



Wildflower Open Classroom

K-8 Tuition-Free, Public Charter School

# Co-Oping Handbook

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# Parent Co-Oping Essentials

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 an hour each week, 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 the classroom Co-oping Representatives. Finally, the Co-oping Request Committee, which consists of the two Co-oping Committee Co-chairs and the 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 director. 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
- 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-oper 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 Classroom Co-opping Committee. Families need to work with the Co-op Committee and teachers to decide what type of co-opping opportunity works best for their family.

### **Standard Co-opping**

Ordinarily, families co-op for one or two hours each week, per family. This time adds up to about 175 hours per year. Generally, teachers set aside standards times throughout the week for small group learning, and parent co-ops teach at the same time each week. Parents or guardians may, of course, volunteer in all of their students' classes to accumulate these hours.

### **Flexible co-opping**

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

### **Alternative co-opping**

Alternative co-opping includes contributions outside of the classroom toward the 75 - 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 facilities or beautification. Alternative co-opping arrangements should be requested through the class co-opping rep.

### **Parent/Maternity Leave**

Co-opping 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-opping 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.

**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.

### **Director 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 director.

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

## **Wildflower Co-Oping Committee**

As a committee, we are responsible for running the Co-oping Workshops. (These will take place early in the school year)

As a classroom co-op rep, you are responsible for coordinating the classroom co-op schedule, help contact parents who miss their co-op times to let them know they missed their designated time and find out if they need some additional support. You will also help facilitate classroom co-op discussions during parent meetings, check in weekly with the classroom teacher to make sure co-oping is running smoothly for your class and, if your class is doing snack, set up a snack schedule.

**Why join?** Because it's fun! You get to work on co-oping—which is the heart and soul of WOC. You also get to work closely with the teacher and get to know the parents. Co-oping is what makes the OC so wonderful and unique and as a co-op rep you get to be super involved with this important aspect.

**How often does the committee meet, or is it mostly via email/phone, does it meet through the summer?** Most definitely be prepared to meet over the summer. Since the Co-op Workshops will happen the first week of school next year, the committee will need to meet at least once if not twice before school starts. We met once more to check in after workshops.

We do a lot of checking in via e-mail. It's a great way to save everyone's time instead of an in-person meeting. If you're on this committee, it's important to be good at checking and responding to e-mail in a timely manner.

**Where are meetings usually held?** At the school or committee chairs home.

**How long is the average meeting?** Usually around 1-2 hours, depending on how full the agenda is. Usually the longer meeting will happen about a month before the co-op workshop.

**Committee Chair and contact info?** \_\_\_\_\_

# Helping Kids Problem Solve

1. Helping a child problem solve, may first involve not getting involved. Allowing children some time to figure out problems themselves can be all that is needed. Second, it may just be a matter of asking a simple question of "What do you need?"
2. Adults can help children learn about the consequences of their behavior or choices by helping the children reflect on the relationship between their behavior and/or choices and the learning environment with which they have some agreements. Again, asking a question, such as "How is what you are choosing to do effecting your learning right now or the learning of your classmates?"
3. When problems arise between students, the process becomes more time intensive but crucial to learning. It might be helpful to find a private space. Also, having the involved students agree to listen to each other is key to finding a solution. Let them know that they will each have a chance to say how they feel and what they need and/or make a request. It is also helpful to have them agree that they cannot interrupt each other during this process. You can restate the problem or have each student summarize what the other is saying before commenting. At this point, asking for possible solutions is appropriate. And then agreeing to have the students revisit how well their solution is working for them.
4. Occasionally problems involve more than just a few students and often affect the entire classroom. If co-ops notice these kinds of problems, it is appropriate to bring it up with the teacher and request that the problem be discussed in circle. Using language such as "I am noticing that when ... kids do...(not naming names and not characterizing behavior), and this interferes with..."
5. Revisiting the classroom agreements can also be a guide to conflict resolution. It is often effective to remind ourselves, and the students, about the agreements we have made or the expectations we have set forth. If you do not know the agreements for your classroom, ask a student to show you or tell you.
6. More helpful hints in problem solving:
  - Observe without evaluating
  - Identify and express feelings
  - Make requests based on your needs
  - Listen for feelings and needs
  - Be present to the needs of others "Don't just do something, stand there!"
7. Finally, by utilizing language set forth in Nonviolent Communication (i.e. making requests vs. demands), we can facilitate conflict resolution among kids and adults.

# The Special Language of Encouragement

When comments about children's efforts are in order, we must be very careful not to place value judgments on what they have done. Too often, we make positive comments in a praising manner. Such comments express our values and opinions, rather than help children believe in themselves.

Be alert to eliminate value-loaded words from your vocabulary at these moments (for example, good, great, excellent, etc.). Substitute words of praise with phrases which express the special meaning of encouragement:

## **Phrases that demonstrate acceptance:**

- "I like the way you handled that!"
- "I like the way you tackle a problem!"
- "I'm glad you enjoy learning!"
- "I'm glad you're pleased with it!"
- "Since you're not satisfied, what do you think you can do so that you will be pleased with it?"
- "It looks as if you enjoyed that!"
- "How do you feel about it?"

