

Classroom Coordinators

*Lincoln Elementary School for the Arts
Anoka, Minnesota*

Classroom Coordinators is a grassroots project involving parents communicating with parents, sharing news of school events and activities, assisting new families and working with teachers and staff. At Lincoln Elementary every classroom has a Classroom Coordinator (CC) who is a parent or guardian of one of the students. The CC works with the teacher to promote classroom and school events by making phone calls to all families, talking at events, arranging guest speakers and volunteering in various other ways.

The goal is to improve communication between school and home, to increase family participation in reading, writing, math and technology and to promote positive behaviors and partnerships.

Acting on a parent's suggestion, Lincoln introduced CCs this year when it became a specialty school, a School for the Arts. Their role was to assist in the transition by communicating how the school would integrate the arts into the curriculum and by trying to increase parent involvement. Fourteen CCs worked at Lincoln this year.

The CCs are similar to "room parents" in that they may organize parties, volunteer for field trips and assist in the classroom. Lincoln Elementary CCs, however, go a step farther by promoting school events and activities, making and receiving calls about homework, class work and a variety of other school questions. In just a year, they have become a vital link between the classroom and the home. With their leadership, all parents were personally informed of events, activities and projects. The effects went well beyond the notices students brought home.

A teacher recounted that when asked if she needed volunteers for a field trip that were recruited by the district's Volunteer Services Coordinator, she replied: "No, our classroom coordinator is already working on it!"

Everyone is involved in the CC project. The volunteer coordinator recruits adults for the CC positions, conducts orientation and distributes packets of information and contacts. CCs attend orientation, provide feedback and input and are constantly in touch with classroom teachers. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) provides support and feedback for CCs, and promotes the position at events and staff meetings. Parents complete a contact permission form so that the CC can communicate with them.

The responses have been positive. "I contacted a parent who at first was not sure why I was calling," recalled one CC. "But by the end of the phone call, he was sharing his ideas with me."

One of the challenges was how to communicate with the large number of families who do not speak English as their first language. The solution was to discuss the role of CCs at the English as a Second Language (ESL) dinner, which had a translator present. The school made provisions for families to request specific communication services, such as a translator.

Because the CCs are volunteers, this practice cost less than \$50 to implement, mainly for the CC materials' packets and for refreshments at the meetings and trainings. The district's Volunteer Services Coordinator picked up the tab.

Lincoln plans to continue using CCs and hopes to expand the program by recruiting coordinators in the spring. By planning ahead, the CCs would be available for Open House in the fall, giving them additional visibility.

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