



**Virginia  
Run Elementary  
School PTA  
Room Parent  
Handbook**

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## A. Introduction

Welcome to the 2017-18 school year, and thank you for volunteering to serve as room parent for a VRES class! In this role, you can positively impact the educational experience of our students.

Whether you are a new Room Parent or a “veteran,” this handbook will provide you with some guidelines and suggestions that will help make your Room Parent experience effective and rewarding. Please review it carefully and always feel free to reach out with questions or suggestions.

### What is a Room Parent?

A Room Parent works directly with the teacher to organize classroom activities and events that require parent volunteer efforts. The extent of a room parent’s involvement will vary from teacher to teacher. Room Parents are also involved in the coordination of various PTA sponsored school-wide events and activities throughout the school year. Typical responsibilities of a room parent include:

- Meet with the classroom teacher and organize dates and volunteer needs for the school year;
- Plan and prepare two class parties;
- Coordinate parents to help with particular projects or special events that occur in the classroom or across the grade-level;
- Schedule regular volunteers as requested by the teacher;
- Serve as a liaison with the PTA;
- Coordinate a classroom’s participation in school events (i.e., Book Fairs, Yearbook, Box Tops, Giant Bonus Bucks etc.)
- Arrange donations of food, craft items, etc. for particular classroom events;
- Organize class participation in Teacher Appreciation Week; and
- Determine and collect donations (if necessary) for class gifts.

Being a Room Parent is a wonderful opportunity to support your child, his/her teacher and our school. Virginia Run Elementary

School depends on the help it gets from all of its parents and guardians. Thank you for making this commitment to support your child's school!

### Contact Information

There are a variety of resources available to help you navigate your duties as a room parent.

The PTA Room Parent Coordinator for this year is:

Kelly Long  
(703) 328-3518  
[kalong928@yahoo.com](mailto:kalong928@yahoo.com)

In addition, PTA officer and committee chair contact information is available on our website at [www.vrespta.org](http://www.vrespta.org). Feel free to contact any of these for information throughout the year. Finally, a list of other room VRES parents will be provided for your use. We encourage you to participate in an active dialogue of ideas and helpful tips!

## B. First Teacher-Room Parent(s) Meeting

Once you have agreed to be the Room Parent for a class, schedule an initial meeting with the teacher to discuss her/his specific expectations and needs. Teacher styles and needs vary. Room parents, likewise, should be forthcoming regarding their own schedules and availability. Be open about your ideas and your abilities to meet the teacher's expectations.



The following are topics that should be covered at this initial meeting:

1. Make-up of classroom - review class roster
  - Request a class list and emails - these will be critical to your ability to communicate with parents!
  - Discuss any medical or other considerations you should be aware of when working with the class. Keep in mind that information should be held in the strictest confidence!
    - Food allergies - keep these in mind when deciding on any snacks for classroom events;
    - Language Barriers—we are a diverse community. Please make every effort to include families where English might not be the primary household language.
    - Disabled students—our classrooms are inclusive. Information regarding disabilities in the classroom may be helpful in planning activities that embrace all of the children in the class.
    - Family contact information - families come in every shape and size. Make sure you have contact information for and reach out to all parents and guardians.
2. Supply needs?
  - Does the teacher need any supplies for day-to-day classroom operations that were not covered in Back-to-School

communications? (Examples include: hand sanitizer, extra snacks, paper products, etc.)

3. Recurring teacher volunteer needs - does the teacher need volunteers for certain activities on a weekly or monthly basis? Examples include:
  - Wednesday envelopes?
  - Copying or bulletin boards?
  - Reading/math pullouts?
  
4. Class Parties and Special Events
  - Parties - Discuss the dates of the two parties allowed by VRES each year? Will the party be an individual class event or will all of the classes in the grade-level participate? Food allergies if bringing food to the party is allowed by your teacher, grade level.
  - Special grade-level events - Discuss any grade-level events that might occur during the year. (Examples: Colonial Day, Ancient Civilizations, Book Parade, etc.) What will the Room Parent responsibilities be?
  - Birthday Celebrations. With more and more students with severe food allergies, VRES requests that you **bring a non-food treat for your child to share** with his/her classmates. Examples: Pencils, stickers, eraser, bookmarks, etc.

Once you have established the teacher's needs and expectations, make sure to reach out to the parents of students in the classroom to introduce yourself and include them in planning. The following is just a suggestion for this first contact.

## Sample Introduction Letter to Parents

Dear <teacher>'s <grade-level> parents.

