



Acton Academy
Find a calling, change the world.

Family Handbook
2017-2018

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Fast Facts

Mascot: Eagle
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Staff

Head of School	Anna Emerick-Biad
Guide	Alana Lambert
Guide	Natalia Gonzalez
Guide	Sophia Baloun
Guide	Amy Fernandez
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Our Purpose

Mission Statement

Acton Academy Las Cruces, Inc.'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 our school is a closely connected family of lifelong learners.
- We believe that the American Experiment, with all its faults, is the best hope on earth for protecting human liberty.

Our Promise

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 a strong character;
- Cherish the arts, the wonders of the physical world and the mystery of life; and,
- Treasure economic, political and religious freedom.

Accountability: Covenants/Contracts

Creating clear, consistent expectations for Acton Academy Las Cruces, Inc. 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. Students sign their own contracts each year and will establish rules of engagement under which learning in the studio will flourish.

Daily Life: Schedules, Lunch and After-school programs

School Hours

Acton Academy Las Cruces, Inc.'s school hours are 8:00am until 3:15pm.

Arrival/Dismissal Procedure

Arrival starts at 8:00am sharp. From 8:00-8:30am, 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 student with a handshake, greeting and eye contact, the customary start to our day together. We ask you to stay in your car and to refrain from socializing with the guides in order to make this process go as quickly as possible for all involved.

If your child arrives after 8:30am due to an unexpected emergency, you will be responsible for leading him or her to the studio.

In order to protect the quality of the morning group discussion, if your child is late, he or she will be guided to sit quietly and read until the discussion concludes.

Dismissal is at 3:15pm sharp. A guide will lead the students out to the front gated area. Please wait in your car and follow the line for efficiency and safety. If you are picking up your child at any time other than dismissal, please park and walk to the studio to get your child. If you are more than 15 minutes late for three or more occasions, you will be assessed a charge of \$25 for each tardy pickup as staff must be paid to wait with your child.

Weekly Schedule

In general, the schedule consistently includes the following activities:

- Socratic discussions
- Individual work time – Math, reading, writing, foreign language
- Collaborative work time in Projects/Quests and Civilization (our term for “World History” because it includes studying economics, politics, art, geography and philosophy)
- Lunch and free times
- Art, PE, Music and Process Drama
- Town meetings and running partner 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. We encourage students to bring a lunch that does not require refrigeration. Acton is a junk food free zone. Please do not send your children with sodas, candy bars, or other processed unhealthy foods.

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. Students will take care of their own snacks and

water bottles. Please pack healthy snacks and a water bottle daily for your child.

*** Note: Due to a severe, life-threatening nut allergy, our elementary studio is a 100% peanut FREE zone.**

After-School Programs

Fueled by family interest, there may be after-school programs on the Acton Academy Las Cruces, Inc. campus during parts of the year. These may include, tennis, film making, speech-making, running, chess, Spanish, Lego/Robotics and yearbook. You will receive an email notifying you of any after-school offerings and can sign up for those in which you are interested. These programs are not a part of the Acton Academy Las Cruces, Inc. curriculum and by participating, you will be asked to sign a waiver and pay any fee associated with these activities..

Acton Academy Las Cruces, Inc.'s Property and Computers/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. These laptops are school property and if one is intentionally damaged or lost by a student, the family is responsible for reimbursing the school in the amount of \$250. 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. \

Health Policies/Absenteeism

Health Forms

Before the first day of school, it is necessary to have a copy of your child's health and immunization records 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.

Attendance/Absenteeism

Acton Academy Las Cruces, Inc. 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 in general will help your child feel connected to the group and engaged in the projects. If you know in advance that you will be taking your child out of school, it is helpful for group planning if you inform the school of the dates he or she will be out of school. By New Mexico State law, if a child misses 5 unexcused days in a 20 day period some action will need to be taken to resolve the issue. <http://bit.ly/1ObNd9V>

You will be able to access your child's math and language online programs via the internet on any computer. A guide will give you the appropriate login information. For unexpected absenteeism, such as a child wakes up and is ill, please send a text message or email your guide.

Three Strike System of Behavior Correction

Strikes are the guide-directed accountability system, while Eagle Bucks are the student-directed accountability system.

A guide gives a strike when he or she witnesses a student crossing one of the community boundaries. These boundaries are the lines that the Acton Academy community will not tolerate being crossed.

1. Intentionally distracting another in a group time or during work time.
2. Intentionally hurting another in words or actions.

Guides keep track of student strikes detailing the date of the strike, the purpose of the strike, and the guide who gave the student the strike.

