



**2023-2024**  
**TRUESDELL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**  
District of Columbia Public Schools

# Room Parent Guide



## TRUESDELL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ROOM PARENT GUIDE

### WHAT IS A “ROOM PARENT”?

Room Parents are the official liaisons between teachers and families. As a Room Parent, you may be asked to recruit other parents to chaperone field trips, help plan class events and exposition nights, assist teachers in prepping homework folders, or do a bit of fundraising to purchase class supplies or teacher gifts. Truesdell’s classes will have two Room Parents (a lead room parent and a co-room parent) in each homeroom to help share the work. Some teachers may want a lot of help (or very little). You will meet with your child’s teacher at the start of the school year to learn what’s expected of you as a Room Parent.

### WHAT WOULD MY RESPONSIBILITIES BE?

Different teachers have different needs — and your responsibilities may vary from grade to grade. But all Room Parents share some things in common: a desire to pitch in, great organizational and communication skills, and the time, energy, and enthusiasm for helping in a hands-on way. Here are some things you may be asked to do:

- **Help the teachers communicate with parents.**  
This includes identifying bilingual parents who can help translate class communications, and making sure that families without access to email also get communications by text/hard copy.
- **Plan and organize class events.**  
In addition to schoolwide celebrations, individual classes host their own events. As a Room Parent, you’ll sign up volunteers to donate time or supplies, send out reminders about upcoming events, meetings, field trips, and needs, and help set up and document the project-based learning showcases that take place in the winter and in the spring year.
- **Foster inclusive cultural events.**  
Not all cultures celebrate seasonal events like Halloween, Thanksgiving, or Valentine’s Day. Room Parents work directly with teachers to plan inclusive cultural events and ways to celebrate them (hosting a “winter festival” that recognizes Hanukkah and Kwanzaa, for instance, instead of a “Christmas party”).
- **Recruit other parent volunteers.**  
You don’t have to go it alone! Delegating specific tasks to other class parents can make things easier. One parent can oversee organizing events, another in charge of class communication. Want to set-up a website for posting class photos? Another parent in your class may have specific skills they’re willing to share.
- **Meet with teachers and other Room Parents on a bi-monthly basis.**  
Regularly scheduled meetups are a good way to keep everyone in the loop and find out how you can best support your teachers throughout the year as their needs change.
- **Solicit and collect supply donations.**

Classrooms always need donations of supplies: tissue boxes, hand sanitizer, snacks for field trips, and the like. Letting parents know when donations are needed will ensure your class has all the disinfecting wipes it needs.

- **Organize appreciations and gifts.**

We love our teachers and staff — and want them to feel appreciated. Room Parents are responsible for soliciting donations to purchase gifts for teachers for special occasions (which may include holidays, birthdays, or Teacher Appreciation weeks). Keeping equity top of mind, all fundraising asks for the classroom should always embrace a “give what you can,” sliding-scale philosophy, so families can contribute meaningfully (whether through volunteering, sharing healthy snacks, or the like), even if they can’t contribute financially.

- **Act as a resource for new families,**

When new students start at Truesdell, Room Parents should reach out to their families them to answer any questions and make them feel welcome as a parent/guardian in our community.

- **Maintain membership in and attend monthly Family Teacher Organization (FTO) meetings and schoolwide activities.**

This is the best way to stay up to date on bigger picture issues that class parents may ask you about — and help the school as a whole!

- **At the end of the year, share your experience and knowledge with incoming Room Parents To help build a strong community and smarter classrooms!**

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** As a Room Parent, you don’t have to do it all! Our classes will have two Room Parents (a lead and a co-lead). Other parents in the class are also eager to help.

## GETTING STARTED

So, you are interested in volunteered to be a Room Parent. Now what?

1. **COMPLETE THE ONLINE INTEREST FORM USING THIS LINK ON OR BEFORE AUGUST 1, 2023: <https://forms.gle/wJozQgrNqEqDRcds9>**
2. **COMPLETE THE DCPS VOLUNTEER SECURITY CLEARANCE PROCESS PRIOR TO SEPTEMBER 1, 2023.** The DCPS volunteer security clearance application can be initiated at <https://octo.quickbase.com/db/bg37a864v> . Additional information about volunteering in DCPS schools may be found at <https://dcps.dc.gov/page/volunteer-our-schools>.

**ROOM PARENT SELECTIONS WILL BE MADE THE LAST WEEK IN AUGUST AND INTRODUCTORY MEETINGS WITH THE TEACHER WILL BE HELD THE FIRST WEEK OF SEPTEMBER.**

At the introductory meeting you will learn about your teachers’ needs, preferences, and expectations. A few important questions to ask the teacher are:

- **Contact information?** How do the teachers prefer to be contacted by you and other class parents? What are school policies for gathering and releasing parent contact information?

