

Room Parent Guide

Bowen School

2011-2012 School Year

Dear Room Parent:

September 23, 2011

Thank you for volunteering! Room parents play a key role in each classroom and in the PTO.

Your primary role is to support the teacher. Throughout the year, your classroom teacher will contact the teacher liaison about class activities/projects and the items and volunteers needed for them. You should also feel free to proactively speak to your class's teacher about the help he/she would like. All teachers are different in the ways that they like to work with their room parents. With this packet you will find a sample planning calendar suggesting specific occasions when classes might be having an activity. Please ask your classroom teacher about which events he/she likes to have.

In addition, the PTO will ask you to coordinate your class's game table at Spring Fling. All teachers have games that are traditionally 'theirs'; your teacher may already have the materials for the game or you may have to develop new ones. You will also be recruiting volunteers to staff the booth.

Please do not feel that, as room parents, all the responsibility for gathering items, etc. falls to you. Call upon other parents in the classroom to help—many people are looking for opportunities to participate and will respond!

To provide organized, timely information to the parents, we ask you to do three things early in the school year:

1. **Decide who will take which roles, and whether you need more team members.** Meet with your room parent team to clarify who prefers to do what. By establishing these guidelines early in the year, you can avoid confusion and duplication of efforts. We hope many room parent teams will decide on roles tonight but as some team members cannot attend the meeting, it may take a few days to get everything settled.

You will also want to meet with your class's teacher to see how he/she wants things organized. This may affect some of the roles outlined in the attached sheet.

2. **Decide who will take the grade-wide roles.** Some grades have special grade-wide activities. In these cases, it makes sense to get together all the room parents for the whole grade to discuss how to share responsibilities. These roles are listed on a separate sheet.

3. **Send out a letter introducing the room parent team.** A sample letter is attached. Feel free to use as much or as little of it as you wish.

If you have any questions or concerns throughout the year, please contact Shara Ertel at 617-519-7414 or sharaertel@me.com.

Thanks again for your help and support!

Shara Ertel

So you signed up to be a room parent

Welcome to a year of fun and activity as you help organize your classroom to support our teachers, our school, our families, and the **Bowen** community.

Your role as room parent team has three components:

Here's what each of these roles could mean, depending on your teacher, your personal style, and your grade.

Supporting the classroom:

Teachers want room parents who will be supportive without being intrusive. They need room parents who are dependable and independent, not needy.

A couple of years ago, the previous room parent coordinator polled teachers in all Bowen classrooms about what you can do best to create a partnership, and it varies by grade (see grade-specific chart). Some of the room parent tasks that are common to all grades include:

- *asking the teacher what he/she needs and wants, and then organizing families to provide it.* This might include organizing parents for a classroom celebration or event, getting sign-ups for volunteers, etc.
- *organizing a class gift to the teacher at Winter Break and the end of the year.* This should be something that benefits the classroom, such as a gift certificate to Staples or the New England Mobile Book Fair, rather than a personal item.

Building the Bowen Community:

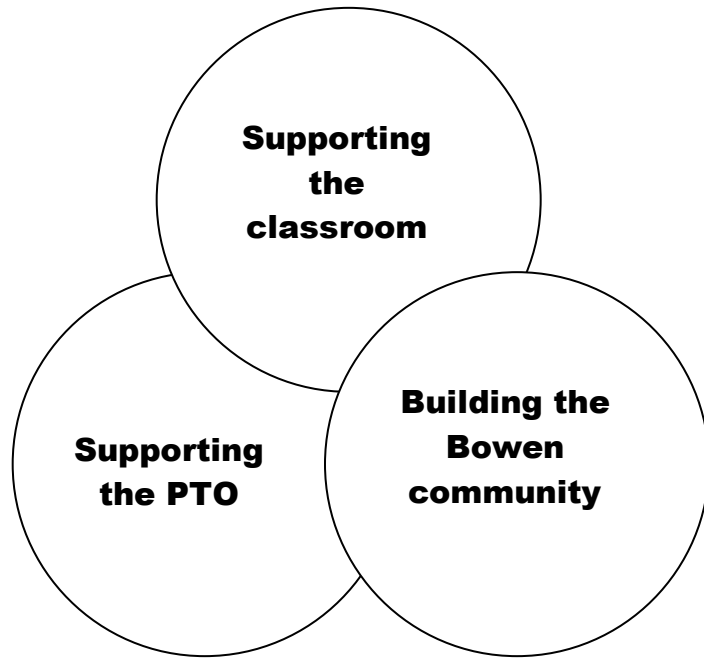
Room parents play a very important role in tying the Bowen families together into a community. Some specific activities could include:

