

Mounds Park
Academy

Grade Rep Handbook

(September, 2005)

This handbook is meant to serve as a general guide for Grade Reps at Mounds Park Academy. It outlines the basic roles and responsibilities for this important volunteer position.

What is a Grade Rep?

At MPA, a Grade Rep is a parent or guardian who – along with others in that grade – agrees to serve in a voluntary role on behalf of a whole grade for the entire school year.

There are several basic responsibilities that all Grade Reps share:

- ❖ Attend the MPA Parents' Association main and divisional meetings (as many as possible)
- ❖ Volunteer for at least one Parents' Association activity per year
- ❖ Plan (with the other Grade Reps) at least two grade socials per year. Typically one is a family event and one is a parent only

event.

- ❖ Get acquainted with the families in the grade and maintain a “finger on the pulse” of the families in that grade.
- ❖ Connect with the teachers in that grade at the beginning of the school year to see if there are any needs that the Grade Reps can help with or find other parents to fill.

In some grades, depending on the teacher, Grade Reps may be asked to coordinate in-class parties or other volunteer activities. This is more the exception than the norm, however, and it is always the teachers' call as to how – or even if – they use Grade Reps throughout the year.

In addition, as students advance into Upper School, the Grade Reps at MPA have typically coordinated such volunteer projects as: Homecoming Activities, Graduation Decoration and helping with the Senior All-Night Party.

The Value of a Grade Rep

Grade Reps can be of great value to MPA behind-the-scenes. By getting to know other parents and by attending the Parents' Association meetings, they act as an informal pipeline for accurate information to be exchanged.

Grade Reps are often the "go to" people in the grade when someone is looking for a volunteer recruit. They are not expected to take on a lot of extra responsibilities themselves. Indeed, a good Grade Rep will keep from getting overburdened and not take on every job. They will also see the overall benefit of sharing involvement with others in terms of volunteer activities. And because of their knowledge of the families, they often have a sense of who among the parents in their grade might be

available or have a certain talent for a given volunteer activity.

Perhaps the most important role of the Grade Rep is to foster a sense of community in the grade. This benefits the families, the students and the whole school in many ways. As younger children ask for "play dates" or as older students go for sleepovers or parties to a classmate's home, the families who have made the investment in getting to know each other will have a better idea of the situation. Parents can also share things more freely with each other if the channels of communication are open before a concern arises. Even teachers can spot a grade that has more cohesiveness. Often, it's the Grade Reps that have instilled a strong group focus through a variety of ways.

How Does a Grade Rep Support Community Effectively?

The actual ways of supporting a strong sense of community differ from group to group and from grade level to grade level. The concept,

however, is the same – to create opportunities for all families to get to know each other better.

The requisite grade socials (which may include children or just the parents/guardians in the grade) are helpful, and there are many types of activities that will draw high participation.

Monthly coffees, playground meetings for younger students and parent gatherings timed around sporting events or student dances at the school are other ideas that have worked in the past. The sky's the limit, though, in terms of finding interesting and effective ways to help families get connected!

How Much of a Time Commitment Does it Take to be a Grade Rep?

Being a Grade Rep is not considered by most people to be an onerous job. The time commitments include attending both the main and divisional Parents' Association meetings

each month (or as many as possible), coordinating with the other Grade Reps in the grade to plan the grade socials (two per year) and taking the time whenever possible to get to know the families in the grade (at the socials, at school events or at separate gatherings, such as coffee shop meetings organized by the Grade Reps).

A person who works outside of the home can be a Grade Rep too. They can do so by connecting with other grade reps and by following Parents' Association issues by reading the meeting minutes. When possible try to be on hand to help with some of the other MPAPA activities. In fact, such a Grade Rep might be especially helpful in effectively drawing other "working parents" into the fold.

Are There Out-of-Pocket Expenses for a Grade Rep?

No one expects the Grade Reps to shoulder a financial burden for doing the important work that they do. And while there shouldn't be

many expenses involved with their role, one exception is in the area of grade socials. The Grade Reps are allotted an amount of \$100 (for Pre K-3) and \$150 (for 4-12) to help offset the expenses of grade socials per school year. Receipts must be submitted for reimbursement to the MPA Parents' Association Treasurer, under the terms set out by the Parents' Association. Additional expenses are usually shared by all the attending families, so that the Grade Reps aren't left covering unforeseen expenses.

How Does Someone Become a Grade Rep?

This is a voluntary position, and any parent or guardian of an MPA student who agrees to take on the basic responsibilities --outlined above -- and signs up may be a Grade Rep.

Are There Limitations to the Number of Grade Reps Per Grade or the Number of Years Someone May Serve as a Grade Rep?

The simple answer is "no," to both questions. To function best, however, it is helpful to have at least one grade rep per classroom (e.g., at least two Grade Reps for K-3, three Grade Reps for 4-8 & four Grade Reps for 9-12). More than the minimum is certainly fine.

As for limiting the number of years someone serves as a Grade Rep, the only suggestion is that you consider taking on additional roles that might support the school in a broader context (such as chairing a major event or taking on a leadership role in the Parents' Association). This does not preclude someone from continuing to serve as a Grade Rep while taking on a larger role at the same time.

Conclusion

We hope that this handbook is helpful and that, if you choose to serve as a Grade Rep at MPA, you'll find it a fulfilling and enjoyable job!

Thank you,

The MPA Parents' Association