



2018-2019 Room Parent Handbook

101 Vernon Street
Newton, Massachusetts 02458
underwoodschoolpto.org
School Office: 617.559.9660
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Dear Room Parents:

Thank you for participating in the Underwood School Room Parent Program by joining the Room Parent Team in your child's classroom. Room Parents play a valuable role in supporting the classroom and the Underwood community.

As Room Parents, we ask that you help in four ways:

- **Teacher Partnership:** Room Parents are asked to meet with the classroom teacher to understand the classroom needs, projects, and associated volunteer opportunities
- **Volunteer Recruitment:** It is our hope that all Underwood parents volunteer their time to support *at least* one classroom activity or fundraiser each year. As Room Parents, we ask for your help to recruit & coordinate parent volunteers for classroom events & projects, as well as for PTO fundraisers. Note that volunteer opportunities do not only occur during school hours, so there are plenty of ways for parents working outside of the home to get involved!!
- **Creative Arts and Sciences Coordination:** The PTO raises funds to pay for the enrichment programs provided to each classroom through the [Creative Arts and Sciences \(CAS\) program](#). Presenters typically include award-winning authors, accomplished musicians, artists, and poets, and the Museum of Science Boston and the Discovery Museums of Acton. Room parents act as the coordinator between the visiting program and the class as directed by the CAS Chair.
- **Community Building:** Room Parents can help strengthen the Underwood community by encouraging attendance at Underwood events and fundraisers. We ask that you support the school's effort to foster an open and inclusive environment for all parents and students.

What steps should you take next?

1. **Establish an e-mail list for the parents in your classroom and use it (but don't abuse it).** Communication is done primarily through email, so setting up a class-wide email group is a great way to get the ball rolling (use the online directory to obtain contact information). When emailing, it is important to always blind copy (bcc) the parents in your class. Also, please use your best judgment in determining frequency of communication. Parents like to know what is going on, but don't like to be bombarded with email.
2. **Schedule a planning meeting (or phone call) with the classroom teacher.** Please set up a time to meet with your classroom teacher within the next few weeks to learn about classroom needs and opportunities. If there are multiple Room Parents in a classroom, please designate one person to take the lead in scheduling this session. Your teacher should expect that you will be reaching out. The teacher liaison for this meeting should also be the lead for future communications with the teacher throughout the year.
3. **(OPTIONAL BUT ENCOURAGED) Identify a venue and date for a grade-wide (adult-only) dinner.** An adult-only, grade-wide dinner is a fun, informal way to build the parent community. Dinners must be a potluck at a volunteering family's house (not necessarily a room parent).

Please coordinate with the room parents in the other class(es) in your grade to determine if you will organize a dinner. If you decide to do a grade-wide parents-only event, please confirm the date and time with Room Parent Coordinator, Jennifer Gistrak, as we try to minimize overlap of the potlucks for different grades.

Need help or guidance?

This Handbook also includes resources to support you as Room Parents, including Commonly Asked Questions and Answers and sample letters. As always, if you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me directly or to reach out to other Room Parents for ideas or suggestions of things that have worked in the past.

Thanks again for joining the Room Parent Team and for all of the dedication you will bring to this position.

Jennifer Gistrak
Mom of Juliana (Grade 4-Hull) and Kai (Grade 2- White)
(jgistrak@psychologyofbalance.com)

Most Commonly Asked Room Parent Questions.....and the Answers

Throughout the year many questions will come up. Here are some of the questions asked most often, along with the answers. If your question is not answered below, please feel free to contact Jennifer Gistrak.

How do I publicize an event or meeting?

There are several ways to publicize an event or meeting:

- class-wide email
- PTO newsletter announcement
- flyers/notices distributed to each child

How do I make copies of flyers or notices to parents for classroom events?

If for a school-related event you may use the copier. You must first check with Maria Vitone, the School Secretary.

Can I use Google Docs or Sign Up Genius to make sign up sheets?

Yes! Google Docs or Sign Up Genius are great ways to enable parents to easily sign up for classroom events or volunteering opportunities. We have many templates, so if you need help, please email Jennifer Gistrak at jgistrak@psychologyofbalance.com.

Can I send home notices/flyers with children?

All notices and/or flyers that go home with children must first be reviewed by Kathleen Smith, School Principal. Once approved by her, ask your child's teacher how best to distribute copies to the children. Please make enough copies for each child.

How do I bring up a new idea or topic at a PTO Meeting?

You can contact Anne-Marie Gravel (President) prior to the meeting and ask that your topic be put on the agenda.

Privacy

In the course of volunteering in the classroom or in the school, you may hear information, see documents, or witness student activities that are private. We ask that you remember to respect the privacy of all the individuals involved, and not disclose the details of such information, documents or activities to any other individual. If you require any further information, or have any questions or concerns regarding this privacy policy, please contact Ms. Smith.

Emails

When emailing your class using your class email list, please put parent email addresses in the BCC address line. In the past, some email recipients have found it easy to cut and paste entire class email lists and use those addresses for the promotion of personal business. This has generated complaints from the community. If you have any questions regarding this policy, please contact Jennifer Gistrak.

