

**Flagstaff Academy PTO**

**Room Parent Handbook**

Thank you for volunteering to be a room parent for your child’s class. This handbook was created to help you understand your role as a room parent and outline the major activities you will be heading up throughout the school year.

Room Parents foster communication by and among parents, students and teachers at Flagstaff Academy. As a room parent you will be able to connect with other Flagstaff Academy Parents and hopefully have fun! Being a room parent is a fantastic way to support your child’s teacher and help other parents make the most of the school year for all the students in each classroom. Being a room parent is more than being a party planner, it is about delegating and inspiring other parents to get involved! This handbook is filled with **suggestions** for making the school year great with low stress for everyone!

Please feel free to contact the Room Parent Coordinator, Elaine Waterman at luluwaterman@gmail.com with any ideas, suggestions, or questions that you may have. Thank you again for being a PTO volunteer! The Flagstaff students, teachers and other parents all appreciate your dedication.

These materials are also available on the Flagstaff PTO website: www.flagstaffacademypto.org.

**Room Parent Responsibilities**

1. **PTO Liason-** As Room Parent you are the liaison between the PTO and your parents.  You will occasionally receive info regarding school/PTO events.  You do not have to volunteer for everything, nor are you responsible for recruiting volunteers (unless you volunteer to recruit), but please let your parents know about the events and encourage them to volunteer or attend.  You may also get questions from parents regarding PTO events, please answer if you have the info, or you can always send the question to Elaine Waterman, Room Parent Coordinator, at [luluwaterman@gmail.com](mailto:luluwaterman@gmail.com). Please attend as many PTO General Meetings as you can so you have the most up to date PTO info. At PTO meetings we occasionally vote regarding monies that can affect your class. You won’t be able to vote unless you are there! Also, you can find out about fun promotions or competitions between classes, such as Box Tops and other fundraisers.
2. **Parties-** As a room parent, you are responsible for planning, communicating with parents, running the event and coordinating cleanup.  There are only a few class celebrations during the year- Halloween/Winter/Valentines/End of the Year Party.  Make sure to get the dates/times from your teachers (they vary due to PK calendar) and find out if any celebrations are preplanned (ex. Polar Express in 1st grade).   Ask your teacher about preferences for parties such as: activities, types of snacks, number of volunteers. Create sign-up sheets for your class- these can be generic to be used for every party.
3. **Teacher/Staff Appreciation**- Another responsibility is to plan and execute the teacher/staff appreciation activities such as birthdays, holiday gifts, teacher appreciation week and end of the year gift. We encourage all families to express their appreciation for their teachers but no child or family should be made to feel it is expected that they participate. Room parents have successfully designated certain activities per day of staff appreciation week.  For example- Monday is Lunch (someone signs up to bring lunch, coordinating with the teacher where and what), Tuesday is Dinner prepared for teacher’s whole family, Wednesday is bring a flower from home or purchase in the front office to add to the teacher bouquet (room parent provides a vase or two), Thursday is breakfast and coffee, Friday is gift card galore! Once again, sign-up sheets are key here. Share them on Google Docs so parents can edit and sign up as they see fit. Keep in mind that some families prefer to only give personal gifts and some may appreciate having this responsibility off of their plates with the assurance that the teacher will be receiving gifts from them at the appropriate times. **HERE IS A LINK TO TEACHER FAVORITES- you can share this link with parents!!!**

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/11FzuzlY73NKBl0ApAKEPjzAkneroiyXN3jwFvLEhV4c/edit?usp=sharing>

1. **Gala Silent Auction Item-** You are responsible for creating an Gala Silent Auction Item. Totally easy. Don’t freak! You don’t have to reinvent the wheel. Best practices are…
   1. Start early- starting in January is not too early! Items are typically due ONE MONTH before the gala event to make sure they are complete and ready to be promoted in the online catalog.
   2. Ask for donations (tangible and/or experiences) from your parents who are business owners.
   3. Create a solicitation team to call 4-5 businesses in the area to donate items/experiences that relate to the “basket theme”.
   4. Create a work of art with the children in lieu of a “basket”. You must communicate with your teacher if you want to use class time for this work. For this reason, it’s best to plan this activity as far in advance of the item deadline as possible, as well as work with other parents to make sure you have help.
   5. Keep the Silent Auction item in mind when budgeting and use your class monies to purchase the “basket” items. If you run out of funds, you can decide whether to collect a special fund for the gala, but sometimes it’s best to limit asking parents for cash.
   6. Ask for ideas from other room parents! It is fun to get creative with your theme and the purpose is to raise money for the school. Every item is valuable, you do not have to put together the MOST EXPENSIVE BASKET EVER. Offering a wide range of “basket” offerings means lots of parents can bid AND WIN! Try to keep the item below $500, if it goes too high it limits who can bid on it.

