



# 2023 - 2024 Early Years' Handbook



**GEMS**  
American Academy  
QATAR

With more than 80 nationalities represented at GAAQ, our students are members of an incredibly diverse international school community. We believe that advocating, teaching, and respecting a student body representing so many world cultures fosters peace, justice, and global understanding. Visitors and new families to our school immediately sense and comment on our Culture of Kindness, a signature of our school community that reflects our core values and philosophy.

In academics, we recognize that the Early Years' program is crucial to laying the foundation for future success. Our teachers and administrators regularly collaborate to plan and present an enriched American curriculum that is intellectually challenging and socially rewarding for your child. We seek to create a climate that fosters self-esteem by celebrating the growth and development of each student, and we encourage an enthusiasm for lifelong education by making learning an enjoyable experience.

We warmly invite you and your child to acquaint yourselves with this handbook to learn about our school's policies, procedures, expectations, and opportunities.

Mark Lentz  
Head of School

Jordan Scheer  
Elementary School Principal

Amber Rigdon  
Assistant Principal



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## 1. Attendance and School Timing

“Even when you’re very small, good attendance makes a BIG difference”



Routine plays a large part in your child's learning. It's important for students' holistic development that they attend school every day. School timings are 7:30am - 12:30pm every day. Making sure your child is on time is crucial to their academic success.

If your child will be absent due to illness, please inform your child's teacher as soon as possible either through ClassDojo or email. A doctor's note is required for extended periods of absence due to illness.

Trying to schedule travel and appointments outside of school hours would be beneficial for your child's learning as missing lots of school can impact their future success. We understand that sometimes these can't be avoided but we ask that you inform the teacher as soon as possible.

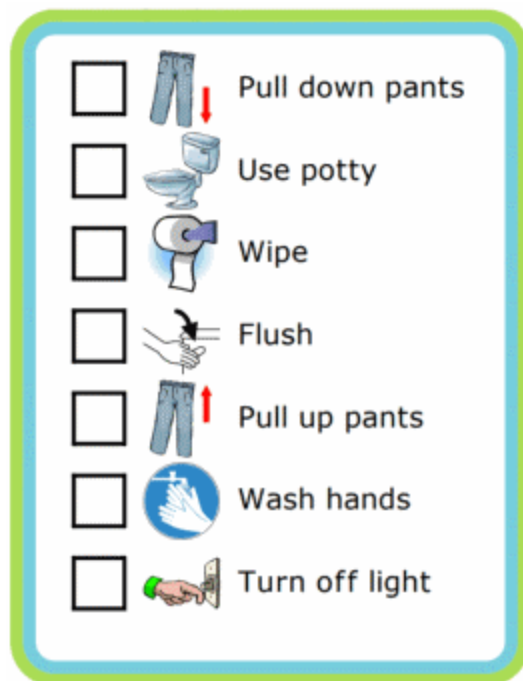
## 2. Bathroom/Toilet Policy

The expectation at GAAQ is for students to be completely potty trained prior to entering the classroom. This means that all students are in cloth underwear and able to use the toilet and clean themselves properly

without assistance - no diapers or pull ups. Also, they should be able to use words to indicate that they need to use the bathroom. All Early Years' classrooms are equipped with a bathroom for students to use throughout the day.

a. Urine accidents

Accidents will happen, so please provide a spare set of uniform, underwear, and socks to keep in their cubbies. Soiled garments will be placed in a



Ziploc bag to be sent home. A child having frequent accidents (that is, 2 or more in one week) may be asked to take a 2-week leave from school, at the teacher's discretion. If upon return, the child continues to indicate that he or she is not fully potty-trained, the child may be asked to take a month-long leave from school to work towards bathroom readiness.

b. Fecal accidents

Children are expected to be fully potty trained (refer to image above). If there is a poop accident, the teacher will

communicate with the nurse and the nurse will call to inform the parent. If a second incident occurs, the same procedure will be followed as the first time and the Lower School Principal's office will be notified. Parents will then be told, by administration, the child will take a 2-week leave from school to practice bathroom readiness.



### 3. Birthday Policy

(All food being shared must be individually wrapped please)



Birthdays are an important milestone for our young students to celebrate, we would love to be part of your celebration. Please inform your child's teacher one week in advance, if you plan to celebrate. Note that we do not consider these celebrations to be "parties". We do not permit parents to attend and we do not decorate or allow any visitors.

Please do not send uncut cakes and candles to school as we are not able to light candles or use knives in the classroom. If you send goody bags or toys, please ensure there is enough for every student in the class.

