

GEMS

American Academy Qatar

PARENT AND STUDENT HANDBOOK

2018 – 2019



EDUCATION

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GEMS AMERICAN ACADEMY QATAR

Mission

We provide inspiring learning opportunities focused on creating, connecting, and collaborating.

Purpose

We exist to improve the lives of others and leave the world better than we found it.

Philosophy

- An atmosphere of trust enables children to question, take risks, work together, assume responsibility for independent work, and pursue individual interests.
- Our commitment to advocating, teaching and respecting a culturally diverse student body fosters peace, justice, and global understanding.
- We believe that the diversity of our student body provides the foundation for creating involved global citizens in our rapidly changing world. We strive to appreciate and celebrate our differences.
- Our approach is guided by respect for **children's** individual differences, recognition of their inherent capacity for growth, and commitment to planning activities in an environment that shapes learning and provides opportunities for student success.
- We recognize that each student learns differently. We provide a wide range of learning opportunities for our students and encourage them to be active participants in their own education.
- We explore all cultures, not only to investigate our differences but also to discover the things we have in common.
- Our students are encouraged to cultivate their individual interests and strengths and develop their own distinct personalities in order to inspire them to expand their way of thinking.
- We believe that quality education is provided through building bridges of trust, communication, and common goals between home and school.
- Students have the opportunity to excel as individuals and work as members of a team.

Goals

- We strive to achieve excellence in education.
- We accept responsibility for attending to the intellectual and academic needs of each student.
- We promote the desire for lifelong learning in our students.
- We give priority to the development of an outstanding teaching staff, well-balanced program, and a safe and efficient campus.

- We encourage self-expression within the limit of our school standards of personal conduct.
- All members of the school community are expected to respect the rights of others and acknowledge responsibility for their own actions.
- We strive to develop a global perspective and promote international understanding.

Objectives of Education

GEMS American Academy Qatar recognizes six broad objectives for education:

Critical and Creative Thinking

Students will learn to question, interpret, and discriminate in order to develop logical, imaginative thinking. They will learn to explore, analyze, and evaluate information, use it in problem solving, and then be challenged to articulate, revise, and defend their thinking.

Communication

Students will learn to listen, speak, read, write, and interpret effectively, as individuals and as members of cooperative groups. They will become aware of how culture, art, music, dance, drama, and sport serve as vehicles for self-expression and in extending communication.

Technical Integration

Students will develop an appreciation for both the value and limitations of technology. They will learn to evaluate the environmental, cultural, and social impact of technological changes.

Personal and Social Values

Students will develop personal skills that contribute to the development of healthy self-esteem, including goal setting, self-discipline, self-motivation, organization, and time management. In addition, students will be expected to extend consciousness beyond self in order to develop a healthy social value system based upon respect for others.

Global Awareness and Understanding

Students will acquire a global perspective by developing their cultural sensitivity, appreciation, and understanding. Students will develop an awareness of the interdependent responsibility of nations and individuals to preserve the environment.

Interdependent Learning

Students will be encouraged to participate fully in their intellectual and social environments, not only to enhance their school years, but also to establish a pattern of involvement and enquiry that will extend into adult life.

Core Educational Values

As a GEMS school, we aim to help students realize their full potential through a commitment to the GEMS core educational values of Global Citizenship, Growing by Learning, Pursuing Excellence, and Leading Through Innovation.

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

We believe in promoting diversity and building communities.

We respect, care, and have empathy for all, accepting that we are all different but recognizing that we are all the same. We see active participation in the community, from the most local to the most global, as the foundation of a valuable life. We celebrate diversity. We take pride in being generous. We believe social, cultural, economic and environmental awareness prepare us to play our part in shaping a sustainable future for those around us and ourselves.

GROWING BY LEARNING

We believe continuous learning is the fuel for continual growth.

For us, learning is about acquiring the knowledge, skills, behaviors, and insight to expand our horizons and help us grow. To grow, we must be open to learn. We foster the spirit of inquiry, equally encouraging creative and critical thinking. We value the mental agility to stay flexible in the face of change, adaptable in our relationships with others, and nimble in our ability to put ideas into action.

PURSUING EXCELLENCE

We believe great **just isn't** good enough.

We see being great as a starting point. We believe in having high standards and aspiring to be the best we can be. We strive to build resilience, strength of character, and the moral compass to do the right thing, even when **it's** not the easy thing. We take accountability for our performance and set ourselves goals we know we **can't** reach yet, because we know that by stretching to meet them we can go further than we imagined.

LEADING THROUGH INNOVATION

We believe the world needs more innovators.

