

# Who's Who in Your Child's School



There are many people at your child's school who are there to help your child learn, grow socially and emotionally, and navigate the school environment. Here's a selected list of who's who at your school: the teaching and administrative staff as well as organizations at the district level. You might want to keep this list handy all year long.

## Classroom Teachers

### Elementary Teacher

In elementary school, the primary classroom teacher teaches core subjects such as mathematics, language arts, science, and social studies through books, games, music, projects, films, computers, and more. (A subject specialist typically leads other topics, such as art or physical education.)

Elementary school teachers also work with special education students, following an Individualized Education Program (IEP). When you speak with your child's teacher, you will learn about your child's academic achievements and any behavioral issues, and you should seek out the teacher whenever you have concerns or questions.

### Subject Specialist

These teachers offer special classes across the school, such as music, art, or foreign language.

### Resource Teacher

Resource teachers work with students for part of the day to support special learning needs. Most often these teachers do not have their own classroom. The most common of these are special-education resource teachers. You may have other resource teachers such as a reading resource, English language learner (ELL), or gifted-education teachers.

- **Special Education Teacher:** Special education teachers help children with special needs and their families over an entire academic career, starting with the IEP, which sets out a personalized learning program. They work closely with general education teachers to provide a supported general educational experience. When ready, the special education teacher will help students with disabilities prepare for middle school. You may use the special education teacher as a resource, too, in learning what to do at home to support what your child is learning at school. Also, you may meet with the special education teacher to follow your child's behavioral progress.
- **ELL (English language learner), ESL (English as a second language), or ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) Teacher:** English as a Second Language Teachers specialize in helping English Language Learners

(ELLs) develop the academic English-language skills needed to learn new grade-level content. A teacher's primary certification may be in ESL, or teachers may be ESL-certified in addition to their primary teaching area; for example, a teacher may be an elementary education teacher with ESL certification or "endorsement". ESL teachers often collaborate with classroom teachers, special education teachers, reading specialists, and parent liaisons to support students. They also oversee the process for identifying ELLs, placing them in appropriate classes at the right language level, and administering English language proficiency tests, as well as ensuring that students have required accommodations on assessments and services. If your child has an ESL teacher, you can meet with him or her to learn about your child's progress with English skills and comprehension. Some ESL teachers may be bilingual, but it is not necessarily a requirement in order to teach English as a Second Language. ESL teachers are also referred to as English Language Learner (ELL), English Language Development (ELD), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), or English as a New Language (ENL) teachers as well.

- **Bilingual/Dual Language Teachers:** Special education teachers help children with special needs and their families over an entire academic career, starting with the IEP, which sets out a personalized learning program. They work closely with general education teachers to provide a supported general education experience. When ready, the special education teacher will help students with disabilities prepare for middle school. You may use the special education teacher as a resource, too, in learning what to do at home to support what your child is learning at school. Also, you may meet with the special education teacher to follow your child's behavioral progress.

## Support Within Your School

### Assistant Principal

Sometimes called vice principals, they help the school principal by becoming responsible for a particular administrative area of the school. For example, an assistant principal may coordinate support services, like school buses, cafeteria meals, and vending machine snacks. Your child's school may have one or several assistant principals, depending on how many students attend. Assistant principals may also handle student discipline and attendance problems, recreational programs, and health matters. For example, if your child must miss school for an extended time, perhaps because of an illness, you may work with an assistant principal to decide how your child will keep up with schoolwork and how the absence will impact your child's academic record.

### Counselor

Counselors help students with social, behavioral, and personal challenges. Elementary school counselors help teachers and parents evaluate a child's talents, difficulties, or special needs by observing children's playing and learning activities. They also participate in developing an IEP. If you see your child acting out towards

you or other children, you may want to speak with a school counselor to learn how your child interacts at school.

### **Librarian**

The librarian administers the library, including overseeing its evolution to a media center. The typical school librarian has a wide range of responsibilities, including the following: manages the library collection (books, audio books, video, and other media), helps students find books that are a good match for their interests and reading level, advises teachers on high-quality nonfiction titles aligned with curriculum and standards, helps students research online and in texts, teaches Internet safety and critical thinking about sources, and manages the library computers. School librarians often work directly with teachers on integration of technology in the classroom. If your child has special interests or literacy needs, you may want to speak with a librarian; he or she can help guide your child to appropriate media resources.

### **Library Aide, Library Technician, Library Technical Assistant, or Media Aide**

People with any or all of these titles assist the school's librarian and patrons; your school's librarian will know the exact staffing. The aides may have specific responsibilities, such as managing the library's computers or repairing books, or general, like helping students who visit.

If your child would benefit from specific training on media resources, a library aide may be the one to help.

### **Literacy Coach**

Literacy coaches improve literacy teaching across all classes, by helping teachers of all topics include literacy skill-building work. The coaches also assess how well the school teaches literacy skills, and may develop school-wide literacy programs. If your child seems out of step with the literacy pace in his or her class, speak with a literacy coach. The coach can then evaluate the class, as well as your child, and recommend changes, such as offering help to the teacher, enrichment for your child, or both.