- creating a communication network between families in the classroom, e.g., an email list
- organizing classroom coffees so parents can get to know each other
- welcoming new families who join Bowen during the year; making sure they are on the Bowen Notes list; that they are on your classroom distribution list, perhaps introducing them to another family who could act as a buddy, etc.
- recruiting families to help in Color Day, Bike Safety Day, Understanding Our Differences, and other school programs, as requested

Supporting the PTO:

Another important role that room parents play is to support the PTO. Specifics include:

- organizing the class booth for the Spring Fling, including getting the booth staffed
- organizing class families to help support other PTO-sponsored events such as the Staff Appreciation lunches



Supporting the Classroom – Grade-Specific Feedback from Teacher Survey

	What teachers want room parents to do	Characteristics teachers want in their room parents	Grade-Specific Room Parent Tasks
Kindergarten	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • coordinating parent volunteers • coordinating special events: Spring Fling, raffle, field trips • help with classroom celebrations such as Halloween and End of Year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependable • Organized • Good communication skills • Enthusiastic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping with Readers' Workshop in class
1st Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contact classroom parents for supplies and materials, celebrations, field trip chaperones, and volunteers • Create class books • Copying • Create book case covers and repairing book cases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive, kind • Helpful • Organized • Happy, positive, friendly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping with the sewing project (dragons) • Halloween and Valentine's Day celebrations • Portfolio celebration • 100s Day
2nd Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan and organize parties, special events • Gather materials for projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to maintain confidentiality • Efficient • Organized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Halloween, Valentine's Day, and Smoothie (end of year) celebrations • Ghana Day • Mexico Day
3rd Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help with research projects • Help with large-scale projects in class • Field trips and chaperones • Book order management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependable • Organized • Flexible • Respectful of privacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help students with research (e.g., spider in fall; Animal research in Feb-Mar) • Grade-wide Many Thanks-givings Festival (Dec.) • Field trips to Plimoth Plant-ation, Arnold Arboretum
4th Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What teachers want room parents to do: • Spread the word regarding classroom wish lists • Help with field trips 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respectful of their wishes • Good communication skills • Someone who does not hold biases against specific students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize brunch for graduating fifth grade students and families • Field trips
5th Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field trip chaperones • Musical rehearsal coordination • Miscellaneous tasks such as copying, typing up final copies of papers, etc • Bring your own talents and interests to the classroom! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good communicator • Patient • Child-centered (knows that children come first in the classroom) • Good listener: asks before making decisions that affect others in the classroom • Organized • Responsible • Good follow-through 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yearbooks • Musical • End of year graduation celebration • Garden

Secrets of success

According to Bowen teachers, the most successful room parents share some traits:

Do's

- Introduce yourself to the teacher...be proactive
- Ask how your teacher likes to communicate—sometimes, drop-off time can be too hectic and email works better
- Ask what role your teacher would like parents to play in the classroom
- Be inclusive of all families, including those who don't speak English or who are new to the school
- Be dependable—do what you agreed to do, at the time the teacher expects it
- Ask Shara or one of the PTO co-chairs if you are not sure of what to do

Don't's

- Don't demand too much of your teacher's time...they are very busy
- Don't use your room parent role to ask for special favors
- Don't create a clique among parents—build the Bowen community by being inclusive

Communicating with your class's families

Bowen is a very diverse community, including many families who are non-native speakers of English, as well as others who do not have access to email. When communicating with your families, it's best to use a format that works for everyone, such as backpack mail. You can feel free to have an email list as well.