Progression of Strikes

Warning:

If a guide sees a student distracting another, the guide gives the student a warning, as the student may not realize what he/she is doing (the distracting may not be intentional). After one warning, any distracting behavior that continues is considered intentional, and the student will get a strike.

There are no warnings for hurting another student; the responsible student automatically receives a strike.

1st strike:

- Student is removed from the group and spends time in a separate part of the studio until he/she is able to participate again within the community rules.
- A guide speaks with him/her to ensure he/she understands why he/she is receiving a strike.

2nd strike:

- Student is separated from the group.
- Student has a more in-depth discussion with a guide about why the choice to distract or harm was made. The guide works with the student to brainstorm specific strategies to prevent a third strike.
- Parents are informed about the students' two strikes through an email in which the strike system is explained and the reasons for the students' first two strikes are given. (See example below.)

3rd strike:

- The students' parents are called immediately and the student is asked to leave school for the remainder of the day.
- If the strike occurs at the end of the day, the student stays home the following day.

Strike Reset

Strikes are tallied over the academic year. If a student receives six strikes within an academic year, it is at the administrator's discretion whether the student will be asked to leave the community. A student who requires constant redirection and continually breaks the rules they have agreed to, will not be successful within the Acton Academy learning model. The school administrator has the right to exit a student immediately from the school if a behavior is deemed extreme without reaching the sixth strike.

Parent Communication Regarding Strikes

For parents seeking guidance on how to talk with their children about their strikes, the following guiding questions may be helpful:

- "When were you most interested in your work today: during the Nesting Quest, DEAR, or Math Power Hour?"
- "When did you feel the most distracted today?"
- "Is it harder to stay focused on your work or to be asked to sit by yourself when you break a rule?"

Example parent email regarding a strike:

Dear *Parent*,

I hope you are having a wonderful fall. I wanted to write and give you an update on *Student*.

I have seen him grow so much this year. He is showing a great deal of compassion and leadership.

That said, I wanted you to be aware of our system for holding each other accountable. The students have agreed

that the most natural consequence for breaking a rule of our covenant is to be removed temporarily from the group. We have agreed upon a "three strikes policy" so that an Eagle can learn and practice making better choices. The first time a student breaks the covenant, he or she is removed from the group discussion or activity and spends time in a separate part of the studio until he or she can decide to participate again within the rules. This could be 5 minutes or up to an hour depending on the child. If an infraction occurs a second time, the student is separated from the group again and has a discussion with a guide about why this choice is being made. Solutions and strategies are discussed and hopefully the choice is made again to participate fully. On the third strike, the child knows that the guide will call his or her parent and request the child be picked up for the rest of the day (or until he or she is ready to engage again within the community boundary system.) These consequences are not for ordinary mishaps and interpersonal conflicts that naturally happen in a community. They are for the serious infractions that do damage to another or to the learning environment as a whole, for example, intentionally hurting another eagle (emotionally or physically) or intentionally distracting another eagle (taking someone out of their work or disrupting the larger group from staying on task.) We've had the final "strike" happen in the past when a child makes the choice to break the rules and is asked to go home. Upon returning, there is no shame – only celebration that the choice has been made to move forward with strength. We have always seen great resilience and positive growth in this situation.

Student has chosen once to emotionally hurt someone and once to physically hurt someone. He has accepted the consequence respectfully and I believe he wants to remain in the community without further separation time. He has real concern and care for others and I trust he'll make positive choices going forward.

More than anything I wanted to give you the opportunity to discuss empowering strategies with him about having positive reactions to negative situations. His leadership can have a big impact on this group and we can't wait to see him grow in this direction.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions at all. Thank you for trusting *Student* to us.

Volunteering At Acton:

We encourage parents to volunteer at the school by participating in extracurricular activities like field trips, class business, and school exhibits. Any parent, or grandparent, wishing to volunteer at the school or accompany the school on a school sponsored event must fill out a volunteer application and have on file with the school a background check. Any potential volunteer who has a felony, misdemeanor, DWI, or anything else the SCHOOL deems unacceptable will not be allowed to volunteer.

Tracking Student Progress & Parent Conferences:

SMART Goals and Points Tracker used in Journey & Discovery Studio:

We trust parents to take the initiative to be involved in their child's weekly goals. This is a large part of your journey as an Acton parent. You have access to all of your child's online programs with tracking of their progress. Your guides will share the passwords with you. More importantly, we encourage you to talk with your child about SMART goals. By keeping up with your child's work, you can enjoy sharing challenges, frustrations, problem-solving techniques and celebration of achievements throughout this journey.

