

CO-OPING AT THE OPEN CLASSROOM

Parent participation in the classroom is an essential feature of the Open Classroom. It is probably the most important distinctive feature of the Open Classroom, and you'll find that parents generally take their co-oping responsibilities very seriously. Parents co-op in the classroom for three hours per week per student (for a maximum of six hours), generally at the same time each week. This provides an important resource upon which teachers rely; parent co-oping is a key part of the classroom curriculum and co-ops are actively involved in the classroom.

Co-oping also keeps parents informed about and involved in their child's education. We have also found that students thrive on having a parent or another adult they know in the classroom helping them and their friends. Open Classroom alumni report that classroom co-oping has had a positive impact on their relationship with their child through adolescence and beyond. Much of what really works at the Open Classroom relates to co-oping in the classroom.

Each class has a Co-oping Representative to coordinate co-oping matters. The Co-oping Committee consists of all of the classroom Co-oping Representatives. Finally, the Co-oping Request Committee, which consists of the two Co-oping Committee Co-chairs and the Head Teacher, consider requests and concerns related to co-oping as described below. If requested by a parent, the parent members of the Co-oping Request Committee will be replaced by one or two teachers.

Finally, if any parent is unable to meet participation requirements due to serious economic or personal circumstances, a waiver for co-oping may be granted by the principal. This is also described below.

Learning to Co-op

Learning how to co-op can be exciting and overwhelming all at the same time. Classroom teachers, as well as seasoned co-ops, are ready, willing and able to teach parents, new to the classroom, techniques, strategies, and philosophically sound practices to make the co-oping experience successful and enjoyable. The co-oping experience may seem a bit intimidating at the beginning, but parents are welcomed wholeheartedly by the students and classroom teacher. We are all learners together in our community, and each person's role is to support his or her own learning and the learning of others. Teachers will guide new co-ops through their first classroom co-oping sessions, and follow through with thoughtful conversations about the experience. Co-ops may assist the teacher in carrying out an activity planned by the teacher or might be encouraged to share their own interests, hobbies, or areas of expertise with the students. If you are hesitant or feel nervous about co-oping, please communicate this to your classroom teacher. Our intent is to make you feel at ease with co-oping.

Co-ops should be actively involved in the classroom. They are expected to:

- Complete their co-oping requirements by arriving on time and prepared to work in the classroom,
- be willing to be a learner,

- take responsibility and be "on task",
- plan curriculum enhancement activities with the teacher.

When interacting with children, co-ops are expected to:

- Listen to children attentively and speak with them respectfully;
- Ask questions that encourage independent thinking;
- Encourage children to listen and learn from each other;
- State expectations clearly and reasonably; and
- Encourage self-control rather than try to impose control.

If parents cannot fulfill their scheduled co-opping time due to illness or for other reasons, it is their responsibility to find a replacement so the classroom teacher is not shorthanded. Co-opping reps will help this process by distributing a list of co-ops available to substitute. It is also effective to use the class email list to trade co-opping times. If a parent is unable to find a replacement, he or she will notify the teacher as long before class time as possible.

If regular substitution is required, the co-op should make an appointment with their teacher and the co-opping rep. In order to protect the integrity of the classroom and ensure that children are familiar with co-ops, the teacher or classroom co-opping rep may in some cases ask the family to meet with the Cooping Request Committee.

Standard co-opping

Ordinarily, each family co-ops for three hours per week per child, up to a maximum of six hours per week (though parents may, of course, volunteer in all of their students' classes). Generally, teachers set aside standards times throughout the week for small group learning, and parent co-ops teach at the same time each week.

Procedure for families with more than two children: If a family has more than two children in the school and wishes to co-op for a maximum of six hours, the family will notify the class co-op reps for all teachers involved. The co-op reps and/or the teachers will then confer and determine where the parent's co-opping time is most needed. Parents may make request, e.g., based on the needs of one of their children. If a parent has a concern about the decision made, that concern may be brought to the Co-opping Request Committee.

Flexible co-opping

Flexible co-opping arrangements split the family's commitment among two or more days each week.

Procedure for requesting flexible co-opping: Flexible co-opping arrangements should be requested through the class co-opping rep. The request must be approved by the classroom teacher and the Head Teacher. If a parent has a concern about the decision made, that concern may be brought to the Co-opping Request Committee.

Alternative co-opping

Alternative co-opping includes contributions outside of the classroom toward the three-hour commitment. Alternative co-ops may, for example, organize field trips, find guest speakers, find research materials, do research to assist the teacher with the curriculum, and develop activities. It may also include work done in other areas of the school, e.g., the library.

Ordinarily, alternative co-ops are expected to spend at least three hours each month in the classroom for each child.

Procedure for requesting alternative co-oping: Alternative co-oping arrangements should be requested through the class co-oping rep. The request must be approved by the classroom teacher and the Head Teacher. If a parent has a concern about the decision made, that concern may be brought to the Co-oping Request Committee.

Parent/Maternity Leave

Co-oping is not required of families for the first three months after the birth of a baby. At the end of three months, the family may choose regular co-oping or may extend parental leave up to one year after birth, while working in other ways to contribute to the classroom.

At any time during the Parental Leave period, a family may arrange regular classroom visiting with a baby within the following parameters, which are designed primarily to address the students' needs for their parents to be a visible part of the OC community, while maintaining respect for the learning environment. [Oh gosh, lots more about this. I'll type the rest from the white book later.]

Procedure for extension: Families that choose to extend parental leave are asked to meet with the Co-oping Request Committee to co-ordinate their classroom contribution.

Principal Waivers

If any parent is unable to meet participation requirements due to serious economic or personal circumstances, a waiver for co-oping may be granted by the principal.

Procedure for requesting a co-oping waiver: A request for a principal waiver from co-oping shall be made by applying to the Head Teacher. The parent will first be asked to discuss the request with the Co-oping Request Committee, which will make a recommendation to the Principal. The parent has a right to meet with the Principal before he or she makes a decision.