A special note on teacher gifts

Newton has a policy calling for no personal gifts to teachers. At Bowen, we have chosen to interpret this policy as follows:

- Families are free to give teachers personal gifts that are homemade or of trivial value. Families are discouraged from giving teachers expensive personal gifts, as it creates disparities between classes and individual teachers.
- Room parents can play a wonderful role by coordinating the kids to create a personal class gift for the teacher, such a cushion that each has signed, a mosaic of photos and messages, etc. Teachers love having these hand made memories from each class.
- Room parents are encouraged to gather optional contributions from families to purchase a class gift that is beneficial to the classroom. Did you know that the average Bowen teacher spends \$1,000 of his/her personal funds to buy classroom supplies each year? Great gift options include gift certificates to Staples, New England Mobile Book Fair, Amazon.com, or others. A list of Bowen teachers' Top Ten Favorite Sources for School Supplies is included in this packet.
- Please be careful to place special emphasis on the facts that contributions are OPTIONAL and that ANY AMOUNT is welcome.
- And one very important reminder: don't forget the aide in your class, if any! Aides and student teachers seldom get the recognition they deserve and a little home made card from the kids will go a long way.

A word about soliciting monetary contributions from families

Don't.

Bowen's population is very diverse economically as well as ethnically and some families may not be able to make a monetary contribution. If you need supplies for a celebration, list the things you need on a signup sheet. Do not ask for money.

The only exception to this is the teacher gift policy stated above, which is completely optional.

What's in it for you?

Over the course of this year, you will spend time and money being a room parent... what do you get back for this investment?

In my experience, what you get back is:

- A chance to get to know the classroom and the teacher...to see what really goes on everyday
- An opportunity to know every kid your child mentions at the dinner table
- Your kids will be proud of you for being a leader in their classroom
- You may make new friends as you work shoulder to shoulder to create and plan classroom events
- A chance to give back to the unsung heroes of our community: our dedicated teachers
- A feeling of pride that you are concretely helping to create a better Bowen experience for your child and for every Bowen student

Room Parent Team Roles

All classrooms have the same basic roles, although depending on the grade and the teacher's preferences, there may be some special roles as well. Here are the basic roles as well as the special roles we already know about:

For all grades:

- **(Co-)Head Room Parents:** This role should go to someone who can be in the school from time to time. The head room parent acts as the main liaison between the teacher, the other room parents, and the rest of the classroom. The (co-)head room parent(s) works with the teacher to plan classroom events, organize help, and understand how the teacher likes to work with her class's families. Especially in K-2, this person may be organizing regular class volunteers for things like Readers and Writers Workshops, or special activities such as sewing in first grade. You may also coordinate field trip volunteers. The (co-)head(s) is/are also responsible for ensuring that the other room parents follow-through on the roles for which they have volunteered.
- **Classroom celebrations coordinator:** This person organizes special celebrations in the class, such as Winter Holiday and End of School. In K-2 classes, there are Halloween celebrations. Some classes also do a special celebration for Valentine's Day or for other special occasions. You might be getting parents to bring snacks, supplies for an activity, or help decorate the classroom. Each teacher has his/her own preferences for celebrations, so you will work with the teacher liaison to understand what your class requires. This role should be done by someone who can be in the classroom at celebration time.
- **Class gifts coordinator:** This person organizes the class's gift to the teacher (and aides) at Winter Holiday and End of Year. Please see the special letter on class gifts for the Bowen school rules on what to do and not to do. This role can be combined with Classroom Celebrations.
- **Spring Fling coordinator:** This person organizes the class's spring fling booth or activities, including deciding what the booth will be, organizing signs and equipment, and getting families to sign up for shifts to work the booth. Special case: the fourth grade classes all work together to sell the food for the Spring Fling. This is a great role for someone who cannot be in the classroom during school hours (can be done at home).
- **Book Order coordinator:** Most teachers like a parent to help collate the monthly book orders and send them in. This is a great role for someone who cannot be in the classroom during school hours (can be done at home).
- **Auction Basket coordinator:** This is a grade-wide role (one person per grade, not per classroom). This person coordinates parent contributions to the Auction Baskets donated for the PTO Auction, usually in February. The PTO suggests a theme for each grade's basket, then you send out a note to families and collect the supplies. This is a great role for someone who cannot be in the classroom during school hours (can be done at home). It could be combined with the Spring Fling role.