### **Occupational Therapist**

Occupational therapists (OT) help children improve their ability to perform tasks in living and working environments. In schools, for example, the occupational therapist assesses a child's capabilities, recommends therapy, adapts classroom equipment, and helps the child participate in school activities. A therapist may work with children individually or work with small groups in the classroom. An OT may also consult with a teacher or serve on an administrative committee. If your child is recommended for OT services, you should contact the therapist to review why the recommendation is being made and what responses are planned.

### **Paraprofessional**

See Librarian aide and Teacher aide.

**Physical Therapist**

Physical therapists (PT) help people restore, maintain, and promote their overall fitness and health. At a school, they may work with students on improving physical condition or recovering from an injury. They may also work with students with disabilities on establishing and maintaining physical fitness. In a school setting, a physical therapist would likely work with other professionals, such as the school nurse, occupational therapist, speech-language pathologist, and educators, as well as the parents. For example, if your child needs some classroom accommodations while recovering from an injury, the physical therapist can help you make sure appropriate ones are provided.

**Principal**

Each school has one principal, who sets the academic and administrative expectations for the school. The principal is responsible for ensuring the school meets state, local, and federal goals on test results. Principals promote professional development of staff, meet with teachers, work with staff, talk with parents, report to the school board, and, if needed, discipline students. Principals are always the school's decision maker and chief public representative. You may speak with the principal about your child, such as his or her class placement, as well as about school issues that concern you, such as after-school programs or the reading curriculum.

**Reading Specialist**

A reading specialist provides reading services across the curriculum. For example, the specialist may work individually with a student who needs extra reading instruction, as well as work with the literacy coach to manage the reading support services provided at the school. The specialist may also train teachers on reading strategies for the classroom. You may contact a reading specialist with questions about your child's reading habits.

**School Nurse**

School nurses provide preventive and acute care to the school population. The duties include administering prescription medicine, advising students about health care, and being the first medical responder to a school health situation, such as an injury. The nurse may also notice patterns of physical symptoms of stress in students. The school will contact you immediately if there is an injury; if you think your child may be responding physically to stress, you may want to contact the nurse.

**School Psychologist**

School psychologists help to provide a safe, healthy, and supportive learning environment for all children. They collaborate with teachers, parents, and school personnel to address students' learning and behavioral problems and growth. For example, they may oversee a school's peer counseling program. If your child is identified with special learning needs, either disabilities or giftedness, you may meet with the school psychologist to help plan his or her education.

**Secretary**

The school secretary manages the administrative work of the school, ranging from registering new students to scheduling appointments with the principal, from answering phone calls to monitoring attendance. Frequently, a school has a secretarial team of a few people to handle all the work. At any time, they must be prepared to answer questions from parents, such as those about immunizations or special program schedules, as well as questions from teachers, on topics like supplies and copiers. Whether you call or visit the school, a secretary will help you reach the person you need.

**Speech-Language Pathologist or Speech Therapist**

They help students with needs related to speech, language, and voice communication, such as stuttering or understanding language. The therapists can assess and diagnose problems, as well as treat existing conditions or help prevent such disorders. If your child regularly has trouble saying or responding to certain words, you may want to seek help from the school's speech-language pathologist.

**Teacher Aide, Teacher Assistant, Instructional Aide**

Aides help with teacher duties, extending the individual attention that can be given to students. Most aides perform both clerical and instructional duties, such as monitoring the cafeteria as well as providing supplemental help to specific students. Many teacher aides also work with children with special needs, helping them participate successfully in a general education classroom. You may want to speak with any aide who regularly works with your child, whether as a tutor or as a playground monitor, to stay informed of your child's progress.

**Support Around Your School****PTA/PTO**

The parent-teacher association (or organization) brings parents together on behalf of the school through activities like parent newsletters and special events. For example, PTAs may organize fundraisers to improve school playgrounds. Find out if your child's school has a PTA and get involved — it helps you meet other parents, as well as get to know the faculty and staff beyond back-to-school night.

**School Board**

The board is responsible for the legislative functioning of the public school district. Its members are elected, appointed, or both. The school board also oversees the budget for the district and makes district-level policy decisions. School board meetings are open to the public — check the website for a meeting schedule — and you can lobby the school board on their decisions, such as which schools will have magnet programs for intense study of a foreign language.

**School District**

The district is the geographic region of schools that work together, typically, a city, town, or county. Two of its primary jobs are assigning students and staff to schools

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and managing the school properties. In general, children are assigned to schools based on where they live, but you may request your child go to another school within the district if another school offers a program not available at the school your child would ordinarily attend. For example, if another school offers the only Spanish immersion program in the area, you may ask the district to enroll your child there. Check your district's website for full details of its geographic boundaries and student opportunities offered.

### **Teacher's Union**

The collective presence of the teachers, the union bargains with the public school board about issues that affect a teacher's employment, such as salaries and tenure, and establishes them in a contract. Periodically, the contracts are renewed or reassessed; as both a taxpayer and a parent, you may want to know the current or proposed contract details.