Welcome to the 2016-17 school year! My name is <Room Parent> and I will be your child's classroom Room Parent this year. I am looking forward to working with you! In order to support <teacher> to the fullest, I will need your help.

Volunteers will be needed throughout the year on a recurring basis as well as for special events/parties. I will be back in touch with <Teacher>'s plans for the year.

Thank you for your support. If you need to contact me for any reason, my phone number is (phone number) and my email address is (email address).

## C. Classroom Volunteers

Teachers' volunteer needs will vary from classroom to classroom. Some teachers rely on room parents to help them get parent volunteer support in the classroom. Others arrange their own volunteer schedules. Please check with your classroom teacher to see what support you can provide.

As noted earlier, some typical examples of recurring volunteer opportunities may include:

- Wednesday envelope stuffing
- Copying and preparing bulletin boards
- Reading pull-out groups
- Math games or pull-out groups

Room parents can either request availability from parents and put a schedule together or use an online resource like Sign-Up Genius to allow parents to pick their own dates. (Note: If using a resource like Sign-Up Genius, please make sure to include as many parents who volunteer as possible. This might require sending home a paper sign-up as well or asking more “enthusiastic” parent volunteers to limit the number of slots they take.)

Teachers may also request help for more labor-intensive art projects or class units.

Finally, many grade levels have special events that take place throughout the school year (i.e. - Kindergarten Bug Show; 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Book Character Parade; 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Ancient Civilizations Day; 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Greek/Roman Festival, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade End of the Year Party; etc.) As a room parent, you may be asked to arrange support at these activities.

In all likelihood, you will have a core group of parents who are more readily available than others. Please try to provide recurring volunteer opportunities as well as chances for parents or guardians with tougher schedules to come in for a one-time special event. Try not to select the same parents over and over again if it means others cannot be included in events. The following communication examples can be used to request volunteer support for the classroom.

## SAMPLE COMMUNICATIONS

Dear Parents:

<Teacher> would like to have volunteers come in on a regular basis to: (List areas of need - i.e., Wednesday envelopes, copying, etc.)

Please let me know if you can help in these areas and how frequently you are available. I will put together a schedule of volunteers. If you find yourself unable to volunteer on a particular day, please arrange to switch with another parent or let me know so that I can find a substitute.

Thank you for your help!

Dear Parents:

As a culminating activity, we are planning our 3<sup>rd</sup> grade ancient civilization party on Friday, June 17. We need three parent volunteers from each 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class to help with the activities for the day. If you can commit from 9:30 until 11:30 on the 17<sup>th</sup>, please email me at (room parent email).

Thank you!

Classroom Parents:

We are planning 5<sup>th</sup> grade Greek/Roman Festival on Friday, June 12 and we need several parent volunteers to help with activity stations throughout the day. If you can commit to the entire day (or even a few hours) please email me at (room parent email). Some of the activities will be outdoors and some will be inside the school. We will email specifics as the date draws nearer. All parents are invited to attend this event.

Thank you!

<Room Parent Name>

## D. Class Parties

Virginia Run Elementary School allows two class parties to be held each year. A class party is usually determined to be an event that includes food, games and possibly crafts. Although parties are generally celebratory in nature, Virginia Run encourages room parents to try to keep an educational focus when they are planning a class party. Many class parties could be used as a culminating activity to a special unit or theme that the students may be studying.

Room parents will need to meet with their child's teacher to determine at what time in the school year class parties should be planned. (Don't forget to plan for rain dates if necessary.) Some teachers have specific ideas for class party activities. Other teachers like to have the room parents plan the entire event.

Room parents will need to ask the teacher what he/she prefers. Decide together on where the class parties should take place (i.e. - classroom, wet/dry area, cafeteria, outside, etc.) Your child's teacher can make arrangements for procuring an alternate site for the party if needed.

Many school parents like to volunteer to help at class parties. They often have lots of creative ideas too. Some room parents like to form party committees that meet to plan the preparations for upcoming class parties. If possible, over plan activities for the party. If you have "extra" activities, you can avoid "dead time" if an activity did not take as long as you had planned. Do include "quiet" activities as well as active activities. Try to have **at least 2** parents volunteer to help at the party. Once your plans are finalized, inform the classroom teacher of your intentions (times, activities, notes to parents, the asking of supplies or donations, etc.) That way, the classroom teacher will be ready to answer parent questions and take collections.



