



ACTON ACADEMY PHOENIX

...a NEW LEARNING VENTURE

FAMILY HANDBOOK
2023 - 2024

3330 East Camelback Road
Phoenix, AZ 85018

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Goal of this Handbook:

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

FAST FACTS

Mascot: Eagle
Address: 3330 East Camelback Rd. Phoenix, AZ 85018
Website: www.actonphx.org
Phone: (978) 795-4342

Acton Team

Director/Discovery Studio Guide	Andrew Collins admin@actonphx.org
Spark Studio Guide	Anne-emmanuelle Persil anne-emmanuelle@actonphx.org
Community Coordinator	Alicia Collins alicia@actonphx.org

OUR PURPOSE

Mission Statement

Acton's mission is to inspire each student who enters our doors to find their calling to 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 in economic, political, and religious freedom.

Our Educational Philosophy

We believe clear thinking leads to good decisions, good decisions lead to the right habits, the right habits forge character, and character determines destiny.

Acton's Promises to Families

We promise, through Socratic guiding and experiential learning, you and your children will:

- Begin a Hero's Journey ;
- Discover precious gifts and a commitment to mastery;
- Become a curious, independent, life-long learner;
- Embrace the forging of a strong character;
- Cherish the arts, the physical world and the mystery of life; and
- Treasure economic, political and religious freedom

Accountability: Contracts

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

The purpose of the contract 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.** Learners sign their own contracts each year and will establish rules of engagement under which learning in the studio will flourish.

DAILY LIFE

Arrival | Dismissal

Acton's school hours are 8:30am to 3:15pm, Monday through Friday

School starts at 8:30am sharp.

The doors will be opened at 8:15am. From 8:15-8:30am, learners engage in free time, reading, socializing and getting prepared for the day. When each student arrives at school, a guide or learner will greet them. 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. If the main gates are closed, you will have to go through the side gate by the church admin office. Enter the code (all odd numbers and #).

Dismissal is at 3:15pm sharp.

A guide will dismiss the learners out to the drop off / pick up 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 gate next to Redemption Arcadia's office to meet your child. There will be no day care after school. Learners must be picked up at 3:15pm. There is a 15-minute grace period. Any pick-up times outside of that 15-minute grace period will result in a \$10 late fee for each additional 15 minutes.

For your convenience, we open the gates again by 3:00pm so you can pull in 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 side gate or studio door to get 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. You are welcome to send a message on Slack to a guide when you are on your way and guides will do their best to give a heads up to the learner when possible.

Weekly Schedule

In general, the schedule consistently includes the following activities:

- Morning discussion
- Individual work - math, reading, writing
- Collaborative work in Quests and Civilization
- Science - through experience, curiosity, quests etc.
- Lunch and free-time
- Physical activity and lots of movement
- Art and Health and Wellness opportunities
- Field trips
- Weekly Community Meetings

Lunch | Snacks

In order to keep our tuition costs low and support each family's healthy food choices, Acton does not provide standardized lunches or snacks. Each learner must bring his or her own lunch. We encourage learners to bring a lunch that does not require refrigeration and foods that your learner can open and eat without assistance. **We are a peanut free campus.** Please keep that in mind when you are packing lunches. More information on that below.

Learners will eat in the studio (if outdoor temperature is too hot) or the tables outside. Each learner is responsible for cleaning up after lunch, as it is an important part of our community culture. Snacks and water are also important for healthy refueling. Learners will take care of their own snacks and water bottles and will have access to fresh drinking water for refilling. Please pack healthy snacks and a water bottle daily for your child.

Peanut Free Campus

Due to multiple needs at our school, we are a peanut free campus. This allergy can be fatal. We ask that you assist us in providing a safe school environment. Please read below for more information on food allergy facts. This is how you can help:

- Do not bring any peanuts or items containing peanuts to school.
- Things made at a facility with other nuts are okay. Just do not bring actual peanuts or peanut butters. Packaging must be checked for: ***Not suitable for nut allergy sufferers and this product contains nuts.***
- If you eat peanut butter before school, please make sure you wash your hands before coming to school.
- All seeds and seed butter is ok.