Grade-specific roles/Grade-wide activities:

Third grade:

- **Many Thanksgivings Coordinator:** this person coordinates families in all of the third grade classrooms to get supplies for and staff activities for the grade-wide Many Thanksgivings activity, usually held in December.

Fourth grade:

- **Graduation Brunch Coordinator:** this person coordinates the menu, food donations, and help for a brunch that the fourth grade traditionally hosts for graduating fifth-graders and their families.

Fifth grade:

- **Graduation Coordinator:** This person coordinates planning for the graduation.
- **Yearbook Coordinator:** This person coordinates planning and production of the yearbook.

Sample Introductory Letter to Parents

Dear Parent/Guardian:

We are the room parent team for teacher's class. Our children are name(s).

Our role is to act as a source of information and as a communication link between teacher's name, the parents in the class and the PTO. Please let us know if you have any questions about activities /events in the classroom or the school.

Over the course of the year, we will email you with class information or requests for various contributions /volunteers for class and for PTO events. Please help when you can! If you do not use your email regularly, or do not have email, please contact us to arrange a way to receive our non-urgent classroom information.

Any questions that you may have regarding your child's work or arrangements to help out in the classroom need to be discussed with teacher's name directly.

Thank you in advance for all your help and support this year!

Sincerely,

Room Parent Team members' names, phone numbers and email addresses

Welcoming new families to Bowen

Your PTO wants to do a better job of welcoming new families to the school. Sometimes we do not know when new families come in during the school year, and those families miss out on all of the Start of School communications. In 2006, the PTO developed a "welcome kit" for Ms. Guzzi/Ms. Megrian to hand out.

Here's how you can help:

- Ms. Megrian will provide a welcome kit to new families (see below for contents of the welcome kit)
- She will also pass along the family's name to Selina, who passes it to Shara, who then informs the room parent
- Your job is to contact the new family and welcome them to Bowen
- Please make sure the new family is:
 - Signed up for Bowenotes
 - On the class communication lists (email, etc)
 - Paired up with another family in the class (buddy system)

Some of the things in the welcome kit include:

- ☑ how to subscribe to Bowenotes
- ☑ a directory form so they get in our database and can be included in directory updates
- ☑ a form to request a directory
- ☑ parking and drop off rules
- ☑ description of what PTO is
- ☑ guide to PTO activities
- ☑ PTO calendar
- ☑ volunteer interest form
- ☑ library volunteer form/library schedule
- ☑ fundraising letter w/ donation form & return envelope

Guidelines on classroom contributions

2009-2010 school year

- **SPECIAL ACTIVITIES:** Our standard practice is to ask parents to contribute supplies and time/ labor for specific classroom activities that are requested by the teacher. You can give out a specific request list by backpack or email or even post it on the classroom door for younger grades. This would cover supplies for Halloween parties, for example.
- **REQUESTS FOR MONEY:** Any request for money from parents **MUST** be routed through Shara / the PTO chairs and Ms. Guzzi before being sent out to parents and families. We know that room parents have done this in past years—for example, requesting a contribution at the beginning of the year to cover small expenditures all year—but it can be a burden on some of our families, especially when combined with school requests for field trip fees, publication fees, etc. Ms. Guzzi and the PTO chairs feel strongly that we want to avoid soliciting money from parents unless it has been expressly approved.
- **SPECIAL EXCEPTION--CLASS GIFTS:** Room parents may ask for monetary contributions **ONLY** for classroom gifts, and in that case the contribution request must be **OPTIONAL** and **OPEN-ENDED** with no amount specified. As you all know by now, Newton has a policy forbidding personal teacher gifts. Room parents may choose to organize parent contributions for gift certificates for classroom supplies (New England Mobile Book Fair, Staples, etc) or items that are handmade by the kids and/or the parents. If you do choose to organize a class gift, please remember the aides in your classroom too.

