

Parent Handbook

**Goal of this Handbook**

To equip parents with the “how to” of daily operations at Acton Academy Amarillo so they may support their children’s Hero’s Journeys.

**Philosophy of our Operations**

There are three underlying values that drive every policy and system created for our community to function and achieve our mission:

1. Freedom for families. We believe parents, not schools, are in charge of their families and trust you to make your own choices for your families.
2. Sanctity of studios as learning spaces for Eagles only. This includes basic safety as well as protection against interruptions, distractions and the threat of lowering standards of excellence.
3. Sanctity of parent/child relationships: We will not come between you and your child.

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# **Fast Facts**

Mascot: Eagle

Address: 2525 Wimberley Rd, Amarillo, TX 79109

Website address: <http://amarilloacton.com/>

Studio Nickname: SPARK Studio: PreK, Kinder and Level 1

Elementary School Studio: ES

Middle School Studio: MS

Contact info: Spark Guide: sparkguide@amarilloacton.com

Elementary studio: [esguide@amarilloacton.com](mailto:esguide@amarilloacton.com)

Middle School Studio: msguide@amarilloacton.com

**Staff**

Karsen Boyett- Spark Lead Guide

Ashley Reeves - ES Lead Guide

Alison Braaten - MS Lead Guide

**Owners/Founders**

Michael and Hannah Haning

Contact Info: hello@amarilloacton.com

**The Purpose of Acton Academy Amarillo**

## **Mission Statement**

Acton Academy Amarillo’s mission is to inspire each person who enters our doors to find a calling and change the world.

### **Our Beliefs**

* We believe each child has a gift that can change the world in a profound way.
* We believe in learning to learn, learning to do and learning to be.
* We believe in a closely connected community of lifelong learners.
* We believe that the American Experiment, with all its faults, is the best hope on earth for protecting human liberty.

### **Our Promises**

We promise your children will:

* Begin a Hero’s Journey;
* Learn to learn, learn to do and learn to be;
* Discover their most precious gifts, along with the dedication it takes to develop real talent;
* Understand the importance of strong character;
* Cherish the arts, the wonders of the physical world and the mystery of life; and,
* Treasure economic, political and religious freedom.

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### **Accountability: Covenants/Contracts**

Creating clear, consistent expectations for Acton Academy Amarillo families is an important part of our school. As such, the parents, students and staff will reaffirm this commitment by signing a covenant each year that describes the roles and responsibilities to which we are agreeing.

The purpose of this living document is not to promote rule-following or bureaucracy but rather the opposite: to draw clear boundaries to encourage innovation between children, parents and guides who through commitment and action show support for the creation of a world-class school.

**Daily Life: Schedules, Lunch**

**School Hours**

Acton Academy Amarillo’s school hours are 8:00am until 3:15pm.

### **Arrival/Dismissal Procedure**

Arrival starts at 8:00am. Doors open at 8:00am. From 8:00 to 8:25am, students engage in free time, reading, socializing and getting organized for the day. When you arrive at school, a Greeter will be in the main drive to greet each learner with a handshake, greeting and eye contact, the customary start to our day together.

The chime rings at 8:25 so Eagles know they have 5 minutes to arrive at their studio’s morning launch discussion circle. The door will be closed at 8:30am.

In order not to interrupt the others who will be focusing on the morning launch discussion, a latecomer is required to sit at their table spot until the launch has finished. In addition to learning the life skill of showing up on time every time, these discussions are critical parts of the daily learning at Acton. For this reason, being on time is part of our contract to each other.

If an Eagle is chronically late, it will impact the quality of his or her learning journey at Acton as well as the culture of the studio community. In the rare case this occurs, we will contact you to discuss a plan to support your family being fully onboard with this commitment.