**Room Parent To Do’s**

1. First things first- Meeting the Teacher
   1. Meet with your teacher to go over their expectations, how they like to communicate (email, in person, phone) and how they need your help.  Ask for what worked for them last year.  Communication between you and your child’s teacher is the key to success!
   2. Parties- Teachers have different needs and requirements. Some have fully established routines for parties and activities, while others are content to let you fully coordinate. See how they feel about crafts, games, healthy treats vs. sweets, allergies, party structure, whole group vs. stations, number of parent volunteers needed, whether siblings can attend, etc.
   3. Ask for a complete list of party dates and times for the entire year. Many parents need lead time in order to attend and help with these activities, try to give them as much time as you can. Including the dates/times of the parties and events at the beginning of the school year when making first contact with classroom parents will be very helpful.
   4. Find out if there are any food allergies in the classroom. What are the allergies so they can be accommodated as much as possible.
      1. Peanuts/tree nuts
      2. Seeds
      3. Gluten
      4. Dairy
2. Send out a message introducing yourself to your parents.  Encourage everyone to participate in some way.  There is a 30 hour minimum volunteer time for each family.  There are lots of ways to get involved, even for working parents! Let parents know who you are, who your child is and how to reach you. If you have decided on the process to collect party monies, introduce it now.
3. Collect Money!  You are responsible for the class money…  But don’t freak out.  It’s really easy!  You can choose from the following
   1. Collect a lump sum at the beginning of the year or per semester-   Some classes choose to do straight up $20 for the whole year, or a sliding scale from $5-$??? depending on the family’s ability to contribute.  Best tip is to send an envelope home in Friday Folders with “Classroom Fund” written on the front.  This way parents just put the money or check in the envelope and return the following money.
   2. Collect money before each event- Gets a little hard to track.  I suggest asking money before events only if you have a lack of funds for that particular event.

**AND THE MOST IMPORTANT THING OF ALL???**

1. Delegate and Ask for Assistance!!!  
   No room parent is an island.  Make sure to ask parents to volunteer, if you do not get enough volunteers and/or supplies after the first email then ASK AGAIN!  You can’t and should not have to do this on your own, or with your own money.  Sometimes a note from the teacher helps if you don’t get enough initial response.  Inspire and energize to get participation, but if that doesn’t work threatening to cancel events usually works.  Hey, I’m just being honest from my time as a room parent.  Sometimes it is hard to get people to donate or volunteer, or they just forget.  So a little reminder doesn’t hurt!  After all, it’s all for the kids!!!

**Parties Best Practices**

1. Send out a volunteer email at least 3 weeks prior to the party date with party information and google docs sign-up sheet. Remind parents about allergies.
2. Send out another email 1 1/2 weeks prior to fill holes in the sign-up sheet. Remind parents about allergies.
3. Send a note home in Friday Folders reminding parents about the event. If need be ask for final donations or volunteers. Let parents know they can drop off non-perishable with their children in the AM of the party. If at all possible, ask parents to bring perishables at the start of the party. Always invite the parents to attend even if they choose not to volunteer. Remind parents about allergies.
4. Week of the party- purchase supplies, coordinate with volunteers and, if needed, have your teacher send out another email to fill the last remaining holes.
5. Try to provide healthy options at the party as well as sweets. And don’t forget beverages (keep in mind that your teacher may require juice boxes to reduce spilling or may ask for no juice boxes due to sugar content), utensils, plates, napkins and serving ware. Some classrooms have plastic ware to reduce paper waste. Make sure to ask your teacher!
6. Other tips- Crafts should be quick and easy to clean up. Games work better in a rotation so that there is not too long of a wait time. Have large trash bags ready for the end of the party.
7. Themes by grade- Kindergarten has a kinder carnival for the end of year party. 1st Grade has a Winter Polar Express Party. 5th Grade has an end of the year picnic for all the classrooms with BBQ and hotdogs.