If you **DO** want to organize a class gift, here's a list of Bowen teachers' top nine places where they like to shop for their classrooms (not in any particular order). All of these places offer gift certificates—choose one that matches your teacher's style (for example, AC Moore if they are into classroom crafts, etc):

- AC Moore www.acmoore.com
- Staples www.staples.com
- New England Mobile Book Fair www.nebookfair.com
- Really Good Stuff www.reallygoodstuff.com
- Lakeshore www.lakeshorelearning.com
- Barnes and Noble www.barnesandnoble.com
- Smile Makers www.smilemakers.com
- Oriental Trading www.orientaltrading.com
- Carson-Dellosa www.carsondellosa.com

These guidelines are meant to ensure that:

- no parent or family feel overwhelmed by monetary requests
- no parent or family is left out because they can't afford it
- the parents and families participate in the life of the classroom

Thank you to all our room parents who make such a difference in the life of the school!

FamilyFun Magazine

Secrets of Successful Room Parents: Our Readers' Best Strategies & Tips for Classroom Volunteers

by Leslie Garisto Pfaff
www.Familyfun.com

When I look back on my daughter's elementary school career, the year I remember most fondly is second grade. It isn't that Lily learned so much that year (though, in fact, she did) or that her teacher was so extraordinary (though, come to think of it, she was) -- it's that I volunteered to be the classroom parent and got to do all kinds of wonderful things: bump along with Lily and her classmates on a hayride, introduce them to the Sugar Plum Fairy at the Nutcracker Ballet, capture 10 months of memories with my camera. At term's end, when I handed each beaming student a framed photo of one of the year's happy moments, I felt like the proud parent of 22 terrific kids -- and in a small way, I was.

Being a classroom parent virtually guarantees such rewarding benefits. You get to see young minds grow. You come to know your child in a new way. And you get the chance to help one of the few people who work harder than you do -- your child's teacher. But the job comes with challenges as well, such as recruiting volunteers and finding great party ideas. To help, we went to the best source we know: FamilyFun readers. Here they share their most successful ideas. We think you'll find they really make the grade.

Meet the Parents - Arrange a class get-together to start the year off right

Sure, e-mail is quick and convenient, but several readers told us nothing beats a face-to-face encounter for getting to know the parents of your child's classmates and instilling a spirit of cooperation for the coming year. Dru Quarles of Charlotte, North Carolina, hosted a casual afternoon party the very first week of school. She invited parents and kids (siblings included), and to keep things simple, asked everyone to bring a snack. "I found out all sorts of helpful things, like which parents were looking to get involved. And the party made the class more cohesive from the get-go," she says. It doesn't have to be an elaborate gathering. Atlanta room parent Hillary Yarmowich planned an afternoon playdate at a park for her son's class. It was so successful that it blossomed into a weekly drop-in event. "It helped us build a strong class network, with lots of active parents and willing volunteers," she says. Another option: a parents-only coffee at school, right after morning drop-off.

Share Photos - Build strong parent bonds by e-mailing pictures

Not everyone can attend school-day functions or chaperone class trips, so Richardson, Texas, room parent Virginia Simms keeps all of the parents involved -- and earns their heartfelt gratitude -- by e-mailing lots of digital pictures of their kids. "I've had parents tell me they feel as if they were right there in the classroom with us," says Virginia, who got everyone's e-mail addresses from the teacher. Other readers extolled the virtues of posting photos on a secure class Web site.

The Holiday Book Exchange - Plan this great activity for any classroom event

One of the most popular party activities in teacher Jennifer Wagner's Austin, Texas, fourth-grade classroom was a fast-paced book swap dreamed up by one of her room parents. Several weeks before their December holiday party, Jennifer's class parent sent home a note asking each child to bring in a wrapped book, new or gently used (she provided a few extras in case anyone forgot). At the event, the kids sat in a circle with their books while the room parent read a story. Whenever she uttered the word "the," the kids had to pass their book to the right; at the word "a," they passed to the left. Jennifer's students found the inevitable confusion uproariously funny. "The kids liked that they got to keep the book they were holding at the end of the story, but what they really loved was the crazy process," she says.