Dismissal is at 3:15pm sharp. For your convenience, you can pull into the parking lot and wait for your children. Please wait in your car and follow the line for efficiency and safety. You are in charge of being clear with your child about who is driving him or her home if it is someone other than yourself. Your child should be confident and knowledgeable about the people who are allowed by you to drive him or her home. This is not a guide’s nor Acton’s responsibility. It is a family responsibility. If your child is ever confused by who is there to drive home, he or she should go immediately to the guide to request help.

If you are picking up your child at any time other than dismissal, please park and walk to the studio to get your child. Please do not ask a guide to watch for you and send your child out. This is up to you and you are free to come into the studio at any time to pick up your child. It is most helpful if you inform your child so he or she can be mentally prepared to stop working and leave the group without hesitation.

**Weekly Schedule**

In general, the schedule consistently includes the following activities:

* Socratic discussions
* Individual work time – Math, reading, writing, typing
* Collaborative work time in Projects/Quests and Civilization (our term for History because it includes studying economics, politics, art, geography and philosophy)
* Lunch and free times
* Art
* PE
* Town meetings and running partner/squad meetings

**Lunch and Snacks**

In order to keep our tuition costs low and support each family’s healthy food choices, Acton does not provide standardized lunches. Each child brings his or her own lunch.

Students choose to eat at their desks, outdoor community tables, or picnic-style on blankets inside or outside. Cleaning up after themselves is an important part of our community culture. Snacks and water are also important for healthy refueling. Please pack healthy snacks and a water bottle each day for your child.

\*Learners are not allowed to share food that has been opened, for health and safety purposes.

**Acton Academy Amarillo’s Property, Chromebooks and School Supplies**

An integral part of our learning program is using technology for students to learn math, reading and writing skills at their own pace. We provide one laptop per student as needed to use during the day on campus. **They are school property. If one is damaged or lost by a student, the family is responsible for reimbursing the school in the amount of $250 that will be added to your tuition bill.**

In addition, if any part of the school campus is intentionally damaged by a student, he or she will assist in the repair.

Included in your tuition are also the basic necessary school supplies such as pens, paper, pencils and project supplies.

Your child is welcome to bring his or her own laptop and books to read. He or she is responsible for the care of any personal items brought to school.

**Health Policies/Absenteeism/Internet Safety and Social Media**

**Health Forms**

Before the first day of school, it is necessary to have a copy of your child’s health and immunization records (or exemption form) from your pediatrician’s office. You may email, mail or hand deliver this information.

### **Medication**

### Students may not carry medicine into the school. Parents must give the medicine and written instructions to a guide. For prescription medicine, please send the medicine in the original container from the pharmacy with the child’s name on it and a dated note listing the times and amounts to be given that day. Include whether or not refrigeration is required.

### **Illness Policy**

Following the state law for illness policy, a student with any of the following symptoms must be isolated and the parents notified and asked to remove the student from school as soon as possible:

* Fever of 100.5 F.
* Diarrhea
* Vomiting
* Nausea
* Severe cough
* Unusual yellow color to skin or eyes
* Stiff neck or headache with one or more of the symptoms listed above
* Difficult breathing or wheezing
* Complaints of severe pain.

If your child is not feeling well in the morning, please observe them carefully before sending them to school and risking the health of the others.

**Children must be free of symptoms for 24 hours before returning to school.**

If your child develops any of these symptoms while at school, we will call you immediately to come pick up your child.

**Substance Misuse and Abuse**

Acton Academy Amarillo has a zero tolerance for chemical and substance misuse and abuse. Disregarding this policy may result in immediate dismissal.

**Internet Safety and Social Media**

Internet Safety: Please read the last paragraph under Acton Academy’s property (above.)

At Acton Academy, we have found excessive gaming, video watching and social media can have a negative impact on work habits and respect for others in general and in the studio in particular. Computers are used for learning, and each studio has technology guardrails. If these guardrails are broken, the learner will lose their computer and the parents will be notified.

Cell phones are not allowed for use during the day on campus. A learner may put their cell phone in a specified box when they arrive, and can use this phone to contact parents in case of an emergency.