Written Progress Reports used in the Exploration Studio:

Parents will be provided with three written progress reports a year. These reports will outline strengths, weaknesses, and skills mastered. School work and projects will be sent home throughout the year for parents

to review with their Eaglet. Eaglet's showcase their work by completing a portfolio which contains samples of their work and skills mastered.

Parent blog

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 and more able to share their ideas and make personal decisions. Please visit the blog to learn more about what is happening at the school and to explore common interest posts. The address is blog.actonlascruces.com

E-mail Newsletter:

A weekly newsletter will be distributed via email giving a recap of the week's events and learning opportunities. The newsletter will give you a wonderful view into the studios.

Parent Conferences & Meeting Requests

“In these days of rapid change, time is precious and you can't afford to waste it in meetings.”

Mark Goulston

Optional meetings with guides will be offered to parents who have any additional questions about their child's learning portfolio after reviewing it at home. You will be notified of the opportunity to sign up for one of these optional meetings. You will be sent a questionnaire to complete before your meeting so that your questions and concerns are clearly outlined and addressed with the guides thoroughly.

Being a small staff, time saving techniques must be employed in order to maintain a high level of efficiency. Before a meeting is scheduled, coordinating and answering questions via email must be exhausted first. Other than the optional yearly progress meetings, it is our policy that we do not offer additional meeting slots unless deemed absolutely necessary. Most information can be exchanged via email.

Weekly Surveys

As part of our commitment to families, every week each family will receive a survey. Your responses are anonymous to the community. We ask that you guide your child to provide helpful input rather than anything personal about another student. The summary of these surveys will be shared with Acton families and guides each week. Your input is vital to our service to you. By sharing the results, we ensure transparency and accountability to you. The survey is a place for constructive input. For any personal situation in which you need advice, please email your guide to discuss offline.

Contacting Guides

Please understand that we will not be available to talk with you during the morning drop off, during school or afternoon pick up times; and will respond to messages between 3:30pm and 5:00pm. Email is the most effective communication. Guides are not permitted to give their personal email or cell numbers to parents.

All communication must be conducted through the school.

Guides may be reached at: guides@actonlascruces.com

Feedback/Assessing Learning

How do I know how my child is doing intellectually?

The Eagles will set and track S.M.A.R.T. goals. These goals are tracked, too, by running partners. Documentation of the weekly assessment of goal achievement is available for children to share with their parents at any time.

We encourage parents to ask their children about their goal setting at the beginning of the week; and follow up at the end of the week. This is an important part of your role as an Acton parent. It is helpful to ask: What would you do differently? Do you feel that your work this week was the best you can do? Where are you feeling most challenged? What was your greatest achievement this week? What was your greatest failure? When did you have the most energy today? When did you serve as a guide to someone? Who guided you? Everyone has an off-week now and then. Is there something you need a break from to get back to a strong start for next week?

Standardized Testing

Eagles will be given nationally-normed achievement tests to assess progress and make certain that they are performing at or above grade level. While intermittent plateaus and even dips in scores happen over a period of years, if a student is not performing at grade level, he or she will receive individualized support in the necessary areas.

You will be notified in advance of testing dates.. Your Eagle will be guided through the process so that they have a full understanding of the purpose of such tests.

Student Portfolios

The core of Acton Academy Las Cruces, Inc.'s assessment is the student portfolios. Clear evidence of the learning that has occurred will be contained in the portfolios. Samples of work compiled and reflected upon by students will be included in addition to the tracking reports from online math programs and their standardized testing results. Most importantly, the portfolios will tell the story of each child's passions, interests, achievements, struggles, learning styles and hopes for the future. Your children's portfolios will contain reflections of learning in their own words. Even failure will be noted and honored as an important part of the learning journey.

When portfolios are sent home, your child will be prepared to sit with you and present the work. Parents will be given instructions on how to review the portfolios and examples of questions to ask to ensure your understanding is complete. This is a celebratory experience for the students. They gain much satisfaction from proving and sharing their learning and growth to the world. We encourage parents to celebrate receiving the child's portfolio and spending quality time with it together.

Optional meetings with guides will be offered to parents who have any additional questions about their child's learning portfolio. You will be notified of the opportunity to sign up for one of these optional meetings. You will be sent a questionnaire to complete before your meeting so that your questions and concerns are clearly outlined and addressed with the guides thoroughly.

