



Room Parent Handbook

Revised August 2026

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 improve the quality of life for students and staff at school and build community among families.

As a room parent, you will be a tremendous asset to your teacher. By organizing parties, handling the volunteer coordination, 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. 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. I hope you have a positive and productive experience in this important role.

Thank you in advance for your time and effort. You are providing a huge service to the entire ECS community!

Natalie Jacoby
PCO Room Parent Coordinator (2026-2027)

ROOM PARENT RESPONSIBILITIES

The main role of an ECS room parent is to act as a liaison between the teacher and your class. These are some specific things you will be responsible for:

1. **Attend the room parent orientation meeting**

There will be an in-person orientation meeting and a virtual orientation meeting in September that all room parents are encouraged to attend.

2. **Work with your co-room parent *(if applicable)***

I recommend that you coordinate with your co-room parent early on in the school year to delineate responsibilities. Ways to split room parent responsibilities include:

- First come first serve (e.g. whoever can tackle a task first let's their fellow room parent know)
- Task related (e.g. assign a room parent to each of these tasks: planning parties, communicate with families about upcoming classroom events or content the PCO requests that room parents send to families, coordination for volunteers and classroom supplies)
- Other (up to room parent teams)

If you're having any issues with your co-room parent, please feel free to reach out to roomparents@ecspco.org and I will be happy to help in any way I can.

3. **Send an email to your teacher as soon as possible to determine their specific needs and expectations.** By early September, the Room Parent Coordinator will send you a sample letter that you can use to email to your teachers. You may personalize this letter, but general items that will be covered include preferred method and frequency of communication, general classroom supply needs, and holiday party limits (such as no glitter). Our teachers all have individual preferences when it comes to their room parents so don't take it personally if your teacher does not want or need a lot of help. Everyone has different ways of doing things.

4. **Send an introduction email to your class.**

- The Room Parent Coordinator will send you a sample email that you can personalize for your class/grade families.
- Classroom (PS and IS), and grade level (MS/HS) family contact lists will be shared with room parents by the Room Parent Coordinator after families have had a chance to opt-in to room parent communications. You should receive these lists by the end of September.
 - The Room Parent Coordinator will keep you informed of any new families who join ECS each marking period so that you can welcome them to the class parent community and include them in class-related communications.

- Consider creating a Label in your email account as a means of organizing your parents' email lists. **But no matter how you put your email list together, please send emails by "bcc" to each family so you are not sharing email addresses. It is important to keep everyone's email address private.** (The PCO is creating a family directory that families can use to contact each other.)
 - The deadline to email your families will be communicated by the Room Parent Coordinator but is generally within one week of receiving the family contact information.
5. **Communicate with your teacher on a periodic basis** (*as agreed upon*).
Based on your teacher's preference, a quick chat or email is a great way to check on classroom supply needs and confirm upcoming classroom party dates. Make sure to keep your teacher informed of any relevant information you send to families by copying them on most correspondences.
6. **Communicate with the families in your class via email.** The PCO may ask room parents to share information with families. The PCO sends these emails to the Room Parent Coordinator, who will then prepare them for you to send out. The idea is that you should be able to just forward (or cut and paste) those emails to send to your class/grade families.

Please also keep in mind the following mechanisms by which families receive school communications:

- End-of-week grade level newsletters
- *The Extra* newsletter sent by ECS's Communication Director weekly
- *The Pulse* newsletter (PCO newsletter emailed out every Wednesday) (if the family has subscribed to it)
 - [Click here to subscribe to the PCO Pulse](#)
- Social media (if the family chooses to follow any of these accounts)
 - Facebook
 - Environmental Charter School
 - ECS Parent Community Organization
 - ECS Transportation Connections
 - Instagram
 - ecspgh
 - Ecs_pco
 - Discord
 - ECS Parent Community
- Room parent email

While there are occasions when families may have received news from more than one source, there is no way of knowing which items families subscribe to and what they read. By sending out emails through room parents, we are hopeful that families hear of events through at least one method of communication.

7. **Plan classroom celebrations**

This is one of the biggest room parent responsibilities for K to 5 room parents, thus it has its own section. See “Parties and Classroom Celebrations” section.

8. **Be accessible to your families.**

Reply to emails/texts/phone calls in a timely fashion.

VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

Room parents help to recruit and organize volunteers for classroom parties.

HOW TO RECRUIT VOLUNTEERS

Send your class families an email when volunteer opportunities arise.

- 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.
- If you are short on volunteers, please reach out to your fellow room parents and the Room Parent Coordinator!

IMPORTANT INFORMATION TO SHARE WITH YOUR VOLUNTEERS

1. **Clearances**

Visit the ECS PCO Volunteer website <https://www.ecspgh.org/parent-resources/volunteer> for information on obtaining clearances as well as how to submit clearances into the Raptor System. ***It is not enough to have the clearances, they must also be submitted into Raptor.***

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: [Report Abuse \(pa.gov\)](https://www.pa.gov/government/other-departments/department-of-health-and-human-services)

2. **Confidentiality**

ECS takes student confidentiality very seriously. 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 issues 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

One of the biggest room parent responsibilities 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 oversee specific events. These details are at the discretion of the room parent. Just be sure to spread the volunteering opportunities around since we do not want anyone to feel left out. 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!