When planning for foods to serve at a class party, please remember to ask the teacher if there are any food allergies you should be made aware of and plan accordingly. Some classes will opt to host only non-food activities. If you are planning a party during lunchtime where the

children will NOT be eating in the cafeteria, please notify the Cafeteria Manager prior to the event. This will aid her in ordering the correct amounts of food for the cafeteria.

If you need to refrigerate perishable foods for a class party, please use the refrigerators located in the upstairs or downstairs teachers' lounges. Please do not use the clinic refrigerator for personal or class items. Due to health regulations, the clinic refrigerator may only be used for medication and health related items.

When asking for supply donations, make sure to ask for the items to be sent in a few days before the scheduled party. That way you will have time to check off the supplies and sent out reminders or purchase items if needed.

There are many different ways to ask for parental support in helping out with a class party. Besides donating money and/or supplies for the party, parents who cannot come into the classroom can also prepare materials at home to send in to the class. They can help you make phone calls or email reminders.

The following pages include some sample letters that room parents have used in the past that have been successful. Remember to be specific. The more details that you provide the parents from the beginning, the less follow-up questions you will have to deal with later. Also, make sure to send confirmations and reminders, especially during busy periods like the holiday season and end-of-year flurry.

## SAMPLE COMMUNICATIONS

To <teacher's name> First Grade Parents,

On Friday, December 14<sup>th</sup>, <teacher's name> class will be having their Winter Holiday party from 9:30 a.m. - 11:00a.m. We have planned fun games, crafts, songs, and treats for the festivities. Any parents who would like to volunteer to help at the party are more than welcome. Please email <room parent> at <email address> if you are planning to attend.

In addition, your child has volunteered to donate the following supply for our party:

(write one supply item needed - i.e.- 24 paper plates, 10 juice boxes, one bag of pretzels, etc.)

The item(s) should be sent to school by the morning of Wednesday, December 12<sup>th</sup>. Please inform the <room parent> by email or calling at <phone number> if you have a problem with this request. Thank you.

Room Parents: <Room Parent Names>

Dear Parents of <teacher's name>'s students,

The end of the year party for the third graders will be held on Friday, June 15<sup>th</sup>. We would like to celebrate with pizza for lunch on that day. We are asking you to please send in \$2.00 to cover the cost of the pizza and drinks. Please send the money in an envelope marked with your child's name on it by June 13<sup>th</sup>. Please address the envelope to <room parent name>. Thanks for your support.

Dear Parents,

Just a reminder that our End of the Year Party will be held on Friday, June 14<sup>th</sup> at 2:15 p.m. We will be making ice cream sundaes for the children.

Thank you to all of you who have volunteered to send in sundae supplies. The list below serves as a confirmation of supplies you signed up to bring. Please send in all non-perishable items no later than June 12<sup>th</sup>.

Parents are welcome to attend and help with the sundae making. We will also be playing some outside water games (weather permitting). Please email <room parent> at <email address > with any questions. Thank you again for all of your assistance this year! Have a great summer!

Sincerely,

<Room Parents>

<u>Student</u>	<u>Donation</u>
Billy	36 plastic spoons
Mary	36 paper bowls
Johnny	1 bottle of chocolate syrup
Lizzie	1 can of spray whipped cream

## E. Serving as a PTA Liaison

Room parents form a critical support network for the PTA at VRES. Without you, the PTA would not be able to successfully deliver many of the programs that enhance the educational experience of our students or provide much-needed resources to teachers and staff.

Over the course of the year, room parents will be asked to:

- Reinforce communications to parents/guardians about important PTA news and announcements;
- Help recruit volunteers for special PTA events;
- Encourage support for fundraising efforts;
- Spread the word about legislative or community issues that could impact our schools; and
- Support PTA initiatives like the school yearbook or book fairs.

Teacher Appreciation Activities. There are a number of activities throughout the year that the PTA hosts to show appreciation for teachers and staff. Room parent assistance is most critical during two events.

In February, the PTA holds the annual Soup and Salad luncheon. Each class will be responsible for bringing in a soup, salad, drink or dessert for 10 people. Whatever your parents decide to send in will be shared by all of the teachers. Please be sure that your donations are either disposable or picked up at 3 p.m. from the cafeteria.

Teacher Appreciation Week is scheduled this year for May 7-11. We plan a full week of activities to help reward and recognize our fabulous, hard working teachers! Listed below is typical agenda for the week. The items that would require your help and planning are in bold. As we approach the 2018 Teacher Appreciation Week, we will be back in contact with more detailed plans.