**Money Best Practices**

1. Send an email introducing yourself and letting parents know to expect the Classroom Fund envelope in the first weeks of school Friday Folder. Having that tangible reminder and easy way of getting funds to you means a higher return of donations. Some veteran room parents suggest $20 as $25 seems too high and $20 per family ensures that there are enough funds.
2. Shop the bargains, Big Lots is great! Oriental trading is great too, if purchased in advance. Make sure to check out the Sale/Imperfects on Oriental Trading’s website.
3. Some Room Parents thrive on excel spreadsheets, others don’t. It is recommended that you track money spent (keep your receipts) as well as checks or cash from parents.

**Teacher Appreciation Best Practices**

1. Ask parents to send in the teacher’s favorite snacks to make a gift basket
2. Collaborate with the other parents for a special gift for the classroom (ex. Classroom beanbag for the booknook)
3. Have your children compile a book listing what they love about their teacher.
4. Don’t forget the aides!

**Other Best Practices**

1. Appreciation- Expressing appreciation leads to more volunteers and a greater community! Send thank you emails to individuals or write thank you notes to put in Friday Folders.
2. Enlisting Volunteers- Set up one sign-in sheet per event/activity and share on google docs. Make sure to set share to parents can edit, that way parents can sign up on the sheet.

**Other items**

1. **Box tops-** Ask your teacher if you are responsible for Box Tops or whether another parent has already taken this on. See if the teacher has used a creative way to stimulate box top donations. See if the other room parents in your grade want to coordinate a friendly competition to encourage kids to bring in more box tops. These are a huge revenue to the PTO and benefit the classroom in so many ways at no expense to parents other than the time of cutting them out. And kids LOVE winning the Box Top competitions!
2. **Sending out Emails-** We used to use a system (PEX) but most room parents opted to use their personal emails. Since the system requires heavy set up we decided to not use it for 2015-2016. Always remember to use the BCC when sending out emails to your parents. Email drafts can always be sent to your teacher or the Room Parent Coordinator first before sending to parents if you are unsure of what to say.
3. **Your first email to parents**
   1. Introduce yourself as room parent
   2. Attach a list of class parties for the year with dates and times
   3. Ask for volunteers for party duties
   4. Mention Box Tops (if this is part of your responsibilities) including preliminary ideas for friendly grade wide competitions and request a volunteer to spearhead it in your class.
   5. Ask if there is a parent who would like to head up the Gala Silent Auction Item
   6. Finally, let parents know that you will be sending occasional communications regarding volunteer opportunities, wishlist items that the teacher has, updates on BoxTop competitions and other pertinent information.

**Some issues you may run into…**

**No real requests coming from the teacher**Room Parents should keep in mind that teachers will have varying degrees of need for assistance. Some teachers may prefer to do certain things themselves, and the need for a Room Parent also varies among the different grades. With that in mind, if a Room Parent feels particularly underutilized, they may want to let the teacher know that they are willing to do more and possibly give the teacher suggestions of things they are willing to take on or they think might be helpful.

**Parents are unreachable/unresponsive; there are not enough volunteers**There can be many reasons for less than enthusiastic responses from classroom parents. Make sure parents know how to get in touch with you, as well as the process for signing up for events (donations and volunteering). If parents are unreachable or unresponsive to a Room Parent’s communications, the teacher or PTO Committee should be made aware of the situation. The Room Parent should not be expected to continue to pursue unresponsive parents beyond what seems reasonable to generate responses from the rest of the class. It is important to recognize the different ways in which people choose to participate. Some prefer to spend time, others may not have the time and/or prefer to donate or do other things to help support the classroom’s activities. Still others simply prefer not to or are unable to be involved. If problems exist with getting enough volunteers for activities, this should be discussed and a decision can be made together on how to handle that situation.