School Committee Policy for Gifts to Staff and Teachers

Individual Staff Member Gifts

Newton Public Schools (NPS) allows a group gift to an individual staff member only if:

- the gift is identified as being from the entire class,
- the identity of the givers and the individual amounts are not disclosed to the recipient, and
- the gift does not exceed \$150 **per school year**.

Individual gifts of appreciation in the form of sentimental tokens are allowed. Gifts of commercial value are not permitted.

NPS allows and encourages giving to charitable organizations such as the school PTO or the Newton Schools Foundation's Honor Thy Teacher Program which honors staff while supporting our schools. Another good option is to make a book donation to the Underwood library in the teacher's name.

Gifts for the Classroom

NPS permits classes to collect money and give a gift from the entire class and for the students to use IN CLASS. This type of gift must be used for **professional purposes in the classroom**. It also is the type of gift that would stay at Underwood should a teacher move away. For example, a gift certificate to a professional teaching store (e.g., Lakeshore, Hammetts), books or other supplies (computers or other technology are not permitted).

When coordinating a class gift, it is important to give every family an opportunity to contribute to the gift and to stress with everyone that the gift will be from the entire class regardless of participation or amount of contribution.

A sample letter from Room Parents to the class is included in this Handbook.

If you have a question about whether a gift is appropriate please feel free to ask Kathleen Smith or Anne-Marie Gravel.

Sample Letter - Holiday & End-of Year Gifts

Dear Parents:

The *[holidays/end of the year]* are approaching and many parents would like to express their appreciation to their child's teacher. We would like to coordinate a gift to the teacher on behalf of all parents that would be used by the entire classroom for educational purposes.

[Room Parent's name here] is in charge of collecting contributions for our class gift. We will put this money into a *[gift card/class project kit]* to *[name of store/type of project kit]*. We will be presenting our gift on behalf of the entire class on *[date of class gathering]*.

If you would like to contribute to this class gift, please contact *[name of parent collecting contributions]* by *[date]*. *This gift will be from all families regardless of contribution.*

In addition to a class gift, there are several acceptable ways of thanking your teacher personally. Here are some suggestions:

- A personal card or note from you and/or your child;
- The Underwood library has a wish-list of books that can be donated in a teacher's honor;
- The Newton Schools Foundation does an excellent job of supporting school programs city-wide that might otherwise be cut. You can donate through their "Honor Thy Teacher" program.

As always, if you have any questions please feel free to contact any of your class's Room Parents.

[insert Room Parent names & contact info]

Sample Sign-Up Sheet

Kindergarten Harvest Breakfast

Please join Ms xxx and our class for a fun filled morning on Friday, November xxx from 8:40-9:30am. If you are able to add to the breakfast menu, please sign up below. Contact xxxx on 617.555.5555 if need further information.

Coffee/Cream/Sugar: _____

Paper plates and paper cups: _____

Napkins: _____

Juice - one gallon: _____

Juice - one gallon: _____

Juice - one gallon: _____

Applesauce: _____

Pumpkin Bread: _____

Corn Bread: _____

Fruit Salad: _____

Plain bagels & cream cheese: _____

Sample Emails for Managing Class Communication

Email to Teacher setting up initial Room Parent Meeting

Subject: Room Parents Meeting

Hi [Teacher],

[Room Parent1, Room Parent2 and I] have all volunteered to be Room Parents this year. We would like to meet with you to get an idea of your needs and activities for the year.

What times suit your schedule best? Hopefully the meeting won't take too long but having it soon would be great.

Thanks!

Jennifer Gistrak

Email introducing Room Parents to all class parents and outlining coming events

Subject: Underwood Room 6 Kindergarten Newsletter #1

Hello everyone,

My name is **Jennifer Gistrak (Kai's Mom)**, and I am a Room Parent of Ms. White's 2nd Grade Class. Our other Room Parents include:

- **Room Parent 1**
- **Room Parent 2**

As Room Parents, our main role is to bring together all our parent volunteers and help [teacher name] organize the many activities that make Kindergarten such a wonderful year!

You'll be hearing from me on a regular basis with information about what activities are coming up, how you can volunteer or contribute, as well as other classroom-related news. If you have any questions about the content of our emails, or if you wish to be removed from the email list, feel free to contact me directly at jgistrak@psychologyofbalance.com, or talk to me in the classroom (I'm there at drop-off most days between 8.20am and 8.30am).

I also wanted to ask if any of you might be willing to host the 2nd Grade Potluck Dinner.

The Potluck Dinner is a fun, informal get-together for all Kindergarten parents (no kids, please) and we would appreciate your willingness to open your home to other parents. Please email if you are able to host this year.

On behalf of all the Room Parents, we look forward to meeting all of you at Underwood this year.

In the meantime, if you have any questions about how to get involved in Underwood or the PTO, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Example of Email to class parents regarding special event

Subject: Kindergarten Valentine's Day party

Hi everyone,

Our Kindergartners will be celebrating Valentine's Day this Friday (the 13th) from 11am to 12pm. They'll be having lots of fun decorating cookies, making Valentine's Day crafts and (of course!) delivering their Valentine cards.

We're seeking a few parents to run the activities and to ensure that all those Valentines reach the right box! If you're able to come in and help, please let me know either by email to jgistrak@psychologyofbalance.com or in person at drop-off or pick-up.

Thanks!