Innovation requires bold thinking, fresh ideas, brave leadership and entrepreneurship; finding better ways of doing things, and doing them. To make a real contribution to a better future we must lead individual by individual, idea by idea, taking calculated risks, spotting opportunities, and acting decisively. We know that, by relentlessly exploring our passions, we will open up new possibilities.

OUR CAMPUS

Facilities

We have a spacious, purpose-built school situated on a 20,000 square-meter campus located in Al Wakra, Qatar. Our facilities include:

Parent Café	Indoor/Outdoor Play Areas
Science Labs	ICT Suite
Art and Sculpture Rooms	Indoor Dining Area
Music Rooms	Dance Studio
Library and Media Centers	Multi-Purpose Sports Hall
Rooftop Sports Court	Dance Studio

All classrooms have interactive technology and each teacher has a laptop in order to make maximum use of multimedia facilities. Laptops and iPads are supported with the latest operating systems and educational software technology.

Campus Security

All visitors must enter through the main entrance, sign in, and wear a visitor badge. Faculty and staff are trained to use the same security guidelines to ensure uniform, orderly, and timely responses to emergencies. Fire, evacuation, and lockdown drills are practiced so that students know the appropriate responses in emergency situations. We encourage all parents to report any suspicious behavior or items **they may observe while they are on campus.**

School Hours

Pre-K	7:45am to 12:30pm/2:45pm
KG2 to Grade 9	7:45am to 2:45pm
After-School Activities	3:00pm to 3:45pm

Note: There will be early dismissal on Tuesdays at 1:30pm to allow faculty and staff to take part in professional development programs.

Transportation Services

Bus transportation to GAAQ is available, but parents cannot access the use of our school bus services.

OUR CURRICULUM

Our program of study is based on U.S. curriculum and national standards, and modeled on the American system of education, but we also embrace the cultural diversity our international student community offers.

The first years of formal schooling are critical. During this period, children develop lifelong attitudes towards learning and build a foundation in the core subjects of Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies (alongside the additional curriculum areas of Health, Arabic and Islamic Studies, Qatar History, Information and Communication Technologies, Music and Art). At the same time, children learn to work and play independently and within groups, develop collaborative and team skills, and also develop a sense of individuality as well as global connectivity.

Curriculum Standards

Grades 1 to 12

Language Arts integrates skills that include reading, writing, spelling, speaking, and listening. The development of these skills is supported through appropriate fiction and non-fiction works to gain a rich understanding of language and communication.

The study of **Mathematics** includes basic computation, problem solving, and real-life applications, with computers and technology integrated appropriately. The Math program is supplemented by the use of manipulative materials to provide concrete experiences that lead to conceptual understanding and the development of higher-order thinking skills.

Through our Science program, students are encouraged to develop and exhibit an understanding of key scientific concepts and principles. As they develop their capacity for scientific thinking and processing, they will also be developing skills such as questioning, predicting, and making connections between their lives and the world around them. Students physical, earth, and space sciences, and applications to Science.

In **Social Studies**, students are prepared to become responsible, participatory citizens in a global society. The program takes advantage of the **school's setting in Qatar** and its international character by using instructional materials that integrate Arabic, Islamic, and global studies. The Social Studies curriculum focuses on eight standards for learning:

Kindergarten 1 (KG1)

The KG1 program has been adapted from the U.S. Creative Curriculum to accommodate the international nature of our students and families. The program has all the elements of the American standards with the addition of Health and the creative Arts (Music, Art, and Performance). The play-based day in KG1 allows children to work at their own pace while having opportunities to develop relationships in a variety of learning environments.

Kindergarten 2 (KG2)

The KG2 program follows U.S. curriculum standards for Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science. Students also have components of Social Studies, Health, Arabic and the creative Arts (Music, Art, and Performance). Subjects are taught through a combination of direct instruction and play-based activities (group, pairs, and individual) that allows students to connect their learning experiences and develop higher-order thinking skills in a personal, meaningful way.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

The primary focus of the ICT program is to use technology to support the curriculum. The use of technology is encouraged in writing, research, communication, artistic expression, data collection, analysis, and presentation. Smart Boards and touch LED screens are used in all mainstream classrooms and the school has a fully equipped ICT lab, as well as mini labs at every grade level.

Encore Subjects

In addition to the core curriculum, specialist (“Encore”) programs for elementary school students include Art, Arabic Language, Islamic Education, Qatar History, Music, ICT, and Physical Education. Each Encore subject follows a specific curriculum that supports the development of the child at his or her grade level. It is understood that all students will participate in Encore classes as they do in core classes.