**Not everyone in class participates in the class project or class gift** If there is a lack of participation in class projects/gifts or other items of that nature, the situation can be very sensitive. Children not participating in such activities must not be singled out in any way…including by other students. However, some parents and/or children may feel it unfair if not all are participating, but all are “getting credit” for the effort (especially if donations of cash or other items are involved). A Room Parents responsibility is to take the steps necessary to inform all class parents of the guidelines, deadlines, and any other pertinent information of donating or participating. If possible, it may be a good idea to let the teacher know of anyone who is not participating in something the rest of the children are (ex. an auction class project). There may be a way for the teacher to intervene to aid the child’s participation, if desired. At times, it may be necessary to just accept the lack of response or participation and move forward as best as possible. At all times, Room Parents must keep in mind the obligation to maintain confidentiality as appropriate, and to ensure that no child or family feels required to participate in an activity that is not a school requirement.

**No good ideas for a class gift or auction donation**Coming up with “good” ideas can often seem daunting. This handbook includes a list of suggested projects for auction donations that might also prompt ideas for other class gifts. Room Parents should also remember that their classes are full of potential project ideas among the families in their class. Never be afraid to ask for help! PTO committee members, teachers and other staff members can also be good sources for project ideas.

**It’s a big project…I can’t do it all myself**Don’t hesitate to ask for help! Often, parents who cannot be volunteers in class or make other kinds of ongoing commitments are willing to participate in “single shot” activities – ones where they can help out with something specific for a defined amount of time. The PTO can also be a resource if additional help is needed on PTO events or activities. Room Parents in particular should not feel obligated to “own” every project or activity they are asked to help with. They are always free to enlist more help.

**Sample Introductory Email**

**Email with money collected up front with an envelope**

Hi Parents!

We are the room parents for xxx's class this year. We are collecting party funds at the beginning of the year for all 4 parties instead of adding to the multiple emails already received and requesting either money/ items for the party every time there is an event.

**The requested amount is $20 per family.**  This will go towards food, crafts and games for the year- 4 parties.  We will buy the food from the party budget.

 \*\* Sometimes a parent who loves to bake may WANT to make cupcakes, or cake pops or something homemade-  we will first give parents the choice to bake if they have a favorite holiday item that they like to share.  You will receive an envelope in this week's Friday folder for you to send in with your child.  Please return it as soon as you can.

If we have any extra $$$ after the 4 parties, we will put this towards a small gift for xxx in celebrations of Teacher Appreciation Week. We will also need parent volunteers for parties (minimum 4 per event). The 4 parties this year are the Halloween party on 10/30, the Winter Party on 12/18, the Valentines Party on 2/14 and the End of the Year Celebration TBD. Our parties will be held at 2:30pm. If you can commit to volunteering at any of these events, please let us know. We will also be sending out google doc sign-up sheets as we near the dates.

Please let me know if you have questions!

In advance, thank you for your support and participation!

Room Parents,

Mrs. Awesome and Mrs. Superparent

**OR an email with no money collection and more info on future events**

Hello!

I just wanted to take a moment to introduce myself as our room parent. I am Mrs. Superparent, aka KidAwesome’s mom. We have some fun things coming up for the kids. Our first (of 4) parties will be our Halloween Party on 10/30 at 2:30pm. We have about one hour for our parties. For this party, I was hoping to do a craft or two, play a game or two, decorate cookies and hand out some treats. I will be sending out a google doc with a sign up sheet for the things we will need. Siblings will be welcome to come but please let me know in advance so they can join in the fun! I will also need 3 parent volunteers to help run the games and crafts.

The rest of our parties will be the Winter Party, Valentine’s Day and our End of School Celebration. I am looking for some volunteers to help plan the parties with me, it’s always more fun as a group! Any and all involvement is appreciates. The rest of the parties will be on: Dec. 18, Feb 14th and the End of Year Celebration is TBD. All our party times will be at 2:30 except the Ed of Year Celebration. Whoever is volunteering to do any set up or help with the parties can come at 2:15.