- **How can you best support the class?** With communication, organizing events, getting chaperones for field trips, making copies, prepping materials for class activities, donating supplies, etc.
- **What ongoing volunteer support needs are there?** Weekly readers, art prep, making copies, snacks, supplies, lunch supervisors, etc.
- **What events should you plan for?** Field trips, holiday events, open-house, assemblies, etc. Is there a calendar already, or should you help set dates for that?
- **Teachers' favorites?** Find out what they like as a gift-guide for parents and thinking ahead to Teacher Appreciation Week 2024 in May: meals, beverages, restaurant, stores, treats, charities, teams, hobbies, etc.
- **Classroom party dates and plans?** How many? Who plans (teacher or parents)? Food requirements (healthy or sweets)? Food allergy considerations? Please consider both student and teacher allergies. Timing and activities/games/crafts?

## REACH OUT & GET ORGANIZED

**Send a welcome email/letter to families introducing yourself, your role, and what parents can expect from you, including your contact information.** Ask parents if they have special interests or talents they would like to share with the class (i.e. gardening, music, photography, cultural experiences, etc.). Share all your communications with teachers before sending them out, to see if there's anything they'd like you to adjust or include.

**Set up and use a group email list (an easy, reliable, and effective way to communicate with families).** Email addresses will be provided to all room parents. Collect and build a calendar of class events along with volunteer needs for each. Identify bilingual parents who can help with translation and have all classroom communications translated. Make sure all families receive all communications — and that families not connected to the Internet or on email get a text or hardcopy. Teachers can assist with printing — and you're always free to use the school copier. **And include your teachers in communication to parents (unless you're asking for donations for birthday gifts for them!).**

## TIPS FOR BEING A GOOD ROOM PARENT & PLANNING ADVICE

### **Get support early.**

Ask parents to sign up to help at the beginning of the school year for activities throughout the year. Offer options so working parents or those with young children can pitch in from home (sending snacks or treats, preparing and purchasing supplies).

### **Budget.**

If there's a teacher's birthday, holiday gift, or party supplies needed, create a budget and alert parents at the beginning of the year what's coming down the road, so they can budget and plan for those, too. Be clear what's optional (teacher gift money) and what's mandatory (field trip fees).

**Delegate.**

Don't try to do it all yourself. Be specific about what jobs need to be done and when, and invite other parents to participate in organizing parties and activities. Identify your most active volunteers and call on them when you're short — and show your appreciation! They'll keep coming.

## IN THE CLASSROOM

**Let the teacher(s) lead.**

Find out **what the teachers want, not what you think they need**. Feel free to share your own ideas for great books, craft projects, etc. — but don't take it personally if the teachers choose not to incorporate them. They have complex lesson plans and know the kids' needs best, so it's important to remember **the teachers are in charge of the classroom**, and we should follow their lead. If you're uncertain about something, ask.

**Good communication is key.**

Before you or other parents come into the classroom, work out with the teachers exactly when you need to be there and what you'll be doing. If you're bringing snacks, are there things you should avoid? Any sensitivities you should be aware of? Avoid making these arrangements during drop-off or pick-up, so your teachers aren't caught up in the chaos of starting or ending their day.

**Take your cues from the teachers.**

Once you enter the classroom, let the teachers take the lead by introducing you to the children. It might be tempting to start talking or playing with your little one, but many of the kids might not understand who you are or what you're doing there. Wait until a teacher gives you some cues and then you can start doing what you came to do.

**Remember you're there for ALL the children.**

It's very easy when visiting the classroom to engage only with your own child but remember the focus of your visit. Whether you're there to read, help with a craft or a party, be sure to give all the children equal attention.

**Don't drop in unexpectedly unless you are conducting a silent check-in on your child (30-minutes only).**

Unexpected visits can cause a disruption and put teachers in a difficult position. Teachers have a very tight schedule, and even the slightest distraction can make the entire day veer off-kilter.

**Know when to leave.**

Although it may be hard to leave the classroom, the best guests know when it's time to leave. Read the story, do the craft, and then say goodbye.

**Be inclusive to all families, especially those whose first language isn't English or those who are new to the school.**

Work with your teachers and the administrators for advice on how to make sure everyone's needs are being met.

**MAINTAIN PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOR and NEVER release contact information without permission or share sensitive information you may be privy to as a room parent.**

## **QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE SIGNING ON**

### **Do I have the time to do this job well?**

Before making any volunteer commitment, make an honest assessment as to whether you have the time and personality to be a good Room Parent. Consider not only how much time you have but when you're available. Think about your work schedule. Will it change or become busier during a certain season? Also factor in time commitments for other children's school activities. If your teachers are looking for hands-on assistance in the classroom (or primarily after-hours help) and your job doesn't allow that kind of flexibility, there may be other ways you can help.

### **Is there another way I can help?**

Not ready to take on the responsibility of Room Parent, but still want to help? You're in luck! Offer to be a regular field-trip chaperone, organizer for one big class event, weekly help in the classroom, making photocopies, assisting with an art project, etc. And remember there are plenty of volunteer opportunities too: lunch monitors, park chaperones, and more. The more help, the merrier!

### **Is this a one-year commitment?**

Yes! But keep in mind that your experience may make the job easier for you in subsequent years, and we always welcome good Room Parents to stay involved!