There are typically THREE class/grade parties during the school year (PS and IS):

1. **Halloween** (*typically on or the day before the Halloween parade*)
2. **Winter Celebration** (*before Winter break*)
3. **Valentine's Day**

Class parties typically last around an hour and involve a craft, challenge(s)/game(s), a story, and/or a snack.

Graduating grades may also have an additional end-of-year celebration.

PARTY PLANNING

- The key to successful party planning is giving yourself enough time.
- Parties can be coordinated between room parents from different classes (work with your homebase teachers to see if they prefer a class party, pairing up with another class, or a grade level party)
 - The Intermediate School encourages room parents within a grade to plan classroom parties together to ensure each classroom has a similar experience
 - (May want to consider this for Primary as well as long as homebase teachers agree)
- Reach out to your classroom teachers in early October, late November, and late mid-January to 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 2-4 weeks before the event.

- You may be responsible for coming up with ideas for crafts and activities.
- It is very helpful to share the party plans with your volunteers ahead of time so they know what to expect.

PARTY FOOD

Room parents are **NOT** responsible for providing food to classroom parties. When planning parties, please do not include any outside food to your party. The ECS Board of Directors has passed a policy that does not allow outside food to be brought into the schools. ECS Food Services Department is responsible for providing food for the parties. The Food Services Department is made aware of all students' food allergies at the start of each school year.

ECS's policy states:

At ECS, we believe that celebrating milestones is a key part of the school experience. To ensure student safety and adhere to our wellness policy and agreements with the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), we do not accept outside food.

Instead, we invite you to contribute to a communal celebration that will benefit all students. Examples of these celebrations are schoolwide, EX: Pumpkin celebrations, middle/high school dances. By donating via a QR code on the ECS website, you are helping the Food Service Department purchase approved items for school-wide events and celebrations throughout the year. This new process allows us to celebrate together as a community, ensuring that every student feels included and safe.

The QR code will be shared with room parents, in addition to it being on ECS's website. Room parents can share the QR code with their classroom families before the Halloween party, and throughout the year as needed, to obtain funds for party foods. Note, the amount of funds collected will determine the level of snacks provided.

If your homebase teacher asks you to provide food for the party, please have them direct all inquiries to the Food Services Director, Niki Hutcherson, at niki.hutcherson@ecspgh.org. All concerns about food provided by ECS for classroom parties should also be directed to the Food Services Director.

FUN IDEAS FOR CELEBRATIONS AND EVENTS

If you are ever stuck for a filler activity, turning on some music and letting the kids dance around is almost always a hit!

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!

- Acorn Necklaces
- Jack O Lantern made from bottle caps
- Make bats out of handprints
- 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.

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 teammate 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).

Books

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

WINTER HOLIDAYS

Try to avoid holiday specific ideas and focus more on generic Winter as we don't know what holidays 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.

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.
- Decorate shoe boxes for valentines.
- Decoupage a small bottle with tissue paper and create a bud vase.

APPENDIX A. SAMPLE INTRODUCTION LETTERS TO TEACHER(S)

(NOTE: Feel free to personalize it as you wish and consider including a picture of you with your child as well as maybe a few fun facts about yourself)

Good evening!

We are so excited to support you this school year as room parents for [insert class]!

We'd like to start by understanding what your goals and needs are.

- **Communication**

- **What are your preferred methods of communication?**

We are also happy to email you once per month to touch base.

We plan to send classroom specific reminders to parents as needed (i.e. reminders about fuzzy friend day, etc...)

- **Classroom Supplies**

- **Do you have an Amazon Wish List we could share with families?**

We are also happy to coordinate supply donations whenever materials that are less conducive to Amazon are needed

- **Classroom Parties**

- **Let us know if there are absolute "NOs" regarding classroom parties (i.e. glitter crafts 🥳) and if you are ok with parent volunteers helping to run the party**

- **Other volunteer needs**

- **Do you anticipate having additional volunteer needs throughout the year?**
We are happy to coordinate those as needed (reading books, cleaning classroom, etc...)

Lastly, here is a little bit of information about us:

INSERT PHOTO OF YOU WITH KID

Name:

Kiddos:

What I do when my kids are in school:

We are looking forward to being your partners this year!

APPENDIX B. SAMPLE INTRODUCTION LETTER TO FAMILIES

(NOTE: Feel free to personalize it as you wish and consider including a picture of you with your child as well as maybe a few fun facts about yourself)

Dear Parents,

[insert name] (child's parent) and [insert name] (child's parent) will be serving as your room parents for [insert class] this school year.

We will reach out periodically with information about **classroom parties, volunteer opportunities** (see information about clearances below), **PCO events, teacher appreciation events**, and **classroom supply needs**.

[If you have the information already, feel free to include information about the classroom wish list, volunteer opportunities, and/or upcoming classroom party).

If you plan to volunteer in the classroom this year, please visit <https://www.ecspgh.org/parent-resources/volunteer> and get your clearances submitted into the Raptor system as soon as possible.

Lastly, here is a little bit of information about us:
INSERT PHOTO OF YOU WITH KID

Name:

Kiddos:

What I do when my kids are in school:

Your room parents for the [insert academic year]