Thanks, Teach! - Coordinate a group gift that's sure to please

Whether it's the teacher's birthday, appreciation week, or the end of the school year, the same question pops up again and again: Is it better to give individual presents or one gift from the entire class? Sandra Hughes, a three-time room parent from Tustin, California, came up with an ingenious way to do both. A few weeks before her son Hudson's second-grade teacher celebrated her birthday, Sandra gave each student a brown paper bag on which she'd written a letter of the alphabet. Inside was a note asking parents to help their child fill the bag with one or more small gifts beginning with that letter. For inspiration, she offered a few examples: muffin mix or movie passes for M; potpourri or

potato chips for P. (Since they had 20 students in the class, she added a P.S. asking for volunteers to take two bags.) The teacher was thrilled when the kids presented her with their sometimes quirky but lovingly chosen items. The idea was such a success that Sandra repeated it in both of her other kids' classes.

Make 'em Laugh - Come prepared with a supply of riddles and jokes

For older kids who've been there and done that, finding a surefire party activity can be a challenge. Room parent Kristin Klinger of Indianapolis, whose son, Joshua, loves a good joke, came up with a genuinely funny idea for his classroom parties. She and her fellow room parents print a slew of silly jokes and riddles off the Internet. On party day, they toss the jokes -- one per strip of paper -- into a hat and ask each child to read one aloud. "They have so much fun laughing at the jokes -- and at themselves," says Kristin. Lisa Mason, a room parent in Monroe Township, New Jersey, always equips herself with jokes, brainteasers, riddles, and simple math and magic tricks before heading into the classroom. If an activity ends earlier than planned or boredom strikes, she has a ready supply of diversions. For age-appropriate humor, check out Yahoooligans at www.yahoooligans.yahoo.com/content/jokes or Kids' Turn Central at www.kidsturncentral.com/jokes.htm

Roll the Videotape - Settle kids down during parties with this entertaining idea

When Jeannie Ecker of Cicero, Indiana, was an elementary school teacher, she discovered a foolproof way to keep her students engaged during quieter parts of classroom parties. While the kids were playing games, one of her room parents would videotape the action; when it was time to settle them down -- such as during snacktime -- she played the tape for them. Once Jeannie became a room parent herself, she continued the tradition, to the great delight of her daughter's second-grade class. "It gives them something to do while they're eating," she says. "They love watching themselves. They're totally absorbed."

Window Dressing - Let the kids create these space-saving and versatile decorations

A few readers, including Jennifer Auten, a teacher and room parent from Sunnyvale, California, had high praise for simple window cling paint. Instead of dipping into the budget for store-bought classroom decorations, Jennifer likes to kick off a party with a craft project and soon-to-be room decoration in one: the students use the inexpensive paint (available at craft supply stores) to make their own themed designs on overhead transparency sheets. Once dry, the clings stick to the windows -- and stay conveniently out of the way. When another occasion rolls around, they're easily peeled off and sent home with their creators.

Room Parenting 101

When we asked veteran classroom parents for their best tips, two ideas came up time and again.

First, try to meet with the teacher before the open house so you can find out what he or she expects from you, any school rules you'll need to follow, and what activities you'll be expected to plan. That way, you can recruit the help you need (have sign-up sheets ready) at the open house.

Second, think twice before planning crafts that revolve around messy materials like glue. A few others:

- E-mail or call the teacher every two weeks to see if a new need has arisen. Many teachers are hesitant to ask for extra, unscheduled help.
- Bring all the supplies you'll need to set up for a party -- tape, scissors, markers, and so on -- with you into the classroom. You won't have to bother the teacher while she's still trying to teach the class.
- When you can, provide craft supplies in individual-sized envelopes or bags. It saves time in the classroom and heads off squabbles over who gets what.

Recruiting Help

Nothing makes for successful room parenting like a pool of informed and happy volunteers. Here are tips from readers on how to keep them that way:

- When asking for help, be specific: Can you be at the Halloween party from 1:30 to 2:30?
- Let parents know what's expected of them by handing out a detailed description of all volunteer jobs, such as book fair coordinator or holiday party helper, at the start of the year.
- Offer a range of ways to pitch in, such as donating supplies or doing the prep for a craft project one evening.
- Use a "week before" reminder system to make sure volunteers remember what they've signed up to do.
- Send a thank-you e-mail after someone has volunteered. When parents know they've made a difference, they'll be more willing to help in the future.