If you have any questions about food allergies, please contact us or check out these facts provided by the Arizona Department of Health Services: <http://www.azdhs.gov/documents/prevention/azwic/food-allergies-resource-guide.pdf>

No Candy

Our experience has shown us that candy (including gum) during the day leads to unproductive behavior and distractions that disrupt the learning; therefore, we ask that all candy stays at home and is not brought to school.

Dress Code

Due to encouraging our learners to be active, we prefer that all learners come to campus with closed-toed shoes. If sandals are worn, please ensure there is a back strap. **No flip flops please.** If your child still struggles with tying his or her own shoes, please have the shoes double-knotted or be sure your child is wearing a shoe he or she is able to adjust without assistance (i.e. velcro).

Please wear appropriate length shorts, skirts, and dresses. If your child is wearing a dress or skirt, please encourage them to wear shorts underneath. If shorts, skirts, or dresses are too short, your child will be unable to participate in activities and be asked to change. We sit on the floor often and could be active and moving at any time. We want to uphold a modest, safe, clean and healthy environment for all our learners.

Birthday Celebrations

We value every learner's special day and believe in celebrating birthdays in a meaningful and inclusive manner. We appreciate your collaboration in making these celebrations enjoyable while keeping the well-being of all learners in mind. Below are the guidelines for coordinating birthday celebrations at our school:

Coordination with Learner's Guide

If you would like to celebrate your child's birthday at school, please coordinate with their Learner's Guide at least 24 hours in advance. This ensures that we can make appropriate arrangements and accommodate any dietary restrictions or preferences.

Celebration Timing

Birthday celebrations will take place during designated free choice times, which include snack break, lunch, or the last 15 minutes of the school day. This ensures that celebrations do not disrupt the learning environment and allow all learners to participate.

Special Activities & Treats

You are welcome to bring in special activities or treats for your child's birthday celebration. Alternative options to traditional sweet treats are highly encouraged. We kindly request that any birthday treats align with our school's commitment to health and well-being.

As healthy alternatives to traditional sweet treats you might consider:

- Book or Game Donation: Instead of treats, consider donating a book or fun game to the studio in honor of your child's birthday.
- Facilitated Activity: Plan a game for the studio to play or an activity for them to do. Learners love dance parties, karaoke, and group games.
- Healthy snacks: Such as fruit kabobs, yogurt parfaits, or popcorn with toppings.

Allergy & Dietary Considerations

Please consider any allergies or dietary restrictions when coordinating the celebration. We strive to create an inclusive environment where every learner can enjoy the celebration safely. **Note: Acton Academy Phoenix is a peanut-free campus. See page 6 for more information.**

Inclusivity & Sensitivity

While celebrating birthdays, we encourage you to consider the diverse backgrounds and beliefs of our learners. Non-food celebrations or activities that promote kindness, creativity, or teamwork are wonderful ways to ensure that every learner can participate and feel valued.

If you have any questions or need further assistance, please reach out to your child's guide.

After-School Programs

Fueled by family interest and availability of staff, there may be fee-based after-school programs on campus during parts of the year. These programs, however, will not be part of the Acton's curriculum. By participating, you will be asked to sign a waiver and pay any fee associated with these activities. If you want to start an after-school club or program, contact admin@actonphx.org. You will receive an email notifying you of any after-school offerings and can sign up for those in which you are interested.

Acton Property | Computers | School supplies

An integral part of our learning program is using technology for learners to learn math, reading, writing and grammar skills at their own pace, as well as for research and creative endeavors. We provide one computer per learner starting at Discovery Studio as needed to use during the day on campus. These laptops are school property and if one is damaged or lost by a student, the family is responsible for reimbursing the school in the amount of \$300 or cost to repair. In addition, if any part of the school campus is intentionally damaged by a student, he or she will assist in the repair. In addition to your tuition, we also ask from a contribution toward some school supplies. The supply list will be sent out prior to the first day of school.

Live Camera + Photo Waiver

All Acton schools across the nation are linked to provide accountability, share best practices, and ensure high quality services. As part of the Acton Academy Trademark License agreement entered into between Acton Academy Phoenix and Acton Academy, it was stipulated that a live video feed capabilities be installed in the interior of the school to be shared with the Acton network only. Parents acknowledge the use of the camera system.