Learning Badges versus Grades

At Acton Academy Las Cruces, Inc., we do not use letter grades. Eagles will receive feedback of the work they produce from their peers, guides and from other sources as appropriate. Their progress will be documented through their achievement of badges in the core skills of writing, language arts, Civilization, math, reading and Socratic discussions. In addition, portfolios provide documentation of learning in the arts and sciences through projects and quest work. Leadership and character development are reflected in 360 reviews. The software programs in language and math track the progress of learning and can be accessed by parents at any time. At the beginning of the year, your guides will provide you the username and passwords to your child's work.

Milestones of achievement at Acton are the Learning Badges which prove success in completing a long-term series of learning challenges. These Learning Badges will document the entire Acton Academy Las Cruces, Inc. learning journey with evidence appropriate for college applications and job interviews of the authentic accomplishments of each Acton graduate.

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 one day 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!

Please do not initiate interaction with your child. If he or she initiates with you, it is fine to interact. When you are leaving, please say a quiet good-bye and make a quick departure.

NEST Camera & Photo Waiver

As part of the Acton Academy Trademark License agreement entered into between Anna Emerick-Biad and Acton Academy, it was stipulated that NEST live video feed capabilities be installed in the interior of the school. All Acton schools across the nation are linked to provide accountability, share best practices, and ensure high quality student services. Parents acknowledge the use of the NEST Camera system. Acton Academy Las Cruces, Inc. is proud of the many accomplishments of our students. Occasionally we use photos of our students on the newsletter, school displays and projects, blog run by the students, or website. Website photos would not identify students by name. It is understood that permission is granted to Acton Academy Las Cruces, Inc. to use the photographs on the world wide web or other printed publications.

Parent Agreement of Participation

As parents at Acton Academy, we agree that to remain in the community we will do the following:

- Both parents will be lifelong learners, and each will have an active learning project (such as a book or self-improvement project) at all times to discuss with their children.
- Our family will develop and share an Annual Family Plan and have a Family Meeting at least once a month.
- At least one parent will attend a minimum of two of the three parent meetings each year.
- Parents will make every effort to complete a Family Badge of their choice each year.
- Parents will respect the studio as the Eagles' space. Parents are welcome to visit the studio after making a reservation 24 hours in advance with a guide and will observe the studio rules during each visit.
- Eagles will be at school early or on time, every time. Eagles will not be allowed to join the morning Socratic discussion if arriving past 8:30am

Student Communication Protocol

The goal of our Student Communication Protocol is to facilitate an environment that best serves the needs of the student while ensuring that all qualifying parental figures have access to school records and updates. This policy outlines how a student's records including attendance, disciplinary actions taken, yearend assessments, and school communications will be handled.

Step Parents:

A step parent is defined as someone who resides with the student and natural parent on a day-to-day basis. According to FERPA (Family Education Rights & Privacy Act) a step parent meeting that criteria, may access a student's records. A step parent that does not meet those criteria must be authorized in writing by the natural parent prior to the school releasing information.

Divorced or Separated Natural Parents:

Unless otherwise specified in writing by both natural parents or by a court order, it is our policy to keep both natural parents in the loop on all student related matters including but not limited to progress reports, disciplinary action strike forms, medical emergency notifications, and school communication platforms such as SchoolRush or the newsletter.

School Visits & Phone Calls:

Unless it is clearly written in a legal document which is on file at the school, we can't stop the parent who has less than 50% of the residential responsibility from calling or visiting the child during school hours.

Transportation:

On the school registration form, parents can specify who has authority to pick up the child from school. Unless otherwise agreed to in writing by both natural parents or as a court order, either natural parent may pick up the student from school.

Communication:

FERPA qualifying Step Parents and both biological parents will be included in the School Rush App, newsletter, parent conference, informed of an emergency, disciplinary action reports, and parent updates.

Enrollment Forms:

For a student to be enrolled in Acton Academy, both natural parents must sign the Medical Release Form and Parent Handbook unless the enrolling parent has sole custody in which case their signature is adequate.

School Meetings & Events:

Natural Parents and FERPA qualifying Stepparents are all invited to attend parent conferences and school events. It is not the schools policy to have separate meetings as we feel it is important for all parental figures to coordinate jointly regarding the best interests of the student. If a special circumstance makes this impossible, alternative arrangements may be made including SKYPE virtual conference etc.

Special Events – Mark your Calendars

School Rush Calendar for events each month

Enjoy notifications of events right on your smart phone! Download SchoolRush App to access the school calendar. This calendar will help you manage field trips, Parent Meetings, parent coffees at campus, end of the year celebrations, PE days, Open Houses and other Acton events.

Academic Year Calendar

The Academic calendar is posted on the web site and in the SchoolRush App.