**Camera Policy**

1. Live video links are given to the Acton Network.This allows for transparency and accountability to the Acton Network.
2. Guides and owners have access to camera links. This allows owners, guides and learners to share lessons learned in real time.
3. The video feeds are not to be used as surveillance. If a situation arises where a learner has been physically or sexually harmed, a guide will review the video feed, and based on what they observe, are required to report to owners & parents of children involved.
4. We promise to protect the rights and privacy of all learners. This means that we will never disclose video footage or information about a learner to another learner/parent.

**Personal Relationships and Public Displays of Affection (PDA)**

At Acton Academy, we believe that healthy relationships and respectful boundaries are an important part of a young person’s journey. As part of our commitment to creating a focused and respectful learning environment, Acton has a strict no PDA policy between older learners in romantic relationships. This includes holding hands, cuddling, or other forms of affection above and beyond casual, friendly affection we observe among younger learners and older friends.

In the upper studios, this will be discussed and included in contract promises.

Breaking the Zero Tolerance PDA policy will be handled as a Strike (explained below) within the studio:

**1st offense**- discussion with Guides and loss of the freedom to sit together during work times

**2nd offense**- learners will send an email to mom and dad about the policy they chose to break

**3rd offense**- choose to stay home for a day and write an apology to the studio to return back with parent permission

As parents, we hope you discuss the appropriateness of affection within a mixed-age learning environment with your hero. We trust you as parents to set boundaries and expectations around dating and PDA with your individual children when age appropriate.

**Attendance/Absenteeism**

Acton Academy Amarillo does not have an attendance policy that specifies a required number of days that your child must be in school. It is the school’s philosophy that traveling with family and engaging in experiences with family is fruitful and educational.

At the same time, consistent attendance will help your child be fully engaged with the community and with the project/quest learning. In fact, most projects depend on the participation of all team members. If you know in advance that you will be taking your child out of school, it is helpful for the other Eagles in the studio to be informed so they can make alternative work plans.

While away from school, your Eagle will be able to access his or her online programs and Journey Tracker for studio assignments.

## **Strike System**

The Strike System exists to protect the safety of each Eagle. A Guide gives a strike when he or she witnesses an Eagle crossing one of the community boundaries. These boundaries are the lines that the Acton Academy community will not tolerate being crossed.

* Physical Harm- If an Eagle chooses to hurt another Eagle on purpose
* Emotional Harm- If an Eagle chooses to hurt another Eagle on purpose
* Leaving Acton- If an Eagle leaves the Acton property without telling a Guide
* Destroying Property- If an Eagle intentionally damages property
* Public Displays of Affection- If an Eagle violates Acton’s PDA policy

Guides keep track of Eagle strikes on a Google Spreadsheet detailing the date of the strike, the purpose of the strike, and who gave the strike.

**1st Strike:**

The Eagle is removed from the group and spends time resetting for a period of time based on age.

A guide speaks with him/her to ensure that he/she understands why the strike was given and to discuss strategies to assure the Eagle is aware of alternate choices.

**2nd Strike:**

The Eagle is separated from the group and meets with a guide to discuss why the choice was made and to develop specific strategies to prevent a third strike.

Lose the freedom of where they want to sit in the Studio and freedom of where to play at recess.

Parents are informed about the Eagles’ strikes by email.

**3rd Strike:**

The Eagle’s parents are informed, and the student is asked to stay home for the next day.

The Eagle may return after completing the Third Strike Form and a verbal apology to the community.

Strikes will reset every session. Any strikes received previously are cleared. The next time this Eagle gets a strike it will be considered a 1st strike.

**Celebrating the return of an Eagle after a 3rd Strike:**

The definition of hero at Acton is one who gets back up after falling down; or apologizes after making a mistake. The community is always happy when an Eagle makes the choice to join back up with the group. There is a tradition of joy and forgiveness as these are experiences that are bound to happen to each Eagle on this adventure of learning.