## **Phrases that show confidence:**

- "Knowing you, I'm sure you'll do fine!"
- "You'll make it!"
- "I have confidence in your judgment!"
- "That's a rough one, but I'm sure you'll work it out!"
- "You'll figure it out!"

## **Phrases that focus on contribution, assets, and appreciation:**

- "Thanks; that helped a lot!"
- "It was thoughtful of you to \_\_\_\_\_!"
- "Thanks, I really appreciate \_\_\_\_\_, because it makes my job much easier!"
- "I need your help on \_\_\_\_\_."
- To a family group: "I really enjoyed today. Thanks!"
- "You have skill in \_\_\_\_\_. Would you do that for the family?"

## **Phrases that recognize effort and improvement:**

- "It looks as if you really worked hard on that."
- "It looks as if you spent a lot of time thinking that through!"
- "I see that you're moving along."
- "Look at the progress you've made!"

- “You’re improving in \_\_\_\_\_.” (Be specific)
- “You may not feel that you’ve reached your goal, but look how far you’ve come!”

**A Word of Caution:**

Encouraging words can become discouraging if motivated by a parent’s desire to establish “good” behavior permanently or by an “I told you so” attitude. Avoid giving with one hand and taking away with the other: that is, avoid qualifying or moralizing comments.

For example:

“It looks as if you really worked hard on that;

... so, why not do that all the time?”

... it’s about time,”

... see what you can do when you try!”

**In summary, encouragement is:**

- Valuing and accepting children as they are (not putting conditions on acceptance)
- Pointing out the positive aspects of behavior
- Showing faith in children so that they can come to believe in themselves
- Recognizing effort and improvement (rather than requiring achievement)
- Showing appreciation for contributions

**Encouragement Practice**

\*Your child helped you fill the dishwasher after dinner

\*Your child is struggling with science homework

\*Your child presents you his/her report card with a big grin

\*A student began the class work correctly but did not follow the directions and did most of the assignment incorrectly. He/she needs to redo it

\*You are waiting for the class to quiet down so you can begin your lesson.

\*A child says “This is boring!”

# Co-Oping Suggestions

*When You Don't Know What To Do...*

We all want to be the best co-oper we can be in order to support our children, our devoted teachers and each other. Sometimes we're not sure what to do during our cooping time. Here are some suggestions and requests from some of our teachers.

## **Circle Time**

- Help kids get to circle on time
- Guide kids to help each other be on time
- Please sit in circle with the class
- Sit next to or between children having difficulty following directions
- Model appropriate circle behavior

## **Small Group Activity Time**

- State your expectations for your group each time you meet (at the beginning of small group), for both academic and behavioral expectations
- Expect that you will see your expectations and verbally praise for doing so
- Give only one reminder, stating clearly what you need
- Excuse the child to see the teacher if directions need to be reiterated

## **Some Common Group Expectations**

- Use a #1 or #2 voice
- Be an attentive listener (no interrupting)
- Listen to and follow directions
- Stay with the group until you are excused

## **During Free Choice Time**

*If you see a disruptive child interfering with the learning of others...*

- Ask, "What are you doing?"
- Ask, "What could you be doing?"
- Ask, "Where could you look to find out?" (Examples: check your planner, look at the board)

***When you are not actively engaged with a child, please give your teacher a gift***

- Straighten up the room as if it were your own
- Clean, organize, wipe the counter, do the dishes, clean the sink...
- Pick up items off the floor (not during a messy art/craft session), dust, straighten any surface, plant, or corner that you see needs it.
- Keep the hallway looking nice – hang up, throw trash away
- Please do not side-talk, it is distracting and what are you role-modeling for the kids?

## **Think of These Incentives**

- Our teachers will have more energy to devote to loving and teaching our children.
- You will be an excellent role model for our children
- Our classroom will look and feel more organized and inviting to us, our kids and guests
- You will feel good knowing you are giving your best contribution

# To Build Relationships With Others

- Listen more and talk less
- Talk with people rather than at them
- Notice and acknowledge others' feelings
- Acknowledge many aspects of people's lives
- Attend to the little things as well as the big ones
- Give congruent messages**
- Understand the power of non-verbal messages
- Share something of yourself with others
- Invite others' ideas and act on them
- Demonstrate trust
- Understand people's basic needs
- Promote empathy for others' viewpoints
- Explicitly develop social skills
- Demonstrate patience
- Care enough to confront constructively
- Be consistent in the way you treat people

## LOOK FOR versus LISTEN FOR

### AUTOMATIC LISTEN FOR

People often think of themselves as open to hear what others have to say, discover who they are and what they have to offer. When examined, there is hardly any situation that is not approached with an '*automatic listening for*' – a set of unexamined assumptions that serve as a filter for every experience. Automatic listenings limit our experience, narrow our perspective and prevent us from seeing anything, which doesn't fit with the point of view we already possess. By being responsible for one's automatic listening for, unforeseen possibilities occur in relationships and situations.