For those of you who do not know, there will be a gala in March or April 2016. We, as a class, have to come up with an item for the silent auction. Last year, the class had a framed piece of artwork with their fingerprints turned into balloons with two illustrated kids flying up into the air. The year before that we collected items for a Gardening Basket complete with aprons covered in the kid’s handprints. These items were auctioned off and the money went towards the school! If anyone has any ideas or thoughts for what we could do- I would love to hear them! If anyone wants to get involved, just let me know!

I am excited to see what this school year brings and thanks for all your help!

Best,

Mrs. Superparent  
xxx’s Room Parent

**How to create a Google Doc Sign Up Sheet (please add to your handbook)**

1. Go to your Google Drive
2. Click the red NEW button
3. On the Drop Down menu, select Google Docs, Google Sheets or Google Slides, depending on whether you are creating a Document, a Spreadsheet or a Presentation.
4. For a sign-up sheet, you would select Google Sheets
5. A spreadsheet will open up which you can than modify. To change the name of your spreadsheet click on “Untitled Document” at the top and change the name (ex. Ms. D’s Halloween Party Sign Up Sheet).
6. To share, click the blue “share” button and add your parent’s emails.
7. Make sure to change the privacy to “can edit”, “can view” or “can comment” based on your needs.
8. Since you will likely be creating a sign up where you want parents to be able to edit, you will choose “can edit” most of the time.
9. **OR** you can get click the right corner to get a share-able link, and change the privacy to anyone with the link can edit.

**Class Auction Ideas**  
The following is a list of project ideas from past years. These items can be done as class auction donations or as class gifts to staff, depending on how they are personalized. The list is provided as suggestions only. Room Parents should feel free to consider other projects not included on this list. As discussed earlier in this document, the age, abilities and availability of the students involved should be taken into account in deciding on an appropriate class project. Note that most items in this list would typically be decorated by the students in order to personalize the gift.

Room Parents who feel help is needed with a class auction project and not enough classroom parents are volunteering to help should first be sure they have done all they can to convey the importance of the project to the school’s fundraising efforts. These projects are always some of the biggest fundraising items and parents eagerly anticipate their appearance at the auction. If there is still a need for additional help, Room Parents should contact the Room Parent Coordinator for assistance.

• Mailbox   
• CD rack   
• Handmade Quilt o “Crazy Quilt” using geometric shapes  
 o Themed quilt with squares decorated by each child   
• Decorative/themed Wall Hanging or Banner   
 o “Stars & Stripes” – children’s rendering of American flag   
 o Children’s rendering of favorite Insect/animal/flower/etc.   
• Framed collage of children’s themed creations (ex. alphabet, penguins, beach, insects, animals, sports, etc.)   
• Hand-decorated furniture   
 o Child’s table & chair, bookcase, storage bench, rocker, end table, etc.   
• Coat rack/peg board featuring decoupage of children’s artwork   
• Treasure Box   
• Floor Mat   
• Decorated ceramic piece(s) (platter, dishes, bowl, etc.)   
• Birdhouse   
• Painted slate piece(s)   
• Decorated garden pottery   
• Painted Whiskey Barrel planter decorated with children’s thumbprints   
• Bookends   
• Bath accessories set   
• Puzzle   
• Set of hand-decorated stationery   
• Table Linens (Tablecloth, Runner, Placemats & Napkins)   
• Custom framed calligraphy print of a favorite poem with mat featuring children’s handprints   
• Canvas tote decorated by children   
• Rock bubble fountain created by the children   
• Handmade book of pages with each child’s response/illustration to a particular question or statement  
 o “If I could make the world a better place…”   
 o ABC’s of the USA book   
 o What I Want to Be When I Grow Up   
 o “My favorite thing about [teacher] is…”   
• Wooden chair painted/decoupaged by children illustrating favorite moments or activities of the school year   
• Music Video featuring students performing songs learned in class   
• Table or Tray inlaid with hand-decorated tiles   
• Hand-decorated throw pillows   
• Hand crafted chess and checkerboard set w/table   
• Hand-painted suitcase   
• Hand-knit blanket (made of squares knit by the children)   
• Themed Gift Baskets

**Once again, thank you so much for agreeing to be the Room Parent in your child’s classroom. It is a very important role and much appreciated. If you have any questions, please email Elaine Waterman at luluwaterman@gmail.com! Have a great year!**