

Coming to America – an Ex-Pat's view of Schools in the USA...

My husband and I and our 3 girls aged 5, 6 and 9, moved from London to Seattle at the end of July, 2014. The whole process of moving and trying to set up family life in another country where we knew no one was incredibly overwhelming. It was clear to me from day 1 that where we chose to set up home would dictate the success of this relocation, ultimately bringing happiness to my family.

After 5 long days of searching Seattle from East to West, I was disheartened having not found a place I thought we could call home. Eventually I fell upon Mercer Island, as I drove down Island Crest Way I melted into my seat as it seemed perfect in so many ways; not only for the excellent schools, but for the tranquility and beauty of the island, as well as the strong sense of community.

Since arriving at the end of July, I have tried to get involved in Island Park as much as possible, not only as a way to meet people but as a means to try and understand the education system here in America (which is surprisingly different from the UK). Recently I was awarded the role of Fundraiser for the PTA. Having come from the UK where fundraising, although necessary, is more of an added bonus, **I have been very surprised at how much schools in the USA rely on fundraising to give kids the 'extras' that really make a difference in their education and enrichment, and also enable schools to hit the top of the rankings.** *In the short time I have been in this role it has also become increasingly apparent to me how much we rely on our parents in order to achieve these great results.*

We are incredibly lucky to have such wonderful schools and to live in such a beautiful place, but I am a strong believer that it is the parents and community that make the difference, creating a fantastic place to live and helping to make the schools first-rate. A community that shares a drive and strong motivation to give our kids the best will always be a winning formula. With the help of our parents we not only benefit our children academically by helping provide the best teachers, access to the latest technology but we also provide increased opportunities for the children to experience new things and the use of wonderful facilities that allow kids to be creative and free in play.

As the VP of Ways & Means (i.e. fundraising), I see it as my responsibility to work closely with other members of the PTA to give our children the best we can. This can only be done with your help. Mercer Island schools rely heavily on the fundraising events and campaigns put on throughout the year to fund the many programs (and teacher salaries) that make our schools so great. And we need volunteers to make these events a success. Each of us has a fantastic and diverse set of skills that can really help, making us parents the perfect team.

For those of you who are in a position to support the school financially, at the beginning of each year we ask for a donation to fund the many programs the State and district do not fund. Unfortunately, the donations given at the start of the school year are not enough to cover the cost of the many programs and staff positions that make Island Park the wonderful school it is, therefore we must hold other fundraising opportunities like Movie Night, Bingo Night and the Spring Auction.

The money raised throughout the year helps support academic learning, it pays for field trips, provides new experiences like Toymaker Workshop, buys the latest technology, allows for a robust arts program and provides for additional staffing positions that enrich the students' daily lives. The Art Docent program is a great example of the special projects you have helped to fund, and the kids have absolutely loved it.

Please help us continue to give your children the best we can. The PTA cannot thrive and continue to assist in making Island Park great without parent volunteers. We need parents willing to take on roles big and small. If you would like to take on a bigger role and meet some really fun and

fantastic people, we are looking for new Board Members next year. If you would prefer to take on something smaller, every PTA committee needs help. We would really value your work, skills and new ideas.

If you are interested in helping us in any way please contact me or our PTA President, Ashleigh Dickinson.

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