Occasionally, we use photos or videos of our learners on the newsletter, school displays and projects, blog, school social media accounts, or website. Photos and videos would not identify learners by name. It is understood that permission is granted to Acton to use the photographs or videos on the worldwide web or other printed publications unless otherwise stated in writing.

Parent Partnership/Volunteering

We welcome parents to share the joy of the studio experience to gain further understanding of the learning journey. You will be a part of a team that is striving to provide a first-class education for every learner throughout our community. The studio is a very special environment for the learners and we want to protect their personal space and privacy. The following guidelines will help ensure integrity and focus during the studio hours.

- Please inform a guide the week in advance before you plan to volunteer or visit. Include the time of your arrival and your expected length of stay. The guide will reply 24 hours after receiving the email (during week days). Please inform your child that you will be visiting to volunteer in his/her studio.
- Please maintain good communication especially in the event of an absence or schedule change. If you cannot fulfill your commitment for any period of time, please contact the guide as soon as possible so other arrangements can be made.

We also encourage parents to volunteer at the school by participating in extracurricular activities like field trips and school events.

HEALTH POLICIES | ABSENTEEISM

Health Forms

Before the first day of school, it is necessary to provide Acton a copy of your child's immunization records and any other pertinent health records from your pediatrician's office. You may email, mail or hand deliver this information to our admin or any guide.

Medication

Learners 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.

Substance Misuse and Abuse

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

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° 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
- Loss of taste and/or smell

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.

For the 2023-2024 school year, please also refer to any policies recommended about COVID-19 related mitigation strategies.

Attendance/Absenteeism

Acton 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 if you inform the guide via email of the dates he or she will be out of school. While away from school, Discovery and older learners will be able to access his or her online programs and the Journey Tracker for studio work. They can also reach out directly to their guide or squad for support. We believe learners can take responsibility for what needs to be completed while he or she is absent.

For unexpected absenteeism, such as a child wakes ill, please let a guide know through Slack, including the reason for the absence.

BEHAVIOR

Certain behavior is not permissible in the community. Some actions are reason to take time away from the community to reset, at first for a few minutes, and eventually permanently. Admin and guides play a role in developing Guardrails, or clear boundaries, as part of their responsibility to parents, to create a safe place for their learners to learn. Whereas, the learners will create the Studio Promises and Rules of Engagement and help keep each other accountable.

Studio Guardrails:

1. I will not cause physical or emotional harm to a fellow learner.
2. I will not lie.
3. I will not distract another learner.

Three-Strike System

Guides are committed to respond to each situation with warm hearts and tough minds in order to support and facilitate learning through conflict/failure when a learner crosses a studio guardrail.

Progression of Strikes

1st strike:

- A guide and/or other learners speak with the person who broke a guardrail to ensure he/she understands why the behavior was harmful and that it cannot continue.
- A learner can remain in the studio as soon as he/she re-commits to the guardrails, acknowledges the mistake, and works to repair any harm done.

2nd strike:

- Learner is separated from the group and has a more in-depth discussion with a guide about why the choice to distract or harm was made, recognizing that a pattern is now forming. The guide and/or another learner works with the person who broke the guardrail to brainstorm specific strategies to prevent a third strike.
- Parents are informed about the learner's two strikes through a written message in which the strike system is re-explained and the reasons for the learner's first two strikes are given.
- A learner can remain in the studio as soon as he/she re-commits to the guardrails, acknowledges the mistake, and works to repair any harm done and prevent a 3rd violation.

3rd strike:

- The learner's parents are called immediately and the learner is asked to leave school for the remainder of the day.
- If the strike occurs at the end of the day, the learner stays home the following day.
- The third time a learner is asked to go home, he or she will be withdrawn from Acton Academy and can re-apply in the future.

Celebrating the return of a Learner

The definition of hero at Acton is one who gets back up after falling down. There is a tradition of joy and forgiveness upon receiving challenging situations, and the community is always happy when a learner makes the choice to return to the group.