- Monday: Luncheon planned by the PTA (will take during the day in the 3rd & 4th Grade Teacher Lounge).
- Tuesday: The students will wear their teacher's favorite color and express their appreciation through thank you notes (written at home) and then given to the teacher in the morning. We definitely need the room parents to head and organize these activities.
- Wednesday: The PTA will deliver a treat to each teacher via their mail boxes.
- Thursday: Students will give gift certificates for school supplies or actual school supplies to their teachers. Room parents can decide which option works best for their class.
- Friday: The PTA will stock the teachers' lounges with snacks or plan a before school breakfast. In the past, we have done ice cream and frozen treats. Last year, there was enough money in the PTA budget to do a breakfast so we did that instead!

Thank you so much for all of your help and support, not just with Teacher Appreciation week but all during the school year! If you have any questions, please feel free to contact this year's Teacher Appreciation Committee Chair.

**Virginia Run Elementary**  
**School Policy for Gift**  
**Giving to Staff**



For as long as most of us can remember, students have spontaneously expressed their appreciation toward their teachers with items such as fruit, a freshly picked wildflower, or a homemade card. In many cases, parents have taken on more of this responsibility, often purchasing small tokens of their appreciation for a teacher. The most typical

times for gifts for teachers are (1) before the winter holidays, (2) during Teacher Appreciation Week and (3) at the end of the year.

When considering giving teacher gifts, room parents are asked to help reinforce the following:

- The most meaningful gifts are the ones that a child makes or finds for his/her teacher. Parents can help in this regard by encouraging their children to think about how they could show their teacher(s) their appreciation with some thought and creativity.
- Gifts should be of modest value. It is really the thought that counts, not the monetary worth or permanence of the object.
- Try to learn about a teacher's likes and dislikes in planning gifts. For example, a teacher with a fragrance allergy might not be the best candidate for a basket of bath products. A sample list of questions you might want to ask your teacher is included below.
- Gifts may be given from individual children or by the class as a whole. Participation in a class gift is always on a **strictly voluntary basis**. When offering the opportunity to donate to a class gift, please limit requests to no more than \$5.00 per child. Keep in mind that not all families are in a position to make financial contributions. Group gifts should always be presented from the whole class, not just those who could make financial contributions.
- Think outside of the box. Ideas for meaningful gifts outside of gift cards, etc., could include:
  - Making a donation to the school or PTA in the teacher's name
  - Purchasing items from a teacher's wish list at the school Book Fair;
  - Helping a teacher put her/his own touch on a classroom with a special chair, bookshelf or other décor; or
  - Donating supplies that a teacher can use throughout the year without dipping into personal funds.
- Finally, remember the many professionals outside of the core classroom who make such a difference in the lives of our children. These include special education teachers and resource aids as well as music, art, P.E., guidance and other specialists. Please encourage parents to recognize the efforts of these individuals.
- **NEW!!** VRES would like to show ALL of our teachers just how important they are to our students and families. To do this, we are asking grade levels to 'Adopt a Specialist' during Teacher Appreciation Week. Each grade level has been paired up with a small group of Specialists (5-6) and families can contribute to a gift for both their home room teacher and their grades Specialist

teachers. Funds will be collected by the Room Parent and then gifts will be purchased for the specialists (either by a Room Parent or by a PTA Board Member). Students can also write notes of appreciation to make sure that our Specialists feel Truly Special!!! The Room Parent Coordinator will email all Room Parents per grade level and let them know what Specialists their classes will be adopting. We hope that you will join us in this fun new initiative. If you have any questions please contact the Room Parent Coordinator.

**SAMPLE Teacher Questionnaire**  
*(This could be e-mailed as well)*

Dear <TEACHER>,

We are currently planning Teacher Appreciation Week and it would be very helpful to us if you could answer the questions below ... thanks !

What are your hobbies?

Do you have a collection? If so,

what? Do you have any pets? If so,

what?

Is there something special you would like for your classroom? What is your favorite:

- Color?
- Snacks?
- Treats?
- Lunch?
- Drink (Coffee, Hot Chocolate, Tea, etc)?
- Restaurant?
- Book Store?
- Teacher Supply Store?

Is there anything you prefer we NOT do?

Thank You!