**Consequences for multiple 3rd Strikes:**

After being sent home a second time, the Eagle will meet with a guide and his/her parents to discuss next steps and whether or not Acton is the right place to continue his/her learning Journey. If an Eagle chooses to stay at Acton and receives another strike after this meeting, s/he may be asked not to return to Acton Academy.

**Transition Contracts**

If an Eagle has a difficult time following the studio contracts and guardrails, Guides will step in. They will present an Eagle-specific agreement to follow if the Eagle wants to remain at Acton Academy. Parents and learners will sign the contract. If the learner chooses to break the contract, he will be asked to leave Acton Academy after that day.

If this happens, the learner is always welcome to reapply when he is ready to rejoin the studio.

## **Staying Informed: How do I know what is going on and talk with my children about their learning?**

**SMART Goals and Journey Tracker**

We trust parents to take the initiative to understand and support their child’s weekly goals and badge plans. This is a large part of your journey as an Acton parent and takes an intentional effort. Your Eagle will be able to share login and password information with you so you have access to the online programs as well as the Acton “Journey Tracker.” Ask your child to give you a tour of their work and explain the Tracker to you. Talking through the programs with your child (with you as “student” and your child as “teacher”) is the most effective way for you to feel equipped. Most importantly, we encourage you to talk with your child about SMART goals. Asking questions about where they are feeling challenged, frustrated and excited can help you encourage them with growth mindset praise and celebrate achievements with them. Remembering that learning is hard and struggling is part of the journey will help you stress less and share patience with your child.

Note: Please read this [page on Growth Mindset praise](https://edspedblog.wordpress.com/2017/04/01/7-steps-to-adopting-a-growth-mindset-at-your-school/) to be equipped with the language that can best motivate your child toward progress in learning.

**Parent Blog**

Please note: Acton Academy Amarillo does not give parenting advice and we do not get in between you and your child. We trust your personal choices regarding discipline or parental authority and have absolutely zero input on your personal family life. Each family is unique and we trust you to make your own best choices.

We do, however, offer you tools to help you incorporate the Acton method of asking questions and offering choices with consequences if you wish to use these at home.

Being an Acton parent is a unique calling. Your child will bring home new skills and ideas gained from learning in a Socratic way. They will be more independent in their learning and more able to share their ideas and make personal decisions. It is a challenge to be on the other end of this transformation as a parent. The blog written by Laura Sandefer, co-founder of Acton Academy, is geared to help parents understand what happens in the studios in order to incorporate the method at home in ways that support the family’s mission.

Laura comes to the blog as a parent with challenges and struggles and not an expert giving advice. The address is: [www.actonacademyparents.com.](http://www.actonacademyparents.com.)

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**Contacting Guides**

\*This year we will be using Slack as a communication app for parents & guides. You will be placed into a Slack Group for the studio that your child is a part of.

For any emergencies, you may text Hannah at (806)787-2425.

In case of an emergency at school, you will receive a group text as well as a group email with instructions.

### **Feedback/Assessing Learning**

**Parent Involvement in Tracking Learning**

**Tools to measure learning:**

* **Points:** Weekly points measure time/effort on task.
* **Badges:** Badges represent several weeks of work compiled and reviewed. They are similar to “courses” completed in a traditional school. Badges are significant milestones of learning and represent excellence and progress in learning.
* **360 Reviews/Full Circle Feedback**: Given each session, these survey measure growth in an Eagles’ leadership and citizenship in the studio. Warm and cool feedback, also called “warm-hearted” and “tough-minded” feedback helps Eagles grow in their character and relationships to others. Eagles “own” their scores and we encourage them to share with their parents.
* **Exhibitions of Learning**: Each session concludes with a public exhibition for parents on a particular area of learning. Eagles demonstrate their learning through debates, speeches, presentations and demonstrations. They discuss their lessons learned and show their portfolios of work. Your guides will advise you of each session’s exhibition date and time at the beginning of the session.
* **Journey Meetings:** Twice a year you and your learner will meet with the guide and the head of school to check in with your learner about their progress in the studio. You will discuss their greatest success, greatest challenge, and goals for the coming sessions. These happen at the beginning of the year, and mid-way through the year in January.