Examples of shareable treats to hand out:

- Cupcakes
- Rice Krispy Treats
- Cookies
- Fresh Cut Fruit
- Ice Cream Cups with spoons
- Doughnut Holes
- Brownies
- Mini cinnamon rolls
- Juice boxes
- Pizza
- Chicken Nuggets
- Pastries
- Vegetables and dip
- Breadsticks
- Hotdog
- Popcorn

#### 4. Communication

The majority of teacher-parent communication is through ClassDojo. Pictures from class are added as well as information about upcoming events and student learning. It's important that all



parents sign-up for an account with ClassDojo as soon as an account code is received so you can keep up-to-date with what's happening in our classrooms! Also, ClassDojo has a messaging interface so you can inform the teacher privately of any information you need to disclose. Email is another form of communication from the school, all parents should have received a welcome email from the teacher which you can use to communicate with them.

Finally, a weekly newsletter is sent home from every classroom teacher to give a short recap of what was covered that week as well as a preview of what's coming up. This is typically also sent via Class Dojo

## **5. The Creative Curriculum Overview**

The philosophy of The Creative Curriculum® is that young children learn best by doing. The Creative Curriculum® is built on theories of development in young children - that all children learn through active exploration of their environment and therefore the environment plays a critical role in learning. The goal of the Creative Curriculum is to help children become independent, self-confident, inquisitive and enthusiastic learners by actively exploring their environment.

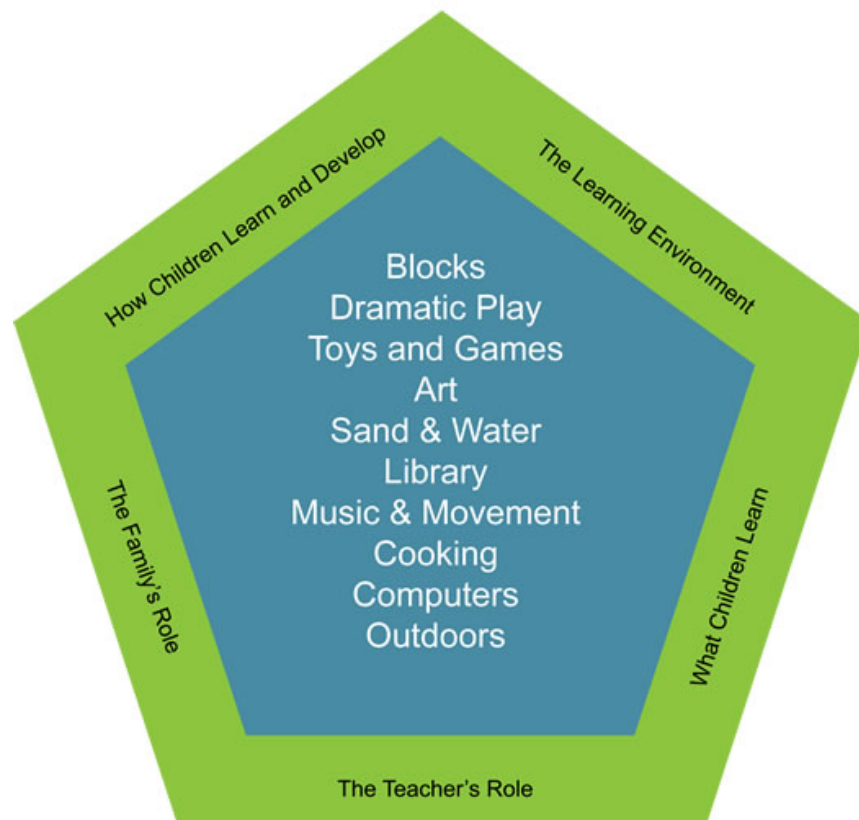
The curriculum identifies goals in all areas of development: Social/Emotional, Cognitive, Physical and Language. The planned activities for the children, the organization of the environment, the selection of toys and materials, planning the daily schedule and interacting with the children are all designed to accomplish the goals and objectives of the curriculum and give your child a successful year in school.

The Creative Curriculum® shows teachers how to integrate learning in literacy, math, science, social studies, the arts, and technology throughout

the day. It also gives the teacher a wide range of teaching strategies -- from child-initiated learning to teacher-directed approaches -- to best respond to children's learning styles, strengths, and interests.

a. The Creative Curriculum Framework

## The Creative Curriculum Framework



## Research and Theory

GEMS American Academy Qatar builds the curriculum for their children around the environment using fourteen different interest areas or learning centers:

- Dramatic Play
- Blocks
- Toys and games



- Art
- Sand, Water & Rice
- Library
- Music
- Writing Center
- Computers
- Outdoors
- Science Discovery
- Listening Center
- Large Motor Area
- Trains/Doll House

The richer the environment, the more concrete opportunities there are for children to learn by interacting with materials and people. The teacher's role is to create an environment that invites children to observe, to be active, to make choices and to experiment.