Classes offered are structured around three strands of 21st Century skills, namely, **Literacies, Competencies, and Character Qualities.** These interest-based classes have been specifically designed by inspired teachers to engage students in learning opportunities that focus on creating, connecting, and collaborating.

After-School Activities

We coordinate a KG2 through high school after-school activities program for all interested students, as follows:

Season 1: October to December

Season 2: January to March

Season 3: April to June

Learning Support

We are committed to differentiated instruction to attend to the individual needs of all students. Learning support is available for students starting in KG and is designed to assist students to achieve grade-level equivalencies in the mainstream classroom.

GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS

School Uniforms

Except on approved or special occasions, students must wear the following regulation school uniform every day:

1. Light blue tailored shirt of an appropriate size, tucked in at the waist.
2. Dark blue slacks for boys.
3. Knee-length or longer dark blue skirts or slacks for girls.
4. Dark blue tie with logo.
5. Black shoes with non-marking soles and black laces.
6. Black leather belts for slacks

Each student must also have the prescribed school PE clothing and proper athletic shoes. **Clothing should be clearly labeled with the student's name.**

Hats

The sun and heat are intense in Qatar, and soaring temperatures can cause rapid dehydration and sunburn. Please provide a hat for your child to keep at **school so they can cover their heads when they're outside. It's also a good** idea to have them apply a high-factor sunscreen every morning before coming to prevent sunburn and skin damage.

Water Bottles

Please provide your child with a labeled water bottle that can be refilled at one of the school water coolers, and reinforce to them that they should drink plenty of water throughout the day. Providing your child with a reusable water bottle **supports our school's desire to promote global citizenship.**

Lunch and Snacks

Students eat in designated areas during scheduled times of the day. Kindergarten students should bring a healthy packed lunch and snack from home, preferably something low in sugar and without nuts or nut products. Students from Grade 1 upwards have the option of bringing lunch from home or purchasing it from the cafeteria. Students are encouraged to bring their own reusable water bottles that can be refilled from school water fountains.

Recess

Elementary students have scheduled recess times. Each grade has a dedicated playground area with appropriate outdoor equipment. Depending on scheduled use by PE classes, the soccer pitch and/or multipurpose room may also be available for play during recess times. All students are expected to play safely and fairly, and to be respectful of each other and of the equipment.

Lost and Found

Lost and found items are kept across from the nurse's office. Any unclaimed items will be donated to charity at various times through the school year.

Assemblies

School assemblies are held throughout the year to allow us to celebrate our core values, promote school spirit and unity, and help our students develop confidence, stage presence, and appropriate audience skills.

House System

Our House System provides an environment where students can develop a sense of belonging to a special group within the wider school structure. We currently offer the House System beginning in Grade 6. The House names are **"Ravens," "Falcons," "Eagles" and "Hawks."**

Student Behavior

Our school commitment is to guide students to become self-disciplined, responsible learners, able to work independently and cooperatively. We believe that a positive academic and social climate is necessary for student success. The responsibility for establishing this climate is shared by each student, faculty member, and parent. We value having students follow reasonable expectations and guidelines, and believe it is important for them to understand the purpose of such guidelines.

Bullying

Our school has a **zero tolerance** policy regarding bullying. Students will be held accountable for all forms of bullying on and off campus (including cyber bullying), as this behavior negatively impacts the culture of the school.

Plagiarism

Honesty in schoolwork requires that students give credit to ideas, language, or **thoughts that are not their own. To try to pass off someone else's ideas or writing as one's own is** plagiarism and is a violation of academic honesty. A superficial change of wording, structure, or conclusion is not sufficient to turn aside the charge of plagiarism. We regard acts of academic dishonesty as a **serious violation of the school community's trust**. Students who commit plagiarism will face serious consequences.

Acceptable Use Policy for Network Resource

Students can expect a 21st-century learning environment where teachers work to integrate technology thoughtfully and purposefully into learning experiences **and assignments. The school's IT resources are intended for educational use** and to promote student learning. The expectations below are intended to help students understand their responsibilities as technology users at GAAQ.

Privileges, Rights, Responsibilities

Access to the school network and the Internet is a privilege and varies according to the age/grade of the student. All students will be required to provide a parental consent form prior to activation of their network access privileges.

These rules of network etiquette must be followed:

- Upon receiving their network folders, students will be given individual passwords. Under no circumstances should passwords be disclosed to other individuals.
- Copyright must never be violated. It is unacceptable to distribute material owned by others over the Internet.
- Students must report any threatening or abusive communications they receive to a faculty member or ICT teacher.