Teacher  
Favorites

Birthdate \_\_\_\_\_

Favorite Color \_\_\_\_\_

Likes \_\_\_\_\_

Dislikes \_\_\_\_\_

Collections \_\_\_\_\_

Favorite Foods \_\_\_\_\_

Favorite Restaurant \_\_\_\_\_

Favorite Stores \_\_\_\_\_

Favorite Sweets \_\_\_\_\_

Favorite Sandwich \_\_\_\_\_

Hobbies \_\_\_\_\_

Fundraising. Without our fundraising activities, the PTA cannot provide much needed financial resources to the school. These activities typically include a major fall fundraiser; box top and grocery receipt drives; two book fairs; spirit nights at local restaurants and various smaller fundraisers during the year such as spirit wear sales and a spring fundraiser that utilizes student art. Please pass along announcements regarding these initiatives, encourage participation and remind parents of critical dates and deadlines.

Yearbook. The school yearbook is largely dependent on pictures submitted by parents and guardians. We are always looking for a photos featuring a wide variety of classes and kids. Please don't forget to bring cameras to special events you participate in as a room parent - also help us spread the word among all of those parents and guardians you may notice snapping away at functions!

Keep the following in mind:

- If sending from a cell phone please select "actual size" or "large format" versions. Some cell phones automatically default to sending pictures in small or compressed formats that cannot be used in a yearbook.
- Information on the yearbook and the various ways to submit pictures is on the PTA Website in the Documents Section ([www.vrespta.org](http://www.vrespta.org)).

## F. Communicating with Parents and Guardians

As noted throughout this handbook, a key Room Parent responsibility is communicating with parents and guardians about classroom news and events or PTA functions.

Email is generally the easiest way to communicate with a wide audience effectively and efficiently. Some notes when using email:

- Clearly mark your emails as classroom related
- Alert parents to checking SPAM filters the first few time you email
- Children often have parents who do not live in the same home. Try to include all parents and guardians whenever possible and appropriate
- If you don't hear back, follow up!
- Reminders and confirmations are always a good idea

Keep in mind that some households do not have access to email. Flyers sent home in the Wednesday envelope are also good ways to reach out. Use of on-line translation services is encouraged. When phone calls are necessary, the VRES Student Directory can provide appropriate phone numbers.

Finally, for many VRES families, English might not be the primary language spoken in the household. There are several translation programs available on the internet for your use. However, when using one of these programs, please include the following disclaimer:

***The following translation program, \_\_\_\_\_, was used by the Room Parent(s) for your child's classroom for the sole purpose of this communication. This is not an official communication from FCPS or VRES. We apologize for any mistakes that were inadvertently made in this translation.***

## G. Financial Guidelines

Over the course of the year, there might be times a Room Parent needs to make purchases for events. The costs can mount quickly! No Room Parent is expected to bear this burden herself/himself.

Room Parents may handle donations in a variety of ways including:

- Asking for small donations of money as each need arises
- Asking for donations of food or supplies.
- Asking for a single upfront amount at the beginning of the year

Please remember that if you are asking for monetary funding, please be cognizant that occasionally some families will not give due to financial hardship or forgetfulness. Ask the students to send in the donation in a sealed envelope marked with their name and your name on the front of the envelope. You may want to keep a log sheet to log in funds listing who donated money, how much, and when the money came in and went out.

How much money classroom activities will require will depend on the activities planned and on the grade-level. A good rule of thumb is to limit donation requests over the course of a year to no more than \$25 per family (again, understanding that not all families will be in a position to contribute for all events or needs in a monetary fashion) and no more than \$5-10 in a single instance.

This guide has been assembled by volunteers for the VRES PTA and is intended for the reference of Room Parents. Any issues with content, errors or omissions are not the responsibility of VRES or FCPS.



## 2017-18 School Year Calendar

August 28, 2017	School Begins
September 22	Student Holiday
October 9	Columbus Day Holiday - Student Holiday
November 3	First Grading Period Ends *+ Students Released Two Hours Early
November 6-7	Student Holidays
November 22	Students Released Two Hours Early
November 23-24	Thanksgiving Break
December 18-January 1, 2018	Winter Break
January 15	Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birthday Holiday - Student Holiday
January 25	Second Grading Period Ends*+ Students Released Two Hours Early
January 26, 29	Student Holiday
February 19	George Washington's Birthday - Presidents' Day Holiday - Student Holiday
March 26-30	Spring Break
April 2	Student Holiday
April 13	Third Grading Period Ends*+ Students Released Two Hours Early
April 16	Student Holiday
May 28	Memorial Day Holiday - Student Holiday
June 7	Graduation on or after this date
June 15	Last Day of School