**Badges versus Grades**

Each Eagle has a badge plan for the year. At the beginning of the year, you will receive this as well as details about the Freedom Levels in each studio. At Acton Academy Amarillo, we do not use letter grades nor do we give written reports from a guide. Eagles will receive feedback on the work they produce from their peers, guides and from other sources as appropriate. Their progress will be documented through their achievement and mastery of badges in the Core Skills of writing, language arts, Civilization, math, reading and Socratic discussions. The software programs in language and math track the progress of learning and can be accessed by parents at any time. Simply ask your child to walk you through their programs and to share their passwords with you.

Large milestones of achievement at Acton are the Servant Leader Badges which prove success in completing a long-term series of leadership challenges. These Badges will document the entire Acton Academy learning journey.

Launchpad and middle school studio Badges can be translated into traditional transcript requirements for college applications, Curriculum Vitae, and to celebrate authentic accomplishments of each Acton graduate. (Completion of a badge equals mastery of a subject area and translates into a traditional A+.)

**Studio Observation**

We welcome parents to visit and observe the studio experience to gain further understanding of the learning journey. The studio, however, is a very special environment for the Eagles and we want to protect their personal space and privacy. The following guidelines will help ensure that the studio experience does not become diluted by interruptions.

Please inform a guide 24 hours before you plan to observe. Include the time of your arrival and your expected length of stay. Please inform your child that you will be visiting to observe and that you will just be watching the group at work.

During your observation time, you may quietly greet your child, and then find a comfortable place to sit. Enjoy taking it all in and then depart quietly.

**Tuition**

Our tuition totals $8,500 per person annually. This amount is broken down into 11 equal installments of $772. We run payments through an automatic bank draft at the beginning of each month and you will receive a receipt.

Tuition is through the months of August to June. \

\*For the 2024/2025 launching of SPARK, the tuition for the SPARK studio is $6,500 per month, broken into 11 payments of $590 per month.

We offer Sibling Discounts as follows:

First Child- Full Price

2nd Child- 15% off

3rd Child- 20% off

4th Child- 25% off

If a family chooses to leave Acton during the middle of a month, their tuition will not be refunded. We ask that you give us two weeks notice before leaving, and we will cancel the bank draft for the following month.

## **Special Events – Mark your Calendars**

## **New Parent Info Night and Welcome Ceremony:**

To begin the year, we will have a Parent Info Night and Welcome Ceremony. This evening we will be addressing FAQ about being an Acton Academy parent, and will give you resources to help you as you begin your journey.

We will also have a Welcome Celebration and Ceremony for all families. This is a special time to commemorate the beginning of the journey of the new year.

## **Acton Calendar & Events Calendar:**

You will be sent a link to the Acton calendar. You will also be given an Events Calendar for the year.

A Few things to Note:

Parent Coffees:

We have these 4x a year, 2 in the fall and 2 in the Spring

We start the Parent Coffee with a Launch. You as the parent may choose which studio launch you would like to observe- SPARK, ES or MS. The launch starts at 8:30am.

After the morning launch, we will meet in the Sunroom for coffee and community!

You can find these Parent Coffee Dates on our calendar for the year.

Family and Community Events:

We will be offering various events throughout the year!

-Family Nights or Adventures

-Moms Night Out

-Dads Night Out

-Service Opportunities

You can find these community event dates on our calendar.

**Parent Lunches:**

Each year we host three parent lunch meetings. Part of the Parent Contract includes the commitment for one parent from each family to attend at least two of these meetings each year.

The purpose of these meetings is a far cry from a typical “P.T.A.” meeting. Rather, they are created to inspire you to find your own calling and to be better equipped to help your child maneuver the landscape of his or her own, unique journey.