Acceptable Use

- All students will have access to the school network and the Internet through the ICT labs, library, and mini labs via laptops, desktops, and iPads.
- The school network is to be used only for educational and career development activities.
- **A student's right to** free speech applies to communication on the

Internet; however, students should expect only limited privacy at school since Internet traffic can be monitored **on the school's server**. Network administrators, teachers, and parents have the right to request to see the content of student computer files and online activities at any time.

Unacceptable Use

- Students will not attempt to gain unauthorized access to the school network or any other computer system.
- Students will not attempt to compromise the system or destroy data by spreading computer viruses.
- Students will not attempt to solicit funds for personal use, school use, or **otherwise using the school's technology** resources.
- Students will not send or display offensive messages or pictures, or use obscene language when using the school's technology resources.
- Students will not access websites that contain material considered pornographic, violent, or insulting or **degrading to Qatar's religious and** cultural beliefs.
- Use of email and chat rooms will be under the supervision of faculty and staff and is limited to educational projects only.
- Students will not add or alter any computer program, nor download programs, games, audio, or video files from the Internet.

Student Safeguards

Any student information communicated via GAAQ web pages will comply with **school policy on data privacy**. **Web pages shall not include a student's name**, phone number, street address, email address, or personal contact information of any kind. Photographs published on web pages may not identify individual students by name without parental approval.

Leaving Campus

Students are to remain on campus at all times during the school day. If students must leave because of illness, the school nurse will call the parents. Students may not excuse themselves from campus. If a parent wishes to take their child out of school before the regular dismissal time, the parent must notify the school office and teacher as soon as possible. The office will issue a release note that will allow the parent to collect their child from class. Parents should not go directly to the classroom during instructional time.

Damage to School Property

Students will be held responsible for all school property that is lost or damaged.

Lost Textbooks

Lost textbooks should be reported to the teacher as soon as possible. Parents will be charged the replacement cost of the book plus 50% for shipping, processing, and handling charges.

Lockers

Students will be assigned a locker or storage area upon arrival at school.

Electronic Devices and Mobile Phones

Personal electronic devices and mobile phones distract from the learning environment; their use is not allowed during school hours unless specifically authorized by faculty or staff.

Supervision of Students

Morning:

The school doors are opened to allow students to enter the building at 7:30am. Students are then to wait in the designated areas until 7:40am before going to their classrooms.

Afternoon:

Students are dismissed at 2:45pm and should be met promptly by parents or proceed directly to the bus. Parents and drivers should wait in the Parent Café until all classes are dismissed rather than waiting in hallways, which is disruptive for teaching and learning.

After-School Activities:

If students are involved in after-school activities, they should be picked up promptly at the conclusion of that activity. Currently, GAAQ does not provide bus service for students participating in after-school activities.

Parents must contact the teacher (and bus driver, if applicable) if their children will be going home in a way that differs from their normal routine.

Absences and Late Arrival

Students should be regularly present throughout the school year to fully participate in the academic program—extended vacations interrupt and have a negative impact on educational progress. If a student is absent for unauthorized reasons for a period of 20 consecutive days, or 25 non-consecutive days, there is a possibility they will not advance to the next grade level or qualify for re-enrollment for the next academic year.

Students are expected to be in their classrooms by 7:45am—punctuality shows respect for classmates and teachers. Students arriving after 7:45am are considered tardy. Tardiness will be recorded and will appear on student progress reports. When a child will be late or absence from school, parents must notify the teacher. All unexplained absences may result in a call home.

PARENT SUPPORT AND INVOLVEMENT

Parental Engagement

Our school has a firm understanding of the benefits of parental engagement. We believe in the importance of an open and collaborative relationship between home and school, and we are focused on giving parents skills and resources to engage in meaningful ways with the learning and growth of their children. We invite parents to participate in parent education events held throughout the year.

Back to School Night

Early in the school year, a Back to School Night will be held to introduce parents to classroom expectations, the curriculum, grade-level policies on **homework, and other details related to the functioning of their children's** classes.

Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)

Our school supports the development of a spirit of unity and community among parents, faculty, staff, and students. By cooperating in different capacities, we will enrich the lives of our students and guide parents into a deeper understanding of the aims, policies, and philosophy of GAAQ. All parents of students enrolled at GAAQ are automatically members of the PTA.

Communication Between Home and School

Communication between home and school is a high priority at GAAQ. Parents will receive notices throughout the year about school events and after-school activities. Classroom teachers typically create their own weekly newsletters.

Report Cards

Student progress towards achieving developmentally appropriate, grade-level curricular standards is reported to parents in many ways throughout the school year.

Parent-Teacher Conferences

Parent-Teacher conferences to discuss student progress are held twice a year.