### LISTENING FOR

Our listening is like a register for reality that exists in the form of questions constantly being asked and answered. For example, a common listening is "do they like me?" or "do they think I am smart?" Everything that happens is interpreted in relation to the listening or question one has. After one recognizes one's already always listening it is possible to consciously design what one is '*listening for*.' You will always get what you are listening for.

# How to Make the Most of Your Co-Opening

- Enthusiasm - Be present to the moment
- Be a learner - come willing to generate ideas and participate
- Look/Listen for - following instructions/quality work
- Extending the learning - look for ways to expand or make connections to the learning
- Arrive early enough to meet with teacher and plan
- Support expectations and classroom agreements
- Outline your expectations
- Other ideas....

## Why are we here???

**To learn and teach!!!**

### **Wildflower Open Classroom School Wide Agreements**

**CARE:** for yourself, others, and your environment

**LISTEN:** hearing, doing, and following directions

**ASK:** questions to clarify and/or understand

**SHOW UP:** on time ready to learn/teach

**STRIVE:** to do your best

### **Wildflower Open Classroom School Wide Con/Sequences: the 5 R's**

#### **1. REMEMBER**

- Say child's name "I need you to \_\_\_\_\_."

#### **2. RELOCATE within same space intervention**

- Sit next to the teacher, sit at different table
- Sit away from group and others in designated area in classroom

#### **3. REMOVAL from class/REFLECTION**

- Hallway or
- Another classroom
- Give out Think Sheet
- Call to director

#### **4. RETURN to Classroom**

- Role play if needed
- Circle reflection time if needed

# What About Kid Sharing or Co-Oping?

1. Kid co-oping is an integral part of the OC philosophy. It takes different formats depending on the kids, the teacher, the classroom dynamics, and the developmental level of the students.
2. This school wide practice puts the child in the teacher/co-oper role for a brief period nearly every week. It gives them the opportunity to practice their skills at being part of the cooperative learning environment for which they are and integral part.
3. At the same time this “kid co-oping time can be a huge, constant, and reliable source of exasperation for teachers and parents. It is where the OC philosophical “rubber meets the road.” It is where we can assess a student’s capability in managing the role of teaching others. Do they get silly and goofy, do they go on and on without assessing the feedback from their audience? We need to step back from our initial reaction to see what is really happening for the sharer and the audience. “Frustration comes when sharing time looks and feels like the children are active members not in an academic community but in a social or play community.”
4. The benefits of trusting children to handle this activity come when you can observe the developmental ascension of this activity through the upper grades. The rules and expectations of sharing create a framework of courtesy within the entire OC community as the participants eventually learn to respect and consider another’s point of view. Visitors to the upper grade classrooms during sharing circle often admire the maturity of social exchanges, the willingness of children to listen attentively and respond thoughtfully to one another. Children also gain confidence in sharing of themselves and becoming teachers in the classroom that eventually expands beyond the classroom and the OC community into the broader community.
5. Kid co-oping time becomes a much-anticipated part of the day and the activity is kid directed and kid managed. It can feel that there is a loss of control in the classroom, but the modeling from teachers and parents in overall classroom activity will provide some structure for sharing. Students will request that certain issues around sharing be explicitly created to ensure fairness. They may ask for those to be put in place in the younger grades or create them themselves in the upper grades.
6. The emphasis on kid co-oping is about the child’s ability to eventually emerge from the OC experience with a healthy understanding and courtesy of having meaningful exchange with others both as a learner and a teacher without a heavily imposed device.

# Differences Between Praise and Encouragement

PRAISE			ENCOURAGEMENT		
Underlying Characteristics	Message Sent to Child	Possible Results	Underlying Characteristics	Message sent to Child	Possible Results
1. Focus is on external control:	"You are worthwhile only when you do what I want." "You cannot and should not be trusted."	Child learns to measure worth by ability to conform; or, child rebels (views any form of cooperation as giving in).	Focus is on child's ability to manage life constructively	"I trust you to become responsible and independent."	Child learns courage to be imperfect and willingness to try. Child gains self-confidence and comes to feel responsible for own behavior...
2. Focus is on external evaluation:	"To be worthwhile you must please me." "Please or Perish."	Child learns to measure worth and how well he/she pleases others - child learns to fear disapproval	Focus is on internal evaluation	"How you feel about yourself and your own efforts is most important."	Child learns to evaluate own progress and to make decisions
3. Is rewarded only for well-done, completed tasks:	"Tom be worthwhile you must meet my standards."	Child develops unrealistic standards and learns to measure worth by how closely she/he reaches perfection - Child learns to dread failure	Recognizes effort and improvement	"You don't have to be perfect. Effort and improvement are important."	Child learns to accept efforts of self and others - child develops desire to stay with tasks - Persistence
4. Focuses on self-evaluation and personal gain:	"You're the best. You must remain superior to others to be worthwhile."	Child learns to be over-competitive to get ahead at the expense of others. Feels worthwhile only when "on top."	Focuses on assets, contributions, and appreciation	"Your contribution counts. We function better with you. We appreciate what you have done."	Child learns to use talents and efforts for good of all, not only for personal gain. Child learns to feel glad for successes of others as well as for own successes