#### **b. What are the Creative Curriculum goals and objectives?**

These goals and objectives provide a direction for planning the program and a way to determine what children know and how they are developing. This information enables teachers to respond to each child individually, to build on strengths and target skills that need strengthening. Because our teachers have a holistic approach and focus on the 'whole child' to promote learning, the goals interrelate and focus on all areas of development:

- Social/Emotional Development: children's feelings about themselves, the development of responsibility and their ability to relate positively to others.
- Physical Development: children's gross and fine motor development.

- Cognitive Development: children's thinking skills, including the development of symbolic and problem-solving skills.
- Language Development: children's ability to communicate through words, both spoken and written.

<b>SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL</b> 1. Regulates own emotions and behaviors a. Manages feelings b. Follows limits and expectations c. Takes care of own needs appropriately 2. Establishes and sustains positive relationships a. Forms relationships with adults b. Responds to emotional cues c. Interacts with peers d. Makes friends 3. Participates cooperatively and constructively in group situations a. Balances needs and rights of self and others b. Solves social problems <b>PHYSICAL</b> 4. Demonstrates traveling skills 5. Demonstrates balancing skills 6. Demonstrates gross-motor manipulative skills 7. Demonstrates fine-motor strength and coordination a. Uses fingers and hands b. Uses writing and drawing tools	<b>LANGUAGE</b> 8. Listens to and understands increasingly complex language a. Comprehends language b. Follows directions 9. Uses language to express thoughts and needs a. Uses an expanding expressive vocabulary b. Speaks clearly c. Uses conventional grammar d. Tells about another time or place 10. Uses appropriate conversational and other communication skills a. Engages in conversations b. Uses social rules of language <b>COGNITIVE</b> 11. Demonstrates positive approaches to learning a. Attends and engages b. Persists c. Solves problems d. Shows curiosity and motivation e. Shows flexibility and inventiveness in thinking 12. Remembers and connects experiences a. Recognizes and recalls b. Makes connections 13. Uses classification skills 14. Uses symbols and images to represent something not present a. Thinks symbolically b. Engages in sociodramatic play	<b>LITERACY</b> 15. Demonstrates phonological awareness, phonics skills, and word recognition a. Notices and discriminates rhyme b. Notices and discriminates alliteration c. Notices and discriminates discrete units of sound d. Applies phonics rules and knowledge of word structure to decode text 16. Demonstrates knowledge of the alphabet a. Identifies and names letters b. Identifies letter-sound correspondences 17. Demonstrates knowledge of print and its uses a. Uses and appreciates books and other texts b. Uses print concepts 18. Comprehends and responds to books and other texts a. Interacts during reading experiences, book conversations, and text reflections b. Uses emergent reading skills c. Retells stories and recounts details from informational texts d. Uses context clues to read and comprehend texts e. Reads fluently 19. Demonstrates writing skills a. Writes name b. Writes to convey meaning c. Writes using conventions	<b>MATHEMATICS</b> 20. Uses number concepts and operations a. Counts b. Quantifies c. Connects numerals with their quantities d. Understands and uses place value and base ten e. Applies properties of mathematical operations and relationships f. Applies number combinations and mental number strategies in mathematical operations 21. Explores and describes spatial relationships and shapes a. Understands spatial relationships b. Understands shapes 22. Compares and measures a. Measures objects b. Measures time and money c. Represents and analyzes data 23. Demonstrates knowledge of patterns <b>SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY</b> 24. Uses scientific inquiry skills 25. Demonstrates knowledge of the characteristics of living things 26. Demonstrates knowledge of the physical properties of objects and materials 27. Demonstrates knowledge of Earth's environment 28. Uses tools and other technology to perform tasks <b>SOCIAL STUDIES</b> 29. Demonstrates knowledge about self 30. Shows basic understanding of people and how they live 31. Explores change related to familiar people or places 32. Demonstrates simple geographic knowledge <b>THE ARTS</b> 33. Explores the visual arts 34. Explores musical concepts and expression 35. Explores dance and movement concepts 36. Explores drama through actions and language <b>ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION</b> 37. Demonstrates progress in listening to and understanding English 38. Demonstrates progress in speaking English
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## 6. Family Involvement

Parental involvement is an essential part of what makes GAAQ a community. It is important that you feel comfortable about exchanging information and discussing topics that will benefit your child with the Class Teacher or Learning Assistant.

Keep an eye on ClassDojo for information about what your child has been doing and enjoying, what they need to be doing more of and what you can do at home together. Keep in touch with your child's Teacher or Learning Assistant as often as possible.

## 8. Food Policy

(All food must come from home)

### Healthy Food policy

At GAAQ, we believe that good health in the early years helps to safeguard children's health and well-being throughout life. It is important that children develop healthy eating habits when they first learn about food and activity. We treat mealtimes as an opportunity to promote a child's social development while enjoying food and highlighting the importance of making healthy choices.