GEMS 3-a-Day Campaign

Parents are encouraged to make family learning part of their lifestyle by doing three effective engagement activities with their children every day.

Legal Status of Students

All GAAQ students are required by the laws of Qatar and school policy to reside with their parent(s) or legal guardian throughout the school year.

Extended Parental Absence

Students should always be under proper supervision at home by a parent. If, due to an emergency, you will be out of town and your child will not be under your direct supervision, please send a formal letter to the school to let us know who will have guardianship responsibilities in your absence.

Homework

Homework is meant to enhance classroom learning. Homework assignments are extensions of material explained in class and offer additional skills practice or opportunities for independent research. The amount of time children spend on homework will vary due to their attention span or skill level. If your child is struggling with homework assignments, please contact the teacher for suggestions.

Please inform your child's teacher a minimum of three (3) days in advance if homework is required for an anticipated period of time a student will be out of school. This will allow the teacher time to prepare all necessary assignments. Please note that homework will not be prepared for students missing school because of extended family vacations.

Parental involvement and supervision helps to ensure that correct learning is taking place. We strongly suggest that parents set up a regular, designated time and place for children to do their homework. Such procedures reinforce study habits learned in school and promote concentration. Please encourage your child to be responsible about completing assignments and bringing them to school when they are due. The school encourages older students to read every evening, and for parents to read to their young children regularly.

Withdrawal Procedures

Notices of withdrawal from enrollment at GAAQ must be submitted in writing to the school Registrar at least two (2) weeks ahead of the official withdrawal date. Parents are responsible for completing and returning a student clearance form. The school will not release records or issue a transfer certificate if there are outstanding books, fees, or fines.

Health Office

The school health office is staffed with 2 full-time nurses whose responsibilities include: administering first aid and treating minor ailments that occur during school hours, promoting health education, providing vaccination and medical information to maintain current records, and liaising with the Qatar Health Authority.

To enable the health office to care for each child effectively, all students are required to submit a health information form and consent form, along with an up-to-date copy of their immunization records, prior to their first day of attendance at school. The health office should also be advised in writing of any special medical concerns, conditions, allergies, or medications a child is taking. It is also a requirement that all students new to Doha schools undergo a medical examination. This includes a basic head-to-toe assessment, height and weight measurements, and distance and color vision checks. Our licensed school nurse will conduct school medicals throughout the year. Should parents wish to arrange an examination with their own physician, a copy of the written medical report must be provided to the health office for their files.

When to Keep Your Child at Home

A sick child cannot learn effectively and is unable to participate in class in a meaningful way. Keeping a sick child at home prevents the spread of illness in the school community and allows your child the opportunity to rest and recover.

We recommend that you keep your child at home in the following situations:

- Vomiting and/or diarrhea . A child with either of these problems should stay home and return to school only after being symptom free for 24 hours.
- A temperature of 37.8 C /100 F and above. Even if the temperature has been reduced with medication, please keep your child at home until they have been without a fever for 24 hours.
- Conjunctivitis. Following a diagnosis of conjunctivitis (also known as “pink eye”), a child may return to school **24 hours after** the first dose of prescribed medicine.
- Rashes. Common infectious diseases with rashes are most contagious in the early stages. A child with a suspicious rash should return to school only after a doctor has made a diagnosis and the school nurse has seen your child before returning to the classroom. Many rashes are not contagious, but if you are in any doubt, please take your child to see the school nurse before he or she attends class.
- Colds: Consider keeping your child at home if he or she is experiencing discomfort from cold symptoms such as nasal congestion and/or cough. A continuous green discharge from the nose may be a sign of infection.

If your child is sick and unable to attend school, please inform the teacher and/or the school office before the start of the school day. The message **will then be passed on to your child’s teachers.**

Please pick your sick child up from school as soon as possible following a phone call from a member of the health office team.

If your child must take any regular medications during school hours, either on a long- or short-term basis, it is necessary that these medications be given to our health office staff for dispensing. The only exceptions to this rule are personal inhalers to prevent/treat asthma attacks and, in some cases, *EpiPens* for students who have life-threatening allergies. All medications should be clearly labeled with your child's name, medication name, dosage, and time to be given. Teachers are not permitted to administer medication to students except under special circumstances, such as during field trips or in an emergency. It is the responsibility of parents to advise the Health Office if their child has any allergies.

Parent Contact Information

Parents must inform the school immediately of any change in their phone numbers and email addresses so we will always be able to contact home. Please contact via phone at 4032 9000 or via email (reception_aaq@gemsedu.com) so our Front of House team can make the change expeditiously.