
- If there is time, we can hang a few lights and put out any extra decorations.

PROPOSED SCHEDULE

- 12:15: arrival, play with Play-Doh
- 12:20-12:25: get started on Paper Bag Gargoyles and/ or Acorn necklaces
- 1:00: games. Upon completion of the games, we will get the kids ready for the parade. Snacks can be served in Turtle Park (weather permitting) or in the classroom.

GAMES (Help will be needed to supervise and determine winners.)

1. Sort seeds from pumpkin guts. Seeds into one bowl, guts into another. Each seed collected is worth 1 point and any guts dropped on the floor or any other mess is -2 seeds.

2. Mummy relay race. 4 teams, each team gets 3 rolls of toilet paper and has to wrap 1 of their players up head to toe (not over mouth, nose or eyes). When they have successfully wrapped their mummy the mummy has to run across the finish line.

Prizes- mini pumpkins (I purchased enough for all kids).

CRAFTS (Help is needed to tie yarn onto acorn necklaces and any other needs.)

1. Acorn necklaces.
2. Paper bag gargoyles.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Paper Bag Gargoyle Supplies

- paper bags
- glue sticks
- markers
- glitter glue
- yarn
- magazines
- scissors
- bags of sand*
- tea lights*

**give these out at the end so the kids can take the gargoyles home and make illuminari out of them*

Acorn Necklace Supplies

- acorns
- yarn
- tacky glue
- decorations
- glitter glue

Pumpkin Guts' Game Supplies

- 4 bags of guts
- 4 bowls for seeds
- 4 bowls for guts

Mummy Race Game

- toilet paper
- a finish line

Other

- M&Ms for guessing game if needed to fill time
- Halloween or class story

Favors

- Mini pumpkins- all kids will get them at the end (game winners can get them after the winning contest)
- Finished crafts

APPENDIX F. SAMPLE CLASS GIFT SOLICITATION LETTER



DEAR PARENTS

As the holidays quickly approach, our minds turn to thoughts of thanks and gift-giving. Many of us would like to recognize the people who touch our children's lives during their days at ECS. There are so many to thank—from Miss Sica and Miss Speer to the Specials teachers (environmental science, art, gym, music, and library)—so this gift idea can be daunting.

HERE'S AN IDEA (THAT I HOPE WILL HELP)



1

As a gift for Miss Sica and Miss Speer, I would like to put together a special holiday basket for each of them. If you could send in just \$5-\$10, we would be able to get:

- For Miss Sica: a gift card to one of her favorite stores, Anthropologie (using about 70% of the donation money)
- For Miss Speer: a smaller gift card to Borders

Each of these gift cards will be put into a nice basket that can be filled with any other small things you wish to personally contribute. I propose the theme **GIFTS TO KEEP YOU WARM!** Gift suggestions include: hot drink mixes, socks or mittens, a special little treat etc.... (Each basket will be signed from all the parents in the class.) It will be **FESTIVE AND WONDERFUL!**

Please understand, the donation of cash or a basket item is completely optional—but I appreciate whatever you might be able to offer.

2

For Specials teachers, Beth Lott (room parent organizer) will be collecting contributions from each class, pooling them together, and dividing the total between all the Specials teachers so that each one will get a gift from the ECS families. (Beth has made this so easy for us!) A contribution of \$5 would be great.



If you are able to contribute to either of these gifts, complete the form below, and include it with your cash/check donation in the attached envelope. You can send it back to me in your child's folder or hand deliver it to me. **Forms and monetary contributions are due on FRIDAY, DECEMBER 10.**

Please let me know if you have any ideas, thoughts, questions.... **Thanks Everyone!**

Felicia (feliciatu@comcast.net)

Name _____

Enclosed is my donation (cash or checks payable to: Felicia Turano)

\$ _____ Amount for Miss Sica and Miss Speer

\$ _____ Amount for ECS Specials teachers

\$ _____ Total amount enclosed

I would like to donate an item to the super fun **Gifts to Keep You Warm** class baskets.
(If you check this box, I will send you an e-mail to arrange to pick up your item(s). Thanks!)

ECS PCO ROOM PARENT EXPENSE FAQ

Each homeroom has a budget of \$75 for the 2014-2015 school year.

The PCO is supplying each homeroom with a budget of \$75 for common room parenting expenses. Being a room parent should not cost you money. The \$75 plus tangible good donations from your classroom families should get you through the school year. Below are approved items to spend the money on:

- Basic materials like paper for letters home, manila envelopes, and other office type supplies (please only charge us for reasonable amounts not 500 sheet packs of paper :))
- Craft materials
- Snacks for events and parties
- Supplies to make teacher gifts (cards, card stock, CDs, yarn,...)
- Paper goods for parties
- Little teacher appreciation items throughout the year (a tasty treat, a favorite drink or Post It Notes, for example--see the staff appreciation surveys for ideas!)

It is always best to ask your families to donate craft supplies, party snacks and paper goods vs. just buying them yourself. Obviously it saves money. More importantly, it gives the families that can not attend events during the day a way to participate and be involved.

Also, work with your fellow room parents to share resources and materials. If you don't use all of the materials that you purchased/ had donated for crafts, parties or gifts then spread the word to the team. Someone may need or want your left over cotton balls that you bought to make snowmen at the holiday party!

This money is not intended to be used in lieu of collecting for holiday or staff appreciation gifts. You can, however, use it to supplement the gift like by buying cards or gift wrap. Some room parents have gifted the amount remaining in their budget to the teacher(s) at the end of the year but that is optional.

If you are purchasing an item that meets the criteria above then this is the procedure to follow to get reimbursed:

1. Keep your receipt! Circle the item(s) purchased on your receipt and make a note on the receipt about what the item is for ("party supply", "teacher gift"...).
2. Put the receipt in an envelope along with your contact information (name, child's name and class, your phone number and/ or email). Label the outside of the envelope, "Attention PCO Treasurer; room parent expense".
3. Submit the envelope to the office (you can send it with your student and it will get where it needs to go).
4. You will receive a check within 7 business days barring school breaks.