Strike Reset

At the beginning of each session, all previous strikes are cleared. The next time this student gets a strike it will be considered a 1st strike.

Parent Communication Regarding Behavior

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

- "When were you most interested in your work today? (Core skills, quest)"
- "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 guardrail or promise?"
- "What will you do tomorrow to help show care for others and stay focused?"

Technology Specific Guardrails

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.

Therefore, we will restrict inappropriate internet usage. This is defined as but not limited to:

- Any non-work use of the Internet or texts during the school hours, except at free time. (Parents are often the cause of such violations when they expect their children to answer emails and texts during the school day.)
- Searching for or displaying any inappropriate material.
- Rude, unkind, belittling or inappropriate remarks sent through social media or by email or other text at any time.

Breaking the technology guardrails, will result in losing access to the technology for a period of time (based on studio specific agreements).

COMMUNICATION

How do I know what's going on?

Slack App & Emails

You can stay informed on the details of the studio by reading the weekly information posted in Slack and occasional emails. Every Friday, a guide will send a brief summary of the week and share some photo highlights. You can find the Slack app in your smart phone app store or at www.slack.com. Please sign up for our group by searching for acton-phx.slack.com and make sure your notifications are turned on if you have not done so already. It is each parent's responsibility to share up to date contact information with the school.

Acton Calendar

Our 2023-2024 calendar is currently posted on our website: actonphx.org/calendar.

This calendar will help you manage session breaks, exhibition dates, journey reviews, our three parent meetings, end of the year celebrations, and all other Acton events. At this site, you can also download a pdf copy of the calendar and/or add the digital calendar to your Google Calendar.

SMART Goals & Journey Tracker

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. For the Discovery and Middle School Studio, you have access to all of your child's online programs with tracking of their progress. Your guides will share the usernames/emails and passwords with you. More importantly, we encourage you to talk with your child about S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) goals. Many learners will be tracking their points, milestones, badges and SMART goals through Journey Tracker online (you will also receive this log in). By keeping up with your child's work, you can enjoy sharing challenges, frustrations, problem-solving techniques and celebration of achievements throughout his or her journey.

For Spark learners, we encourage you to talk about one or two big challenges they want to focus on each session, such as counting to 100, practicing letter sounds or finishing a certain set of the Rainbow Drawers for reading.

Parent Surveys

As part of our commitment to families, we ask that each family completes a feedback survey once each quarter. This survey will be sent to you via email or with a sharable link on slack, and we ask that you fill it out within 2-3 days. We ask that you provide helpful input rather than anything personal about another learner or family. The summary of these surveys will be shared with Acton families, guides and Acton network leadership each time. 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 celebration and constructive input. For any personal situation in which you need insight, please send a Slack message to our Director and discuss offline.

Contacting Guides

Our general philosophy is that guides must not come between a parent and child. You are the main authority and shepherd of your child's education, and we are here to support you but with limitations. Because guides move between studios and have contact with all Eagles, communication with parents is through a common email noted below or through a group message in Slack. If you wish to direct your email to a particular guide, simply address your note to him or her. The information on the emails is kept strictly confidential within the Acton staff. Be prepared: guides are Socratic and rather than answering questions, they may ask you questions and refer you to resources to help you.

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 usually respond to messages between 3:30pm and 5:00pm on weekdays during the session.

Slack is the most effective communication. Guides have phones only for emergencies and are not able to take calls or texts from parents and caregivers during the day.

When reaching out to Guides with any concerns, please use guides@actonphx.org or send a direct message that includes all guides in the group so that we are all informed.

Emergencies

In the case of an emergency, you will receive an immediate notification in Slack informing you on what the emergency is as well as the action that has taken place to ensure student safety. We may send a group text message to all families in some cases. Please make sure we have your most up to date phone number and be sure you have access to Slack with notifications turned on.

FEEDBACK + MEASURING PROGRESS

How do I know how my child is progressing?

The best way to know how learners are progressing is to spend time with them as they engage in various activities at home. For example, you see evidence of their growth as writers by making cards or writing stories together and how they are progressing as readers by reading with them. Are they counting higher or adding numbers better than before? The learners in Discovery will also set and track S.M.A.R.T. goals and earn mastery based badges. These goals are tracked in Journey Tracker and supported by the learner's squad.