In an effort to provide students with the healthiest environment possible, we are encouraging you to provide only healthy snacks for school.

Children need healthy snacks for energy, vitamins, minerals and other nutrients to help them grow, learn and be active. Healthy students are more able to pay attention in class and perform their best in school work.

If you give your child healthy snacks now, he or she will learn to make healthy food choices in the future. Here are some examples for healthy breakfast and snacks:

- Healthy cereal with milk ( Please send in a bowl and spoon)
- Fresh cut-up fruit with yogurt.
- Vegetables
- Fruit salad
- Egg (A boiled egg or omelet)
- A sandwich containing fresh natural ingredients, such as salad, cooked meats, jam or cheese.
- Apples, grapes, oranges or any kind of fruit.
- Vanilla muffin
- A cereal bar

Here are some examples for lunch:

- Pasta
- Rice and Chicken

- A sandwich containing fresh natural ingredients, such as salad, cooked meats, jam or cheese.
- Salad
- Fruit
- Wraps

GAAQ has a strict healthy eating policy, so please do not send chocolate, cookies/biscuits, donuts, chips, or sodas in lunches or snacks. Students will not be allowed to eat or drink them during school hours and they will be sent home.



## 9. Nap and Rest Time

A nap/rest period is an essential part of a child's day because it allows them to recharge after a busy and exciting day.

First dismissal in Pre-K and KG 1 is at 12:30 pm. Students who attend school until 2:15 pm because of a sibling or the bus schedule are expected to sleep on provided cots which will be labeled with the child's name and sterilized. Parents should



send in bedding (a small bedsheet and blanket), a pillow, and a soft toy. All items must be labeled with the student's name and class.

The policy for nappers is that they are sleeping or laying calmly and quietly in the naproom. If any child is continuously disturbing others who are trying to sleep, the parents will be asked to pick up the student at first dismissal (12:30 pm) for the remainder of the year.

## 10. Nurse and Medicine Policy



In order to reduce the spread of illnesses in school, the following regulations apply:

1. Please DO NOT send your child to school if they have:
  - a. A fever (inform nurses)
  - b. Vomiting (*not to return to school for 24 hours after the last Vomiting episode*)
  - c. Diarrhea (*not to return to school for 24 hours after the last diarrheal episode*)
  - d. Heavy nasal discharge
  - e. Productive cough
  - f. Red, watery and painful eyes
2. If your child has an infected sore or wound, it must be covered by a well-sealed dressing or plaster.
3. If your child has a skin rash, please send them to the clinic for clearance before sending them to class.

4. If your child has been absent from school for more than 2 days due to a contagious illness, please send them to the clinic along with a medical certificate for clearance before sending them to class.
5. If your child is assessed by the school nurse and thought to be a possible source of infection to other students and staff, you will be contacted to take them out of school immediately.
6. Please inform the school if your child has had or is being treated for a medical condition. If they need to take any medications while at school, these must be sent to the clinic together with the Doctor's prescription as written parental consent needs to be obtained.



## 11. School Supplies

- 1 backpack. Backpacks should be a manageable size for students to carry on their backs and fit into the cubbies independently. Wheelie bags are not recommended as they do not fit in our cubbies and are liable to be tripped over.
- 2 family-size ziploc boxes to send soiled clothes home in.
- 2 family-size wet wipes for classroom use
- 1 labeled reusable water bottle to be taken home daily for cleaning
- 1 set of uniform and underclothes kept at school in case of bathroom accident



- 1 set of bedding if your child is napping - a small sheet, blanket, and pillow
- 1 Family Picture

## 12. Toys From Home

We ask that children leave toys at home. In a group environment, the introduction of children's own toys can cause complications with the process of learning to share. This is a major developmental goal for us and they are able to master it more successfully using the items at school. If a toy is brought in, it will be returned to the child's bag with a note reminder about our "Toys from Home Policy."



## 13. Uniform

Please dress your child in full school uniform every day. We will be busy moving around and doing many art projects throughout the year, so they should be comfortable.

For their own safety, children are not allowed to wear crocs, heelys, flip-flops or sandals to school. Shoes should be black, closed-toe, and Velcro or slip-on (no laces).

Please refer to the "School Uniform" page in the Elementary Handbook (which can be downloaded from the school website) for complete information.

Our classroom temperature changes often throughout the day. Even if your child is usually warm, we highly recommend sending the school uniform sweater or jacket to school each day. Children frequently misplace clothing items throughout the school year, please make sure EVERY article of clothing is clearly labeled with his/her name and class. This includes jackets, sweaters, shirts and underclothes.