We encourage parents to ask their children about their work 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/say things like:

- What did you enjoy learning this week?
- Do you feel that your work this week was the best you can do?
- What would you do differently?
- 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?

Journey Tracker

Journey Tracker is an online tool used by the Discover Studio (starting at age 8) and older studios to create a badge plan, record S.M.A.R.T. goals, and track progress each day. Parents can also login with a learner at home to follow his or her progress and achievements.

Standardized Assessment

Learners working at level 3 and above will take a standardized assessment to measure how they perform in comparison to national norms every other year. You will be notified in advance of testing dates. Learners will be guided through the process so that they have a full understanding of the purpose of such tests. While most learners do pretty well, it is important that we do not overemphasize these one-day tests, but rather look at them as one data point in a much larger story.

Journey Reviews

The core of Acton Academy assessment is the learner's work. Clear evidence of the learning that has occurred will be contained in the samples of work compiled and reflected upon by learners in addition to the tracking reports from online programs and their standardized testing results. Most importantly, the learner's work will tell the story of each learner's passions, interests, achievements, struggles, learning styles and hopes for the future.

We will offer optional Journey Reviews in the fall and spring. 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. You may also conduct a Journey Review at home any time following this general guideline.

Learning Badges versus Grades

At Acton, we do not use letter grades. Learners will receive feedback of the work they produce from their peers, guides and from other sources as appropriate. The software programs in reading 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 learner's work.

Starting in Discovery, the achievement of milestones and badges in the core skills of writing, spelling, math, and reading will help document their mastery of skills at progressing levels. For example, earning a level 3 math badge is equivalent to earning an A+ in 3rd grade math. These badges will document the entire learning journey with evidence appropriate for college applications and job interviews of the authentic accomplishments of each Acton graduate. In addition, projects and quest work will provide documentation of learning in the arts, humanities, and sciences. Leadership and character growth are reflected in peer reviews.

PARENTS ON A HERO'S JOURNEY

Testimony & Tools

No doubt, as a parent at Acton Academy Phoenix, you have embarked on a hero's journey (whether you are ready for it or not!). Each family is unique and we trust you to make your own best choices. While Acton Academy does not give parenting advice we do, however, offer you testimony and tools to help you incorporate the Acton method of asking questions and offering choices with consequences if you wish to use these at home.

We invite you to [read this note](#) that offers testimony, tools and some tips we've gathered from Acton Academies and Acton Academy parents from all over the world to equip and inspire you on your Hero's Journey as a parent.

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 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 parent blog written by Laura Sandefer is one way 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. You may click on the "subscribe" button on the blog if you wish to receive email notifications of new posts. The address is: www.actonacademyparents.com.

Family Badges

At Acton, we also challenge families to take on some intentional activities as part of a family wide hero's journey and to best live out a purposeful and intentional life. We've compiled [seven different Family Badges](#) to earn during your time at Acton. We recommend starting with the [Lencioni Family Plan](#) badge. Please let us know if you decide to take on a badge as a family and share your experience.

PARENT AGREEMENT OF PARTICIPATION

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

1. **We long for our learner to discover a calling that will change the world.** We will allow our learner to fail early and cheaply as they gain the skills to be a lifelong learner. We will support with love rather than stepping in to take the struggle away or to fix the problem for them.
2. **We welcome Acton Academy as a self-paced environment** where learners run the studios through the delegation of certain rights by Directors and parents, with access to dozens of experts for instruction, allowing Guides to focus on an engaging set of challenges and questions.
3. **We will complete parent feedback surveys** each quarter to provide meaningful feedback to our community.
4. **We will respect the studio as the learner's 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.
5. **For your own Hero's Journeys as parents:**
 - We will be lifelong learners and have an active learning project (such as a book or self-improvement project) at all times to discuss with our children.
 - At least one parent will attend a minimum of two of the three parent meetings each year.
 - Ensure learners will be at school early or on time, every time and understand that learners who arrive late may not be able to participate in that morning's activity.